

The French Immortals Series — Complete eBook

The French Immortals Series — Complete

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1905 *By Robert Arnot*

The editor-in-chief of the Maison Mazarin—a man of letters who cherishes an enthusiastic yet discriminating love for the literary and artistic glories of France—formed within the last two years the great project of collecting and presenting to the vast numbers of intelligent readers of whom New World boasts a series of those great and undying romances which, since 1784, have received the crown of merit awarded by the French Academy—that coveted assurance of immortality in letters and in art.

In the presentation of this serious enterprise for the criticism and official sanction of The Academy, 'en seance', was included a request that, if possible, the task of writing a preface to the series should be undertaken by me. Official sanction having been bestowed upon the plan, I, as the accredited officer of the French Academy, convey to you its hearty appreciation, endorsement, and sympathy with a project so nobly artistic. It is also my duty, privilege, and pleasure to point out, at the request of my brethren, the peculiar importance and lasting value of this series to all who would know the inner life of a people whose greatness no turns of fortune have been able to diminish.

In the last hundred years France has experienced the most terrible vicissitudes, but, vanquished or victorious, triumphant or abased, never has she lost her peculiar gift of attracting the curiosity of the world. She interests every living being, and even those who do not love her desire to know her. To this peculiar attraction which radiates from her, artists and men of letters can well bear witness, since it is to literature and to the arts, before all, that France owes such living and lasting power. In every quarter of the civilized world there are distinguished writers, painters, and eminent musicians, but in France they exist in greater numbers than elsewhere. Moreover, it is universally conceded that French writers and artists have this particular and praiseworthy quality: they are most accessible to people of other countries. Without losing their national characteristics, they possess the happy gift of universality. To speak of letters alone: the books that Frenchmen write are read, translated, dramatized, and imitated everywhere; so it is not strange that these books give to foreigners a desire for a nearer and more intimate acquaintance with France.

Men preserve an almost innate habit of resorting to Paris from almost every quarter of the globe. For many years American visitors have been more numerous than others, although the journey from the United States is long and costly. But I am sure that when for the first time they see Paris—its palaces, its churches, its museums—and visit Versailles, Fontainebleau, and Chantilly, they do not regret the travail they have undergone. Meanwhile, however,

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I ask myself whether such sightseeing is all that, in coming hither, they wish to accomplish. Intelligent travellers—and, as a rule, it is the intelligent class that feels the need of the educative influence of travel—look at our beautiful monuments, wander through the streets and squares among the crowds that fill them, and, observing them, I ask myself again: Do not such people desire to study at closer range these persons who elbow them as they pass; do they not wish to enter the houses of which they see but the facades; do they not wish to know how Parisians live and speak and act by their firesides? But time, alas! is lacking for the formation of those intimate friendships which would bring this knowledge within their grasp. French homes are rarely open to birds of passage, and visitors leave us with regret that they have not been able to see more than the surface of our civilization or to recognize by experience the note of our inner home life.

How, then, shall this void be filled? Speaking in the first person, the simplest means appears to be to study those whose profession it is to describe the society of the time, and primarily, therefore, the works of dramatic writers, who are supposed to draw a faithful picture of it. So we go to the theatre, and usually derive keen pleasure therefrom. But is pleasure all that we expect to find? What we should look for above everything in a comedy or a drama is a representation, exact as possible, of the manners and characters of the dramatis persona of the play; and perhaps the conditions under which the play was written do not allow such representation. The exact and studied portrayal of a character demands from the author long preparation, and cannot be accomplished in a few hours. From, the first scene to the last, each tale must be posed in the author's mind exactly as it will be proved to be at the end. It is the author's aim and mission to place completely before his audience the souls of the "agonists" laying bare the complications of motive, and throwing into relief the delicate shades of motive that sway them. Often, too, the play is produced before a numerous audience—an audience often distraught, always pressed for time, and impatient of the least delay. Again, the public in general require that they shall be able to understand without difficulty, and at first thought, the characters the author seeks to present, making it necessary that these characters be depicted from their most salient sides—which are too often vulgar and unattractive.

In our comedies and dramas it is not the individual that is drawn, but the type. Where the individual alone is real, the type is a myth of the imagination—a pure invention. And invention is the mainspring of the theatre, which rests purely upon illusion, and does not please us unless it begins by deceiving us.

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I believe, then, that if one seeks to know the world exactly as it is, the theatre does not furnish the means whereby one can pursue the study. A far better opportunity for knowing the private life of a people is available through the medium of its great novels. The novelist deals with each person as an individual. He speaks to his reader at an hour when the mind is disengaged from worldly affairs, and he can add without restraint every detail that seems needful to him to complete the rounding of his story. He can return at will, should he choose, to the source of the plot he is unfolding, in order that his reader may better understand him; he can emphasize and dwell upon those details which an audience in a theatre will not allow.

The reader, being at leisure, feels no impatience, for he knows that he can at any time lay down or take up the book. It is the consciousness of this privilege that gives him patience, should he encounter a dull page here or there. He may hasten or delay his reading, according to the interest he takes in his romance—nay, more, he can return to the earlier pages, should he need to do so, for a better comprehension of some obscure point. In proportion as he is attracted and interested by the romance, and also in the degree of concentration with which he reads it, does he grasp better the subtleties of the narrative. No shade of character drawing escapes him. He realizes, with keener appreciation, the most delicate of human moods, and the novelist is not compelled to introduce the characters to him, one by one, distinguishing them only by the most general characteristics, but can describe each of those little individual idiosyncrasies that contribute to the sum total of a living personality.

When I add that the dramatic author is always to a certain extent a slave to the public, and must ever seek to please the passing taste of his time, it will be recognized that he is often, alas! compelled to sacrifice his artistic leanings to popular caprice—that is, if he has the natural desire that his generation should applaud him.

As a rule, with the theatre-going masses, one person follows the fads or fancies of others, and individual judgments are too apt to be irresistibly swayed by current opinion. But the novelist, entirely independent of his reader, is not compelled to conform himself to the opinion of any person, or to submit to his caprices. He is absolutely free to picture society as he sees it, and we therefore can have more confidence in his descriptions of the customs and characters of the day.

It is precisely this view of the case that the editor of the series has taken, and herein is the *raison d'être* of this collection of great French romances. The choice was not easy to make. That form of literature called the romance abounds with us. France has always loved it, for French writers exhibit a curiosity—and I may say an indiscretion—that is almost charming in the study of customs and morals at large; a quality that induces them to talk freely of themselves and of their neighbors, and to set forth fearlessly both the good and the bad in human nature. In this fascinating phase of literature, France never has produced greater examples than of late years.

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In the collection here presented to American readers will be found those works especially which reveal the intimate side of French social life—works in which are discussed the moral problems that affect most potently the life of the world at large. If inquiring spirits seek to learn the customs and manners of the France of any age, they must look for it among her crowned romances. They need go back no farther than Ludovic Halevy, who may be said to open the modern epoch. In the romantic school, on its historic side, Alfred de Vigny must be looked upon as supreme. De Musset and Anatole France may be taken as revealing authoritatively the moral philosophy of nineteenth-century thought. I must not omit to mention the Jacqueline of Th. Bentzon, and the “Attic” Philosopher of Emile Souvestre, nor the, great names of Loti, Claretie, Coppe, Bazin, Bourget, Malot, Droz, De Massa, and last, but not least, our French Dickens, Alphonse Daudet. I need not add more; the very names of these “Immortals” suffice to commend the series to readers in all countries.

One word in conclusion: America may rest assured that her students of international literature will find in this series of ‘ouvrages couronnés’ all that they may wish to know of France at her own fireside—a knowledge that too often escapes them, knowledge that embraces not only a faithful picture of contemporary life in the French provinces, but a living and exact description of French society in modern times. They may feel certain that when they have read these romances, they will have sounded the depths and penetrated into the hidden intimacies of France, not only as she is, but as she would be known.

Gaston BOISSIER
Secrétaire Perpetuel de l'Académie Française

GEORGES OHNET

The only French novelist whose books have a circulation approaching the works of Daudet and of Zola is Georges Ohnet, a writer whose popularity is as interesting as his stories, because it explains, though it does not excuse, the contempt the Goncourts had for the favor of the great French public, and also because it shows how the highest form of Romanticism still ferments beneath the varnish of Naturalism in what is called genius among the great masses of readers.

Georges Ohnet was born in Paris, April 3, 1848, the son of an architect. He was destined for the Bar, but was early attracted by journalism and literature. Being a lawyer it was not difficult for him to join the editorial staff of *Le Pays*, and later *Le Constitutionnel*. This was soon after the Franco-German War. His romances, since collected under the title ‘*Batailles de la Vie*’, appeared first in ‘*Le Figaro*, ‘*L’Illustration*, and ‘*Revue des Deux Mondes*’, and have been exceedingly well received by the public. This relates also to his dramas, some of his works meeting with a popular success rarely extended to any author. For some time Georges Ohnet did not find the same

favor with the critics, who often attacked him with a passionate violence and unusual severity. True, a high philosophical flow of thoughts cannot be detected in his writings, but nevertheless it is certain that the characters and the subjects of which he treats are brilliantly sketched and clearly developed. They are likewise of perfect morality and honesty.

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There was expected of him, however, an idea which was not quite realized. Appearing upon the literary stage at a period when Naturalism was triumphant, it was for a moment believed that he would restore Idealism in the manner of George Sand.

In any case the hostile critics have lost. For years public opinion has exalted him, and the reaction is the more significant when compared with the tremendous criticism launched against his early romances and novels.

A list of his works follows:

Serge Panine (1881), crowned by the French Academy, has since gone through one hundred and fifty French editions; Le Maître des Forges (1882), a prodigious success, two hundred and fifty editions being printed (1900); La Comtesse Sarah (1882); Lise Fleuyon (1884); La Grande Maynieye (1886); Les Dames de Croix-Mort (1886); Volonte (1888); Le Docteur Rameau (1889); Deynier Amour (1889); Le Cure de Favieyes (1890); Dette de Haine (1891); Nemsod et Cie. (1892); Le Lendemain des Amours (1893); Le Droit de l'Enfant (1894.); Les Vieilles Rancunes (1894); La Dame en Gris (1895); La Fille du Deputé (1896); Le Roi de Paris (1898); Au Fond du Gouffre (1899); Gens de la Noce (1900); La Tenibreuse (1900); Le Cyasseur d'Affaires (1901); Le Crepuscule (1901); Le Marche à l'Amour (1902).

Ohnet's novels are collected under the titles, 'Noir et Rose (1887) and L'Ame de Pierre (1890).

The dramatic writings of Georges Ohnet, mostly taken from his novels, have greatly contributed to his reputation. Le Maître des Forges was played for a full year (Gymnase, 1883); it was followed by Serge Panine (1884); La Comtesse Sarah (1887). La Grande Mayniere (1888), met also with a decided and prolonged success; Dernier Amour (Gymnase, 1890); Colonel Roquebrune (Porte St. Martin, 1897). Before that he had already written the plays Regina Sarpi (1875) and Marthe (1877), which yet hold a prominent place upon the French stage.

I have shown in this rapid sketch that a man of the stamp of Georges Ohnet must have immortal qualities in himself, even though flayed and roasted alive by the critics. He is most assuredly an artist in form, is endowed with a brilliant style, and has been named "L'Historiographe de la bourgeoisie contemporaine." Indeed, antagonism to plutocracy and hatred of aristocracy are the fundamental theses in almost every one of his books.

His exposition, I repeat, is startlingly neat, the development of his plots absolutely logical, and the world has acclaimed his ingenuity in dramatic construction. He is truly, and in all senses, of the Ages.

Victor CHERBOULIEZ
de l'Academie Francaise

SERGE PANINE

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF DESVARENNES

The firm of Desvarennnes has been in an ancient mansion in the Rue Saint Dominique since 1875; it is one of the best known and most important in French industry. The counting-houses are in the wings of the building looking upon the courtyard, which were occupied by the servants when the family whose coat-of-arms has been effaced from above the gate-way were still owners of the estate.

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Madame Desvarennnes inhabits the mansion which she has had magnificently renovated. A formidable rival of the Darblays, the great millers of France, the firm of Desvarennnes is a commercial and political power. Inquire in Paris about its solvency, and you will be told that you may safely advance twenty millions of francs on the signature of the head of the firm. And this head is a woman.

This woman is remarkable. Gifted with keen understanding and a firm will, she had in former times vowed to make a large fortune, and she has kept her word.

She was the daughter of a humble packer of the Rue Neuve-Coquenard. Toward 1848 she married Michel Desvarennnes, who was then a journeyman baker in a large shop in the Chaussee d'Antin. With the thousand francs which the packer managed to give his daughter by way of dowry, the young couple boldly took a shop and started a little bakery business. The husband kneaded and baked the bread, and the young wife, seated at the counter, kept watch over the till. Neither on Sundays nor on holidays was the shop shut.

Through the window, between two pyramids of pink and blue packets of biscuits, one could always catch sight of the serious-looking Madame Desvarennnes, knitting woollen stockings for her husband while waiting for customers. With her prominent forehead, and her eyes always bent on her work, this woman appeared the living image of perseverance.

At the end of five years of incessant work, and possessing twenty thousand francs, saved sou by sou, the Desvarennnes left the slopes of Montmartre, and moved to the centre of Paris. They were ambitious and full of confidence. They set up in the Rue Vivienne, in a shop resplendent with gilding and ornamented with looking-glasses. The ceiling was painted in panels with bright hued pictures that caught the eyes of the passers-by. The window-shelves were of white marble, and the counter, where Madame Desvarennnes was still enthroned, was of a width worthy of the receipts that were taken every day. Business increased daily; the Desvarennnes continued to be hard and systematic workers. The class of customers alone had changed; they were more numerous and richer. The house had a specialty for making small rolls for the restaurants. Michel had learned from the Viennese bakers how to make those golden balls which tempt the most rebellious appetite, and which, when in an artistically folded damask napkin, set off a dinner-table.

About this time Madame Desvarennnes, while calculating how much the millers must gain on the flour they sell to the bakers, resolved, in order to lessen expenses, to do without middlemen and grind her own corn. Michel, naturally timid, was frightened when his wife disclosed to him the simple project which she had formed. Accustomed to submit to the will of her whom he respectfully called "the mistress," and of whom he was but the head clerk, he dared not oppose her. But, a red-tapist by nature, and hating innovations, owing to weakness of mind, he trembled inwardly and cried in agony:

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“Wife, you’ll ruin us.”

The mistress calmed the poor man’s alarm; she tried to impart to him some of her confidence, to animate him with her hope, but without success, so she went on without him. A mill was for sale at Jouy, on the banks of the Oise; she paid ready money for it, and a few weeks later the bakery in the Rue Vivienne was independent of every one. She ground her own flour, and from that time business increased considerably. Feeling capable of carrying out large undertakings, and, moreover, desirous of giving up the meannesses of retail trade, Madame Desvarennnes, one fine day, sent in a tender for supplying bread to the military hospitals. It was accepted, and from that time the house ranked among the most important. On seeing the Desvarennnes take their daring flight, the leading men in the trade had said:

“They have system and activity, and if they do not upset on the way, they will attain a high position.”

But the mistress seemed to have the gift of divination. She worked surely—if she struck out one way you might be certain that success was there. In all her enterprises, “good luck” stood close by her; she scented failures from afar, and the firm never made a bad debt. Still Michel continued to tremble. The first mill had been followed by many more; then the old system appeared insufficient to Madame Desvarennnes. As she wished to keep up with the increase of business she had steam-mills built,—which are now grinding three hundred million francs’ worth of corn every year.

Fortune had favored the house immensely, but Michel continued to tremble. From time to time when the mistress launched out a new business, he timidly ventured on his usual saying:

“Wife, you’re going to ruin us.”

But one felt it was only for form’s sake, and that he himself no longer meant what he said. Madame Desvarennnes received this plaintive remonstrance with a calm smile, and answered, maternally, as to a child:

“There, there, don’t be frightened.”

Then she would set to work again, and direct with irresistible vigor the army of clerks who peopled her counting-houses.

In fifteen years’ time, by prodigious efforts of will and energy, Madame Desvarennnes had made her way from the lonely and muddy Rue Neuve-Coquenard to the mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique. Of the bakery there was no longer question. It was some time since the business in the Rue Vivienne had been transferred to the foreman of the shop. The flour trade alone occupied Madame Desvarennnes’s attention. She ruled the



prices in the market; and great bankers came to her office and did business with her on a footing of equality. She did not become any prouder for it, she knew too well the strength and weakness of life to have pride; her former plain dealing had not stiffened into self-sufficiency. Such as one had known her when beginning business, such one found her in the zenith of her fortune.

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Instead of a woollen gown she wore a silk one, but the color was still black; her language had not become refined; she retained the same blunt familiar accent, and at the end of five minutes' conversation with any one of importance she could not resist calling him "my dear," to come morally near him. Her commands had more fulness. In giving her orders, she had the manner of a commander-in-chief, and it was useless to haggle when she had spoken. The best thing to do was to obey, as well and as promptly as possible.

Placed in a political sphere, this marvellously gifted woman would have been a Madame Roland; born to the throne, she would have been a Catherine II.; there was genius in her. Sprung from the lower ranks, her superiority had given her wealth; had she come from the higher, the great mind might have governed the world.

Still she was not happy; she had been married fifteen years, and her fireside was devoid of a cradle. During the first years she had rejoiced at not having a child. Where could she have found time to occupy herself with a baby? Business engrossed her attention; she had no leisure to amuse herself with trifles. Maternity seemed to her a luxury for rich women; she had her fortune to make. In the struggle against the difficulties attending the enterprise she had begun, she had not had time to look around her and perceive that her home was lonely. She worked from morning till night. Her whole life was absorbed in this work, and when night came, overcome with fatigue, she fell asleep, her head filled with cares which stifled all tricks of the imagination.

Michel grieved, but in silence; his feeble and dependent nature missed a child. He, whose mind lacked occupation, thought of the future. He said to himself that the day when the dreamt-of fortune came would be more welcome if there were an heir to whom to leave it. What was the good of being rich, if the money went to collateral relatives? There was his nephew Savinien, a disagreeable urchin whom he looked on with indifference; and he was biased regarding his brother, who had all but failed several times in business, and to whose aid he had come to save the honor of the name. The mistress had not hesitated to help him, and had prevented the signature of "Desvarennnes" being protested. She had not taunted him, having as large a heart as she had a mind. But Michel had felt humiliated to see his own folk make a gap in the financial edifice erected so laboriously by his wife. Out of this had gradually sprung a sense of dissatisfaction with the Desvarennnes of the other branch, which manifested itself by a marked coolness, when, by chance, his brother came to the house, accompanied by his son Savinien.

And then the paternity of his brother made him secretly jealous. Why should that incapable fellow, who succeeded in nothing, have a son? It was only those ne'er-do-well sort of people who were thus favored. He, Michel, already called the rich Desvarennnes, he had not a son. Was it just? But where is there justice in this world?

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The first time that she saw him with a downcast face the mistress had questioned him, and he had frankly expressed his regrets. But he had been so repelled by his wife, in whose heart a great trouble, steadily repressed, however, had been produced, that he never dared to recur to the subject.

He suffered in silence. But he no longer suffered alone. Like an overflowing river that finds an outlet in the valley, which it inundates, the longings for maternity, hitherto repressed by the preoccupations of business, had suddenly seized Madame Desvarennnes.

Strong and unyielding, she struggled and would not own herself conquered. Still she became sad. Her voice sounded less sonorously in the offices where she gave an order; her energetic nature seemed subdued. Now she looked around her. She beheld prosperity made stable by incessant work, respect gained by spotless honesty; she had attained the goal which she had marked out in her ambitious dreams, as being paradise itself. Paradise was there; but it lacked the angel. They had no child.

From that day a change came over this woman, slowly but surely; scarcely perceptible to strangers, but easy to be seen by those around her. She became benevolent, and gave away considerable sums of money, especially to children's "Homes." But when the good people who governed these establishments, lured on by her generosity, came to ask her to be on their committee of management, she became angry, asking them if they were joking with her? What interest could those brats have for her? She had other fish to fry. She gave them what they needed, and what more could they want? The fact was she felt weak and troubled before children. But within her a powerful and unknown voice had arisen, and the hour was not far distant when the bitter wave of her regrets was to overflow and be made manifest.

She did not like Savinien, her nephew, and kept all her sweetness for the son of one of their old neighbors in the Rue Neuve-Coquenard, a small haberdasher, who had not been able to get on, but continued humbly to sell thread and needles to the thrifty folks of the neighborhood. The haberdasher, Mother Delarue, as she was called, had remained a widow after one year of married life. Pierre, her boy, had grown up under the shadow of the bakery, the cradle of the Desvarennnes's fortunes.

On Sundays the mistress would give him a gingerbread or a cracknel, and amuse herself with his baby prattle. She did not lose sight of him when she removed to the Rue Vivienne. Pierre had entered the elementary school of the neighborhood, and by his precocious intelligence and exceptional application, had not been long in getting to the top of his class. The boy had left school after gaining an exhibition admitting him to the Chaptal College. This hard worker, who was in a fair way of making his own position without costing his relatives anything, greatly interested Madame Desvarennnes. She found in this plucky nature a striking analogy to herself. She formed projects for Pierre's future; in fancy she saw him enter the Polytechnic school, and leave

it with honors. The young man had the choice of becoming a mining or civil engineer, and of entering the government service.

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He was hesitating what to do when the mistress came and offered him a situation in her firm as junior partner; it was a golden bridge that she placed before him. With his exceptional capacities he was not long in giving to the house a new impulse. He perfected the machinery, and triumphantly defied all competition. All this was a happy dream in which Pierre was to her a real son; her home became his, and she monopolized him completely. But suddenly a shadow came o'er the spirit of her dreams. Pierre's mother, the little haberdasher, proud of her son, would she consent to give him up to a stranger? Oh! if Pierre had only been an orphan! But one could not rob a mother of her son! And Madame Desvarennnes stopped the flight of her imagination. She followed Pierre with anxious looks; but she forbade herself to dispose of the youth: he did not belong to her.

This woman, at the age of thirty-five, still young in heart, was disturbed by feelings which she strove, but vainly, to rule. She hid them especially from her husband, whose repining chattering she feared. If she had once shown him her weakness he would have overwhelmed her daily with the burden of his regrets. But an unforeseen circumstance placed her at Michel's mercy.

Winter had come, bringing December and its snow. The weather this year was exceptionally inclement, and traffic in the streets was so difficult, business was almost suspended. The mistress left her deserted offices and retired early to her private apartments. The husband and wife spent their evenings alone. They sat there, facing each other, at the fireside. A shade concentrated the light of the lamp upon the table covered with expensive knick-knacks. The ceiling was sometimes vaguely lighted up by a glimmer from the stove which glittered on the gilt cornices. Ensconced in deep comfortable armchairs, the pair respectively caressed their favorite dream without speaking of it.

Madame Desvarennnes saw beside her a little pink-and-white baby girl, toddling on the carpet. She heard her words, understood her language, untranslatable to all others than a mother. Then bedtime came. The child, with heavy eyelids, let her little fair-haired head fall on her shoulders. Madame Desvarennnes took her in her arms and undressed her quietly, kissing her bare and dimpled arms. It was exquisite enjoyment which stirred her heart deliciously. She saw the cradle, and devoured the child with her eyes. She knew that the picture was a myth. But what did it matter to her? She was happy. Michel's voice broke on her reverie.

"Wife," said he, "this is Christmas Eve; and as there are only us two, suppose you put your slipper on the hearth."

Madame Desvarennnes rose. Her eyes vaguely turned toward the hearth on which the fire was dying, and beside the upright of the large sculptured mantelpiece she beheld for a moment a tiny shoe, belonging to the child which she loved to see in her dreams. Then the vision vanished, and there was nothing left but the lonely hearth. A sharp pain

tore her swollen heart; a sob rose to her lips, and, slowly, two tears rolled down her cheeks. Michel, quite pale, looked at her in silence; he held out his hand to her, and said, in a trembling voice:

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"You were thinking about it, eh?"

Madame Desvarennnes bowed her head, twice, silently, and without adding another word, the pair fell into each other's arms and wept.

From that day they hid nothing from each other, and shared their troubles and regrets in common. The mistress unburdened her heart by making a full confession, and Michel, for the first time in his life, learned the depth of soul of his companion to its inmost recesses. This woman, so energetic, so obstinate, was, as it were, broken down. The springs of her will seemed worn out. She felt despondencies and wearinesses until then unknown. Work tired her. She did not venture down to the offices; she talked of giving up business, which was a bad sign. She longed for country air. Were they not rich enough? With their simple tastes so much money was unnecessary. In fact, they had no wants. They would go to some pretty estate in the suburbs of Paris, live there and plant cabbages. Why work? they had no children.

Michel agreed to these schemes. For a long time he had wished for repose. Often he had feared that his wife's ambition would lead them too far. But now, since she stopped of her own accord, it was all for the best.

At this juncture their solicitor informed them that, near to their works, the Cernay estate was to be put up for sale. Very often, when going from Jouy to the mills, Madame Desvarennnes had noticed the chateau, the slate roofs of the turrets of which rose gracefully from a mass of deep verdure. The Count de Cernay, the last representative of a noble race, had just died of consumption, brought on by reckless living, leaving nothing behind him but debts and a little girl two years old. Her mother, an Italian singer and his mistress, had left him one morning without troubling herself about the child. Everything was to be sold, by order of the Court.

Some most lamentable incidents had saddened the Count's last hours. The bailiffs had entered the house with the doctor when he came to pay his last call, and the notices of the sale were all but posted up before the funeral was over. Jeanne, the orphan, scared amid the troubles of this wretched end, seeing unknown men walking into the reception-rooms with their hats on, hearing strangers speaking loudly and with arrogance, had taken refuge in the laundry. It was there that Madame Desvarennnes found her, playing, plainly dressed in a little alpaca frock, her pretty hair loose and falling on her shoulders. She looked astonished at what she had seen; silent, not daring to run or sing as formerly in the great desolate house whence the master had just been taken away forever.

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With the vague instinct of abandoned children who seek to attach themselves to some one or some thing, Jeanne clung to Madame Desvarennnes, who, ready to protect, and longing for maternity, took the child in her arms. The gardener's wife acted as guide during her visit over the property. Madame Desvarennnes questioned her. She knew nothing of the child except what she had heard from the servants when they gossiped in the evenings about their late master. They said Jeanne was a bastard. Of her relatives they knew nothing. The Count had an aunt in England who was married to a rich lord; but he had not corresponded with her lately. The little one then was reduced to beggary as the estate was to be sold.

The gardener's wife was a good woman and was willing to keep the child until the new proprietor came; but when once affairs were settled, she would certainly go and make a declaration to the mayor, and take her to the workhouse. Madame Desvarennnes listened in silence. One word only had struck her while the woman was speaking. The child was without support, without ties, and abandoned like a poor lost dog. The little one was pretty too; and when she fixed her large deep eyes on that improvised mother, who pressed her so tenderly to her heart, she seemed to implore her not to put her down, and to carry her away from the mourning that troubled her mind and the isolation that froze her heart.

Madame Desvarennnes, very superstitious, like a woman of the people, began to think that, perhaps, Providence had brought her to Cernay that day and had placed the child in her path. It was perhaps a reparation which heaven granted her, in giving her the little girl she so longed for. Acting unhesitatingly, as she did in everything, she left her name with the woman, carried Jeanne to her carriage, and took her to Paris, promising herself to make inquiries to find her relatives.

A month later, the property of Cernay pleasing her, and the researches for Jeanne's friends not proving successful, Madame Desvarennnes took possession of the estate and the child into the bargain.

Michel welcomed the child without enthusiasm. The little stranger was indifferent to him; he would have preferred adopting a boy. The mistress was delighted. Her maternal instincts, so long stifled, developed fully. She made plans for the future. Her energy returned; she spoke loudly and firmly. But in her appearance there was revealed an inward contentment never remarked before, which made her sweeter and more benevolent. She no longer spoke of retiring from business. The discouragement which had seized her left her as if by magic. The house which had been so dull for some months became noisy and gay. The child, like a sunbeam, had scattered the clouds.

It was then that the most unlooked-for phenomenon, which was so considerably to influence Madame Desvarennnes's life, occurred. At the moment when the mistress seemed provided by chance with the heiress so much longed for, she learned with

surprise that she was about to become a mother! After sixteen years of married life, this discovery was almost a discomfiture. What would have been delight formerly was now a cause for fear. She, almost an old woman!

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There was an incredible commotion in the business world when the news became known. The younger branch of Desvarennnes had witnessed Jeanne's arrival with little satisfaction, and were still more gloomy when they learned that the chances of their succeeding to great wealth were over. Still they did not lose all hopes. At thirty-five years of age one cannot always tell how these little affairs will come off. An accident was possible. But none occurred; all passed off well.

Madame Desvarennnes was as strong physically as she was morally, and proved victorious by bringing into the world a little girl, who was named Michelins in honor of her father. The mistress's heart was large enough to hold two children; she kept the orphan she had adopted, and brought her up as if she had been her very own. Still there was soon an enormous difference in her manner of loving Jeanne and Michelins. This mother had for the long-wished-for child an ardent, mad, passionate love like that of a tigress for her cubs. She had never loved her husband. All the tenderness which had accumulated in her heart blossomed, and it was like spring.

This autocrat, who had never allowed contradiction, and before whom all her dependents bowed either with or against the grain, was now led in her turn; the bronze of her character became like wax in the little pink hands of her daughter. The commanding woman bent before the little fair head. There was nothing good enough for Micheline. Had the mother owned the world she would have placed it at the little one's feet. One tear from the child upset her. If on one of the most important subjects Madame Desvarennnes had said "No," and Micheline came and said "Yes," the hitherto resolute will became subordinate to the caprice of a child. They knew it in the house and acted upon it. This manoeuvre succeeded each time, although Madame Desvarennnes had seen through it from the first. It appeared as if the mother felt a secret joy in proving under all circumstances the unbounded adoration which she felt for her daughter. She often said:

"Pretty as she is, and rich as I shall make her, what husband will be worthy of Micheline? But if she believes me when it is time to choose one, she will prefer a man remarkable for his intelligence, and will give him her fortune as a stepping-stone to raise him as high as she chooses him to go."

Inwardly she was thinking of Pierre Delarue, who had just taken honors at the Polytechnic school, and who seemed to have a brilliant career before him. This woman, humbly born, was proud of her origin, and sought a plebeian for her son-in-law, to put into his hand a golden tool powerful enough to move the world.

Micheline was ten years old when her father died. Alas, Michel was not a great loss. They wore mourning for him; but they hardly noticed that he was absent. His whole life had been a void. Madame Desvarennnes, it is sad to say, felt herself more mistress of her child when she was a widow. She was jealous of Micheline's affections, and each

kiss the child gave her father seemed to the mother to be robbed from her. With this fierce tenderness, she preferred solitude around this beloved being.

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At this time Madame Desvarennnes was really in the zenith of womanly splendor. She seemed taller, her figure had straightened, vigorous and powerful. Her gray hair gave her face a majestic appearance. Always surrounded by a court of clients and friends, she seemed like a sovereign. The fortune of the firm was not to be computed. It was said Madame Desvarennnes did not know how rich she was.

Jeanne and Micheline grew up amid this colossal prosperity. The one, tall, brown-haired, with blue eyes changing like the sea; the other, fragile, fair, with dark dreamy eyes. Jeanne, proud, capricious, and inconstant; Micheline, simple, sweet, and tenacious. The brunette inherited from her reckless father and her fanciful mother a violent and passionate nature; the blonde was tractable and good like Michel, but resolute and firm like Madame Desvarennnes. These two opposite natures were congenial, Micheline sincerely loving Jeanne, and Jeanne feeling the necessity of living amicably with Micheline, her mother's idol, but inwardly enduring with difficulty the inequalities which began to exhibit themselves in the manner with which the intimates of the house treated the one and the other. She found these flatteries wounding, and thought Madame Desvarennnes's preferences for Micheline unjust.

All these accumulated grievances made Jeanne conceive the wish one morning of leaving the house where she had been brought up, and where she now felt humiliated. Pretending to long to go to England to see that rich relative of her father, who, knowing her to be in a brilliant society, had taken notice of her, she asked Madame Desvarennnes to allow her to spend a few weeks from home. She wished to try the ground in England, and see what she might expect in the future from her family. Madame Desvarennnes lent herself to this whim, not guessing the young girl's real motive; and Jeanne, well attended, went to her aunt's home in England.

Madame Desvarennnes, besides, had attained the summit of her hopes, and an event had just taken place which preoccupied her. Micheline, deferring to her mother's wishes, had decided to allow herself to be betrothed to Pierre Delarue, who had just lost his mother, and whose business improved daily. The young girl, accustomed to treat Pierre like a brother, had easily consented to accept him as her future husband.

Jeanne, who had been away for six months, had returned sobered and disillusioned about her family. She had found them kind and affable, had received many compliments on her beauty, which was really remarkable, but had not met with any encouragement in her desires for independence. She came home resolved not to leave until she married. She arrived in the Rue Saint-Dominique at the moment when Pierre Delarue, thirsting with ambition, was leaving his betrothed, his relatives, and gay Paris to undertake engineering work on the coasts of Algeria and Tunis that would raise him above his rivals. In leaving, the young

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man did not for a moment think that Jeanne was returning from England at the same hour with trouble for him in the person of a very handsome cavalier, Prince Serge Panine, who had been introduced to her at a ball during the London season. Mademoiselle de Cernay, availing herself of English liberty, was returning escorted only by a maid in company with the Prince. The journey had been delightful. The tete-a-tete travelling had pleased the young people, and on leaving the train they had promised to see each other again. Official balls facilitated their meeting; Serge was introduced to Madame Desvarennnes as being an English friend, and soon became the most assiduous partner of Jeanne and Micheline. It was thus, under the most trivial pretext, that the man gained admittance to the house where he was to play such an important part.

CHAPTER II

THE GALLEY-SLAVE OF PLEASURE

One morning in the month of May, 1879, a young man, elegantly attired, alighted from a well-appointed carriage before the door of Madame Desvarennnes's house. The young man passed quickly before the porter in uniform, decorated with a military medal, stationed near the door. The visitor found himself in an anteroom which communicated with several corridors. A messenger was seated in the depth of a large armchair, reading the newspaper, and not even lending an inattentive ear to the whispered conversation of a dozen canvassers, who were patiently awaiting their turn for gaining a hearing. On seeing the young man enter by the private door, the messenger rose, dropped his newspaper on the armchair, hastily raised his velvet skullcap, tried to smile, and made two steps forward.

"Good-morning, old Felix," said the young man, in a friendly tone to the messenger. "Is my aunt within?"

"Yes, Monsieur Savinien, Madame Desvarennnes is in her office; but she has been engaged for more than an hour with the Financial Secretary of the War Department."

In uttering these words old Felix put on a mysterious and important air, which denoted how serious the discussions going on in the adjoining room seemed to his mind.

"You see," continued he, showing Madame Desvarennnes's nephew the anteroom full of people, "madame has kept all these waiting since this morning, and perhaps she won't see them."

"I must see her though," murmured the young man.

He reflected a moment, then added:

“Is Monsieur Marechal in?”

“Yes, sir, certainly. If you will allow me I will announce you.”

“It is unnecessary.”

And, stepping forward, he entered the office adjoining that of Madame Desvarennnes.

Seated at a large table of black wood, covered with bundles of papers and notes, a young man was working. He was thirty years of age, but appeared much older. His prematurely bald forehead, and wrinkled brow, betokened a life of severe struggles and privations, or a life of excesses and pleasures. Still those clear and pure eyes were not those of a libertine, and the straight nose solidly joined to the face was that of a searcher. Whatever the cause, the man was old before his time.

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On hearing the door of his office open, he raised his eyes, put down his pen, and was making a movement toward his visitor, when the latter interrupted him quickly with these words:

“Don’t stir, Marechal, or I shall be off! I only came in until Aunt Desvarennnes is at liberty; but if I disturb you I will go and take a turn, smoke a cigar, and come back in three quarters of an hour.”

“You do not disturb me, Monsieur Savinien; at least not often enough, for be it said, without reproaching you, it is more than three months since we have seen anything of you. There, the post is finished. I was writing the last addresses.”

And taking a heavy bundle of papers off the desk, Marechal showed them to Savinien.

“Gracious! It seems that business is going on well here.”

“Better and better.”

“You are making mountains of flour.”

“Yes; high as Mont Blanc; and then, we now have a fleet.”

“What! a fleet?” cried Savinien, whose face expressed doubt and surprise at the same time.

“Yes, a steam fleet. Last year Madame Desvarennnes was not satisfied with the state in which her corn came from the East. The corn was damaged owing to defective stowage; the firm claimed compensation from the steamship company. The claim was only moderately satisfied, Madame Desvarennnes got vexed, and now we import our own. We have branches at Smyrna and Odessa.”

“It is fabulous! If it goes on, my aunt will have an administration as important as that of a European state. Oh! you are happy here, you people; you are busy. I amuse myself! And if you knew how it wearies me! I am withering, consuming myself, I am longing for business.”

And saying these words, young Monsieur Desvarennnes allowed a sorrowful moan to escape him.

“It seems to me,” said Marechal, “that it only depends upon yourself to do as much and more business than any one?”

“You know well enough that it is not so,” sighed Savinien; “my aunt is opposed to it.”

“What a mistake!” cried Marechal, quickly. “I have heard Madame Desvarennnes say more than twenty times how she regretted your being unemployed. Come into the firm, you will have a good berth in the counting-house.”

“In the counting-house!” cried Savinien, bitterly; “there’s the sore point. Now look here; my friend, do you think that an organization like mine is made to bend to the trivialities of a copying clerk’s work? To follow the humdrum of every-day routine? To blacken paper? To become a servant?—me! with what I have in my brain?”

And, rising abruptly, Savinien began to walk hurriedly up and down the room, disdainfully shaking his little head with its low forehead on which were plastered a few fair curls (made with curling-irons), with the indignant air of an Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders.

“Oh, I know very well what is at the bottom of the business—my aunt is jealous of me because I am a man of ideas. She wishes to be the only one of the family who possesses any. She thinks of binding me down to a besotting work,” continued he, “but I won’t have it. I know what I want! It is independence of thought, bent on the solution of great problems—that is, a wide field to apply my discoveries. But a fixed rule, common law, I could not submit to it.”

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"It is like the examinations," observed Marechal, looking slyly at young Desvarennnes, who was drawing himself up to his full height; "examinations never suited you."

"Never," said Savinien, energetically. "They wished to get me into the Polytechnic School; impossible! Then the Central School; no better. I astonished the examiners by the novelty of my ideas. They refused me."

"Well, you know," retorted Marechal, "if you began by overthrowing their theories—"

"That's it!" cried Savinien, triumphantly. "My mind is stronger than I; I must let my imagination have free run, and no one will ever know what that particular turn of mind has cost me. Even my family do not think me serious. Aunt Desvarennnes has forbidden any kind of enterprise, under pretence that I bear her name, and that I might compromise it because I have twice failed. My aunt paid, it is true. Do you think it is generous of her to take advantage of my situation, and prohibit my trying to succeed? Are inventors judged by three or four failures? If my aunt had allowed me I should have astonished the world."

"She feared, above all," said Marechal, simply, "to see you astonishing the Tribunal of Commerce."

"Oh! you, too," moaned Savinien, "are in league with my enemies; you make no account of me."

And young Desvarennnes sank as if crushed into an armchair and began to lament. He was very unhappy at being misunderstood. His aunt allowed him three thousand francs a month on condition that he would not make use of his ten fingers. Was it moral? Then he with such exuberant vigor had to waste it on pleasure and seeing life to the utmost. He passed his time in theatres, at clubs, restaurants, in boudoirs. He lost his time, his money, his hair, his illusions. He bemoaned his lot, but continued, only to have something to do. With grim sarcasm he called himself the galley-slave of pleasure. And notwithstanding all these consuming excesses, he asserted that he could not render his imagination barren. Amid the greatest follies at suppers, during the clinking of glasses; in the excitement of the dance-inspirations came to him in flashes, he made prodigious discoveries.

And as Marechal ventured a timid "Oh!" tinged with incredulity, Savinien flew into a passion. Yes; he had invented something astonishing; he saw fortune within reach, and he thought the bargain made with his aunt very unjust. Therefore he had come to break it, and to regain his liberty.

Marechal looked at the young man while he was explaining with animation his ambitious projects. He scrutinized that flat forehead within which the dandy asserted so many good ideas were hidden. He measured that slim form bent by wild living, and asked

himself how that degenerate being could struggle against the difficulties of business. A smile played on his lips. He knew Savinien too well not to be aware that he was a prey to one of those attacks of melancholy which seized on him when his funds were low.

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On these occasions, which occurred frequently, the young man had longings for business, which Madame Desvarennnes stopped by asking: "How much?" Savinien allowed himself to be with difficulty induced to consent to renounce the certain profits promised, as he said, by his projected enterprise. At last he would capitulate, and with his pocket well lined, nimble and joyful, he returned to his boudoirs, race-courses, fashionable restaurants, and became more than ever the galley-slave of pleasure.

"And Pierre?" asked young Desvarennnes, suddenly and quickly changing the subject. "Have you any news of him?"

Marechal became serious. A cloud seemed to have come across his brow; he gravely answered Savinien's question.

Pierre was still in the East. He was travelling toward Tunis, the coast of which he was exploring. It was a question of the formation of an island sea by taking the water through the desert. It would be a colossal undertaking, the results of which would be considerable as regarded Algeria. The climate would be completely changed, and the value of the colony would be increased tenfold, because it would become the most fertile country in the world. Pierre had been occupied in this undertaking for more than a year with unequalled ardor; he was far from his home, his betrothed, seeing only the goal to be attained; turning a deaf ear to all that would distract his attention from the great work, to the success of which he hoped to contribute gloriously.

"And don't people say," resumed Savinien with an evil smile, "that during his absence a dashing young fellow is busy luring his betrothed away from him?"

At these words Marechal made a quick movement.

"It is false," he interrupted; "and I do not understand how you, Monsieur Desvarennnes, should be the bearer of such a tale. To admit that Mademoiselle Micheline could break her word or her engagements is to slander her, and if any one other than you—"

"There, there, my dear friend," said Savinien, laughing, "don't get into a rage. What I say to you I would not repeat to the first comer; besides, I am only the echo of a rumor that has been going the round during the last three weeks. They even give the name of him who has been chosen for the honor and pleasure of such a brilliant conquest. I mean Prince Serge Panine."

"As you have mentioned Prince Panine," replied Marechal, "allow me to tell you that he has not put his foot inside Madame Desvarennnes's door for three weeks. This is not the way of a man about to marry the daughter of the house."

"My dear fellow, I only repeat what I have heard. As for me, I don't know any more. I have kept out of the way for more than three months. And besides, it matters little to me



whether Micheline be a commoner or a princess, the wife of Delarue or of Panine. I shall be none the richer or the poorer, shall I? Therefore I need not care. The dear child will certainly have millions enough to marry easily. And her adopted sister, the stately Mademoiselle Jeanne, what has become of her?"

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“Ah! as to Mademoiselle de Cernay, that is another affair,” cried Marechal.

And as if wishing to divert the conversation in an opposite direction to which Savinien had led it a moment before, he spoke readily of Madame Desvarennés’s adopted daughter. She had made a lively impression on one of the intimate friends of the house—the banker Cayrol, who had offered his name and his fortune to the fair Jeanne.

This was a cause of deep amazement to Savinien. What! Cayrol! The shrewd close-fisted Auvergnat! A girl without a fortune! Cayrol Silex as he was called in the commercial world on account of his hardness. This living money-bag had a heart then! It was necessary to believe it since both money-bag and heart had been placed at Mademoiselle de Cernay’s feet. This strange girl was certainly destined to millions. She had just missed being Madame Desvarennés’s heiress, and now Cayrol had taken it into his head to marry her.

But that was not all. And when Marechal told Savinien that the fair Jeanne flatly refused to become the wife of Cayrol, there was an outburst of joyful exclamations. She refused! By Jove, she was mad! An unlooked-for marriage—for she had not a penny, and had most extravagant notions. She had been brought up as if she were to live always in velvet and silks—to loll in carriages and think only of her pleasure. What reason did she give for refusing him! None. Haughtily and disdainfully she had declared that she did not love “that man,” and that she would not marry him.

When Savinien heard these details his rapture increased. One thing especially charmed him: Jeanne’s saying “that man,” when speaking of Cayrol. A little girl who was called “De Cernay” just as he might call himself “Des Batignolles” if he pleased: the natural and unacknowledged daughter of a Count and of a shady public singer! And she refused Cayrol, calling him “that man.” It was really funny. And what did worthy Cayrol say about it?

When Marechal declared that the banker had not been dampened by this discouraging reception, Savinien said it was human nature. The fair Jeanne scorned Cayrol and Cayrol adored her. He had often seen those things happen. He knew the baggages so well! Nobody knew more of women than he did. He had known some more difficult to manage than proud Mademoiselle Jeanne.

An old leaven of hatred had festered in Savinien’s heart against Jeanne since the time when the younger branch of the Desvarennés had reason to fear that the superb heritage was going to the adopted daughter. Savinien had lost the fear, but had kept up the animosity. And everything that could happen to Jeanne of a vexing or painful nature would be witnessed by him with pleasure.

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He was about to encourage Marechal to continue his revelations, and had risen and was leaning on the desk. With his face excited and eager, he was preparing his question, when, through the door which led to Madame Desvarennnes's office, a confused murmur of voices was heard. At the same time the door was half opened, held by a woman's hand, square, with short fingers, a firm-willed and energetic hand. At the same time, the last words exchanged between Madame Desvarennnes and the Financial Secretary of the War Office were distinctly audible. Madame Desvarennnes was speaking, and her voice sounded clear and plain; a little raised and vibrating. There seemed a shade of anger in its tone.

"My dear sir, you will tell the Minister that does not suit me. It is not the custom of the house. For thirty-five years I have conducted business thus, and I have always found it answer. I wish you good-morning."

The door of the office facing that which Madame Desvarennnes held closed, and a light step glided along the corridor. It was the Financial Secretary's. The mistress appeared.

Marechal rose hastily. As to Savinien, all his resolution seemed to have vanished at the sound of his aunt's voice, for he had rapidly gained a corner of the room, and seated himself on a leather-covered sofa, hidden behind an armchair, where he remained perfectly quiet.

"Do you understand that, Marechal?" said dame Desvarennnes; "they want to place a resident agent at the mill on pretext of checking things. They say that all military contractors are obliged to submit to it. My word, do they take us for thieves, the rascals? It is the first time that people have seemed to doubt me. And it has enraged me. I have been arguing for a whole hour with the man they sent me. I said to him, 'My dear sir, you may either take it or leave it. Let us start from this point: I can do without you and you cannot do without me. If you don't buy my flour, somebody else will. I am not at all troubled about it. But as to having any one here who would be as much master as myself, or perhaps more, never! I am too old to change my customs.' Thereupon the Financial Secretary left. There! And, besides, they change their Ministry every fortnight. One would never know with whom one had to deal. Thank you, no."

While talking thus with Marechal, Madame Desvarennnes was walking about the office. She was still the same woman with the broad prominent forehead. Her hair, which she wore in smooth plaits, had become gray, but the sparkle of her dark eyes only seemed the brighter from this. She had preserved her splendid teeth, and her smile had remained young and charming. She spoke with animation, as usual, and with the gestures of a man. She placed herself before her secretary, seeming to appeal to him as a witness of her being in the right. During the hour with the official personage she had been obliged to contain herself. She unburdened herself to Marechal, saying just what she thought.

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But all at once she perceived Savinien, who was waiting to show himself now that she had finished. The mistress turned sharply to the young man, and frowned slightly:

“Hallo! you are there, eh? How is it that you could leave your fair friends?”

“But, aunt, I came to pay you my respects.”

“No nonsense now; I’ve no time,” interrupted the mistress. “What do you want?”

Savinien, disconcerted by this rude reception, blinked his eyes, as if seeking some form to give his request; then, making up his mind, he said:

“I came to see you on business.”

“You on business?” replied Madame Desvarennnes, with a shade of astonishment and irony.

“Yes, aunt, on business,” declared Savinien, looking down as if he expected a rebuff.

“Oh, oh, oh!” said Madame Desvarennnes, “you know our agreement; I give you an allowance—”

“I renounce my income,” interrupted Savinien, quickly, “I wish to take back my independence. The transfer I made has already cost me too dear. It’s a fool’s bargain. The enterprise which I am going to launch is superb, and must realize immense profits. I shall certainly not abandon it.”

While speaking, Savinien had become animated and had regained his self-possession. He believed in his scheme, and was ready to pledge his future. He argued that his aunt could not blame him for giving proof of his energy and daring, and he discoursed in bombastic style.

“That’s enough!” cried Madame Desvarennnes, interrupting her nephew’s oration. “I am very fond of mills, but not word-mills. You are talking too much about it to be sincere. So many words can only serve to disguise the nullity of your projects. You want to embark in speculation? With what money?”

“I contribute the scheme and some capitalists will advance the money to start with; we shall then issue shares!”

“Never in this life! I oppose it. You! With a responsibility. You! Directing an undertaking. You would only commit absurdities. In fact, you want to sell an idea, eh? Well, I will buy it.”

"It is not only the money I want," said Savinien, with an indignant air, "it is confidence in my ideas, it is enthusiasm on the part of my shareholders, it is success. You don't believe in my ideas, aunt!"

"What does it matter to you, if I buy them from you? It seems to me a pretty good proof of confidence. Is that settled?"

"Ah, aunt, you are implacable!" groaned Savinien. "When you have laid your hand upon any one, it is all over. Adieu, independence; one must obey you. Nevertheless, it was a vast and beautiful conception."

"Very well. Marechal, see that my nephew has ten thousand francs. And you, Savinien, remember that I see no more of you."

"Until the money is spent!" murmured Marechal, in the ear of Madame Desvarennés's nephew.

And taking him by the arm he was leading him toward the safe when the mistress turned to Savinien and said:

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"By the way, what is your invention?"

"Aunt, it is a threshing machine," answered the young man, gravely.

"Rather a machine for coining money," said the incorrigible Marechal, in an undertone.

"Well; bring me your plans," resumed Madame Desvarennnes, after having reflected a moment. "Perchance you may have hit upon something."

The mistress had been generous, and now the woman of business reasserted herself and she thought of reaping the benefit.

Savinien seemed very confused at this demand, and as his aunt gave him an interrogative look, he confessed:

"There are no drawings made as yet."

"No drawings as yet?" cried the mistress. "Where then is your invention?"

"It is here," replied Savinien, and with an inspired gesture he struck his narrow forehead.

Madame Desvarennnes and Marechal could not resist breaking out into a laugh.

"And you were already talking of issuing shares?" said the mistress. "Do you think people would have paid their money with your brain as sole guarantee? You! Get along; I am the only one to make bargains like that, and you are the only one with whom I make them. Go, Marechal, give him his money; I won't gainsay it. But you are a trickster, as usual!"

CHAPTER III

PIERRE RETURNS

By a wave of her hand she dismissed Savinien, who, abashed, went out with Marechal. Left alone, she seated herself at her secretary's desk, and taking the pile of letters she signed them. The pen flew in her fingers, and on the paper was displayed her name, written in large letters in a man's handwriting.

She had been occupied thus for about a quarter of an hour when Marechal reappeared. Behind him came a stout thickset man of heavy build, and gorgeously dressed. His face, surrounded by a bristly dark brown beard, and his eyes overhung by bushy eyebrows, gave him, at the first glance, a harsh appearance. But his mouth promptly banished this impression. His thick and sensual lips betrayed voluptuous tastes. A

disciple of Lavater or Gall would have found the bump of amativeness largely developed.

Marechal stepped aside to allow him to pass.

“Good-morning, mistress,” said he familiarly, approaching Madame Desvarennnes.

The mistress raised her head quickly, and said:

“Ah! it’s you, Cayrol! That’s capital! I was just going to send for you.”

Jean Cayrol, a native of Cantal, had been brought up amid the wild mountains of Auvergne. His father was a small farmer in the neighborhood of Saint-Flour, scraping a miserable pittance from the ground for the maintenance of his family. From the age of eight years Cayrol had been a shepherd-boy. Alone in the quiet and remote country, the child had given way to ambitious dreams. He was very intelligent, and felt that he was born to another sphere than that of farming.

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Thus, at the first opportunity which had occurred to take him into a town, he was found ready. He went as servant to a banker at Brioude. There, in the service of this comparatively luxurious house, he got smoothed down a little, and lost some of his clumsy loutishness. Strong as an ox, he did the work of two men, and at night, when in his garret, fell asleep learning to read. He was seized by the ambition to get on. No pains were to be spared to gain his goal.

His master having been elected a member of the Chamber of Deputies, Cayrol accompanied him to Paris. Life in the capital finished the turmoil of Cayrol's brain. Seeing the prodigious activity of the great city on whose pavements fortunes sprang up in a day like mushrooms, the Auvergnat felt his moral strength equal to the occasion, and leaving his master, he became clerk to a merchant in the Rue du Sentier.

There, for four years, he studied commerce, and gained much experience. He soon learned that it was only in financial transactions that large fortunes were to be rapidly made. He left the Rue du Sentier, and found a place at a stock-broker's. His keen scent for speculation served him admirably. After the lapse of a few years he had charge of the business. His position was getting better; he was making fifteen thousand francs per annum, but that was nothing compared to his dreams. He was then twenty-eight years of age. He felt ready to do anything to succeed, except something unhandsome, for this lover of money would have died rather than enrich himself by dishonest means.

It was at this time that his lucky star threw him in Madame Desvarennes's way. The mistress, understanding men, guessed Cayrol's worth quickly. She was seeking a banker who would devote himself to her interests. She watched the young man narrowly for some time; then, sure she was not mistaken as to his capacity, she bluntly proposed to give him money to start a business. Cayrol, who had already saved eighty thousand francs, received twelve hundred thousand from Madame Desvarennes, and settled in the Rue Taitbout, two steps from the house of Rothschild.

Madame Desvarennes had made a lucky hit in choosing Cayrol as her confidential agent. This short, thickset Auvergnat was a master of finance, and in a few years had raised the house to an unexpected degree of prosperity. Madame Desvarennes had drawn considerable sums as interest on the money lent, and the banker's fortune was already estimated at several millions. Was it the happy influence of Madame Desvarennes that changed everything she touched into gold, or were Cayrol's capacities really extraordinary? The results were there and that was sufficient. They did not trouble themselves over and above that.

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The banker had naturally become one of the intimates of Madame Desvarennés's house. For a long time he saw Jeanne without particularly noticing her. This young girl had not struck his fancy. It was one night at a ball, on seeing her dancing with Prince Panine, that he perceived that she was marvellously engaging. His eyes were attracted by an invincible power and followed her graceful figure whirling through the waltz. He secretly envied the brilliant cavalier who was holding this adorable creature in his arms, who was bending over her bare shoulders, and whose breath lightly touched her hair. He longed madly for Jeanne, and from that moment thought only of her.

The Prince was then very friendly with Mademoiselle de Cernay; he overwhelmed her with kind attentions. Cayrol watched him to see if he spoke to her of love, but Panine was a past master in these drawing-room skirmishes, and the banker got nothing for his pains. That Cayrol was tenacious has been proved. He became intimate with the Prince. He tendered him such little services as create intimacy, and when he was sure of not being repulsed with haughtiness, he questioned Serge. Did he love Mademoiselle de Cernay? This question, asked in a trembling voice and with a constrained smile, found the Prince quite calm. He answered lightly that Mademoiselle de Cernay was a very agreeable partner, but that he had never dreamed of offering her his homage. He had other projects in his head. Cayrol pressed the Prince's hand violently, made a thousand protestations of devotedness, and finally obtained his complete confidence.

Serge loved Mademoiselle Desvarennés, and it was to become intimate with her that he had so eagerly sought her friend's company. Cayrol, in learning the Prince's secret, resumed his usual reserved manner. He knew that Micheline was engaged to Pierre Delarue, but still, women were so whimsical! Who could tell? Perhaps Mademoiselle Desvarennés had looked favorably upon the handsome Serge.

He was really admirable to view, this Panine, with his blue eyes, pure as a maiden's, and his long fair mustache falling on each side of his rosy mouth. He had a truly royal bearing, and was descended from an ancient aristocratic race; he had a charming hand and an arched foot, enough to make a woman envious. Soft and insinuating with his tender voice and sweet Slavonic accent, he was no ordinary man, but one usually creating a great impression wherever he went.

His story was well known in Paris. He was born in the province of Posen, so violently seized on by Prussia, that octopus of Europe. Serge's father had been killed during the insurrection of 1848, and he, when a year old, was brought by his uncle, Thaddeus Panine, to France, and was educated at the College Rollin, where he had not acquired over much learning.

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In 1866, at the moment when war broke out between Prussia and Austria, Serge was eighteen years old. By his uncle's orders he had left Paris, and had entered himself for the campaign in an Austrian cavalry regiment. All who bore the name of Panine, and had strength to hold a sword or carry a gun, had risen to fight the oppressor of Poland. Serge, during this short and bloody struggle, showed prodigies of valor. On the night of Sadowa, out of seven bearing the name of Panine, who had served against Prussia, five were dead, one was wounded; Serge alone was untouched, though red with the blood of his uncle Thaddeus, who was killed by the bursting of a shell. All these Panines, living or dead, had gained honors. When they were spoken of before Austrians or Poles, they were called heroes.

Such a man was a dangerous companion for a young, simple, and artless girl like Micheline. His adventures were bound to please her imagination, and his beauty sure to charm her eyes. Cayrol was a prudent man; he watched, and it was not long before he perceived that Micheline treated the Prince with marked favor. The quiet young girl became animated when Serge was there. Was there love in this transformation? Cayrol did not hesitate. He guessed at once that the future would be Panine's, and that the maintenance of his own influence in the house of Desvarennnes depended on the attitude which he was about to take. He passed over to the side of the newcomer with arms and baggage, and placed himself entirely at his disposal.

It was he who three weeks before, in the name of Panine, had made overtures to Madame Desvarennnes. The errand had been difficult, and the banker had turned his tongue several times in his mouth before speaking. Still, Cayrol could overcome all difficulties. He was able to explain the object of his mission without Madame flying into a passion. But, the explanation over, there was a terrible scene. He witnessed one of the most awful bursts of rage that it was possible to expect from a violent woman. The mistress treated the friend of the family as one would not have dared to treat a petty commercial traveller who came to a private house to offer his wares. She showed him the door, and desired him not to darken the threshold again.

But if Cayrol was resolute he was equally patient. He listened without saying a word to the reproaches of Madame Desvarennnes, who was exasperated that a candidate should be set up in opposition to the son-in-law of her choosing. He did not go, and when Madame Desvarennnes was a little calmed by the letting out of her indignation, he argued with her. The mistress was too hasty about the business; it was no use deciding without reflecting. Certainly, nobody esteemed Pierre Delarue more than he did; but it was necessary to know whether Micheline loved him. A childish affection was not love, and Prince Panine thought he might hope that Mademoiselle Desvarennnes——

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The mistress did not allow Cayrol to finish his sentence; she rang the bell and asked for her daughter. This time, Cayrol prudently took the opportunity of disappearing. He had opened fire; it was for Micheline to decide the result of the battle. The banker awaited the issue of the interview between mother and daughter in the next room. Through the door he heard the irritated tones of Madame Desvarennnes, to which Micheline answered softly and slowly. The mother threatened and stormed. Coldly and quietly the daughter received the attack. The tussle lasted about an hour, when the door reopened and Madame Desvarennnes appeared, pale and still trembling, but calmed. Micheline, wiping her beautiful eyes, still wet with tears, regained her apartment.

"Well," said Cayrol timidly, seeing the mistress standing silent and absorbed before him; "I see with pleasure that you are less agitated. Did Mademoiselle Micheline give you good reasons?"

"Good reasons!" cried Madame Desvarennnes with a violent gesture, last flash of the late storm. "She cried, that's all. And you know when she cries I no longer know what I do or say! She breaks my heart with her tears. And she knows it. Ah! it is a great misfortune to love children too much!"

This energetic woman was conquered, and yet understood that she was wrong to allow herself to be conquered. She fell into a deep reverie, and forgot that Cayrol was present. She thought of the future which she had planned for Micheline, and which the latter carelessly destroyed in an instant.

Pierre, now an orphan, would have been a real son to the mistress. He would have lived in her house, and have surrounded her old age with care and affection. And then, he was so full of ability that he could not help attaining a brilliant position. She would have helped him, and would have rejoiced in his success. And all this scaffolding was overturned because this Panine had crossed Micheline's path. A foreign adventurer, prince perhaps, but who could tell? Lies are easily told when the proofs of the lie have to be sought beyond the frontiers. And it was her daughter who was going to fall in love with an insipid fop who only coveted her millions. That she should see such a man enter her family, steal Micheline's love from her, and rummage her strongbox! In a moment she vowed mortal hatred against Panine, and resolved to do all she could to prevent the longed-for marriage with her daughter.

She was disturbed in her meditation by Cayrol's voice. He wished to take an answer to the Prince. What must he say to him?

"You will let him know," said Madame Desvarennnes, "that he must refrain from seeking opportunities of meeting my daughter. If he be a gentleman, he will understand that his presence, even in Paris, is disagreeable to me. I ask him to go away for three weeks. After that time he may come back, and I agree to give him an answer."

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"You promise me that you will not be vexed with me for having undertaken this errand?"

"I promise on one condition. It is, that not a word which has passed here this morning shall be repeated to any one. Nobody must suspect the proposal that you have just made to me."

Cayrol swore to hold his tongue, and he kept his word. Prince Panine left that same night for England.

Madame Desvarennnes was a woman of quick resolution. She took a sheet of paper, a pen, and in her large handwriting wrote the following lines addressed to Pierre:

"If you do not wish to find Micheline married on your return, come back without a moment's delay."

She sent this ominous letter to the young man, who was then in Tripoli. That done, she returned to her business as if nothing had happened. Her placid face did not once betray the anguish of her heart during those three weeks.

The term fixed by Madame Desvarennnes with the Prince had expired that morning. And the severity with which the mistress had received the Minister of War's Financial Secretary was a symptom of the agitation in which the necessity of coming to a decision placed Micheline's mother. Every morning for the last week she had expected Pierre to arrive. What with having to give an answer to the Prince as she had promised, and the longing to see him whom she loved as a son, she felt sick at heart and utterly cast down. She thought of asking the Prince for a respite. It was for that reason she was glad to see Cayrol.

The latter, therefore, had arrived opportunely. He looked as if he brought startling news. By a glance he drew Madame Desvarennnes's attention to Marechal and seemed to say:

"I must be alone with you; send him away."

The mistress understood, and with a decided gesture said:

"You can speak before Marechal; he knows all my affairs as well as I do myself."

"Even the matter that brings me here?" replied Cayrol, with surprise.

"Even that. It was necessary for me to have some one to whom I could speak, or else my heart would have burst! Come, do your errand. The Prince?"

"A lot it has to do with the Prince," exclaimed Cayrol, in a huff. "Pierre has arrived!"

Madame Desvarennnes rose abruptly. A rush of blood rose to her face, her eyes brightened, and her lips opened with a smile.

“At last!” she cried. “But where is he? How did you hear of his return?”

“Ah! faith, it was just by chance. I was shooting yesterday at Fontainebleau, and I returned this morning by the express. On arriving at Paris, I alighted on the platform, and there I found myself face to face with a tall young man with a long beard, who, seeing me pass, called out, ‘Ah, Cayrol!’ It was Pierre. I only recognized him by his voice. He is much changed; with his beard, and his complexion bronzed like an African.”

“What did he say to you?”

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"Nothing. He pressed my hand. He looked at me for a moment with glistening eyes. There was something on his lips which he longed to ask, yet did not; but I guessed it. I was afraid of giving way to tenderness, that might have ended in my saying something foolish, so I left him."

"How long ago is that?"

"About an hour ago. I only just ran home before coming on here. There I found Panine waiting for me. He insisted upon accompanying me. I hope you won't blame him?"

Madame Desvarennnes frowned.

"I will not see him just now," she said, looking at Cayrol with a resolute air. "Where did you leave him?"

"In the garden, where I found the young ladies."

As if to verify the banker's words, a merry peal of laughter was heard through the half-open window. It was Micheline, who, with returning gayety, was making up for the three weeks' sadness she had experienced during Panine's absence.

Madame Desvarennnes went to the window, and looked into the garden. Seated on the lawn, in large bamboo chairs, the young girls were listening to a story the Prince was telling. The morning was bright and mild; the sun shining through Micheline's silk sunshade lit up her fair head. Before her, Serge, bending his tall figure, was speaking with animation. Micheline's eyes were softly fixed on him. Reclining in her armchair, she allowed herself to be carried away with his conversation, and thoroughly enjoyed his society, of which she had been deprived for the last three weeks. Beside her, Jeanne, silently watching the Prince, was mechanically nibbling, with her white teeth, a bunch of carnations which she held in her hands. A painful thought contracted Mademoiselle de Cernay's brow, and her pale lips on the red flowers seemed to be drinking blood.

The mistress slowly turned away from this scene. A shadow had crossed her brow, which had, for a moment, become serene again at the announcement of Pierre's arrival. She remained silent for a little while, as if considering; then coming to a resolution, and turning to Cayrol, she said:

"Where is Pierre staying?"

"At the Hotel du Louvre," replied the banker.

"Well, I'm going there."

Madame Desvarennnes rang the bell violently.

"My bonnet, my cloak, and the carriage," she said, and with a friendly nod to the two men, she went out quickly.

Micheline was still laughing in the garden. Marechal and Cayrol looked at each other. Cayrol was the first to speak.

"The mistress told you all about the matter then? How is it you never spoke to me about it?"

"Should I have been worthy of Madame Desvarennnes's confidence had I spoken of what she wished to keep secret?"

"To me?"

"Especially to you. The attitude which you have taken forbade my speaking. You favor Prince Panine?"

"And you; you are on Pierre Delarue's side?"

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"I take no side. I am only a subordinate, you know; I do not count."

"Do not attempt to deceive me. Your influence over the mistress is great. The confidence she has in you is a conclusive proof. Important events are about to take place here. Pierre has certainly returned to claim his right as betrothed, and Mademoiselle Micheline loves Prince Serge. Out of this a serious conflict will take place in the house. There will be a battle. And as the parties in question are about equal in strength, I am seeking adherents for my candidate. I own, in all humility, I am on love's side. The Prince is beloved by Mademoiselle Desvarennnes, and I serve him. Micheline will be grateful, and will do me a turn with Mademoiselle de Cernay. As to you, let me give you a little advice. If Madame Desvarennnes consults you, speak well of Panine. When the Prince is master here, your position will be all the better for it."

Marechal had listened to Cayrol without anything betraying the impression his words created. He looked at the banker in a peculiar manner, which caused him to feel uncomfortable, and made him lower his eyes.

"Perhaps you do not know, Monsieur Cayrol," said the secretary, after a moment's pause, "how I entered this firm. It is as well in that case to inform you. Four years ago, I was most wretched. After having sought fortune ten times without success, I felt myself giving way morally and physically. There are some beings gifted with energy, who can surmount all the difficulties of life. You are one of those. As for me, the struggle exhausted my strength, and I came to grief. It would take too long to enumerate all the ways of earning my living I tried. Few even fed me; and I was thinking of putting an end to my miserable existence when I met Pierre. We had been at college together. I went toward him; he was on the quay. I dared to stop him. At first he did not recognize me, I was so haggard, so wretched-looking! But when I spoke, he cried, 'Marechal!' and, without blushing at my tatters, put his arms round my neck. We were opposite the Belle Jardiniere, the clothiers; he wanted to rig me out. I remember as if it were but yesterday I said, 'No, nothing, only find me work!'—'Work, my poor fellow,' he answered, 'but just look at yourself; who would have confidence to give you any? You look like a tramp, and when you accosted me a little while ago, I asked myself if you were not about to steal my watch!' And he laughed gayly, happy at having found me again, and thinking that he might be of use to me. Seeing that I would not go into the shop, he took off his overcoat, and put it on my back to cover my tattered clothes, and there and then he took me to Madame Desvarennnes. Two days later I entered the office. You see the position I hold, and I owe it to Pierre. He has been more than a friend to me—a brother. Come! after that, tell me what you would think of me if I did what you have just asked me?"



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Cayrol was confused; he twisted his bristly beard with his fingers.

"Faith, I do not say that your scruples are not right; but, between ourselves, every step that is taken against the Prince will count for naught. He will marry Mademoiselle Desvarennnes."

"It is possible. In that case, I shall be here to console Pierre and sympathize with him."

"And in the mean time you are going to do all you can in his favor?"

"I have already had the honor of telling you that I cannot do anything."

"Well, well. One knows what talking means, and you will not change my idea of your importance. You take the weaker side then; that's superb!"

"It is but strictly honest," said Marechal. "It is true that that quality has become very rare!"

Cayrol wheeled round on his heels. He took a few steps toward the door, then, returning to Marechal, held out his hand:

"Without a grudge, eh?"

The secretary allowed his hand to be shaken without answering, and the banker went out, saying to himself:

"He is without a sou and has prejudices! There's a lad without a future."

CHAPTER IV

THE RIVALS

On reaching Paris, Pierre Delarue experienced a strange feeling. In his feverish haste he longed for the swiftness of electricity to bring him near Micheline. As soon as he arrived in Paris, he regretted having travelled so fast. He longed to meet his betrothed, yet feared to know his fate.

He had a sort of presentiment that his reception would destroy his hopes. And the more he tried to banish these thoughts, the more forcibly they returned. The thought that Micheline had forgotten her promise made the blood rush to his face.

Madame Desvarennnes's short letter suggested it. That his betrothed was lost to him he understood, but he would not admit it. How was it possible that Micheline should forget him? All his childhood passed before his mind. He remembered the sweet and artless

evidences of affection which the young girl had given him. And yet she no longer loved him! It was her own mother who said so. After that could he still hope?

A prey to this deep trouble, Pierre entered Paris. On finding himself face to face with Cayrol, the young man's first idea was, as Cayrol had guessed, to cry out, "What's going on? Is all lost to me?" A sort of anxious modesty kept back the words on his lips. He would not admit that he doubted. And, then, Cayrol would only have needed to answer that all was over, and that he could put on mourning for his love. He turned around, and went out.

The tumult of Paris surprised and stunned him. After spending a year in the peaceful solitudes of Africa, to find himself amid the cries of street-sellers, the rolling of carriages, and the incessant movement of the great city, was too great a contrast to him. Pierre was overcome by languor; his head seemed too heavy for his body to carry; he mechanically entered a cab which conveyed him to the Hotel du Louvre. Through the window, against the glass of which he tried to cool his heated forehead, he saw pass in procession before his eyes, the Column of July, the church of St. Paul, the Hotel de Ville in ruins, and the colonnade of the Louvre.

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An absurd idea took possession of him. He remembered that during the Commune he was nearly killed in the Rue Saint-Antoine by the explosion of a shell, thrown by the insurgents from the heights of Pere-Lachaise. He thought that had he died then, Micheline would have wept for him. Then, as in a nightmare, it seemed to him that this hypothesis was realized. He saw the church hung with black, he heard the funeral chants. A catafalque contained his coffin, and slowly his betrothed came, with a trembling hand, to throw holy water on the cloth which covered the bier. And a voice said within him:

“You are dead, since Micheline is about to marry another.”

He made an effort to banish this importunate idea. He could not succeed. Thoughts flew through his brain with fearful rapidity. He thought he was beginning to be seized with brain fever. And this dismal ceremony kept coming before him with the same chants, the same words repeated, and the same faces appearing. The houses seemed to fly before his vacant eyes. To stop this nightmare he tried to count the gas-lamps: one, two, three, four, five—but the same thought interrupted his calculation:

“You are dead, since your betrothed is about to marry another.”

He was afraid he was going mad. A sharp pain shot across his forehead just above the right eyebrow. In the old days he had felt the same pain when he had overworked himself in preparing for his examinations at the Polytechnic School. With a bitter smile he asked himself if one of the aching vessels in his brain was about to burst?

The sudden stoppage of the cab freed him from this torture. The hotel porter opened the door. Pierre stepped out mechanically. Without speaking a word he followed a waiter, who showed him to a room on the second floor. Left alone, he sat down. This room, with its commonplace furniture, chilled him. He saw in it a type of his future life: lonely and desolate. Formerly, when he used to come to Paris, he stayed with Madame Desvarennnes, where he had the comforts of home, and every one looked on him affectionately.

Here, at the hotel, orders were obeyed with politeness at so much a day. Would it always be thus in future?

This painful impression dissipated his weakness as by enchantment. He so bitterly regretted the sweets of the past, that he resolved to struggle to secure them for the future. He dressed himself quickly, and removed all the traces of his journey; then, his mind made up, he jumped into a cab, and drove to Madame Desvarennnes's. All indecision had left him. His fears now seemed contemptible. He must defend himself. It was a question of his happiness.

At the Place de la Concorde a carriage passed his cab. He recognized the livery of Madame Desvarennés's coachman and leant forward. The mistress did not see him. He was about to stop the cab and tell his driver to follow her carriage when a sudden thought decided him to go on. It was Micheline he wanted to see. His future destiny depended on her. Madame Desvarennés had made him clearly understand that by calling for his help in her fatal letter. He went on his way, and in a few minutes arrived at the mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique.

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Micheline and Jeanne were still in the garden, seated in the same place on the lawn. Cayrol had joined Serge. Both, profiting by the lovely morning, were enjoying the society of their beloved ones. A quick step on the gravel walk attracted their attention. In the sunlight a young man, whom neither Jeanne nor Micheline recognized, was advancing. When about two yards distant from the group he slowly raised his hat.

Seeing the constrained and astonished manner of the young girls, a sad smile played on his lips, then he said, softly:

“Am I then so changed that I must tell you my name?”

At these words Micheline jumped up, she became as white as her collar, and trembling, with sobs rising to her lips, stood silent and petrified before Pierre. She could not speak, but her eyes were eagerly fixed on the young man. It was he, the companion of her youth, so changed that she had not recognized him; worn by hard work, perhaps by anxieties, bronzed—and with his face hidden by a black beard which gave him a manly and energetic appearance. It was certainly he, with a thin red ribbon at his button-hole, which he had not when he went away, and which showed the importance of the works he had executed and of great perils he had faced. Pierre, trembling and motionless, was silent; the sound of his voice choked with emotion had frightened him. He had expected a cold reception, but this scared look, which resembled terror, was beyond all he had pictured. Serge wondered and watched.

Jeanne broke the icy silence. She went up to Pierre, and presented her forehead.

“Well,” she said, “don’t you kiss your friends?”

She smiled affectionately on him. Two grateful tears sparkled in the young man’s eyes, and fell on Mademoiselle de Cernay’s hair. Micheline, led away by the example and without quite knowing what she was doing, found herself in Pierre’s arms. The situation was becoming singularly perplexing to Serge. Cayrol, who had not lost his presence of mind, understood it, and turning toward the Prince, said:

“Monsieur Pierre Delarue: an old friend and companion of Mademoiselle Desvarennés’s; almost a brother to her,” thus explaining in one word all that could appear unusual in such a scene of tenderness.

Then, addressing Pierre, he simply added—“Prince Panine.”

The two men looked at each other. Serge, with haughty curiosity; Pierre, with inexpressible rage. In a moment, he guessed that the tall, handsome man beside his betrothed was his rival. If looks could kill, the Prince would have fallen down dead. Panine did not deign to notice the hatred which glistened in the eyes of the newcomer. He turned toward Micheline with exquisite grace and said:



“Your mother receives her friends this evening, I think, Mademoiselle; I shall have the honor of paying my respects to her.”

And taking leave of Jeanne with a smile, and of Pierre with a courteous bow, he left, accompanied by Cayrol.

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Serge's departure was a relief to Micheline. Between these two men to whom she belonged, to the one by a promise, to the other by an avowal, she felt ashamed. Left alone with Pierre she recovered her self-possession, and felt full of pity for the poor fellow threatened with such cruel deception. She went tenderly to him, with her loving eyes of old, and pressed his hand:

"I am very glad to see you again, my dear Pierre; and my mother will be delighted. We were very anxious about you. You have not written to us for some months."

Pierre tried to joke: "The post does not leave very often in the desert. I wrote whenever I had an opportunity."

"Is it so very pleasant in Africa that you could not tear yourself away a whole year?"

"I had to take another journey on the coast of Tripoli to finish my labors. I was interested in my work, and anxious not to lose the result of so much effort, and I think I have succeeded—at least in—the opinion of my employers," said the young man, with a ghastly smile.

"My dear Pierre, you come in time from the land of the sphinx," interrupted Jeanne gravely, and glancing intently at Micheline. "There is here, I assure you, a difficult enigma to solve."

"What is it?"

"That which is written in this heart," she replied, lightly touching her companion's breast.

"From childhood I have always read it as easily as a book," said Pierre, with tremulous voice, turning toward the amazed Micheline.

Mademoiselle de Cernay tossed her head.

"Who knows? Perhaps her disposition has changed during your absence;" and nodding pleasantly, she went toward the house.

Pierre followed her for a moment with his eyes, then, turning toward his betrothed, said:

"Micheline, shall I tell you your secret? You no longer love me."

The young girl started. The attack was direct. She must at once give an explanation. She had often thought of what she would say when Pierre came back to her. The day had arrived unexpectedly. And the answers she had prepared had fled. The truth appeared harsh and cold. She understood that the change in her was treachery, of which Pierre was the innocent victim; and feeling herself to blame, she waited

tremblingly the explosion of this loyal heart so cruelly wounded. She stammered, in tremulous accents:

“Pierre, my friend, my brother.”

“Your brother!” cried the young man, bitterly. “Was that the name you were to give me on my return?”

At these words, which so completely summed up the situation, Micheline remained silent. Still she felt that at all hazards she must defend herself. Her mother might come in at any moment. Between Madame Desvarennnes and her betrothed, what would become of her? The hour was decisive. Her strong love for Serge gave her fresh energy.

“Why did you go away?” she asked, with sadness.

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Pierre raised with pride his head which had been bent with anguish.

"To be worthy of you," he merely said.

"You did not need to be worthy of me; you, who were already above every one else. We were betrothed; you only had to guard me."

"Could not your heart guard itself?"

"Without help, without the support of your presence and affection?"

"Without other help or support than I had myself: Hope and Remembrance."

Micheline turned pale. Each word spoken by Pierre made her feel the unworthiness of her conduct more completely. She endeavored to find a new excuse:

"Pierre, you know I was only a child."

"No," said the young man, with choked voice, "I see that you were already a woman; a being weak, inconstant, and cruel; who cares not for the love she inspires, and sacrifices all to the love she feels."

So long as Pierre had only complained, Micheline felt overwhelmed and without strength; but the young man began to accuse. In a moment the young girl regained her presence of mind and revolted.

"Those are hard words!" she exclaimed.

"Are they not deserved?" cried Pierre, no longer restraining himself. "You saw me arrive trembling, with eyes full of tears, and not only had you not an affectionate word to greet me with, but you almost accuse me of indifference. You reproach me with having gone away. Did you not know my motive for going? I was betrothed to you; you were rich and I was poor. To remove this inequality I resolved to make a name. I sought one of those perilous scientific missions which bring celebrity or death to those who undertake them. Ah! think not that I went away from you without heart-breaking! For a year I was almost alone, crushed with fatigue, always in danger; the thought that I was suffering for you supported me.

"When lost in the vast desert, I was sad and discouraged; I invoked you, and your sweet face gave me fresh hope and energy. I said to myself, 'She is waiting for me. A day will come when I shall win the prize of all my trouble.' Well, Micheline, the day has come; here I am, returned, and I ask for my reward. Is it what I had a right to expect? While I was running after glory, another, more practical and better advised, stole your heart. My happiness is destroyed. You did well to forget me. The fool who goes so far away from

his betrothed does not deserve her faithfulness. He is cold, indifferent, he does not know how to love!"

These vehement utterances troubled Micheline deeply. For the first time she understood her betrothed, felt how much he loved her, and regretted not having known it before. If Pierre had spoken like that before going away, who knows? Micheline's feelings might have been quickened. No doubt she would have loved him. It would have come naturally. But Pierre had kept the secret of his passion for the young girl to himself. It was only despair, and the thought of losing her, that made him give vent to his feelings now.

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"I see that I have been cruel and unjust to you," said Micheline. "I deserve your reproaches, but I am not the only one to blame. You, too, are at fault. What I have just heard has upset me. I am truly sorry to cause you so much pain; but it is too late. I no longer belong to myself."

"And did you belong to yourself?"

"No! It is true, you had my word, but be generous. Do not abuse the authority which being my betrothed gives you. That promise I would now ask back from you."

"And if I refuse to release you from your promise? If I tried to, regain your love?" cried Pierre, forcibly. "Have I not the right to defend myself? And what would you think of my love if I relinquished you so readily?"

There was a moment's silence. The interview was at its highest pitch of excitement. Micheline knew that she must put an end to it. She replied with firmness:

"A girl such as I am will not break her word; mine belongs to you, but my heart is another's. Say you insist, and I am ready to keep my promise to become your wife. It is for you to decide."

Pierre gave the young girl a look which plunged into the depths of her heart. He read there her resolve that she would act loyally, but that at the same time she would never forget him who had so irresistibly gained her heart. He made a last effort.

"Listen," he said, with ardent voice, "it is impossible that you can have forgotten me so soon: I love you so much! Remember our affection in the old days, Micheline. Remember!"

He no longer argued; he pleaded. Micheline felt victorious. She was moved with pity.

"Alas! my poor Pierre, my affection was only friendship, and my heart has not changed toward you. The love which I now feel is quite different. If it had not come to me, I might have been your wife. And I esteemed you so much, that I should have been happy. But now I understand the difference. You, whom I had accepted, would never have been more to me than a tender companion; he whom I have chosen will be my master."

Pierre uttered a cry at this cruel and frank avowal.

"Ah! how you hurt me!"

And bitter tears rolled down his face to the relief of his overburdened heart. He sank on to a seat, and for a moment gave way to violent grief. Micheline, more touched by his despair than she had been by his reproaches, went to him and wiped his face with her



lace handkerchief. Her white hand was close to the young man's mouth,—and he kissed it eagerly. Then, as if roused by the action, he rose with a changed look in his eyes, and seized the young girl in his arms. Micheline did not utter a word. She looked coldly and resolutely at Pierre, and threw back her head to avoid the contact of his eager lips. That look was enough. The arms which held her were unloosed, and Pierre moved away, murmuring:

“I beg your pardon. You see I am not in my right mind.”

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Then passing his hand across his forehead as if to chase away a wicked thought, he added:

“So it is irrevocable? You love him?”

“Enough to give you so much pain; enough to be nobody’s unless I belong to him.”

Pierre reflected a moment, then, coming to a decision:

“Go, you are free,” said he; “I give you back your promise.”

Micheline uttered a cry of triumph, which made him who had been her betrothed turn pale. She regretted not having hidden her joy better. She approached Pierre and said:

“Tell me that you forgive me!”

“I forgive you.”

“You still weep?”

“Yes; I am weeping over my lost happiness. I thought the best means of being loved were to deserve it. I was mistaken. I will courageously atone for my error. Excuse my weakness, and believe that you will never have a more faithful and devoted friend than I.”

Micheline gave him her hand, and, smiling, bowed her forehead to his lips. He slowly impressed a brotherly kiss, which effaced the burning trace of the one which he had stolen a moment before.

At the same time a deep voice was heard in the distance, calling Pierre. Micheline trembled.

“’Tis my mother,” she said. “She is seeking you. I will leave you. Adieu, and a thousand thanks from my very heart.”

And nimbly springing behind a clump of lilac-trees in flower, Micheline disappeared.

Pierre mechanically went toward the house. He ascended the marble steps and entered the drawing-room. As he shut the door, Madame Desvarenes appeared.

CHAPTER V

A CRITICAL INTERVIEW

Madame Desvarennnes had been driven to the Hotel du Louvre without losing a minute. She most wanted to know in what state of mind her daughter's betrothed had arrived in Paris. Had the letter, which brutally told him the truth, roused him and tightened the springs of his will? Was he ready for the struggle?

If she found him confident and bold, she had only to settle with him as to the common plan of action which must bring about the eviction of the audacious candidate who wished to marry Micheline. If she found him discouraged and doubtful of himself, she had decided to animate him with her ardor against Serge Panine.

She prepared these arguments on the way, and, boiling with impatience, outstripped in thought the fleet horse which was drawing her past the long railings of the Tuileries toward the Hotel du Louvre. Wrapped in her meditations she did not see Pierre. She was saying to herself:

"This fair-haired Polish dandy does not know with whom he has to deal. He will see what sort of a woman I am. He has not risen early enough in the morning to hoodwink me. If Pierre is only of the same opinion as I, we shall soon spoil this fortune-hunter's work."

The carriage stopped.

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"Monsieur Pierre Delarue?" inquired the mistress.

"Madame, he went out a quarter of an hour ago."

"To go where?"

"He did not say."

"Do you know whether he will be absent long?"

"I don't know."

"Much obliged."

Madame Desvarennnes, quite discomfited by this mischance, reflected. Where could Pierre have gone? Probably to her house. Without losing a minute, she reentered the carriage, and gave orders to return to the Rue Saint-Dominique. If he had gone at once to her house, it was plain that he was ready to do anything to keep Micheline. The coachman who had received the order drove furiously. She said to herself:

"Pierre is in a cab. Allowing that he is driving moderately quick he will only have half-an-hour's start of me. He will pass through the office, will see Marechal, and however eager he be, will lose a quarter of an hour in chatting to him. It would be most vexing if he did anything foolish in the remaining fifteen minutes! The fault is mine: I ought to have sent him a letter at Marseilles, to tell him what line of conduct to adopt on his arrival. So long as he does not meet Micheline on entering the house!"

At that idea Madame Desvarennnes felt the blood rushing to her face. She put her head out of the carriage window, and called to the coachman:

"Drive faster!"

He drove more furiously still, and in a few minutes reached the Rue Saint-Dominique.

She tore into the house like a hurricane, questioned the hall-porter, and learned that Delarue had arrived. She hastened to Marechal, and asked him in such a strange manner, "Have you seen Pierre?" that he thought some accident had happened.

On seeing her secretary's scared look, she understood that what she most dreaded had come to pass. She hurried to the drawing-room, calling Pierre in a loud voice. The French window opened, and she found herself face to face with the young man. A glance at her adopted son's face increased her fears. She opened her arms and clasped Pierre to her heart.

After the first emotions were over, she longed to know what had happened during her absence, and inquired of Pierre:

“By whom were you received on arriving here?”

“By Micheline.”

“That is what I feared! What did she tell you?”

“Everything!”

In three sentences these two strong beings had summed up all that had taken place. Madame Desvarennnes remained silent for a moment, then, with sudden tenderness, and as if to make up for her daughter’s treachery, said:

“Come, let me kiss you again, my poor boy. You suffer, eh? and I too! I am quite overcome. For ten years I have cherished the idea of your marrying Micheline. You are a man of merit, and you have no relatives. You would not take my daughter away from me; on the contrary I think you like me, and would willingly live with me. In arranging this marriage I realized the dream of my life. I was not taking a son-in-law-I was gaining a new child.”

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"Believe me," said Pierre, sadly, "it is not my fault that your wish is not carried out."

"That, my boy, is another question!" cried Madame Desvarennnes, whose voice was at once raised two tones. "And that is where we do not agree. You are responsible for what has occurred. I know what you are going, to tell me. You wished to bring laurels to Micheline as a dower. That is all nonsense! When one leaves the Polytechnic School with honors, and with a future open to you like yours, it is not necessary to scour the deserts to dazzle a young girl. One begins by marrying her, and celebrity comes afterward, at the same time as the children. And then there was no need to risk all at such a cost. What, are we then so grand? Ex-bakers! Millionaires, certainly, which does not alter the fact that poor Desvarennnes carried out the bread, and that I gave change across the counter when folks came to buy sou-cakes! But you wanted to be a knight-errant, and, during that time, a handsome fellow. Did Micheline tell you the gentleman's name?"

"I met him when I came here; he was with her in the garden. We were introduced to each other."

"That was good taste," said Madame Desvarennnes with irony. "Oh, he is a youth who is not easily disturbed, and in his most passionate transports will not disarrange a fold of his cravat. You know he is a Prince? That is most flattering to the Desvarennnes! We shall use his coat-of-arms as our trade-mark. The fortune hunter, ugh! No doubt he said to himself, 'The baker has money—and her daughter is agreeable.' And he is making a business of it."

"He is only following the example of many of his equals. Marriage is to-day the sole pursuit of the nobility."

"The nobility! That of our country might be tolerated, but foreign noblemen are mere adventurers."

"It is well known that the Panines come from Posen—the papers have mentioned them more than twenty times."

"Why is he not in his own country?"

"He is exiled."

"He has done something wrong, then!"

"He has, like all his family, fought for independence."

"Then he is a revolutionist!"

"A patriot."

“You are very kind to tell me all that.”

“I may hate Prince Panine,” said Pierre, simply, “but that is no reason why I should not be just to him.”

“So be it; he is an exceptional being, a great citizen, a hero, if you like. But that does not prove that he will make my daughter happy. And if you take my advice, we shall send him about his business in a very short time.”

Madame Desvarennnes was excited and paced hurriedly up and down the room. The idea of resuming the offensive after she had been forced to act on the defensive for months past pleased her. She thought Pierre argued too much. A woman of action, she did not understand why Pierre had not yet come to a resolution. She felt that she must gain his confidence.

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"You are master of the situation," she said. "The Prince does not suit me—"

"Micheline loves him," interrupted Pierre.

"She fancies so," replied Madame Desvarennnes. "She has got it into her head, but it will wear off. You thoroughly understand that I did not bid you to come from Africa to be present at my daughter's wedding. If you are a man, we shall see some fun. Micheline is your betrothed. You have our word, and the word of a Desvarennnes is as good as the signature.—It has never been dishonored. Well, refuse to give us back our promise. Gain time, make love, and take my daughter away from that dandy."

Pierre remained silent for a few minutes. In a moment he measured the extent of the mischief done, by seeing Micheline before consulting Madame Desvarennnes. With the help of this energetic woman he might have struggled, whereas left to his own strength, he had at the outset been vanquished and forced to lay down his arms. Not only had he yielded, but he had drawn his ally into his defeat.

"Your encouragements come too late," said he. "Micheline asked me to give her back her promise, and I gave it to her."

"You were so weak as that!" cried Madame Desvarennnes. "And she had so much boldness? Does she dote on him so? I suspected her plans, and I hastened to warn you. But all is not lost. You have given Micheline back her promise. So be it. But I have not given you back yours. You are pledged to me. I will not countenance the marriage which my daughter has arranged without my consent! Help me to break it off. And, faith, you could easily find another woman worth Micheline, but where shall I find a son-in-law worth you? Come, the happiness of us all is in peril; save it!"

"Why continue the struggle? I am beaten beforehand."

"But if you forsake me, what can I do single-handed with Micheline?"

"Do what she wishes, as usual. You are surprised at my giving you this advice? It is no merit on my part. Until now you have refused your daughter's request; but if she comes again beseeching and crying, you who are so strong and can say so well 'I will,' will be weak and will not be able to refuse her her Prince. Believe me; consent willingly. Who knows? Your son'-in-law may be grateful to you for it by-and-by."

Madame Desvarennnes had listened to Pierre with amazement.

"Really, you are incredible," she said; "you discuss all this so calmly. Have you no grief?"

"Yes," replied Pierre, solemnly, "it is almost killing me."

“Nonsense! You are boasting!” cried Madame Desvarennnes, vehemently. “Ah, scholar! figures have dried up your heart!”

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"No," replied the young man, with melancholy, "but work has destroyed in me the seductions of youth. It has made me thoughtful, and a little sad. I frightened Micheline, instead of attracting her. The worst is that we live in such a state of high pressure, it is quite impossible to grasp all that is offered to us in this life-work and pleasure. It is necessary to make a choice, to economize one's time and strength, and to work with either the heart or the brain alone. The result is that the neglected organ wastes away, and that men of pleasure remain all their lives mediocre workers, while hard workers are pitiful lovers. The former sacrifice the dignity of existence, the latter that which is the charm of existence. So that, in decisive moments, when the man of pleasure appeals to his intelligence, he finds he is unfit for duty, and when the man of toil appeals to his heart, he finds that he is unqualified for happiness."

"Well, my boy, so much the worse for the women who cannot appreciate men of work, and who allow themselves to be wheedled by men of pleasure. I never was one of those; and serious as you are, thirty years ago I would have jumped at you. But as you know your ailment so well, why don't you cure yourself? The remedy is at hand."

"What is it?"

"Strong will. Marry Micheline. I'll answer for everything."

"She does not love me."

"A woman always ends by loving her husband."

"I love Micheline too much to accept her hand without her heart."

Madame Desvarennes saw that she would gain nothing, and that the game was irrevocably lost. A great sorrow stole over her. She foresaw a dark future, and had a presentiment that trouble had entered the house with Serge Panine. What could she do? Combat the infatuation of her daughter! She knew that life would be odious for her if Micheline ceased to laugh and to sing. Her daughter's tears would conquer her will. Pierre had told her truly. Where was the use of fighting when defeat was certain? She, too, felt that she was powerless, and with heartfelt sorrow came to a decision.

"Come, I see that I must make up my mind to be grandmother to little princes. It pleases me but little on the father's account. My daughter will have a sad lot with a fellow of that kind. Well, he had better keep in the right path; for I shall be there to call him to order. Micheline must be happy. When my husband was alive, I was already more of a mother than a wife; now my whole life is wrapped up in my daughter."

Then raising her vigorous arms with grim energy, she added:

"Do you know, if my daughter were made miserable through her husband, I should be capable of killing him."

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These were the last words of the interview which decided the destiny of Micheline, of the Prince, of Madame Desvarennnes, and of Pierre. The mistress stretched out her hand and rang the bell. A servant appeared, to whom she gave instructions to tell Marechal to come down. She thought it would be pleasant for Pierre to pour out his griefs into the heart of his friend. A man weeps with difficulty before a woman, and she guessed that the young man's heart was swollen with tears. Marechal was not far off. He arrived in a moment, and springing toward Pierre put his arms round his neck. When Madame Desvarennnes saw the two friends fully engrossed with each other, she said to Marechal:

"I give you leave until this evening. Then bring Pierre back with you; I wish to see him after dinner."

And with a firm step she went toward Micheline's room, where the latter was waiting in fear to know the result of the interview.

CHAPTER VI

A SIGNIFICANT MEETING

The mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique is certainly one of the finest to be seen. Sovereigns alone have more sumptuous palaces. The wide staircase, of carved oak, is bordered by a bronze balustrade, made by Ghirlandajo, and brought from Florence by Sommervieux, the great dealer in curiosities. Baron Rothschild would consent to give only a hundred thousand francs for it. Madame Desvarennnes bought it. The large panels of the staircase are hung with splendid tapestry, from designs by Boucher, representing the different metamorphoses of Jupiter. At each landing-place stands a massive Japanese vase of 'claisonne' enamel, supported by a tripod of Chinese bronze, representing chimeras. On the first floor, tall columns of red granite, crowned by gilt capitals, divide the staircase from a gallery, serving as a conservatory. Plaited blinds of crimson silk hang before the Gothic windows, filled with marvellous stained glass.

In the vestibule-the hangings of which are of Cordova-leather, with gold ground-seemingly awaiting the good pleasure of some grand lady, is a sedan-chair, decorated with paintings by Fragonard. Farther on, there is one of those superb carved mother-of-pearl coffers, in which Oriental women lay by their finery and jewellery. A splendid Venetian mirror, its frame embellished with tiny figure subjects, and measuring two metres in width and three in height, fills a whole panel of the vestibule. Portieres of Chinese satin, ornamented with striking embroidery, such as figures on a priest's chasuble, fall in sumptuous folds at the drawing-room and dining-room doors.

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The drawing-room contains a splendid set of Louis Quatorze furniture, of gilt wood, upholstered in fine tapestry, in an extraordinary state of preservation. Three crystal lustres, hanging at intervals along the room, sparkle like diamonds. The hangings, of woven silk and gold, are those which were sent as a present by Louis Quatorze to Monsieur de Pimentel, the Spanish Ambassador, to reward him for the part he had taken in the conclusion of the Treaty of the Pyrenees. These hangings are unique, and were brought back from Spain in 1814, in the baggage-train of Soult's army, and sold to an inhabitant of Toulouse for ten thousand francs. It was there that Madame Desvarennnes discovered them in a garret in 1864, neglected by the grandchildren of the buyer, who were ignorant of the immense value of such unrivalled work. Cleverly mended, they are to-day the pride of the great trader's drawing-room. On the mantelpiece there is a large clock in Chinese lacquer, ornamented with gilt bronze, made on a model sent out from Paris in the reign of Louis Quatorze, and representing the Flight of the Hours pursued by Time.

Adjoining the great drawing-room is a boudoir upholstered in light gray silk damask, with bouquets of flowers. This is Madame Desvarennnes's favorite room. A splendid Erard piano occupies one side of the apartment. Facing it is a sideboard in sculptured ebony, enriched with bronze, by Gouthieres. There are only two pictures on the walls: "The Departure of the Newly Married Couple," exquisitely painted by Lancret; and "The Prediction," an adorable work by Watteau, bought at an incredible price at the Pourtales sale. Over the chimney-piece is a miniature by Pommayrac, representing Micheline as a little child—a treasure which Madame Desvarennnes cannot behold without tears coming to her eyes. A door, hidden by curtains, opens on to a staircase leading directly to the courtyard.

The dining-room is in the purest Renaissance style austere woodwork; immense chests of caned pearwood, on which stand precious ewers in Urbino ware, and dishes by Bernard Palissy. The high stone fireplace is surmounted by a portrait of Diana of Poitiers, with a crescent on her brow, and is furnished with firedogs of elaborately worked iron. The centre panel bears the arms of Admiral Bonnivet. Stained-glass windows admit a softly-tinted light. From the magnificently painted ceiling, a chandelier of brass repousse work hangs from the claws of a hovering eagle.

The billiard-room is in the Indian style. Magnificent panoplies unite Rajpoot shields, Mahratta scimitars, helmets with curtains of steel, rings belonging to Afghan chiefs, and long lances ornamented with white mares' tails, wielded by the horsemen of Cabul. The walls are painted from designs brought from Lahore. The panels of the doors were decorated by Gerome. The great artist has painted Nautch girls twisting their floating scarves, and jugglers throwing poignards into the air. Around the room are low divans, covered with soft and brilliant Oriental cloth. The chandelier is quite original in form, being the exact representation of the god Vishnu. From the centre of the body hangs a lotus leaf of emeralds, and from each of the four arms is suspended a lamp shaped like a Hindu pagoda, which throws out a mellow light.

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Madame Desvarennnes was entertaining her visitors in these celebrated apartments that evening. Marechal and Pierre had just come in, and were talking together near the fireplace. A few steps from them was a group, consisting of Cayrol, Madame Desvarennnes, and a third person, who had never until then put his foot in the house, in spite of intercessions in his favor made by the banker to Madame Desvarennnes. He was a tall, pale, thin man, whose skin seemed stretched on his bones, with a strongly developed under-jaw, like that of a ravenous animal, and eyes of indefinable color, always changing, and veiled behind golden-rimmed spectacles. His hands were soft and smooth, with moist palms and closely cut nails—vicious hands, made to take cunningly what they coveted. He had scanty hair, of a pale yellow, parted just above the ear, so as to enable him to brush it over the top of his head. This personage, clad in a double-breasted surtout, over a white waistcoat, and wearing a many-colored rosette, was called Hermann Herzog.

A daring financier, he had come from Luxembourg, preceded by a great reputation; and, in a few months, he had launched in Paris such a series of important affairs that the big-wigs on the Exchange felt bound to treat with him. There were many rumors current about him. Some said he was the most intelligent, most active, and most scrupulous of men that it was possible to meet. Others said that no greater scoundrel had ever dared the vengeance of the law, after plundering honest people. Of German nationality, those who cried him down said he was born at Mayence. Those who treated the rumors as legends said he was born at Frankfort, the most Gallic town beyond the river Rhine.

He had just completed an important line of railway from Morocco to the centre of our colony in Algeria, and now he was promoting a company for exporting grain and flour from America. Several times Cayrol had tried to bring Herzog and Madame Desvarennnes together. The banker had an interest in the grain and flour speculation, but he asserted that it would not succeed unless the mistress had a hand in it. Cayrol had a blind faith in the mistress's luck.

Madame Desvarennnes, suspicious of everything foreign, and perfectly acquainted with the rumors circulated respecting Herzog, had always refused to receive him. But Cayrol had been so importunate that, being quite tired of refusing, and, besides, being willing to favor Cayrol for having so discreetly managed the negotiations of Micheline's marriage, she had consented.

Herzog had just arrived. He was expressing to Madame Desvarennnes his delight at being admitted to her house. He had so often heard her highly spoken of that he had formed a high idea of her, but one which was, however, far below the reality; he understood now that it was an honor to be acquainted with her. He wheedled her with German grace, and with a German-Jewish accent, which reminds one of the itinerant merchants, who offer you with persistence "a goot pargain."

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The mistress had been rather cold at first, but Herzog's amiability had thawed her. This man, with his slow speech and queer eyes, produced a fascinating effect on one like a serpent. He was repugnant, and yet, in spite of one's self one was led on. He, had at once introduced the grain question, but in this he found himself face to face with the real Madame Desvarennnes; and no politeness held good on her part when it was a question of business. From his first words, she had found a weak point in the plan, and had attacked him with such plainness that the financier, seeing his enterprise collapse at the sound of the mistress's voice—like the walls of Jericho at the sound of the Jewish trumpets—had beaten a retreat, and had changed the subject.

He was about to float a credit and discount company superior to any in the world. He would come back and talk with Madame Desvarennnes about it, because she ought to participate in the large profits which the matter promised. There was no risk. The novelty of the undertaking consisted in the concurrence of the largest banking-houses of France and abroad, which would hinder all competition, and prevent hostility on the part of the great money-handlers. It was very curious, and Madame Desvarennnes would feel great satisfaction in knowing the mechanism of this company, destined to become, from the first, the most important in the world, and yet most easy to understand.

Madame Desvarennnes neither said "Yes" nor "No." Moved by the soft and insinuating talkativeness of Herzog, she felt herself treading on dangerous ground. It seemed to her that her foot was sinking, as in those dangerous peat-mosses of which the surface is covered with green grass, tempting one to run on it. Cayrol was under the charm. He drank in the German's words. This clever man, who had never till then been duped, had found his master in Herzog.

Pierre and Marechal had come nearer, and Madame Desvarennnes, profiting by this mingling of groups, introduced the men to each other. On hearing the name of Pierre Delarue, Herzog looked thoughtful, and asked if the young man was the renowned engineer whose works on the coast of Africa had caused so much talk in Europe? On Madame Desvarennnes replying in the affirmative, he showered well-chosen compliments on Pierre. He had had the pleasure of meeting Delarue in Algeria, when he had gone over to finish the railroad in Morocco.

But Pierre had stepped back on learning that the constructor of that important line was before him.

"Ah! is it you, sir, who carried out that job?" said he. "Faith! you treated those poor Moors rather hardly!"

He remembered the misery of the poor natives employed by Europeans who superintended the work. Old men, women, and children were placed at the disposal of the contractors by the native authorities, to dig up and remove the soil; and these poor wretches, crushed with hard work, and driven with the lash by drunken overseers—who

commanded them with a pistol in hand—under a burning sun, inhaled the noxious vapors arising from the upturned soil, and died like flies. It was a terrible sight, and one that Pierre could not forget.

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But Herzog, with his cajoling sweetness, protested against this exaggerated picture. Delarue had arrived during the dog-days—a bad time. And then, it was necessary for the work to be carried on without delay. Besides, a few Moors, more or less—what did it matter? Negroes, all but monkeys!

Marechal, who had listened silently until then, interrupted the conversation, to defend the monkeys in the name of Littré. He had framed a theory, founded on Darwin, and tending to prove that men who despised monkeys despised themselves. Herzog, a little taken aback by this unexpected reply, had looked at Marechal slyly, asking himself if it was a joke. But, seeing Madame Desvarennes laugh, he recovered his self-possession. Business could not be carried on in the East as in Europe. And then, had it not always been thus? Had not all the great discoverers worked the countries which they discovered? Christopher Columbus, Cortez—had they not taken riches from the Indians, in exchange for the civilization which they brought them? He (Herzog) had, in making a railway in Morocco, given the natives the means of civilizing themselves. It was only fair that it should cost them something.

Herzog uttered his tirade with all the charm of which he was capable; he looked to the right and to the left to notice the effect. He saw nothing but constrained faces. It seemed as if they were expecting some one or something. Time was passing; ten o'clock had just struck. From the little boudoir sounds of music were occasionally heard, when Micheline's nervous hand struck a louder chord on her piano. She was there, anxiously awaiting some one or something. Jeanne de Cernay, stretched in an easy-chair, her head leaning on her hand, was dreaming.

During the past three weeks the young girl had changed. Her bright wit no longer enlivened Micheline's indolent calmness; her brilliant eyes were surrounded by blue rings, which denoted nights passed without sleep. The change coincided strangely with Prince Panine's departure for England, and the sending of the letter which recalled Pierre to Paris. Had the inhabitants of the mansion been less occupied with their own troubles, they would no doubt have noticed this sudden change, and have sought to know the reason. But the attention of all was concentrated on the events which had already troubled them, and which would no doubt be yet more serious to the house, until lately so quiet.

The visitors' bell sounded, and caused Micheline to rise. The blood rushed to her cheeks. She whispered, "It is he!" and, hesitating, she remained a moment leaning on the piano, listening vaguely to the sounds in the drawing-room. The footman's voice announcing the visitor reached the young girls:

"Prince Panine."

Jeanne also rose then, and if Micheline had turned round she would have been frightened at the pallor of her companion. But Mademoiselle Desvarennes was not

thinking of Mademoiselle de Cernay; she had just raised the heavy door curtain, and calling to Jeanne, "Are you coming?" passed into the drawing-room:

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It was indeed Prince Serge, who was expected by Cayrol with impatience, by Madame Desvarennnes with silent irritation, by Pierre with deep anguish. The handsome prince, calm and smiling, with white cravat and elegantly fitting dress-coat which showed off his fine figure, advanced toward Madame Desvarennnes before whom he bowed. He seemed only to have seen Micheline's mother. Not a look for the two young girls or the men who were around him. The rest of the universe did not seem to count. He bent as if before a queen, with a dash of respectful adoration. He seemed to be saying:

"Here I am at your feet; my life depends on you; make a sign and I shall be the happiest of men or the most miserable."

Micheline followed him with eyes full of pride; she admired his haughty grace and his caressing humility. It was by these contrasts that Serge had attracted the young girl's notice. She felt herself face to face with a strange nature, different from men around her, and had become interested in him. Then he had spoken to her, and his sweet penetrating voice had touched her heart.

What he had achieved with Micheline he longed to achieve with her mother. After placing himself at the feet of the mother of her whom he loved, he sought the road to her heart. He took his place beside the mistress and spoke. He hoped that Madame Desvarennnes would excuse the haste of his visit. The obedience which he had shown in going away must be a proof to her of his submission to her wishes. He was her most devoted and respectful servant. He resigned himself to anything she might exact of him.

Madame Desvarennnes listened to that sweet voice; she had never heard it so full of charm. She understood what influence this sweetness had exercised over Micheline; she repented not having watched over her more carefully, and cursed the hour that had brought all this evil upon them. She was obliged, however, to answer him. The mistress went straight to the point. She was not one to beat about the bush when once her mind was made up.

"You come, no doubt, sir, to receive an answer to the request you addressed to me before your departure for England!"

The Prince turned slightly pale. The words which Madame Desvarennnes was about to pronounce were of such importance to him that he could not help feeling moved. He answered, in a suppressed tone:

"I would not have dared to speak to you on the subject, Madame, especially in public; but since you anticipate my desire, I admit I am waiting with deep anxiety for one word from you which will decide my fate."



He continued bent before Madame Desvarennnes like a culprit before his judge. The mistress was silent for a moment, as if hesitating before answering, and then said, gravely:

“That word I hesitated to pronounce, but some one in whom I have great confidence has advised me to receive you favorably.”

“He, Madame, whoever he may be, has gained my everlasting gratitude.”

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"Show it to him," said Madame Desvarennes; "he is the companion of Micheline's young days, almost a son to me."

And turning toward Pierre, she pointed him out to Panine.

Serge took three rapid strides toward Pierre, but quick as he had been Micheline was before him. Each of the lovers seized a hand of Pierre, and pressed it with tender effusion. Panine, with his Polish impetuosity, was making the most ardent protestations to Pierre—he would be indebted to him for life.

Micheline's late betrothed, with despair in his heart, allowed his hands to be pressed and wrung in silence. The voice of her whom he loved brought tears to his eyes.

"How generous and good you are!" said the young girl, "how nobly you have sacrificed yourself!"

"Don't thank me," replied Pierre; "I have no merit in accomplishing what you admire. I am weak, you see, and I could not bear to see you suffer."

There was a great commotion in the drawing-room. Cayrol was explaining to Herzog, who was listening with great attention, what was taking place. Serge Panine was to be Madame Desvarennes's son-in-law. It was a great event.

"Certainly," said the German; "Madame Desvarennes's son-in-law will become a financial power. And a Prince, too. What a fine name for a board of directors!"

The two financiers looked at each other for a moment; the same thought had struck them.

"Yes, but," replied Cayrol, "Madame Desvarennes will never allow Panine to take part in business."

"Who knows?" said Herzog. "We shall see how the marriage settlements are drawn up."

"But," cried Cayrol, "I would not have it said that I was leading Madame Desvarennes's son-in-law into speculations."

"Who is speaking of that?" replied Herzog, coldly. "Am I seeking shareholders? I have more money than I want; I refuse millions every day."

"Oh, I know capitalists run after you," said Cayrol, laughingly; "and to welcome them you affect the scruples of a pretty woman. But let us go and congratulate the Prince."

While Cayrol and Herzog were exchanging those few words which had such a considerable influence on the future of Serge Panine—a scene, terrible in its simplicity, was going on without being noticed. Micheline had thrown herself with a burst of tenderness into her mother's arms. Serge was deeply affected by the young girl's affection for him, when a trembling hand touched his arm. He turned round. Jeanne de Cernay was before him, pale and wan; her eyes sunken into her head like two black nails, and her lips tightened by a violent contraction. The Prince stood thunderstruck at the sight of her. He looked around him. Nobody was observing him. Pierre was beside Marechal, who was whispering those words which only true friends can find in the sad hours of life. Madame Desvarennnes was holding Micheline in her arms. Serge approached Mademoiselle de Cernay. Jeanne still fixed on him the same menacing look. He was afraid.

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"Take care!" he said.

"Of what?" asked the young girl, with a troubled voice. "What have I to fear now?"

"What do you wish?" resumed Panine, with old firmness, and with a gesture of impatience.

"I wish to speak with you immediately."

"You see that is impossible."

"I must."

Cayrol and Herzog approached. Serge smiled at Jeanne with a sign of the head which meant "Yes." The young girl turned away in silence, awaiting the fulfilment of the promise made.

Cayrol took her by the hand with tender familiarity.

"What were you saying to the happy man who has gained the object of his dreams, Mademoiselle? It is not to him you must speak, but to me, to give me hope. The moment is propitious; it is the day for betrothals. You know how much I love you; do me the favor of no longer repulsing me as you have done hitherto! If you would be kind, how charming it would be to celebrate the two weddings on the same day. One church, one ceremony, one splendid feast would unite two happy couples. Is there nothing in this picture to entice you?"

"I am not easily enticed, as you know," said Jeanne, in a firm voice, trying to smile.

Micheline and Madame Desvarennnes had drawn near.

"Come, Cayrol," said Serge, in a tone of command; "I am happy to-day; perhaps I may succeed in your behalf as I have done in my own. Let me plead your cause with Mademoiselle de Cernay?"

"With all my heart. I need an eloquent pleader," sighed the banker, shaking his head sadly.

"And you, Mademoiselle, will you submit to the trial?" asked the Prince, turning toward Jeanne. "We have always been good friends, and I shall be almost a brother to you. This gives me some right over your mind and heart, it seems to me. Do you authorize me to exercise it?"

"As you like, sir," answered Jeanne, coldly. "The attempt is novel. Who knows? Perhaps it will succeed!"

“May Heaven grant it,” said Cayrol. Then, approaching Panine:

“Ah! dear Prince, what gratitude I shall owe you! You know,” added he in a whisper, “if you need a few thousand louis for wedding presents—”

“Go, go, corrupter!” replied Serge, with the same forced gayety; “you are flashing your money in front of us. You see it is not invincible, as you are obliged to have recourse to my feeble talents. But know that I am working for glory.”

And turning toward Madame Desvarennnes he added: “I only ask a quarter of an hour.”

“Don’t defend yourself too much,” said Micheline in her companion’s ear, and giving her a tender kiss which the latter did not return.

“Come with me,” said Micheline to Pierre, offering him her arm; “I want to belong to you alone while Serge is pleading with Jeanne. I will be your sister as formerly. If you only knew how I love you!”

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The large French window which led to the garden had just been opened by Marechal, and the mild odors of a lovely spring night perfumed the drawing-room. They all went out on the lawn. Thousands of stars were twinkling in the sky, and the eyes of Micheline and Pierre were lifted toward the dark blue heavens seeking vaguely for the star which presided over their destiny. She, to know whether her life would be the long poem of love of which she dreamed; he, to ask whether glory, that exacting mistress for whom he had made so many sacrifices, would at least comfort him for his lost love.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A man weeps with difficulty before a woman
Antagonism to plutocracy and hatred of aristocrats
Enough to be nobody's unless I belong to him
Even those who do not love her desire to know her
Flayed and roasted alive by the critics
Hard workers are pitiful lovers
He lost his time, his money, his hair, his illusions
He was very unhappy at being misunderstood
I thought the best means of being loved were to deserve it
Men of pleasure remain all their lives mediocre workers
My aunt is jealous of me because I am a man of ideas
Negroes, all but monkeys!
Patience, should he encounter a dull page here or there
Romanticism still ferments beneath the varnish of Naturalism
Sacrifice his artistic leanings to popular caprice
Unqualified for happiness
You are talking too much about it to be sincere

SERGE PANINE

By GEORGES OHNET

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VII

JEANNE'S SECRET

In the drawing-room Jeanne and Serge remained standing, facing each other. The mask had fallen from their faces; the forced smile had disappeared. They looked at each other attentively, like two duellists seeking to read each other's game, so that they may ward off the fatal stroke and prepare the decisive parry.

“Why did you leave for England three weeks ago, without seeing me and without speaking to me?”

“What could I have said to you?” replied the Prince, with an air of fatigue and dejection.

Jeanne flashed a glance brilliant as lightning:

“You could have told me that you had just asked for Micheline’s hand!”

“That would have been brutal!”

“It would have been honest! But it would have necessitated an explanation, and you don’t like explaining. You have preferred leaving me to guess this news from the acts of those around me, and the talk of strangers.”

All these words had been spoken by Jeanne with feverish vivacity. The sentences were as cutting as strokes from a whip. The young girl’s agitation was violent; her cheeks were red, and her breathing was hard and stifled with emotion. She stopped for a moment; then, turning toward the Prince, and looking him full in the face, she said:

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"And so, this marriage is decided?"

Serge answered,

"Yes."

It was fainter than a whisper. As if she could not believe it, Jeanne repeated:

"You are going to marry Micheline?"

And as Panine in a firmer voice answered again, "Yes!" the young girl took two rapid steps and brought her flushed face close to him.

"And I, then?" she cried with a violence she could no longer restrain.

Serge made a sign. The drawing-room window was still open, and from outside they could be heard.

"Jeanne, in mercy calm yourself," replied he. "You are in a state of excitement."

"Which makes you uncomfortable?" interrupted the young girl mockingly.

"Yes, but for your sake only," said he, coldly.

"For mine?"

"Certainly. I fear your committing an imprudence which might harm you."

"Yes; but you with me! And it is that only which makes you afraid."

The Prince looked at Mademoiselle de Cernay, smilingly. Changing his tone, he took her hand in his.

"How naughty you are to-night! And what temper you are showing toward poor Serge! What an opinion he will have of himself after your displaying such a flattering scene of jealousy!"

Jeanne drew away her hand.

"Ah, don't try to joke. This is not the moment, I assure you. You don't exactly realize your situation. Don't you understand that I am prepared to tell Madame Desvarences everything—"

"Everything!" said the Prince. "In truth, it would not amount to much. You would tell her that I met you in England; that I courted you, and that you found my attentions agreeable. And then? It pleases you to think too seriously of that midsummer night's

dream under the great trees of Churchill Castle, and you reproach me for my errors! But what are they? Seriously, I do not see them! We lived in a noisy world; where we enjoyed the liberty which English manners allow to young people. Your aunt found no fault with the charming chatter which the English call flirtation. I told you I loved you; you allowed me to think that I was not displeasing to you. We, thanks to that delightful agreement, spent a most agreeable summer, and now you do not wish to put an end to that pleasant little excursion made beyond the limits drawn by our Parisian world, so severe, whatever people say about it. It is not reasonable, and it is imprudent. If you carry out your menacing propositions, and if you take my future mother-in-law as judge of the rights which you claim, don't you understand that you would be condemned beforehand? Her interests are directly opposed to yours. Could she hesitate between her daughter and you?"

"Oh! your calculations are clever and your measures were well taken," replied Jeanne. "Still, if Madame Desvarennnes were not the woman you think her—" Then, hesitating:

"If she took my part, and thinking that he who was an unloyal lover would be an unfaithful husband—she would augur of the future of her daughter by my experience; and what would happen?"

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"Simply this," returned Serge. "Weary of the precarious and hazardous life which I lead, I would leave for Austria, and rejoin the service. A uniform is the only garb which can hide poverty honorably."

Jeanne looked at him with anguish; and making an effort said:

"Then, in any case, for me it is abandonment?" And falling upon a seat, she hid her face in her hands. Panine remained silent for a moment. The young girl's, grief, which he knew to be sincere, troubled him more than he wished to show. He had loved Mademoiselle de Cernay, and he loved her still. But he felt that a sign of weakness on his part would place him at Jeanne's mercy, and that an avowal from his lips at this grave moment meant a breaking-off of his marriage with Micheline. He hardened himself against his impressions, and replied, with insinuating sweetness:

"Why do you speak of desertion, when a good man who loves you fondly, and who possesses a handsome fortune, wishes to marry you?"

Mademoiselle de Cernay raised her head, hastily.

"So, it is you who advise me to marry Monsieur Cayrol? Is there nothing revolting to you in the idea that I should follow your advice? But then, you deceived me from the first moment you spoke to me. You have never loved me even for a day! Not an hour!"

Serge smiled, and resuming his light, caressing tone, replied:

"My dear Jeanne, if I had a hundred thousand francs a year, I give you my word of honor that I would not marry another woman but you, for you would make an adorable Princess."

Mademoiselle de Cernay made a gesture of perfect indifference.

"Ah! what does the title matter to me?" she exclaimed, with passion. "What I want is you! Nothing but you!"

"You do not know what you ask. I love you far too much to associate you with my destiny. If you knew that gilded misery, that white kid-gloved poverty, which is my lot, you would be frightened, and you would understand that in my resolution to give you up there is much of tenderness and generosity. Do you think it is such an easy matter to give up a woman so adorable as you are? I resign myself to it, though.

"What could I do with my beautiful Jeanne in the three rooms in the Rue de Madame where I live? Could I, with the ten or twelve thousand francs which I receive through the liberality of the Russian Panines, provide a home? I can hardly make it do for myself. I live at the club, where I dine cheaply. I ride my friends' horses! I never touch a card, although I love play. I go much in society; I shine there, and walk home to save the cost



of a carriage. My door-keeper cleans my rooms and keeps my linen in order. My private life is sad, dull, and humiliating. It is the black chrysalis of the bright butterfly which you know. That is what Prince Panine is, my dear Jeanne. A gentleman of good appearance, who lives as carefully as an old maid. The world sees him elegant and happy, and its envies his luxury; but this luxury is as deluding as watch-chains made of pinchbeck. You understand now that I cannot seriously ask you to share such an existence."

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But if, with this sketch of his life, correctly described, Panine thought to turn the young girl against him, he was mistaken. He had counted without considering Jeanne's sanguine temperament, which would lead her to make any sacrifices to keep the man she adored.

"If you were rich, Serge," she said, "I would not have made an effort to bring you back to me. But you are poor and I have a right to tell you that I love you. Life with you would be all devotedness and self-denial. Each pain endured would be a proof of love, and that is why I wish to suffer. Your life with mine would be neither sad nor humiliated; I would make it sweet by my tenderness, and bright by my happiness. And we should be so happy that you would say, 'How could I ever have dreamed of anything else?'"

"Alas! Jeanne," replied the Prince; "it is a charming and poetic idyl which you present to me. We should flee far from the world, eh? We should go to an unknown spot and try to regain paradise lost. How long would that happiness last? A season during the springtime of our youth. Then autumn would come, sad and harsh. Our illusions would vanish like the swallows in romances, and we should find, with alarm, that we had taken the dream of a day for eternal happiness! Forgive my speaking plain words of disenchantment," added Serge, seeing Jeanne rising abruptly, "but our life is being settled at this moment. Reason alone should guide us."

"And I beseech you to be guided only by your heart," cried Mademoiselle de Cernay, seizing the hands of the Prince, and pressing them with her trembling fingers. "Remember that you loved me. Say that you love me still!"

Jeanne had drawn near to Serge. Her burning face almost touched his. Her eyes, bright with excitement, pleaded passionately for a tender look. She was most fascinating, and Panine, usually master of himself, lost his presence of mind for a moment. His arms encircled the shoulders of the adorable pleader, and his lips were buried in the masses of her dark hair.

"Serge!" cried Mademoiselle de Cernay, clinging to him whom she loved so fondly.

But the Prince was as quickly calmed as he had been carried away. He gently put Jeanne aside.

"You see," he said with a smile, "how unreasonable we are and how easily we might commit an irreparable folly. And yet our means will not allow us."

"In mercy do not leave me!" pleaded Jeanne, in a tone of despair. "You love me! I feel it; everything tells me so! And you would desert me because you are poor and I am not rich. Is a man ever poor when he has two arms? Work."

The word was uttered by Jeanne with admirable energy. She possessed the courage to overcome every difficulty.

Serge trembled. For the second time he felt touched to the very soul by this strange girl. He understood that he must not leave her with the slightest hope of encouragement, but throw ice on the fire which was devouring her.

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"My dear Jeanne," he said, with affectionate sweetness, "you are talking nonsense. Remember this, that for Prince Panine there are only three social conditions possible: to be rich, a soldier, or a priest. I have the choice. It is for you to decide."

This put an end to Mademoiselle de Cernay's resistance. She felt how useless was further argument, and falling on a sofa, crushed with grief, cried:

"Ah! this time it is finished; I am lost!"

Panine, then, approaching her, insinuating and supple, like the serpent with the first woman, murmured in her ear, as if afraid lest his words, in being spoken aloud, would lose their subtle venom:

"No, you are not lost. On the contrary, you are saved, if you will only listen to and understand me. What are we, you and I? You, a child adopted by a generous woman; I, a ruined nobleman. You live in luxury, thanks to Madame Desvarennés's liberality. I can scarcely manage to keep myself with the help of my family. Our present is precarious, our future hazardous. And, suddenly, fortune is within our grasp. We have only to stretch out our hands, and with one stroke we gain the uncontested power which money brings!

"Riches, that aim of humanity! Do you understand? We, the weak and disdained, become strong and powerful. And what is necessary to gain them? A flash of sense; a minute of wisdom; forget a dream and accept a reality."

Jeanne waited till he had finished. A bitter smile played on her lips. Henceforth she would believe in no one. After listening to what Serge had just said, she could listen to anything.

"So," said she, "the dream is love; the reality is interest. And is it you who speak thus to me? You, for whom I was prepared to endure any sacrifice! You, whom I would have served on my knees! And what reason do you give to justify your conduct? Money! Indispensable and stupid money! Nothing but money! But it is odious, infamous, low!"

Serge received this terrible broadside of abuse without flinching. He had armed himself against contempt, and was deaf to all insults. Jeanne went on with increasing rage:

"Micheline has everything: family, fortune, and friends, and she is taking away my one possession—your love. Tell me that you love her! It will be more cruel but less vile! But no, it is not possible! You gave way to temptation at seeing her so rich; you had a feeling of covetousness, but you will become yourself again and will act like an honest man. Think, that in my eyes you are dishonoring yourself! Serge, answer me!"

She clung to him again, and tried to regain him by her ardor, to warm him with her passion. He remained unmoved, silent, and cold. Her conscience rebelled.

“Well, then,” said she, “marry her.”

She remained silent and sullen, seeming to forget he was there. She was thinking deeply. Then she walked wildly up and down the room, saying:

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“So, it is that implacable self-interest with which I have just come in contact, which is the law of the world, the watchword of society! So, in refusing to share the common folly, I risk remaining in isolation, and I must be strong to make others stand in awe of me. Very well, then, I shall henceforth act in such a manner as to be neither dupe nor victim. In future, everything will be: self, and woe to him who hinders me. That is the morality of the age, is it not?”

And she laughed nervously.

“Was I not stupid? Come, Prince, you have made me clever. Many thanks for the lesson; it was difficult, but I shall profit by it.”

The Prince, astonished at the sudden change, listened to Jeanne with stupor. He did not yet quite understand.

“What do you intend to do?” asked he.

Jeanne looked at him with a fiendish expression. Her eyes sparkled like stars; her white teeth shone between her lips.

“I intend,” replied she, “to lay the foundation of my power, and to follow your advice, by marrying a millionaire!”

She ran to the window, and, looking out toward the shady garden, called:

“Monsieur Cayrol!”

Serge, full of surprise, and seized by a sudden fit of jealousy, went toward her as if to recall her.

“Jeanne,” said he, vaguely holding out his arms.

“Well! what is it?” she asked, with crushing haughtiness. “Are you frightened at having gained your cause so quickly?”

And as Serge did not speak:

“Come,” added she, “you will have a handsome fee; Micheline’s dower will be worth the trouble you have had.”

They heard Cayrol’s hurried steps ascending the stairs.

“You have done me the honor to call me, Mademoiselle,” said he, remaining on the threshold of the drawing-room. “Am I fortunate enough at length to have found favor in your eyes?”

"Here is my hand," said Mademoiselle de Cernay, simply tendering him her white taper fingers, which he covered with kisses.

Madame Desvarennnes had come in behind the banker. She uttered a joyous exclamation.

"Cayrol, you shall not marry Jeanne for her beauty alone. I will give her a dower."

Micheline fell on her companion's neck. It was a concert of congratulations. But Jeanne, with a serious air, led Cayrol aside:

"I wish to act honestly toward you, sir; I yield to the pleading of which I am the object. But you must know that my sentiments do not change so quickly. It is my hand only which I give you today."

"I have not the conceitedness to think that you love me, Mademoiselle," said Cayrol, humbly. "You give me your hand; it will be for me to gain your heart, and with time and sincere affection I do not despair of winning it. I am truly happy, believe me, for the favor you do me, and all my life long shall be spent in proving my gratitude to you."

Jeanne was moved; she glanced at Cayrol, and did not think him so common-looking as usual. She resolved to do all in her power to like this good man.

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Serge, in taking leave of Madame Desvarennnes, said:

"In exchange for all the happiness which you give me, I have only my life to offer; accept it, Madame, it is yours."

The mistress looked at the Prince deeply; then, in a singular tone, said:

"I accept it; from to-day you belong to me."

Marechal took Pierre by the arm and led him outside.

"The Prince has just uttered words which remind me of Antonio saying to the Jew in 'The Merchant of Venice': 'Thy ducats in exchange for a pound of my flesh.' Madame Desvarennnes loves her daughter with a more formidable love than Shylock had for his gold. The Prince will do well to be exact in his payments of the happiness which he has promised."

CHAPTER VIII

A PLEASANT UNDERSTANDING

The day following this memorable evening, Pierre left for Algeria, notwithstanding the prayers of Madame Desvarennnes who wished to keep him near her. He was going to finish his labors. He promised to return in time for the wedding. The mistress, wishing to give him some compensation, offered him the management of the mills at Jouy, saying:

"So that if you are not my son, you will be at least my partner. And if I do not leave you all my money at my death, I can enrich you during my life."

Pierre would not accept. He would not have it said that in wishing to marry Micheline he had tried to make a speculation. He wished to leave that house where he had hoped to spend his life, empty-handed, so that no one could doubt that it was the woman he loved in Micheline and not the heiress. He had been offered a splendid appointment in Savoy as manager of some mines; he would find there at the same time profit and happiness, because there were interesting scientific studies to be made in order to enable him to carry on the work creditably. He resolved to throw himself heart and soul into the work and seek forgetfulness in study.

In the mansion of the Rue Saint-Dominique the marriage preparations were carried on with great despatch. On the one side the Prince, and on the other Cayrol, were eager for the day: the one because he saw the realization of his ambitious dreams, the other because he loved so madly. Serge, gracious and attentive, allowed himself to be adored by Micheline, who was never weary of listening to and looking at him whom she

loved. It was a sort of delirium that had taken possession of the young girl. Madame Desvarennnes looked on the metamorphosis in her child with amazement. The old Micheline, naturally indolent and cold, just living with the indolence of an odalisque stretched on silk cushions, had changed into a lively, loving sweetheart, with sparkling eyes and cheerful lips. Like those lowers which the sun causes to bloom and be fragrant, so Micheline under a look from Serge became animated and grown handsomer.

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The mother looked on with bitterness; she spoke of this transformation in her child with ironical disdain. She was sure Micheline was not in earnest; only a doll was capable of falling in love so foolishly with a man for his personal beauty. For to her mind the Prince was as regards mental power painfully deficient. No sense, dumb as soon as the conversation took a serious turn, only able to talk dress like a woman, or about horses like a jockey. And it was such a person upon whom Micheline literally doted! The mistress felt humiliated; she dared not say anything to her daughter, but she relieved herself in company of Marechal, whose discretion she could trust, and whom she willingly called the tomb of her secrets.

Marechal listened patiently to the confidences of Madame Desvarennnes, and he tried to fight against the growing animosity of the mistress toward her future son-in-law. Not that he liked the Prince—he was too much on Pierre’s side to be well disposed toward Panine; but with his good sense he saw that Madame Desvarennnes would find it advantageous to overcome her feeling of dislike. And when the mistress, so formidable toward everybody except her daughter, cried with rage:

“That Micheline! I have just seen her again in the garden, hanging on the arm of that great lanky fellow, her eyes fixed on his like a lark fascinated by a looking-glass. What on earth has happened to her that she should be in such a state?”

Marechal interrupted her gently.

“All fair people are like that,” he affirmed with ironical gayety. “You cannot understand it, Madame; you are dark.”

Then Madame Desvarennnes became angry.

“Be quiet,” she said, “you are stupid! She ought to have a shower-bath! She is mad!”

As for Cayrol he lived in ecstasy, like an Italian kneeling before a madonna. He had never been so happy; he was overwhelmed with joy. Until then, he had only thought of business matters. To be rich was the aim of his life; and now he was going to work for happiness. It was all pleasure for him. He was not blase; he amused himself like a child, adorning the rooms which were to be occupied by Jeanne. To his mind nothing was too expensive for the temple of his goddess, as he said, with a loud laugh which lighted up his whole face. And when he spoke of his love’s future nest, he exclaimed, with a voluptuous shiver:

“It is charming; a veritable little paradise!” Then the financier shone through all, and he added:

“And I know what it costs!”

But he did not grudge his money. He knew he would get the interest of it back. On one subject he was anxious—Mademoiselle de Cernay's health. Since the day of their engagement, Jeanne had become more serious and dull. She had grown thin and her eyes were sunken as if she wept in secret. When he spoke of his fears to Madame Desvarennnes, the latter said:

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"These young girls are so senseless. The notion of marriage puts them in such an incomprehensible state! Look at my daughter. She chatters like a magpie and skips about like a kid. She has two glow-worms under her eyelids! As to Jeanne, that's another affair; she has the matrimonial melancholy, and has the air of a young victim. Leave them alone; it will all come right. But you must admit that the gayety of the one is at least as irritating as the languor of the other!"

Cayrol, somewhat reassured by this explanation, and thinking, like her, that it was the uncertainties of marriage which were troubling Jeanne, no longer attached any importance to her sad appearance. Micheline and Serge isolated themselves completely. They fled to the garden as soon as any one ventured into the drawing room, to interrupt their *tete-a-tete*. If visitors came to the garden they took refuge in the conservatory.

This manoeuvre pleased Serge, because he always felt uncomfortable in Jeanne's presence. Mademoiselle de Cernay had a peculiar wrinkle on her brow whenever she saw Micheline passing before her hanging on the arm of the Prince, which tormented him. They were obliged to meet at table in the evening, for Serge and Cayrol dined at the Rue Saint-Dominique. The Prince talked in whispers to Micheline, but every now and then he was obliged to speak to Jeanne. These were painful moments to Serge. He was always in dread of some outburst, knowing her ardent and passionate nature. Thus, before Jeanne, he made Micheline behave in a less demonstrative manner. Mademoiselle Desvarennes was proud of this reserve, and thought it was tact and good breeding on the part of the Prince, without doubting that what she thought reserve in the man of the world was the prudence of an anxious lover.

Jeanne endured the tortures of Hades. Too proud to say anything after the explanation she had had with Serge, too much smitten to bear calmly the sight of her rival's happiness, she saw draw near with deep horror the moment when she would belong to the man whom she had determined to marry although she did not love him. She once thought of breaking off the engagement; as she could not belong to the man whom she adored, at least she could belong to herself. But the thought of the struggle she would have to sustain with those who surrounded her, stopped her. What would she do at Madame Desvarennes's? She would have to witness the happiness of Micheline and Serge. She would rather leave the house.

With Cayrol at least she could go away; she would be free, and perhaps the esteem which she would surely have for her husband would do instead of love. Sisterly or filial love, in fact the least affection, would satisfy the poor man, who was willing to accept anything from Jeanne. And she would not have that group of Serge and Micheline before her eyes, always walking round the lawn and disappearing arm in arm down the narrow walks. She would not have the continual murmur of their love-making in her ears, a murmur broken by the sound of kisses when they reached shady corners.

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One evening, when Serge appeared in the little drawing-room of the Rue Saint-Dominique, he found Madame Desvarennnes alone. She looked serious, as if some important business were pending. She stood before the fireplace; her hands crossed behind her back like a man. Apparently, she had sought to be alone. Cayrol, Jeanne, and Micheline were in the garden. Serge felt uneasy. He had a presentiment of trouble. But determined to make the best of it, whatever it might be, he looked pleasant and bowed to Madame Desvarennnes, without his face betraying his uneasiness.

“Good-day, Prince; you are early this evening, though not so early as Cayrol; but then he does not quite know what he is doing now. Sit down, I want to talk to you. You know that a young lady like Mademoiselle Desvarennnes cannot get married without her engagement being much talked about. Tongues have been very busy, and pens too. I have heard a lot of scandal and have received heaps of anonymous letters about you.”

Serge gave a start of indignation.

“Don’t be uneasy,” continued the mistress. “I did not heed the tales, and I burned the letters. Some said you were a dissolute man, capable of anything to gain your object. Others insinuated that you were not a Prince, that you were not a Pole, but the son of a Russian coachman and a little dressmaker of Les Ternes; that you had lived at the expense of Mademoiselle Anna Monplaisir, the star of the Varietes Theatre, and that you were bent on marrying to pay your debts with my daughter’s money.”

Panine, pale as death, rose up and said, in a stifled voice:

“Madame!”

“Sit down, my dear child,” interrupted the mistress. “If I tell you these things, it is because I have the proofs that they are untrue. Otherwise, I would not have given myself the trouble to talk to you about them. I would have shown you the door and there would have been an end of it. Certainly, you are not an angel; but the peccadillos which you have been guilty of are those which one forgives in a son, and which in a son-in-law makes some mothers smile. You are a Prince, you are handsome, and you have been loved. You were then a bachelor; and it was your own affair. But now, you are going to be, in about ten days, the husband of my daughter, and it is necessary for us to make certain arrangements. Therefore, I waited to see you, to speak of your wife, of yourself, and of me.”

What Madame Desvarennnes had just said relieved Serge of a great weight. He felt so happy that he resolved to do everything in his power to please the mother of his betrothed.

“Speak, Madame,” he exclaimed. “I am listening to you with attention and confidence. I am sure that from you I can only expect goodness and sense.”

The mistress smiled.

“Oh, I know you have a gilt tongue, my handsome friend, but I don’t pay myself with words, and I, am not easy to be wheedled.”

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"Faith," said Serge, "I won't deceive you. I will try to please you with all my heart."

Madame Desvarennnes's face brightened as suddenly at these words as a landscape, wrapped in a fog, which is suddenly lighted up by the sun.

"Then we shall understand each other," she said. "For the last fortnight we have been busy with marriage preparations, and have not been able to think or reason. Everybody is rambling about here. Still, we are commencing a new life, and I think it is as well to lay the foundation. I seem to be drawing up a contract, eh? What can I do? It is an old business habit. I like to know how I stand."

"I think it is quite right. I think, too, that you have acted with great delicacy in not imposing your conditions upon me before giving your consent."

"Has that made you feel better disposed toward me? So much the better!" said the mistress. "Because you know that I depend on my daughter, who will henceforth depend on you, and it is to my interest that I should be in your good graces."

In pronouncing these words with forced cheerfulness, Madame Desvarennnes's voice trembled slightly. She knew what an important game she was playing, and wished to win it at any price.

"You see," continued she, "I am not an easy woman to deal with. I am a little despotic, I know. I have been in the habit of commanding during the last thirty-five years. Business was heavy, and required a strong will. I had it, and the habit is formed. But this strong will, which has served me so well in business will, I am afraid, with you, play me some trick. Those who have lived with me a long time know that if I am hot-headed I have a good heart. They submit to my tyranny; but you who are a newcomer, how will you like it?"

"I shall do as the others do," said Serge, simply. "I shall be led, and with pleasure. Think that I have lived for years without kindred, without ties—at random; and, believe me, any chain will be light and sweet which holds me to any one or anything. And then," frankly added he, changing his tone and looking at Madame Desvarennnes with tenderness, "if I did not do everything to please you I should be ungrateful."

"Oh!" cried Madame Desvarennnes, "unfortunately that is not a reason."

"Would you have a better one?" said the young man, in his most charming accent. "If I had not married your daughter for her own sake, I believe that I should have married her for yours." Madame Desvarennnes was quite pleased, and shaking her finger threateningly at Serge, said:

"Ah, you Pole, you boaster of the North!"

“Seriously,” continued Serge, “before I knew I was to be your son-in-law, I thought you a matchless woman. Add to the admiration I had for your great qualities the affection which your goodness has inspired, and you will understand that I am both proud and happy to have such a mother as you.”

Madame Desvarennnes looked at Panine attentively; she saw he was sincere. Then, taking courage, she touched the topic of greatest interest to her. “If that is the case, you will have no objections to live with me?” She stopped; then emphasized the words, “With me.”

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"But was not that understood?" asked Serge, gayly' "I thought so. You must have seen that I have not been seeking a dwelling for my wife and myself. If you had not made the offer to me, I should have asked you to let me stay with you."

Madame Desvarennnes broke into such an outburst of joy that she astonished Panine. It was then only that in that pallor, in that sudden trembling, in that changed voice, he understood, the immensity of the mother's love for her daughter.

"I have everything to gain by that arrangement," continued he. "My wife will be happy at not leaving you, and you will be pleased at my not having taken away your daughter. You will both like me better, and that is all I wish."

"How good you are in deciding thus, and how I thank you for it," resumed Madame Desvarennnes. "I feared you would have ideas of independence."

"I should have been happy to sacrifice them to you, but I have not even that merit."

All that Serge had said had been so open and plain, and expressed with such sweetness that, little by little, Madame Desvarennnes's prejudices disappeared. He took possession of her as he had done of Micheline, and as he did of every one whom he wished to conquer. His charm was irresistible. He seized on one by the eyes and the ears. Naturally fascinating, moving, captivating, bold, he always preserved his artless and tender ways, which made him resemble a young girl.

"I am going to tell you how we shall manage," said the mistress. "Foreseeing my daughter's marriage, I have had my house divided into two distinct establishments. They say that life in common with a mother-in-law is objectionable to a son-in-law, therefore I wish you to have a home of your own. I know that an old face like mine frightens young lovers. I will come to you when you invite me. But even when I am shut up in my own apartments I shall be with my daughter; I shall breathe the same air; I shall hear her going and coming, singing, laughing, and I shall say to myself, 'It is all right, she is happy.' That is all I ask. A little corner, whence I can share her life."

Serge took her hand with effusion.

"Don't be afraid; your daughter will not leave you."

Madame Desvarennnes, unable to contain her feelings, opened her arms, and Serge fell on her breast, like a true son.

"Do you know, I am going to adore you!" cried Madame Desvarennnes, showing Panine a face beaming with happiness.

"I hope so," said the young man, gayly.

Madame Desvarennnes became thoughtful.

“What a strange thing life is!” resumed she. “I did not want you for a son-in-law, and now you are behaving so well toward me that I am full of remorse. Oh, I see now what a dangerous man you are, if you captivate other women’s hearts as you have caught mine.”

She looked at the Prince fixedly, and added, in her clear commanding voice, with a shade of gayety:

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"Now, I hope you will reserve all your powers of charming for my daughter. No more flirting, eh? She loves you; she would be jealous, and you would get into hot water with me! Let Micheline's life be happy, without a cloud-blue, always blue sky!"

"That will be easy," said Serge. "To be unhappy I should have to seek misfortune; and I certainly shall not do that."

He began to laugh.

"Besides, your good friends who criticised so when you gave me Micheline's hand would be only too pleased. I will not give them the pleasure of posing as prophets and saying, 'We knew it would be so!'"

"You must forgive them," replied Madame Desvarennnes. "You have made enemies. Without speaking of projects which I had formed, I may say that my daughter has had offers from the best folks in Paris; from first-rate firms! Our circle was rather indignant.

"People said: 'Oh, Madame Desvarennnes wanted her daughter to be a Princess. We shall see how it will turn out. Her son-in-law will spend her money and spurn her.' The gossip of disappointed people. Give them the lie; manage that we shall all live together, and we shall be right against the world."

"Do you hope it will be so?"

"I am sure of it," answered the mistress, affectionately pressing the hand of her future son-in-law.

Micheline entered, anxious at the long interview between Serge and her mother. She saw them hand in hand. She uttered a joyful cry, and threw her arms caressingly round her mother's neck.

"Well! you are agreed?" she said, making a gracious sign to Serge.

"He has been charming," replied Madame Desvarennnes, whispering in her daughter's ear. "He agrees to live in this house, and that quite gracefully. There, child, this is the happiest moment I've had since your engagement. I admit that I regret nothing."

Then, resuming aloud:

"We will leave to-morrow for Cernay, where the marriage shall take place. I shall have to order the workmen in here to get ready for your reception. Besides the wedding will be more brilliant in the country. We shall have all the work-people there. We will throw the park open to the countryside; it will be a grand fete. For we are lords of the manor there," added she, with pride.

“You are right, mamma; it will be far better,” exclaimed Micheline. And taking Serge by the hand:

“Come, let us go,” said she, and led him into the garden.

And amid the sweet-smelling shrubs they resumed their walk, always the same yet ever new, their arms twined round each other, the young girl clinging to him whom she loved, and he looking fondly at her, and with caressing voice telling her the oft-told tale of love which she was never tired of hearing, and which always filled her with thrills of joy.

CHAPTER IX

THE DOUBLE MARRIAGE

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The Chateau of Cernay is a vast and beautiful structure of the time of Louis XIII. A walled park of a hundred acres surrounds it, with trees centuries old. A white painted gate separates the avenue from the road leading to Pontoise by way of Conflans. A carpet of grass, on which carriages roll as if on velvet, leads up to the park gates. Before reaching, it there is a stone bridge which spans the moat of running water. A lodge of stone, faced with brick, with large windows, rises at each corner of this space.

The chateau, surrounded by cleverly arranged trees, stands in the centre, on a solid foundation of red granite from the Jura. A splendid double staircase leads to the ground floor as high as an 'entresol'. A spacious hall, rising to the roof of the building, lighted by a window filled with old stained glass, first offers itself to the visitor. A large organ, by Cavallie-Col, rears its long brilliant pipes at one end of the hall to a level with the gallery of sculptured wood running round and forming a balcony on the first floor. At each corner is a knight in armor, helmet on head, and lance in hand, mounted on a charger, and covered with the heavy trappings of war. Cases full of objects of art of great value, bookshelves containing all the new books, are placed along the walls. A billiard-table and all sorts of games are lodged under the vast staircase. The broad bays which give admission to the reception-rooms and grand staircase are closed by tapestry of the fifteenth century, representing hunting scenes. Long cords of silk and gold loop back these marvellous hangings in the Italian style. Thick carpets, into which the feet sink, deaden the sound of footsteps. Spacious divans, covered with Oriental materials, are placed round the room.

Over the chimney-piece, which is splendidly carved in woodwork, is a looking-glass in the Renaissance style, with a bronze and silver frame, representing grinning fawns and dishevelled nymphs. Benches are placed round the hearth, which is large enough to hold six people. Above the divans, on the walls, are large oil-paintings by old masters. An "Assumption," by Jordaens, which is a masterpiece; "The Gamesters," by Valentin; "A Spanish Family on Horseback," painted by Velasquez; and the marvel of the collection—a "Holy Family," by Francia, bought in Russia. Then, lower down, "A Young Girl with a Canary," by Metz; a "Kermesse," by Braurver, a perfect treasure, glitter, like the gems they are, in the midst of panoplies, between the high branches of palm-trees planted in enormous delft vases. A mysterious light filters into that fresh and picturesque apartment through the stained-glass windows.

From the hall the left wing is reached, where the reception-rooms are, and one's eyes are dazzled by the brightness which reigns there. It is like coming out from a cathedral into broad daylight. The furniture, of gilt wood and Genoese velvet, looks very bright. The walls are white and gold; and flowers are everywhere. At the end is Madame Desvarennés's bedroom, because she does not like mounting stairs, and lives on the ground floor. Adjoining it is a conservatory, furnished as a drawing-room, and serving as a boudoir for the mistress of the house.

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The dining-room, the gun-room, and the smoking-room are in the right wing. The gun-room deserves a particular description. Four glass cases contain guns of every description and size of the best English and French manufacture. All the furniture is made of stags' horns, covered with fox-skins and wolf-skins. A large rug, formed by four bears' skins, with menacing snouts, showing their white teeth at the four corners, is in the centre of the room. On the walls are four paintings by Princeteau, admirably executed, and representing hunting scenes. Low couches, wide as beds, covered with gray cloth, invite the sportsmen to rest. Large dressing-rooms, fitted up with hot and cold water, invite them to refresh themselves with a bath. Everything has been done to suit the most fastidious taste. The kitchens are underground.

On the first story are the principal rooms. Twelve bedrooms, with dressing-rooms, upholstered in chintz of charming design. From these, a splendid view of the park and country beyond may be obtained. In the foreground is a piece of water, bathing, with its rapid current, the grassy banks which border the wood, while the low-lying branches of the trees dip into the flood, on which swans, dazzlingly white, swim in stately fashion. Beneath an old willow, whose drooping boughs form quite a vault of pale verdure, a squadron of multicolored boats remain fastened to the balustrade of a landing stage. Through an opening in the trees you see in the distance fields of yellow corn, and in the near background, behind a row of poplars, ever moving like a flash of silver lightning, the Oise flows on between its low banks.

This sumptuous dwelling, on the evening of the 14th of July, was in its greatest splendor. The trees of the park were lit up by brilliant Venetian lanterns; little boats glided on the water of the lake carrying musicians whose notes echoed through the air. Under a marquee, placed midway in the large avenue, the country lads and lasses were dancing with spirit, while the old people, more calm, were seated under the large trees enjoying the ample fare provided. A tremendous uproar of gayety reechoed through the night, and the sound of the cornet attracted the people to the ball.

It was nine o'clock. Carriages were fast arriving with guests for the mansion. In the centre of the handsome hall, illuminated with electric light, stood Madame Desvarennés in full dress, having put off black for one day, doing honor to the arrivals. Behind her stood Marechal and Savinien, like two aides-de-camp, ready, at a sign, to offer their arms to the ladies, to conduct them to the drawing-rooms. The gathering was numerous. Merchant-princes came for Madame Desvarennés's sake; bankers for Cayrol's; and the aristocrats and foreign nobility for the Prince's. An assemblage as opposed in ideas as in manners: some valuing only money, others high birth; all proud and elbowing each other with haughty assurance, speaking ill of each other and secretly jealous.

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There were heirs of dethroned kings; princes without portions, who were called Highness, and who had not the income of their fathers' former chamberlains; millionaires sprung from nothing, who made a great show and who would have given half of their possessions for a single quartering of the arms of these great lords whom they affected to despise.

Serge and Cayrol went from group to group; the one with his graceful and delicate elegance; the other with his good-humor, radiant and elated by the consciousness of his triumphs. Herzog had just arrived, accompanied by his daughter, a charming girl of sixteen, to whom Marechal had offered his arm. A whispering was heard when Herzog passed. He was accustomed to the effect which he produced in public, and quite calmly congratulated Cayrol.

Serge had just introduced Micheline to Count Soutzko, a gray-haired old gentleman of military appearance, whose right sleeve was empty. He was a veteran of the Polish wars, and an old friend of Prince Panine's, at whose side he had received the wounds which had so frightfully mutilated him. Micheline, smiling, was listening to flattering tales which the old soldier was relating about Serge. Cayrol, who had got rid of Herzog, was looking for Jeanne, who had just disappeared in the direction of the terrace.

The rooms were uncomfortably warm, and many of the visitors had found their way to the terraces. Along the marble veranda, overlooking the lake, chairs had been placed. The ladies, wrapped in their lace scarfs, had formed into groups and were enjoying the delights of the beautiful evening. Bursts of subdued laughter came from behind fans, while the gentlemen talked in whispers. Above all this whispering was heard the distant sound of the cornet at the peasants' ball.

Leaning over the balustrade, in a shady corner, far from the noise which troubled him and far from the fete which hurt him, Pierre was dreaming. His eyes were fixed on the illuminations in the park, but he did not see them. He thought of his vanished hopes. Another was beloved by Micheline, and in a few hours he would take her away, triumphant and happy. A great sadness stole over the young man's spirit; he was disgusted with life and hated humanity. What was to become of him now? His life was shattered; a heart like his could not love twice, and Micheline's image was too deeply engraven on it for it ever to be effaced. Of what use was all the trouble he had taken to raise himself above others? A worthless fellow had passed that way and Micheline had yielded to him. Now it was all over!

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And Pierre asked himself if he had not taken a wrong view of things, and if it was not the idle and good-for-nothing fellows who were more prudent than he. To waste his life in superhuman works, to tire his mind in seeking to solve great problems, and to attain old age without other satisfaction than unproductive honors and mercenary rewards. Those who only sought happiness and joy—epicureans who drive away all care, all pain, and only seek to soften their existence, and brighten their horizon—were they not true sages? Death comes so quickly! And it is with astonishment that one perceives when the hour is at hand, that one has not lived! Then the voice of pride spoke to him: what is a man who remains useless, and does not leave one trace of his passage through the world by works or discoveries? And, in a state of fever, Pierre said to himself:

“I will throw myself heart and soul into science; I will make my name famous, and I will make that ungrateful child regret me. She will see the difference between me and him whom she has chosen. She will understand that he is nobody, except by her money, whereas she would have been all by me.”

A hand was placed on his shoulder; and Marechal’s affectionate voice said to him:

“Well! what are you doing here, gesticulating like that?”

Pierre turned round.

Lost in his thoughts he had not heard his friend approaching.

“All our guests have arrived,” continued Marechal. “I have only just been able to leave them and to come to you. I have been seeking you for more than a quarter of an hour. You are wrong to hide yourself; people will make remarks. Come toward the house; it is as well to show yourself a little; people might imagine things which they must not imagine.”

“Eh! let them think what they like; what does it matter to me?” said Pierre, sadly. “My life is a blank.”

“Your life may be a blank; but it is your duty not to let any one perceive it. Imitate the young Spartan, who smiled although the fox, hidden under his cloak, was gnawing his vitals. Let us avoid ridicule, my friend. In society there is nothing that provokes laughter more than a disappointed lover, who rolls his eyes about and looks woe-begone. And, then, you-see, suffering is a human law; the world is an arena, life is a conflict. Material obstacles, moral griefs, all hinder and overwhelm us. We must go on, though, all the same, and fight. Those who give in are trodden down! Come, pull yourself together!”

“And for whom should I fight now? A moment ago I was making projects, but I was a fool! All hope and ambition are dead in me.”



“Ambition will return, you may be sure! At present you are suffering from weariness of mind; but your strength will return. As to hope, one must never despair.”

“What can I expect in the future?”

“What? Why, everything! In this world all sorts of things happen!” said Marechal, gayly.

“Who is to prove that the Princess will not be a widow soon?”

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Pierre could not help laughing and said,

“Come, don’t talk such nonsense!”

“My dear fellow,” concluded Marechal, “in life it is only nonsense that is common-sense. Come and smoke a cigar.”

They traversed several groups of people and bent their steps in the direction of the chateau. The Prince was advancing toward the terrace, with an elegantly dressed and beautiful woman on his arm. Savinien, in the midst of a circle of dandies, was picking the passers-by to pieces in his easy-going way. Pierre and Marechal came behind these young men without being noticed.

“Who is that hanging on the arm of our dear Prince?” asked a little fat man, girt in a white satin waistcoat, and a spray of white lilac in his buttonhole.

“Eh! Why, Le Brede, my boy, you don’t know anything!” cried Savinien in a bantering, jocose tone.

“Because I don’t know that lovely fair woman?” said Le Brede, in a piqued voice. “I don’t profess to know the names of all the pretty women in Paris!”

“In Paris? That woman from Paris? You have not looked at her. Come, open your eyes. Pure English style, my friend.”

The dandies roared with laughter. They had at once recognized the pure English style. They were not men to be deceived. One of them, a tall, dark fellow, named Du Tremblays, affected an aggrieved air, and said:

“Le Brede, my dear fellow, you make us blush for you!”

The Prince passed, smiling and speaking in a low voice to the beautiful Englishwoman, who was resting the tips of her white gloved fingers on her cavalier’s arm.

“Who is she?” inquired Le Brede, impatiently.

“Eh, my dear fellow, it is Lady Harton, a cousin of the Prince. She is extremely rich, and owns a district in London.”

“They say that a year ago she was very kind to Serge Panine,” added Du Tremblays, confidentially.

“Why did he not marry her, then, since she is so rich? He has been quite a year in the market, the dear Prince.”

“She is married.”

“Oh, that is a good reason. But where is her husband?”

“Shut up in a castle in Scotland. Nobody ever sees him. He is out of his mind; and is surrounded by every attention.”

“And a strait-waistcoat! Then why does not this pretty woman get a divorce?”

“The money belongs to the husband.”

“Really!”

Pierre and Marechal had listened, in silence, to this cool and yet terrible conversation. The group of young men dispersed. The two friends looked at each other. Thus, then, Serge Panine was judged by his companions in pleasure, by the frequenters of the clubs in which he had spent a part of his existence. The Prince being “in the market” was obliged to marry a rich woman. He could not marry Lady Harton, so he had sought Micheline. And the sweet child was the wife of such a man! And what could be done? She loved him!

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Madame Desvarennnes and Micheline appeared on the terrace. Lady Harton pointed to the bride with her fan. The Prince, leaving his companion, advanced toward Micheline.

“One of my English relatives, a Polish lady, married to Lord Harton, wishes to be introduced to you,” said Serge. “Are you agreeable?”

“With all my heart,” replied the young wife, looking lovingly at her husband. “All who belong to you are dear to me, you know.”

The beautiful Englishwoman approached slowly.

“The Princess Panine!” said Serge, gravely, introducing Micheline, who bowed gracefully. Then, with a shade of familiarity: “Lady Harton!” continued he, introducing his relative.

“I am very fond of your husband, Madame,” said the Englishwoman. “I hope you will allow me to love you also; and I beg you to grant me the favor of accepting this small remembrance.”

While speaking, she unfastened from her wrist a splendid bracelet with the inscription, *Semper*.

Serge frowned and looked stern. Micheline, lowering her eyes, and awed by the Englishwoman’s grandeur, timidly said:

“I accept it, Madame, as a token of friendship.”

“I think I recognize this bracelet, Madame,” observed Serge.

“Yes; you gave it to me,” replied Lady Harton, quietly. “*Semper*—I beg your pardon, Madame, we Poles all speak Latin—*Semper* means ‘Always!’ It is a great word. On your wife’s arm this bracelet will be well placed. *Au revoir*, dear Prince. I wish you every happiness.”

And bowing to Micheline with a regal bow, Lady Harton took the arm of a tall young man whom she had beckoned, and walked away.

Micheline, amazed, looked at the bracelet sparkling on her white wrist. Without uttering a word Serge unfastened it, took it off his wife’s arm, and advancing on the terrace, with a rapid movement flung it in the water. The bracelet gleamed in the night-air and made a brilliant splash; then the water resumed its tranquillity. Micheline, astonished, looked at Serge, who came toward her, and very humbly said:

“I beg your pardon.”

The young wife did not answer, but her eyes filled with tears; a smile brightened her lips, and hurriedly taking his arm, she led him into the drawing-room.

Dancing was going on there. The young ladies of Pontoise, and the cream of Creil, had come to the fete, bent on not losing such an opportunity of enjoying themselves. Under the watchful eyes of their mothers, who, decked out in grand array, were seated along the walls, they were gamboling, in spite of the stifling heat, with all the impetuosity of young provincials habitually deprived of the pleasures of the ballroom. Crossing the room, Micheline and Serge reached Madame Desvarennés's boudoir.

It was delightfully cool in there. Cayrol had taken refuge there with Jeanne, and Mademoiselle Susanne Herzog. This young girl felt uncomfortable at being a third party with the newly-married couple, and welcomed the arrival of the Prince and Micheline with pleasure. Her father had left her for a moment in Cayrol's care; but she had not seen him for more than an hour.

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"Mademoiselle," said the Prince, gayly, "a little while ago, when I was passing through the rooms, I heard these words: 'Loan, discount, liquidation.' Your father must have been there. Shall I go and seek him?"

"I should be very grateful," said the young girl.

"I will go."

And turning lightly on his heels, happy to escape Jeanne's looks, Serge reentered the furnace. At once he saw Herzog seated in the corner of a bay-window with one of the principal stock-brokers of Paris. He was speaking. The Prince went straight up to him.

"Sorry to draw you away from the sweets of conversation," said he, smiling; "but your daughter is waiting for you, and is anxious at your not coming."

"Faith! My daughter, yes. I will come and see you tomorrow," said he to his companion. "We will talk over this association: there is much to be gained by it."

The other, a man with a bloated face, and fair Dundreary whiskers, was eager to do business with him. Certainly the affair was good.

"Oh, my dear Prince, I am happy to be alone with you for a moment!" said Herzog, with that familiarity which was one of his means of becoming intimate with people. "I was going to compliment you! What a splendid position you have reached."

"Yes; I have married a charming woman," replied the Prince, coldly.

"And what a fortune!" insisted the financier. "Ah, it is worthy of the lot of a great lord such as you are! Oh, you are like those masterpieces of art which need a splendidly carved frame! Well, you have your frame, and well gilt too!"

He laughed and seemed pleased at Serge's happiness. He had taken one of his hands and was patting it softly between his own.

"Not a very 'convenient' mother-in-law, for instance," he went on, good-naturedly; "but you are so charming! Only you could have, coaxed Madame Desvarennnes, and you have succeeded. Oh! she likes you, my dear Prince; she told me so only a little while ago. You have won her heart. I don't know how you manage it, but you are irresistible! By the way, I was not there when the marriage contract was read, and I, forgot to ask Cayrol. Under what conditions art you married?"

The Prince looked at Herzog with a look that was hardly friendly. But the financier appeared so indifferent, that Serge could not help answering him:

"My wife's fortune is settled on herself."

“Ah! ah! that is usual in Normandy!” replied Herzog with a grave look. “I was told Madame Desvarennnes was a clever woman and she has proved it. And you signed the contract with your eyes shut, my dear Prince. It is perfect, just as a gentleman should do!”

He said this with a good-natured air. Then, suddenly lifting his eyes, and with an ironical smile playing on his lips, he added:

“You are bowled out, my dear fellow, don’t you know?”

“Sir!” protested Serge with haughtiness.

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"Don't cry out; it is too late, and would be useless," replied the financier. "Let me explain your position to you. Your hands are tied. You cannot dispose of a sou belonging to your wife without her consent. It is true, you have influence over her, happily for you. Still you must foresee that she will be guided by her mother. A strong woman, too, the mother! Ah, Prince, you have allowed yourself to be done completely. I would not have thought it of you."

Serge, nonplussed for a moment, regained his self-possession, and looked Herzog in the face:

"I don't know what idea you have formed of me, sir, and I don't know what object you have in speaking thus to me."

"My interest in you," interrupted the financier. "You are a charming fellow: you please me much. With your tastes, it is possible that in a brief time you may be short of money. Come and see me: I will put you into the way of business. Au revoir, Prince."

And without giving Serge time to answer him, Herzog reached the boudoir where his daughter was waiting with impatience. Behind him came the Prince looking rather troubled. The financier's words had awakened importunate ideas in his mind. Was it true that he had been duped by Madame Desvarennnes, and that the latter, while affecting airs of greatness and generosity, had tied him like a noodle to her daughter's apron-string? He made an effort to regain his serenity.

"Micheline loves me and all will be well," said he to himself.

Madame Desvarennnes joined the young married people. The rooms were clearing by degrees. Serge took Cayrol apart.

"What are you going to do to-night, my dear fellow?"

"You know an apartment has been prepared for you here?"

"Yes, I have already thanked Madame Desvarennnes, but I mean to go back to Paris. Our little paradise is prepared for us, and I wish to enter it to-night. I have my carriage and horses here. I am taking away my wife post-haste."

"That is an elopement," said Serge; gayly, "quite in the style of the regency!"

"Yes, my dear Prince, that's how we bankers do it," said Cayrol, laughing.

Then changing his tone:

"See, I vibrate, I am palpitating. I am hot and cold by turns. Just fancy, I have never loved before; my heart is whole, and I love to distraction!"



Serge instinctively glanced at Jeanne. She was seated, looking sad and tired.

Madame Desvarennnes, between Jeanne and Micheline, had her arms twined round the two young girls. Regret filled her eyes. The mother felt that the last moments of her absolute reign were near, and she was contemplating with supreme adoration these two children who had grown up around her like two fragile and precious flowers. She was saying to them,

“Well, the great day is over. You are both married. You don’t belong to me any longer. How I shall miss you! This morning I had two children, and now—”

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"You have four," interrupted Micheline. "Why do you complain?"

"I don't complain," retorted Madame Desvarennnes, quickly.

"That's right!" said Micheline, gayly.

Then going toward Jeanne:

"But you are not speaking, you are so quiet; are you ill?"

Jeanne shuddered, and made an effort to soften the hard lines on her face.

"It is nothing. A little fatigue."

"And emotion," added Micheline. "This morning when we entered the church, at the sound of the organ, in the midst of flowers, surrounded by all our friends, I felt that I was whiter than my veil. And the crossing to my place seemed so long, I thought I should never get there. I did so, though. And now everybody calls me 'Madame' and some call me 'Princess.' It amuses me!"

Serge had approached.

"But you are a Princess," said he, smiling, "and everybody must call you so."

"Oh, not mamma, nor Jeanne, nor you," said the young wife, quickly; "always call me Micheline. It will be less respectful, but it will be more tender."

Madame Desvarennnes could not resist drawing her daughter once more to her heart.

"Dear child," she said with emotion, "you need affection, as flowers need the sun! But I love you, there."

She stopped and added:

"We love you."

And she held out her hand to her son-in-law. Then changing the subject:

"But I am thinking, Cayrol, as you are returning to Paris, you might take some orders for me which I will write out."

"What? Business? Even on my wedding-day?" exclaimed Micheline.

"Eh! my daughter, we must have flour," replied the mistress, laughing. "While we are enjoying ourselves Paris eats, and it has a famous appetite."



Micheline, leaving her mother, went to her husband.

“Serge, it is not yet late. Suppose we put in an appearance at the work-people’s ball? I promised them, and the good folks will be so happy!”

“As you please. I am awaiting your orders. Let us make ourselves popular!”

Madame Desvarennnes had gone to her room. Carol took the opportunity of telling his coachman to drive round by the park to the door of the little conservatory and wait there. Thus, his wife and he would avoid meeting any one, and would escape the leave-taking of friends and the curiosity of lockers-on.

Micheline went up to Jeanne, and said:

“As you are going away quietly, dear, I shall not see you again this evening. Adieu!”

And with a happy smile, she kissed her. Then taking her husband’s arm she led him toward the park.

CHAPTER X

CAYROL’S DISAPPOINTMENT

Jeanne left alone, watched them as they disappeared with the light and easy movements of lovers.

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Serge, bending toward Micheline, was speaking tenderly. A rush of bitter feeling caused Jeanne's heart to swell. She was alone, she, while he whom she loved-her whole being revolted. Unhappy one! Why did she think of this man? Had she the right to do so now? She no longer belonged to herself. Another, who was as kind to her as Serge was ungrateful, was her husband. She thought thus in sincerity of heart. She wished to love Cayrol. Alas, poor Jeanne! She would load him with attentions and caresses! And Serge would be jealous, for he could never have forgotten her so soon.

Her thoughts again turned to him whom she wished to forget. She made an effort, but in vain. Serge was uppermost; he possessed her. She was afraid. Would she never be able to break off the remembrance? Would his name be ever on her lips, his face ever before her eyes?

Thank heaven! she was about to leave. Travelling, and the sight of strange places other than those where she had lived near Serge, would draw her attention from the persecution she suffered. Her husband was about to take her away, to defend her. It was his duty, and she would help him with energy. With all the strength of her will she summoned Cayrol. She clung violently to him as a drowning person catches at a straw, with the vigor of despair.

There was between Jeanne and Cayrol a sympathetic communication. Mentally called by his wife, the husband appeared.

"Ah! at last!" said she.

Cayrol, surprised at this welcome, smiled. Jeanne, without noticing, added:

"Well, Monsieur; are we leaving soon?"

The banker's surprise increased. But as this surprise was decidedly an agreeable one he did not protest.

"In a moment, Jeanne, dear," he said.

"Why this delay?" asked the young wife, nervously.

"You will understand. There are more than twenty carriages before the front door. Our coachman is driving round, and we will go out by the conservatory door without being seen."

"Very well; we will wait."

This delay displeased Jeanne. In the ardor of her resolution, in the first warmth of her struggle, she wished at once to put space between her and Serge. Unfortunately, Cayrol had thwarted this effort of proud revolt. She was vexed with him. He, without

knowing the motives which actuated his wife, guessed that something had displeased her. He wished to change the current of her thoughts.

“You were marvellously beautiful to-night,” he said, approaching her gallantly. “You were much admired, and I was proud of you. If you had heard my friends! It was a concert of congratulations: What a fortunate fellow that Cayrol is! He is rich; he has a charming wife! You see, Jeanne, thanks to you, in the eyes of all, my happiness is complete.”

Jeanne frowned, and without answering, shook her head haughtily. Cayrol continued, without noticing this forecast of a storm:

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"They envy me; and I can understand it! I would not change places with anybody. There, our friend Prince Panine is very happy; he has married a woman whom he loves and who adores him. Well, he is not happier than I am!"

Jeanne rose abruptly, and gave her husband a terrible look.

"Monsieur!" she cried with rage.

"I beg your pardon," said Cayrol, humbly; "I appear ridiculous to you, but my happiness is stronger than I am, and I cannot hide my joy. You will see that I can be grateful. I will spend my life in trying to please you. I have a surprise for you to begin with."

"What kind of surprise?" asked Jeanne, with indifference.

Cayrol rubbed his hands with a mysterious air. He was enjoying beforehand the pleasant surprise he had in store for his wife.

"You think we are going to Paris to spend our honeymoon like ordinary folk?"

Jeanne started. Cayrol seemed unfortunate in his choice of words.

"Well, not at all," continued the banker. "Tomorrow I leave my offices. My customers may say what they like; I will leave my business, and we are off."

Jeanne showed signs of pleasure. A flash of joy lit up her face. To go away, that was rest for her!

"And where shall we go?"

"That is the surprise! You know that the Prince and his wife intend travelling!"

"Yes; but they refused to say where they were going;" interrupted Jeanne, with a troubled expression.

"Not to me. They are going to Switzerland. Well, we shall join them there."

Jeanne arose like a startled deer when it hears the sound of a gun.

"Join them there!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; to continue the journey together. A party of four; two newly-married couples. It will be charming. I spoke to Serge on the subject. He objected at first, but the Princess came to my assistance. And when he saw that his wife and I were agreed, he commenced to laugh, and said: 'You wish it? I consent. Don't say anything more!' It is all very well to talk of love's solitude; in about a fortnight, passed tete-a-tete, Serge will

be glad to have us. We will go to Italy to see the lakes; and there, in a boat, all four, of us will have such pleasant times.”

Cayrol might have gone on talking for an hour, but Jeanne was not listening. She was thinking. Thus all the efforts which she had decided to make to escape from him whom she loved would be useless. An invincible fatality ever brought her toward him whom she was seeking to avoid. And it was her husband who was aiding this inevitable and execrable meeting. A bitter smile played on her lips. There was something mournfully comic in this stubbornness of Cayrol’s, in throwing her in the way of Serge.

Cayrol, embarrassed by Jeanne’s silence, waited a moment.

“What is the matter?” he asked. “You are just like the Prince when I spoke to him on the subject.”

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Jeanne turned away abruptly. Cayrol's comparison was too direct. His blunders were becoming wearisome.

The banker, quite discomfited on seeing the effect of his words, continued:

"You object to this journey? If so, I am willing to give it up."

The young wife was touched by this humble servility.

"Well, yes," she said, softly, "I should be grateful to you."

"I had hoped to please you," said Cayrol. "It is for me to beg pardon for having succeeded so badly. Let us remain in Paris. It does not matter to me what place we are in! Being near to you is all I desire."

He approached her, and, with beaming eyes, added:

"You are so beautiful, Jeanne; and I have loved you so long a time!"

She moved away, full of a vague dread. Cayrol, very excitedly, put her cloak round her shoulders, and looking toward the door, added:

"The carriage is there, we can go now."

Jeanne, much troubled, did not rise.

"Wait another minute," said she.

Cayrol smiled constrainedly:

"A little while ago you were hurrying me off."

It was true. But a sudden change had come over Jeanne. Her energy had given way. She felt very weary. The idea of going away with Cayrol, and of being alone with him in the carriage frightened her. She looked vaguely at her husband, and saw, in a sort of mist, this great fat man, with a protruding shirt-front, rolls of red flesh on his neck above his collar, long fat ears which only needed gold ear-rings, and his great hairy hands, on the finger of one of which shone the new wedding-ring. Then, in a rapid vision, she beheld the refined profile, the beautiful blue eyes, and the long, fair mustache of Serge. A profound sadness came over the young woman, and tears rushed to her eyes.

"What is the matter with you? You are crying!" exclaimed Cayrol, anxiously.



"It is nothing; my nerves are shaken. I am thinking of this chateau which bears my name. Here I spent my youth, and here my father died. A thousand ties bind me to this dwelling, and I cannot leave it without being overcome."

"Another home awaits you, luxuriantly adorned," murmured Cayrol, "and worthy of receiving you. It is there you will live henceforth with me, happy through me, and belonging to me."

Then, ardently supplicating her, he added:

"Let us go, Jeanne!"

He tried to take her in his arms, but the young wife disengaged herself.

"Leave me alone!" she said, moving away.

Cayrol looked at her in amazement.

"What is it? You are trembling and frightened!"

He tried to jest:

"Am I so very terrible, then? Or is it the idea of leaving here that troubles you so much? If so, why did you not tell me sooner? I can understand things. Let us remain here for a few days, or as long as you like. I have arranged my affairs so as to be at liberty. Our little paradise can wait for us."

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He spoke pleasantly, but with an undercurrent of anxiety.

Jeanne came slowly to him, and calmly taking his hand, said:

"You are very good."

"I am not making any efforts to be so," retorted Cayrol, smiling. "What do I ask? That you may be happy and satisfied."

"Well, do you wish to please me?" asked the young wife.

"Yes!" exclaimed Cayrol, warmly, "tell me how."

"Madame Desvarennnes will be very lonely tomorrow when her daughter will be gone. She will need consoling—"

"Ah, ah," said Cayrol, thinking that he understood, "and you would like—"

"I would like to remain some time with her. You could come every day and see us. I would be very grateful to you, and would love you very much!"

"But—but—but—!" exclaimed Cayrol, much confounded, "you cannot mean what you say, Jeanne! What, my dear? You wish me to return alone to Paris to-night? What would my servants say? You would expose me to ridicule!"

Poor Cayrol made a piteous face. Jeanne looked at him as she had never looked before. It made his blood boil.

"Would you be so very ridiculous for having been delicate and tender?"

"I don't see what tenderness has to do with it," cried Cayrol; "on the contrary! But I love you. You don't seem to think it!"

"Prove it," replied Jeanne, more provokingly.

This time Cayrol lost all patience.

"Is it in leaving you that I shall prove it? Really, Jeanne, I am disposed to be kind and to humor your whims, but on condition that they are reasonable. You seem to be making fun of me! If I give way on such important points on the day of our marriage, whither will you lead me? No; no! You are my wife. The wife must follow her husband; the law says so!"

"Is it by law only that you wish to keep me? Have you forgotten what I told you when you made me an offer of marriage? It is my hand only which I give you."

“And I answered you, that it would be my aim to gain your heart. Well, but give me the means. Come, dear,” said the banker in a resolute tone, “you take me for a child. I am not so simple as that! I know what this resistance means; charming modesty so long as it is not everlasting.”

Jeanne turned away without answering. Her face had changed its expression; it was hard and determined.

“Really,” continued Cayrol, “you would make a saint lose patience. Come, answer me, what does this attitude mean?”

The young wife remained silent. She felt she could not argue any longer, and seeing no way out of her trouble, felt quite discouraged. Still she would not yield. She shuddered at the very idea of belonging to this man; she had never thought of the issue of this brutal and vulgar adventure. Now that she realized it, she felt terribly disgusted.

Cayrol anxiously watched the increasing anguish depicted on his wife’s face. He had a presentiment that she was hiding something from him, and the thought nearly choked him. And, with this suspicion, his ingenuity came to his aid. He approached Jeanne, and said, affectionately:

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"Come, dear child, we are misleading one another; I in speaking too harshly, you in refusing to understand me. Forget that I am your husband; see in me only a friend and open your heart; your resistance hides a mystery. You have had some grief or have been deceived."

Jeanne, softened, said, in a low tone:

"Don't speak to me like that; leave me."

"No," resumed Cayrol, quietly, "we are beginning life; there must be no misunderstanding. Be frank, and you will find me indulgent. Come, young girls are often romantic. They picture an ideal; they fall in love with some one who does not return their love, which is sometimes even unknown to him who is their hero. Then, suddenly, they have to return to a reality. They find themselves face to face with a husband who is not the expected Romeo, but who is a good man, devoted, loving, and ready to heal the wounds he has not made. They are afraid of this husband; they mistrust him, and will not follow him. It is wrong, because it is near him, in honorable and right existence, that they find peace and forgetfulness."

Cayrol's heart was torn by anxiety, and with trembling voice he tried to read the effect of his words on Jeanne's features. She had turned away. Cayrol bent toward her and said:

"You don't answer me."

And as she still remained silent, he took her hand and forced her to look at him. He saw that her face was covered with tears. He shuddered, and then flew into a terrible passion.

"You are crying! It is true then? You have loved?"

Jeanne rose with a bound; she saw her imprudence. She understood the trap he had laid; her cheeks burned. Drying her tears, she turned toward Cayrol, and cried:

"Who has said so?"

"You cannot deceive me," replied the banker, violently. "I saw it in your looks. Now, I want to know the man's name!"

Jeanne looked him straight in the face.

"Never!" she said.

"Ah, that is an avowal!" exclaimed Cayrol.

“You have deceived me unworthily by your pretended kindness,” interrupted Jeanne, proudly, “I will not say anything more.”

Cayrol flew at her—the churl reappeared. He muttered a fearful oath, and seizing her by the arm, shouted:

“Take care! Don’t play with me. Speak, I insist, or—” and he shook her brutally.

Jeanne, indignant, screamed and tore herself away from him.

“Leave me,” she said, “you fill me with horror!”

The husband, beside himself, pale as death and trembling convulsively, could not utter a word, and was about to rush upon her when the door opened, and Madame Desvarennnes appeared, holding in her hand the letters which she had written for Cayrol to take back to Paris. Jeanne uttered a cry of joy, and with a bound threw herself into the arms of her who had been a mother to her.

CHAPTER XI

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CONFESSION

Madame Desvarennnes understood the situation at a glance. She beheld Cayrol livid, tottering, and excited. She felt Jeanne trembling on her breast; she saw something serious had occurred. She calmed herself and put on a cold manner to enable her the better to suppress any resistance that they might offer.

"What is the matter?" she asked, looking severely at Cayrol.

"Something quite unexpected," replied the banker, laughing nervously. "Madame refuses to follow me."

"And for what reason?" she asked.

"She dare not speak!" Cayrol resumed, whose excitement increased as he spoke. "It appears she has in her heart an unhappy love! And as I do not resemble the dreamed-of type, Madame has repugnances. But you understand the affair is not going to end there. It is not usual to come and say to a husband, twelve hours after marriage, 'Sir, I am very sorry, but I love somebody else!' It would be too convenient. I shall not lend myself to these whims."

"Cayrol, oblige me by speaking in a, lower tone," said Madame Desvarennnes, quietly. "There is some misunderstanding between you and this child."

The husband shrugged his broad shoulders.

"A misunderstanding? Faith! I think so! You have a delicacy of language which pleases me! A misunderstanding! Say rather a shameful deception! But I want to know the gentleman's name. She will have to speak. I am not a scented, educated gentleman. I am a peasant, and if I have to—"

"Enough," said Madame Desvarennnes, sharply tapping with the tips of her fingers Cayrol's great fist which he held menacingly like a butcher about to strike. Then, taking him quietly aside toward the window, she added:

"You are a fool to go on like this! Go to my room for a moment. To you, now, she will not say anything; to me she will confide all and we shall know what to do."

Cayrol's face brightened.

"You are right," he said. "Yes, as ever, you are right. You must excuse rile, I do not know how to talk to women. Rebuke her and put a little sense in her head. But don't leave her; she is fit to commit any folly."

Madame Desvarennnes smiled.

"Be easy," she answered.

And making a sign to Cayrol, who was leaving the room, she returned to Jeanne.

"Come, my child, compose yourself. We are alone and you will tell me what happened. Among women we understand each other. Come, you were frightened, eh?"

Jeanne was one petrified, immovable, and dumb, she fixed her eyes on a flower which was hanging from a vase. This red flower fascinated her. She could not take her eyes off it. Within her a persistent thought recurred: that of her irremediable misfortune. Madame Desvarennnes looked at her for a moment; then, gently touching her shoulder, resumed;

"Won't you answer me? Have you not confidence in me? Have I not brought you up? And if you are not born of me, have not the tenderness and care I have lavished upon you made me your real mother?"

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Jeanne did not answer, but her eyes filled with tears;

"You know that I love you," continued the mistress. "Come, come to my arms as you used to do when you were little and were suffering. Place your head thereon my heart and let your tears flow. I see they are choking you."

Jeanne could no longer resist, and falling on her knees beside Madame Desvarennnes, she buried her face in the silky and scented folds of her dress like a frightened bird that flies to the nest and hides itself under the wings of its mother.

This great and hopeless grief was to the mistress a certain proof that Cayrol was right. Jeanne had loved and still loved another man than her husband. But why had she not said anything, and why had she allowed herself to be married to the banker? She had resisted, she remembered now. She had struggled, and the refusals they had put down to pride they must now attribute to passion.

She did not wish to be separated from him whom she loved. Hence the struggle that had ended in her abandoning her hand to Cayrol, perhaps in a moment of despair and discouragement. But why had he whom she loved not married her? What obstacle had arisen between him and the young girl? Jeanne, so beautiful, and dowered by Madame Desvarennnes, who then could have hesitated to ask her hand?

Perhaps he whom Jeanne loved was unworthy of her? No! She would not have chosen him. Perhaps he was not free to marry? Yes, it must be that. Some married man, perhaps! A scoundrel who did not mind breaking a young girl's heart! Where had she met him? In society at her house in the Rue Saint-Dominique, perhaps! Who could tell? He very likely still continued to come there. At the thought Madame Desvarennnes grew angry. She wished to know the name of the man so that she might have an explanation with him, and tell him what she thought of his base conduct. The gentleman should have respectable, well-educated girls to trifle with, should he? And he risked nothing! He should be shown to the door with all honors due to his shameful conduct.

Jeanne was still weeping silently at Madame Desvarennnes's knee. The latter raised her head gently and wiped away the tears with her lace pocket-handkerchief.

"Come, my child! all this deluge means nothing. You must make up your mind. I can understand your hiding anything from your husband, but not from me! What is your lover's name?"

This question so simply put, threw a faint light on Jeanne's troubled brain. She saw the danger she was running. To speak before Madame Desvarennnes! To tell the name of him who had been false to her! To her! Was it possible? In a moment she understood that she was about to destroy Micheline and Serge. Her conscience revolted and she

would not. She raised herself and looking at Madame Desvarennnes with still frightened eyes,

“For pity’s sake, forget my tears! Don’t believe what my husband has told you. Never seek to know. Remain ignorant as you are on the subject!”

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"Then he whom you love is related to me, as: you wish to hide his name even from me," said Madame Desvarennnes with instinctive anguish.

She was silent. Her eyes became fixed. They looked without seeing. She was thinking.

"I beseech you," cried Jeanne, madly placing her hands before Madame Desvarennnes's face as if to check her scrutiny.

"If I had a son," continued the mistress, "I would believe—" Suddenly she ceased speaking; she became pale, and bending toward Jeanne, she looked into her very soul.

"Is it—" she began.

"No! no!" interrupted Jeanne, terrified at seeing that the mistress had found out the truth.

"You deny it before I have pronounced the name?" said Madame Desvarennnes in a loud voice. "You read it then on my lips? Unhappy girl! The man whom you love is the husband of my daughter!"

My daughter! The accent with which Madame Desvarennnes pronounced the word "my" was full of tragical power. It revealed the mother capable of doing anything to defend the happiness of the child whom she adored. Serge had calculated well. Between Jeanne and Micheline, Madame Desvarennnes would not hesitate. She would have allowed the world to crumble away to make of its ruins a shelter where her daughter would be joyous and happy.

Jeanne had fallen back overwhelmed. The mistress raised her roughly. She had no more consideration for her. It was necessary that she should speak. Jeanne was the sole witness, and if the truth had to be got by main force she should be made to speak it.

"Ah, forgive me!" moaned the young girl.

"It is not a question of that! In one word, answer me: Does he love you?"

"Do I know?"

"Did he tell you he did?"

"Yes."

"And he has married Micheline!" exclaimed Madame Desvarennnes, with a fearful gesture. "I distrusted him. Why did I not obey my instinct?"

And she began walking about like a lioness in a cage. Then, suddenly stopping and placing herself before Jeanne, she continued:

“You must help me to save Micheline!”

She thought only of her own flesh and blood. Without hesitation, unconsciously, she abandoned the other—the child of adoption. She claimed the safety of her daughter as a debt.

“What has she to fear?” asked Jeanne, bitterly. “She triumphs, as she is his wife.”

“If he were to abandon her,” said the mother with anguish. Then, reflecting: “Still, he has sworn to me that he loved her.”

“He lied!” cried Jeanne, with rage. “He wanted Micheline for her fortune!”

“But why that?” inquired Madame Desvarennnes, menacingly. “Is she not pretty enough to have pleased him? Do you think that you are the only one to be loved?”

“If I had been rich he would have married me!”, replied Jeanne, exasperated.

She had risen in revolt. They were treading too heavily on her. With a ferocious cry of triumph; she added:

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"The night he used his influence with me to get me to marry Cayrol, he assured me so on his word of honor!"

"Honor!" ironically repeated Madame Desvarennnes, overwhelmed. "How he has deceived us all! But what can I do? What course can I take? A separation? Micheline would not consent. She loves him."

And, in an outburst of fury, she cried:

"Is it possible that that stupid girl loves that worthless dandy? And she has my blood in her veins! If she knew the truth she would die!"

"Am I dead?" asked Jeanne, gloomily.

"You have an energetic nature," retorted the mistress, compassionately; "but she is so weak, so gentle! Ah! Jeanne, think what I have been to you; raise some insurmountable barrier between yourself and Serge!"

"Go back to your husband. You would not go with him a little while ago. It was folly. If you separate from Cayrol, you will not be able to keep away Serge, and you will take my daughter's husband from her!"

"Ah! you think only of her! Her, always! She above all!" cried Jeanne, with rage. "But me, I exist, I count, I have the right to be protected, of being happy! And you wish me to sacrifice myself, to give myself up to this man, whom I do not love, and who terrifies me?"

This time the question was plainly put. Madame Desvarennnes became herself. She straightened her figure, and in her commanding voice whose authority no one resisted, said:

"What then? You wish to be separated from him? To regain your liberty at the price of scandal? And what liberty? You will be repulsed, disdained. Believe me, impose silence on your heart and listen to your reason. Your husband is a good, loyal man. If you cannot love him, he will command your respect. In marrying him, you have entered into engagements toward him. Fulfil them; it is your duty."

Jeanne felt overpowered and vanquished. "But what will my life be?" she groaned.

"That of an honest woman," replied Madame Desvarennnes, with true grandeur. "Be a wife; God will make you a mother, and you will be saved."

Jeanne bowed herself at these words. She no longer felt in them the selfishness of the mother. What the mistress now said was sincere and true. It was no longer her agitated and alarmed heart that inspired her; it was her conscience, calm and sincere.

“Very well; I will obey you,” said the young wife, simply. “Kiss me then, mother.”

She bent her brow, and Madame Desvarennnes let tears of gratitude and admiration fall on it. Then Jeanne went of her own accord to the room door.

“Come, Monsieur,” called she to Cayrol.

The husband, grown cooler while waiting, and troubled at the length of the interview, showed his anxious face on the threshold. He saw Madame Desvarennnes grave, and Jeanne collected. He dared not speak.



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"Cayrol, everything is explained," said the mistress. "You have nothing to fear from him whom you suspected. He is separated from Jeanne forever, And; besides, nothing has passed between him and her who is your wife that could arouse your jealousy. I will not tell you the name of this man now. But if perchance he by some impossibility reappeared and threatened your happiness, I would myself—you understand, me?—point him out to you!"

Cayrol remained thinking for, a moment; then addressing Madame Desvarennnes, replied:

"It is well. I have confidence in you."

Then turning toward Jeanne, he added:

"Forgive me and let everything be forgotten."

The mistress's face beamed with joy, as she followed their departing figures with her eyes, and murmured:

"Brave hearts!"

Then, changing her expression:

"Now for the other one!" exclaimed she.

And she went out on to the terrace.

CHAPTER XII

THE FETE

The air was mild, the night clear and bright. Cayrol's carriage rolled rapidly along the broad avenue of the park shadowed by tall trees, the lanterns throwing, as they passed, their quivering light on the thickets. The rumbling carriages took the last guests to the railway station. It was past midnight. A nightingale began singing his song of love to the stars.

Madame Desvarennnes mechanically stopped to listen. A sense of sorrow came over this mother who was a prey to the most cruel mental anguish. She thought that she could have been very happy on that splendid night, if her heart had been full of quietude and serenity. Her two daughters were married; her last task was accomplished. She ought to have nothing to do but enjoy life after her own fashioning, and be calm and satisfied. Instead of that, here were fear and dissimulation taking possession of her mind; and an ardent, pitiless struggle beginning against the man who had deceived her

daughter and lied to her. The bark which carried her fortune, on reaching port, had caught fire, and it was necessary to begin laboring again amid cares and pains.

A dull rage filled her heart. To have so surely built up the edifice of her happiness, to have embellished it every hour, and then to see an intruder audaciously taking possession of it, and making his despotic and hateful authority prevail! And what could she do against this new master? Nothing. He was marvellously protected by Micheline's mad love for him. To strike Serge would be to wound Micheline, surely and mortally. So this scoundrel could laugh at her and dare her with impunity!

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What must she do? Take him aside and tell him that she knew of his disloyal conduct, and tell him of her contempt and hatred for him? And after that? What would be the consequence of this outburst of violence? The Prince, using his power over Micheline, would separate the daughter from the mother. And Madame Desvarennnes would be alone in her corner, abandoned like a poor dog, and would die of despair and anger. What other course then? She must dissemble, mask her face with indifference, if possible with tenderness, and undertake the difficult task of separating Micheline from the man whom she adored. It was quite a feat of strategy to plan. To bring out the husband's faults and to make his errors known, and give her the opportunity of proving his worthlessness. In a word, to make the young wife understand that she had married an elegant manikin, unworthy of her love.

It would be an easy matter to lay snares for Serge. He was a gambler. She could let him have ready money to satisfy his passion. Once in the clutches of the demon of play, he would neglect his wife, and the mother might regain a portion of the ground she had lost. Micheline's fortune once broken into, she would interpose between her daughter and son-in-law. She would make him pull up, and holding him tightly by her purse strings, would lead him whither she liked.

Already in fancy she saw her authority regained, and her daughter, her treasure, her life, true mistress of the situation, grateful to her for having saved her. And then, she thought, a baby will come, and if Micheline is really my daughter, she will adore the little thing, and the blind love which she has given to her husband will be diminished by so much.

Serge did not know what an adversary he had against him in his mother-in-law. It was a bad thing to cross the mistress when business matters were concerned, but now that her daughter's happiness was at stake! A smile came to her lips. A firm resolution from that hour must guide her, and the struggle between her son-in-law and herself could only end by the crushing of one of them.

In the distance the music from the work-people's ball was heard. Madame Desvarennnes mechanically bent her steps toward the tent under which the heavy bounds of the dancers reechoed. Every now and then large shadows appeared on the canvas. A joyful clamor issued from the ballroom. Loud laughter resounded, mingled with piercing cries of tickled women.

The voice of the master of the ceremonies could be heard jocose and solemn: "La poule! Advance! Set to partners!" Then the stamping of heavy shoes on the badly planed floor, and, above all, the melancholy sounds of the clarinet and the shrill notes of the cornet were audible.

At the entrance of the ballroom, surrounded by tables and stools, two barrels of wine on stands presented their wooden taps, ready for those who wanted to quench their thirst.

A large red mark under each barrel showed that the hands of the drinkers were no longer steady. A cake-seller had taken up his place at the other side, and was kneading a last batch of paste, while his apprentice was ringing a bell which hung over the iron cooking-stove to attract customers. There was an odor of rancid butter, spilled wine, and paraffin oil.

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Adjoining the ballroom, a merry-go-round; which had been the delight of the village urchins all day, appealed for custom by the aid of a barrel-organ on which a woman in a white bodice was playing the waltz from 'Les Cloches de Corneville'.

The animation of this fete, in the midst of which Madame Desvarennnes suddenly appeared, was a happy diversion from the serious thoughts which beset her. She remembered that Serge and Micheline must be there. She came from under the shadow of the avenue into the full light. On recognizing her, all the workpeople, who were seated, rose. She was really mistress and lady of the place. And then she had fed these people since morning. With a sign she bade them be seated, and walking quickly toward the dancing-room, lifted the red and white cotton curtain which hung over the entrance.

There, in a space of a hundred square yards or so, about a hundred and fifty people were sitting or standing. At the end, on a stage, were the musicians, each with a bottle of wine at his feet, from which they refreshed themselves during the intervals. An impalpable dust, raised by the feet of the dancers, filled the air charged with acrid odors. The women in light dresses and bareheaded, and the men arrayed in their Sunday clothes, gave themselves up with frantic ardor to their favorite pleasure.

Ranged in double rows, vis-a-vis, they were waiting with impatience for the music to strike up for the last figure. Near the orchestra, Serge was dancing with the Mayor's daughter opposite Micheline, whose partner was the mayor himself. An air of joyful gravity lit up the municipal officer's face. He was enjoying the honor which the Princess had done him. His pretty young daughter, dressed, in her confirmation dress, which had been lengthened with a muslin flounce, a rose in her hair, and her hands encased in straw-colored one-button kid gloves, hardly dared raise her eyes to the Prince, and with burning cheeks, answered in monosyllables the few remarks Serge felt forced to address to her.

The orchestra bellowed, the floor shook; the two lines of dancers had advanced in a body. Madame Desvarennnes, leaning against the door-post, followed with her eyes her daughter, whose light footsteps contrasted strangely with the heavy tread of the women around her. The mayor, eager and respectful, followed her, making efforts to keep up with her without treading on her long train. It was,

"Excuse me, Madame la Princesse. If Madame la Princesse will do me the honor to give me her hand, it is our turn to cross."

They had just crossed. Serge suddenly found himself facing his mother-in-law. His face lit up, and he uttered a joyful exclamation. Micheline raised her eyes, and following her husband's look, perceived her mother. Then it was a double joy. With a mischievous wink, Serge called Madame Desvarennnes's attention to the mayor's

solemn appearance as he was galloping with Micheline, also the comical positions of the rustics.

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Micheline was smiling. She was enjoying herself. All this homely gayety, of which she was the cause, made her feel happy. She enjoyed the pleasure of those around her. With her compassionate eyes she thanked her mother in the distance for having prepared this fete in honor of her marriage. The clarinet, violin, and cornet sounded a last modulation, then the final cadence put an end to the bounds of the dances. Each took his lady to her place—the mayor with pompous gait, Serge with as much grace as if he had been at an ambassador's ball and was leading a young lady of highest rank.

Madame Desvarennnes was suddenly surrounded; cheers resounded, the band struck up the Marseillaise.

“Let us escape,” said Serge, “because these good people will think nothing of carrying us in triumph.”

And leading away his mother-in-law and his wife, he left the ballroom followed by cheers.

Outside they all three walked in silence. The night air was delightful after coming out of that furnace. The cheering had ceased, and the orchestra was playing a polka. Micheline had taken her husband's arm.

They went along slowly, and close together. Not a word was exchanged; they all three seemed to be listening within themselves. When they reached the house, they went up the steps leading into the greenhouse, which served also as a boudoir to Madame Desvarennnes.

The atmosphere was still warm and scented, the lamps still burning. The guests had left; Micheline looked round. The remembrance of this happy evening, which had been the crowning of her happiness, filled her heart with emotion. Turning toward her mother with a radiant face, she cried:

“Ah! mamma! I am so happy,” and threw her arms around her.

Serge started at this cry. Two tears came to his eyes, and looking a little pale, he stretched out to Madame Desvarennnes his hands, which she felt trembling in hers, and said:

“Thank you.”

Madame Desvarennnes gazed at him for a moment. She did not see the shadow of a wicked thought on his brow. He was sincerely affected, truly grateful. The idea occurred to her that Jeanne had deceived her, or had deceived herself, and that Serge had not loved her. A feeling of relief took possession of her. But distrust had unfortunately entered her mind. She put away that flattering hope. And giving her son-

in-law such a look, which, had he been less moved, he would have understood, she murmured,

“We shall see.”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A uniform is the only garb which can hide poverty honorably
Forget a dream and accept a reality
I don't pay myself with words
Implacable self-interest which is the law of the world
In life it is only nonsense that is common-sense
Is a man ever poor when he has two arms?
Is it by law only that you wish to keep me?

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Nothing that provokes laughter more than a disappointed lover
Suffering is a human law; the world is an arena
The uncontested power which money brings
We had taken the dream of a day for eternal happiness
What is a man who remains useless

SERGE PANINE

By **GEORGES OHNET**

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST BREAK

The first two months of this union were truly enchanting. Serge and Micheline never left each other. After an absence of eight days they had returned to Paris with Madame Desvarennés, and the hitherto dull mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique was filled with joyful bustle. The splendid stables, formerly too large for the mistress's three horses, were now insufficient for the service of the Prince. There were eight splendid carriage-horses, a pair of charming ponies—bought especially for Micheline's use, but which the young wife had not been able to make up her mind to drive herself—four saddle-horses, upon which every morning about eight o'clock, when the freshness of night had perfumed the Bois de Boulogne, the young people took their ride round the lake.

A bright sun made the sheet of water sparkle between its borders of dark fir-trees; the flesh air played in Micheline's veil, and the tawny leather of the saddles creaked. Those were happy days for Micheline, who was delighted at having Serge near her, attentive to her every want, and controlling his thoroughbred English horse to her gentle pace. Every now and then his mount would wheel about and rear in revolt, she following him with fond looks, proud of the elegant cavalier who could subdue without apparent effort, by the mere pressure of his thighs, that impetuous steed.

Then she would give her horse a touch with the whip, and off she would go at a gallop, feeling happy with the wind blowing in her face, and he whom she loved by her side to smile on and encourage her. Then they would scamper along; the dog with his thin body almost touching the ground, racing and frightening the rabbits, which shot across

the road swift as bullets. Out of breath by the violent ride, Micheline would stop, and pat the neck of her lovely chestnut horse. Slowly the young people would return to the Rue Saint-Dominique, and, on arriving in the courtyard, there was such a pawing of feet as brought the clerks to the windows, hiding behind the curtains. Tired with healthy exercise, Micheline would go smiling to the office where her mother was hard at work, and say:

“Here we are, mamma!”

The mistress would rise and kiss her daughter beaming with freshness. Then they would go up to breakfast.

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Madame Desvarennnes's doubts were lulled to rest. She saw her daughter happy. Her son-in-law was in every respect cordial and charming toward her. Cayrol and his wife had scarcely been in Paris since their marriage. The banker had joined Herzog in his great scheme of the "Credit," and was travelling all over Europe establishing offices and securing openings. Jeanne accompanied him. They were then in Greece. The young wife's letters to her adopted mother breathed calmness and satisfaction. She highly praised her husband's kindness to her, and said it was unequalled.

No allusion was made to that evening of their marriage, when, escaping from Cayrol's wrath, she had thrown herself in Madame Desvarennnes's arms, and had allowed her secret to be found out. The mistress might well think then that the thought which at times still troubled her mind was a remembrance of a bad dream.

What contributed especially to make her feel secure was Jeanne's absence. If the young woman had been near Serge, Madame Desvarennnes might have trembled. But Micheline's beautiful rival was far away, and Serge seemed very much in love with his wife.

Everything was for the best. The formidable projects which Madame Desvarennnes had formed in the heat of her passion had not been earned out. Serge had as yet not given Madame Desvarennnes cause for real displeasure. Certainly he was spending money foolishly, but then his wife was so rich!

He had put his household on an extraordinary footing. Everything that most refined luxury had invented he had introduced as a matter of course, and for everyday use. He entertained magnificently several times a week. And Madame Desvarennnes, from her apartments, for she would never appear at these grand receptions, heard the noise of these doings. This woman, modest and simple in her ideas, whose luxury had always been artistic, wondered that they could spend so much on frivolous entertainments. But Micheline was queen of these sumptuous ceremonies. She came in full dress to be admired by her mother, before going down to receive her guests, and the mistress had not courage to offer any remonstrances as to expense when she saw her daughter so brilliant and contented.

They played cards very much. The great colony of foreigners who came every week to Panine's receptions brought with them their immoderate passion for cards, and he was only too willing to give way to it. These gentlemen, among them all, almost without taking off their white kid gloves, would win or lose between forty and fifty thousand francs at bouillotte, just to give them an appetite before going to the club to finish the night at baccarat.

Meanwhile the ladies, with their graceful toilettes displayed on the low soft chairs, talked of dress behind their fans, or listened to the songs of a professional singer, while young men whispered soft nothings in their ears.

It was rumored that the Prince lost heavily. It was not to be wondered at; he was so happy in love! Madame Desvarennnes, who used every means of gaining information on the subject, even to the gossip of the servants, heard that the sums were enormous. No doubt they were exaggerated, but the fact remained the same. The Prince was losing.

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Madame Desvarennnes could not resist the inclination of finding out whether Micheline knew what was going on, and one morning when the young wife came down to see her mother, dressed in a lovely pink gown, the mistress, while teasing her daughter, said, carelessly:

"It seems your husband lost heavily last night."

Micheline looked astonished at Madame Desvarennnes, and in a quiet voice replied:

"A good host may not win from his guests; it would look as if he invited them to rob them. Losses at cards are included in the costs of a reception."

Madame Desvarennnes thought that her daughter had become a very grand lady, and had soon acquired expanded ideas. But she dared not say anything more. She dreaded a quarrel with her daughter, and would have sacrificed everything to retain her cajoling ways.

She threw herself into her work with renewed vigor.

"If the Prince spends large sums," she said to herself, "I will earn larger ones. There can be no hole dug deep enough by him that I shall not be able, to fill up."

And she made the money come in at the door so that her son-in-law might throw it out of the window.

One fine day these great people who visited at the mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique hastened away to the country. September had arrived, bringing with it the shooting season. The Prince and Micheline settled themselves at Cernay, not as in the first days of their marriage as lovers who sought quietude, but as people sure of their happiness, who wished to make a great show. They took all the carriages with them, and there was nothing but bustle and movement. The four keepers, dressed in the Prince's livery, came daily for orders as to shooting arrangements. And every week shoals of visitors arrived, brought from the station in large breaks drawn by four horses.

The princely dwelling was in its full splendor. There was a continual going and coming of fashionable worldlings. From top to bottom of the castle was a constant rustling of silk dresses; groups of pretty women, coming downstairs with peals of merry laughter and singing snatches from the last opera. In the spacious hall they played billiards and other games, while one of the gentlemen performed on the large organ. There was a strange mixture of freedom and strictness. The smoke of Russian cigarettes mingled with the scent of opoponax. An elegant confusion which ended about six o'clock in a general flight, when the sportsmen came home, and the guests went to their rooms. An hour afterward all these people met in the large drawing-room; the ladies in low-bodied evening dresses; the gentlemen in dress-coats and white satin waistcoats, with a sprig

of mignonette and a white rose in their buttonholes. After dinner, they danced in the drawing-rooms, where a mad waltz would even restore energy to the gentlemen tired out by six hours spent in the field.

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Madame Desvarennnes did not join in that wild existence. She had remained in Paris, attentive to business. On Saturdays she came down by the five o'clock train and regularly returned on the Monday morning. Her presence checked their wild gayety a little. Her black dress was like a blot among the brocades and satins. Her severe gravity, that of a woman who pays and sees the money going too fast, was like a reproach, silent but explicit, to that gay and thoughtless throng of idlers, solely taken up by their pleasure.

The servants made fun of her. One day the Prince's valet, who thought himself a clever fellow, said before all the other servants that Mother Damper had arrived. Of course they all roared with laughter and exclaimed:

"Bother the old woman! Why does she come and worry us? She had far better stop in the office and earn money; that's all she's good for!"

The disdain which the servants learned from their master grew rapidly. So much so that one Monday morning, toward nine o'clock, Madame Desvarennnes came down to the courtyard, expecting to find the carriage which generally took her to the station. It was the second coachman's duty to drive her, and she did not see him. Thinking that he was a little late, she walked to the stable-yard. There, instead of the victoria which usually took her, she saw a large mail-coach to which two grooms were harnessing the Prince's four bays. The head coachman, an Englishman, dressed like a gentleman, with a stand-up collar, and a rose in his buttonhole, stood watching the operations with an air of importance.

Madame Desvarennnes went straight to him. He had seen her coming, out of the corner of his eye, without disturbing himself.

"How is it that the carriage is not ready to take me to the station?" asked the mistress.

"I don't know, Madame," answered this personage, condescendingly, without taking his hat off.

"But where is the coachman who generally drives me?"

"I don't know. If Madame would like to see in the stables—"

And with a careless gesture, the Englishman pointed out to Madame Desvarennnes the magnificent buildings at the end of the courtyard.

The blood rose to the mistress's cheeks; she gave the coachman such a look that he moved away a little. Then glancing at her watch, she said, coldly:

"I have only a quarter of an hour before the train leaves, but here are horses that ought to go well. Jump on the box, my man, you shall drive me."

The Englishman shook his head.

“Those horses are not for service; they are only for pleasure,” he answered. “I drive the Prince. I don’t mind driving the Princess, but I am not here to drive you, Madame.”

And with an insolent gesture, setting his hat firmly on his head, he turned his back upon the mistress. At the same moment, a sharp stroke from a light cane made his hat roll on the pavement. And as the Englishman turned round, red with rage, he found himself face to face with the Prince, whose approach neither Madame Desvarennnes nor he had heard.

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Serge, in an elegant morning suit, was going round his stables when he had been attracted by this discussion. The Englishman, uneasy, sought to frame an excuse.

“Hold your tongue!” exclaimed the Prince, sharply, “and go and wait my orders.”

And turning toward the mistress:

“Since this man refuses to drive you, I shall have the pleasure of taking you to the station myself,” he said, with a charming smile.

And as Madame Desvarennnes remonstrated,

“Oh! I can drive four-in-hand,” he added. “For once in my life that talent will have been of some use to me. Pray jump in.”

And opening the door of the mail-coach he handed her into the vast carriage. Then, climbing with one bound to the box, he gathered the reins and, cigar in mouth, with all the coolness of an old coachman, he started the horses in the presence of all the grooms, and made a perfect semicircle on the gravel of the courtyard.

The incident was repeated favorably for Serge. It was agreed that he had behaved like a true nobleman. Micheline was proud of it, and saw in this act of deference to her mother a proof of his love for her. As to the mistress, she understood the advantage this clever manoeuvre gave to the Prince. At the same time she felt the great distance which henceforth separated her from the world in which her daughter lived.

The insolence of that servant was a revelation to her. They despised her. The Prince’s coachman would not condescend to drive a plebeian like her. She paid the wages of these servants to no purpose. Her plebeian origin and business habits were a vice. They submitted to her; they did not respect her.

Although her son-in-law and daughter were perfect toward her in their behavior, she became gloomy and dull, and but seldom went now to Cernay. She felt in the way, and uncomfortable. The smiling and superficial politeness of the visitors irritated her nerves. These people were too well bred to be rude toward Panine’s mother-in-law, but she felt that their politeness was forced. Under their affected nicety she detected irony. She began to hate them all.

Serge, sovereign lord of Cernay, was really happy. Every moment he experienced new pleasure in gratifying his taste for luxury. His love for horses grew more and more. He gave orders to have a model stud-house erected in the park amid the splendid meadows watered by the Oise; and bought stallions and breeding mares from celebrated English breeders. He contemplated starting a racing stable.

One day when Madame Desvarennnes arrived at Cernay, she was surprised to see the greensward bordering the woods marked out with white stakes. She asked inquiringly what these stakes meant? Micheline answered in an easy tone:

“Ah! you saw them? That is the track for training. We made Mademoiselle de Cernay gallop there to-day. She’s a level-going filly with which Serge hopes to win the next Poule des Produits.”

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The mistress was amazed. A child who had been brought up so simply, in spite of her large fortune, a little commoner, speaking of level-going fillies and the Poule des Produits! What a change had come over her and what incredible influence this frivolous, vain Panine had over that young and right-minded girl! And that in a few months! What would it be later? He would succeed in imparting to her his tastes and would mould her to his whims, and the young modest girl whom he had received from the mother would become a horsey and fast woman.

Was it possible that Micheline could be happy in that hollow and empty life? The love of her husband satisfied her. His love was all she asked for, all else was indifferent to her. Thus of her mother, the impassioned toiler, was born the passionate lover! All the fervency which the mother had given to business, Micheline had given to love.

Moreover, Serge behaved irreproachably. One must do him that justice. Not even an appearance accused him. He was faithful, unlikely as that may seem in a man of his kind; he never left his wife. He had hardly ever gone out without her; they were a couple of turtle-doves. They were laughed at.

"The Princess has tied a string round Serge's foot," was said by some of Serge's former woman friends!

It was something to be sure of her daughter's happiness. That happiness was dearly bought; but as the proverb says:

"Money troubles are not mortal!"

And, besides, it was evident that the Prince did not keep account of his money; his hand was always open. And never did a great lord do more honor to his fortune. Panine, in marrying Micheline, had found the mistress's cash-box at his disposal.

This prodigious cash-box had seemed to him inexhaustible, and he had drawn on it like a Prince in the Arabian Nights on the treasure of the genii.

Perhaps it would suffice to let him see that he was spending the capital as well as the income to make him alter his line of conduct. At all events, the moment was not yet opportune, and, besides, the amount was not yet large enough. Cry out about some hundred thousand francs! Madame Desvarences would be thought a miser and would be covered with shame. She must wait.

And, shut up in her office in the Rue Saint-Dominique with Marechal, who acted as her confidant, she worked with heart and soul full of passion and anger, making money. It was fine to witness the duel between these two beings: the one useful, the other useless; one sacrificing everything to work, the other everything to pleasure.

Toward the end of October, the weather at Cernay became unsettled, and Micheline complained of the cold. Country life so pleased Serge that he turned a deaf ear to her complaints. But lost in that large house, the autumn winds rustling through the trees, whose leaves were tinted with yellow, Micheline became sad, and the Prince understood that it was time to go back to Paris.

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The town seemed deserted to Serge. Still, returning to his splendid apartments was a great satisfaction and pleasure to him. Everything appeared new. He reviewed the hangings, the expensive furniture, the paintings and rare objects. He was charmed. It was really of wonderful beauty, and the cage seemed worthy of the bird. For several evenings he remained quietly at home with Micheline, in the little silver-gray drawing-room that was his favorite room. He looked through albums, too, while his wife played at her piano quietly or sang.

They retired early and came down late. Then he had become a gourmand. He spent hours in arranging menus and inventing unknown dishes about which he consulted his chef, a cook of note.

He rode in the Bois in the course of the day, but did not meet any one there; for of every two carriages one was a hackney coach with a worn-out sleepy horse, his head hanging between his knees, going the round of the lake. He ceased going to the Bois, and went out on foot in the Champs-Élysées. He crossed the Pont de la Concorde, and walked up and down the avenues near the Cirque.

He was wearied. Life had never appeared so monotonous to him. Formerly he had at least the preoccupations of the future. He asked himself how he could alter the sad condition in which he vegetated! Shut up in this happy existence, without a care or a cross, he grew weary like a prisoner in his cell. He longed for the unforeseen; his wife irritated him, she was of too equable a temperament. She always met him with the same smile on her lips. And then happiness agreed with her too well; she was growing stout.

One day, on the Boulevard des Italiens, Serge met an old friend, the Baron de Prefont, a hardened 'roué'. He had not seen him since his marriage. It was a pleasure to him. They had a thousand things to say to each other. And walking along, they came to the Rue Royale.

"Come to the club," said Prefont, taking Serge by the arm.

The Prince, having nothing else to do, allowed himself to be led away, and went. He felt a strange pleasure in those large rooms of the club, the Grand Cercle, with their glaring furniture. The common easy-chairs, covered with dark leather, seemed delightful. He did not notice the well-worn carpets burned here and there by the hot cigar-ash; the strong smell of tobacco, impregnated in the curtains, did not make him feel qualmish. He was away from home, and was satisfied with anything for a change. He had been domesticated long enough.

One morning, taking up the newspaper, a name caught Madame Desvarennes's eye—that of the Prince. She read:

“The golden book of the Grand Cercle has just had another illustrious name inscribed in it. The Prince Panine was admitted yesterday, proposed by the Baron de Prefont and the Duc de Bligny.”

These few lines made Madame Desvarennés’s blood boil. Her ears tingled as if all the bells of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont had been rung together. In a rapid vision, she saw misfortune coming. Her son-in-law, that born gambler, at the Grand Cercle! No more smiles for Micheline; henceforth she had a terrible rival—the devouring love of play.

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Then Madame Desvarennnes reflected. The husband's deserting his fireside would be salvation for herself. The door by which he went out, would serve as an entrance for her. The plan which she had conceived at Cernay that terrible night of the marriage when Jeanne had confided in her, remained for her to execute. By opening her purse widely to the Prince, she would help him in his vice. And she would infallibly succeed in separating Serge and Micheline.

But the mistress checked herself. Lend her hands to the destruction of her son-in-law in a fit of fierce maternal egoism? Was it not unworthy of her? How many tears would the Prince's errors cost her whom she wished to regain at all price? And then would she always be there to compensate by her devoted affection the bitterly regretted estrangement from the husband? She would, in dying, leave the household disunited.

She was horrified at what she had for an instant dreamed of doing. And instead of helping the Prince on to destruction, she determined to do all in her power to keep him in the path of honor. That resolution formed, Madame Desvarennnes was satisfied. She felt superior to Serge, and to a mind like hers the thought was strengthening.

The admission to the Grand Cercle gave Serge a powerful element of interest in life: He had to manoeuvre to obtain his liberty. His first evenings spent from home troubled Micheline deeply. The young wife was jealous when she saw her husband going out. She feared a rival, and trembled for her love. Serge's mysterious conduct caused her intolerable torture. She dared not say anything to her mother, and remained perfectly quiet on the subject before her husband. She sought discreetly, listened to the least word that might throw any light on the matter.

One day she found an ivory counter, bearing the stamp of the Grand Cercle, in her husband's dressing-room. It was in the Rue Royale then that her husband spent his evenings. This discovery was a great relief to her. It was not very wrong to go there, and if the Prince did go and smoke a few cigars and have a game at bouillotte, it was not a very great crime. The return of his usual friends to Paris and the resumption of their receptions would bring him home again.

Serge now left Micheline about ten o'clock in the evening regularly and arrived at the club about eleven. High play did not commence until after midnight. Then he seated himself at the gaming-table with all the ardor of a professional gambler. His face changed its expression. When winning, it was animated with an expression of awful joy; when losing, he looked as hard as a stone, his features contracted, and his eyes were full of gloomy fire. He bit his mustache convulsively. Moreover, always silent, winning or losing with superb indifference.

He lost. His bad luck had followed him. At the club his losses were no longer limited. There was always some one willing to take a hand, and until dawn he played, wasting his life and energies to satisfy his insane love of gambling.

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One morning, Marechal entered Madame Desvarennnes's private office, holding a little square piece of paper. Without speaking a word, he placed it on the desk. The mistress took it, read what was written upon it in shaky handwriting, and suddenly becoming purple, rose. The paper bore these simple words:

"Received from Monsieur Salignon the sum of one hundred thousand francs. Serge Panine."

"Who brought this paper?" asked Madame Desvarennnes, crushing it between her fingers.

"The waiter who attends the card-room at the club."

"The waiter?" cried Madame Desvarennnes, astonished.

"Oh, he is a sort of banker," said Marechal. "These gentlemen apply to him when they run short of money. The Prince must have found himself in that predicament. Still he has just received the rents for the property in the Rue de Rivoli."

"The rents!" grumbled Madame Desvarennnes, with an energetic movement. "The rents! A drop of water in a river! You don't know that he is a man to lose the hundred thousand francs which they claim, in one night."

The mistress paced up and down the room. She suddenly came to a standstill. "If I don't stop him, the rogue will sell the feather-bed from under my daughter! But he shall have a little of my mind! He has provoked me long enough. Pay it! I'll take my money's worth out of him."

And in a second, Madame Desvarennnes was in the Prince's room.

Serge, after a delicate breakfast, was smoking and dozing on the smoking-room sofa. The night had been a heavy one for him. He had won two hundred and fifty thousand francs from Ibrahim Bey, then he had lost all, besides five thousand louis advanced by the obliging Salignon. He had told the waiter to come to the Rue Saint-Dominique, and by mistake the man had gone to the office.

The sudden opening of the smoking-room door roused Serge. He unclosed his eyes and looked very much astonished at seeing Madame Desvarennnes appear. Pale, frowning, and holding the accusing paper in her hand, she angrily inquired:

"Do you recognize that?" and placed the receipt which he had signed, before him, as he slowly rose.

Serge seized it quickly, and then looking coldly at his mother-in-law, said:

“How did this paper come into your hands?”

“It has just been brought to my cashier. A hundred thousand francs! Faith! You are going ahead! Do you know how many bushels of corn must be ground to earn that?”

“I beg your pardon, Madame,” said the Prince, interrupting Madame Desvarennnes. “I don’t suppose you came here to give me a lesson in commercial statistics. This paper was presented to your cashier by mistake. I was expecting it, and here is the money ready to pay it. As you have been good enough to do so, pray refund yourself.”

And taking a bundle of bank-notes from a cabinet, the Prince handed them to the astonished mistress.

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"But," she sought to say, very much put out by this unexpected answer, "where did you get this money from? You must have inconvenienced yourself."

"I beg your pardon," said the Prince, quietly, "that only concerns myself. Be good enough to see whether the amount is there," added he with a smile. "I reckon so badly that it is possible I may have made a mistake to your disadvantage."

Madame Desvarennnes pushed away the hand which presented the bank-notes, and shook her head gravely:

"Keep this money," she said; "unfortunately you will need it. You have entered on a very dangerous path, which grieves me very much. I would willingly give ten times the amount, at once, to be sure that you would never touch another card."

"Madame!" said the Prince with impatience.

"Oh! I know what I am risking by speaking thus. It weighs so heavily on my heart. I must give vent to it or I shall choke. You are spending money like a man who does not know what it is to earn it. And if you continue—"

Madame Desvarennnes raised her eyes and looked at the Prince. She saw him so pale with suppressed rage that she dared not say another word. She read deadly hatred in the young man's look. Frightened at what she had just been saying, she stepped back, and went quickly toward the door.

"Take this money, Madame," said Serge, in a trembling voice. "Take it, or all is over between us forever."

And, seizing the notes, he put them by force in Madame Desvarennnes's hands. Then tearing up with rage the paper that had been the cause of this painful scene, he threw the pieces in the fireplace.

Deeply affected, Madame Desvarennnes descended the stairs which she had a few minutes before gone up with so much resolution. She had a presentiment that an irreparable rupture had just taken place between herself and her son-in-law. She had ruffled Panine's pride. She felt that he would never forgive her. She went to her room sad and thoughtful. Life was becoming gloomy for this poor woman. Her confidence in herself had disappeared. She hesitated now, and was irresolute when she had to take a decision. She no longer went straight to the point by the shortest road. Her sonorous voice was softened. She was no longer the same willing energetic woman who feared no obstacles. She had known defeat.

The attitude of her daughter had changed toward her. It seemed as if Micheline wished to absolve herself of all complicity with Madame Desvarennnes. She kept away to prove to her husband that if her mother had displeased him in any way, she had nothing to do

with it. This behavior grieved her mother, who felt that Serge was working secretly to turn Micheline against her. And the mad passion of the young wife for him whom she recognized as her master did not allow the mother to doubt which side she would take if ever she had to choose between husband and mother.

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One day Micheline came down to see her mother. It was more than a month since she had visited her. In a moment Madame Desvarennnes saw that she had something of an embarrassing nature to speak of. To begin with she was more affectionate than usual, seeming to wish with the honey of her kisses to sweeten the bitter cross which the mistress was doomed to bear. Then she hesitated. She fidgeted about the room humming. At last she said that the doctor had come at the request of Serge, who was most anxious about his wife's health. And that excellent Doctor Rigaud, who had known her from a child, had found her suffering from great weakness. He had ordered change of air.

At these words Madame Desvarennnes raised her head and gave her daughter a terrible look:

"Come, no nonsense! Speak the truth! He is taking you away!"

"But, mamma," said Micheline, disconcerted at this interruption, "I assure you, you are mistaken. Anxiety for my health alone guides my husband."

"Your husband!" broke forth Madame Desvarennnes. "Your husband! Ah, there; go away! Because if you stop here, I shall not be able to control myself, and shall say things about him that you will not forgive in a hurry! As you are ill, you are right to have change of air. I shall remain here, without you, fastened to my chain, earning money for you while you are far, away. Go along!"

And seizing her daughter by the arm with convulsive strength, she pushed her roughly; for the first time in her life, repeating, in a low tone:

"Go away! Leave me alone!"

Micheline suffered herself to be put outside the room, and went to her own apartments astonished and frightened. The young wife had hardly left the room when Madame Desvarennnes suffered the reaction of the emotion she had just felt. Her nerves were unstrung, and falling on a chair she remained immovable and humbled. Was it possible that her daughter, her adored child, would abandon her to obey the grudges of her husband? No, Micheline, when back in her room, would remember that she was carrying away all the joy of the house, and that it was cruel to deprive her mother of her only happiness in life.

Slightly reassured, she went down to the office. As she reached the landing, she saw the Prince's servants carrying up trunks belonging to their master to be packed. She felt sick at heart. She understood that this project had been discussed and settled beforehand. It seemed to her that all was over; that her daughter was going away forever, and that she would never see her again. She thought of going to beseech Serge and ask him what sum he would take in exchange for Micheline's liberty; but the

haughty and sarcastic face of the Prince forcibly putting the bank-notes in her hands, passed before her, and she guessed that she would not obtain anything. Cast down and despairing, she entered her office and set to work.

The next day, by the evening express, the Prince and Princess left for Nice with all their household, and the mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique remained silent and deserted.



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CHAPTER XIV

A SUDDEN JOURNEY

At the end of the Promenade des Anglais, on the pleasant road bordered with tamarind-trees, stands, amid a grove of cork-oaks and eucalypti, a charming white villa with pink shutters. A Russian lady, the Countess Woreseff, had it built five years ago, and occupied it one winter. Then, tired of the monotonous noise of the waves beating on the terrace and the brightness of the calm blue sky, she longed for the mists of her native country, and suddenly started for St. Petersburg, leaving that charming residence to be let.

It was there, amid rhododendrons and strawberry-trees in full bloom, that Micheline and Serge had taken up their abode. Until that day the Princess had scarcely travelled. Her mother, always occupied in commercial pursuits, had never left Paris. Micheline had remained with her. During this long journey, accomplished in most luxurious style, she had behaved like a child astonished at everything, and pleased at the least thing. With her face close to the window she saw through the transparent darkness of a lovely winter's night, villages and forests gliding past like phantoms. Afar off, in the depths of the country, she caught sight of a light glimmering, and she loved to picture a family gathered by the fire, the children asleep and the mother working in the silence.

Children! She often thought of them, and never without a sigh of regret rising to her lips. She had been married for some months, and her dreams of becoming a mother had not been realized. How happy she would have been to have a baby, with fair hair, to fondle and kiss! Then the idea of a child reminded her of her own mother. She thought of the deep love one must feel for a child. And the image of the mistress, sad and alone, in the large house of the Rue Saint-Dominique, came to her mind. A vague remorse seized her heart. She felt she had behaved badly. She said to herself: "If, to punish me, Heaven will not grant me a child!" She wept, and soon her grief and trouble vanished with her tears. Sleep overpowered her, and when she awoke it was broad daylight and they were in Provence.

From that moment everything was dazzling. The arrival at Marseilles; the journey along the coast, the approach to Nice, were all matters of ecstasy to Micheline. But it was when the carriage, which was waiting for them at the railway station, stopped at the gates of the villa, that she broke into raptures. She could not feast her eyes enough on the scene which was before her. The blue sea, the sky without a cloud, the white houses rising on the hill amid the dark foliage, and in the distance the mountaintops covered with snow, and tinged with pink under the brilliant rays of the sun. All this vigorous and slightly wild nature surprised the Parisienne. It was a new experience. Dazzled by the light and intoxicated with the perfumes, a sort of languor came over her.

She soon recovered and became quite strong—something altogether new for her, and she felt thoroughly happy.

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The life of the Prince and the Princess became at Nice what it had been in Paris during the early days of their marriage. Visitors flocked to their house. All that the colony could reckon of well-known Parisians and foreigners of high repute presented themselves at the villa. The fetes recommenced. They gave receptions three times a week; the other evenings Serge went to the Cercle.

This absorbing life had gone on for two months. It was the beginning of February, and already nature was assuming a new appearance under the influence of spring. One evening, three people—two gentlemen and a lady—stepped out of a carriage at the villa gates, and found themselves face to face with a traveller who had come on foot. Two exclamations broke out simultaneously.

“Marechal!” “Monsieur Savinien!”

“You! at Nice? And by what miracle?”

“A miracle which makes you travel fifteen leagues an hour in exchange for a hundred and thirty-three francs first-class, and is called the Marseilles express!”

“I beg your pardon, my dear friend. I have not introduced you to Monsieur and Mademoiselle Herzog.”

“I have already had the honor of meeting Mademoiselle Herzog at Madame Desvarennés’s,” said Marechal, bowing to the young girl, without appearing to notice the father.

“You were going to the villa?” asked Savinien. “We, too, were going. But how is my aunt? When did you leave her?”

“I have not left her.”

“What’s that you say?”

“I say that she is here.”

Savinien let his arms drop in profound consternation to show how difficult it was for him to believe what was going on. Then, in a faint treble voice, he said:

“My aunt! At Nice! Promenade des Anglais! That’s something more wonderful than the telephone and phonograph! If you had told me that the Pantheon had landed one fine night on the banks of the Paillon, I should not be more astonished. I thought Madame Desvarennés was as deeply rooted in Paris as the Colonne Vendôme! But tell me, what is the object of this journey?”

“A freak.”

“Which manifested itself—”

“Yesterday morning at breakfast. Pierre Delarue, who is going to finish his business in Algeria, and then settle in France, came to say ‘Good-by’ to Madame Desvarennnes. A letter arrived from the Princess. She commenced reading it, then all at once she exclaimed ‘Cayrol and his wife arrived at Nice two days ago!’ Pierre and I were astonished at the tone in which she uttered these words. She was lost in thought for a few moments, then she said to Pierre: ‘You are leaving tonight for Marseilles? Well, I shall go with you. You will accompany me to Nice.’ And turning toward me, she added: ‘Marechal, pack up your portmanteau. I shall take you with me.’”

While speaking, they had walked across the garden, and reached the steps leading to the villa.

“Nothing is easier than to explain this sudden journey,” remarked Mademoiselle Herzog. “On learning that Monsieur and Madame Cayrol were at Nice with the Princess, Madame Desvarennnes must have felt how very lonely she was in Paris. She had a longing to be near them, and started.”

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Herzog listened attentively, and seemed to be seeking the connection which should exist between the arrival of the Cayrols and the departure of Madame Desvarennnes.

"The funniest thing to me is Marechal taking a holiday," observed Savinien. "They are still at dinner," he added, entering the drawing-room, through the great doors of which sounds of voices and rattling of plates were heard.

"Well, let us wait for them; we are in agreeable company," said Herzog, turning toward Marechal, who only answered by a cold bow.

"What are you going to do here, Marechal?" inquired Savinien. "You will be awfully bored."

"Why? Once in a way I am going to enjoy myself and be a swell. You will teach me, Monsieur Savinien. It cannot be very difficult. It is only necessary to wear a dove-colored coat like you, a gardenia in my buttonhole like Monsieur Le Bride, frizzled hair like Monsieur du Tremblay, and to assail the bank at Monaco."

"Like all these gentlemen," said Suzanne, gayly, "you are a gambler then?"

"I have never touched a card."

"But then you ought to have great good luck," said the young girl.

Herzog had come up to them.

"Will you go partners?" he asked of Marechal. "We will divide the winnings."

"You are too kind," replied Marechal, dryly, turning away.

He could not get used to Herzog's familiarity, and there was something in the man which displeased him greatly. There was, he thought, a police-court atmosphere about him.

Suzanne, on the contrary, interested him. The simple, lively, and frank young girl attracted him, and he liked to talk with her. On several occasions, at Madame Desvarennnes's, he had been her partner. There was through this a certain intimacy between them which he could not extend to the father.

Herzog had that faculty, fortunately for him, of never appearing offended at what was said to him. He took Savinien's arm in a familiar manner and asked: "Have you noticed that the Prince has looked very preoccupied for the last few days?"

"I don't wonder at it," replied Savinien. "He has been very unlucky at cards. It is all very well for his wife, my charming cousin, to be rich, but if he is going on like that it won't last long!"

The two men withdrew to the window.

Suzanne went up to Marechal. She had resumed her thoughtful air. He saw her advancing, and, guessing what she was going to say, felt uncomfortable at having to tell an untruth if he did not wish to hurt her feelings by brutal frankness.

“Monsieur Marechal,” she began, “how is it that you are always so cold and formal with my father?”

“My dear young lady, there is a great difference between your father and me. I keep my place, that’s all.”

The young girl shook her head sadly.

“It is not that; you are amiable and ever friendly with me—”

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"You are a woman, and the least politeness—"

"No! My father must have hurt your feelings unwittingly; for he is very good. I have asked him, and he did not seem to understand what I meant. But my questions drew his attention to you. He thinks highly of you and would like to see you filling a position more in harmony with your merit. You know that Monsieur Cayrol and my father have just launched a tremendous undertaking?"

"The 'Credit European'?"

"Yes. They will have offices in all the commercial centres of European commerce. Would you like the management of one of these branches?"

"I, Mademoiselle?" cried Marechal, astonished, and already asking himself what interest Herzog could have in making him leave the house of Desvarennnes.

"The enterprise is colossal," continued Suzanne, "and frightens me at times. Is it necessary to be so rich? I would like my father to retire from these enormous speculations into which he has thrown himself, body and soul. I have simple tastes. My father wishes to make a tremendous fortune for me, he says. All he undertakes is for me, I know. It seems to me that he runs a great risk. That is why I am talking to you. I am very superstitious, and I fancy if you were with us it would bring us luck."

Suzanne, while speaking, had leaned toward Marechal. Her face reflected the seriousness of her thoughts. Her lovely eyes implored. The young man asked himself how this charming girl could belong to that horrible Herzog.

"Believe me that I am deeply touched, Mademoiselle, by the favor you have done me," said he, with emotion. "I owe it solely to your kindness, I know; but I do not belong to myself. I am bound to Madame Desvarennnes by stronger ties than those of interest—those of gratitude."

"You refuse?" she cried, painfully.

"I must."

"The position you fill is humble."

"I was very glad to accept it at a time when my daily bread was not certain."

"You have been reduced," said the young girl, with trembling voice, "to such—"

"Wretchedness. Yes, Mademoiselle, my outset in life was hard. I am without relations. Mother Marechal, a kind fruiterer of the Rue Pavée au Marais, found me one morning by the curbstone, rolled in a number of the Constitutionnel, like an old pair of boots.

The good woman took me home, brought me up and sent me to college. I must tell you that I was very successful and gained a scholarship. I won all the prizes. Yes, and I had to sell my gilt-edged books from the Lycee Charlemagne in the days of distress. I was eighteen when my benefactress, Mother Marechal, died. I was without help or succor. I tried to get along by myself. After ten years of struggling and privations I felt physical and moral vigor giving way. I looked around me and saw those who overcame obstacles were stronger than I. I felt that I was doomed not to make way in the world, not being one of those who could command, so I resigned myself to obey. I fill a humble position as you know, but one which satisfies my wants. I am without ambition. A little philosophical, I observe all that goes on around me. I live happily like Diogenes in his tub."

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"You are a wise man," resumed Suzanne. "I, too, am a philosopher, and I live amid surroundings which do not please me. I, unfortunately, lost my mother when I was very young, and although my father is very kind, he has been obliged to neglect me a little. I see around me people who are millionaires or who aspire to be. I am doomed to receive the attentions of such men as Le Bride and Du Tremblay—empty-headed coxcombs, who court my money, and to whom I am not a woman, but a sack of ducats trimmed with lace."

"These gentlemen are the modern Argonauts. They are in search of the Golden Fleece," observed Marechal.

"The Argonauts!" cried Suzanne, laughing. "You are right. I shall never call them anything else."

"Oh, they will not understand you!" said Marechal, gayly. "I don't think they know much of mythology."

"Well, you see I am not very happy in the bosom of riches," continued the young girl. "Do not abandon me. Come and talk with me sometimes. You will not chatter trivialities. It will be a change from the others."

And, nodding pleasantly to Marechal, Mademoiselle Herzog joined her father, who was gleaning details about the house of Desvarennnes from Savinien.

The secretary remained silent for a moment.

"Strange girl!" he murmured. "What a pity she has such a father."

The door of the room in which Monsieur and Mademoiselle Herzog, Marechal and Savinien were, opened, and Madame Desvarennnes entered, followed by her daughter, Cayrol, Serge and Pierre. The room, at the extreme end of the villa, was square, surrounded on three sides by a gallery shut in by glass and stocked with greenhouse plants. Lofty archways, half veiled with draperies, led to the gallery. This room had been the favorite one of Countess Woreseff. She had furnished it in Oriental style, with low seats and large divans, inviting one to rest and dream during the heat of the day. In the centre of the apartment was a large ottoman, the middle of which formed a flower-stand. Steps led down from the gallery to the terrace whence there was a most charming view of sea and land.

On seeing his aunt enter, Savinien rushed forward and seized both her hands. Madame Desvarennnes's arrival was an element of interest in his unoccupied life. The dandy guessed at some mysterious business and thought it possible that he might get to know it. With open ears and prying eyes, he sought the meaning of the least words.

"If you knew, my dear aunt, how surprised I am to see you here," he exclaimed in his hypocritical way.

"Not more so than I am to find myself here," said she, with a smile. "But, bah! I have slipped my traces for a week."

"And what are you going to do here?" continued Savinien.

"What everybody does. By-the-bye, what do they do?" asked Madame Desvarennnes, with vivacity.

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"That depends," answered the Prince. "There are two distinct populations here. On the one hand, those who take care of themselves; on the other, those who enjoy themselves. For the former there is the constitutional every morning in the sun, with slow measured steps on the Promenade des Anglais. For the latter there are excursions, races, regattas. The first economize their life like misers; the second waste it like prodigals. Then night comes on, and the air grows cold. Those who take care of themselves go home, those who amuse themselves go out. The first put on dressing-gowns; the second put on ball-dresses. Here, the house is quiet, lit up by a night-light; there, the rooms sparkle with light, and resound with the noise of music and dancing. Here they cough, there they laugh. Infusion on the one hand, punch on the other. In fact, everywhere and always, a contrast. Nice is at once the saddest and the gayest town. One dies of over-enjoyment, and one amuses one's self at the risk of dying."

"A sojourn here is very dangerous, then?"

"Oh! aunt, not so dangerous, nor, above all, so amusing as the Prince says. We are a set of jolly fellows, who kill time between the dining-room of the hotel, pigeon-shooting, and the Cercle, which is not so very amusing after all."

"The dining-room is bearable," said Marechal, "but pigeon-shooting must in time become—"

"We put some interest into the game."

"How so?"

"Oh! It is very simple: a gentleman with a gun in his hand stands before the boxes which contain the pigeons. You say to me: 'I bet fifty louis that the bird will fall.' I answer, 'Done.' The gentleman calls out, 'Pull;' the box opens, the pigeon flies, the shot follows. The bird falls or does not fall. I lose or win fifty louis."

"Most interesting!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Herzog.

"Pshaw!" said Savinien with ironical indifference, "it takes the place of 'trente et quarante,' and is better than 'odd or even' on the numbers of the cabs which pass."

"And what do the pigeons say to that?" asked Pierre, seriously.

"They are not consulted," said Serge, gayly.

"Then there are races and regattas," continued Savinien.

"In which case you bet on the horses?" interrupted Marechal.

"Or on the boats."

"In fact, betting is applied to all circumstances of life?"

"Exactly; and to crown all, we have the Cercle, where we go in the evening. Baccarat triumphs there. It is not very varied either: A hundred louis? Done—Five. I draw. There are some people who draw at five. Nine, I show up, I win or I lose, and the game continues."

"And that amid the glare of gas and the smoke of tobacco," said Marechal, "when the nights are so splendid and the orange-trees smell so sweetly. What a strange existence!"

"An existence for idiots, Marechal," sighed Savinien, "that I, a man of business, must submit to, through my aunt's domineering ways! You know now how men of pleasure spend their lives, my friend, and you might write a substantial resume entitled, 'The Fool's Breviary.' I am sure it would sell well."

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Madame Desvarennnes, who had heard the last words, was no longer listening. She was lost in a deep reverie. She was much altered since grief and trouble had come upon her; her face was worn, her temples hollow, her chin was more prominent. Her eyes had sunk into her head, and were surrounded by dark rims.

Serge, leaning against the wall near the window, was observing her. He was wondering with secret anxiety what had brought Madame Desvarennnes so suddenly to his house after a separation of two months, during which time she had scarcely written to Micheline. Was the question of money to be resumed? Since the morning Madame had been smiling, calm and pleased like a schoolgirl home for her holidays. This was the first time she had allowed a sad expression to rest on her face. Her gayety was feigned then.

A look crossing his made him start. Jeanne had just turned her eyes toward him. For a second they met his own. Serge could not help shuddering. Jeanne was calling his attention to Madame Desvarennnes; she, too, was observing her. Was it on their account she had come to Nice? Had their secret fallen into her hands? He resolved to find out.

Jeanne had turned away her eyes from him. He could feast his on her now. She had become more beautiful. The tone of her complexion had become warmer. Her figure had developed. Serge longed to call her his own. For a moment his hands trembled; his throat was dry, his heart seemed to stop beating.

He tried to shake off this attraction, and walked to the centre of the room. At the same time visitors were announced. Le Bride, with his inseparable friend, Du Tremblay, escorting Lady Harton, Serge's beautiful cousin, who had caused Micheline some anxiety on the day of her marriage, but whom she no longer feared; then the Prince and Princess Odescalchi, Venetian nobles, followed by Monsieur Clement Souverain, a young Belgian, starter of the Nice races, a great pigeon shot, and a mad leader of cotillons.

"Oh, dear me! my lady, all in black?" said Micheline, pointing to the tight-fitting black satin worn by the English beauty.

"Yes, my dear Princess; mourning," replied Lady Harton, with a vigorous shake of the hands. "Ball-room mourning—one of my best partners; gentlemen, you know Harry Tornwall?"

"Countess Alberti's cavalier?" added Serge. "Well?"

"Well! he has just killed himself."

A concert of exclamations arose in the drawing-room, and the visitors suddenly surrounded her.

“What! did you not know? It was the sole topic of conversation at Monaco to-day. Poor Tornwall, being completely cleared out, went during the night to the park belonging to the villa occupied by Countess Alberti, and blew his brains out under her window.”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Micheline.

“It was very bad taste on your countryman’s part,” observed Serge.

“The Countess was furious, and said that Tornwall’s coming to her house to kill himself proved clearly to her that he did not know how to behave.”

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"Do you wish to prevent those who are cleared out from blowing out their brains?" inquired Cayrol. "Compel the pawnbrokers of Monaco to lend a louis on all pistols."

"Well," retorted young Monsieur Souverain, "when the louis is lost the players will still be able to hang themselves."

"Yes," concluded Marechal, "then at any rate the rope will bring luck to others."

"Gentlemen, do you know that what you have been relating to us is very doleful?" said Suzanne Herzog. "Suppose, to vary our impressions, you were to ask us to waltz?"

"Yes, on the terrace," said Le Brede, warmly. "A curtain of orange-trees will protect us from the vulgar gaze."

"Oh! Mademoiselle, what a dream!" sighed Du Tremblay, approaching Suzanne. "Waltzing with you! By moonlight."

"Yes, friend Pierrot!" sang Suzanne, bursting into a laugh.

Already the piano, vigorously attacked by Pierre, desirous of making himself useful since he could not be agreeable, was heard in the next room. Serge had slowly approached Jeanne.

"Will you do me the favor of dancing with me?" he asked, softly.

The young woman started; her cheeks became pale, and in a sharp tone she answered:

"Why don't you ask your wife?"

Serge smiled.

"You or nobody."

Jeanne raised her eyes boldly, and looking at him in the face, said, defiantly:

"Well, then, nobody!"

And, rising, she took the arm of Cayrol, who was advancing toward her.

The Prince remained motionless for a moment, following them with his eyes. Then, seeing his wife alone with Madame Desvarennnes, he went out on the terrace. Already the couples were dancing on the polished marble. Joyful bursts of laughter rose in the perfumed air that sweet March night. A deep sorrow came over Serge; an intense disgust with all things. The sea sparkled, lit up by the moon. He had a mad longing to



seize Jeanne in his arms and carry her far away from the world, across that immense calm space which seemed made expressly to rock sweetly eternal loves.

CHAPTER XV

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Micheline intended following her husband, but Madame Desvarennnes, without rising, took hold of her hand.

“Stay with me for a little while,” she said, tenderly. “We have scarcely exchanged ten words since my arrival. Come, tell me, are you pleased to see me?”

“How can you ask me that?” answered Micheline, seating herself on the sofa beside her mother.

“I ask you so that you may tell me so,” resumed Madame Desvarennnes, softly. “I know what you think, but that is not enough.” She added pleadingly:

“Kiss me, will you?”

Micheline threw her arms round her mother’s neck, saying, “Dear mamma!” which made tears spring to the tortured mother’s eyes. She folded her-daughter in her arms, and clasped her as a miser holds his treasure.

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"It is a long time since I have heard you speak thus to me. Two months! And I have been desolate in that large house you used to fill alone in the days gone by."

The young wife interrupted her mother, reproachfully:

"Oh! mamma; I beg you to be reasonable."

"To be reasonable? In other words, I suppose you mean that I am to get accustomed to living without you, after having for twenty years devoted my life to you? Bear, without complaining, that my happiness should be taken away, and now that I am old lead a life without aim, without joy, without trouble even, because I know if you had any troubles you would not tell me!"

There was a moment's pause. Then Micheline, in a constrained manner, said:

"What griefs could I have?"

Madame Desvarennnes lost all patience, and giving vent to her feelings exclaimed, bitterly:

"Those which your husband causes you!"

Micheline arose abruptly.

"Mother!" she cried.

But the mistress had commenced, and with unrestrained bitterness, went on:

"That gentleman has behaved toward me in such a manner as to shake my confidence in him! After vowing that he would never separate you from me, he brought you here, knowing that I could not leave Paris."

"You are unjust," retorted Micheline. "You know the doctors ordered me to go to Nice."

"Pooh! You can make doctors order you anything you like!" resumed her mother, excitedly, and shaking her head disdainfully. "Your husband said to our good Doctor Rigaud: 'Don't you think that a season in the South would do my wife good?' The doctor answered: 'If it does not do her any good it certainly won't do her any harm.' Then your husband added, 'just take a sheet of paper and write out a prescription. You understand? It is for my mother-in-law, who will not be pleased at our going away.'"

And as Micheline seemed to doubt what she was saying, the latter added:

"The doctor told me when I went to see him about it. I never had much faith in doctors, and now—"

Micheline felt she was on delicate ground, and wanted to change the subject. She soothed her mother as in days gone by, saying:

“Come, mamma; will you never be able to get used to your part? Must you always be jealous? You know all wives leave their mothers to follow their husbands. It is the law of nature. You, in your day, remember, followed your husband, and your mother must have wept.”

“Did my mother love me as I love you?” asked Madame Desvarennnes, impetuously. “I was brought up differently. We had not time to love each other so much. We had to work. The happiness of spoiling one’s child is a privilege of the rich. For you there was no down warm enough or silk soft enough to line your cradle. You have been petted and worshipped for twenty years. Yet, it only needed a man, whom you scarcely knew six months ago, to make you forget everything.”

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"I have not forgotten anything," replied Micheline, moved by these passionate expressions. "And in my heart you still hold the same place."

The mistress looked at the young wife, then, in a sad tone, said:

"It is no longer the first place."

This simple, selfish view made Micheline smile.

"It is just like you, you tyrant!" she exclaimed. "You must be first. Come, be satisfied with equality! Remember that you were first in the field, and that for twenty years I have loved you, while he has to make up for lost time. Don't try to make a comparison between my love for him and my affection for you. Be kind: instead of looking black at him, try to love him. I should be so happy to see you united, and to be able, without reservation, to think of you both with the same tenderness!"

"Ah! how you talk me over. How charming and caressing you can be when you like. And how happy Serge ought to be with a wife like you! It is always the way; men like him always get the best wives."

"I don't suppose, mamma, you came all the way from Paris to run down my husband to me."

Madame Desvarennnes became serious again.

"No; I came to defend you."

Micheline looked surprised.

"It is time for me to speak. You are seriously menaced," continued the mother.

"In my love?" asked the young wife, in an altered tone.

"No; in your fortune."

Micheline smiled superbly.

"If that be all!"

This indifference made her mother positively jump.

"You speak very coolly about it! At the rate your husband is spending, there will be nothing left of your dowry in six months."

"Well!" said the Princess, gayly, "you will give us another."

Madame Desvarennnes assumed her cold businesslike manner.

“Ta! ta! ta! Do you think there is no limit to my resources? I gave you four millions when you were married, represented by fifteen hundred thousand francs, in good stock, a house in the Rue de Rivoli, and eight hundred thousand francs which I prudently kept in the business, and for which I pay you interest. The fifteen hundred thousand francs have vanished. My lawyer came to tell me that the house in the Rue de Rivoli had been sold without a reinvestment taking place.”

The mistress stopped. She had spoken in that frank, determined, way of hers that was part of her strength. She looked fixedly at Micheline, and asked:

“Did you know this, my girl?”

The Princess, deeply troubled, because now it was not a question of sentiment, but of serious moment, answered, in a low tone:

“No, mamma.”

“How is that possible?” Madame Desvarennnes demanded, hotly. “Nothing can be done without your signature.”

“I gave it,” murmured Micheline.

“You gave it!” repeated the mistress in a tone of anger. “When?”

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"The day after my marriage."

"Your husband had the impudence to ask for it the day after your marriage?"

Micheline smiled.

"He did not ask for it, mamma," she replied, with sweetness; "I offered it to him. You had settled all on me."

"Prudently! With a fellow like your husband!"

"Your mistrust must have been humiliating to him. I was ashamed of it. I said nothing to you, because I knew you would rather prevent the marriage, and I loved Serge. I, therefore, signed the contract which you had had prepared. Only the next day I gave a general power of attorney to my husband."

Madame Desvarennes's anger was over. She was observing Micheline, and wished to find out the depth of the abyss into which her daughter had thrown herself with blind confidence.

"And what did he say then?" she inquired.

"Nothing," answered Micheline, simply. "Tears came to his eyes, and he kissed me. I saw that this delicacy touched his heart and I was happy. There, mamma," she added with eyes sparkling at the remembrance of the pleasure she had experienced, "he may spend as much as he likes; I am amply repaid beforehand."

Madame Desvarennes shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"My dear child, you are mad enough to be locked up. What is there about the fellow to turn every woman's brain?"

"Every woman's?" exclaimed Micheline, anxiously, looking at her mother.

"That is a manner of speaking. But, my dear, you must understand that I cannot be satisfied with what you have just told me. A tear and a kiss! Bah! That is not worth your dowry."

"Come, mamma, do let me be happy."

"You can be happy without committing follies. You do not need a racing-stable."

"Oh, he has chosen such pretty colors," interrupted Micheline, with a smile. "Pearl-gray and silver, and pink cap. It is charming!"



"You think so? Well, you are not difficult to please. And the club? What do you say to his gambling?"

Micheline turned pale, and with a constraint which hurt her mother, said:

"Is it necessary to make a fuss about a few games at bouillotte?"

This continual defense of Serge exasperated Madame Desvarennnes.

"Don't talk to me," she continued, violently. "I am well informed on that subject. He leaves you alone every evening to go and play with gentlemen who turn up the king with a dexterity the Legitimists must envy. My dear, shall I tell you his fortune? He commenced with cards; he continues with horses; he will finish with worthless women!"

"Mamma!" cried Micheline, wounded to the heart.

"And your money will pay the piper! But, happily, I am here to put your household matters right. I am going to keep your gentleman so well under that in future he will walk straight, I'll warrant you!"

Micheline rose and stood before her mother, looking so pale that the latter was frightened.

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"Mother," she said, in trembling tones, "if ever you say one word to my husband, take care! I shall never see you again!"

Madame Desvarennnes flinched before her daughter. It was no longer the weak Micheline who trusted to her tears, but a vehement woman ready to defend him whom she loved. And as she remained silent, not daring to speak again:

"Mother," continued Micheline, with sadness, yet firmly, "this explanation was inevitable; I have suffered beforehand, knowing that I should have to choose between my affection for my husband and my respect for you."

"Between the one and the other," said the mistress, bitterly, "you don't hesitate, I see."

"It is my duty; and if I failed in it, you yourself, with your good sense, would see it."

"Oh! Micheline, could I have expected to find you thus?" cried the mother, in despair. "What a change! It is not you who are speaking; it is not my daughter. Fool that you are! Don't you see whither you are being led? You, yourself, are preparing your own misfortune. Don't think that my words are inspired by jealousy. A higher sentiment dictates them, and at this moment my maternal love gives me, I fear, a foresight of the future. There is only just time to rescue you from the danger into which you are running. You hope to retain your husband by your generosity? There where you think you are giving proofs of love he will only see proofs of weakness. If you make yourself cheap he will count you as nothing. If you throw yourself at his feet he will trample on you."

The Princess shook her head haughtily, and smiled.

"You don't know him, mamma. He is a gentleman; he understands all these delicacies, and there is more to be gained by submitting one's self to his discretion, than by trying to resist his will. You blame his manner of existence, but you don't understand him. I know him. He belongs to a different race than you and I. He needs refinements of luxury which would be useless to us, but the deprivation of which would be hard to him. He suffered much when he was poor, he is making up for it now. We are guilty of some extravagances, 'tis true; but what does it matter? For whom have you made a fortune? For me! For what object? My happiness! Well, I am happy to surround my Prince with the glory and pomp which suits him so well. He is grateful to me; he loves me, and I hold his love dearer than all else in the world; for if ever he ceases to love me I shall die!"

"Micheline!" cried Madame Desvarennnes, beside herself, and seizing her daughter with nervous strength.

The young wife quietly allowed her fair head to fall on her mother's shoulder, and whispered faintly in her ear:

"You don't want to wreck my life. I understand your displeasure. It is natural; I feel it. You cannot think otherwise than you do, being a simple, hardworking woman; but I beg of you to banish all hatred, and confine these ideas within yourself. Say nothing more about them for love of me!"

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The mother was vanquished. She had never been able to resist that suppliant voice.

"Ah! cruel child," she moaned, "what pain you are causing me!"

"You consent, don't you, dear mother?" murmured Micheline, falling into the arms of her by whom she knew she was adored.

"I will do as you wish," said Madame Desvarennnes, kissing her daughter's hair—that golden hair which, in former days, she loved to stroke.

The strains of the piano sounded on the terrace. In the shade, groups of merry dancers were enjoying themselves. Happy voices were heard approaching, and Savinien, followed by Marechal and Suzanne, came briskly up the steps.

"Oh, aunt, it is not fair," said the dandy. "If you have come here to monopolize Micheline, you will be sent back to Paris. We want a vis-a-vis for a quadrille. Come, Princess, it is delightfully cool outside, and I am sure you will enjoy it."

"Monsieur Le Brede has gathered some oranges, and is trying to play at cup and ball with them on his nose, while his friend, Monsieur du Tremblay, jealous of his success, talks of illuminating the trees with bowls of punch," said Marechal.

"And what is Serge doing?" inquired Micheline, smiling.

"He is talking to my wife on the terrace," said Cayrol, appearing in the gallery.

The young people went off and were lost in the darkness. Madame Desvarennnes looked at Cayrol. He was happy and calm. There was no trace of his former jealousy. During the six months which had elapsed since his marriage, the banker had observed his wife closely, her actions, her words: nothing had escaped him. He had never found her at fault. Thus, reassured, he had given her his confidence and this time forever. Jeanne was adorable; he loved her more than ever. She seemed very much changed to him. Her disposition, formerly somewhat harsh, had softened, and the haughty, capricious girl had become a mild, demure, and somewhat serious woman. Unable to read his companion's thoughts, Cayrol sincerely believed that he had been unnecessarily anxious, and that Jeanne's troubles had only been passing fancies. He took credit of the change in his wife to himself, and was proud of it.

"Cayrol, oblige me by removing that lamp; it hurts my eyes," said Madame Desvarennnes, anxious that the traces on her face, caused by her late discussion with her daughter, should not be visible. "Then ask Jeanne to come here for a few minutes. I have something to say to her."

"Certainly," said Cayrol, taking the lamp off the table and carrying it into the adjoining room.

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Darkness did Madame Desvarennnes good. It refreshed her mind and calmed her brow. The noise of dancing reached her. She commenced thinking. So it had vainly tried to prove to her that a life of immoderate pleasure was not conducive to happiness. The young wife had stopped her ears so that she might not hear, and closed her eyes that she might not see. Her mother asked herself if she did not exaggerate the evil. Alas! no. She saw that she was not mistaken. Examining the society around her, men and women: everywhere was feverish excitement, dissipation, and nullity. You might rummage through their brains without finding one practical idea; in all their hearts, there was not one lofty aspiration. These people, in their daily life were like squirrels in a cage, and because they moved, they thought they were progressing. In them scepticism had killed belief; religion, family, country, were, as they phrased it, all humbug. They had only one aim, one passion—to enjoy themselves. Their watchword was “pleasure.” All those who did not perish of consumption would die in lunatic asylums.

What was she doing in the midst of this rottenness? She, the woman of business? Could she hope to regenerate these poor wretches by her example? No! She could not teach them to be good, and they excelled in teaching others harm. She must leave this gilded vice, taking with her those she loved, and leave the idle and incompetent to consume and destroy themselves.

She felt disgusted, and resolved to do all to tear Micheline away from the contagion. In the meantime she must question Jeanne. A shadow appeared on the threshold: it was hers. In the darkness of the gallery Serge crept behind her without being seen. He had been watching Jeanne, and seeing her go away alone, had followed her. In the angle of the large bay-window, opening into the garden, he waited with palpitating heart. Madame Desvarennnes’s voice was heard in the silence of the drawing-room; he listened.

“Sit down, Jeanne; our interview will be short, and it could not be delayed, for to-morrow I shall not be here.”

“You are leaving so soon?”

“Yes; I only left Paris on my daughter’s account, and on yours. My daughter knows what I had to tell her; now it is your turn! Why did you come to Nice?”

“I could not do otherwise.”

“Because?”

“Because my husband wished it.”

“You ought to have made him wish something else. Your power over him is absolute.”

There was a moment's pause. Then Jeanne answered:

"I feared to insist lest I should awaken his suspicions."

"Good! But admitting that you came to Nice, why accept hospitality in this house?"

"Micheline offered it to us," said Jeanne.

"And even that did not make you refuse. What part do you purpose playing here? After six months of honesty, are you going to change your mind?"

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Serge, behind his shelter, shuddered. Madame Desvarennnes's words were clear. She knew all.

Jeanne's voice was indignant when she replied:

"By what right do you insult me by such a suspicion?"

"By the right which you have given me in not keeping to your bargain. You ought to have kept out of the way, and I find you here, seeking danger and already trying those flirtations which are the forerunners of sin, and familiarizing yourself with evil before wholly giving yourself up to it."

"Madame!" cried Jeanne, passionately.

"Answer! Have you kept the promise you made me?"

"Have the hopes which you held out to me been realized?" replied Jeanne, with despair. "For six months I have been away, and have I found peace of mind and heart? The duty which you pointed out to me as a remedy for the pain which tortured me I have fruitlessly followed. I have wept, hoping that the trouble within me would be washed away with my tears. I have prayed to Heaven, and asked that I might love my husband. But, no! That man is as odious to me as ever. Now I have lost all my illusions, and find myself joined to him for the rest of my days! I have to tell lies, to wear a mask, to smile! It is revolting, and I suffer! Now that you know what is passing within me, judge, and say whether your reproaches are not a useless cruelty."

On hearing Jeanne, Madame Desvarennnes felt herself moved with deep pity. She asked herself whether it was not unjust for that poor child to suffer so much. She had never done anything wrong, and her conduct was worthy of esteem.

"Unhappy woman!" she said.

"Yes, unhappy, indeed," resumed Jeanne, "because I have nothing to cling to, nothing to sustain me. My mind is afflicted with feverish thoughts, my heart made desolate with bitter regrets. My will alone protects me, and in a moment of weakness it may betray me."

"You still love him?" asked Madame Desvarennnes, in a deep voice which made Serge quiver.

"Do I know? There are times when I think I hate him. What I have endured since I have been here is incredible! Everything galls me, irritates me. My husband is blind, Micheline unsuspicious, and Serge smiles quietly, as if he were preparing some treachery. Jealousy, anger, contempt, are all conflicting within me. I feel that I ought to go away, and still I feel a horrible delight in remaining."

“Poor child!” said Madame Desvarennnes. “I pity you from my soul. Forgive my unjust words; you have done all in your power. You have had momentary weaknesses like all human beings. You must be helped, and may rely on me. I will speak to your husband to-morrow; he shall take you away. Lacking happiness, you must have peace. Go you are a brave heart, and if Heaven be just, you will be rewarded.”

Serge heard the sound of a kiss. In an embrace, the mother had blessed her adopted daughter. Then the Prince saw Madame Desvarennnes go slowly past him. And the silence was broken only by the sobs of Jeanne who was half lying on the sofa in the darkness.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE TELLTALE KISS

Serge slipped from his hiding-place and came toward Jeanne. The carpet deadened the sound of his steps. The young woman was gazing into vacancy and breathing with difficulty. He looked at her for a moment without speaking; then, leaning over her shoulder.

"Is it true, Jeanne," he murmured, softly, "that you hate me?"

Jeanne arose, bewildered, exclaiming,

"Serge!"

"Yes, Serge," answered the Prince, "who has never ceased to love you."

A deep blush spread over the young woman's face.

"Leave me," she said. "Your language is unworthy of a man. I will not listen to you."

And with a quick step she walked toward the gallery. Serge threw himself in her way, saying:

"You must stop; you cannot escape me."

"But this is madness," exclaimed Jeanne, moving away. "Do you forget where we are?"

"Do you forget what you have just been saying?" retorted Serge. "I was there; I did not miss a word."

"If you heard me," said Jeanne, "you know that everything separates us. My duty, yours, and my will."

"A will which is enforced, and against which your heart rebels. A will to which I will not submit."

As he spoke, Serge advanced toward her, trying to seize her in his arms.

"Take care!" replied Jeanne. "Micheline and my husband are there. You must be mad to forget it. If you come a step farther I shall call out."

"Call, then!" cried Serge, clasping her in his arms.

Jeanne tried to free herself from him, but could not.

“Serge,” she said, paling with mingled anguish and rapture in the arms of him whom she adored, “what you are doing is cowardly and base!”

A kiss stopped the words on her lips. Jeanne felt herself giving way. She made a supreme effort.

“I won’t, Serge!” she stammered. “Have mercy!”

Tears of shame rolled down her face.

“No! you belong to me. The other, your husband, stole you from me. I take you back. I love you!”

The young woman fell on a seat.

Serge repeated,

“I love you! I love you! I love you!”

A fearful longing took possession of Jeanne. She no longer pushed away the arms which clasped her. She placed her hands on Serge’s shoulder, and with a deep sigh gave herself up.

A profound silence reigned around. Suddenly a sound of approaching voices roused them, and at the same moment the heavy curtain which separated the room from the adjoining drawing-room was lifted. A shadow appeared on the threshold, as they were still in each other’s arms. The stifled exclamation, “O God!” followed by a sob of agony, resounded. The door curtain fell, surrounding with its folds the unknown witness of that terrible scene.

Jeanne had risen, trying to collect her ideas. A sudden light dawned on her mind; she realized in a moment the extent of her crime, and uttering a cry of horror and despair, she escaped, followed by Serge, through the gallery.

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Then the heavy curtain was lifted again, and tottering, livid, almost dead, Micheline entered the room. Pierre, serious and cold, walked behind her. The Princess, feeling tired, had come into the house. Chance had led her there to witness this proof of misfortune and treason.

Both she and Delarue looked at each other, silent and overwhelmed. Their thoughts whirled through their brains with fearful rapidity. In a moment they looked back on their existence. He saw the pale betrothed of whom he had dreamed as a wife, who had willingly given herself to another, and who now found herself so cruelly punished. She measured the distance which separated these two men: the one good, loyal, generous; the other selfish, base, and unworthy. And seeing him whom she adored, so vile and base compared to him whom she had disdained, Micheline burst into bitter tears.

Pierre tremblingly hastened toward her. The Princess made a movement to check him, but she saw on the face of her childhood's friend such sincere grief and honest indignation, that she felt as safe, with him as if he had really been her brother. Overcome, she let her head fall on his shoulder, and wept.

The sound of approaching footsteps made Micheline arise. She recognized her husband's step, and hastily seizing Pierre's hand, said:

"Never breathe a word; forget what you have seen."

Then, with deep grief, she added:

"If Serge knew that I had seen him unawares he would never forgive me!"

Drying her tears, and still tottering from the shock, she left the room. Pierre remained alone, quite stunned; pitying, yet blaming the poor woman, who, in her outraged love, still had the absurd courage to hold her tongue and to resign herself. Anger seized on him, and the more timid Micheline seemed herself, the more violent and passionate he felt.

Serge came back to the room. After the first moment of excitement, he had reflected, and wanted to know by whom he had been observed. Was it Madame Desvarennnes, Micheline, or Cayrol, who had come in? At this idea he trembled, measuring the possible results of the imprudence he had been guilty of. He resolved to face the difficulty if it were either of these three interested parties, and to impose silence if he had to deal with an indifferent person. He took the lamp which Madame Desvarennnes had a short time before asked Cayrol to remove and went into the room. Pierre was there alone.

The two men measured each other with their looks. Delarue guessed the anxiety of Serge, and the Prince understood the hostility of Pierre. He turned pale.

“It was you who came in?” he asked, boldly.

“Yes,” replied Pierre, with severity.

The Prince hesitated for a second. He was evidently seeking a polite form to express his request. He did not find one, and in a threatening manner, he resumed:

“You must hold your tongue, otherwise—”

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"Otherwise?" inquired Pierce, aggressively.

"What is the use of threats?" replied Serge, already calmed. "Excuse me; I know that you will not tell; if not for my sake at least for that of others."

"Yes, for others," said Pierre, passionately; "for others whom you have basely sacrificed, and who deserve all your respect and love; for Madame Desvarennnes, whose high intelligence you have not been able to understand; for Micheline, whose tender heart you have not been able to appreciate. Yes, for their sakes I will hold my peace, not out of regard for you, because you neither deserve consideration nor esteem."

The Prince advanced a step, and exclaimed:

"Pierre!"

Pierre did not move, and looking Serge in the face, continued:

"The truth is unpleasant to you, still you must hear it. You act according to your fancies. Principles and morals, to which all men submit, are dead letters to you. Your own pleasure above all things, and always! That is your rule, eh? and so much the worse if ruin and trouble to others are the consequences? You only have to deal with two women, and you profit by it. But I warn you that if you continue to crush them I will be their defender."

Serge had listened to all this with disdainful impassibility, and when Pierre had finished, he smiled, snapped his fingers, and turning toward the young man:

"My dear fellow," said he, "allow me to tell you that I think you are very impertinent. You come here meddling with my affairs. What authority have you? Are you a relative? A connection? By what right do you preach this sermon?"

As he concluded, Serge seated himself and laughed with a careless air.

Pierre answered, gravely:

"I was betrothed to Micheline when she saw and loved you: that is my right! I could have married her, but sacrificed my love to hers: that is my authority! And it is in the name of my shattered hopes and lost happiness that I call you to account for her future peace."

Serge had risen, he was deeply embittered at what Delarue had just told him, and was trying to recover his calmness. Pierre, trembling with emotion and anger, was also striving to check their influence.

"It seems to me," said the Prince, mockingly, "that in your claim there is more than the outcry of an irritated conscience; it is the complaint of a heart that still loves."

"And if that were so?" retorted Pierre. "Yes, I love her, but with a pious love, from the depth of my soul, as one would love a saint; and I only suffer the more to see her suffering."

Somewhat irritated the Prince exclaimed, impatiently:

"Oh, don't let us have a lyric recitation; let us be brief and clear. What do you want? Explain yourself. I don't suppose that you have addressed this rebuke to me solely for the purpose of telling me that you are in love with my wife!"

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Pierre disregarded what was insulting in the Prince's answer, and calming himself, by force of will, replied:

"I desire, since you ask me, that you forget the folly and error of a moment, and that you swear to me on your honor never to see Madame Cayrol again."

Pierre's moderation wounded the Prince more than his rage had affected him. He felt petty beside this devoted friend, who only thought of the happiness of her whom he loved without hope. His temper increased.

"And what if I refuse to lend myself to those whims which you express so candidly?"

"Then," said Pierre, resolutely, "I shall remember that, when renouncing Micheline, I promised to be a brother to her, and if you compel me I will defend her."

"You are threatening me, I think," cried Serge, beside himself.

"No! I warn you."

"Enough," said the Prince, scarcely able to command himself. "For any little service you have rendered me, from henceforth we are quits. Don't think that I am one of those who yield to violence. Keep out of my path; it will be prudent."

"Listen, then, to this. I am not one of those who shirk a duty, whatever the peril be in accomplishing it. You know what price I put on Micheline's happiness; you are responsible for it, and I shall oblige you to respect it."

And leaving Serge dumb with suppressed rage, Pierre went out on the terrace.

On the high road the sound of the carriages bearing away Savinien, Herzog and his daughter, resounded in the calm starry night. In the villa everything was quiet. Pierre breathed with delight; he instinctively turned his eyes toward the brilliant sky, and in the far-off firmament, the star which he appropriated to himself long ago, and which he had so desperately looked for when he was unhappy, suddenly appeared bright and twinkling. He sighed and moved on.

The Prince spent a part of the night at the club; he was excessively nervous, and after alternate losses and gains, he retired, carrying off a goodly sum from his opponents. It was a long time since he had been so lucky, and on his way home he smiled when he thought how false was the proverb, "Lucky at play, unlucky in love." He thought of that adorable Jeanne whom he had held in his arms a few hours before, and who had so eagerly clung to him. He understood that she had never ceased to belong to him. The image of Cayrol, self-confident man, happy in his love, coming to his mind, caused Serge to laugh.

There was no thought for Micheline; she had been the stepping-stone to fortune for him; he knew that she was gentle and thought her not very discerning. He could easily deceive her; with a few caresses and a little consideration he could maintain the illusion of his love for her. Madame Desvarennnes alone inconvenienced him in his arrangements. She was sagacious, and on several occasions he had seen her unveil plots which he thought were well contrived. He must really beware of her. He had often noticed in her voice and look an alarming hardness. She was not a woman to be afraid of a scandal. On the contrary, she would hail it with joy, and be happy to get rid of him whom she hated with all her might.

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In spite of himself, Serge remembered the night of his union to Micheline, when he had said to Madame Desvarennnes: "Take my life; it is yours!" She had replied seriously, and almost threateningly: "Very well; I accept it!" These words now resounded in his ears like a verdict. He promised himself to play a sure game with Madame Desvarennnes. As to Cayrol, he was out of the question; he had only been created as a plaything for princes such as Serge; his destiny was written on his forehead, and he could not escape. If it had not been Panine, some one else would have done the same thing for him. Besides, how could that ex-cowherd expect to keep such a woman as Jeanne was to himself. It would have been manifestly unfair.

The Prince found his valet asleep in the hall. He went quickly to his bedroom, and slept soundly without remorse, without dreams, until noon. Coming down to breakfast, he found the family assembled. Savinien had come to see his aunt, before whom he wanted to place a "colossal idea." This time, he said, it was worth a fortune. He hoped to draw six thousand francs from the mistress who, according to her usual custom, could not fail to buy from him what he called his idea.

The dandy was thoughtful; he was preparing his batteries. Micheline, pale, and her eyes red for want of rest, was seated near the gallery, silently watching the sea, on which were passing, in the distance, fishing-smacks with their sails looking like white-winged birds. Madame Desvarennnes was serious, and was giving Marechal instructions respecting her correspondence, while at the same time watching her daughter out of the corner of her eye. Micheline's depressed manner caused her some anxiety; she guessed some mystery. Still the young wife's trouble might be the result of last evening's serious interview. But the sagacity of the mistress guessed a new incident. Perhaps some scene between Serge and Micheline in regard to the club. She was on the watch.

Cayrol and Jeanne had gone for a drive to Mentone. With a single glance the Prince took in the attitude of one and all, and after a polite exchange of words and a careless kiss on Micheline's brow, he seated himself at table. The repast was silent. Each one seemed preoccupied. Serge anxiously asked himself whether Pierre had spoken. Marechal, deeply interested in his plate, answered briefly, when addressed by Madame Desvarennnes. All the guests seemed constrained. It was a relief when they rose from the table.

Micheline took her husband's arm and leading him into the garden, under the shade of the magnolias, said to him:

"My mother leaves us to-night. She has received a letter recalling her to Paris. Her journey here was, you no doubt know, on our account. Our absence made her sad, and she could no longer refrain from seeing me, so she came. On her return to Paris she will feel very lonely, and as I am so often alone—"

“Micheline!” interrupted Serge, with astonishment.

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"It is not a reproach, dear," continued the young wife, sweetly. "You have your engagements. There are necessities to which one must submit; you do what you think is expected of you, and it must be right. Only grant me a favor."

"A favor? To you?" replied Serge, troubled at the unexpected turn the interview was taking. "Speak, dear one; are you not at liberty to do as you like?"

"Well," said Micheline, with a faint smile, "as you are so kindly disposed, promise that we shall leave for Paris this week. The season is far advancing. All your friends will have returned. It will not be such a great sacrifice which I ask from you."

"Willingly," said Serge, surprised at Micheline's sudden resolution. "But, admit," added he, gravely, "that your mother has worried you a little on the subject."

"My mother knows nothing of my project," returned the Princess, coldly. "I did not care to say anything about it to her until I had your consent. A refusal on your part would have seemed too cruel. Already, you are not the best of friends, and it is one of my regrets. You must be good to my mother, Serge; she is getting old, and we owe her much gratitude and love."

Panine remained silent. Could such a sudden change have come over Micheline in one day? She who lately sacrificed her mother for her husband now came and pleaded in favor of Madame Desvarennnes. What had happened?

He promptly decided on his course of action.

"All that you ask me shall be religiously fulfilled. No concession will be too difficult for me to make if it please you. You wish to return to Paris, we will go as soon as our arrangements have been made. Tell Madame Desvarennnes, then, and let her see in our going a proof that I wish to live on good terms with her."

Micheline simply said: "Thank you." And Serge having gallantly kissed her hand, she regained the terrace.

Left alone, Serge asked himself the meaning of the transformation in his wife. For the first time she had shown signs of taking the initiative. Had the question of money been raised by Madame Desvarennnes, and was Micheline taking him back to Paris in the hope of inducing a change in his habits? They would see. The idea that Micheline had seen him with Jeanne never occurred to him. He did not think his wife capable of so much self-control. Loving as she was, she could not have controlled her feelings, and would have made a disturbance. Therefore he had no suspicions.

As to their leaving for Paris he was delighted at the idea. Jeanne and Cayrol were leaving Nice at the end of the week. Lost in the vastness of the capital, the lovers would be more secure. They could see each other at leisure. Serge would hire a small house

in the neighborhood of the Bois de Boulogne, and there they could enjoy each other's society without observation.

CHAPTER XVII

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CAYROL IS BLIND

Micheline, on her return to Paris, was a cause of anxiety to all her friends. Morally and physically she was changed. Her former gayety had disappeared. In a few weeks she became thin and seemed to be wasting away. Madame Desvarennnes, deeply troubled, questioned her daughter, who answered, evasively, that she was perfectly well and had nothing to trouble her. The mother called in Doctor Rigaud, although she did not believe in the profession, and, after a long conference, took him to see Micheline. The doctor examined her, and declared it was nothing but debility. Madame Desvarennnes was assailed with gloomy forebodings. She spent sleepless nights, during which she thought her daughter was dead; she heard the funeral dirges around her coffin. This strong woman wept, not daring to show her anxiety, and trembling lest Micheline should suspect her fears.

Serge was careless and happy, treating the apprehensions of those surrounding him with perfect indifference. He did not think his wife was ill—a little tired perhaps, or it might be change of climate, nothing serious. He had quite fallen into his old ways, spending every night at the club, and a part of the day in a little house in the Avenue Maillot, near the Bois de Boulogne. He had found one charmingly furnished, and there he sheltered his guilty happiness.

It was here that Jeanne came, thickly veiled, since her return from Nice. They each had a latchkey belonging to the door opening upon the Bois. The one who arrived first waited for the other, within the house, whose shutters remained closed to deceive passers-by. Then the hour of departure came; the hope of meeting again did not lessen their sadness at parting.

Jeanne seldom went to the Rue Saint-Dominique. The welcome that Micheline gave her was the same as usual, but Jeanne thought she discovered a coldness which made her feel uncomfortable; and she did not care to meet her lover's wife, so she made her visits scarce.

Cayrol came every morning to talk on business matters with Madame Desvarennnes. He had resumed the direction of his banking establishment. The great scheme of the European Credit Company had been launched by Herzog, and promised great results. Still Herzog caused Cayrol considerable anxiety. Although a man of remarkable intelligence, he had a great failing, and by trying to grasp too much often ended by accomplishing nothing. Scarcely was one scheme launched when another idea occurred to him, to which he sacrificed the former.

Thus, Herzog was projecting a still grander scheme to be based on the European Credit. Cayrol, less sanguine, and more practical, was afraid of the new scheme, and when Herzog spoke to him about it, said that things were well enough for him as they

were, and that he would not be implicated in any fresh financial venture however promising.

Cayrol's refusal had vexed Herzog. The German knew what opinion he was held in by the public, and that without the prestige of Cayrol's name, and behind that, the house of Desvarennés, he would never have been able to float the European Credit as it had been. He was too cunning not to know this, and Cayrol having declined to join him, he looked round in search of a suitable person to inspire the shareholders with confidence.

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His daughter often went to the Rue Saint-Dominique. Madame Desvarennnes and Micheline had taken a fancy to her, as she was serious, natural, and homelike. They liked to see her, although her father was not congenial to their taste. Herzog had not succeeded in making friends with the mistress; she disliked and instinctively mistrusted him.

One day it was rumored that Suzanne Herzog had gone in for an examination at the Hotel de Ville, and had gained a certificate: People thought it was very ridiculous. What was the good of so much learning for a girl who would have such a large fortune, and who would never know want. Savinien thought it was affectation and most laughable! Madame Desvarennnes thought it was most interesting; she liked workers, and considered that the richer people were, the more reason they had to work. Herzog had allowed his daughter to please herself and said nothing.

Springtime had come, and fine weather, yet Micheline's health did not improve. She did not suffer, but a sort of languor had come over her. For days she never quitted her reclining-chair. She was very affectionate toward her mother, and seemed to be making up for the lack of affection shown during the first months of her marriage.

She never questioned Serge as to his manner of spending his time, though she seldom saw him, except at meal hours. Every week she wrote to Pierre, who was buried in his mines, and after every despatch her mother noticed that she seemed sadder and paler.

Serge and Jeanne grew bolder. They felt that they were not watched. The little house seemed too small for them, and they longed to go beyond the garden, as the air of the Bois was so sweet and scented with violets. A feeling of bravado came over them, and they did not mind being seen together. People would think they were a newly-married couple.

One afternoon they sallied forth, Jeanne wearing a thick veil, and trembling at the risk she was running, yet secretly delighted at going. They chose the most unfrequented paths and solitary nooks. Then, after an hour's stroll, they returned briskly, frightened at the sounds of carriages rolling in the distance. They often went out after that, and chose in preference the paths near the pond of Madrid where, behind sheltering shrubs, they sat talking and listening to the busy hum of Parisian life, seemingly so far away.

One day, about four o'clock, Madame Desvarennnes was going to Saint-Cloud on business, and was crossing the Bois de Boulogne. Her coachman had chosen the most unfrequented paths to save time. She had opened the carriage-window, and was enjoying the lovely scent from the shrubs. Suddenly a watering-cart stopped the way. Madame Desvarennnes looked through the window to see what was the matter, and remained stupefied. At the turning of a path she espied Serge, with a woman on his arm. She uttered a cry that caused the couple to turn round. Seeing that pale face, they sought to hide themselves.

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In a moment Madame Desvarennnes was out of the carriage. The guilty couple fled down a path. Without caring what might be said of her, and goaded on by a fearful rage, she tried to follow them. She especially wished to see the woman who was closely veiled. She guessed her to be Jeanne. But the younger woman, terrified, fled like a deer down a side walk. Madame Desvarennnes, quite out of breath, was obliged to stop. She heard the slamming of a carriage-door, and a hired brougham that had been waiting at the end of the path swept by her bearing the lovers toward the town.

The mistress hesitated a moment, then said to her coachman:

“Drive home.” And, abandoning her business, she arrived in the Rue Saint-Dominique a few minutes after the Prince.

With a bound, without going through the offices, without even taking off her bonnet and cloak, she went up to Serge’s apartments. Without hesitating, she entered the smoking-room.

Panine was there. Evidently he was expecting her. On seeing Madame Desvarennnes he rose, with a smile:

“One can see that you are at home,” said he, ironically; “you come in without knocking.”

“No nonsense; the moment is ill-chosen,” briefly retorted the mistress. “Why did you run away when you saw me a little while ago?”

“You have such a singular way of accosting people,” he answered, lightly. “You come on like a charge of cavalry. The person with whom I was talking was frightened, she ran away and I followed her.”

“She was doing wrong then if she was frightened. Does she know me?”

“Who does not know you? You are almost notorious—in the corn-market!”

Madame Desvarennnes allowed the insult to pass without remark, and advancing toward Serge, said:

“Who is this woman?”

“Shall I introduce her to you?” inquired the Prince, quietly. “She is one of my countrywomen, a Polish—”

“You are a liar!” cried Madame Desvarennnes, unable to control her temper any longer. “You are lying most impudently!”

And she was going to add, "That woman was Jeanne!" but prudence checked the sentence on her lips.

Serge turned pale.

"You forget yourself strangely, Madame," he said, in a dry tone.

"I forgot myself a year ago, not now! It was when I was weak that I forgot myself. When Micheline was between you and me I neither dared to speak nor act.

"But now, since after almost ruining my poor daughter, you deceive her, I have no longer any consideration for you. To make her come over to my side I have only to speak one word."

"Well, speak it! She is there. I will call her!"

Madame Desvarennnes, in that supreme moment, was assailed by a doubt. What if Micheline, in her blind love, did not believe her?

She raised her hand to stop Serge.

"Will not the fear of killing my daughter by this revelation stay you?" asked she, bitterly.
"What manner of man are you to have so little heart and conscience?"

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Panine burst into laughter.

“You see what your threats are worth, and what value I place on them. Spare them in the future. You ask me what manner of man I am? I will tell you. I have not much patience, I hate to have my liberty interfered with, and I have a horror of family jars. I expect to be master of my own house.”

Madame Desvarennnes was roused at these words. Her rage had abated on her daughter’s account, but now it rose to a higher pitch.

“Ah! so this is it, is it?” she said. “You would like perfect liberty, I see! You make such very good use of it. You don’t like to hear remarks upon it. It is more convenient, in fact! You wish to be master in your own house? In your own house! But, in truth, what are you here to put on airs toward me? Scarcely more than a servant. A husband receiving wages from me!”

Serge, with flashing eyes, made a terrible movement. He tried to speak, but his lips trembled, and he could not utter a sound. By a sign he showed Madame Desvarennnes the door. The latter looked resolutely at the Prince, and with energy which nothing could henceforth soften, added:

“You will have to deal with me in future! Good-day!”

And, leaving the room with as much calmness as she felt rage when entering it, she went down to the counting-house.

Cayrol was sitting chatting with Marechal in his room. He was telling him that Herzog’s rashness caused him much anxiety. Marechal did not encourage his confidence. The secretary’s opinion on the want of morality on the part of the financier had strengthened. The good feeling he entertained toward the daughter had not counterbalanced the bad impression he had of the father, and he warmly advised Cayrol to break off all financial connection with such a man. Cayrol, indeed, had now very little to do with the European Credit. The office was still at his banking house, and the payments for shares were still made into his bank, but as soon as the new scheme which Herzog was preparing was launched, the financier intended settling in splendid offices which were being rapidly completed in the neighborhood of the Opera. Herzog might therefore commit all the follies which entered his head. Cayrol would be out of it.

Madame Desvarennnes entered. At the first glance, the men noticed the traces of the emotion she had just experienced. They rose and waited in silence. When the mistress was in a bad humor everybody gave way to her. It was the custom. She nodded to Cayrol, and walked up and down the office, absorbed in her own thoughts. Suddenly stopping, she said:

“Marechal, prepare Prince Panine’s account.”

The secretary looked up amazed, and did not seem to understand.

“Well! The Prince has had an overdraft; you will give me a statement; that’s all! I wish to see how we two stand.”

The two men, astonished to hear Madame Desvarennnes speak of her son-in-law as she would of a customer, exchanged looks.

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"You have lent my son-in-law money, Cayrol?"

And as the banker remained silent, still looking at the secretary, Madame added:

"Does the presence of Marechal make you hesitate in answering me? Speak before him; I have told you more than a hundred times that he knows my business as well as I do."

"I have, indeed, advanced some money to the Prince," replied Cayrol.

"How much?" inquired Madame Desvarennnes.

"I don't remember the exact amount. I was happy to oblige your son-in-law."

"You were wrong, and have acted unwisely in not acquainting me of the fact. It is thus that his follies have been encouraged by obliging friends. At all events, I ask you now not to lend him any more."

Cayrol seemed put out, and, with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders up, replied:

"This is a delicate matter which you ask of me. You will cause a quarrel between the Prince and myself—"

"Do you prefer quarreling with me?" asked the mistress.

"Zounds! No!" replied the banker. "But you place me in an embarrassing position! I have just promised to lend Serge a considerable sum to-night."

"Well! you will not give it to him."

"That is an act which he will scarcely forgive," sighed Cayrol.

Madame Desvarennnes placed her hand on the shoulder of the banker, and looking seriously at him, said:

"You would not have forgiven me if I had allowed you to render him this service."

A vague uneasiness filled Cayrol's heart, a shadow seemed to pass before his eyes, and in a troubled voice he said to the mistress:

"Why so?"

"Because he would have repaid you badly."

Cayrol thought the mistress was alluding to the money he had already lent, and his fears vanished. Madame Desvarennnes would surely repay it.

“So you are cutting off his resources?” he asked.

“Completely,” answered the mistress. “He takes too much liberty, that young gentleman. He was wrong to forget that I hold the purse-strings. I don’t mind paying, but I want a little deference shown me for my money. Good-by! Cayrol, remember my instructions.”

And, shaking hands with the banker, Madame Desvarennnes entered her own office, leaving the two men together.

There was a moment’s pause: Cayrol was the first to break the silence.

“What do you think of the Prince’s position?”

“His financial position?” asked Marechal.

“Oh, no! I know all about that! I mean his relation to Madame Desvarennnes.”

“Zounds! If we were in Venice in the days of the Aqua-Toffana, the sbirri and the bravi —”

“What rubbish!” interrupted Cayrol, shrugging his shoulders.

“Let me continue,” said the secretary, “and you can shrug your shoulders afterward if you like. If we had been in Venice, knowing Madame Desvarennnes as I do, it would not have been surprising to me to have had Master Serge found at the bottom of the canal some fine morning.”

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"You are not in earnest," muttered the banker.

"Much more so than you think. Only you know we live in the nineteenth century, and we cannot make Providence interpose in the form of a dagger or poison so easily as in former days. Arsenic and verdigris are sometimes used, but it does not answer. Scientific people have had the meanness to invent tests by which poison can be detected even when there is none."

"You are making fun of me," said Cayrol, laughing.

"I! No. Come, do you wish to do a good stroke of business? Find a man who will consent to rid Madame Desvarennnes of her son-in-law. If he succeed, ask Madame Desvarennnes for a million francs. I will pay it at only twenty-five francs' discount, if you like!"

Cayrol was thoughtful. Marechal continued:

"You have known the house a long time, how is it you don't understand the mistress better? I tell you, and remember this: between Madame Desvarennnes and the Prince there is a mortal hatred. One of the two will destroy the other. Which? Betting is open."

"But what must I do? The Prince relies on me—"

"Go and tell him not to do so any longer."

"Faith, no! I would rather he came to my office. I should be more at ease. Adieu, Marechal."

"Adieu, Monsieur Cayrol. But on whom will you bet?"

"Before I venture I should like to know on whose side the Princess is."

"Ah, dangler! You think too much of the women! Some day you will be let in through that failing of yours!"

Cayrol smiled conceitedly, and went away. Marechal sat down at his desk, and took out a sheet of paper.

"I must tell Pierre that everything is going on well here," he murmured. "If he knew what was taking place he would soon be back, and might be guilty of some foolery or other." So he commenced writing.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:



Because they moved, they thought they were progressing
Everywhere was feverish excitement, dissipation, and nullity
It was a relief when they rose from the table
Money troubles are not mortal
One amuses one's self at the risk of dying
Scarcely was one scheme launched when another idea occurred
Talk with me sometimes. You will not chatter trivialities
They had only one aim, one passion—to enjoy themselves
Without a care or a cross, he grew weary like a prisoner

SERGE PANINE

By GEORGES OHNET

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE UNIVERSAL CREDIT COMPANY

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The banking-house of Cayrol had not a very imposing appearance. It was a narrow two-storied building, the front blackened by time. There was a carriage gateway, on the right-hand side of which was the entrance to the offices. The stairs leading to the first floor were covered by a well-worn carpet. Here was a long corridor into which the different offices opened. On their glass doors might be read: "Payments of dividends." "Accounts." "Foreign correspondence." "General office." Cayrol's own room was quite at the end, and communicated with his private apartments. Everything breathed of simplicity and honesty. Cayrol had never tried to throw dust into people's eyes. He had started modestly when opening the bank; his business had increased, but his habits had remained the same. It was not a difficult matter to obtain an interview, even by people not known to him. They sent in their cards, and were admitted to his sanctum.

It was amid the coming and going of customers and clerks that Prince Panine came the following day to find Cayrol. For the first time Serge had put himself out for the banker. He was introduced with marks of the most profound respect. The great name of Desvarennnes seemed to cast a kind of halo round his head in the eyes of the clerks.

Cayrol, a little embarrassed, but still resolute, went toward him. Serge seemed nervous and somewhat abrupt in manner. He foresaw some difficulty.

"Well! my dear fellow," he said, without sitting down. "What are you up to? I have waited since yesterday for the money you promised me."

Cayrol scratched his ear, and felt taken aback by this plain speaking.

"The fact is—" stammered he.

"Have you forgotten your engagement?" asked Serge, frowning.

"No," replied Cayrol, speaking slowly, "but I met Madame Desvarennnes yesterday."

"And what had that to do with your intentions?"

"Zounds! It had everything to do with them. Your mother-in-law made a scene, and forbade my lending you any money. You must understand, my dear Prince, that my relations with Madame Desvarennnes are important. I hold a great deal of money of hers in my bank. She first gave me a start. I cannot, without appearing ungrateful, act contrary to her will. Place yourself in my position, and judge impartially of the terrible alternative between obliging you and displeasing my benefactress."

"Don't cry; it is useless," said Serge, with a scornful laugh. "I sympathize with your troubles. You side with the money-bags. It remains to be seen whether you will gain by it."



“My dear Prince, I swear to you that I am in despair,” cried Cayrol, annoyed at the turn the interview was taking. “Listen; be reasonable! I don’t know what you have done to your mother-in-law, but she seems much vexed with you. In your place I would rather make a few advances than remain hostile toward Madame Desvarennnes. That would mend matters, you see. Flies are not to be caught with vinegar.”

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Serge looked contemptuously at Cayrol, and put on his hat with supreme insolence.

“Pardon me, my dear fellow; as a banker you are excellent when you have any money to spare, but as a moralist you are highly ridiculous.”

And, turning on his heel, he quitted the office, leaving Cayrol quite abashed. He passed along the corridor switching his cane with suppressed rage. Madame Desvarennnes had, with one word, dried up the source from which he had been drawing most of the money which he had spent during the last three months. He had to pay a large sum that evening at the club, and he did not care to apply to the money-lenders of Paris.

He went down the stairs wondering how he would get out of this scrape! Go to Madame Desvarennnes and humble himself as Cayrol advised? Never! He regretted, for a moment, the follies which had led him into this difficulty. He ought to have been able to live on two hundred thousand francs a year! He had squandered money foolishly, and now the inexhaustible well from which he had drawn his treasure was closed by an invincible will.

He was crossing the gateway, when a well-known voice struck his ear, and he turned round. Herzog, smiling in his enigmatical manner, was before him. Serge bowed, and wanted to pass on, but the financier put his hand on his arm, saying:

“What a hurry you are in, Prince. I suppose your pocketbook is full of notes, and you are afraid of being plundered.”

And with his finger, Herzog touched the silver mounted pocketbook, the corner of which was peeping out of the Prince’s pocket. Panine could not control a gesture of vexation, which made the financier smile.

“Am I wrong?” asked Herzog. “Can our friend Cayrol have refused your request? By-the-bye, did you not quarrel with Madame Desvarennnes yesterday? Whoever was it told me that? Your mother-in-law spoke of cutting off all your credit, and from your downcast look I guess that fool Cayrol has obeyed the orders he has received.”

Serge, exasperated and stamping with rage, wanted to speak, but it was no easy matter interrupting Herzog. Besides, there was something in the latter’s look which annoyed Serge. His glance seemed to be fathoming the depths of Panine’s pockets, and the latter instinctively tightened his arms across his chest, so that Herzog might not see that his pocketbook was empty.

“What are you talking about?” asked Serge, at last, with a constrained smile.

“About things which must greatly interest you,” said Herzog, familiarly. “Come, be sincere. Cayrol has just refused you a sum of money. He’s a simpleton! How much do you want? Will a hundred thousand francs do just now?”

And writing a few words on a check, the financier handed it to Serge, adding:

“A man of your position should not be in any difficulty for such a paltry sum!”

“But, sir,” said Serge, astonished, and pushing away Herzog’s hand.

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"Accept it, and don't feel indebted to me. It is hardly worth while between you and me."

And taking Panine's arm Herzog walked on with him.

"Your carriage is there? all right, mine will follow. I want to talk to you. Your troubles cannot last. I will show you the means of extricating yourself and that without delay, my dear sir."

And without consulting Panine he seated himself beside him in the carriage.

"I told you once, if you remember," continued the financier, "that I might prove useful to you. You were haughty, and I did not insist; yet you see the day has come. Let me speak frankly with you. It is my usual manner, and there is some good in it."

"Speak," answered Serge, rather puzzled.

"You find yourself at this moment, vulgarly speaking, left in the lurch. Your wants are many and your resources few."

"At least—" protested Serge.

"Good! There you are refractory," said the financier, laughingly, "and I have not finished. The day after your marriage you formed your household on a lavish footing; you gave splendid receptions; you bought race-horses; in short, you went the pace like a great lord. Undoubtedly it costs a lot of money to keep up such an establishment. As you spent without counting the cost, you confounded the capital with the interest, so that at this moment you are three parts ruined. I don't think you would care to change your mode of living, and it is too late in the day to cut down expenses and exist on what remains? No. Well, to keep up your present style you need at least a million francs every year."

"You calculate like Cocker," remarked Serge, smiling with some constraint.

"That is my business," answered Herzog. "There are two ways by which you can obtain that million. The first is by making it up with your mother-in-law, and consenting, for money, to live under her dominion. I know her, she will agree to this."

"But," said Serge, "I refuse to submit."

"In that case you must get out of your difficulties alone."

"And how?" inquired the Prince, with astonishment.

Herzog looked at him seriously.



"By entering on the path which I am ready to open up to you," replied Herzog, "and in which I will guide you. By going in for business."

Serge returned Herzog's glance and tried to read his face, but found him impenetrable.

"To go into business one needs experience, and I have none."

"Mine will suffice," retorted the financier.

"Or money," continued the Prince, "and I have none, either."

"I don't ask money from you. I offer you some."

"What, then, do I bring into the concern?"

"The prestige of your name, and your relations with Madame Desvarennnes."

The Prince answered, haughtily:

"My relations are personal, and I doubt whether they will serve you. My mother-in-law is hostile, and will do nothing for me. As to my name, it does not belong to me, it belongs to those who bore it nobly before me."

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"Your relations will serve me," said Herzog. "I am satisfied. Your mother-in-law cannot get out of your being her daughter's husband, and for that you are worth your weight in gold. As to your name, it is just because it has been nobly borne that it is valuable. Thank your ancestors, therefore, and make the best of the only heritage they left you. Besides, if you care to examine things closely, your ancestors will not have reason to tremble in their graves. What did they do formerly? They imposed taxes on their vassals and extorted money from the vanquished. We financiers do the same. Our vanquished are the speculators; our vassals the shareholders. And what a superiority there is about our proceedings! There is no violence. We persuade; we fascinate; and the money flows into our coffers. What do I say? They beseech us to take it. We reign without contest. We are princes, too princes of finance. We have founded an aristocracy as proud and as powerful as the old one. Feudality of nobility no longer exists; it has given way to that of money."

Serge laughed. He saw what Herzog was driving at.

"Your great barons of finance are sometimes subject to executions," said he.

"Were not Chalais, Cinq-Mars, Biron, and Montmorency executed?" asked Herzog, with irony.

"That was on a scaffold," replied Panine.

"Well! the speculator's scaffold is the Bourse! But only small dabblers in money succumb; the great ones are safe from danger. They are supported in their undertakings by such powerful and numerous interests that they cannot fail without involving public credit; even governments are forced to come to their aid. One of these powerful and indestructible enterprises I have dreamed of grafting on to the European Credit Company, the Universal Credit Company. Its very name is a programme in itself. To stretch over the four quarters of the globe like an immense net, and draw into its meshes all financial speculators: such is its aim. Nobody will be able to withstand us. I am offering you great things, but I dream of still greater. I have ideas. You will see them developed, and will profit by them, if you join my fortunes. You are ambitious, Prince. I guessed it; but your ambition hitherto has been satisfied with small things—luxurious indulgences and triumphs of elegance! What are these worth to what I can give you? The sphere in which you move is narrow. I will make it immense. You will no longer reign over a small social circle, you will rule a world."

Serge, more affected than he cared to show, tried to banter.

"Are you repeating the prologue to Faust?" asked he. "Where is your magical compact? Must I sign it?"

“Not at all. Your consent is sufficient. Look into the business, study it at your leisure, and measure the results; and then if it suit you, you can sign a deed of partnership. Then in a few years you may possess a fortune surpassing all that you have dreamed of.”

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The financier remained silent. Serge was weighing the question. Herzog was happy; he had shown himself to all Paris in company with Madame Desvarennés's son-in-law. He had already realized one of his projects. The carriage was just passing down the Champs Elysees. The weather was lovely, and in the distance could be seen the trees of the Tuileries and the different monuments of the Place de la Concorde bathed in blue mist. Groups of horsemen were cantering along the side avenues. Long files of carriages were rolling rapidly by with well-dressed ladies. The capital displayed at that hour all the splendor of its luxury. It was Paris in all its strength and gayety.

Herzog stretched out his hand, and calling the Prince's attention to the sight, said:

"There's your empire!"

Then, looking at him earnestly, he asked:

"Is it agreed?"

Serge hesitated for a moment, and then bowed his head, saying:

"It is agreed."

Herzog pulled the check-string communicating with the coachman and alighted.

"Good-by," said he to Panine.

He slipped into his own carriage, which had followed closely behind, and drove off.

From that day, even Jeanne had a rival. The fever of speculation had seized on Serge; he had placed his little finger within the wheels and he must follow—body, name, and soul. The power which this new game exercised over him was incredible. It was quite different to the stupid games at the club, always the same. On the Bourse, everything was new, unexpected, sudden, and formidable. The intensity of the feelings were increased a hundredfold, owing to the importance of the sums risked.

It was really a splendid sight to see Herzog manipulating matters, maneuvering with a miraculous dexterity millions of francs. And then the field for operations was large. Politics, the interests of nations, were the mainsprings which impelled the play, and the game assumed diplomatic vastness and financial grandeur.

From his private office Herzog issued orders, and whether his ability was really extraordinary, or whether fortune exceptionally favored him, success was certain. Serge, from the first week, realized considerable sums. This brilliant success threw him in a state of great excitement. He believed everything that Herzog said to him as if it were gospel. He saw the world bending under the yoke which he was about to impose upon it. People working and toiling every day were doing so for him alone, and like one

of those kings who had conquered the world, he pictured all the treasures of the earth laid at his feet. From that time he lost the sense of right and wrong. He admitted the unlikely, and found the impossible quite natural. He was a docile tool in the hands of Herzog.

The rumor of this unforeseen change in Panine's circumstances soon reached Madame Desvarennés's ears. The mistress was frightened, and sent for Cayrol, begging him to remain a director of the European Credit, in order to watch the progress of the new affair. With her practical common sense, she foresaw disasters, and even regretted that Serge had not confined himself to cards and reckless living.

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Cayrol was most uneasy, and made a confidant of his wife, who, deeply troubled, told Panine the fears his friends entertained on his account. The Prince smiled disdainfully, saying these fears were the effect of plebeian timidity. The mistress understood nothing of great speculations, and Cayrol was a narrow-minded banker! He knew what he was doing. The results of his speculations were mathematical. So far they had not disappointed his hopes. The great Universal Credit Company, of which he was going to be a director, would bring him in such an immense fortune that he would be independent of Madame Desvarennnes.

Jeanne, terrified at this blind confidence, tried to persuade him. Serge took her in his arms, kissed her, and banished her fears.

Madame Desvarennnes had forbidden her people to tell Micheline anything of what was going on, as she wished her to remain in perfect ignorance. By a word, the mistress, if she could not have prevented the follies of which Serge was guilty, could, at least, have spared herself and her daughter. It would have only been necessary to reveal his behavior and betrayal to Micheline, and to provoke a separation. If the house of Desvarennnes were no longer security for Panine, his credit would fall. Disowned by his mother-in-law, and publicly given up by her, he would be of no use to Herzog, and would be promptly thrown over by him. The mistress did not wish her daughter to know the heartrending truth. She would not willingly cause her to shed tears, and therefore preferred risking ruin.

Micheline, too, tried to hide her troubles from her mother. She knew too well that Serge would have the worst of it if he got into her black books. With the incredible persistence of a loving heart, she hoped to win back Serge. Thus a terrible misunderstanding caused these two women to remain inactive and silent, when, by united efforts, they might, perhaps, have prevented dangers.

The great speculation was already being talked about. Herzog was boldly placing his foot on the summit whereon the five or six demigods, who ruled the stock market, were firmly placed. The audacious encroachments of this newcomer had vexed these formidable potentates, and already they had decided secretly his downfall because he would not let them share in his profits.

One morning, the Parisians, on awakening, found the walls placarded with notices advertising the issue of shares in the Universal Credit Company, and announcing the names of the directors, among which appeared that of the Prince. Some were members of the Legion d'Honneur; others recent members of the Cabinet Council, and Prefets retired into private life. A list of names to dazzle the public, but all having a weak point.

This created a great sensation in the business world. Madame Desvarennnes's son-in-law was on the board. It was a good speculation, then? People consulted the mistress,

who found herself somewhat in a dilemma; either she must disown her son-in-law, or speak well of the affair. Still she did not hesitate, for she was loyal and honest above all things. She declared the speculation was a poor one, and did all she could to prevent any of her friends becoming shareholders.

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The issue of shares was disastrous. The great banks remained hostile, and capitalists were mistrustful. Herzog landed a few million francs. Doorkeepers and cooks brought him their savings. He covered expenses. But it was no use advertising and puffing in the newspapers, as a word had gone forth which paralyzed the speculation. Ugly rumors were afloat. Herzog's German origin was made use of by the bankers, who whispered that the aim of the Universal Credit Company was exclusively political. It was to establish branch banks in every part of the world to further the interests of German industry. Further, at a given moment, Germany might have need of a loan in case of war, and the Universal Credit Company would be there to supply the necessary aid to the great military nation.

Herzog was not a man to be put down without resisting, and he made supreme efforts to float his undertaking. He caused a number of unissued shares to be sold on 'Change, and had them bought up by his own men, thus creating a fictitious interest in the company. In a few days the shares rose and were at a premium, simply through the jobbery to which Herzog lent himself.

Panine was little disposed to seek for explanations, and, besides, had such unbounded faith in his partner that he suspected nothing. He remained in perfect tranquillity. He had increased his expenditure, and his household was on a royal footing. Micheline's sweetness emboldened him; he no longer took the trouble of dissimulating, and treated his young wife with perfect indifference.

Jeanne and Serge met every day at the little house in the Avenue Maillot. Cayrol was too much engaged with the new anxieties which Herzog caused him, to look after his wife, and left her quite free to amuse herself. Besides, he had not the least suspicion. Jeanne, like all guilty women, overwhelmed him with kind attentions, which the good man mistook for proofs of love. The fatal passion was growing daily stronger in the young woman's heart, and she would have found it impossible to have given up her dishonorable happiness with Panine. She felt herself capable of doing anything to preserve her lover.

Jeanne had already said, "Oh! if we were but free!" And they formed projects. They would go away to Lake Lugano, and, in a villa hidden by trees and shrubs, would enjoy the pleasures of being indissolubly united. The woman was more eager than the man in giving way to these visions of happiness. She sometimes said, "What hinders us now? Let us go." But Serge, prudent and discreet, even in the most affectionate moments, led Jeanne to take a more sensible view. What was the use of a scandal? Did they not belong to each other?

Then the young woman reproached him for not loving her as much as she loved him. She was tired of dissimulating; her husband was an object of horror to her, and she had to tell him untruths and submit to his caresses which were revolting to her. Serge calmed her with a kiss, and bade her wait awhile.

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Pierre, rendered anxious on hearing that Serge had joined Herzog in his dangerous financial speculations, had left his mines and had just arrived. The letters which Micheline addressed to the friend of her youth, her enforced confidant in trouble, were calm and resigned. Full of pride, she had carefully hidden from Pierre the cause of her troubles. He was the last person by whom she would like to be pitied, and her letters had represented Serge as repentant and full of good feeling. Marechal, for similar reasons, had kept his friend in the dark. He feared Pierre's interference, and he wished to spare Madame Desvarennnes the grief of seeing her adopted son quarreling with her son-in-law.

But the placards announcing the establishment of the Universal Credit Company made their way into the provinces, and one morning Pierre found some stuck on the walls of his establishment. Seeing the name of Panine, and not that of Cayrol, Pierre shuddered. The unpleasant ideas which he experienced formerly when Herzog was introduced to the Desvarennnes recurred to his mind. He wrote to the mistress to ask what was going on, and not receiving an answer, he started off without hesitation for Paris.

He found Madame Desvarennnes in a terrible state of excitement. The shares had just fallen a hundred and twenty francs. A panic had ensued. The affair was considered as absolutely lost, and the shareholders were aggravating matters by wanting to sell out at once.

Savinien was just coming away from the mistress's room. He wanted to see the downfall of the Prince, whom he had always hated, looking upon him as a usurper of his own rights upon the fortune of the Desvarennnes. He began lamenting to his aunt, when she turned upon him with unusual harshness, and he felt bound as he said, laughing, to leave the "funereal mansion."

Cayrol, as much interested in the affairs of the Prince as if they were his own, went backward and forward between the Rue Saint-Dominique and the Rue Taitbout, pale and troubled, but without losing his head. He had already saved the European Credit Company by separating it six weeks before from the Universal Credit Company, notwithstanding Madame Desvarennnes's supplications to keep them together, in the hope that the one would save the other. But Cayrol, practical, clear, and implacable, had refused, for the first time, to obey Madame Desvarennnes. He acted with the resolution of a captain of a vessel, who throws overboard a portion of the cargo to save the ship, the crew, and the rest of the merchandise. He did well, and the European Credit was safe. The shares had fallen a little, but a favorable reaction was already showing itself. The name of Cayrol, and his presence at the head of affairs, had reassured the public, and the shareholders gathered round him, passing a vote of confidence.

The banker, devoted to his task, next sought to save Panine, who was at that very moment robbing him of his honor and happiness in the house of the Avenue Maillot.

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Pierre, Cayrol, and Madame Desvarennnes met in Marechal's private office. Pierre declared that it was imperative to take strong measures and to speak to the Prince. It was the duty of the mistress to enlighten Panine, who was no doubt Herzog's dupe.

Madame Desvarennnes shook her head sadly. She feared that Serge was not a dupe but an accomplice. And what could she tell him? Let him ruin himself! He would not believe her. She knew how he received her advice and bore her remonstrances.

An explanation between her and Serge was impossible, and her interference would only hurry him into the abyss.

"Well, then, I will speak to him," said Pierre, resolutely.

"No," said Madame Desvarennnes, "not you! Only one here can tell him efficaciously what he must hear, and that is Cayrol. Let us above all things keep guard over our words and our behavior. On no account must Micheline suspect anything."

Thus, at the most solemn moments, when fortune and honor, perhaps, were compromised, the mother thought of her daughter's welfare and happiness.

Cayrol went up to the Prince's rooms. He had just come in, and was opening his letters, while having a cigarette in the smoking-room. A door, covered by curtains, led to a back stair which opened into the courtyard. Cayrol had gone up that way, feeling sure that by so doing he would not meet Micheline.

On seeing Jeanne's husband, Serge rose quickly. He feared that Cayrol had discovered everything, and instinctively stepped backward. The banker's manner soon undeceived him. He was serious, but not in a rage. He had evidently come on business.

"Well, my dear Cayrol," said the Prince, gayly, "what good fortune has brought you here?"

"If it is fortune, it is certainly not good fortune," answered the banker, gravely. "I wish to have some talk with you, and I shall be grateful if you will listen patiently."

"Oh! oh!" said Serge. "How serious you are. You have some heavy payments on hand, and want a little help, eh? I will speak to Herzog."

Cayrol looked at the Prince in amazement. So he did not suspect anything? Such carelessness and negligence frightened him. The banker resolved to proceed clearly, and without beating about the bush; to do away with such blind confidence a thunderbolt was necessary.

"I have not come about my business, but yours," returned Cayrol. "The Universal Credit Company is on the eve of disaster; there is still time for you to withdraw safely and soundly from the sinking wreck. I bring you the means."

Serge laughed.

"Thank you, Cayrol; you are very kind, my friend. I know your intentions are good, but I don't believe a word you are saying. You have come from Madame Desvarennnes. You are both agreed that I shall give up the Universal Credit, but I will not yield to any pressure. I know what I am doing. Be easy."

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And quietly lighting another cigarette, he gracefully puffed the smoke toward the ceiling. Cayrol did not trouble to argue, but took a newspaper from his pocket and handed it to Panine, simply saying, "Read!"

It was an article in a reliable financial paper prophesying the failure of the Universal Credit Company, and basing its statements on irrefutable calculations. Serge took the paper and looked over it. He turned pale and crushed it in his hand.

"What infamy!" cried he. "I know our adversaries are enraged. Yes, they know that our new company is destined to crush them in the future, and they are doing all they can to run us aground. Jealousy! Envy! There is no other foundation for these rumors, and they are unworthy a serious man's attention."

"There is neither envy nor jealousy. All is true," said Cayrol. "You will admit that I am your sincere friend? Well, I swear to you that the situation is terrible, and you must resign your directorship of the Universal Credit without loss of time. There's not a moment to lose. Sit down and write your resignation."

"Do you think I am a child to be led by the nose like that?" asked the Prince, in a passion. "If you are sincere, Cayrol, as I wish to believe, I also think you are a fool. You don't understand! As to drawing out of the company, never! I have a lot of money invested in it."

"Well, lose your money, Madame Desvarennnes will pay you back. At least you can save your name."

"Ah, I see you are conniving with her!" exclaimed the Prince, loudly. "Don't tell me another word, I don't believe you. I shall go straight to the office, and I will speak to Herzog. We will take measures to prosecute the papers for libel if they dare to publish these untruths."

Cayrol saw that nothing would convince Panine. He hoped that an interview with Herzog would enlighten him. He left the matter to chance, as reasoning was of no avail, and went down to the mistress.

Serge drove to the Universal Credit Company. It was the first day in the new offices. Herzog had furnished them splendidly, thinking that this would give the shareholders a high opinion of the undertaking. How could they have any doubts when they saw such splendid furniture and large offices? How could they refuse to place their money in the hands of speculators that could cover their floors with such soft carpets? The porters, with their dark blue and red cloth liveries, and buttons with the company's monogram on them, answered inquiries with haughty condescension. Everything foretold success. It was in the air. You could hear the cashier shovelling heaps of gold. The people who

had placed the Universal Credit Company on such a footing were either very powerful or very impudent.

Serge walked in, as he would have done at home, with his hat on, amid a number of small shareholders, who had come full of anxiety after reading the accounts in the newspapers, and who felt full of confidence after seeing the splendor of the place. Panine reached Herzog's office, but when about to open the door, loud voices struck his ear. The financier was arguing with a director, and Panine listened.

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"The speculation is safe and sure," Herzog was saying. "The shares are low, I know, because I have ceased to keep them up. I have given orders in London, Vienna, and Berlin, and we are buying up all shares that are offered in the market. I shall then run the shares up again, and we shall realize an enormous sum. It is most simple."

"But it is shady," said the other voice.

"Why? I defend myself as I am attacked. The great banks seek to deteriorate my stock. I buy in, and take it out of my adversaries. Is it not just and lawful?"

Panine breathed freely and felt reassured. The depreciation was caused by Herzog; he had just said so. There was nothing to fear then. It was just a trick of Herzog's, and the company would come out brighter than ever.

Serge went in.

"Oh! here's Prince Panine," said Herzog. "Ask him what he thinks of the matter. I defer to his judgment."

"I don't want to know anything," said Serge. "I have full confidence in you, my dear manager, and our business will prosper in your hands, I am sure. Besides, I know the manoeuvres of our opponents, and I think every financial means justifiable to answer them."

"Ah! What did I say to you a few minutes ago?" cried Herzog, addressing his questioner in a tone of triumph. "Let me act and you will see. Besides, I don't want to keep you against your will," he added, harshly. "You are at liberty to withdraw from us if you like."

The other protested that what he had said was for the best interests of all concerned. He did not dream of leaving the company; on the contrary, they might rely on him. He appreciated the experience and ability of Herzog too well to separate his fortune from his friend's. And, shaking hands with the financier, he took his leave.

"Come! What is all this clamor in the newspapers?" asked Serge, when he found himself alone with Herzog. "Do you know that the articles published are very perfidious?"

"All the more perfidious because they are founded on truth," said the financier, coldly.

"What do you mean?" cried Serge, in alarm.

"The truth. Do you think I am to tell you lies as I did to that idiot who has just gone out? The Universal Credit has at this moment a screw loose. But patience! I have an idea, and in a fortnight the shares will have doubled in value. I have a splendid scheme in hand which will kill the gas companies. It is a plan for lighting by magnesium. Its effect

will be startling. I shall publish sensational articles describing the invention in the London and Brussels papers. Gas shares will fall very low. I shall buy up all I can, and when I am master of the situation, I shall announce that the threatened gas companies are buying up the invention. Shares will rise again, and I shall realize a goodly sum, which will be for the benefit of the Universal Credit."

"But for such a formidable speculation foreign agents will require security?"

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"I will offer it to them. I have here ten million francs' worth of shares in the European Credit belonging to Cayrol. We will give the cashier a joint receipt for them. The speculation will last three days. It is safe, and when the result is achieved we will replace the shares, and take back the receipt."

"But," asked Serge, "is this plan of taking the shares which don't belong to us legal?"

"It is a transfer," said Herzog, with simplicity. "Besides, don't forget that we have to do with Cayrol, that is to say with a partner."

"Suppose we tell him of it," insisted the Prince.

"No! The deuce! We should have to explain everything to him. He knows what's what, and would find the idea too good, and want a share of the spoil. No! Sign that, and don't be alarmed. The sheep will be back in the fold before the shepherd comes to count them."

A dark presentiment crossed Serge's mind, and he was afraid. At that moment, when his fate was being decided, he hesitated to go deeper into the rut where he had already been walking too long. He stood silent and undecided. Confused thoughts crowded his brain; his temples throbbed, and a buzzing noise sounded in his ears. But the thought of giving up his liberty, and again subjecting himself to Madame Desvarennés's protection was like the lash of a whip, and he blushed for having hesitated.

Herzog looked at him, and, smiling in a constrained way, said:

"You, too, may give up the affair if you like. If I share it with you it is because you are so closely allied to me. I don't so very much care to cut the pear in two. Don't think that I am begging of you to be my partner! Do as you like."

Serge caught hold of the paper and, having signed it, handed it to the financier.

"All right," said Herzog. "I shall leave to-night and be absent three days. Watch the money market. You will see the results of my calculations."

And shaking hands with the Prince, Herzog went to the cashier to get the scrip and deposit the receipt.

CHAPTER XIX

SIN GROWS BOLDER

There was a party at Cayrol's. In the drawing-rooms of the mansion in the Rue Taitbout everything was resplendent with lights, and there was quite a profusion of flowers.

Cayrol had thought of postponing the party, but was afraid of rousing anxieties, and like an actor who, though he has just lost his father, must play the following day, so Cayrol gave his party and showed a smiling face, so as to prevent harm to his business.

Matters had taken a turn for the worse during the last three days. The bold stroke, to carry out which Herzog had gone to London so as to be more secret, had been got wind of. The fall of the shares had not taken place. Working with considerable sums of money, the loss on the difference was as great as the gains would have been. The shares belonging to the European Credit Company had defrayed the cost of the game. It was a disaster. Cayrol, in his anxiety, had applied for the scrip and had only found the receipt given to the cashier. Although the transaction was most irregular, Cayrol had not said anything; but, utterly cast down, had gone to Madame Desvarennés to tell her of the fact.



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The Prince was in bed, pretending to be ill. His wife, happily ignorant of all that was going on, rejoiced secretly at his indisposition because she was allowed to nurse him and have him all to herself. Panine, alarmed at the check they had experienced, was expecting Herzog with feverish impatience, and to keep out of sight had chosen the privacy of his own room.

Still, Cayrol had been allowed to see him, and with great circumspection told him that his non-appearance at the same time that Herzog was absent was most fatal for the Universal Credit Company. It was absolutely necessary that he should be seen in public. He must come to his party, and appear with a calm face. Serge promised to come, and had imposed on Micheline the heavy task of accompanying him to Jeanne's. It was the first time since her return from Nice that she had entered the house of her husband's mistress.

The concert was over, and a crowd of guests were coming from the large drawing-room to the boudoir and little drawing-room.

"The symphony is over. Ouf!" said Savinien, yawning.

"You don't like music?" asked Marechal, with a laugh.

"Yes, military music. But two hours of Schumann and Mendelssohn at high pressure is too much for one man. But I say, Marechal, what do you think of Mademoiselle Herzog's being at Cayrol's soiree. It is a little too strong."

"How so?"

"Why, the father has bolted, and the daughter is preparing a dance. Each has a different way of using their feet."

"Very pretty, Monsieur Desvarennnes, but I advise you to keep your flashes of wit to yourself," said Marechal, seriously. "That may not suit everybody."

"Oh, Marechal, you, too, making a fuss!"

And turning on his heel, he went to the refreshment table.

Prince and Princess Panine were just coming in. Micheline was smiling, and Serge was pale, though calm. Cayrol and Jeanne came toward them. Everybody turned to look at them. Jeanne, without embarrassment, shook hands with her friend. Cayrol bowed respectfully to Micheline.

"Princess," he said, "will you honor me by taking my arm? You are just in time, they are going to begin dancing."



"Not myself, though, thank you," replied Micheline, with a sad smile, "I am still very weak, but I will look on."

And on Cayrol's arm she entered the large drawing-room. Serge followed with Jeanne.

The festivities were at their height. The orchestra was playing a waltz, and in a whirl of silk and gauze the young people seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Suzanne Herzog was sitting alone near a window, in a simple white dress, and without a single ornament. Marechal had just approached her, and she had welcomed him with a smile.

"Are you not dancing to-night, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

"I am waiting to be invited," she answered, sadly, "and, like sister Anne, I see nobody coming. There are ugly reports abroad about my father's fortune, and the Argonauts are drawing off."

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"Will you give me a dance?" said Marechal. "I don't dance to perfection, never having practised much, but with a good will."

"Thank you, Monsieur Marechal, I would rather talk. I am not very cheerful to-night, and, believe me, I only came because Madame Desvarennnes wished it. I would rather have remained at home. Business has gone wrong with my father by what I can hear, for I don't know what goes on at the office. I feel more inclined to cry than to laugh. Not that I regret the loss of money, you know; I don't care for it, but my father must be in despair."

Marechal listened silently to Suzanne, not daring to tell her what he thought of Herzog, and respected the real ignorance or willing blindness of the young girl who did not doubt her father's loyalty.

The Princess, leaning on Cayrol's arm, had just finished promenading round the rooms, when she perceived Suzanne and, leaving the banker, came and seated herself beside her. Many of the guests looked at each other and whispered words which Micheline did not hear, and if she had heard would not have understood. "It is heroic!" some said. Others answered, "It is the height of impudence."

The Princess was talking with Suzanne and was looking at her husband who, leaning against a door, was following Jeanne with his eyes.

At a sign from Cayrol, Marechal left the room. The secretary joined Madame Desvarennnes, who had come with Pierre and had remained in Cayrol's private office. During this party matters of moment were to be discussed, and a consultation was about to take place between the interested parties. On seeing Marechal enter, Madame only uttered one word:

"Cayrol?"

"Here he is," answered the secretary.

Cayrol came in, hurriedly.

"Well," he asked, with great anxiety, "have you any news?"

"Pierre has just come from London," answered the mistress. "What we feared is true. Herzog, conjointly with my son-in-law, has made use of the ten millions belonging to the European Credit."

"Do you think that Herzog has really bolted?" inquired Marechal.

“No! he is too deep for that,” replied Cayrol. “He will return. He knows that in compromising the Prince it is as if he had compromised the firm of Desvarennnes, therefore he is quite easy on the matter.”

“Can the one be saved without the other?” asked the mistress.

“It is impossible. Herzog has so firmly bound up his interests with those of the Prince that it will be necessary to extricate both or let both perish together.”

“Well, we must save Herzog into the bargain, then!” said Madame Desvarennnes, coldly. “But by what means?”

“These,” answered Cayrol. “The shares taken away by Herzog, under the security of the Prince’s signature, were deposited by the shareholders. When the Universal Credit removed to its new offices, these shares were taken away by mistake. It will suffice to replace the scrip. I will give back the receipt to the Prince and all trace of this deplorable affair will be wiped out.”

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"But the numbers of the shares will not be the same," said Madame Desvarennnes, accustomed to minute regularity in all operations.

"We can explain the change by feigning a sale when they were high, and buying them up when low. We will show a profit, and the shareholders will not quarrel. Besides, I reserve the right of divulging Herzog's fraud without implicating Panine, if the shareholders insist. Trust me, I will catch Herzog another time. It is my stupid confidence in that man which has been partly the cause of this disaster. I will make your business mine and force him to shell out. I shall leave for London to-night, by the 1.50 train. Promptness of action in such a case is the first step toward success."

"Thank you, Cayrol," said the mistress. "Have my daughter and the Prince arrived?"

"Yes, Serge is calm; he has more power over himself than I could have believed."

"What does it matter to him what is going on? Is it he who will feel the blow? No. He knows that I shall go on working to keep him in idleness and maintain him in luxury. I may think myself lucky if he is reclaimed by this hard lesson, and does not again begin to rummage in other people's safes, for then I should be unable to save him."

The mistress rose and, with flashing eyes, walked up and down the room.

"Oh, the wretch!" she said. "If ever my daughter ceases to come between him and me!"

A terrible gesture finished the sentence.

Cayrol, Marechal, and Pierre looked at each other. The same thought came to their minds, dark and fearful. In a paroxysm of rage this fond mother, this energetic and passionate woman, would be capable of killing any one.

"You remember what I told you one day," murmured Marechal, approaching Cayrol.

"I would prefer the hatred of ten men to that of such a woman," answered Cayrol.

"Cayrol!" continued Madame Desvarennnes, after a few moments of meditation, "the conduct of the business of which you spoke to us a little while ago depends solely on you, does it not?"

"On me alone."

"Do it at once, then, cost me what it may. Has it been noised abroad?"

"No one has the slightest suspicion. I have not mentioned it to a living soul," said the banker—"except to my wife," added he with a frankness which drew a smile from Pierre. "But my wife and I are one."

“What did she say?” asked Madame Desvarenes, looking straight at Cayrol.

“If I had been the person concerned,” he said, “she could not possibly have been more affected. She loves you so much, Madame, you and those belonging to you. She besought me to do all in my power to get the Prince out of this scrape. She had tears in her eyes: And, truly, if I did not feel bound to serve you from gratitude I would do it for her sake and to give her pleasure. I was touched, I can assure you. Really, she has a heart!”

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Marechal exchanged a look with Madame Desvarennnes, who advanced toward the banker, and shook him by the hand, saying:

“Cayrol, you are truly a good man!”

“I know it,” said Cayrol, smiling to hide his emotion, “and you may rely upon me.”

Micheline appeared on the threshold of the room. Through the half-open door the dancers could be seen passing to and fro, and the sound of music floated in the air.

“What has become of you, mamma? I hear that you have been here for more than an hour.”

“I was talking on business matters with these gentlemen,” answered Madame Desvarennnes, smoothing from her brow the traces of her cares by an effort of will. “But you, dear, how do you feel? Are you not tired?”

“Not more so than usual,” replied Micheline, looking round to follow the movements of her husband, who was trying to reach Jeanne.

“Why did you come to this party? It was unwise.”

“Serge wished me to come, and I did not care to let him come without me.”

“Eh! dear me!” exclaimed Madame Desvarennnes. “Let him do what he likes. Men are savages. When you are ill it won’t hurt him.”

“I am not ill, and I won’t be,” resumed Micheline, warmly. “We are going away now.”

She motioned to Serge with her fan. Panine came to her.

“You will take me home, won’t you, Serge?”

“Certainly, dear one,” answered Serge.

Jeanne, who was listening at a distance, raised her hand to her forehead as a sign that she wanted him. A feeling of surprise came over the Prince, and he did not understand what she meant. Micheline had seen the sign. A deadly pallor spread over her features, and a cold perspiration broke out on her forehead. She felt so ill that she could have cried out. It was the first time she had seen Serge and Jeanne together since the dreadful discovery at Nice. She had avoided witnessing their meeting, feeling uncertain of herself, and fearing to lose her self-control. But seeing the two lovers before her, devouring each other with their looks, and making signs to each other, made her feel most terribly jealous and angry.

Serge had decided to obey the imperious signs which Jeanne made to him, and turning toward his wife, said:

"I remember now, my dear, that before going home I must call at the club. I promised, and cannot put it off. Excuse my not going with you, and ask your mother to accompany you."

"Very well," said Micheline, in a trembling voice. "I will ask her. You are not going just yet?"

"In a moment."

"I, too, shall leave in a moment."

The young wife did not want to lose one detail of the horrible comedy being played under her very eyes. She remained to learn, unawares, the reason for which Jeanne kept her husband.

Not thinking that he was watched, Serge had gone across to Jeanne, and affecting a smile, inquired:

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"What is the matter?"

"Serious news." And she explained that she must speak to her lover that evening.

"Where?" Serge asked, with astonishment.

"Here," answered Jeanne.

"But your husband?" the Prince said.

"Is leaving in an hour. Our guests will not remain late. Go to the garden, and wait in the pavilion. The door of the back stairs leading to my dressing-room will be open. When everybody has gone, come up."

"Take care; we are observed," said Serge, uneasily.

And they began to laugh with affectation and talked aloud about frivolous things, as if nothing serious were occupying their thoughts. Cayrol had come back again. He went up to Madame Desvarennnes, who was talking with her daughter, and, full of business, thoughtlessly said:

"I will telegraph you as soon as I reach London."

"Are you going away?" inquired Micheline, a light dawning on her mind.

"Yes," said Cayrol; "I have an important matter to settle."

"And when do you start?" continued Micheline, in such a changed voice that her mother was frightened.

"In a moment," answered the banker. "Allow me to leave you. I have several orders to give."

And leaving the boudoir, he regained the little drawing-room.

Micheline, with clinched hands and fixed gaze, was saying to herself:

"She will be alone to-night, and has asked him to come to her. He told me an untruth about his having to go to the club. He is going to see her!"

And passing her hand across her brow, as if to drive away an unpleasant thought, the young wife remained silent, dismayed and crushed.

"Micheline, what is the matter with you?" asked Madame Desvarennnes, seizing her daughter's hand, which was icy cold.



"Nothing," stammered Micheline.

"You are ill, I see. Come, let us go home. Come and kiss Jeanne—"

"I!" cried Micheline, with horror, instinctively recoiling as if dreading some impure contact.

Madame Desvarennnes became suddenly cold and calm. She foresaw a terrible revelation, and observing her daughter narrowly, said:

"Why do you cry out when I speak of your kissing Jeanne? Whatever is the matter?"

Micheline grasped her mother's arm, and pointed to Serge and Jeanne, who were in the little drawing-room, laughing and talking, surrounded by a group of people, yet alone.

"Look at them!" she cried.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the mother in agony. She read the truth in her daughter's eyes.

"You know—" she began.

"That he is her lover," cried Micheline, interrupting her. "Don't you see that I am dying through it?" she added, sobbing bitterly and falling into her mother's arms.

The mistress carried her as if she had been a child into Cayrol's private office, and shut the door. Then, kneeling beside the couch on which Micheline was stretched, she gave vent to her grief. She begged her daughter to speak to her, and warmed her hands with kisses; then, seeing her still cold and motionless, she was frightened, and wanted to call for help.

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"No; be quiet!" murmured Micheline, recovering. "Let no one know. I ought to have held my peace; but I have suffered so much I could not help myself.

"My life is blasted, you see. Take me away; save me from this infamy! Jeanne, my sister, and Serge. Oh! make me forget it! For pity's sake, mamma, you who are so strong, you who have always done what you wished, take from my heart all the pain that is there!"

Madame Desvarennnes, overcome by such a load of grief, lost command of herself, and, quite brokenhearted, began to cry and moan.

"O God! Micheline, my poor child! you were suffering so and did not tell me. Oh! I knew you no longer trusted your old mother. And I stupidly did not guess it! I said to myself, at least she knows nothing about it, and sacrificed everything to keep the knowledge of their wrong-doing from you. Don't cry any more, darling, you will break my heart. I, who would have given up everything in the world to see you happy! Oh, I have loved you too much! How I am punished!"

"It is I who am punished," said Micheline, sobbing, "for not obeying you. Ah! children ought always to heed their mother. She divines the danger. Is it not too horrible, mamma? I, who have sacrificed everything for him, to think that he does not love me, and never will love me! What will my life be without confidence, hope, or affection? I am too unhappy. It would be better to die!"

"Die! you!" cried her mother, whose eyes, wet with tears, dried in a moment, as if by an inward fire. "Die! Come, don't talk such nonsense! Because a man treats you with scorn and betrays you? Are men worth dying for? No, you shall live, my darling, with your old mother. You shall have a deed of separation from your husband."

"And he will be free," exclaimed Micheline, angrily. "He will go on loving her! Oh! I cannot bear that thought. Do you know, what I am going to tell you seems awful. I love him so much, that I would rather see him dead than unfaithful."

Madame Desvarennnes was struck, and remained silent. Serge dead! That idea had already occurred to her as a dream of deliverance. It came upon her peremptorily, violently, irresistibly. She repelled it with an effort.

"I can never think of him but as vile and odious," continued Micheline. "Every day his sin will seem more dastardly and his hypocrisy more base. There, a little while ago, he was smiling; and do you know why? Because Cayrol is going away, and during his absence Serge will return here tonight."

"Who told you?"

“I read it in his joyful looks. I love him. He cannot hide anything from me. A traitor to me, and a traitor toward his friend, that is the man whom—I am ashamed to own it—I love!”

“Compose yourself! Someone is coming,” said Madame Desvarennnes, and at the same time the door opened and Jeanne appeared, followed by Marechal, who was anxious at their disappearance.

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"Is Micheline ill?" inquired Madame Cayrol, coming forward.

"No; it is nothing. Just a little fatigue," said Madame Desvarennnes. "Marechal, give my daughter your arm, and take her to her carriage. I shall be down in a minute."

And holding Jeanne by the hand to prevent her following Micheline, she added:

"Stay; I have something to say to you."

Jeanne looked surprised. Madame Desvarennnes was silent for a moment. She was thinking about Serge coming there that night. She had only to say one word to Cayrol to prevent his going away. The life of this wretch was entirely in her hands then! But Jeanne! Was she going to ruin her? Had she the right thus to destroy one who had struggled and had defended herself? Would it be just? Jeanne had been led on against her will. She must question her. If the poor girl were suffering, if she repented, she must spare her.

Madame Desvarennnes, having thus made up her mind, turned toward Jeanne who was waiting.

"It is a long time since I have seen you, my dear, and I find you happy and smiling. It is the first time since your marriage that you have seemed so happy."

Jeanne looked at the mistress without answering. In these words she detected irony.

"You have found peace," continued Madame Desvarennnes, looking steadfastly at Jeanne with her piercing eyes. "You see, my dear, when you have a clear conscience—for you have nothing to reproach yourself with?"

Jeanne saw in this sentence a question and not an affirmation. She answered, boldly:

"Nothing!"

"You know that I love you, and would be most lenient," continued Madame Desvarennnes, sweetly, "and that you might safely confide in me!"

"I have nothing to fear, having nothing to tell," said Jeanne.

"Nothing?" repeated the mistress, with emphasis.

"Nothing," affirmed Jeanne.

Madame Desvarennnes once more looked at her adopted daughter as if she would read her very soul. She found her quite calm.



"Very well, then!" said she, hastily walking toward the door.

"Are you going already?" asked Jeanne, offering her brow to Madame Desvarennés's lips.

"Yes, good-by!" said the latter, with an icy kiss.

Jeanne, without again turning round, went into the drawing-room. At the same moment, Cayrol, in a travelling-coat, entered the office, followed by Pierre.

"Here I am, quite ready," said the banker to Madame Desvarennés. "Have you any new suggestion to make to me, or anything else to say?"

"Yes," replied Madame Desvarennés, in a stern voice which made Cayrol start.

"Then make haste. I have only a moment to spare, and you know the train waits for no one."

"You will not go!"

Cayrol, in amazement, answered:

"Do you mean it? Your interests are at stake yonder."

"Your honor is in danger here," cried the mistress, vehemently.

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"My honor!" repeated Cayrol, starting back. "Madame, do you know what you are saying?"

"Ay!" answered Madame Desvarennnes. "And do you remember what I promised you? I undertook to warn you, myself, if ever the day came when you would be threatened."

"Well?" questioned Cayrol, turning quite livid.

"Well! I keep my promise. If you wish to know who your rival is, come home to-night."

Some inaudible words rattled in Cayrol's throat.

"A rival! in my house! Can Jeanne be guilty? Do you know, if it is true I will kill them both!"

"Deal with them as your conscience dictates," said Madame Desvarennnes. "I have acted according to mine."

Pierre, hitherto dumb with horror at the scene of which he had been a witness, shook off his stupor, and going up to Madame Desvarennnes, said:

"Madame, do you know that what you have just done is frightful!"

"How? That man will be acting within his rights the same as I am. They are seeking to take away his wife, and they are killing my daughter, and dishonoring me! We are defending ourselves! Woe to those who are guilty of the crime!"

Cayrol had fallen, as if thunderstruck, on a chair, with haggard eyes; his voice was gone, and he looked the image of despair. Madame Desvarennnes's words came back to him like the refrain of a hated song. To himself he kept repeating, without being able to chase away the one haunting thought: "Her lover, to-night, at your house!" He felt as if he were going mad. He was afraid he should not have time to wreak his vengeance. He made a terrible effort, and, moaning with grief, he arose.

"Take care!" said Pierre. "Here's your wife."

Cayrol eyed Jeanne, who was approaching. Burning tears came to his eyes. He murmured:

"She, with a look so pure, and a face so calm! Is it possible?"

He nodded a farewell to Pierre and Madame Desvarennnes, who were leaving, and recovering himself, advanced to meet Jeanne.

"Are you off?" she inquired. "You know you have no time to lose!"

Cayrol shuddered. She seemed anxious to get rid of him.

"I have still a few minutes to spend with you," he said, with emotion. "You see, Jeanne, I am sad at going away alone. It is the first time I have left you. In a moment our guests will be gone—I beg of you, come with me!"

Jeanne smiled. "But you see, dear, I am in evening dress."

"The night of our marriage I brought you away from Cernay like that. Wrap yourself up in your furs, and come! Give me this proof of affection. I deserve it. I am not a bad man—and I love you so!"

Jeanne frowned. This pressing vexed her.

"This is childish," she said. "You will return the day after tomorrow, and I am tired. Have some pity for me."

"You refuse?" asked Cayrol, becoming gloomy and serious.

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Jeanne touched his face slightly with her white hand.

“Come! Don’t leave me in a temper! You won’t miss me much, you will sleep all the way. Good-by!”

Cayrol kissed her; in a choking voice, he said:

“Good-by!”

And he left her.

Jeanne’s face brightened, as she stood listening for a moment and heard the carriage which contained her husband rolling away. Uttering a sigh of relief, she murmured:

“At last!”

CHAPTER XX

THE CRISIS

Jeanne had just taken off her ball-dress to put on a dressing-gown of Oriental cloth richly embroidered with silk flowers. Leaning her elbows on the mantelpiece, and breathing heavily, she was waiting. Her maid came in, bringing a second lamp. The additional light displayed the rich warm hangings of ruby plush embroidered in dull gold. The bed seemed one mass of lace.

“Has everybody gone?” asked Jeanne, pretending to yawn.

“Messieurs Le Brede and Du Tremblay, the last guests, are just putting on their overcoats,” answered the maid. “But Monsieur Pierre Delarue has come back, and is asking whether Madame will speak with him for a moment.”

“Monsieur Delarue?” repeated Jeanne, with astonishment.

“He says he has something important to say to Madame.”

“Where is he?” asked Jeanne.

“There, in the gallery. The lights were being put out in the drawing-room.”

“Well, show him in.”

The maid went out. Jeanne, much puzzled, asked herself, what could have brought Pierre back? It must certainly be something very important. She had always felt

somewhat awed in Pierre's presence. At that moment the idea of being face to face with the young man was most distressing to her.

A curtain was lifted and Pierre appeared. He remained silent and confused at the entrance of the room, his courage had deserted him.

"Well," said Jeanne, with assumed stiffness, "whatever is the matter, my friend?"

"The matter is, my dear Jeanne," began Pierre, "that—"

But the explanation did not seem so very easy to give, for he stopped and could not go on.

"That?" repeated Madame Cayrol.

"I beg your pardon," resumed Pierre. "I am greatly embarrassed. In coming here I obeyed a sudden impulse. I did not think of the manner in which I should tell you what I have to say, and I see that I shall have to run a great risk of offending you."

Jeanne assumed a haughty air.

"Well, but, my dear friend, if what you have to say is so difficult, don't say it."

"Impossible!" retorted Pierre. "My silence would cause irreparable mischief. In mercy, Jeanne, make my task easier! Meet me half way! You have projects for to-night which are known. Danger threatens you. Take care!"

Jeanne shuddered. But controlling herself, she answered, laughing nervously:

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"What rubbish are you talking about? I am at home, surrounded by my servants, and I have nothing to fear. I beg of you to believe me."

"You deny it!" exclaimed Pierre. "I expected as much. But you are only taking useless trouble. Come, Jeanne, I am the friend of your childhood; you have no reason to fear aught from me. I am only trying to be of use to you. You must know that, by my coming here, I know all. Jeanne, listen to me!"

"Are you mad?" interrupted the young woman, proudly, "or are you taking part in some absurd joke?"

"I am in my right mind, unfortunately for you!" said Pierre, roughly, seeing that Jeanne refused to believe him. "And there is no joke in the matter. Everything is true, serious and terrible! Since you compel me to say things which may be unpalatable, they must out. Prince Panine is in your house, or he soon will be. Your husband, whom you think far away, is within call, perhaps, and will come and take you unawares. Is not that a serious matter?"

A frown overspread her face, and in an ungovernable rage she stepped forward, determined not to give in, and exclaimed:

"Go away! or I shall call for assistance!"

"Don't call, it would look bad!" resumed Pierre, calmly. "On the contrary, let the servants get out of the way, and get the Prince to go if he be here, or if he has not yet arrived, prevent his coming in. So long as I remain here you will dissimulate your fear and will not take any precautions. I will leave you, then. Adieu, Jeanne! Believe that I wished to render you a service, and be sure that when I have crossed the threshold of this door I shall have forgotten everything that I may have said."

Pierre bowed, and, lifting the heavy curtain which hid the door leading to the gallery, went out.

He had hardly gone when the opposite door opened, and Serge entered the room. The young woman rushed into his arms and whispered into his ear, with trembling lips:

"Serge, we are lost!"

"I was there," answered Panine. "I heard all."

"What shall we do?" cried Jeanne, terrified.

"Go away at once. To remain here a moment longer is an imprudence."

"And I, if I remain, what shall I say to Cayrol when he comes?"

“Your husband!” said Serge, bitterly. “He loves you, he will forgive you.”

“I know; but then we two shall be separated for ever. Is that what you desire?”

“And what can I do?” cried Serge, in despair. “Everything around me is giving way! Fortune, which has been my one aim in life, is escaping from me. The family which I have scorned is forsaking me. The friendship which I have betrayed overwhelms me. There is nothing left to me.”

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"And my love, my devotion?" exclaimed Jeanne, passionately. "Do you think that I will leave you? We must go away. I asked you long ago. You resisted; the moment has now come. Be easy! Madame Desvarennnes will pay and save your name. In exchange you will give her back her daughter. You don't care about her, because you love me. I am your real wife; she who ought to share your life. Well, I take back my rights. I pay for them with my honor. I break all ties which could hold me back. I am yours, Serge! Our sin and misfortune will bind us more closely than any laws could."

"Think, that with me you will have to endure poverty, and, perhaps, misery," said the Prince, moved by the young woman's infatuation.

"My love will make you forget everything!"

"You will not feel regret or remorse?"

"Never, so long as you love me."

"Come, then," said the Prince, taking Jeanne in his arms. "And if life is too hard—"

"Well," added Jeanne, finishing the sentence with sparkling eyes, "we will seek refuge together in death! Come!"

Serge bolted the door, through which Pierre had passed, and which alone communicated with the other apartments. Then, taking his mistress by the hand, he went with her into the dressing-room. Jeanne threw a dark cloak round her shoulders, put a hat on her head, and without taking either money, jewels, lace, or, in fact, anything that she had received from Cayrol, they went down the little back stairs.

It was very dark. Jeanne did not take a light, as she did not care to attract attention, so they had to feel every step of the way as quietly as possible, striving not to make the least noise, holding their breath, and with beating hearts. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, Jeanne stretched out her hand, and sought the handle of the door which opened into the courtyard. She turned it, but the door would not open. She pushed, but it did not give way. Jeanne uttered a low groan. Serge shook it vigorously, but it would not open.

"It has been fastened on the outside," he whispered.

"Fastened?" murmured Jeanne, seized with fear. "Fastened, and by whom?"

Serge did not answer. The idea that Cayrol had done it came to his mind at once. The husband lying in wait, had seen him enter, and to prevent his escaping from his vengeance had cut off all means of retreating.

Silently, they went upstairs again, into the room through the dressing-room. Jeanne took off her bonnet and cloak, and sank into an armchair.

"I must get away!" said Serge, with suppressed rage; and he walked toward the door of the gallery.

"No! don't open that," cried Jeanne, excitedly.

And with a frightened look, she added:

"What if he were behind the door?"

At the same moment, as if Jeanne's voice had indeed evoked Cayrol, a heavy step was heard approaching along the gallery, a hand tried to open the bolted door. Serge and Jeanne remained motionless, waiting.

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“Jeanne!” called the voice of Cayrol from the outside, sounding mournfully in the silence, “Jeanne, open!”

And with his fist he knocked imperatively on the woodwork.

“I know you are there! Open, I say!” he cried, with increasing rage. “If you don’t open the door, I’ll—”

“Go! I beseech you!” whispered Jeanne, in Panine’s ear. “Go downstairs again, and break open the door. You won’t find any one there now.”

“Perhaps he has stationed some one there,” answered Serge. “Besides, I won’t leave you here alone exposed to his violence.”

“You are not alone. I can hear you talking!” said Cayrol, beside himself. “I shall break open this door!”

The husband made a tremendous effort. Under the pressure of his heavy weight the lock gave way. With a bound he was in the middle of the room. Jeanne threw herself before him; she no longer trembled. Cayrol took another step and fixed his glaring eyes on the man whom he sought, uttering a fearful oath.

“Serge!” cried he. “I might have guessed it. It is not only money of which you are robbing me, you villain!”

Panine turned horribly pale, and advanced toward Cayrol, despite Jeanne, who was clinging to him.

“Don’t insult me; it is superfluous,” said he. “My life belongs to you; you can take it. I shall be at your service whenever you please.”

Cayrol burst into a fearful laugh.

“Ah! a duel! Come! Am I a gentleman? I am a plebeian! a rustic! a cowherd! you know that! I have you now! I am going to smash you!”

He looked round the room as if seeking a weapon, and caught sight of the heavy fire-dogs. He caught up one with a cry of triumph, and, brandishing it like a club, rushed at Serge.

More rapid than he, Jeanne threw herself before her lover. She stretched out her arms, and with a sharp voice, and the look of a she-wolf defending her cubs,

“Keep behind me,” said she to Serge; “he loves me and will not dare to strike!”

Cayrol had stopped. At these words he uttered a loud cry: "wretched woman! You first, then!"

Raising his weapon, he was about to strike, when his eyes met Jeanne's. The young woman was smiling, happy to die for her lover. Her pale face beamed from out her black hair with weird beauty. Cayrol trembled. That look which he had loved, would he never see it again? That rosy mouth, whose smile he cherished, would it be hushed in death? A thousand thoughts of happy days came to his mind. His arm fell. A bitter flood rushed from his heart to his eyes; the iron dropped heavily from his hand on to the floor, and the poor man, overcome, sobbing, and ashamed of his weakness, fell senseless on a couch.

Jeanne did not utter a word. By a sign she showed Serge the door, which was open, and with a swollen heart she leaned on the mantelpiece, waiting for the unfortunate man, from whom she had received such a deep and sad proof of love, to come back to life.

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Serge had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI

"When rogues fall out"

The night seemed long to Madame Desvarennnes. Agitated and feverish, she listened through the silence, expecting every moment to hear some fearful news. In fancy she saw Cayrol entering his wife's room like a madman, unawares. She seemed to hear a cry of rage, answered by a sigh of terror; then a double shot resounded, the room filled with smoke, and, struck down in their guilty love, Serge and Jeanne rolled in death, interlaced in each other's arms, like Paolo and Francesca de Rimini, those sad lovers of whom Dante tells us.

Hour after hour passed; not a sound disturbed the mansion. The Prince had not come in. Madame Desvarennnes, unable to lie in bed, arose, and now and again, to pass the time, stole on tiptoe to her daughter's room. Micheline, thoroughly exhausted with fatigue and emotion, had fallen asleep on her pillow, which was wet with tears.

Bending over her, by the light of the lamp, the mistress gazed at Micheline's pale face, and a sigh rose to her lips.

"She is still young," she thought; "she may begin life afresh. The remembrance of these sad days will be wiped out, and I shall see her revive and smile again. That wretch was nearly the death of her."

And the image of Serge and Jeanne stretched beside each other in the room full of smoke came before her eyes again. She shook her head to chase the importunate vision away, and noiselessly regained her own apartment.

The day dawned pale and bleak. Madame Desvarennnes opened her window and cooled her burning brow in the fresh morning air. The birds were awake, and were singing on the trees in the garden.

Little by little, the distant sound of wheels rolling by was heard. The city was awakening from its sleep.

Madame Desvarennnes rang and asked for Marechal. The secretary appeared instantly. He, too, had shared the anxieties and fears of the mistress, and had risen early. Madame Desvarennnes greeted him with a grateful smile. She felt that she was really loved by this good fellow, who understood her so thoroughly. She begged him to go to Cayrol's, and gain some information, without giving him further details, and she waited, walking up and down the room to calm the fever of her mind.

On leaving the house in the Rue Taitbout, Serge felt bewildered, not daring to go home, and unable to decide on any plan; yet feeling that it was necessary to fix on something without delay, he reached the club. The walk did him good, and restored his physical equilibrium. He was thankful to be alive after such a narrow escape. He went upstairs with a comparatively light step, and tossed his overcoat to a very sleepy footman who had risen to receive him. He went into the card-room. Baccarat was just finishing. It was three o'clock in the morning. The appearance of the Prince lent the game a little fresh animation. Serge plunged into it as if it were a battle. Luck was on his side. In a short time he cleared the bank: a thousand louis. One by one the players retired. Panine, left alone, threw himself on a couch and slept for a few hours, but it was not a refreshing sleep. On the contrary, it made him feel more tired.

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The day servants disturbed him when they came in to sweep the rooms and open the windows. He went into the lavatory, and there bathed his face. When his ablutions were over he wrote a note to Jeanne, saying that he had reflected, and could not possibly let her go away with him. He implored her to do all in her power to forget him. He gave this letter to one of the messengers, and told him to give it into the hands of Madame Cayrol's maid, and to none other.

The care of a woman and the worry of another household seemed unbearable to him. Besides, what could he do with Jeanne? The presence of his mistress would prevent his being able to go back to Micheline. And now he felt that his only hope of safety was in Micheline's love for him.

But first of all he must go and see if Herzog had returned, and ascertain the real facts of the position in regard to the Universal Credit Company.

Herzog occupied a little house on the Boulevard Haussmann, which he had hired furnished from some Americans. The loud luxury of the Yankees had not frightened him. On the contrary, he held that the gay colors of the furniture and the glitter of the gilded cornices were bound to have a fascination for prospective shareholders. Suzanne had reserved a little corner for herself, modestly hung with muslin and furnished with simple taste, which was a great contrast to the loud appearance of the other part of the house.

On arriving, Serge found a stableman washing a victoria. Herzog had returned. The Prince quietly went up the steps, and had himself announced.

The financier was sitting in his study by the window, looking through the newspapers. When Serge entered he rose. The two men stood facing each other for a moment. The Prince was the first to speak.

"How is it that you have kept me without news during your absence?" asked he, harshly.

"Because," replied Herzog, calmly, "the only news I had was not good news."

"At least I should have known it."

"Would the result of the operation have been different?"

"You have led me like a child in this affair," Serge continued, becoming animated. "I did not know where I was going. You made me promises, how have you kept them?"

"As I was able," quietly answered Herzog. "Play has its chances. One seeks Austerlitz and finds Waterloo."

“But,” cried the Prince, angrily, “the shares which you sold ought not to have gone out of your hands.”

“You believed that?” retorted the financier, ironically. “If they ought not to have gone out of my hands it was hardly worth while putting them into them.”

“In short,” said Panine, eager to find some responsible party on whom he could pour out all the bitterness of his misfortune, “you took a mean advantage of me.”

“Good! I expected you to say that!” returned Herzog, smiling. “If the business had succeeded, you would have accepted your share of the spoil without any scruples, and would have felt ready to crown me. It has failed; you are trying to get out of the responsibility, and are on the point of treating me as if I were a swindler. Still, the affair would not have been more honest in the first instance than in the second, but success embellishes everything.”

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Serge looked hard at Herzog.

"What is there to prove," replied he, "that this speculation, which brings ruin and loss to me, does not enrich you?"

"Ungrateful fellow!" observed the financier, ironically, "you suspect me!"

"Of having robbed me!" cried Serge, in a rage. "Why not?"

Herzog, for a moment, lost his temper and turned red in the face. He seized Panine violently by the arm, and said:

"Gently, Prince; whatever insults you heap upon me must be shared by you. You are my partner."

"Scoundrel!" yelled Panine, exasperated at being held by Herzog.

"Personalities," said the financier, in a jesting tone. "Then I take my leave!"

And loosing his hold of the Prince, he went toward the door.

Serge sprang after him, exclaiming:

"You shall not leave this room until you have given me the means of rectifying this disaster."

"Then let us talk sensibly, as boon companions," said Herzog. "I know of a marvellous move by which we can get out of the difficulty. Let us boldly call a general meeting. I will explain the thing, and amaze everybody. We shall get a vote of confidence for the past, with funds for the future. We shall be as white as snow, and the game is played. Are you in with me?"

"Enough," replied the Prince, intensely disgusted. "It does not suit me to do a yet more shameful thing in order to get out of this trouble. It is no use arguing further; we are lost."

"Only the weak allow themselves to be lost!" exclaimed the financier. "The strong defend themselves. You may give in if you like; I won't. Three times have I been ruined and three times have I risen again. My head is good! I am down now. I shall rise again, and when I am well off, and have a few millions to spare, I will settle old debts. Everybody will be astonished because they won't expect it, and I shall be more thought of than if I had paid up at the time."

"And if you are not allowed to go free?" asked Serge. "What if they arrest you?"

"I shall be in Aix-la-Chapelle to-night," said Herzog. "From there I shall treat with the shareholders of the Universal Credit. People judge things better at a distance. Are you coming with me?"

"No," replied Serge, in a low voice.

"You are wrong. Fortune is capricious, and in six months we may be richer than we ever have been. But as you have decided, let me give you a piece of advice which will be worth the money you have lost. Confess all to your wife; she can get you out of this difficulty."

The financier held out a hand to Serge which he did not take.

"Ah! pride!" murmured Herzog. "After all it is your right—It is you who pay!"

Without answering a word the Prince went out.

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At that same hour, Madame Desvarennnes, tired by long waiting, was pacing up and down her little drawing-room. A door opened and Marechal, the long-looked for messenger, appeared. He had been to Cayrol's, but could not see him. The banker, who had shut himself up in his private office where he had worked all night, had given orders that no one should interrupt him. And as Madame Desvarennnes seemed to have a question on her lips which she dared not utter, Marechal added that nothing unusual seemed to have happened at the house.

But as the mistress was thanking her secretary, the great gate swung on its hinges, and a carriage rolled into the courtyard. Marechal flew to the window, and uttered one word,

"Cayrol!"

Madame Desvarennnes motioned to him to leave her, and the banker appeared on the threshold.

At a glance the mistress saw the ravages which the terrible night he had passed through had caused. Yesterday, the banker was rosy, firm, and upright as an oak, now he was bent, and withered like an old man. His hair had become gray about the temples, as if scorched by his burning thoughts. He was only the shadow of himself.

Madame Desvarennnes advanced toward him, and in one word asked a world of questions.

"Well?" she said.

Cayrol, gloomy and fierce, raised his eyes to the mistress, and answered:

"Nothing!"

"Did he not come?"

"Yes, he came. But I had not the necessary energy to kill him. I thought it was an easier matter to become a murderer. And you thought so too, eh?"

"Cayrol!" cried Madame Desvarennnes, shuddering, and troubled to find that she had been so easily understood by him whom she had armed on her behalf.

"The opportunity was a rare one, though," continued Cayrol, getting excited. "Fancy; I found them together under my own roof. The law allowed me, if not the actual right to kill them, at least an excuse if I did so. Well, at the decisive moment, when I ought to have struck the blow, my heart failed me. He lives, and Jeanne loves him."

There was a pause.

“What are you going to do?”

“Get rid of him in another way,” answered Cayrol. “I had only two ways of killing him. One was to catch him in my own house, the other to call him out. My will failed me in the one case; my want of skill would fail me in the other. I will not fight Serge. Not because I fear death, for my life is blighted, and I don’t value it; but if I were dead, Jeanne would belong to him, and I could not bear the thought of that even in death. I must separate them forever.”

“And how?”

“By forcing him to disappear.”

“And if he refuse?”

Cayrol shook his head menacingly, and exclaimed:

“I defy him! If he resist, I will bring him before the assizes!”

“You?” said Madame Desvarennnes, going nearer to Cayrol.

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"Yes, I!" answered the banker, with energy.

"Wretched man! And my daughter?" cried the mistress. "Think well what you are saying! You would disgrace me and mine."

"Am I not dishonored myself?" asked Cayrol. "Your son-in-law is a robber, who has defiled my home and robbed my safe."

"An honest man does not seek to revenge himself after the manner you suggest," said the mistress, gravely.

"An honest man defends himself as he can. I am not a knight. I am only a financier. Money is my weapon. The Prince has stolen from me. I will have him sentenced as a thief."

Madame Desvarennnes frowned.

"Make out your account. I will pay it."

"Will you also pay me for my lost happiness?" cried the banker, exasperated. "Should I not rather have chosen to be ruined than be betrayed as I am? You can never repair the wrong he has done me. And then I am suffering so, I must have my revenge!"

"Ah! fool that you are," replied Madame Desvarennnes. "The guilty will not feel your blows, but the innocent. When my daughter and I are in despair will you be less unhappy! Oh! Cayrol, take heed that you lose not in dignity what you gain in revenge. The less one is respected by others the more one must respect one's self. Contempt and silence elevate the victim, while rage and hatred make him descend to the level of those who have outraged him."

"Let people judge me as they please. I care only for myself! I am a vulgar soul, and have a low mind—anything you like. But the idea that that woman belongs to another drives me mad. I ought to hate her, but, notwithstanding everything, I cannot live without her. If she will come back to me I will forgive her. It is ignoble! I feel it, but it is too strong for me. I adore her!"

Before that blind love Madame Desvarennnes shuddered. She thought of Micheline who loved Serge as Cayrol loved Jeanne.

"Suppose she chooses to go away with Serge," said the mistress to herself. In a moment she saw the house abandoned, Micheline and Serge in foreign lands, and she alone in the midst of her overthrown happiness, dying of sadness and regrets. She made a last effort to move Cayrol.

“Come, must I appeal in vain? Can you forget that I was a sure and devoted friend to you, and that you owe your fortune to me? You are a good man and will not forget the past. You have been outraged and have the right of seeking revenge, but think that in carrying it out you will hurt two women who have never done you any harm. Be generous! Be just! Spare us!”

Cayrol remained silent; his face did not relax. After a moment he said:

“You see how low I have fallen, by not yielding at once to your supplications! Friendship, gratitude, generosity, all the good feelings I had, have been consumed by this execrable love. There is nothing left but love for her. For her, I forget everything. I degrade and debase myself. And what is worse than all, is that I know all this and yet I cannot help myself.”

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"Miserable man!" murmured the mistress.

"Oh! most miserable," sobbed Cayrol, falling into an armchair.

Madame Desvarennnes approached him, and quietly placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Cayrol, you are weeping? Then, forgive."

The banker arose and, with lowering brow, said:

"No! my resolution is irrevocable. I wish to place a world between Jeanne and Serge. If he has not gone away by tonight my complaint will be lodged in the courts of justice."

Madame Desvarennnes no longer persisted. She saw that the husband's heart was permanently closed.

"It is well. I thank you for having warned me. You might have taken action without doing so. Good-by, Cayrol. I leave your conscience to judge between you and me."

The banker bowed, and murmured:

"Good-by!"

And with a heavy step, almost tottering, he went out.

The sun had risen, and lit up the trees in the garden. Nature seemed to be making holiday. The flowers perfumed the air, and in the deep blue sky swallows were flying to and fro. This earthly joy exasperated Madame Desvarennnes. She would have liked the world to be in mourning. She closed the window hastily, and remained lost in her own reflections.

So everything was over! The great prosperity, the honor of the house, everything was foundering in a moment. Even her daughter might escape from her, and follow the infamous husband whom she adored in spite of his faults—perhaps because of his very faults—and might drag on a weary existence in a strange land, which would terminate in death.

For that sweet and delicate child could not live without material comforts and mental ease, and her husband was doomed to go on from bad to worse, and would drag her down with him! The mistress pictured her daughter, that child whom she had brought up with the tenderest care, dying on a pallet, and the husband, odious to the last, refusing her admission to the room where Micheline was in agony.

A fearful feeling of anger overcame her. Her motherly love gained the mastery, and in the silence of the room she roared out these words:

“That shall not be!”

The opening of the door recalled her to her senses, and she rose. It was Marechal, greatly agitated. After Cayrol's arrival, not knowing what to do, he had gone to the Universal Credit Company, and there, to his astonishment, had found the offices closed. He had heard from the porter, one of those superb personages dressed in blue and red cloth, who were so important in the eyes of the shareholders, that the evening before, owing to the complaint of a director, the police had entered the offices, and taken the books away, and that the official seal had been placed on the doors. Marechal, much alarmed, had hastened back to Madame Desvarennnes to apprise her of the fact. It was evidently necessary to take immediate steps to meet this new complication. Was this indeed the beginning of legal proceedings? And if so how would the Prince come out of it?

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Madame Desvarennnes listened to Marechal, without uttering a word. Events were hurrying on even quicker than she had dreaded. The fears of the interested shareholders outran even the hatred of Cayrol. What would the judges call Herzog's underhand dealings? Would it be embezzlement? Or forgery? Would they come and arrest the Prince at her house? The house of Desvarennnes, which had never received a visit from a sheriff's officer, was it to be disgraced now by the presence of the police?

The mistress, in that fatal hour, became herself again. The strong-minded woman of old reappeared. Marechal was more alarmed at this sudden vigor than he had been at her late depression. When he saw Madame Desvarennnes going toward the door, he made an effort to detain her.

"Where are you going, Madame?" he inquired, with anxiety.

The mistress gave him a look that terrified him, and answered:

"I am going to square accounts with the Prince."

And, passing through the door leading to the little staircase, Madame Desvarennnes went up to her son-in-law's rooms.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MOTHER'S REVENGE

On leaving Herzog, Serge had turned his steps toward the Rue Saint-Dominique. He had delayed the moment of going home as long as possible, but the streets were beginning to be crowded. He might meet some people of his acquaintance. He resolved to face what ever reception was awaiting him on the way, he was planning what course he should adopt to bring about a reconciliation with his redoubtable mother-in-law. He was no longer proud, but felt quite broken down. Only Madame Desvarennnes could put him on his feet again; and, as cowardly in trouble as he had been insolent in prosperity, he accepted beforehand all that she might impose upon him; all, provided that she would cover him with her protection.

He was frightened, not knowing how deep Herzog had led him in the mire. His moral sense had disappeared, but he had a vague instinct of the danger he had incurred. The financier's last words came to his mind: "Confess all to your wife; she can get you out of this difficulty!" He understood the meaning of them, and resolved to follow the advice. Micheline loved him. In appealing to her heart, deeply wounded as it was, he would have in her an ally, and he had long known that Madame Desvarennnes could not oppose her daughter in anything.

He entered the house through the back garden gate, and regained his room without making the slightest noise. He dreaded meeting Madame Desvarennnes before seeing Micheline. First he changed his attire; he had walked about Paris in evening clothes. Looking in the glass he was surprised at the alteration in his features. Was his beauty going too? What would become of him if he failed to please. And, like an actor who is about to play an important part, he paid great attention to the making up of his face. He wished once more to captivate his wife, as his safety depended on the impression he was about to make on her. At last, satisfied with himself, he tried to look smiling, and went to his wife's room.

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Micheline was up.

At the sight of Serge she could not suppress an exclamation of surprise. It was a long time since he had discontinued these familiar visits. The presence of her beloved one in that room, which had seemed so empty when he was not there, made her feel happy, and she went to him with a smile, holding out her hand. Serge drew her gently toward him and kissed her hair.

"Up, already, dear child," said he, affectionately.

"I have scarcely slept," answered Micheline. "I was so anxious. I sat up for you part of the night. I had left you without saying good-night. It was the first time it had occurred, and I wanted to beg your pardon. But you came in very late."

"Micheline, it is I who am ungrateful," interrupted Panine, making the young wife sit down beside him. "It is I who must ask you to be indulgent."

"Serge! I beg of you!" said the young wife, taking both his hands. "All is forgotten. I would not reproach you, I love you so much!"

Micheline's face beamed with joy, and tears filled her eyes.

"You are weeping," said Panine. "Ah! I feel the weight of my wrongs toward you. I see how deserving you are of respect and affection. I feel unworthy, and would kneel before you to say how I regret all the anxieties I have caused you, and that my only desire in the future will be to make you forget them."

"Oh! speak on! speak on!" cried Micheline, with delight. "What happiness to hear you say such sweet words! Open your heart to me! You know I would die to please you. If you have any anxieties or annoyances confide in me. I can relieve them. Who could resist me when you are in question?"

"I have none, Micheline," answered Serge, with the constrained manner of a man who is feigning. "Nothing but the regret of not having lived more for you."

"Is the future not in store for us?" said the young wife, looking lovingly at him.

The Prince shook his head, saying:

"Who can answer for the future?"

Micheline came closer to her husband, not quite understanding what Serge meant, but her mind was on the alert, and in an alarmed tone, she resumed:

“What strange words you are uttering? Are we not both young? And, if you like, is there not much happiness in store for us?”

And she clung to him. Serge turned away.

“Oh, stay,” she murmured, again putting her arms round him. “You are so truly mine at this moment!”

Panine saw that the opportunity for confessing all had come. He was able to bring tears to his eyes, and went toward the window as if to hide his emotion. Micheline followed him, and, in an eager tone, continued:

“Ah! I knew you were hiding something. You are unhappy or in pain; threatened perhaps? Ah! if you love me, tell me the truth!”

“Well, yes! It is true, I am threatened. I am suffering and unhappy! But don’t expect a confession from me. I should blush to make it. But, thank Heaven, if I cannot extricate myself from the difficulty in which I am placed through my own folly and imprudence—there is yet another way out of it.”

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“Serge! you would kill yourself!” cried Micheline, terrified at the gesture Panine had made. “What would become of me then? But what is there that is so hard to explain? And to whom should it be said?”

“To your mother,” answered Serge, bowing his head.

“To my mother? Very well, I will go to her. Oh! don’t fear anything. I can defend you, and to strike you she will first have to attack me.”

Serge put his arms round Micheline, and with a kiss, the hypocrite inspired her whom he entrusted with his safety with indomitable courage.

“Wait for me here,” added the young wife, and passing through the little drawing-room she reached the smoking-room.

She halted there a moment, out of breath and almost choked with emotion. The long expected day had arrived. Serge was coming back to her. She went on, and as she reached the door of the stair leading to her mother’s rooms, she heard a light tap from without.

Greatly astonished, she opened the door, and suddenly drew back, uttering an exclamation. A woman, thickly veiled, stood before her.

At the sight of Micheline the stranger seemed inclined to turn and fly. But overcome with jealousy, the young wife seized her by the arm, dragged off her veil, and recognizing her, exclaimed:

“Jeanne!”

Madame Cayrol approached Micheline, and beseechingly stretched out her hands:

“Micheline! don’t think—I come—”

“Hold your tongue!” cried Micheline. “Don’t tell me any lies! I know all! You are my husband’s mistress!”

Crushed by such a stroke, Jeanne hid her face in her hands and moaned:

“O God!”

“You must really be bold,” continued Micheline, in a furious tone, “to seek him here, in my house, almost in my arms!”

Jeanne drew herself up, blushing with shame and grief.



“Ah! don’t think,” she said, “that love brings me here.”

“What is it then?” asked Micheline, contemptuously.

“The knowledge of inevitable and pressing danger which threatens Serge.”

“A danger! Of what kind?”

“Compromised by Herzog, he is at the mercy of my husband, who has sworn to ruin him.”

“Your husband!”

“Yes, he is his rival. If you could ruin me, would you not do it?” said Jeanne.

“You!” retorted Micheline, passionately. “Do you think I am going to worry about you? Serge is my first thought. You say you came to warn him. What must be done?”

“Without a moment’s delay he must go away!”

A strange suspicion crossed Micheline’s mind. She approached Jeanne, and looking earnestly at her, said:

“He must go away without delay, eh? And it is you, braving everything, without a thought of the trouble you leave behind you, who come to warn him? Ah! you mean to go with him?”

Jeanne hesitated a moment. Then, boldly and impudently, defying and almost threatening the legitimate wife:

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"Well, yes, I wish to! Enough of dissimulation! I love him!" she exclaimed.

Micheline, transfigured by passion, strong, and ready for a struggle, threw herself in Jeanne's way, with arms outstretched, as if to prevent her going to Serge.

"Well!" she said; "try to take him from me!"

"Take him from you!" answered Jeanne, laughing like a mad woman. "To whom does he most belong? To the woman who was as ignorant of his love as she was of his danger; who could do nothing toward his happiness, and can do nothing for his safety? Or to the mistress who has sacrificed her honor to please him and risks her safety to save him?"

"Ah! wretch!" cried Micheline, "to invoke your infamy as a right!"

"Which of us has taken him from the other?" continued Jeanne, forgetting respect, modesty, everything. "Do you know that he loved me before he married you? Do you know that he abandoned me for you—for your money, I should say? Now, do you wish to weigh what I have suffered with what you suffer? Shall we make out a balance-sheet of our tears? Then, you will be able to tell which of us he has loved more, and to whom he really belongs."

Micheline had listened to this furious address almost in a state of stupor, and replied, vehemently:

"What matter who triumphs if his ruin is certain. Selfish creatures that we are, instead of disputing about his love, let us unite in saving him! You say he must go away! But flight is surely an admission of guilt—humiliation and obscurity in a strange land. And that is what you advise, because you hope to share that miserable existence with him. You are urging him on to dishonor. His fate is in the hands of a man who adores you, who would sacrifice everything for you, as I would for Serge, and yet you have not thrown yourself at his feet! You have not offered your life as the price of your lover's! And you say that you love him!"

"Ah!" stammered Jeanne, distracted. "You wish me to save him for you!"

"Is that the cry of your heart?" said Micheline, with crushing disdain. "Well, see what I am ready to do. If, to remove your jealous fears, it is necessary to sacrifice myself, I swear to you that if Serge be saved, he shall be perfectly free, and I will never see him again!"

Micheline, chaste and calm, with hands raised to Heaven, seemed to grow taller and nobler. Jeanne, trembling and overpowered, looked at her rival with a painful effort, and murmured, softly:

“Would you do that?”

“I would do more!” said the lawful wife, bending before the mistress. “I ought to hate you, and I kneel at your feet and beseech you to listen to me. Do what I ask you and I will forgive you and bless you. Do not hesitate! Follow me! Let us throw ourselves at the feet of him whom you have outraged. His generosity cannot be less than ours, and to us, who sacrifice our love, he will not be able to refuse to sacrifice his vengeance.”

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This greatness and goodness awaked feelings in Jeanne's heart which she thought dead. She was silent for a moment and then her breast heaved with convulsive sobs, and she fell helpless into the arms which Micheline, full of pity, held out to her.

"Forgive me," moaned the unhappy woman. "I am conquered. Your rights are sacred, and you have just made them still more so. Keep Serge: with you he will once more become honest and happy, because, if your love is not greater than mine, it is nobler and purer."

The two women went hand in hand to try to save the man whom they both adored.

All this time Serge remained in the little drawing-room enjoying the hope of returning peace. It was sweet to him, after the troubles he had gone through. He had not the slightest suspicion of the scene in the adjoining room between Jeanne and Micheline. The fond heroism of his wife and the self-denial of his mistress were unknown to him.

Time was passing. At least an hour had sped since Micheline left him to go to her mother, and Serge was beginning to think that the interview was very long, when a light step made him tremble. It came from the gallery. He thought it was Micheline, and opening the door, he went to meet her.

He drew back disappointed, vexed, and anxious, when he found it was Pierre. The two men had never met alone since that terrible night at Nice. Pierre assumed a bold demeanor, and returned Pierre's firm look. Steadying his voice, he said:

"Ah! is it you?"

"Were you not expecting me?" answered Pierre whose harsh voice thrilled Serge.

The Prince opened his mouth to speak, but Pierre, did not give him time. In stern and provoking accents, he continued:

"I made you a promise once; have you forgotten it? I have a good memory. You are a villain, and I come to chastise you!"

"Pierre!" exclaimed the Prince, starting fiercely.

But he suddenly calmed himself, and added:

"Leave me! I will not listen to you!"

"You will have to, though! You are a source of trouble and shame to the family to which you have allied yourself, and as you have not the courage to kill yourself, I have come to help you. You must leave Paris to-night, or you will be arrested. We shall go

together to Brussels and there we shall fight. If chance favors you, you will be at liberty to continue your infamies, but at any rate I shall have done my best to rid two unfortunate women of your presence.”

“You are mad!” said Serge, sneeringly.

“Don’t think so! And know that I am ready for any emergency. Come; must I strike you, to give you courage?” growled Pierre, ready to suit the action to the word.

“Ah! take care!” snarled Serge, with an evil look.

And opening a drawer which was close to him, he took out a revolver.

“Thief first, then murderer!” said Pierre, with a terrible laugh. “Come, let’s see you do it!”

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And he was going toward the Prince when the door opened, and Madame Desvarennnes came forward. Placing her hand on Pierre's shoulder, she said, in that commanding tone which few could resist:

"Go; wait for me in my room. I wish it!"

Pierre bowed, and, without answering, went out.

Serge had placed the pistol on the table and was waiting.

"We have to talk over several matters," said Madame Desvarennnes, gravely, "and you know it."

"Yes, Madame," answered Panine, sadly, "and, believe me, no one judges my conduct more severely than I do."

The mistress could not help looking surprised.

"Ah!" she said, with irony, "I did not expect to find you in such a mood. You have not accustomed me to such humility and sweetness. You must be afraid, to have arrived at that stage!"

The Prince appeared not to have understood the implied insult in his mother-in-law's words. One thing struck him, which was that she evidently did not expect to find him repentant and humbled.

"Micheline must have told you," he began.

"I have not seen my daughter," interrupted the mistress, sharply, as if to make him understand that he must depend solely upon himself.

Ignorant that Micheline had met Jeanne on her way to her mother, and had gone to Cayrol, Serge thought he was abandoned by his only powerful ally. He saw that he was lost and that his feigned resignation was useless. Unable to control himself any longer, his face darkened with rage.

"She, too, against me! Well! I will defend myself alone!"

Turning toward Madame Desvarennnes, he added:

"To begin with, what do you want with me?"

"I wish to ask you a question. We business folk when we fail, and cannot pay our way, throw blood on the blot and it disappears. You members of the nobility, when you are disgraced, how do you manage?"

"If I am not mistaken, Madame," answered the Prince, in a light tone, "you do me the favor of asking what my intentions are for the future? I will answer you with precision. I purpose leaving to-night for Aix-la-Chapelle, where I shall join my friend Herzog. We shall begin our business again. My wife, on whose good feelings I rely, will accompany me, notwithstanding everything."

And in these last words he put all the venom of his soul.

"My daughter will not leave me!" exclaimed Madame Desvarennnes.

"Very well, then, you can accompany her," retorted Panine. "That arrangement will suit me. Since my troubles I have learned to appreciate domestic happiness."

"Ah! you hope to play your old games on me," said Madame Desvarennnes. "You won't get much out of me. My daughter and I with you—in the stream where you are going to sink? Never!"

"Well, then," cried Panine, "what do you expect?"

A violent ring at the front door resounded as Madame Desvarennnes was about to answer, and stopped the words on her lips. This signal, which was used only on important occasions, sounded to Madame like a funeral knell. Serge frowned, and instinctively moved back.

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Marechal appeared through the half-open door with a scared face, and silently handed Madame Desvarennnes a card. She glanced at it, turned pale, and said to the secretary:

"Very well, let him wait!" She threw the card on the table. Serge came forward and read:

"Delbarre, sheriff's officer."

Haggard-looking and aghast, he turned to the mistress, as if seeking an explanation.

"Well!" she observed: "it is clear, he has come to arrest you."

Serge rushed to a cabinet, and opening a drawer, took forth some handfuls of gold and notes, which he crammed into his pockets.

"By the back stairs I shall have time to get away. It is my last chance! Keep the man for five minutes only."

"And if the door is guarded?" asked Madame Desvarennnes.

Serge remained abject before her. He felt himself enclosed in a ring which he could not break through.

"One may be prosecuted without being condemned," he gasped. "You will use your influence, I know, and you will get me out of this mess. I shall be grateful to you for ever, and will do anything you like! But don't leave me, it would be cowardly!"

He trembled, as he thus besought her distractedly.

"The son-in-law of Madame Desvarennnes does not go before the Assize Courts even to be acquitted," said she, with a firm voice.

"What would you have me do?" cried Serge, passionately.

Madame Desvarennnes did not answer, but pointed to the revolver on the table.

"Kill myself? Ah! no; that would be giving you too much pleasure."

And he gave the weapon a push, so that it rolled close to Madame Desvarennnes.

"Ah! wretch!" cried she, giving way to her suppressed rage. "You are not even a Panine! The Panines knew how to die."

"I have not time to act a melodrama with you," snarled Serge. "I am going to try to save myself."

And he took a step toward the door.

The mistress seized the revolver, and threw herself before him.

"You shall not go out!" she cried.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed, gnashing his teeth.

"You shall not go out!" repeated the mistress, with flashing eyes.

"We shall see!"

And with a strong arm he seized Madame Desvarennnes, and threw her aside.

The mistress became livid. Serge had his hand on the handle of the door. He was about to escape. Madame Desvarennnes's arm was stretched forth.

A shot made the windows rattle; the weapon fell from her hand, having done its work and, amid the smoke, a body dropped heavily on the carpet, which was soon dyed with blood.

At the same moment, the door opened, and Micheline entered, holding in her hand the fatal receipt which she had just wrung from Cayrol. The young wife uttered a heartrending cry, and fell senseless on Serge's body.

Behind Micheline came the officer and Marechal. The secretary exchanged looks with the mistress, who was lifting her fainting daughter and clasping her in her arms. He understood all.

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Turning toward his companion, he said:

“Alas! sir, here is a sad matter! The Prince, on hearing that you had come, took fright, although his fault was not very serious, and has shot himself.”

The officer bowed respectfully to the mistress, who was bending over Micheline.

“Please to withdraw, Madame. You have already suffered too much,” said he. “I understand your legitimate grief. If I need any information, this gentleman will give it to me.”

Madame Desvarennnes arose, and, without bending under the burden, she bore away on her bosom her daughter, regained.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Cowardly in trouble as he had been insolent in prosperity
Heed that you lose not in dignity what you gain in revenge
She would have liked the world to be in mourning
The guilty will not feel your blows, but the innocent

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire serge Panine:

A man weeps with difficulty before a woman
A uniform is the only garb which can hide poverty honorably
Antagonism to plutocracy and hatred of aristocrats
Because they moved, they thought they were progressing
Cowardly in trouble as he had been insolent in prosperity
Enough to be nobody's unless I belong to him
Even those who do not love her desire to know her
Everywhere was feverish excitement, dissipation, and nullity
Flayed and roasted alive by the critics
Forget a dream and accept a reality
Hard workers are pitiful lovers
He lost his time, his money, his hair, his illusions
He was very unhappy at being misunderstood
Heed that you lose not in dignity what you gain in revenge
I thought the best means of being loved were to deserve it
I don't pay myself with words
Implacable self-interest which is the law of the world
In life it is only nonsense that is common-sense
Is a man ever poor when he has two arms?
Is it by law only that you wish to keep me?
It was a relief when they rose from the table



Men of pleasure remain all their lives mediocre workers
Money troubles are not mortal
My aunt is jealous of me because I am a man of ideas
Negroes, all but monkeys!
Nothing that provokes laughter more than a disappointed lover
One amuses one's self at the risk of dying
Patience, should he encounter a dull page here or there
Romanticism still ferments beneath the varnish of Naturalism
Sacrifice his artistic leanings to popular caprice
Scarcely was one scheme launched when another idea occurred
She would have liked the world to be in mourning
Suffering is a human law; the world is an arena
Talk with me sometimes.

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You will not chatter trivialities

The guilty will not feel your blows, but the innocent

The uncontested power which money brings

They had only one aim, one passion—to enjoy themselves

Unqualified for happiness

We had taken the dream of a day for eternal happiness

What is a man who remains useless

Without a care or a cross, he grew weary like a prisoner

You are talking too much about it to be sincere

THE RED LILY

By Anatole France

The real name of the subject of this preface is Jacques-Anatole Thibault. He was born in Paris, April 16, 1844, the son of a bookseller of the Quai Malaquais, in the shadow of the Institute. He was educated at the College Stanislas and published in 1868 an essay upon Alfred de Vigny. This was followed by two volumes of poetry: 'Les Poemes Dorees' (1873), and 'Les Noces Corinthiennes' (1876). With the last mentioned book his reputation became established.

Anatole France belongs to the class of poets known as "Les Parnassiens." Yet a book like 'Les Noces Corinthiennes' ought to be classified among a group of earlier lyrics, inasmuch as it shows to a large degree the influence of Andre Chenier and Alfred de Vigny. France was, and is, also a diligent contributor to many journals and reviews, among others, 'Le Globe, Les Debats, Le Journal Officiel, L'Echo de Paris, La Revue de Famille, and Le Temps'. On the last mentioned journal he succeeded Jules Claretie. He is likewise Librarian to the Senate, and has been a member of the French Academy since 1896.

The above mentioned two volumes of poetry were followed by many works in prose, which we shall notice. France's critical writings are collected in four volumes, under the title, 'La Vie Litteraire' (1888-1892); his political articles in 'Opinions Sociales' (2 vols., 1902). He combines in his style traces of Racine, Voltaire, Flaubert, and Renan, and, indeed, some of his novels, especially 'Thais' (1890), 'Jerome Coignard' (1893), and 'Lys Rouge' (1894), which was crowned by the Academy, are romances of the first rank.

Criticism appears to Anatole France the most recent and possibly the ultimate evolution of literary expression, "admirably suited to a highly civilized society, rich in souvenirs and old traditions It proceeds," in his opinion, "from philosophy and history, and demands for its development an absolute intellectual liberty It is the last in date

of all literary forms, and it will end by absorbing them all To be perfectly frank the critic should say: 'Gentlemen, I propose to enlarge upon my own thoughts concerning Shakespeare, Racine, Pascal, Goethe, or any other writer.'"

It is hardly necessary to say much concerning a critic with such pronounced ideas as Anatole France. He gives us, indeed, the full flower of critical Renanism, but so individualized as to become perfection in grace, the extreme flowering of the Latin genius. It is not too much to say that the critical writings of Anatole France recall the *Causeries du Lundi*, the golden age of Sainte-Beuve!

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As a writer of fiction, Anatole France made his debut in 1879 with 'Jocaste', and 'Le Chat Maigre'. Success in this field was yet decidedly doubtful when 'Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard' appeared in 1881. It at once established his reputation; 'Sylvestre Bonnard', as 'Le Lys Rouge' later, was crowned by the French Academy. These novels are replete with fine irony, benevolent scepticism and piquant turns, and will survive the greater part of romances now read in France. The list of Anatole France's works in fiction is a large one. The titles of nearly all of them, arranged in chronological order, are as follows: 'Les Desirs de Jean Seyvien (1882); Abeille (1883); Le Livre de mon Ami (1885); Nos Enfants (1886); Balthazar (1889); Thais (1890); L'Etui de Naire (1892); Jerome Coignard, and La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedanque (1893); and Histoire Contemporaine (1897-1900), the latter consisting of four separate works: 'L'Orme du Mail, Le Mannequin d'Osier, L'Anneau d'Amethyste, and Monsieur Bergeret a Paris'. All of his writings show his delicately critical analysis of passion, at first playfully tender in its irony, but later, under the influence of his critical antagonism to Brunetiere, growing keener, stronger, and more bitter. In 'Thais' he has undertaken to show the bond of sympathy that unites the pessimistic sceptic to the Christian ascetic, since both despise the world. In 'Lys Rouge', his greatest novel, he traces the perilously narrow line that separates love from hate; in 'Opinions de M. l'Abbe Jerome Coignard' he has given us the most radical breviary of scepticism that has appeared since Montaigne. 'Le Livre de mon Ami' is mostly autobiographical; 'Clio' (1900) contains historical sketches.

To represent Anatole France as one of the undying names in literature would hardly be extravagant. Not that I would endow Ariel with the stature and sinews of a Titan; this were to miss his distinctive qualities: delicacy, elegance, charm. He belongs to a category of writers who are more read and probably will ever exercise greater influence than some of greater name. The latter show us life as a whole; but life as a whole is too vast and too remote to excite in most of us more than a somewhat languid curiosity. France confines himself to themes of the keenest personal interest, the life of the world we live in. It is herein that he excels! His knowledge is wide, his sympathies are many-sided, his power of exposition is unsurpassed. No one has set before us the mind of our time, with its half-lights, its shadowy vistas, its indefiniteness, its haze on the horizon, so vividly as he.

In Octave Mirbeau's notorious novel, a novel which it would be complimentary to describe as naturalistic, the heroine is warned by her director against the works of Anatole France, "Ne lisez jamais du Voltaire. . . C'est un peche mortel . . . ni de Renan . . . ni de l'Anatole France. Voila qui est dangereux." The names are appropriately united; a real, if not precisely an apostolic, succession exists between the three writers.

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Jules Lemaitre
de l'Academie Francais

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

"I need love"

She gave a glance at the armchairs placed before the chimney, at the tea-table, which shone in the shade, and at the tall, pale stems of flowers ascending above Chinese vases. She thrust her hand among the flowery branches of the guelder roses to make their silvery balls quiver. Then she looked at herself in a mirror with serious attention. She held herself sidewise, her neck turned over her shoulder, to follow with her eyes the spring of her fine form in its sheath-like black satin gown, around which floated a light tunic studded with pearls wherein sombre lights scintillated. She went nearer, curious to know her face of that day. The mirror returned her look with tranquillity, as if this amiable woman whom she examined, and who was not unpleasing to her, lived without either acute joy or profound sadness.

On the walls of the large drawing-room, empty and silent, the figures of the tapestries, vague as shadows, showed pallid among their antique games and dying graces. Like them, the terra-cotta statuettes on slender columns, the groups of old Saxony, and the paintings of Sevres, spoke of past glories. On a pedestal ornamented with precious bronzes, the marble bust of some princess royal disguised as Diana appeared about to fly out of her turbulent drapery, while on the ceiling a figure of Night, powdered like a marquise and surrounded by cupids, sowed flowers. Everything was asleep, and only the crackling of the logs and the light rattle of Therese's pearls could be heard.

Turning from the mirror, she lifted the corner of a curtain and saw through the window, beyond the dark trees of the quay, the Seine spreading its yellow reflections. Weariness of the sky and of the water was reflected in her fine gray eyes. The boat passed, the 'Hirondelle', emerging from an arch of the Alma Bridge, and carrying humble travellers toward Grenelle and Billancourt. She followed it with her eyes, then let the curtain fall, and, seating herself under the flowers, took a book from the table. On the straw-colored linen cover shone the title in gold: 'Yseult la Blonde', by Vivian Bell. It was a collection of French verses composed by an Englishwoman, and printed in London. She read indifferently, waiting for visitors, and thinking less of the poetry than of the poetess, Miss Bell, who was perhaps her most agreeable friend, and whom she almost never saw; who, at every one of their meetings, which were so rare, kissed her, calling her "darling," and babbled; who, plain yet seductive, almost ridiculous, yet wholly exquisite, lived at Fiesole like a philosopher, while England celebrated her as her most beloved poet. Like

Vernon Lee and like Mary Robinson, she had fallen in love with the life and art of Tuscany; and, without

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even finishing her *Tristan*, the first part of which had inspired in Burne-Jones dreamy aquarelles, she wrote Provencal verses and French poems expressing Italian ideas. She had sent her 'Yseult la Blonde' to "Darling," with a letter inviting her to spend a month with her at Fiesole. She had written: "Come; you will see the most beautiful things in the world, and you will embellish them."

And "darling" was saying to herself that she would not go, that she must remain in Paris. But the idea of seeing Miss Bell in Italy was not indifferent to her. And turning the leaves of the book, she stopped by chance at this line:

Love and gentle heart are one.

And she asked herself, with gentle irony, whether Miss Bell had ever been in love, and what manner of man could be the ideal of Miss Bell. The poetess had at Fiesole an escort, Prince Albertinelli. He was very handsome, but rather coarse and vulgar; too much so to please an aesthete who blended with the desire for love the mysticism of an Annunciation.

"Good-evening, Therese. I am positively worn out."

The Princess Seniavine had entered, supple in her furs, which almost seemed to form a part of her dark beauty. She seated herself brusquely, and, in a voice at once harsh yet caressing, said:

"This morning I walked through the park with General Lariviere. I met him in an alley and made him go with me to the bridge, where he wished to buy from the guardian a learned magpie which performs the manual of arms with a gun. Oh! I am so tired!"

"But why did you drag the General to the bridge?"

"Because he had gout in his toe."

Therese shrugged her shoulders, smiling:

"You squander your wickedness. You spoil things."

"And you wish me, dear, to save my kindness and my wickedness for a serious investment?"

Therese made her drink some Tokay.

Preceded by the sound of his powerful breathing, General Lariviere approached with heavy state and sat between the two women, looking stubborn and self-satisfied, laughing in every wrinkle of his face.

“How is Monsieur Martin-Belleme? Always busy?”

Therese thought he was at the Chamber, and even that he was making a speech there.

Princess Seniavine, who was eating caviare sandwiches, asked Madame Martin why she had not gone to Madame Meillan's the day before. They had played a comedy there.

“A Scandinavian play? Was it a success?”

“Yes—I don't know. I was in the little green room, under the portrait of the Duc d'Orleans. Monsieur Le Menil came to me and did me one of those good turns that one never forgets. He saved me from Monsieur Garain.”

The General, who knew the Annual Register, and stored away all useful information, pricked up his ears.

“Garain,” he asked, “the minister who was in the Cabinet when the princes were exiled?”

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"Himself. I was excessively agreeable to him. He talked to me of the yearnings of his heart and he looked at me with alarming tenderness. And from time to time he gazed, with sighs, at the portrait of the Duc d'Orleans. I said to him: 'Monsieur Garain, you are making a mistake. It is my sister-in-law who is an Orleanist. I am not.' At this moment Monsieur Le Menil came to escort me to the buffet. He paid great compliments—to my horses! He said, also, there was nothing so beautiful as the forest in winter. He talked about wolves. That refreshed me."

The General, who did not like young men, said he had met Le Menil the day before in the forest, galloping, with vast space between himself and his saddle.

He declared that old cavaliers alone retained the traditions of good horsemanship; that people in society now rode like jockeys.

"It is the same with fencing," he added. "Formerly—"

Princess Seniavine interrupted him:

"General, look and see how charming Madame Martin is. She is always charming, but at this moment she is prettier than ever. It is because she is bored. Nothing becomes her better than to be bored. Since we have been here, we have bored her terribly. Look at her: her forehead clouded, her glance vague, her mouth dolorous. Behold a victim!"

She arose, kissed Therese tumultuously, and fled, leaving the General astonished.

Madame Martin-Belleme prayed him not to listen to what the Princess had said.

He collected himself and asked:

"And how are your poets, Madame?"

It was difficult for him to forgive Madame Martin her preference for people who lived by writing and were not of his circle.

"Yes, your poets. What has become of that Monsieur Choulette, who visits you wrapped in a red muffler?"

"My poets? They forget me, they abandon me. One should not rely on anybody. Men and women—nothing is sure. Life is a continual betrayal. Only that poor Miss Bell does not forget me. She has written to me from Florence and sent her book."

"Miss Bell? Isn't she that young person who looks, with her yellow waving hair, like a little lapdog?"

He reflected, and expressed the opinion that she must be at least thirty.

An old lady, wearing with modest dignity her crown of white hair, and a little vivacious man with shrewd eyes, came in suddenly—Madame Marmet and M. Paul Vence. Then, carrying himself very stiffly, with a square monocle in his eye, appeared M. Daniel Salomon, the arbiter of elegance. The General hurried out.

They talked of the novel of the week. Madame Marmet had dined often with the author, a young and very amiable man. Paul Vence thought the book tiresome.

“Oh,” sighed Madame Martin, “all books are tiresome. But men are more tiresome than books, and they are more exacting.”

Madame Marmet said that her husband, who had much literary taste, had retained, until the end of his days, a horror of naturalism. She was the widow of a member of the ‘Academie des Inscriptions’, and plumed herself upon her illustrious widowhood. She was sweet and modest in her black gown and her beautiful white hair.

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Madame Martin said to M. Daniel Salomon that she wished to consult him particularly on the picture of a group of beautiful children.

“You will tell me if it pleases you. You may also give me your opinion, Monsieur Vence, unless you disdain such trifles.”

M. Daniel Salomon looked at Paul Vence through his monocle with disdain. Paul Vence surveyed the drawing-room.

“You have beautiful things, Madame. That would be nothing. But you have only beautiful things, and all serve to set off your own beauty.”

She did not conceal her pleasure at hearing him speak in that way. She regarded Paul Vence as the only really intelligent man she knew. She had appreciated him before his books had made him celebrated. His ill-health, his dark humor, his assiduous labor, separated him from society. The little bilious man was not very pleasing; yet he attracted her. She held in high esteem his profound irony, his great pride, his talent ripened in solitude, and she admired him, with reason, as an excellent writer, the author of powerful essays on art and on life.

Little by little the room filled with a brilliant crowd. Within the large circle of armchairs were Madame de Wesson, about whom people told frightful stories, and who kept, after twenty years of half-smothered scandal, the eyes of a child and cheeks of virginal smoothness; old Madame de Morlaine, who shouted her witty phrases in piercing cries; Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician; Madame Garain, the wife of the exminister; three other ladies; and, standing easily against the mantelpiece, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, editor of the ‘Journal des Debats’, a deputy who caressed his white beard while Madame de Morlaine shouted at him:

“Your article on bimetallism is a pearl, a jewel! Especially the end of it.”

Standing in the rear of the room, young clubmen, very grave, lisped among themselves:

“What did he do to get the button from the Prince?”

“He, nothing. His wife, everything.”

They had their own cynical philosophy. One of them had no faith in promises of men.

“They are types that do not suit me. They wear their hearts on their hands and on their mouths. You present yourself for admission to a club. They say, ‘I promise to give you a white ball. It will be an alabaster ball—a snowball! They vote. It’s a black ball. Life seems a vile affair when I think of it.’”

“Then don’t think of it.”

Daniel Salomon, who had joined them, whispered in their ears spicy stories in a lowered voice. And at every strange revelation concerning Madame Raymond, or Madame Berthier, or Princess Seniavine, he added, negligently:

“Everybody knows it.”

Then, little by little, the crowd of visitors dispersed. Only Madame Marmet and Paul Vence remained.

The latter went toward Madame Martin, and asked:

“When do you wish me to introduce Dechartre to you?”

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It was the second time he had asked this of her. She did not like to see new faces. She replied, unconcernedly:

“Your sculptor? When you wish. I saw at the Champ de Mars medallions made by him which are very good. But he does not work much. He is an amateur, is he not?”

“He is a delicate artist. He does not need to work in order to live. He caresses his figures with loving slowness. But do not be deceived about him, Madame. He knows and he feels. He would be a master if he did not live alone. I have known him since his childhood. People think that he is solitary and morose. He is passionate and timid. What he lacks, what he will lack always to reach the highest point of his art, is simplicity of mind. He is restless, and he spoils his most beautiful impressions. In my opinion he was created less for sculpture than for poetry or philosophy. He knows a great deal, and you will be astonished at the wealth of his mind.”

Madame Marmet approved.

She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it. She listened a great deal and talked little. Very affable, she gave value to her affability by not squandering it. Either because she liked Madame Martin, or because she knew how to give discreet marks of preference in every house she went, she warmed herself contentedly, like a relative, in a corner of the Louis XVI chimney, which suited her beauty. She lacked only her dog.

“How is Toby?” asked Madame Martin. “Monsieur Vence, do you know Toby? He has long silky hair and a lovely little black nose.”

Madame Marmet was relishing the praise of Toby, when an old man, pink and blond, with curly hair, short-sighted, almost blind under his golden spectacles, rather short, striking against the furniture, bowing to empty armchairs, blundering into the mirrors, pushed his crooked nose before Madame Marmet, who looked at him indignantly.

It was M. Schmoll, member of the Academie des Inscriptions. He smiled and turned a madrigal for the Countess Martin with that hereditary harsh, coarse voice with which the Jews, his fathers, pressed their creditors, the peasants of Alsace, of Poland, and of the Crimea. He dragged his phrases heavily. This great philologist knew all languages except French. And Madame Martin enjoyed his affable phrases, heavy and rusty like the iron-work of brica-brac shops, among which fell dried leaves of anthology. M. Schmoll liked poets and women, and had wit.

Madame Marmet feigned not to know him, and went out without returning his bow.

When he had exhausted his pretty madrigals, M. Schmoll became sombre and pitiful. He complained piteously. He was not decorated enough, not provided with sinecures enough, nor well fed enough by the State—he, Madame Schmoll, and their five

daughters. His lamentations had some grandeur. Something of the soul of Ezekiel and of Jeremiah was in them.

Unfortunately, turning his golden-spectacled eyes toward the table, he discovered Vivian Bell's book.

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"Oh, 'Yseult La Blonde'," he exclaimed, bitterly. "You are reading that book, Madame? Well, learn that Mademoiselle Vivian Bell has stolen an inscription from me, and that she has altered it, moreover, by putting it into verse. You will find it on page 109 of her book: 'A shade may weep over a shade.' You hear, Madame? 'A shade may weep over a shade.' Well, those words are translated literally from a funeral inscription which I was the first to publish and to illustrate. Last year, one day, when I was dining at your house, being placed by the side of Mademoiselle Bell, I quoted this phrase to her, and it pleased her a great deal. At her request, the next day I translated into French the entire inscription and sent it to her. And now I find it changed in this volume of verses under this title: 'On the Sacred Way'—the sacred way, that is I."

And he repeated, in his bad humor:

"I, Madame, am the sacred way."

He was annoyed that the poet had not spoken to him about this inscription. He would have liked to see his name at the top of the poem, in the verses, in the rhymes. He wished to see his name everywhere, and always looked for it in the journals with which his pockets were stuffed. But he had no rancor. He was not really angry with Miss Bell. He admitted gracefully that she was a distinguished person, and a poet that did great honor to England.

When he had gone, the Countess Martin asked ingenuously of Paul Vence if he knew why that good Madame Marmet had looked at M. Schmoll with such marked though silent anger. He was surprised that she did not know.

"I never know anything," she said.

"But the quarrel between Schmoll and Marmet is famous. It ceased only at the death of Marmet.

"The day that poor Marmet was buried, snow was falling. We were wet and frozen to the bones. At the grave, in the wind, in the mud, Schmoll read under his umbrella a speech full of jovial cruelty and triumphant pity, which he took afterward to the newspapers in a mourning carriage. An indiscreet friend let Madame Marmet hear of it, and she fainted. Is it possible, Madame, that you have not heard of this learned and ferocious quarrel?

"The Etruscan language was the cause of it. Marmet made it his unique study. He was surnamed Marmet the Etruscan. Neither he nor any one else knew a word of that language, the last vestige of which is lost. Schmoll said continually to Marmet: 'You do not know Etruscan, my dear colleague; that is the reason why you are an honorable savant and a fair-minded man.' Piqued by his ironic praise, Marmet thought of learning

a little Etruscan. He read to his colleague a memoir on the part played by flexions in the idiom of the ancient Tuscans.”

Madame Martin asked what a flexion was.

“Oh, Madame, if I explain anything to you, it will mix up everything. Be content with knowing that in that memoir poor Marmet quoted Latin texts and quoted them wrong. Schmoll is a Latinist of great learning, and, after Mommsen, the chief epigraphist of the world.

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“He reproached his young colleague—Marmet was not fifty years old—with reading Etruscan too well and Latin not well enough. From that time Marmet had no rest. At every meeting he was mocked unmercifully; and, finally, in spite of his softness, he got angry. Schmoll is without rancor. It is a virtue of his race. He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes. One day, as he went up the stairway of the Institute with Renan and Oppert, he met Marmet, and extended his hand to him. Marmet refused to take it, and said ‘I do not know you.’—‘Do you take me for a Latin inscription?’ Schmoll replied. Marmet died and was buried because of that satire. Now you know the reason why his widow sees his enemy with horror.”

“And I have made them dine together, side by side.”

“Madame, it was not immoral, but it was cruel.”

“My dear sir, I shall shock you, perhaps; but if I had to choose, I should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one.”

A young man, tall, thin, dark, with a long moustache, entered, and bowed with brusque suppleness.

“Monsieur Vence, I think that you know Monsieur Le Menil.”

They had met before at Madame Martin’s, and saw each other often at the Fencing Club. The day before they had met at Madame Meillan’s.

“Madame Meillan’s—there’s a house where one is bored,” said Paul Vence.

“Yet Academicians go there,” said M. Robert Le Menil. “I do not exaggerate their value, but they are the elite.”

Madame Martin smiled.

“We know, Monsieur Le Menil, that at Madame Meillan’s you are preoccupied by the women more than by the Academicians. You escorted Princess Seniavine to the buffet and talked to her about wolves.”

“What wolves?”

“Wolves, and forests blackened by winter. We thought that with so pretty a woman your conversation was rather savage!”

Paul Vence rose.

“So you permit, Madame, that I should bring my friend Dechartre? He has a great desire to know you, and I hope he will not displease you. There is life in his mind. He is full of ideas.”

“Oh, I do not ask for so much,” Madame Martin said. “People that are natural and show themselves as they are rarely bore me, and sometimes they amuse me.”

When Paul Vence had gone, Le Menil listened until the noise of footsteps had vanished; then, coming nearer:

“To-morrow, at three o’clock? Do you still love me?”

He asked her to reply while they were alone. She answered that it was late, that she expected no more visitors, and that no one except her husband would come.

He entreated. Then she said:

“I shall be free to-morrow all day. Wait for me at three o’clock.”

He thanked her with a look. Then, placing himself on at the other side of the chimney, he asked who was that Dechartre whom she wished introduced to her.

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"I do not wish him to be introduced to me. He is to be introduced to me. He is a sculptor."

He deplored the fact that she needed to see new faces, adding:

"A sculptor? They are usually brutal."

"Oh, but this one does so little sculpture! But if it annoys you that I should meet him, I will not do so."

"I should be sorry if society took any part of the time you might give to me."

"My friend, you can not complain of that. I did not even go to Madame Meillan's yesterday."

"You are right to show yourself there as little as possible. It is not a house for you."

He explained. All the women that went there had had some spicy adventure which was known and talked about. Besides, Madame Meillan favored intrigue. He gave examples. Madame Martin, however, her hands extended on the arms of the chair in charming restfulness, her head inclined, looked at the dying embers in the grate. Her thoughtful mood had flown. Nothing of it remained on her face, a little saddened, nor in her languid body, more desirable than ever in the quiescence of her mind. She kept for a while a profound immobility, which added to her personal attraction the charm of things that art had created.

He asked her of what she was thinking. Escaping the magic of the blaze in the ashes, she said:

"We will go to-morrow, if you wish, to far distant places, to the odd districts where the poor people live. I like the old streets where misery dwells."

He promised to satisfy her taste, although he let her know that he thought it absurd. The walks that she led him sometimes bored him, and he thought them dangerous. People might see them.

"And since we have been successful until now in not causing gossip—"

She shook her head.

"Do you think that people have not talked about us? Whether they know or do not know, they talk. Not everything is known, but everything is said."

She relapsed into her dream. He thought her discontented, cross, for some reason which she would not tell. He bent upon her beautiful, grave eyes which reflected the light of the grate. But she reassured him.

"I do not know whether any one talks about me. And what do I care? Nothing matters."

He left her. He was going to dine at the club, where a friend was waiting for him. She followed him with her eyes, with peaceful sympathy. Then she began again to read in the ashes.

She saw in them the days of her childhood; the castle wherein she had passed the sweet, sad summers; the dark and humid park; the pond where slept the green water; the marble nymphs under the chestnut-trees, and the bench on which she had wept and desired death. To-day she still ignored the cause of her youthful despair, when the ardent awakening of her imagination threw her into a troubled maze of desires and of fears. When she was a child, life frightened her. And now she knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope; that it is a very ordinary thing. She should have known this. She thought:

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"I saw mamma; she was good, very simple, and not very happy. I dreamed of a destiny different from hers. Why? I felt around me the insipid taste of life, and seemed to inhale the future like a salt and pungent aroma. Why? What did I want, and what did I expect? Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?"

She had been born rich, in the brilliancy of a fortune too new. She was a daughter of that Montessuy, who, at first a clerk in a Parisian bank, founded and governed two great establishments, brought to sustain them the resources of a brilliant mind, invincible force of character, a rare alliance of cleverness and honesty, and treated with the Government as if he were a foreign power. She had grown up in the historical castle of Joinville, bought, restored, and magnificently furnished by her father. Montessuy made life give all it could yield. An instinctive and powerful atheist, he wanted all the goods of this world and all the desirable things that earth produces. He accumulated pictures by old masters, and precious sculptures. At fifty he had known all the most beautiful women of the stage, and many in society. He enjoyed everything worldly with the brutality of his temperament and the shrewdness of his mind.

Poor Madame Montessuy, economical and careful, languished at Joinville, delicate and poor, under the frowns of twelve gigantic caryatides which held a ceiling on which Lebrun had painted the Titans struck by Jupiter. There, in the iron cot, placed at the foot of the large bed, she died one night of sadness and exhaustion, never having loved anything on earth except her husband and her little drawing-room in the Rue Maubeuge.

She never had had any intimacy with her daughter, whom she felt instinctively too different from herself, too free, too bold at heart; and she divined in Therese, although she was sweet and good, the strong Montessuy blood, the ardor which had made her suffer so much, and which she forgave in her husband, but not in her daughter.

But Montessuy recognized his daughter and loved her. Like most hearty, full-blooded men, he had hours of charming gayety. Although he lived out of his house a great deal, he breakfasted with her almost every day, and sometimes took her out walking. He understood gowns and furbelows. He instructed and formed Therese. He amused her. Near her, his instinct for conquest inspired him still. He desired to win always, and he won his daughter. He separated her from her mother. Therese admired him, she adored him.

In her dream she saw him as the unique joy of her childhood. She was persuaded that no man in the world was as amiable as her father.

At her entrance in life, she despaired at once of finding elsewhere so rich a nature, such a plenitude of active and thinking forces. This discouragement had followed her in the choice of a husband, and perhaps later in a secret and freer choice.

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She had not really selected her husband. She did not know: she had permitted herself to be married by her father, who, then a widower, embarrassed by the care of a girl, had wished to do things quickly and well. He considered the exterior advantages, estimated the eighty years of imperial nobility which Count Martin brought. The idea never came to him that she might wish to find love in marriage.

He flattered himself that she would find in it the satisfaction of the luxurious desires which he attributed to her, the joy of making a display of grandeur, the vulgar pride, the material domination, which were for him all the value of life, as he had no ideas on the subject of the happiness of a true woman, although he was sure that his daughter would remain virtuous.

While thinking of his absurd yet natural faith in her, which accorded so badly with his own experiences and ideas regarding women, she smiled with melancholy irony. And she admired her father the more.

After all, she was not so badly married. Her husband was as good as any other man. He had become quite bearable. Of all that she read in the ashes, in the veiled softness of the lamps, of all her reminiscences, that of their married life was the most vague. She found a few isolated traits of it, some absurd images, a fleeting and fastidious impression. The time had not seemed long and had left nothing behind. Six years had passed, and she did not even remember how she had regained her liberty, so prompt and easy had been her conquest of that husband, cold, sickly, selfish, and polite; of that man dried up and yellowed by business and politics, laborious, ambitious, and commonplace. He liked women only through vanity, and he never had loved his wife. The separation had been frank and complete. And since then, strangers to each other, they felt a tacit, mutual gratitude for their freedom. She would have had some affection for him if she had not found him hypocritical and too subtle in the art of obtaining her signature when he needed money for enterprises that were more for ostentation than real benefit. The man with whom she dined and talked every day had no significance for her.

With her cheek in her hand, before the grate, as if she questioned a sibyl, she saw again the face of the Marquis de Re. She saw it so precisely that it surprised her. The Marquis de Re had been presented to her by her father, who admired him, and he appeared to her grand and dazzling for his thirty years of intimate triumphs and mundane glories. His adventures followed him like a procession. He had captivated three generations of women, and had left in the heart of all those whom he had loved an imperishable memory. His virile grace, his quiet elegance, and his habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth far beyond the ordinary term of years. He noticed particularly the young Countess Martin. The homage of this expert flattered her. She thought of him now with pleasure. He had a marvellous art of conversation. He amused her. She let him see it, and at once he promised to himself, in his heroic frivolity, to finish worthily his happy life by the subjugation of this young woman whom he appreciated above every

one else, and who evidently admired him. He displayed, to capture her, the most learned stratagems. But she escaped him very easily.

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She yielded, two years later, to Robert Le Menil, who had desired her ardently, with all the warmth of his youth, with all the simplicity of his mind. She said to herself: "I gave myself to him because he loved me." It was the truth. The truth was, also, that a dumb yet powerful instinct had impelled her, and that she had obeyed the hidden impulse of her being. But even this was not her real self; what awakened her nature at last was the fact that she believed in the sincerity of his sentiment. She had yielded as soon as she had felt that she was loved. She had given herself, quickly, simply. He thought that she had yielded easily. He was mistaken. She had felt the discouragement which the irreparable gives, and that sort of shame which comes of having suddenly something to conceal. Everything that had been whispered before her about other women resounded in her burning ears. But, proud and delicate, she took care to hide the value of the gift she was making. He never suspected her moral uneasiness, which lasted only a few days, and was replaced by perfect tranquillity. After three years she defended her conduct as innocent and natural.

Having done harm to no one, she had no regrets. She was content. She was in love, she was loved. Doubtless she had not felt the intoxication she had expected, but does one ever feel it? She was the friend of the good and honest fellow, much liked by women who passed for disdainful and hard to please, and he had a true affection for her. The pleasure she gave him and the joy of being beautiful for him attached her to this friend. He made life for her not continually delightful, but easy to bear, and at times agreeable.

That which she had not divined in her solitude, notwithstanding vague yearnings and apparently causeless sadness, he had revealed to her. She knew herself when she knew him. It was a happy astonishment. Their sympathies were not in their minds. Her inclination toward him was simple and frank, and at this moment she found pleasure in the idea of meeting him the next day in the little apartment where they had met for three years. With a shake of the head and a shrug of her shoulders, coarser than one would have expected from this exquisite woman, sitting alone by the dying fire, she said to herself: "There! I need love!"

CHAPTER II

"One can see that you are young!"

It was no longer daylight when they came out of the little apartment in the Rue Spontini. Robert Le Menil made a sign to a coachman, and entered the carriage with Therese. Close together, they rolled among the vague shadows, cut by sudden lights, through the ghostly city, having in their minds only sweet and vanishing impressions while everything around them seemed confused and fleeting.

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The carriage approached the Pont-Neuf. They stepped out. A dry cold made vivid the sombre January weather. Under her veil Therese joyfully inhaled the wind which swept on the hardened soil a dust white as salt. She was glad to wander freely among unknown things. She liked to see the stony landscape which the clearness of the air made distinct; to walk quickly and firmly on the quay where the trees displayed the black tracery of their branches on the horizon reddened by the smoke of the city; to look at the Seine. In the sky the first stars appeared.

"One would think that the wind would put them out," she said.

He observed, too, that they scintillated a great deal. He did not think it was a sign of rain, as the peasants believe. He had observed, on the contrary, that nine times in ten the scintillation of stars was an augury of fine weather.

Near the little bridge they found old iron-shops lighted by smoky lamps. She ran into them. She turned a corner and went into a shop in which queer stuffs were hanging. Behind the dirty panes a lighted candle showed pots, porcelain vases, a clarinet, and a bride's wreath.

He did not understand what pleasure she found in her search.

"These shops are full of vermin. What can you find interesting in them?"

"Everything. I think of the poor bride whose wreath is under that globe. The dinner occurred at Maillot. There was a policeman in the procession. There is one in almost all the bridal processions one sees in the park on Saturdays. Don't they move you, my friend, all these poor, ridiculous, miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past?"

Among cups decorated with flowers she discovered a little knife, the ivory handle of which represented a tall, thin woman with her hair arranged a la Maintenon. She bought it for a few sous. It pleased her, because she already had a fork like it. Le Menil confessed that he had no taste for such things, but said that his aunt knew a great deal about them. At Caen all the merchants knew her. She had restored and furnished her house in proper style. This house was noted as early as 1690. In one of its halls were white cases full of books. His aunt had wished to put them in order. She had found frivolous books in them, ornamented with engravings so unconventional that she had burned them.

"Is she silly, your aunt?" asked Therese.

For a long time his anecdotes about his aunt had made her impatient. Her friend had in the country a mother, sisters, aunts, and numerous relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her. He talked of them with admiration. It annoyed her that he often

visited them. When he came back, she imagined that he carried with him the odor of things that had been packed up for years. He was astonished, naively, and he suffered from her antipathy to them.

He said nothing. The sight of a public-house, the panes of which were flaming, recalled to him the poet Choulette, who passed for a drunkard. He asked her if she still saw that Choulette, who called on her wearing a mackintosh and a red muffler.

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It annoyed her that he spoke like General Lariviere. She did not say that she had not seen Choulette since autumn, and that he neglected her with the capriciousness of a man not in society.

“He has wit,” she said, “fantasy, and an original temperament. He pleases me.”

And as he reproached her for having an odd taste, she replied:

“I haven’t a taste, I have tastes. You do not disapprove of them all, I suppose.”

He replied that he did not criticise her. He was only afraid that she might do herself harm by receiving a Bohemian who was not welcome in respectable houses.

She exclaimed:

“Not welcome in respectable houses—Choulette? Don’t you know that he goes every year for a month to the Marquise de Rieu? Yes, to the Marquise de Rieu, the Catholic, the royalist. But since Choulette interests you, listen to his latest adventure. Paul Vence related it to me. I understand it better in this street, where there are shirts and flowerpots at the windows.

“This winter, one night when it was raining, Choulette went into a public-house in a street the name of which I have forgotten, but which must resemble this one, and met there an unfortunate girl whom the waiters would not have noticed, and whom he liked for her humility. Her name was Maria. The name was not hers. She found it nailed on her door at the top of the stairway where she went to lodge. Choulette was touched by this perfection of poverty and infamy. He called her his sister, and kissed her hands. Since then he has not quitted her a moment. He takes her to the coffee-houses of the Latin Quarter where the rich students read their reviews. He says sweet things to her. He weeps, she weeps. They drink; and when they are drunk, they fight. He loves her. He calls her his chaste one, his cross and his salvation. She was barefooted; he gave her yarn and knitting-needles that she might make stockings. And he made shoes for this unfortunate girl himself, with enormous nails. He teaches her verses that are easy to understand. He is afraid of altering her moral beauty by taking her out of the shame where she lives in perfect simplicity and admirable destitution.”

Le Menil shrugged his shoulders.

“But that Choulette is crazy, and Paul Vence has no right to tell you such stories. I am not austere, assuredly; but there are immoralities that disgust me.” They were walking at random. She fell into a dream.

“Yes, morality, I know—duty! But duty—it takes the devil to discover it. I can assure you that I do not know where duty is. It’s like a young lady’s turtle at Joinville. We spent

all the evening looking for it under the furniture, and when we had found it, we went to bed.”

He thought there was some truth in what she said. He would think about it when alone.

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"I regret sometimes that I did not remain in the army. I know what you are going to say—one becomes a brute in that profession. Doubtless, but one knows exactly what one has to do, and that is a great deal in life. I think that my uncle's life is very beautiful and very agreeable. But now that everybody is in the army, there are neither officers nor soldiers. It all looks like a railway station on Sunday. My uncle knew personally all the officers and all the soldiers of his brigade. Nowadays, how can you expect an officer to know his men?"

She had ceased to listen. She was looking at a woman selling fried potatoes. She realized that she was hungry and wished to eat fried potatoes.

He remonstrated:

"Nobody knows how they are cooked."

But he had to buy two sous' worth of fried potatoes, and to see that the woman put salt on them.

While Therese was eating them, he led her into deserted streets far from the gaslights. Soon they found themselves in front of the cathedral. The moon silvered the roofs.

"Notre Dame," she said. "See, it is as heavy as an elephant yet as delicate as an insect. The moon climbs over it and looks at it with a monkey's maliciousness. She does not look like the country moon at Joinville. At Joinville I have a path—a flat path—with the moon at the end of it. She is not there every night; but she returns faithfully, full, red, familiar. She is a country neighbor. I go seriously to meet her. But this moon of Paris I should not like to know. She is not respectable company. Oh, the things that she has seen during the time she has been roaming around the roofs!"

He smiled a tender smile.

"Oh, your little path where you walked alone and that you liked because the sky was at the end of it! I see it as if I were there."

It was at the Joinville castle that he had seen her for the first time, and had at once loved her. It was there, one night, that he had told her of his love, to which she had listened, dumb, with a pained expression on her mouth and a vague look in her eyes.

The reminiscence of this little path where she walked alone moved him, troubled him, made him live again the enchanted hours of his first desires and hopes. He tried to find her hand in her muff and pressed her slim wrist under the fur.

A little girl carrying violets saw that they were lovers, and offered flowers to them. He bought a two-sous' bouquet and offered it to Therese.

She was walking toward the cathedral. She was thinking: “It is like an enormous beast—a beast of the Apocalypse.”

At the other end of the bridge a flower-woman, wrinkled, bearded, gray with years and dust, followed them with her basket full of mimosas and roses. Therese, who held her violets and was trying to slip them into her waist, said, joyfully:

“Thank you, I have some.”

“One can see that you are young,” the old woman shouted with a wicked air, as she went away.

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Therese understood at once, and a smile came to her lips and eyes. They were passing near the porch, before the stone figures that wear sceptres and crowns.

“Let us go in,” she said.

He did not wish to go in. He declared that the door was closed. She pushed it, and slipped into the immense nave, where the inanimate trees of the columns ascended in darkness. In the rear, candles were moving in front of spectre-like priests, under the last reverberations of the organs. She trembled in the silence, and said:

“The sadness of churches at night moves me; I feel in them the grandeur of nothingness.”

He replied:

“We must believe in something. If there were no God, if our souls were not immortal, it would be too sad.”

She remained for a while immovable under the curtains of shadow hanging from the arches. Then she said:

“My poor friend, we do not know what to do with this life, which is so short, and yet you desire another life which shall never finish.”

In the carriage that took them back he said gayly that he had passed a fine afternoon. He kissed her, satisfied with her and with himself. But his good-humor was not communicated to her. The last moments they passed together were spoiled for her always by the presentiment that he would not say at parting the thing that he should say. Ordinarily, he quitted her brusquely, as if what had happened were not to last. At every one of their partings she had a confused feeling that they were parting forever. She suffered from this in advance and became irritable.

Under the trees he took her hand and kissed her.

“Is it not rare, Therese, to love as we love each other?”

“Rare? I don’t know; but I think that you love me.”

“And you?”

“I, too, love you.”

“And you will love me always?”

“What does one ever know?”



And seeing the face of her lover darken:

“Would you be more content with a woman who would swear to love only you for all time?”

He remained anxious, with a wretched air. She was kind and she reassured him:

“You know very well, my friend, that I am not fickle.”

Almost at the end of the lane they said good-by. He kept the carriage to return to the Rue Royale. He was to dine at the club and go to the theatre, and had no time to lose.

Therese returned home on foot. Opposite the Trocadero she remembered what the old flower-woman had said: “One can see that you are young.” The words came back to her with a significance not immoral but sad. “One can see that you are young!” Yes, she was young, she was loved, and she was bored to death.

CHAPTER III

A DISCUSSION ON THE LITTLE CORPORAL

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In the centre of the table flowers were disposed in a basket of gilded bronze, decorated with eagles, stars, and bees, and handles formed like horns of plenty. On its sides winged Victories supported the branches of candelabra. This centrepiece of the Empire style had been given by Napoleon, in 1812, to Count Martin de l'Aisne, grandfather of the present Count Martin-Belleme. Martin de l'Aisne, a deputy to the Legislative Corps in 1809, was appointed the following year member of the Committee on Finance, the assiduous and secret works of which suited his laborious temperament. Although a Liberal, he pleased the Emperor by his application and his exact honesty. For two years he was under a rain of favors. In 1813 he formed part of the moderate majority which approved the report in which Laine censured power and misfortune, by giving to the Empire tardy advice. January 1, 1814, he went with his colleagues to the Tuileries. The Emperor received them in a terrifying manner. He charged on their ranks. Violent and sombre, in the horror of his present strength and of his coming fall, he stunned them with his anger and his contempt.

He came and went through their lines, and suddenly took Count Martin by the shoulders, shook him and dragged him, exclaiming: "A throne is four pieces of wood covered with velvet? No! A throne is a man, and that man is I. You have tried to throw mud at me. Is this the time to remonstrate with me when there are two hundred thousand Cossacks at the frontiers? Your Laine is a wicked man. One should wash one's dirty linen at home." And while in his anger he twisted in his hand the embroidered collar of the deputy, he said: "The people know me. They do not know you. I am the elect of the nation. You are the obscure delegates of a department." He predicted to them the fate of the Girondins. The noise of his spurs accompanied the sound of his voice. Count Martin remained trembling the rest of his life, and tremblingly recalled the Bourbons after the defeat of the Emperor. The two restorations were in vain; the July government and the Second Empire covered his oppressed breast with crosses and cordons. Raised to the highest functions, loaded with honors by three kings and one emperor, he felt forever on his shoulder the hand of the Corsican. He died a senator of Napoleon III, and left a son agitated by the same fear.

This son had married Mademoiselle Belleme, daughter of the first president of the court of Bourges, and with her the political glories of a family which gave three ministers to the moderate monarch. The Bellemes, advocates in the time of Louis XV, elevated the Jacobin origins of the Martins. The second Count Martin was a member of all the Assemblies until his death in 1881. His son took without trouble his seat in the Chamber of Deputies. Having married Mademoiselle Therese Montessuy, whose dowry supported his political fortune, he appeared discreetly among the four or five bourgeois, titled and wealthy, who rallied to democracy, and were received without much bad grace by the republicans, whom aristocracy flattered.

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In the dining-room, Count Martin-Belleme was doing the honors of his table with the good grace, the sad politeness, recently prescribed at the Elysee to represent isolated France at a great northern court. From time to time he addressed vapid phrases to Madame Garain at his right; to the Princess Seniavine at his left, who, loaded with diamonds, felt bored. Opposite him, on the other side of the table, Countess Martin, having by her side General Lariviere and M. Schmoll, member of the Academie des Inscriptions, caressed with her fan her smooth white shoulders. At the two semicircles, whereby the dinner-table was prolonged, were M. Montessuy, robust, with blue eyes and ruddy complexion; a young cousin, Madame Belleme de Saint-Nom, embarrassed by her long, thin arms; the painter Duviquet; M. Daniel Salomon; then Paul Vence and Garain the deputy; Belleme de Saint-Nom; an unknown senator; and Dechartre, who was dining at the house for the first time. The conversation, at first trivial and insignificant, was prolonged into a confused murmur, above which rose Garain's voice:

"Every false idea is dangerous. People think that dreamers do no harm. They are mistaken: dreamers do a great deal of harm. Even apparently inoffensive utopian ideas really exercise a noxious influence. They tend to inspire disgust at reality."

"It is, perhaps, because reality is not beautiful," said Paul Vence.

M. Garain said that he had always been in favor of all possible improvements. He had asked for the suppression of permanent armies in the time of the Empire, for the separation of church and state, and had remained always faithful to democracy. His device, he said, was "Order and Progress." He thought he had discovered that device.

Montessuy said:

"Well, Monsieur Garain, be sincere. Confess that there are no reforms to be made, and that it is as much as one can do to change the color of postage-stamps. Good or bad, things are as they should be. Yes, things are as they should be; but they change incessantly. Since 1870 the industrial and financial situation of the country has gone through four or five revolutions which political economists had not foreseen and which they do not yet understand. In society, as in nature, transformations are accomplished from within."

As to matters of government his ideas were terse and decided. He was strongly attached to the present, heedless of the future, and the socialists troubled him little. Without caring whether the sun and capital should be extinguished some day, he enjoyed them. According to him, one should let himself be carried. None but fools resisted the current or tried to go in front of it.

But Count Martin, naturally sad, had, dark presentiments. In veiled words he announced catastrophes. His timorous phrases came through the flowers, and irritated M. Schmoll, who began to grumble and to prophesy. He explained that Christian

nations were incapable, alone and by themselves, of throwing off barbarism, and that without the Jews and the Arabs Europe would be to-day, as in the time of the Crusades, sunk in ignorance, misery, and cruelty.

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"The Middle Ages," he said, "are closed only in the historical manuals that are given to pupils to spoil their minds. In reality, barbarians are always barbarians. Israel's mission is to instruct nations. It was Israel which, in the Middle Ages, brought to Europe the wisdom of ages. Socialism frightens you. It is a Christian evil, like priesthood. And anarchy? Do you not recognize in it the plague of the Albigeois and of the Vaudois? The Jews, who instructed and polished Europe, are the only ones who can save it to-day from the evangelical evil by which it is devoured. But they have not fulfilled their duty. They have made Christians of themselves among the Christians. And God punishes them. He permits them to be exiled and to be despoiled. Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere. From Russia my co-religionists are expelled like savage beasts. In France, civil and military employments are closing against Jews. They have no longer access to aristocratic circles. My nephew, young Isaac Coblentz, has had to renounce a diplomatic career, after passing brilliantly his admission examination. The wives of several of my colleagues, when Madame Schmoll calls on them, display with intention, under her eyes, anti-Semitic newspapers. And would you believe that the Minister of Public Instruction has refused to give me the cross of the Legion of Honor for which I have applied? There's ingratitude! Anti-Semitism is death—it is death, do you hear? to European civilization."

The little man had a natural manner which surpassed all the art in the world. Grotesque and terrible, he threw the table into consternation by his sincerity. Madame Martin, whom he amused, complimented him on this:

"At least," she said, "you defend your co-religionists. You are not, Monsieur Schmoll, like a beautiful Jewish lady of my acquaintance who, having read in a journal that she received the elite of Jewish society, went everywhere shouting that she had been insulted."

"I am sure, Madame, that you do not know how beautiful and superior to all other moralities is Jewish morality. Do you know the parable of the three rings?"

This question was lost in the murmur of the dialogues wherein were mingled foreign politics, exhibitions of paintings, fashionable scandals, and Academy speeches. They talked of the new novel and of the coming play. This was a comedy. Napoleon was an incidental character in it.

The conversation settled upon Napoleon I, often placed on the stage and newly studied in books—an object of curiosity, a personage in the fashion, no longer a popular hero, a demi-god, wearing boots for his country, as in the days when Norvins and Beranger, Charlet and Raffet were composing his legend; but a curious personage, an amusing type in his living infinity, a figure whose style is pleasant to artists, whose movements attract thoughtless idlers.

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Garain, who had founded his political fortune on hatred of the Empire, judged sincerely that this return of national taste was only an absurd infatuation. He saw no danger in it and felt no fear about it. In him fear was sudden and ferocious. For the moment he was very quiet; he talked neither of prohibiting performances nor of seizing books, of imprisoning authors, or of suppressing anything. Calm and severe, he saw in Napoleon only Taine's 'condottiere' who kicked Volney in the stomach. Everybody wished to define the true Napoleon. Count Martin, in the face of the imperial centrepiece and of the winged Victories, talked suitably of Napoleon as an organizer and administrator, and placed him in a high position as president of the state council, where his words threw light upon obscure questions. Garain affirmed that in his sessions, only too famous, Napoleon, under pretext of taking snuff, asked the councillors to pass to him their gold boxes ornamented with miniatures and decked with diamonds, which they never saw again. The anecdote was told to him by the son of Mounier himself.

Montessuy esteemed in Napoleon the genius of order. "He liked," he said, "work well done. That is a taste most persons have lost."

The painter Duviquet, whose ideas were those of an artist, was embarrassed. He did not find on the funeral mask brought from St. Helena the characteristics of that face, beautiful and powerful, which medals and busts have consecrated. One must be convinced of this now that the bronze of that mask was hanging in all the old shops, among eagles and sphinxes made of gilded wood. And, according to him, since the true face of Napoleon was not that of the ideal Napoleon, his real soul may not have been as idealists fancied it. Perhaps it was the soul of a good bourgeois. Somebody had said this, and he was inclined to think that it was true. Anyway, Duviquet, who flattered himself with having made the best portraits of the century, knew that celebrated men seldom resemble the ideas one forms of them.

M. Daniel Salomon observed that the fine mask about which Duviquet talked, the plaster cast taken from the inanimate face of the Emperor, and brought to Europe by Dr. Antommarchi, had been moulded in bronze and sold by subscription for the first time in 1833, under Louis Philippe, and had then inspired surprise and mistrust. People suspected the Italian chemist, who was a sort of buffoon, always talkative and famished, of having tried to make fun of people. Disciples of Dr. Gall, whose system was then in favor, regarded the mask as suspicious. They did not find in it the bumps of genius; and the forehead, examined in accordance with the master's theories, presented nothing remarkable in its formation.

"Precisely," said Princess Seniavine. "Napoleon was remarkable only for having kicked Volney in the stomach and stealing a snuffbox ornamented with diamonds. Monsieur Garain has just taught us."

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"And yet," said Madame Martin, "nobody is sure that he kicked Volney."

"Everything becomes known in the end," replied the Princess, gayly. "Napoleon did nothing at all. He did not even kick Volney, and his head was that of an idiot."

General Lariviere felt that he should say something. He hurled this phrase:

"Napoleon—his campaign of 1813 is much discussed."

The General wished to please Garain, and he had no other idea. However, he succeeded, after an effort, in formulating a judgment:

"Napoleon committed faults; in his situation he should not have committed any." And he stopped abruptly, very red.

Madame Martin asked:

"And you, Monsieur Vence, what do you think of Napoleon?"

"Madame, I have not much love for sword-bearers, and conquerors seem to me to be dangerous fools. But in spite of everything, that figure of the Emperor interests me as it interests the public. I find character and life in it. There is no poem or novel that is worth the Memoirs of Saint Helena, although it is written in ridiculous fashion. What I think of Napoleon, if you wish to know, is that, made for glory, he had the brilliant simplicity of the hero of an epic poem. A hero must be human. Napoleon was human."

"Oh, oh!" every one exclaimed.

But Paul Vence continued:

"He was violent and frivolous; therefore profoundly human. I mean, similar to everybody. He desired, with singular force, all that most men esteem and desire. He had illusions, which he gave to the people. This was his power and his weakness; it was his beauty. He believed in glory. He had of life and of the world the same opinion as any one of his grenadiers. He retained always the infantile gravity which finds pleasure in playing with swords and drums, and the sort of innocence which makes good military men. He esteemed force sincerely. He was a man among men, the flesh of human flesh. He had not a thought that was not in action, and all his actions were grand yet common. It is this vulgar grandeur which makes heroes. And Napoleon is the perfect hero. His brain never surpassed his hand—that hand, small and beautiful, which grasped the world. He never had, for a moment, the least care for what he could not reach."

"Then," said Garain, "according to you, he was not an intellectual genius. I am of your opinion."

“Surely,” continued Paul Vence, “he had enough genius to be brilliant in the civil and military arena of the world. But he had not speculative genius. That genius is another pair of sleeves, as Buffon says. We have a collection of his writings and speeches. His style has movement and imagination. And in this mass of thoughts one can not find a philosophic curiosity, not one expression of anxiety about the unknowable, not an expression of fear of the mystery which surrounds destiny. At Saint Helena, when he talks of God and of the soul, he seems to be a little

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fourteen-year-old school-boy. Thrown upon the world, his mind found itself fit for the world, and embraced it all. Nothing of that mind was lost in the infinite. Himself a poet, he knew only the poetry of action. He limited to the earth his powerful dream of life. In his terrible and touching naivete he believed that a man could be great, and neither time nor misfortune made him lose that idea. His youth, or rather his sublime adolescence, lasted as long as he lived, because life never brought him a real maturity. Such is the abnormal state of men of action. They live entirely in the present, and their genius concentrates on one point. The hours of their existence are not connected by a chain of grave and disinterested meditations. They succeed themselves in a series of acts. They lack interior life. This defect is particularly visible in Napoleon, who never lived within himself. From this is derived the frivolity of temperament which made him support easily the enormous load of his evils and of his faults. His mind was born anew every day. He had, more than any other person, a capacity for diversion. The first day that he saw the sun rise on his funereal rock at Saint Helena, he jumped from his bed, whistling a romantic air. It was the peace of a mind superior to fortune; it was the frivolity of a mind prompt in resurrection. He lived from the outside."

Garain, who did not like Paul Vence's ingenious turn of wit and language, tried to hasten the conclusion:

"In a word," he said, "there was something of the monster in the man."

"There are no monsters," replied Paul Vence; "and men who pass for monsters inspire horror. Napoleon was loved by an entire people. He had the power to win the love of men. The joy of his soldiers was to die for him."

Countess Martin would have wished Dechartre to give his opinion. But he excused himself with a sort of fright.

"Do you know," said Schmoll again, "the parable of the three rings, sublime inspiration of a Portuguese Jew."

Garain, while complimenting Paul Vence on his brilliant paradox, regretted that wit should be exercised at the expense of morality and justice.

"One great principle," he said, "is that men should be judged by their acts."

"And women?" asked Princess Seniavine, brusquely; "do you judge them by their acts? And how do you know what they do?"

The sound of voices was mingled with the clear tintinabulation of silverware. A warm air bathed the room. The roses shed their leaves on the cloth. More ardent thoughts mounted to the brain.



General Lariviere fell into dreams.

“When public clamor has split my ears,” he said to his neighbor, “I shall go to live at Tours. I shall cultivate flowers.”

He flattered himself on being a good gardener; his name had been given to a rose. This pleased him highly.

Schmoll asked again if they knew the parable of the three rings.

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The Princess rallied the Deputy.

“Then you do not know, Monsieur Garain, that one does the same things for very different reasons?”

Montessuy said she was right.

“It is very true, as you say, Madame, that actions prove nothing. This thought is striking in an episode in the life of Don Juan, which was known neither to Moliere nor to Mozart, but which is revealed in an English legend, a knowledge of which I owe to my friend James Russell Lowell of London. One learns from it that the great seducer lost his time with three women. One was a bourgeoisie: she was in love with her husband; the other was a nun: she would not consent to violate her vows; the third, who had for a long time led a life of debauchery, had become ugly, and was a servant in a den. After what she had done, after what she had seen, love signified nothing to her. These three women behaved alike for very different reasons. An action proves nothing. It is the mass of actions, their weight, their sum total, which makes the value of the human being.”

“Some of our actions,” said Madame Martin, “have our look, our face: they are our daughters. Others do not resemble us at all.”

She rose and took the General’s arm.

On the way to the drawing-room the Princess said:

“Therese is right. Some actions do not express our real selves at all. They are like the things we do in nightmares.”

The nymphs of the tapestries smiled vainly in their faded beauty at the guests, who did not see them.

Madame Martin served the coffee with her young cousin, Madame Belleme de Saint-Nom. She complimented Paul Vence on what he had said at the table.

“You talked of Napoleon with a freedom of mind that is rare in the conversations I hear. I have noticed that children, when they are handsome, look, when they pout, like Napoleon at Waterloo. You have made me feel the profound reasons for this similarity.”

Then, turning toward Dechartre:

“Do you like Napoleon?”

“Madame, I do not like the Revolution. And Napoleon is the Revolution in boots.”

“Monsieur Dechartre, why did you not say this at dinner? But I see you prefer to be witty only in tete-a-tetes.”

Count Martin-Belleme escorted the men to the smoking-room. Paul Vence alone remained with the women. Princess Seniavine asked him if he had finished his novel, and what was the subject of it. It was a study in which he tried to reach the truth through a series of plausible conditions.

“Thus,” he said, “the novel acquires a moral force which history, in its heavy frivolity, never had.”

She inquired whether the book was written for women. He said it was not.

“You are wrong, Monsieur Vence, not to write for women. A superior man can do nothing else for them.”

He wished to know what gave her that idea.

“Because I see that all the intelligent women love fools.”

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"Who bore them."

"Certainly! But superior men would weary them more. They would have more resources to employ in boring them. But tell me the subject of your novel."

"Do you insist?"

"Oh, I insist upon nothing."

"Well, I will tell you. It is a study of popular manners; the history of a young workman, sober and chaste, as handsome as a girl, with the mind of a virgin, a sensitive soul. He is a carver, and works well. At night, near his mother, whom he loves, he studies, he reads books. In his mind, simple and receptive, ideas lodge themselves like bullets in a wall. He has no desires. He has neither the passions nor the vices that attach us to life. He is solitary and pure. Endowed with strong virtues, he becomes conceited. He lives among miserable people. He sees suffering. He has devotion without humanity. He has that sort of cold charity which is called altruism. He is not human because he is not sensual."

"Oh! One must be sensual to be human?"

"Certainly, Madame. True pity, like tenderness, comes from the heart. He is not intelligent enough to doubt. He believes what he has read. And he has read that to establish universal happiness society must be destroyed. Thirst for martyrdom devours him. One morning, having kissed his mother, he goes out; he watches for the socialist deputy of his district, sees him, throws himself on him, and buries a poniard in his breast. Long live anarchy! He is arrested, measured, photographed, questioned, judged, condemned to death, and guillotined. That is my novel."

"It is not very amusing," said the Princess; "but that is not your fault. Your anarchists are as timid and moderate as other Frenchmen. The Russians have more audacity and more imagination."

Countess Martin asked Paul Vence whether he knew a silent, timid-looking man among the guests. Her husband had invited him. She knew nothing of him, not even his name. Paul Vence could only say that he was a senator. He had seen him one day by chance in the Luxembourg, in the gallery that served as a library.

"I went there to look at the cupola, where Delacroix has painted, in a wood of bluish myrtles, heroes and sages of antiquity. That gentleman was there, with the same wretched and pitiful air. His coat was damp and he was warming himself. He was talking with old colleagues and saying, while rubbing his hands: 'The proof that the Republic is the best of governments is that in 1871 it could kill in a week sixty thousand

insurgents without becoming unpopular. After such a repression any other regime would have been impossible.”

“He is a very wicked man,” said Madame Martin. “And to think that I was pitying him!”

Madame Garain, her chin softly dropped on her chest, slept in the peace of her housewifely mind, and dreamed of her vegetable garden on the banks of the Loire, where singing-societies came to serenade her.

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Joseph Schmoll and General Lariviere came out of the smoking-room. The General took a seat between Princess Seniavine and Madame Martin.

"I met this morning, in the park, Baronne Warburg, mounted on a magnificent horse. She said, 'General, how do you manage to have such fine horses?' I replied: Madame, to have fine horses, you must be either very wealthy or very clever."

He was so well satisfied with his reply that he repeated it twice.

Paul Vence came near Countess Martin:

"I know that senator's name: it is Lye. He is the vice-president of a political society, and author of a book entitled, The Crime of December Second."

The General continued:

"The weather was horrible. I went into a hut and found Le Menil there. I was in a bad humor. He was making fun of me, I saw, because I sought shelter. He imagines that because I am a general I must like wind and snow. He said that he liked bad weather, and that he was to go foxhunting with friends next week."

There was a pause; the General continued:

"I wish him much joy, but I don't envy him. Foxhunting is not agreeable."

"But it is useful," said Montessuy.

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"Foxes are dangerous for chicken-coops in the spring when the fowls have to feed their families."

"Foxes are sly poachers, who do less harm to farmers than to hunters. I know something of this."

Therese was not listening to the Princess, who was talking to her. She was thinking:

"He did not tell me that he was going away!"

"Of what are you thinking, dear?" inquired the Princess.

"Of nothing interesting," Therese replied.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF A DREAM

In the little shadowy room, where sound was deadened by curtains, portieres, cushions, bearskins, and carpets from the Orient, the firelight shone on glittering swords hanging among the faded favors of the cotillions of three winters. The rosewood chiffonier was surmounted by a silver cup, a prize from some sporting club. On a porcelain plaque, in the centre of the table, stood a crystal vase which held branches of white lilacs; and lights palpitated in the warm shadows. Therese and Robert, their eyes accustomed to obscurity, moved easily among these familiar objects. He lighted a cigarette while she arranged her hair, standing before the mirror, in a corner so dim she could hardly see herself. She took pins from the little Bohemian glass cup standing on the table, where she had kept it for three years. He looked at her, passing her light fingers quickly through the gold ripples of her hair, while her face, hardened and bronzed by the shadow, took on a mysterious expression. She did not speak.

He said to her:

“You are not cross now, my dear?”

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And, as he insisted upon having an answer, she said:

“What do you wish me to say, my friend? I can only repeat what I said at first. I think it strange that I have to learn of your projects from General Lariviere.”

He knew very well that she had not forgiven him; that she had remained cold and reserved toward him. But he affected to think that she only pouted.

“My dear, I have explained it to you. I have told you that when I met Lariviere I had just received a letter from Caumont, recalling my promise to hunt the fox in his woods, and I replied by return post. I meant to tell you about it to-day. I am sorry that General Lariviere told you first, but there was no significance in that.”

Her arms were lifted like the handles of a vase. She turned toward him a glance from her tranquil eyes, which he did not understand.

“Then you are going?”

“Next week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I shall be away only ten days at most.”

She put on her sealskin toque, ornamented with a branch of holly.

“Is it something that you can not postpone?”

“Oh, yes. Fox-skins would not be worth anything in a month. Moreover, Caumont has invited good friends of mine, who would regret my absence.”

Fixing her toque on her head with a long pin, she frowned.

“Is fox-hunting interesting?”

“Oh, yes, very. The fox has stratagems that one must fathom. The intelligence of that animal is really marvellous. I have observed at night a fox hunting a rabbit. He had organized a real hunt. I assure you it is not easy to dislodge a fox. Caumont has an excellent cellar. I do not care for it, but it is generally appreciated. I will bring you half a dozen skins.”

“What do you wish me to do with them?”

“Oh, you can make rugs of them.”

“And you will be hunting eight days?”

“Not all the time. I shall visit my aunt, who expects me. Last year at this time there was a delightful reunion at her house. She had with her her two daughters and her three



nieces with their husbands. All five women are pretty, gay, charming, and irreproachable. I shall probably find them at the beginning of next month, assembled for my aunt's birthday, and I shall remain there two days."

"My friend, stay as long as it may please you. I should be inconsolable if you shortened on my account a sojourn which is so agreeable."

"But you, Therese?"

"I, my friend? I can take care of myself."

The fire was languishing. The shadows were deepening between them. She said, in a dreamy tone:

"It is true, however, that it is never prudent to leave a woman alone."

He went near her, trying to see her eyes in the darkness. He took her hand.

"You love me?" he said.

"Oh, I assure you that I do not love another but—"

"What do you mean?"

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"Nothing. I am thinking—I am thinking that we are separated all through the summer; that in winter you live with your parents and your friends half the time; and that, if we are to see so little of each other, it is better not to see each other at all."

He lighted the candelabra. His frank, hard face was illuminated. He looked at her with a confidence that came less from the conceit common to all lovers than from his natural lack of dignity. He believed in her through force of education and simplicity of intelligence.

"Therese, I love you, and you love me, I know. Why do you torment me? Sometimes you are painfully harsh."

She shook her little head brusquely.

"What will you have? I am harsh and obstinate. It is in the blood. I take it from my father. You know Joinville; you have seen the castle, the ceilings, the tapestries, the gardens, the park, the hunting-grounds, you have said that none better were in France; but you have not seen my father's workshop—a white wooden table and a mahogany bureau. Everything about me has its origin there. On that table my father made figures for forty years; at first in a little room, then in the apartment where I was born. We were not very wealthy then. I am a parvenu's daughter, or a conqueror's daughter, it's all the same. We are people of material interests. My father wanted to earn money, to possess what he could buy—that is, everything. I wish to earn and keep—what? I do not know—the happiness that I have—or that I have not. I have my own way of being exacting. I long for dreams and illusions. Oh, I know very well that all this is not worth the trouble that a woman takes in giving herself to a man; but it is a trouble that is worth something, because my trouble is myself, my life. I like to enjoy what I like, or think what I like. I do not wish to lose. I am like papa: I demand what is due to me. And then—"

She lowered her voice:

"And then, I have—impulses! Now, my dear, I bore you. What will you have? You shouldn't have loved me."

This language, to which she had accustomed him, often spoiled his pleasure. But it did not alarm him. He was sensitive to all that she did, but not at all to what she said; and he attached no importance to a woman's words. Talking little himself, he could not imagine that often words are the same as actions.

Although he loved her, or, rather, because he loved her with strength and confidence, he thought it his duty to resist her whims, which he judged absurd. Whenever he played the master, he succeeded with her; and, naively, he always ended by playing it.

“You know very well, Therese, that I wish to do nothing except to be agreeable to you. Don’t be capricious with me.”

“And why should I not be capricious? If I gave myself to you, it was not because I was logical, nor because I thought I must. It was because I was capricious.”

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He looked at her, astonished and saddened.

“The word is not pleasant to you, my friend? Well let us say that it was love. Truly it was, with all my heart, and because I felt that you loved me. But love must be a pleasure, and if I do not find in it the satisfaction of what you call my capriciousness, but which is really my desire, my life, my love, I do not want it; I prefer to live alone. You are astonishing! My caprices! Is there anything else in life? Your foxhunt, isn’t that capricious?”

He replied, very sincerely:

“If I had not promised, I swear to you, Therese, that I would sacrifice that small pleasure with great joy.”

She felt that he spoke the truth. She knew how exact he was in filling the most trifling engagements, yet realized that if she insisted he would not go. But it was too late: she did not wish to win. She would seek hereafter only the violent pleasure of losing. She pretended to take his reason seriously, and said:

“Ah, you have promised!”

And she affected to yield.

Surprised at first, he congratulated himself at last on having made her listen to reason. He was grateful to her for not having been stubborn. He put his arm around her waist and kissed her on the neck and eyelids as a reward. He said:

“We may meet three or four times before I go, and more, if you wish. I will wait for you as often as you wish to come. Will you meet me here to-morrow?”

She gave herself the satisfaction of saying that she could not come the next day nor any other day.

Softly she mentioned the things that prevented her.

The obstacles seemed light; calls, a gown to be tried on, a charity fair, exhibitions. As she dilated upon the difficulties they seemed to increase. The calls could not be postponed; there were three fairs; the exhibitions would soon close. In fine, it was impossible for her to see him again before his departure.

As he was well accustomed to making excuses of that sort, he failed to observe that it was not natural for Therese to offer them. Embarrassed by this tissue of social obligations, he did not persist, but remained silent and unhappy.



With her left arm she raised the portiere, placed her right hand on the key of the door; and, standing against the rich background of the sapphire and ruby-colored folds of the Oriental draperies, she turned her head toward the friend she was leaving, and said, a little mockingly, yet with a touch of tragic emotion:

“Good-by, Robert. Enjoy yourself. My calls, my errands, your little visits are nothing. Life is made up of just such trifles. Good-by!”

She went out. He would have liked to accompany her, but he made it a point not to show himself with her in the street, unless she absolutely forced him to do so.

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In the street, Therese felt suddenly that she was alone in the world, without joy and without pain. She returned to her house on foot, as was her habit. It was night; the air was frozen, clear, and tranquil. But the avenues through which she walked, in shadows studded with lights, enveloped her with that mild atmosphere of the queen of cities, so agreeable to its inhabitants, which makes itself felt even in the cold of winter. She walked between the lines of huts and old houses, remains of the field-days of Auteuil, which tall houses interrupted here and there. These small shops, these monotonous windows, were nothing to her. Yet she felt that she was under the mysterious spell of the friendship of inanimate things; and it seemed to her that the stones, the doors of houses, the lights behind the windowpanes, looked kindly upon her. She was alone, and she wished to be alone. The steps she was taking between the two houses wherein her habits were almost equal, the steps she had taken so often, to-day seemed to her irrevocable. Why? What had that day brought? Not exactly a quarrel. And yet the words spoken that day had left a subtle, strange, persistent sting, which would never leave her. What had happened? Nothing. And that nothing had effaced everything. She had a sort of obscure certainty that she would never return to that room which had so recently enclosed the most secret and dearest phases of her life. She had loved Robert with the seriousness of a necessary joy. Made to be loved, and very reasonable, she had not lost in the abandonment of herself that instinct of reflection, that necessity for security, which was so strong in her. She had not chosen: one seldom chooses. She had not allowed herself to be taken at random and by surprise. She had done what she had wished to do, as much as one ever does what one wishes to do in such cases. She had nothing to regret. He had been to her what it was his duty to be. She felt, in spite of everything, that all was at an end. She thought, with dry sadness, that three years of her life had been given to an honest man who had loved her and whom she had loved. "For I loved him. I must have loved him in order to give myself to him." But she could not feel again the sentiments of early days, the movements of her mind when she had yielded. She recalled small and insignificant circumstances: the flowers on the wall-paper and the pictures in the room. She recalled the words, a little ridiculous and almost touching, that he had said to her. But it seemed to her that the adventure had occurred to another woman, to a stranger whom she did not like and whom she hardly understood. And what had happened only a moment ago seemed far distant now. The room, the lilacs in the crystal vase, the little cup of Bohemian glass where she found her pins—she saw all these things as if through a window that one passes in the street. She was without bitterness, and even without sadness. She had nothing to forgive, alas!

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This absence for a week was not a betrayal, it was not a fault against her; it was nothing, yet it was everything. It was the end. She knew it. She wished to cease. It was the consent of all the forces of her being. She said to herself: "I have no reason to love him less. Do I love him no more? Did I ever love him?" She did not know and she did not care to know. Three years, during which there had been months when they had seen each other every day—was all this nothing? Life is not a great thing. And what one puts in it, how little that is!

In fine, she had nothing of which to complain. But it was better to end it all. All these reflections brought her back to that point. It was not a resolution; resolutions may be changed. It was graver: it was a state of the body and of the mind.

When she arrived at the square, in the centre of which is a fountain, and on one side of which stands a church of rustic style, showing its bell in an open belfry, she recalled the little bouquet of violets that he had given to her one night on the bridge near Notre Dame. They had loved each other that day—perhaps more than usual. Her heart softened at that reminiscence. But the little bouquet remained alone, a poor little flower skeleton, in her memory.

While she was thinking, passers-by, deceived by the simplicity of her dress, followed her. One of them made propositions to her: a dinner and the theatre. It amused her. She was not at all disturbed; this was not a crisis. She thought: "How do other women manage such things? And I, who promised myself not to spoil my life. What is life worth?"

Opposite the Greek lantern of the Musee des Religions she found the soil disturbed by workmen. There were paving-stones crossed by a bridge made of a narrow flexible plank. She had stepped on it, when she saw at the other end, in front of her, a man who was waiting for her. He recognized her and bowed. It was Dechartre. She saw that he was happy to meet her; she thanked him with a smile. He asked her permission to walk a few steps with her, and they entered into the large and airy space. In this place the tall houses, set somewhat back, efface themselves, and reveal a glimpse of the sky.

He told her that he had recognized her from a distance by the rhythm of her figure and her movements, which were hers exclusively.

"Graceful movements," he added, "are like music for the eyes."

She replied that she liked to walk; it was her pleasure, and the cause of her good health.

He, too, liked to walk in populous towns and beautiful fields. The mystery of highways tempted him. He liked to travel. Although voyages had become common and easy, they retained for him their powerful charm. He had seen golden days and crystalline nights, Greece, Egypt, and the Bosphorus; but it was to Italy that he returned always, as to the mother country of his mind.

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"I shall go there next week," he said. "I long to see again Ravenna asleep among the black pines of its sterile shore. Have you seen Ravenna, Madame? It is an enchanted tomb where sparkling phantoms appear. The magic of death lies there. The mosaic works of Saint Vitale, with their barbarous angels and their aureolated empresses, make one feel the monstrous delights of the Orient. Despoiled to-day of its silver lamels, the grave of Galla Placidia is frightful under its crypt, luminous yet gloomy. When one looks through an opening in the sarcophagus, it seems as if one saw the daughter of Theodosius, seated on her golden chair, erect in her gown studded with stones and embroidered with scenes from the Old Testament; her beautiful, cruel face preserved hard and black with aromatic plants, and her ebony hands immovable on her knees. For thirteen centuries she retained this funereal majesty, until one day a child passed a candle through the opening of the grave and burned the body."

Madame Martin-Belleme asked what that dead woman, so obstinate in her conceit, had done during her life.

"Twice a slave," said Dechartre, "she became twice an empress."

"She must have been beautiful," said Madame Martin. "You have made me see her too vividly in her tomb. She frightens me. Shall you go to Venice, Monsieur Dechartre? Or are you tired of gondolas, of canals bordered by palaces, and of the pigeons of Saint Mark? I confess that I still like Venice, after being there three times."

He said she was right. He, too, liked Venice.

Whenever he went there, from a sculptor he became a painter, and made studies. He would like to paint its atmosphere.

"Elsewhere," he said, "even in Florence, the sky is too high. At Venice it is everywhere; it caresses the earth and the water. It envelops lovingly the leaden domes and the marble facades, and throws into the iridescent atmosphere its pearls and its crystals. The beauty of Venice is in its sky and its women. What pretty creatures the Venetian women are! Their forms are so slender and supple under their black shawls. If nothing remained of these women except a bone, one would find in that bone the charm of their exquisite structure. Sundays, at church, they form laughing groups, agitated, with hips a little pointed, elegant necks, flowery smiles, and inflaming glances. And all bend, with the suppleness of young animals, at the passage of a priest whose head resembles that of Vitellius, and who carries the chalice, preceded by two choir-boys."

He walked with unequal step, following the rhythm of his ideas, sometimes quick, sometimes slow. She walked more regularly, and almost outstripped him. He looked at her sidewise, and liked her firm and supple carriage. He observed the little shake which at moments her obstinate head gave to the holly on her toque.

Without expecting it, he felt a charm in that meeting, almost intimate, with a young woman almost unknown.

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They had reached the place where the large avenue unfolds its four rows of trees. They were following the stone parapet surmounted by a hedge of boxwood, which entirely hides the ugliness of the buildings on the quay. One felt the presence of the river by the milky atmosphere which in misty days seems to rest on the water. The sky was clear. The lights of the city were mingled with the stars. At the south shone the three golden nails of the Orion belt. Dechartre continued:

“Last year, at Venice, every morning as I went out of my house, I saw at her door, raised by three steps above the canal, a charming girl, with small head, neck round and strong, and graceful hips. She was there, in the sun and surrounded by vermin, as pure as an amphora, fragrant as a flower. She smiled. What a mouth! The richest jewel in the most beautiful light. I realized in time that this smile was addressed to a butcher standing behind me with his basket on his head.”

At the corner of the short street which goes to the quay, between two lines of small gardens, Madame Martin walked more slowly.

“It is true that at Venice,” she said, “all women are pretty.”

“They are almost all pretty, Madame. I speak of the common girls—the cigar-girls, the girls among the glass-workers. The others are commonplace enough.”

“By others you mean society women; and you don’t like these?”

“Society women? Oh, some of them are charming. As for loving them, that’s a different affair.”

“Do you think so?”

She extended her hand to him, and suddenly turned the corner.

CHAPTER V

A dinner ‘en Famille’

She dined that night alone with her husband. The narrow table had not the basket with golden eagles and winged Victories. The candelabra did not light Oudry’s paintings. While he talked of the events of the day, she fell into a sad reverie. It seemed to her that she floated in a mist. It was a peaceful and almost sweet suffering. She saw vaguely through the clouds the little room of the Rue Spontini transported by angels to one of the summits of the Himalaya Mountains, and Robert Le Menil—in the quaking of a sort of world’s end—had disappeared while putting on his gloves. She felt her pulse to see whether she were feverish. A rattle of silverware on the table awoke her. She heard her husband saying:

“My dear friend Gavaut delivered to-day, in the Chamber, an excellent speech on the question of the reserve funds. It’s extraordinary how his ideas have become healthy and just. Oh, he has improved a great deal.”

She could not refrain from smiling.

“But Gavaut, my friend, is a poor devil who never thought of anything except escaping from the crowd of those who are dying of hunger. Gavaut never had any ideas except at his elbows. Does anybody take him seriously in the political world? You may be sure that he never gave an illusion to any woman, not even his wife. And yet to produce that sort of illusion a man does not need much.” She added, brusquely:

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"You know Miss Bell has invited me to spend a month with her at Fiesole. I have accepted; I am going."

Less astonished than discontented, he asked her with whom she was going.

At once she answered:

"With Madame Marmet."

There was no objection to make. Madame Marmet was a proper companion, and it was appropriate for her to visit Italy, where her husband had made some excavations. He asked only:

"Have you invited her? When are you going?"

"Next week."

He had the wisdom not to make any objection, judging that opposition would only make her capriciousness firmer, and fearing to give impetus to that foolish idea. He said:

"Surely, to travel is an agreeable pastime. I thought that we might in the spring visit the Caucasus and Turkestan. There is an interesting country. General Annenkoff will place at our disposal carriages, trains, and everything else on his railway. He is a friend of mine; he is quite charmed with you. He will provide us with an escort of Cossacks."

He persisted in trying to flatter her vanity, unable to realize that her mind was not worldly. She replied, negligently, that it might be a pleasant trip. Then he praised the mountains, the ancient cities, the bazaars, the costumes, the armor.

He added:

"We shall take some friends with us—Princess Seniavine, General Lariviere, perhaps Vence or Le Menil."

She replied, with a little dry laugh, that they had time to select their guests.

He became attentive to her wants.

"You are not eating. You will injure your health."

Without yet believing in this prompt departure, he felt some anxiety about it. Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone. He felt that he was himself only when his wife was there. And then, he had decided to give two or three political dinners during the session. He saw his party growing. This was the moment to assert himself, to make a dazzling show. He said, mysteriously:

“Something might happen requiring the aid of all our friends. You have not followed the march of events, Therese?”

“No, my dear.”

“I am sorry. You have judgment, liberality of mind. If you had followed the march of events you would have been struck by the current that is leading the country back to moderate opinions. The country is tired of exaggerations. It rejects the men compromised by radical politics and religious persecution. Some day or other it will be necessary to make over a Casimir-Perier ministry with other men, and that day—”

He stopped: really she listened too inattentively.

She was thinking, sad and disenchanted. It seemed to her that the pretty woman, who, among the warm shadows of a closed room, placed her bare feet in the fur of the brown bear rug, and to whom her lover gave kisses while she twisted her hair in front of a glass, was not herself, was not even a woman that she knew well, or that she desired to know, but a person whose affairs were of no interest to her. A pin badly set in her hair, one of the pins from the Bohemian glass cup, fell on her neck. She shivered.

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"Yet we really must give three or four dinners to our good political friends," said M. Martin-Belleme. "We shall invite some of the ancient radicals to meet the people of our circle. It will be well to find some pretty women. We might invite Madame Berard de la Malle; there has been no gossip about her for two years. What do you think of it?"

"But, my dear, since I am to go next week—"

This filled him with consternation.

They went, both silent and moody, into the drawing-room, where Paul Vence was waiting. He often came in the evening.

She extended her hand to him.

"I am very glad to see you. I am going out of town. Paris is cold and bleak. This weather tires and saddens me. I am going to Florence, for six weeks, to visit Miss Bell."

M. Martin-Belleme then lifted his eyes to heaven.

Vence asked whether she had been in Italy often.

"Three times; but I saw nothing. This time I wish to see, to throw myself into things. From Florence I shall take walks into Tuscany, into Umbria. And, finally, I shall go to Venice."

"You will do well. Venice suggests the peace of the Sabbath-day in the grand week of creative and divine Italy."

"Your friend Dechartre talked very prettily to me of Venice, of the atmosphere of Venice, which sows pearls."

"Yes, at Venice the sky is a colorist. Florence inspires the mind. An old author has said: 'The sky of Florence is light and subtle, and feeds the beautiful ideas of men.' I have lived delicious days in Tuscany. I wish I could live them again."

"Come and see me there."

He sighed.

The newspaper, books, and his daily work prevented him.

M. Martin-Belleme said everyone should bow before such reasons, and that one was too happy to read the articles and the fine books written by M. Paul Vence to have any wish to take him from his work.

“Oh, my books! One never says in a book what one wishes to say. It is impossible to express one’s self. I know how to talk with my pen as well as any other person; but, after all, to talk or to write, what futile occupations! How wretchedly inadequate are the little signs which form syllables, words, and phrases. What becomes of the idea, the beautiful idea, which these miserable hieroglyphics hide? What does the reader make of my writing? A series of false sense, of counter sense, and of nonsense. To read, to hear, is to translate. There are beautiful translations, perhaps. There are no faithful translations. Why should I care for the admiration which they give to my books, since it is what they themselves see in them that they admire? Every reader substitutes his visions in the place of ours. We furnish him with the means to quicken his imagination. It is a horrible thing to be a cause of such exercises. It is an infamous profession.”

“You are jesting,” said M. Martin-Belleme.

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"I do not think so," said Therese. "He recognizes that one mind is impenetrable to another mind, and he suffers from this. He feels that he is alone when he is thinking, alone when he is writing. Whatever one may do, one is always alone in the world. That is what he wishes to say. He is right. You may always explain: you never are understood."

"There are signs—" said Paul Vence.

"Don't you think, Monsieur Vence, that signs also are a form of hieroglyphics? Give me news of Monsieur Choulette. I do not see him any more."

Vence replied that Choulette was very busy in forming the Third Order of Saint Francis.

"The idea, Madame, came to him in a marvellous fashion one day when he had gone to call on his Maria in the street where she lives, behind the public hospital—a street always damp, the houses on which are tottering. You must know that he considers Maria the saint and martyr who is responsible for the sins of the people.

"He pulled the bell-rope, made greasy by two centuries of visitors. Either because the martyr was at the wine-shop, where she is familiarly known, or because she was busy in her room, she did not open the door. Choulette rang for a long time, and so violently that the bellrope remained in his hand. Skilful at understanding symbols and the hidden meaning of things, he understood at once that this rope had not been detached without the permission of spiritual powers. He made of it a belt, and realized that he had been chosen to lead back into its primitive purity the Third Order of Saint Francis. He renounced the beauty of women, the delights of poetry, the brightness of glory, and studied the life and the doctrine of Saint Francis. However, he has sold to his editor a book entitled 'Les Blandices', which contains, he says, the description of all sorts of loves. He flatters himself that in it he has shown himself a criminal with some elegance. But far from harming his mystic undertakings, this book favors them in this sense, that, corrected by his later work, he will become honest and exemplary; and the gold that he has received in payment, which would not have been paid to him for a more chaste volume, will serve for a pilgrimage to Assisi."

Madame Martin asked how much of this story was really true. Vence replied that she must not try to learn.

He confessed that he was the idealist historian of the poet, and that the adventures which he related of him were not to be taken in the literal and Judaic sense.

He affirmed that at least Choulette was publishing Les Blandices, and desired to visit the cell and the grave of St. Francis.

“Then,” exclaimed Madame Martin, “I will take him to Italy with me. Find him, Monsieur Vence, and bring him to me. I am going next week.”

M. Martin then excused himself, not being able to remain longer. He had to finish a report which was to be laid before the Chamber the next day.

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Madame Martin said that nobody interested her so much as Choulette. Paul Vence said that he was a singular specimen of humanity.

“He is not very different from the saints of whose extraordinary lives we read. He is as sincere as they. He has an exquisite delicacy of sentiment and a terrible violence of mind. If he shocks one by many of his acts, the reason is that he is weaker, less supported, or perhaps less closely observed. And then there are unworthy saints, just as there are bad angels: Choulette is a worldly saint, that is all. But his poems are true poems, and much finer than those written by the bishops of the seventeenth century.”

She interrupted him:

“While I think of it, I wish to congratulate you on your friend Dechartre. He has a charming mind.”

She added:

“Perhaps he is a little too timid.”

Vence reminded her that he had told her she would find Dechartre interesting.

“I know him by heart; he has been my friend since our childhood.”

“You knew his parents?”

“Yes. He is the only son of Philippe Dechartre.”

“The architect?”

“The architect who, under Napoleon III, restored so many castles and churches in Touraine and the Orleanais. He had taste and knowledge. Solitary and quiet in his life, he had the imprudence to attack Viollet-le-Duc, then all-powerful. He reproached him with trying to reestablish buildings in their primitive plan, as they had been, or as they might have been, at the beginning. Philippe Dechartre, on the contrary, wished that everything which the lapse of centuries had added to a church, an abbey, or a castle should be respected. To abolish anachronisms and restore a building to its primitive unity, seemed to him to be a scientific barbarity as culpable as that of ignorance. He said: ‘It is a crime to efface the successive imprints made in stone by the hands of our ancestors. New stones cut in old style are false witnesses.’ He wished to limit the task of the archaeologic architect to that of supporting and consolidating walls. He was right. Everybody said that he was wrong. He achieved his ruin by dying young, while his rival triumphed. He bequeathed an honest fortune to his widow and his son. Jacques Dechartre was brought up by his mother, who adored him. I do not think that maternal tenderness ever was more impetuous. Jacques is a charming fellow; but he is a spoiled child.”



"Yet he appears so indifferent, so easy to understand, so distant from everything."

"Do not rely on this. He has a tormented and tormenting imagination."

"Does he like women?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it isn't with any idea of match-making."

"Yes, he likes them. I told you that he was an egoist. Only selfish men really love women. After the death of his mother, he had a long liaison with a well-known actress, Jeanne Tancrede."

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Madame Martin remembered Jeanne Tancrede; not very pretty, but graceful with a certain slowness of action in playing romantic roles.

"They lived almost together in a little house at Auteuil," Paul Vence continued. "I often called on them. I found him lost in his dreams, forgetting to model a figure drying under its cloths, alone with himself, pursuing his idea, absolutely incapable of listening to anybody; she, studying her roles, her complexion burned by rouge, her eyes tender, pretty because of her intelligence and her activity. She complained to me that he was inattentive, cross, and unreasonable. She loved him and deceived him only to obtain roles. And when she deceived him, it was done on the spur of the moment. Afterward she never thought of it. A typical woman! But she was imprudent; she smiled upon Joseph Springer in the hope that he would make her a member of the Comedie Francaise. Dechartre left her. Now she finds it more practical to live with her managers, and Jacques finds it more agreeable to travel."

"Does he regret her?"

"How can one know the things that agitate a mind anxious and mobile, selfish and passionate, desirous to surrender itself, prompt in disengaging itself, liking itself most of all among the beautiful things that it finds in the world?"

Brusquely she changed the subject.

"And your novel, Monsieur Vence?"

"I have reached the last chapter, Madame. My little workingman has been guillotined. He died with that indifference of virgins without desire, who never have felt on their lips the warm taste of life. The journals and the public approve the act of justice which has just been accomplished. But in another garret, another workingman, sober, sad, and a chemist, swears to himself that he will commit an expiatory murder."

He rose and said good-night.

She called him back.

"Monsieur Vence, you know that I was serious. Bring Choulette to me."

When she went up to her room, her husband was waiting for her, in his red-brown plush robe, with a sort of doge's cap framing his pale and hollow face. He had an air of gravity. Behind him, by the open door of his workroom, appeared under the lamp a mass of documents bound in blue, a collection of the annual budgets. Before she could reach her room he motioned that he wished to speak to her.

"My dear, I can not understand you. You are very inconsequential. It does you a great deal of harm. You intend to leave your home without any reason, without even a

pretext. And you wish to run through Europe with whom? With a Bohemian, a drunkard—that man Choulette.”

She replied that she should travel with Madame Marmet, in which there could be nothing objectionable.

“But you announce your going to everybody, yet you do not even know whether Madame Marmet can accompany you.”

“Oh, Madame Marmet will soon pack her boxes. Nothing keeps her in Paris except her dog. She will leave it to you; you may take care of it.”

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“Does your father know of your project?”

It was his last resource to invoke the authority of Montessuy. He knew that his wife feared to displease her father. He insisted:

“Your father is full of sense and tact. I have been happy to find him agreeing with me several times in the advices which I have permitted myself to give you. He thinks as I do, that Madame Meillan’s house is not a fit place for you to visit. The company that meets there is mixed, and the mistress of the house favors intrigue. You are wrong, I must say, not to take account of what people think. I am mistaken if your father does not think it singular that you should go away with so much frivolity, and the absence will be the more remarked, my dear, since circumstances have made me eminent in the course of this legislature. My merit has nothing to do with the case, surely. But if you had consented to listen to me at dinner I should have demonstrated to you that the group of politicians to which I belong has almost reached power. In such a moment you should not renounce your duties as mistress of the house. You must understand this yourself.”

She replied “You annoy me.” And, turning her back to him, she shut the door of her room between them. That night in her bed she opened a book, as she always did before going to sleep. It was a novel. She was turning the leaves with indifference, when her eyes fell on these lines:

“Love is like devotion: it comes late. A woman is hardly in love or devout at twenty, unless she has a special disposition to be either, a sort of native sanctity. Women who are predestined to love, themselves struggle a long time against that grace of love which is more terrible than the thunderbolt that fell on the road to Damascus. A woman oftenest yields to the passion of love only when age or solitude does not frighten her. Passion is an arid and burning desert. Passion is profane asceticism, as harsh as religious asceticism. Great woman lovers are as rare as great penitent women. Those who know life well know that women do not easily bind themselves in the chains of real love. They know that nothing is less common than sacrifice among them. And consider how much a worldly woman must sacrifice when she is in love—liberty, quietness, the charming play of a free mind, coquetry, amusement, pleasure—she loses everything.

“Coquetry is permissible. One may conciliate that with all the exigencies of fashionable life. Not so love. Love is the least mundane of passions, the most anti-social, the most savage, the most barbarous. So the world judges it more severely than mere gallantry or looseness of manners. In one sense the world is right. A woman in love betrays her nature and fails in her function, which is to be admired by all men, like a work of art. A woman is a work of art, the most marvellous that man’s industry ever has produced. A woman is a wonderful artifice, due to the concourse of all the arts mechanical and of all the arts liberal. She is the work of everybody, she belongs to the world.”

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Therese closed the book and thought that these ideas were only the dreams of novelists who did not know life. She knew very well that there was in reality neither a Carmel of passion nor a chain of love, nor a beautiful and terrible vocation against which the predestined one resisted in vain; she knew very well that love was only a brief intoxication from which one recovered a little sadder. And yet, perhaps, she did not know everything; perhaps there were loves in which one was deliciously lost. She put out her lamp. The dreams of her first youth came back to her.

CHAPTER VI

A DISTINGUISHED RELICT

It was raining. Madame Martin-Belleme saw confusedly through the glass of her coupe the multitude of passing umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies. She was thinking. Her thoughts were gray and indistinct, like the aspect of the streets and the squares.

She no longer knew why the idea had come to her to spend a month with Miss Bell. Truly, she never had known. The idea had been like a spring, at first hidden by leaves, and now forming the current of a deep and rapid stream. She remembered that Tuesday night at dinner she had said suddenly that she wished to go, but she could not remember the first flush of that desire. It was not the wish to act toward Robert Le Menil as he was acting toward her. Doubtless she thought it excellent to go travelling in Italy while he went fox-hunting. This seemed to her a fair arrangement. Robert, who was always pleased to see her when he came back, would not find her on his return. She thought this would be right. She had not thought of it at first. And since then she had thought little of it, and really she was not going for the pleasure of making him grieve. She had against him a thought less piquant, and more harsh. She did not wish to see him soon. He had become to her almost a stranger. He seemed to her a man like others—better than most others—good-looking, estimable, and who did not displease her; but he did not preoccupy her. Suddenly he had gone out of her life. She could not remember how he had become mingled with it. The idea of belonging to him shocked her. The thought that they might meet again in the small apartment of the Rue Spontini was so painful to her that she discarded it at once. She preferred to think that an unforeseen event would prevent their meeting again—the end of the world, for example. M. Lagrange, member of the Academie des Sciences, had told her the day before of a comet which some day might meet the earth, envelop it with its flaming hair, imbue animals and plants with unknown poisons, and make all men die in a frenzy of laughter. She expected that this, or something else, would happen next month. It was not inexplicable that she wished to go. But that her desire to go should contain a vague joy, that she should feel the charm of what she was to find, was inexplicable to her.

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Her carriage left her at the corner of a street.

There, under the roof of a tall house, behind five windows, in a small, neat apartment, Madame Marmet had lived since the death of her husband.

Countess Martin found her in her modest drawing-room, opposite M. Lagrange, half asleep in a deep armchair. This worldly old savant had remained ever faithful to her. He it was who, the day after M. Marmet's funeral, had conveyed to the unfortunate widow the poisoned speech delivered by Schmoll. She had fainted in his arms. Madame Marmet thought that he lacked judgment, but he was her best friend. They dined together often with rich friends.

Madame Martin, slender and erect in her zibeline corsage opening on a flood of lace, awakened with the charming brightness of her gray eyes the good man, who was susceptible to the graces of women. He had told her the day before how the world would come to an end. He asked her whether she had not been frightened at night by pictures of the earth devoured by flames or frozen to a mass of ice. While he talked to her with affected gallantry, she looked at the mahogany bookcase. There were not many books in it, but on one of the shelves was a skeleton in armor. It amazed one to see in this good lady's house that Etruscan warrior wearing a green bronze helmet and a cuirass. He slept among boxes of bonbons, vases of gilded porcelain, and carved images of the Virgin, picked up at Lucerne and on the Righi. Madame Marmet, in her widowhood, had sold the books which her husband had left. Of all the ancient objects collected by the archaeologist, she had retained nothing except the Etruscan. Many persons had tried to sell it for her. Paul Vence had obtained from the administration a promise to buy it for the Louvre, but the good widow would not part with it. It seemed to her that if she lost that warrior with his green bronze helmet she would lose the name that she wore worthily, and would cease to be the widow of Louis Marmet of the Academie des Inscriptions.

"Do not be afraid, Madame; a comet will not soon strike the earth. Such a phenomenon is very improbable."

Madame Martin replied that she knew no serious reason why the earth and humanity should not be annihilated at once.

Old Lagrange exclaimed with profound sincerity that he hoped the cataclysm would come as late as possible.

She looked at him. His bald head could boast only a few hairs dyed black. His eyelids fell like rags over eyes still smiling; his cheeks hung in loose folds, and one divined that his body was equally withered. She thought, "And even he likes life!"

Madame Marmet hoped, too, that the end of the world was not near at hand.

“Monsieur Lagrange,” said Madame Martin, “you live, do you not, in a pretty little house, the windows of which overlook the Botanical Gardens? It seems to me it must be a joy to live in that garden, which makes me think of the Noah’s Ark of my infancy, and of the terrestrial paradises in the old Bibles.”

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But he was not at all charmed with his house. It was small, unimproved, infested with rats.

She acknowledged that one seldom felt at home anywhere, and that rats were found everywhere, either real or symbolical, legions of pests that torment us. Yet she liked the Botanical Gardens; she had always wished to go there, yet never had gone. There was also the museum, which she was curious to visit.

Smiling, happy, he offered to escort her there. He considered it his house. He would show her rare specimens, some of which were superb.

She did not know what a bolide was. She recalled that some one had said to her that at the museum were bones carved by primitive men, and plaques of ivory on which were engraved pictures of animals, which were long ago extinct. She asked whether that were true. Lagrange ceased to smile. He replied indifferently that such objects concerned one of his colleagues.

“Ah!” said Madame Martin, “then they are not in your showcase.”

She observed that learned men were not curious, and that it is indiscreet to question them on things that are not in their own showcases. It is true that Lagrange had made a scientific fortune in studying meteors. This had led him to study comets. But he was wise. For twenty years he had been preoccupied by nothing except dining out.

When he had left, Countess Martin told Madame Marmet what she expected of her.

“I am going next week to Fiesole, to visit Miss Bell, and you are coming with me.”

The good Madame Marmet, with placid brow yet searching eyes, was silent for a moment; then she refused gently, but finally consented.

CHAPTER VII

MADAME HAS HER WAY

The Marseilles express was ready on the quay, where the postmen ran, and the carriages rolled amid smoke and noise, under the light that fell from the windows. Through the open doors travellers in long cloaks came and went. At the end of the station, blinding with soot and dust, a small rainbow could be discerned, not larger than one's hand. Countess Martin and the good Madame Marniet were already in their carriage, under the rack loaded with bags, among newspapers thrown on the cushions. Choulette had not appeared, and Madame Martin expected him no longer. Yet he had promised to be at the station. He had made his arrangements to go, and had received from his publisher the price of *Les Blandices*. Paul Vence had brought him one evening

to Madame Martin's house. He had been sweet, polished, full of witty gayety and naive joy. She had promised herself much pleasure in travelling with a man of genius, original, picturesquely ugly, with an amusing simplicity; like a child prematurely old and abandoned, full of vices, yet with a certain degree of innocence. The doors closed. She expected him no longer. She should not have counted on his impulsive and vagabondish mind. At the moment when the engine began to breathe hoarsely, Madame Marmet, who was looking out of the window, said, quietly:

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"I think that Monsieur Choulette is coming."

He was walking along the quay, limping, with his hat on the back of his head, his beard unkempt, and dragging an old carpet-bag. He was almost repulsive; yet, in spite of his fifty years of age, he looked young, so clear and lustrous were his eyes, so much ingenuous audacity had been retained in his yellow, hollow face, so vividly did this old man express the eternal adolescence of the poet and artist. When she saw him, Therese regretted having invited so strange a companion. He walked along, throwing a hasty glance into every carriage—a glance which, little by little, became sullen and distrustful. But when he recognized Madame Martin, he smiled so sweetly and said good-morning to her in so caressing a voice that nothing was left of the ferocious old vagabond walking on the quay, nothing except the old carpet-bag, the handles of which were half broken.

He placed it in the rack with great care, among the elegant bags enveloped with gray cloth, beside which it looked conspicuously sordid. It was studded with yellow flowers on a blood-colored background.

He was soon perfectly at ease, and complimented Madame Martin on the elegance of her travelling attire.

"Excuse me, ladies," he added, "I was afraid I should be late. I went to six o'clock mass at Saint Severin, my parish, in the Virgin Chapel, under those pretty, but absurd columns that point toward heaven though frail as reeds-like us, poor sinners that we are."

"Ah," said Madame Martin, "you are pious to-day."

And she asked him whether he wore the cordon of the order which he was founding. He assumed a grave and penitent air.

"I am afraid, Madame, that Monsieur Paul Vence has told you many absurd stories about me. I have heard that he goes about circulating rumors that my ribbon is a bell-rope—and of what a bell! I should be pained if anybody believed so wretched a story. My ribbon, Madame, is a symbolical ribbon. It is represented by a simple thread, which one wears under one's clothes after a pauper has touched it, as a sign that poverty is holy, and that it will save the world. There is nothing good except in poverty; and since I have received the price of Les Blandices, I feel that I am unjust and harsh. It is a good thing that I have placed in my bag several of these mystic ribbons."

And, pointing to the horrible carpet-bag:

"I have also placed in it a host which a bad priest gave to me, the works of Monsieur de Maistre, shirts, and several other things."

Madame Martin lifted her eyebrows, a little ill at ease. But the good Madame Marmet retained her habitual placidity.

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As the train rolled through the homely scenes of the outskirts, that black fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city, Choulette took from his pocket an old book which he began to fumble. The writer, hidden under the vagabond, revealed himself. Choulette, without wishing to appear to be careful of his papers, was very orderly about them. He assured himself that he had not lost the pieces of paper on which he noted at the coffeehouse his ideas for poems, nor the dozen of flattering letters which, soiled and spotted, he carried with him continually, to read them to his newly-made companions at night. After assuring himself that nothing was missing, he took from the book a letter folded in an open envelope. He waved it for a while, with an air of mysterious impudence, then handed it to the Countess Martin. It was a letter of introduction from the Marquise de Rieu to a princess of the House of France, a near relative of the Comte de Chambord, who, old and a widow, lived in retirement near the gates of Florence. Having enjoyed the effect which he expected to produce, he said that he should perhaps visit the Princess; that she was a good person, and pious.

"A truly great lady," he added, "who does not show her magnificence in gowns and hats. She wears her chemises for six weeks, and sometimes longer. The gentlemen of her train have seen her wear very dirty white stockings, which fell around her heels. The virtues of the great queens of Spain are revived in her. Oh, those soiled stockings, what real glory there is in them!"

He took the letter and put it back in his book. Then, arming himself with a horn-handled knife, he began, with its point, to finish a figure sketched in the handle of his stick. He complimented himself on it:

"I am skilful in all the arts of beggars and vagabonds. I know how to open locks with a nail, and how to carve wood with a bad knife."

The head began to appear. It was the head of a thin woman, weeping.

Choulette wished to express in it human misery, not simple and touching, such as men of other times may have felt it in a world of mingled harshness and kindness; but hideous, and reflecting the state of ugliness created by the free-thinking bourgeois and the military patriots of the French Revolution. According to him the present regime embodied only hypocrisy and brutality.

"Their barracks are a hideous invention of modern times. They date from the seventeenth century. Before that time there were only guard-houses where the soldiers played cards and told tales. Louis XIV was a precursor of Bonaparte. But the evil has attained its plenitude since the monstrous institution of the obligatory enlistment. The shame of emperors and of republics is to have made it an obligation for men to kill. In the ages called barbarous, cities and princes entrusted their defence to mercenaries, who fought prudently. In a great battle only five

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or six men were killed. And when knights went to the wars, at least they were not forced to do it; they died for their pleasure. They were good for nothing else. Nobody in the time of Saint Louis would have thought of sending to battle a man of learning. And the laborer was not torn from the soil to be killed. Nowadays it is a duty for a poor peasant to be a soldier. He is exiled from his house, the roof of which smokes in the silence of night; from the fat prairies where the oxen graze; from the fields and the paternal woods. He is taught how to kill men; he is threatened, insulted, put in prison and told that it is an honor; and, if he does not care for that sort of honor, he is fusilladed. He obeys because he is terrorized, and is of all domestic animals the gentlest and most docile. We are warlike in France, and we are citizens. Another reason to be proud, this being a citizen! For the poor it consists in sustaining and preserving the wealthy in their power and their laziness. The poor must work for this, in presence of the majestic quality of the law which prohibits the wealthy as well as the poor from sleeping under the bridges, from begging in the streets, and from stealing bread. That is one of the good effects of the Revolution. As this Revolution was made by fools and idiots for the benefit of those who acquired national lands, and resulted in nothing but making the fortune of crafty peasants and financiering bourgeois, the Revolution only made stronger, under the pretence of making all men equal, the empire of wealth. It has betrayed France into the hands of the men of wealth. They are masters and lords. The apparent government, composed of poor devils, is in the pay of the financiers. For one hundred years, in this poisoned country, whoever has loved the poor has been considered a traitor to society. A man is called dangerous when he says that there are wretched people. There are laws against indignation and pity, and what I say here could not go into print.”

Choulette became excited and waved his knife, while under the wintry sunlight passed fields of brown earth, trees despoiled by winter, and curtains of poplars beside silvery rivers.

He looked with tenderness at the figure carved on his stick.

“Here you are,” he said, “poor humanity, thin and weeping, stupid with shame and misery, as you were made by your masters—soldiers and men of wealth.”

The good Madame Marmet, whose nephew was a captain in the artillery, was shocked at the violence with which Choulette attacked the army. Madame Martin saw in this only an amusing fantasy. Choulette’s ideas did not frighten her. She was afraid of nothing. But she thought they were a little absurd. She did not think that the past had ever been better than the present.

“I believe, Monsieur Choulette, that men were always as they are to-day, selfish, avaricious, and pitiless. I believe that laws and manners were always harsh and cruel to the unfortunate.”

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Between La Roche and Dijon they took breakfast in the dining-car, and left Choulette in it, alone with his pipe, his glass of benedictine, and his irritation.

In the carriage, Madame Marmet talked with peaceful tenderness of the husband she had lost. He had married her for love; he had written admirable verses to her, which she had kept, and never shown to any one. He was lively and very gay. One would not have thought it who had seen him later, tired by work and weakened by illness. He studied until the last moment. Two hours before he died he was trying to read again. He was affectionate and kind. Even in suffering he retained all his sweetness. Madame Martin said to her:

“You have had long years of happiness; you have kept the reminiscence of them; that is a share of happiness in this world.”

But good Madame Marmet sighed; a cloud passed over her quiet brow.

“Yes,” she said, “Louis was the best of men and the best of husbands. Yet he made me very miserable. He had only one fault, but I suffered from it cruelly. He was jealous. Good, kind, tender, and generous as he was, this horrible passion made him unjust, ironical, and violent. I can assure you that my behavior gave not the least cause for suspicion. I was not a coquette. But I was young, fresh; I passed for beautiful. That was enough. He would not let me go out alone, and would not let me receive calls in his absence. Whenever we went to a reception, I trembled in advance with the fear of the scene which he would make later in the carriage.”

And the good Madame Marmet added, with a sigh:

“It is true that I liked to dance. But I had to renounce going to balls; it made him suffer too much.”

Countess Martin expressed astonishment. She had always imagined Marmet as an old man, timid, and absorbed by his thoughts; a little ridiculous, between his wife, plump, white, and amiable, and the skeleton wearing a helmet of bronze and gold. But the excellent widow confided to her that, at fifty-five years of age, when she was fifty-three, Louis was just as jealous as on the first day of their marriage.

And Therese thought that Robert had never tormented her with jealousy. Was it on his part a proof of tact and good taste, a mark of confidence, or was it that he did not love her enough to make her suffer? She did not know, and she did not have the heart to try to know. She would have to look through recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open.

She murmured carelessly:

“We long to be loved, and when we are loved we are tormented or worried.”



The day was finished in reading and thinking. Choulette did not reappear. Night covered little by little with its gray clouds the mulberry-trees of the Dauphine. Madame Marmet went to sleep peacefully, resting on herself as on a mass of pillows. Therese looked at her and thought:

“She is happy, since she likes to remember.”

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The sadness of night penetrated her heart. And when the moon rose on the fields of olive-trees, seeing the soft lines of plains and of hills pass, Therese, in this landscape wherein everything spoke of peace and oblivion, and nothing spoke of her, regretted the Seine, the Arc de Triomphe with its radiating avenues, and the alleys of the park where, at least, the trees and the stones knew her.

Suddenly Choulette threw himself into the carriage. Armed with his knotty stick, his face and head enveloped in red wool and a fur cap, he almost frightened her. It was what he wished to do. His violent attitudes and his savage dress were studied. Always seeking to produce effects, it pleased him to seem frightful.

He was a coward himself, and was glad to inspire the fears he often felt. A moment before, as he was smoking his pipe, he had felt, while seeing the moon swallowed up by the clouds, one of those childish frights that tormented his light mind. He had come near the Countess to be reassured.

“Arles,” he said. “Do you know Arles? It is a place of pure beauty. I have seen, in the cloister, doves resting on the shoulders of statues, and I have seen the little gray lizards warming themselves in the sun on the tombs. The tombs are now in two rows on the road that leads to the church. They are formed like cisterns, and serve as beds for the poor at night. One night, when I was walking among them, I met a good old woman who was placing dried herbs in the tomb of an old maid who had died on her wedding-day. We said goodnight to her. She replied: ‘May God hear-you! but fate wills that this tomb should open on the side of the northwest wind. If only it were open on the other side, I should be lying as comfortably as Queen Jeanne.’”

Therese made no answer. She was dozing. And Choulette shivered in the cold of the night, in the fear of death.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LADY OF THE BELLS

In her English cart, which she drove herself, Miss Bell had brought over the hills, from the railway station at Florence, the Countess Martin-Belleme and Madame Marmet to her pink-tinted house at Fiesole, which, crowned with a long balustrade, overlooked the incomparable city. The maid followed with the luggage. Choulette, lodged, by Miss Bell's attention, in the house of a sacristan's widow, in the shadow of the cathedral of Fiesole, was not expected until dinner. Plain and gentle, wearing short hair, a waistcoat, a man's shirt on a chest like a boy's, almost graceful, with small hips, the poetess was doing for her French friends the honors of the house, which reflected the ardent delicacy of her taste. On the walls of the drawing-room were pale Virgins, with long hands,

reigning peacefully among angels, patriarchs, and saints in beautiful gilded frames. On a pedestal stood a Magdalena, clothed only with her hair, frightful with thinness

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and old age, some beggar of the road to Pistoia, burned by the suns and the snows, whom some unknown precursor of Donatello had moulded. And everywhere were Miss Bell's chosen arms-bells and cymbals. The largest lifted their bronze clappers at the angles of the room; others formed a chain at the foot of the walls. Smaller ones ran along the cornices. There were bells over the hearth, on the cabinets, and on the chairs. The shelves were full of silver and golden bells. There were big bronze bells marked with the Florentine lily; bells of the Renaissance, representing a lady wearing a white gown; bells of the dead, decorated with tears and bones; bells covered with symbolical animals and leaves, which had rung in the churches in the time of St. Louis; table-bells of the seventeenth century, having a statuette for a handle; the flat, clear cow-bells of the Ruth Valley; Hindu bells; Chinese bells formed like cylinders—they had come from all countries and all times, at the magic call of little Miss Bell.

"You look at my speaking arms," she said to Madame Martin. "I think that all these Misses Bell are pleased to be here, and I should not be astonished if some day they all began to sing together. But you must not admire them all equally. Reserve your purest and most fervent praise for this one."

And striking with her finger a dark, bare bell which gave a faint sound:

"This one," she said, "is a holy village-bell of the fifth century. She is a spiritual daughter of Saint Paulin de Nole, who was the first to make the sky sing over our heads. The metal is rare. Soon I will show to you a gentle Florentine, the queen of bells. She is coming. But I bore you, darling, with my babble. And I bore, too, the good Madame Marmet. It is wrong."

She escorted them to their rooms.

An hour later, Madame Martin, rested, fresh, in a gown of foulard and lace, went on the terrace where Miss Bell was waiting for her. The humid air, warmed by the sun, exhaled the restless sweetness of spring. Therese, resting on the balustrade, bathed her eyes in the light. At her feet, the cypress-trees raised their black distaffs, and the olive-trees looked like sheep on the hills. In the valley, Florence extended its domes, its towers, and the multitudes of its red roofs, through which the Arno showed its undulating line. Beyond were the soft blue hills.

She tried to recognize the Boboli Gardens, where she had walked at her first visit; the Cascine, which she did not like; the Pitti Palace. Then the charming infinity of the sky attracted her. She looked at the forms in the clouds.

After a long silence, Vivian Bell extended her hand toward the horizon.

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“Darling, I do not know how to say what I wish. But look, darling, look again. What you see there is unique in the world. Nature is nowhere else so subtle, elegant, and fine. The god who made the hills of Florence was an artist. Oh, he was a jeweller, an engraver, a sculptor, a bronze-founder, and a painter; he was a Florentine. He did nothing else in the world, darling. The rest was made by a hand less delicate, whose work was less perfect. How can you think that that violet hill of San Miniato, so firm and so pure in relief, was made by the author of Mont Blanc? It is not possible. This landscape has the beauty of an antique medal and of a precious painting. It is a perfect and measured work of art. And here is another thing that I do not know how to say, that I can not even understand, but which is a real thing. In this country I feel—and you will feel as I do, darling—half alive and half dead; in a condition which is sad, noble, and very sweet. Look, look again; you will realize the melancholy of those hills that surround Florence, and see a delicious sadness ascend from the land of the dead.”

The sun was low over the horizon. The bright points of the mountain-peaks faded one by one, while the clouds inflamed the sky. Madame Marmet sneezed.

Miss Bell sent for some shawls, and warned the French women that the evenings were fresh and that the night-air was dangerous.

Then suddenly she said:

“Darling, you know Monsieur Jacques Dechartre? Well, he wrote to me that he would be at Florence next week. I am glad Monsieur Jacques Dechartre is to meet you in our city. He will accompany us to the churches and to the museums, and he will be a good guide. He understands beautiful things, because he loves them. And he has an exquisite talent as a sculptor. His figures in medallions are admired more in England than in France. Oh, I am so glad Monsieur Jacques Dechartre and you are to meet at Florence, darling!”

CHAPTER IX

CHOULETTE FINDS A NEW FRIEND

She next day, as they were traversing the square where are planted, in imitation of antique amphitheatres, two marble pillars, Madame Marmet said to the Countess Martin:

“I think I see Monsieur Choulette.”

Seated in a shoemaker’s shop, his pipe in his hand, Choulette was making rhythmic gestures, and appeared to be reciting verses. The Florentine cobbler listened with a kind smile. He was a little, bald man, and represented one of the types familiar to Flemish painters. On a table, among wooden lasts, nails, leather, and wax, a basilic

plant displayed its round green head. A sparrow, lacking a leg, which had been replaced by a match, hopped on the old man's shoulder and head.

Madame Martin, amused by this spectacle, called Choulette from the threshold. He was softly humming a tune, and she asked him why he had not gone with her to visit the Spanish chapel.

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He arose and replied:

“Madame, you are preoccupied by vain images; but I live in life and in truth.”

He shook the cobbler’s hand and followed the two ladies.

“While going to church,” he said, “I saw this old man, who, bending over his work, and pressing a last between his knees as in a vise, was sewing coarse shoes. I felt that he was simple and kind. I said to him, in Italian: ‘My father, will you drink with me a glass of Chianti?’ He consented. He went for a flagon and some glasses, and I kept the shop.”

And Choulette pointed to two glasses and a flagon placed on a stove.

“When he came back we drank together; I said vague but kind things to him, and I charmed him by the sweetness of sounds. I will go again to his shop; I will learn from him how to make shoes, and how to live without desire. After which, I shall not be sad again. For desire and idleness alone make us sad.”

The Countess Martin smiled.

“Monsieur Choulette, I desire nothing, and, nevertheless, I am not joyful. Must I make shoes, too?”

Choulette replied, gravely:

“It is not yet time for that.”

When they reached the gardens of the Oricellari, Madame Marmet sank on a bench. She had examined at Santa Maria-Novella the frescoes of Ghirlandajo, the stalls of the choir, the Virgin of Cimabue, the paintings in the cloister. She had done this carefully, in memory of her husband, who had greatly liked Italian art. She was tired. Choulette sat by her and said:

“Madame, could you tell me whether it is true that the Pope’s gowns are made by Worth?”

Madame Marmet thought not. Nevertheless, Choulette had heard people say this in cafes. Madame Marmet was astonished that Choulette, a Catholic and a socialist, should speak so disrespectfully of a pope friendly to the republic. But he did not like Leo XIII.

“The wisdom of princes is shortsighted,” he said; “the salvation of the Church must come from the Italian republic, as Leo XIII believes and wishes; but the Church will not be saved in the manner which this pious Machiavelli thinks. The revolution will make

the Pope lose his last sou, with the rest of his patrimony. And it will be salvation. The Pope, destitute and poor, will then become powerful. He will agitate the world. We shall see again Peter, Lin, Clet, Anaclet, and Clement; the humble, the ignorant; men like the early saints will change the face of the earth. If to-morrow, in the chair of Peter, came to sit a real bishop, a real Christian, I would go to him, and say: 'Do not be an old man buried alive in a golden tomb; quit your noble guards and your cardinals; quit your court and its simulacrums of power. Take my arm and come with me to beg for your bread among the nations. Covered with rags, poor, ill, dying, go on the highways, showing in yourself the image of Jesus. Say, "I am begging my bread for the condemnation of the wealthy."

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Go into the cities, and shout from door to door, with a sublime stupidity, "Be humble, be gentle, be poor!" Announce peace and charity to the cities, to the dens, and to the barracks. You will be disdained; the mob will throw stones at you. Policemen will drag you into prison. You shall be for the humble as for the powerful, for the poor as for the rich, a subject of laughter, an object of disgust and of pity. Your priests will dethrone you, and elevate against you an anti-pope, or will say that you are crazy. And it is necessary that they should tell the truth; it is necessary that you should be crazy; the lunatics have saved the world. Men will give to you the crown of thorns and the reed sceptre, and they will spit in your face, and it is by that sign that you will appear as Christ and true king; and it is by such means that you will establish Christian socialism, which is the kingdom of God on earth."

Having spoken in this way, Choulette lighted one of those long and tortuous Italian cigars, which are pierced with a straw. He drew from it several puffs of infectious vapor, then he continued, tranquilly:

"And it would be practical. You may refuse to acknowledge any quality in me except my clear view of situations. Ah, Madame Marmet, you will never know how true it is that the great works of this world were always achieved by madmen. Do you think, Madame Martin, that if Saint Francis of Assisi had been reasonable, he would have poured upon the earth, for the refreshment of peoples, the living water of charity and all the perfumes of love?"

"I do not know," replied Madame Martin; "but reasonable people have always seemed to me to be bores. I can say this to you, Monsieur Choulette."

They returned to Fiesole by the steam tramway which goes up the hill. The rain fell. Madame Marmet went to sleep and Choulette complained. All his ills came to attack him at once: the humidity in the air gave him a pain in the knee, and he could not bend his leg; his carpet-bag, lost the day before in the trip from the station to Fiesole, had not been found, and it was an irreparable disaster; a Paris review had just published one of his poems, with typographical errors as glaring as Aphrodite's shell.

He accused men and things of being hostile to him. He became puerile, absurd, odious. Madame Martin, whom Choulette and the rain saddened, thought the trip would never end. When she reached the house she found Miss Bell in the drawing-room, copying with gold ink on a leaf of parchment, in a handwriting formed after the Aldine italics, verses which she had composed in the night. At her friend's coming she raised her little face, plain but illuminated by splendid eyes.

"Darling, permit me to introduce to you the Prince Albertinelli."



The Prince possessed a certain youthful, godlike beauty, that his black beard intensified. He bowed.

“Madame, you would make one love France, if that sentiment were not already in our hearts.”

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The Countess and Choulette asked Miss Bell to read to them the verses she was writing. She excused herself from reciting her uncertain cadence to the French poet, whom she liked best after Francois Villon. Then she recited in her pretty, hissing, birdlike voice.

"That is very pretty," said Choulette, "and bears the mark of Italy softly veiled by the mists of Thule."

"Yes," said the Countess Martin, "that is pretty. But why, dear Vivian, did your two beautiful innocents wish to die?"

"Oh, darling, because they felt as happy as possible, and desired nothing more. It was discouraging, darling, discouraging. How is it that you do not understand that?"

"And do you think that if we live the reason is that we hope?"

"Oh, yes. We live in the hope of what to-morrow, tomorrow, king of the land of fairies, will bring in his black mantle studded with stars, flowers, and tears. Oh, bright king, To-morrow!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A hero must be human. Napoleon was human
Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere
Brilliance of a fortune too new
Curious to know her face of that day
Do you think that people have not talked about us?
Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone
Fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city
Gave value to her affability by not squandering it
He could not imagine that often words are the same as actions
He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes
He is not intelligent enough to doubt
He studied until the last moment
Her husband had become quite bearable
His habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth
I feel in them (churches) the grandeur of nothingness
I gave myself to him because he loved me
I haven't a taste, I have tastes
It was too late: she did not wish to win
Knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope
Laughing in every wrinkle of his face
Learn to live without desire
Life as a whole is too vast and too remote



Life is made up of just such trifles
Life is not a great thing
Love was only a brief intoxication
Made life give all it could yield
Miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past
None but fools resisted the current
Not everything is known, but everything is said
One would think that the wind would put them out: the stars
Picturesquely ugly
Recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open
Relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her
She is happy, since she likes to remember
She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it
Should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one
So well satisfied with

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his reply that he repeated it twice
That if we live the reason is that we hope
That sort of cold charity which is called altruism
The discouragement which the irreparable gives
The most radical breviary of scepticism since Montaigne
The violent pleasure of losing
Umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies
Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?
Whether they know or do not know, they talk

THE RED LILY

By Anatole France

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER X

DECHARTRE ARRIVES IN FLORENCE

They had dressed for dinner. In the drawing-room Miss Bell was sketching monsters in imitation of Leonard. She created them, to know what they would say afterward, sure that they would speak and express rare ideas in odd rhythms, and that she would listen to them. It was in this way that she often found her inspiration.

Prince Albertinelli strummed on the piano the Sicilian 'O Lola'! His soft fingers hardly touched the keys.

Choulette, even harsher than was his habit, asked for thread and needles that he might mend his clothes. He grumbled because he had lost a needle-case which he had carried for thirty years in his pocket, and which was dear to him for the sweetness of the reminiscences and the strength of the good advice that he had received from it. He thought he had lost it in the hall devoted to historic subjects in the Pitti Palace; and he blamed for this loss the Medicis and all the Italian painters.

Looking at Miss Bell with an evil eye, he said:

"I compose verses while mending my clothes. I like to work with my hands. I sing songs to myself while sweeping my room; that is the reason why my songs have gone to the hearts of men, like the old songs of the farmers and artisans, which are even



more beautiful than mine, but not more natural. I have pride enough not to want any other servant than myself. The sacristan's widow offered to repair my clothes. I would not permit her to do it. It is wrong to make others do servilely for us work which we can do ourselves with noble pride."

The Prince was nonchalantly playing his nonchalant music. Therese, who for eight days had been running to churches and museums in the company of Madame Marmet, was thinking of the annoyance which her companion caused her by discovering in the faces of the old painters resemblances to persons she knew. In the morning, at the Ricardi Palace, on the frescoes of Gozzoli, she had recognized M. Gamin, M. Lagrange, M. Schmoll, the Princess Seniavine as a page, and M. Renan on horseback. She was terrified at finding M. Renan everywhere. She led all her ideas back to her little circle of academicians and fashionable people,

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by an easy turn, which irritated her friend. She recalled in her soft voice the public meetings at the Institute, the lectures at the Sorbonne, the evening receptions where shone the worldly and the spiritualist philosophers. As for the women, they were all charming and irreproachable. She dined with all of them. And Therese thought: "She is too prudent. She bores me." And she thought of leaving her at Fiesole and visiting the churches alone. Employing a word that Le Menil had taught her, she said to herself:

"I will 'plant' Madame Marmet."

A lithe old man came into the parlor. His waxed moustache and his white imperial made him look like an old soldier; but his glance betrayed, under his glasses, the fine softness of eyes worn by science and voluptuousness. He was a Florentine, a friend of Miss Bell and of the Prince, Professor Arrighi, formerly adored by women, and now celebrated in Tuscany for his studies of agriculture. He pleased the Countess Martin at once. She questioned him on his methods, and on the results he obtained from them. He said that he worked with prudent energy. "The earth," he said, "is like women. The earth does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality." The Ave Maria rang in all the campaniles, seeming to make of the sky an immense instrument of religious music. "Darling," said Miss Bell, "do you observe that the air of Florence is made sonorous and silvery at night by the sound of the bells?"

"It is singular," said Choulette, "we have the air of people who are waiting for something."

Vivian Bell replied that they were waiting for M. Dechartre. He was a little late; she feared he had missed the train.

Choulette approached Madame Marmet, and said, gravely "Madame Marmet, is it possible for you to look at a door—a simple, painted, wooden door like yours, I suppose, or like mine, or like this one, or like any other—without being terror-stricken at the thought of the visitor who might, at any moment, come in? The door of one's room, Madame Marmet, opens on the infinite. Have you ever thought of that? Does one ever know the true name of the man or woman, who, under a human guise, with a known face, in ordinary clothes, comes into one's house?"

He added that when he was closeted in his room he could not look at the door without feeling his hair stand on end. But Madame Marmet saw the doors of her rooms open without fear. She knew the name of every one who came to see her—charming persons.

Choulette looked at her sadly, and said, shaking his head: "Madame Marmet, those whom you call by their terrestrial names have other names which you do not know, and which are their real names."

Madame Martin asked Choulette if he thought that misfortune needed to cross the threshold in order to enter one's life.

"Misfortune is ingenious and subtle. It comes by the window, it goes through walls. It does not always show itself, but it is always there. The poor doors are innocent of the coming of that unwelcome visitor."

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Choulette warned Madame Martin severely that she should not call misfortune an unwelcome visitor.

“Misfortune is our greatest master and our best friend. Misfortune teaches us the meaning of life. Madame, when you suffer, you know what you must know; you believe what you must believe; you do what you must do; you are what you must be. And you shall have joy, which pleasure expels. True joy is timid, and does not find pleasure among a multitude.”

Prince Albertinelli said that Miss Bell and her French friends did not need to be unfortunate in order to be perfect, and that the doctrine of perfection reached by suffering was a barbarous cruelty, held in horror under the beautiful sky of Italy. When the conversation languished, he prudently sought again at the piano the phrases of the graceful and banal Sicilian air, fearing to slip into an air of *Trovatore*, which was written in the same manner.

Vivian Bell questioned the monsters she had created, and complained of their absurd replies.

“At this moment,” she said, “I should like to hear speak only figures on tapestries which should say tender things, ancient and precious as themselves.”

And the handsome Prince, carried away by the flood of melody, sang. His voice displayed itself like a peacock’s plumage, and died in spasms of “ohs” and “ahs.”

The good Madame Marmet, her eyes fixed on the door, said:

“I think that Monsieur Dechartre is coming.”

He came in, animated, with joy on his usually grave face.

Miss Bell welcomed him with birdlike cries.

“Monsieur Dechartre, we were impatient to see you. Monsieur Choulette was talking evil of doors—yes, of doors of houses; and he was saying also that misfortune is a very obliging old gentleman. You have lost all these beautiful things. You have made us wait very long, Monsieur Dechartre. Why?”

He apologized; he had taken only the time to go to his hotel and change his dress. He had not even gone to bow to his old friend the bronze San Marco, so imposing in his niche on the San Michele wall. He praised the poetess and saluted the Countess Martin with joy hardly concealed.

“Before quitting Paris I went to your house, where I was told you had gone to wait for spring at Fiesole, with Miss Bell. I then had the hope of finding you in this country, which I love now more than ever.”

She asked him whether he had gone to Venice, and whether he had seen again at Ravenna the empresses wearing aureolas, and the phantoms that had formerly dazzled him.

No, he had not stopped anywhere.

She said nothing. Her eyes remained fixed on the corner of the wall, on the St. Paulin bell.

He said to her:

“You are looking at the Nolette.”

Vivian Bell laid aside her papers and her pencils.

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“You shall soon see a marvel, Monsieur Dechartre. I have found the queen of small bells. I found it at Rimini, in an old building in ruins, which is used as a warehouse. I bought it and packed it myself. I am waiting for it. You shall see. It bears a Christ on a cross, between the Virgin and Saint John, the date of 1400, and the arms of Malatesta—Monsieur Dechartre, you are not listening enough. Listen to me attentively. In 1400 Lorenzo Ghiberti, fleeing from war and the plague, took refuge at Rimini, at Paola Malatesta’s house. It was he that modelled the figures of my bell. And you shall see here, next week, Ghiberti’s work.”

The servant announced that dinner was served.

Miss Bell apologized for serving to them Italian dishes. Her cook was a poet of Fiesole.

At table, before the fiascani enveloped with corn straw, they talked of the fifteenth century, which they loved. Prince Albertinelli praised the artists of that epoch for their universality, for the fervent love they gave to their art, and for the genius that devoured them. He talked with emphasis, in a caressing voice.

Dechartre admired them. But he admired them in another way.

“To praise in a becoming manner,” he said, “those men, who worked so heartily, the praise should be modest and just. They should be placed in their workshops, in the shops where they worked as artisans. It is there that one may admire their simplicity and their genius. They were ignorant and rude. They had read little and seen little. The hills that surround Florence were the boundary of their horizon. They knew only their city, the Holy Scriptures, and some fragments of antique sculptures, studied and caressed lovingly.”

“You are right,” said Professor Arrighi. “They had no other care than to use the best processes. Their minds bent only on preparing varnish and mixing colors. The one who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel, in order that the painting should not be broken when the wood was split, passed for a marvellous man. Every master had his secret formulae.”

“Happy time,” said Dechartre, “when nobody troubled himself about that originality for which we are so avidly seeking to-day. The apprentice tried to work like the master. He had no other ambition than to resemble him, and it was without trying to be that he was different from the others. They worked not for glory, but to live.”

“They were right,” said Choulette. “Nothing is better than to work for a living.”

“The desire to attain fame,” continued Dechartre, “did not trouble them. As they did not know the past, they did not conceive the future; and their dream did not go beyond their

lives. They exercised a powerful will in working well. Being simple, they made few mistakes, and saw the truth which our intelligence conceals from us.”

Choulette began to relate to Madame Marmet the incidents of a call he had made during the day on the Princess of the House of France to whom the Marquise de Rieu had given him a letter of introduction. He liked to impress upon people the fact that he, the Bohemian and vagabond, had been received by that royal Princess, at whose house neither Miss Bell nor the Countess Martin would have been admitted, and whom Prince Albertinelli prided himself on having met one day at some ceremony.

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"She devotes herself," said the Prince, "to the practices of piety."

"She is admirable for her nobility, and her simplicity," said Choulette. "In her house, surrounded by her gentlemen and her ladies, she causes the most rigorous etiquette to be observed, so that her grandeur is almost a penance, and every morning she scrubs the pavement of the church. It is a village church, where the chickens roam, while the 'cure' plays briscola with the sacristan."

And Choulette, bending over the table, imitated, with his napkin, a servant scrubbing; then, raising his head, he said, gravely:

"After waiting in consecutive anterooms, I was at last permitted to kiss her hand."

And he stopped.

Madame Martin asked, impatiently:

"What did she say to you, that Princess so admirable for her nobility and her simplicity?"

"She said to me: 'Have you visited Florence? I am told that recently new and handsome shops have been opened which are lighted at night.' She said also 'We have a good chemist here. The Austrian chemists are not better. He placed on my leg, six months ago, a porous plaster which has not yet come off.' Such are the words that Maria Therese deigned to address to me. O simple grandeur! O Christian virtue! O daughter of Saint Louis! O marvellous echo of your voice, holy Elizabeth of Hungary!"

Madame Martin smiled. She thought that Choulette was mocking. But he denied the charge, indignantly, and Miss Bell said that Madame Martin was wrong. It was a fault of the French, she said, to think that people were always jesting.

Then they reverted to the subject of art, which in that country is inhaled with the air.

"As for me," said the Countess Martin, "I am not learned enough to admire Giotto and his school. What strikes me is the sensuality of that art of the fifteenth century which is said to be Christian. I have seen piety and purity only in the images of Fra Angelico, although they are very pretty. The rest, those figures of Virgins and angels, are voluptuous, caressing, and at times perversely ingenuous. What is there religious in those young Magian kings, handsome as women; in that Saint Sebastian, brilliant with youth, who seems merely the dolorous Bacchus of Christianity?"

Dechartre replied that he thought as she did, and that they must be right, she and he; since Savonarola was of the same opinion, and, finding no piety in any work of art, wished to burn them all.

“There were at Florence, in the time of the superb Manfred, who was half a Mussulman, men who were said to be of the sect of Epicurus, and who sought for arguments against the existence of God. Guido Cavalcanti disdained the ignorant folk who believed in the immortality of the soul. The following phrase by him was quoted: ‘The death of man is exactly similar to that of brutes.’ Later, when antique beauty was excavated from ruins, the Christian style of art seemed sad. The painters that worked in the churches and cloisters were neither devout nor chaste. Perugino was an atheist, and did not conceal it.”

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"Yes," said Miss Bell; "but it was said that his head was hard, and that celestial truths, could not penetrate his thick cranium. He was harsh and avaricious, and quite embedded in material interests. He thought only of buying houses."

Professor Arrighi defended Pietro Vanucci of Perugia.

"He was," he said, "an honest man. And the prior of the Gesuati of Florence was wrong to mistrust him. That monk practised the art of manufacturing ultramarine blue by crushing stones of burned lapis-lazuli. Ultramarine was then worth its weight in gold; and the prior, who doubtless had a secret, esteemed it more precious than rubies or sapphires. He asked Pietro Vanucci to decorate the two cloisters of his convent, and he expected marvels, less from the skilfulness of the master than from the beauty of that ultramarine in the skies. During all the time that the painter worked in the cloisters at the history of Jesus Christ, the prior kept by his side and presented to him the precious powder in a bag which he never quitted. Pietro took from it, under the saintly man's eyes, the quantity he needed, and dipped his brush, loaded with color, in a cupful of water, before rubbing the wall with it. He used in that manner a great quantity of the powder. And the good father, seeing his bag getting thinner, sighed: 'Jesus! How that lime devours the ultramarine!' When the frescoes were finished, and Perugino had received from the monk the agreed price, he placed in his hand a package of blue powder: 'This is for you, father. Your ultramarine which I took with my brush fell to the bottom of my cup, whence I gathered it every day. I return it to you. Learn to trust honest people.'"

"Oh," said Therese, "there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that Perugino was avaricious yet honest. Interested people are not always the least scrupulous. There are many misers who are honest."

"Naturally, darling," said Miss Bell. "Misers do not wish to owe anything, and prodigal people can bear to have debts. They do not think of the money they have, and they think less of the money they owe. I did not say that Pietro Vanucci of Perugia was a man without property. I said that he had a hard business head and that he bought houses. I am very glad to hear that he returned the ultramarine to the prior of the Gesuati."

"Since your Pietro was rich," said Choulette, "it was his duty to return the ultramarine. The rich are morally bound to be honest; the poor are not."

At this moment, Choulette, to whom the waiter was presenting a silver bowl, extended his hands for the perfumed water. It came from a vase which Miss Bell passed to her guests, in accordance with antique usage, after meals.

"I wash my hands," he said, "of the evil that Madame Martin does or may do by her speech, or otherwise."

And he rose, awkwardly, after Miss Bell, who took the arm of Professor Arrighi.

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In the drawing-room she said, while serving the coffee:

“Monsieur Choulette, why do you condemn us to the savage sadness of equality? Why, Daphnis's flute would not be melodious if it were made of seven equal reeds. You wish to destroy the beautiful harmonies between masters and servants, aristocrats and artisans. Oh, I fear you are a sad barbarian, Monsieur Choulette. You are full of pity for those who are in need, and you have no pity for divine beauty, which you exile from this world. You expel beauty, Monsieur Choulette; you repudiate her, nude and in tears. Be certain of this: she will not remain on earth when the poor little men shall all be weak, delicate, and ignorant. Believe me, to abolish the ingenious grouping which men of diverse conditions form in society, the humble with the magnificent, is to be the enemy of the poor and of the rich, is to be the enemy of the human race.”

“Enemies of the human race!” replied Choulette, while stirring his coffee. “That is the phrase the harsh Roman applied to the Christians who talked of divine love to him.”

Dechartre, seated near Madame Martin, questioned her on her tastes about art and beauty, sustained, led, animated her admirations, at times prompted her with caressing brusquerie, wished her to see all that he had seen, to love all that he loved.

He wished that she should go in the gardens at the first flush of spring. He contemplated her in advance on the noble terraces; he saw already the light playing on her neck and in her hair; the shadow of laurel-trees falling on her eyes. For him the land and the sky of Florence had nothing more to do than to serve as an adornment to this young woman.

He praised the simplicity with which she dressed, the characteristics of her form and of her grace, the charming frankness of the lines which every one of her movements created. He liked, he said, the animated and living, subtle, and free gowns which one sees so rarely, which one never forgets.

Although she had been much lauded, she had never heard praise which had pleased her more. She knew she dressed well, with bold and sure taste. But no man except her father had made to her on the subject the compliments of an expert. She thought that men were capable of feeling only the effect of a gown, without understanding the ingenious details of it. Some men who knew gowns disgusted her by their effeminate air. She was resigned to the appreciation of women only, and these had in their appreciation narrowness of mind, malignity, and envy. The artistic admiration of Dechartre astonished and pleased her. She received agreeably the praise he gave her, without thinking that perhaps it was too intimate and almost indiscreet.

“So you look at gowns, Monsieur Dechartre?”



No, he seldom looked at them. There were so few women well dressed, even now, when women dress as well as, and even better, than ever. He found no pleasure in seeing packages of dry-goods walk. But if a woman having rhythm and line passed before him, he blessed her.

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He continued, in a tone a little more elevated:

"I can not think of a woman who takes care to deck herself every day, without meditating on the great lesson which she gives to artists. She dresses for a few hours, and the care she has taken is not lost. We must, like her, ornament life without thinking of the future. To paint, carve, or write for posterity is only the silliness of conceit."

"Monsieur Dechartre," asked Prince Albertinelli, "how do you think a mauve waist studded with silver flowers would become Miss Bell?"

"I think," said Choulette, "so little of a terrestrial future, that I have written my finest poems on cigarette paper. They vanished easily, leaving to my verses only a sort of metaphysical existence."

He had an air of negligence for which he posed. In fact, he had never lost a line of his writing. Dechartre was more sincere. He was not desirous of immortality. Miss Bell reproached him for this.

"Monsieur Dechartre, that life may be great and complete, one must put into it the past and the future. Our works of poetry and of art must be accomplished in honor of the dead and with the thought of those who are to come after us. Thus we shall participate in what has been, in what is, and in what shall be. You do not wish to be immortal, Monsieur Dechartre? Beware, for God may hear you."

Dechartre replied:

"It would be enough for me to live one moment more."

And he said good-night, promising to return the next day to escort Madame Martin to the Brancacci chapel.

An hour later, in the aesthetic room hung with tapestry, whereon citron-trees loaded with golden fruit formed a fairy forest, Therese, her head on the pillow, and her handsome bare arms folded under her head, was thinking, seeing float confusedly before her the images of her new life: Vivian Bell and her bells, her pre-Raphaelite figures, light as shadows, ladies, isolated knights, indifferent among pious scenes, a little sad, and looking to see who was coming; she thought also of the Prince Albertinelli, Professor Arrighi, Choulette, with his odd play of ideas, and Dechartre, with youthful eyes in a careworn face.

She thought he had a charming imagination, a mind richer than all those that had been revealed to her, and an attraction which she no longer tried to resist. She had always recognized his gift to please. She discovered now that he had the will to please. This idea was delightful to her; she closed her eyes to retain it. Then, suddenly, she shuddered. She had felt a deep blow struck within her in the depth of her being. She



had a sudden vision of Robert, his gun under his arm, in the woods. He walked with firm and regular step in the shadowy thicket. She could not see his face, and that troubled her. She bore him no ill-will. She was not discontented with him, but with herself. Robert went straight on, without turning his head, far, and still farther, until he was only a black point in the desolate wood. She thought that perhaps she had been capricious and harsh in leaving him without a word of farewell, without even a letter. He was her lover and her only friend. She never had had another. "I do not wish him to be unfortunate because of me," she thought.

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Little by little she was reassured. He loved her, doubtless; but he was not susceptible, not ingenious, happily, in tormenting himself. She said to herself:

“He is hunting and enjoying the sport. He is with his aunt, whom he admires.” She calmed her fears and returned to the charming gayety of Florence. She had seen casually, at the Offices, a picture that Dechartre liked. It was a decapitated head of the Medusa, a work wherein Leonardo, the sculptor said, had expressed the minute profundity and tragic refinement of his genius. She wished to see it again, regretting that she had not seen it better at first. She extinguished her lamp and went to sleep.

She dreamed that she met in a deserted church Robert Le Menil enveloped in furs which she had never seen him wear. He was waiting for her, but a crowd of priests had separated them. She did not know what had become of him. She had not seen his face, and that frightened her. She awoke and heard at the open window a sad, monotonous cry, and saw a humming-bird darting about in the light of early dawn. Then, without cause, she began to weep in a passion of self-pity, and with the abandon of a child.

CHAPTER XI

“The dawn of faith and love”

She took pleasure in dressing early, with delicate and subtle taste. Her dressing-room, an aesthetic fantasy of Vivian Bell, with its coarsely varnished pottery, its tall copper pitchers, and its faience pavement, like a chess-board, resembled a fairy’s kitchen. It was rustic and marvellous, and the Countess Martin could have in it the agreeable surprise of mistaking herself for a fairy. While her maid was dressing her hair, she heard Dechartre and Choulette talking under her windows. She rearranged all the work Pauline had done, and uncovered the line of her nape, which was fine and pure. She looked at herself in the glass, and went into the garden.

Dechartre was there, reciting verses of Dante, and looking at Florence: “At the hour when our mind, a greater stranger to the flesh. . .”

Near him, Choulette, seated on the balustrade of the terrace, his legs hanging, and his nose in his beard, was still at work on the figure of Misery on his stick.

Dechartre resumed the rhymes of the canticle: “At the hour when our mind, a greater stranger to the flesh; and less under the obsession of thoughts, is almost divine in its visions, . . .”

She approached beside the boxwood hedge, holding a parasol and dressed in a straw-colored gown. The faint sunlight of winter enveloped her in pale gold.



Dechartre greeted her joyfully.

She said:

“You are reciting verses that I do not know. I know only Metastasio. My teacher liked only Metastasio. What is the hour when the mind has divine visions?”

“Madame, that hour is the dawn of the day. It may be also the dawn of faith and of love.”

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Choulette doubted that the poet meant dreams of the morning, which leave at awakening vivid and painful impressions, and which are not altogether strangers to the flesh. But Dechartre had quoted these verses in the pleasure of the glorious dawn which he had seen that morning on the golden hills. He had been, for a long time, troubled about the images that one sees in sleep, and he believed that these images were not related to the object that preoccupies one the most, but, on the contrary, to ideas abandoned during the day.

Therese recalled her morning dream, the hunter lost in the thicket.

"Yes," said Dechartre, "the things we see at night are unfortunate remains of what we have neglected the day before. Dreams avenge things one has disdained. They are reproaches of abandoned friends. Hence their sadness."

She was lost in dreams for a moment, then she said:

"That is perhaps true."

Then, quickly, she asked Choulette if he had finished the portrait of Misery on his stick. Misery had now become a figure of Piety, and Choulette recognized the Virgin in it. He had even composed a quatrain which he was to write on it in spiral form—a didactic and moral quatrain. He would cease to write, except in the style of the commandments of God rendered into French verses. The four lines expressed simplicity and goodness. He consented to recite them.

Therese rested on the balustrade of the terrace and sought in the distance, in the depth of the sea of light, the peaks of Vallambrosa, almost as blue as the sky. Jacques Dechartre looked at her. It seemed to him that he saw her for the first time, such was the delicacy that he discovered in her face, which tenderness and intelligence had invested with thoughtfulness without altering its young, fresh grace. The daylight which she liked, was indulgent to her. And truly she was pretty, bathed in that light of Florence, which caresses beautiful forms and feeds noble thoughts. A fine, pink color rose to her well-rounded cheeks; her eyes, bluish-gray, laughed; and when she talked, the brilliancy of her teeth set off her lips of ardent sweetness. His look embraced her supple bust, her full hips, and the bold attitude of her waist. She held her parasol with her left hand, the other hand played with violets. Dechartre had a mania for beautiful hands. Hands presented to his eyes a physiognomy as striking as the face—a character, a soul. These hands enchanted him. They were exquisite. He adored their slender fingers, their pink nails, their palms soft and tender, traversed by lines as elegant as arabesques, and rising at the base of the fingers in harmonious mounts. He examined them with charmed attention until she closed them on the handle of her umbrella. Then, standing behind her, he looked at her again. Her bust and arms, graceful and pure in line, her beautiful form, which was like that of a living amphora, pleased him.

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“Monsieur Dechartre, that black spot over there is the Boboli Gardens, is it not? I saw the gardens three years ago. There were not many flowers in them. Nevertheless, I liked their tall, sombre trees.”

It astonished him that she talked, that she thought. The clear sound of her voice amazed him, as if he never had heard it.

He replied at random. He was awkward. She feigned not to notice it, but felt a deep inward joy. His low voice, which was veiled and softened, seemed to caress her. She said ordinary things:

“That view is beautiful, The weather is fine.”

CHAPTER XII

HEARTS AWAKENED

In the morning, her head on the embroidered pillow, Therese was thinking of the walks of the day before; of the Virgins, framed with angels; of the innumerable children, painted or carved, all beautiful, all happy, who sing ingenuously the Alleluia of grace and of beauty. In the illustrious chapel of the Brancacci, before those frescoes, pale and resplendent as a divine dawn, he had talked to her of Masaccio, in language so vivid that it had seemed to her as if she had seen him, the adolescent master of the masters, his mouth half open, his eyes dark and blue, dying, enchanted. And she had liked these marvels of a morning more charming than a day. Dechartre was for her the soul of those magnificent forms, the mind of those noble things. It was by him, it was through him, that she understood art and life. She took no interest in things that did not interest him. How had this affection come to her? She had no precise remembrance of it. In the first place, when Paul Vence wished to introduce him to her, she had no desire to know him, no presentiment that he would please her. She recalled elegant bronze statuettes, fine waxworks signed with his name, that she had remarked at the Champ de Mars salon or at Durand-Ruel's. But she did not imagine that he could be agreeable to her, or more seductive than many artists and lovers of art at whom she laughed with her friends. When she saw him, he pleased her; she had a desire to attract him, to see him often. The night he dined at her house she realized that she had for him a noble and elevating affection. But soon after he irritated her a little; it made her impatient to see him closeted within himself and too little preoccupied by her. She would have liked to disturb him. She was in that state of impatience when she met him one evening, in front of the grille of the Musee des Religions, and he talked to her of Ravenna and of the Empress seated on a gold chair in her tomb. She had found him serious and charming, his voice warm, his eyes soft in the shadow of the night, but too much a stranger, too far from her, too unknown. She had felt a sort of uneasiness, and she did

not know, when she walked along the boxwood bordering the terrace, whether she desired to see him every day or never to see him again.

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Since then, at Florence, her only pleasure was to feel that he was near her, to hear him. He made life for her charming, diverse, animated, new. He revealed to her delicate joys and a delightful sadness; he awakened in her a voluptuousness which had been always dormant. Now she was determined never to give him up. But how? She foresaw difficulties; her lucid mind and her temperament presented them all to her. For a moment she tried to deceive herself; she reflected that perhaps he, a dreamer, exalted, lost in his studies of art, might remain assiduous without being exacting. But she did not wish to reassure herself with that idea. If Dechartre were not a lover, he lost all his charm. She did not dare to think of the future. She lived in the present, happy, anxious, and closing her eyes.

She was dreaming thus, in the shade traversed by arrows of light, when Pauline brought to her some letters with the morning tea. On an envelope marked with the monogram of the Rue Royale Club she recognized the handwriting of Le Menil. She had expected that letter. She was only astonished that what was sure to come had come, as in her childhood, when the infallible clock struck the hour of her piano lesson.

In his letter Robert made reasonable reproaches. Why did she go without saying anything, without leaving a word of farewell? Since his return to Paris he had expected every morning a letter which had not come. He was happier the year before, when he had received in the morning, two or three times a week, letters so gentle and so well written that he regretted not being able to print them. Anxious, he had gone to her house.

"I was astounded to hear of your departure. Your husband received me. He said that, yielding to his advice, you had gone to finish the winter at Florence with Miss Bell. He said that for some time you had looked pale and thin. He thought a change of air would do you good. You had not wished to go, but, as you suffered more and more, he succeeded in persuading you.

"I had not noticed that you were thin. It seemed to me, on the contrary, that your health was good. And then Florence is not a good winter resort. I cannot understand your departure. I am much tormented by it. Reassure me at once, I pray you.

"Do you think it is agreeable for me to get news of you from your husband and to receive his confidences? He is sorry you are not here; it annoys him that the obligations of public life compel him to remain in Paris. I heard at the club that he had chances to become a minister. This astonishes me, because ministers are not usually chosen among fashionable people."

Then he related hunting tales to her. He had brought for her three fox-skins, one of which was very beautiful; the skin of a brave animal which he had pulled by the tail, and which had bitten his hand.

In Paris he was worried. His cousin had been presented at the club. He feared he might be blackballed. His candidacy had been posted. Under these conditions he did not dare advise him to withdraw; it would be taking too great a responsibility. If he were blackballed it would be very disagreeable. He finished by praying her to write and to return soon.

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Having read this letter, she tore it up gently, threw it in the fire, and calmly watched it burn.

Doubtless, he was right. He had said what he had to say; he had complained, as it was his duty to complain. What could she answer? Should she continue her quarrel? The subject of it had become so indifferent to her that it needed reflection to recall it. Oh, no; she had no desire to be tormented. She felt, on the contrary, very gentle toward him! Seeing that he loved her with confidence, in stubborn tranquillity, she became sad and frightened. He had not changed. He was the same man he had been before. She was not the same woman. They were separated now by imperceptible yet strong influences, like essences in the air that make one live or die. When her maid came to dress her, she had not begun to write an answer.

Anxious, she thought: "He trusts me. He suspects nothing." This made her more impatient than anything. It irritated her to think that there were simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others.

She went into the parlor, where she found Vivian Bell writing. The latter said:

"Do you wish to know, darling, what I was doing while waiting for you? Nothing and everything. Verses. Oh, darling, poetry must be our souls naturally expressed."

Therese kissed Miss Bell, rested her head on her friend's shoulder, and said:

"May I look?"

"Look if you wish, dear. They are verses made on the model of the popular songs of your country."

"Is it a symbol, Vivian? Explain it to me."

"Oh, darling, why explain, why? A poetic image must have several meanings. The one that you find is the real one. But there is a very clear meaning in them, my love; that is, that one should not lightly disengage one's self from what one has taken into the heart."

The horses were harnessed. They went, as had been agreed, to visit the Albertinelli gallery. The Prince was waiting for them, and Dechartre was to meet them in the palace. On the way, while the carriage rolled along the wide highway, Vivian Bell talked with her usual transcendentalism. As they were descending among houses pink and white, gardens and terraces ornamented with statues and fountains, she showed to her friend the villa, hidden under bluish pines, where the ladies and the cavaliers of the Decameron took refuge from the plague that ravaged Florence, and diverted one another with tales frivolous, facetious, or tragic. Then she confessed the thought which had come to her the day before.



“You had gone, darling, to Carmine with Monsieur Dechartre, and you had left at Fiesole Madame Marmet, who is an agreeable person, a moderate and polished woman. She knows many anecdotes about persons of distinction who live in Paris. And when she tells them, she does as my cook Pompaloni does when he serves eggs: he does not put salt in them, but he puts the salt-cellar next to them. Madame

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Marmet's tongue is very sweet, but the salt is near it, in her eyes. Her conversation is like Pompaloni's dish, my love—each one seasons to his taste. Oh, I like Madame Marmet a great deal. Yesterday, after you had gone, I found her alone and sad in a corner of the drawing-room. She was thinking mournfully of her husband. I said to her: 'Do you wish me to think of your husband, too? I will think of him with you. I have been told that he was a learned man, a member of the Royal Society of Paris. Madame Marmet, talk to me of him.' She replied that he had devoted himself to the Etruscans, and that he had given to them his entire life. Oh, darling, I cherished at once the memory of that Monsieur Marmet, who lived for the Etruscans. And then a good idea came to me. I said to Madame Marmet, 'We have at Fiesole, in the Pretorio Palace, a modest little Etruscan museum. Come and visit it with me. Will you?' She replied it was what she most desired to see in Italy. We went to the Pretorio Palace; we saw a lioness and a great many little bronze figures, grotesque, very fat or very thin. The Etruscans were a seriously gay people. They made bronze caricatures. But the monkeys—some afflicted with big stomachs, others astonished to show their bones—Madame Marmet looked at them with reluctant admiration. She contemplated them like—there is a beautiful French word that escapes me—like the monuments and the trophies of Monsieur Marmet."

Madame Martin smiled. But she was restless. She thought the sky dull, the streets ugly, the passers-by common.

"Oh, darling, the Prince will be very glad to receive you in his palace."

"I do not think so."

"Why, darling, why?"

"Because I do not please him much."

Vivian Bell declared that the Prince, on the contrary, was a great admirer of the Countess Martin.

The horses stopped before the Albertinelli palace. On the sombre facade were sealed those bronze rings which formerly, on festival nights, held rosin torches. These bronze rings mark, in Florence, the palaces of the most illustrious families. The palace had an air of lofty pride. The Prince hastened to meet them, and led them through the empty salons into the gallery. He, apologized for showing canvases which perhaps had not an attractive aspect. The gallery had been formed by Cardinal Giulio Albertinelli at a time when the taste for Guido and Caraccio, now fallen, had predominated. His ancestor had taken pleasure in gathering the works of the school of Bologna. But he would show

to Madame Martin several paintings which had not displeased Miss Bell, among others a Mantegna.

The Countess Martin recognized at once a banal and doubtful collection; she felt bored among the multitude of little Parrocels, showing in the darkness a bit of armor and a white horse.

A valet presented a card.

The Prince read aloud the name of Jacques Dechartre. At that moment he was turning his back on the two visitors. His face wore the expression of cruel displeasure one finds on the marble busts of Roman emperors. Dechartre was on the staircase.

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The Prince went toward him with a languid smile. He was no longer Nero, but Antinous.

"I invited Monsieur Dechartre to come to the Albertinelli palace," said Miss Bell. "I knew it would please you. He wished to see your gallery."

And it is true that Dechartre had wished to be there with Madame Martin. Now all four walked among the Guidos and the Albanos.

Miss Bell babbled to the Prince—her usual prattle about those old men and those Virgins whose blue mantles were agitated by an immovable tempest. Dechartre, pale, enervated, approached Therese, and said to her, in a low tone:

"This gallery is a warehouse where picture dealers of the entire world hang the things they can not sell. And the Prince sells here things that Jews could not sell."

He led her to a Holy Family exhibited on an easel draped with green velvet, and bearing on the border the name of Michael-Angelo.

"I have seen that Holy Family in the shops of picture-dealers of London, of Basle, and of Paris. As they could not get the twenty-five louis that it is worth, they have commissioned the last of the Albertinellis to sell it for fifty thousand francs."

The Prince, divining what they were saying, approached them gracefully.

"There is a copy of this picture almost everywhere. I do not affirm that this is the original. But it has always been in the family, and old inventories attribute it to Michael-Angelo. That is all I can say about it."

And the Prince turned toward Miss Bell, who was trying to find pictures by the pre-Raphaelites.

Dechartre felt uneasy. Since the day before he had thought of Therese. He had all night dreamed and yearned over her image. He saw her again, delightful, but in another manner, and even more desirable than he had imagined in his insomnia; less visionary, of a more vivid piquancy, and also of a mind more mysteriously impenetrable. She was sad; she seemed cold and indifferent. He said to himself that he was nothing to her; that he was becoming importunate and ridiculous. This irritated him. He murmured bitterly in her ear: "I have reflected. I did not wish to come. Why did I come?" She understood at once what he meant, that he feared her now, and that he was impatient, timid, and awkward. It pleased her that he was thus, and she was grateful to him for the trouble and the desires he inspired in her. Her heart throbbed faster. But, affecting to understand that he regretted having disturbed himself to come and look at bad paintings, she replied that in truth this gallery was not interesting. Already, under the terror of displeasing her, he felt reassured, and believed that, really indifferent, she had not perceived the accent nor the significance of what he had said.

He said “No, nothing interesting.” The Prince, who had invited the two visitors to breakfast, asked their friend to remain with them. Dechartre excused himself. He was about to depart when,

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in the large empty salon, he found himself alone with Madame Martin. He had had the idea of running away from her. He had no other wish now than to see her again. He recalled to her that she was the next morning to visit the Bargello. "You have permitted me to accompany you." She asked him if he had not found her moody and tiresome. Oh, no; he had not thought her tiresome, but he feared she was sad.

"Alas," he added, "your sadness, your joys, I have not the right to know them." She turned toward him a glance almost harsh. "You do not think that I shall take you for a confidante, do you?" And she walked away brusquely.

CHAPTER XIII

"You must take me with my own soul!"

After dinner, in the salon of the bells, under the lamps from which the great shades permitted only an obscure light to filter, good Madame Marmet was warming herself by the hearth, with a white cat on her knees. The evening was cool. Madame Martin, her eyes reminiscent of the golden light, the violet peaks, and the ancient trees of Florence, smiled with happy fatigue. She had gone with Miss Bell, Dechartre, and Madame Marmet to the Chartrist convent of Ema. And now, in the intoxication of her visions, she forgot the care of the day before, the importunate letters, the distant reproaches, and thought of nothing in the world but cloisters chiselled and painted, villages with red roofs, and roads where she saw the first blush of spring. Dechartre had modelled for Miss Bell a waxen figure of Beatrice. Vivian was painting angels. Softly bent over her, Prince Albertinelli caressed his beard and threw around him glances that appeared to seek admiration.

Replying to a reflection of Vivian Bell on marriage and love:

"A woman must choose," he said. "With a man whom women love her heart is not quiet. With a man whom the women do not love she is not happy."

"Darling," asked Miss Bell, "what would you wish for a friend dear to you?"

"I should wish, Vivian, that my friend were happy. I should wish also that she were quiet. She should be quiet in hatred of treason, humiliating suspicions, and mistrust."

"But, darling, since the Prince has said that a woman can not have at the same time happiness and security, tell me what your friend should choose."

"One never chooses, Vivian; one never chooses. Do not make me say what I think of marriage."

At this moment Choulette appeared, wearing the magnificent air of those beggars of whom small towns are proud. He had played briscola with peasants in a coffeehouse of Fiesole.

“Here is Monsieur Choulette,” said Miss Bell. “He will teach what we are to think of marriage. I am inclined to listen to him as to an oracle. He does not see the things that we see, and he sees things that we do not see. Monsieur Choulette, what do you think of marriage?”

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He took a seat and lifted in the air a Socratic finger:

“Are you speaking, Mademoiselle, of the solemn union between man and woman? In this sense, marriage is a sacrament. But sometimes, alas! it is almost a sacrilege. As for civil marriage, it is a formality. The importance given to it in our society is an idiotic thing which would have made the women of other times laugh. We owe this prejudice, like many others, to the bourgeois, to the mad performances of a lot of financiers which have been called the Revolution, and which seem admirable to those that have profited by it. Civil marriage is, in reality, only registry, like many others which the State exacts in order to be sure of the condition of persons: in every well organized state everybody must be indexed. Morally, this registry in a big ledger has not even the virtue of inducing a wife to take a lover. Who ever thinks of betraying an oath taken before a mayor? In order to find joy in adultery, one must be pious.”

“But, Monsieur,” said Therese, “we were married at the church.”

Then, with an accent of sincerity:

“I can not understand how a man ever makes up his mind to marry; nor how a woman, after she has reached an age when she knows what she is doing, can commit that folly.”

The Prince looked at her with distrust. He was clever, but he was incapable of conceiving that one might talk without an object, disinterestedly, and to express general ideas. He imagined that Countess Martin-Belleme was suggesting to him projects that she wished him to consider. And as he was thinking of defending himself and also avenging himself, he made velvet eyes at her and talked with tender gallantry:

“You display, Madame, the pride of the beautiful and intelligent French women whom subjection irritates. French women love liberty, and none of them is as worthy of liberty as you. I have lived in France a little. I have known and admired the elegant society of Paris, the salons, the festivals, the conversations, the plays. But in our mountains, under our olive-trees, we become rustic again. We assume golden-age manners, and marriage is for us an idyl full of freshness.”

Vivian Bell examined the statuette which Dechartre had left on the table.

“Oh! it was thus that Beatrice looked, I am sure. And do you know, Monsieur Dechartre, there are wicked men who say that Beatrice never existed?”

Choulette declared he wished to be counted among those wicked men. He did not believe that Beatrice had any more reality than other ladies through whom ancient poets who sang of love represented some scholastic idea, ridiculously subtle.

Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself, jealous of Dante as of the universe, a refined man of letters, Choulette continued:



“I suspect that the little sister of the angels never lived, except in the imagination of the poet. It seems a pure allegory, or, rather, an exercise in arithmetic or a theme of astrology. Dante, who was a good doctor of Bologna and had many moons in his head, under his pointed cap—Dante believed in the virtue of numbers. That inflamed mathematician dreamed of figures, and his Beatrice is the flower of arithmetic, that is all.”

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And he lighted his pipe.

Vivian Bell exclaimed:

“Oh, do not talk in that way, Monsieur Choulette. You grieve me much, and if our friend Monsieur Gebhart heard you, he would not be pleased with you. To punish you, Prince Albertinelli will read to you the canticle in which Beatrice explains the spots on the moon. Take the Divine Comedy, Eusebio. It is the white book which you see on the table. Open it and read it.”

During the Prince’s reading, Dechartre, seated on the couch near Countess Martin, talked of Dante with enthusiasm as the best sculptor among the poets. He recalled to Therese the painting they had seen together two days before, on the door of the Servi, a fresco almost obliterated, where one hardly divined the presence of the poet wearing a laurel wreath, Florence, and the seven circles. This was enough to exalt the artist. But she had distinguished nothing, she had not been moved. And then she confessed that Dante did not attract her. Dechartre, accustomed to her sharing all his ideas of art and poetry, felt astonishment and some discontent. He said, aloud:

“There are many grand and strong things which you do not feel.”

Miss Bell, lifting her head, asked what were these things that “darling” did not feel; and when she learned that it was the genius of Dante, she exclaimed, in mock anger:

“Oh, do you not honor the father, the master worthy of all praise, the god? I do not love you any more, darling. I detest you.”

And, as a reproach to Choulette and to the Countess Martin, she recalled the piety of that citizen of Florence who took from the altar the candles that had been lighted in honor of Christ, and placed them before the bust of Dante.

The Prince resumed his interrupted reading. Dechartre persisted in trying to make Therese admire what she did not know. Certainly he would have easily sacrificed Dante and all the poets of the universe for her. But near him, tranquil, and an object of desire, she irritated him, almost without his realizing it, by the charm of her laughing beauty. He persisted in imposing on her his ideas, his artistic passions, even his fantasy, and his capriciousness. He insisted in a low tone, in phrases concise and quarrelsome. She said:

“Oh, how violent you are!”

Then he bent to her ear, and in an ardent voice, which he tried to soften:

“You must take me with my own soul!”

Therese felt a shiver of fear mingled with joy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE AVOWAL

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She next day she said to herself that she would reply to Robert. It was raining. She listened languidly to the drops falling on the terrace. Vivian Bell, careful and refined, had placed on the table artistic stationery, sheets imitating the vellum of missals, others of pale violet powdered with silver dust; celluloid pens, white and light, which one had to manage like brushes; an iris ink which, on a page, spread a mist of azure and gold. Therese did not like such delicacy. It seemed to her not appropriate for letters which she wished to make simple and modest. When she saw that the name of "friend," given to Robert on the first line, placed on the silvery paper, tinted itself like mother-of-pearl, a half smile came to her lips. The first phrases were hard to write. She hurried the rest, said a great deal of Vivian Bell and of Prince Albertinelli, a little of Choulette, and that she had seen Dechartre at Florence. She praised some pictures of the museums, but without discrimination, and only to fill the pages. She knew that Robert had no appreciation of painting; that he admired nothing except a little cuirassier by Detaille, bought at Goupil's.

She saw again in her mind this cuirassier, which he had shown to her one day, with pride, in his bedroom, near the mirror, under family portraits. All this, at a distance, seemed to her petty and tiresome. She finished her letter with words of friendship, the sweetness of which was not feigned. Truly, she had never felt more peaceful and gentle toward her lover. In four pages she had said little and explained less. She announced only that she should stay a month in Florence, the air of which did her good. Then she wrote to her father, to her husband, and to Princess Seniavine. She went down the stairway with the letters in her hand. In the hall she threw three of them on the silver tray destined to receive papers for the post-office. Mistrusting Madame Marmet, she slipped into her pocket the letter to Le Menil, counting on chance to throw it into a post-box.

Almost at the same time Dechartre came to accompany the three friends in a walk through the city. As he was waiting he saw the letters on the tray.

Without believing that characters could be divined through penmanship, he was susceptible to the form of letters as to elegance of drawing. The writing of Therese charmed him, and he liked its openness, the bold and simple turn of its lines. He looked at the addresses without reading them, with an artist's admiration.

They visited, that morning, Santa Maria Novella, where the Countess Martin had already gone with Madame Marmet. But Miss Bell had reproached them for not observing the beautiful Ginevra of Benci on a fresco of the choir. "You must visit that figure of the morning in a morning light," said Vivian. While the poetess and Therese were talking together, Dechartre listened patiently to Madame Marmet's conversation, filled with anecdotes, wherein academicians dined with elegant women, and shared the anxiety of that lady, much preoccupied for several days by the necessity to buy a tulle veil. She could find none to her taste in the shops of Florence.



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As they came out of the church they passed the cobbler's shop. The good man was mending rustic shoes. Madame Martin asked the old man whether he was well, whether he had enough work for a living, whether he was happy. To all these questions he replied with the charming affirmative of Italy, the musical *si*, which sounded melodious even in his toothless mouth. She made him tell his sparrow's story. The poor bird had once dipped its leg in burning wax.

"I have made for my little companion a wooden leg out of a match, and he hops upon my shoulder as formerly," said the cobbler.

"It is this good old man," said Miss Bell, "who teaches wisdom to Monsieur Choulette. There was at Athens a cobbler named Simon, who wrote books on philosophy, and who was the friend of Socrates. I have always thought that Monsieur Choulette resembled Socrates."

Therese asked the cobbler to tell his name and his history. His name was Serafino Stoppini, and he was a native of Stia. He was old. He had had much trouble in his life.

He lifted his spectacles to his forehead, uncovering blue eyes, very soft, and almost extinguished under their red lids.

"I have had a wife and children; I have none now. I have known things which I know no more."

Miss Bell and Madame Marmet went to look for a veil.

"He has nothing in the world," thought Therese, "but his tools, a handful of nails, the tub wherein he dips his leather, and a pot of basilick, yet he is happy."

She said to him:

"This plant is fragrant, and it will soon be in bloom."

He replied:

"If the poor little plant comes into bloom it will die."

Therese, when she left him, placed a coin on the table.

Dechartre was near her. Gravely, almost severely, he said to her:

"You know . . ."

She looked at him and waited.

He finished his phrase:

" . . . that I love you?"

She continued to fix on him, silently, the gaze of her clear eyes, the lids of which were trembling. Then she made a motion with her head that meant Yes. And, without his trying to stop her, she rejoined Miss Bell and Madame Marmet, who were waiting for her at the corner.

CHAPTER XV

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

Therese, after quitting Dechartre, took breakfast with her friend and Madame Marmet at the house of an old Florentine lady whom Victor Emmanuel had loved when he was Duke of Savoy. For thirty years she had not once gone out of her palace on the Arno, where, she painted, and wearing a wig, she played the guitar in her spacious white salon. She received the best society of Florence, and Miss Bell often called on her. At table this recluse, eighty-seven years of age, questioned the Countess Martin on the fashionable world of Paris, whose movement was familiar to her through the journals. Solitary, she retained respect and a sort of devotion for the world of pleasure.

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As they came out of the palazzo, in order to avoid the wind which was blowing on the river, Miss Bell led her friends into the old streets with black stone houses and a view of the distant horizon, where, in the pure air, stands a hill with three slender trees. They walked; and Vivian showed to her friend, on facades where red rags were hanging, some marble masterpiece—a Virgin, a lily, a St. Catherine. They walked through these alleys of the antique city to the church of Or San Michele, where it had been agreed that Dechartre should meet them. Therese was thinking of him now with deepest interest. Madame Marmet was thinking of buying a veil; she hoped to find one on the Corso. This affair recalled to her M. Lagrange, who, at his regular lecture one day, took from his pocket a veil with gold dots and wiped his forehead with it, thinking it was his handkerchief. The audience was astonished, and whispered to one another. It was a veil that had been confided to him the day before by his niece, Mademoiselle Jeanne Michot, whom he had accompanied to the theatre, and Madame Marmet explained how, finding it in the pocket of his overcoat, he had taken it to return it to his niece.

At Lagrange's name, Therese recalled the flaming comet announced by the savant, and said to herself, with mocking sadness, that it was time for that comet to put an end to the world and take her out of her trouble. But above the walls of the old church she saw the sky, which, cleared of clouds by the wind from the sea, shone pale blue and cold. Miss Bell showed to her one of the bronze statues which, in their chiselled niches, ornament the facade of the church.

"See, darling, how young and proud is Saint George. Saint George was formerly the cavalier about whom young girls dreamed."

But "darling" said that he looked precise, tiresome, and stubborn. At this moment she recalled suddenly the letter that was still in her pocket.

"Ah! here comes Monsieur Dechartre," said the good Madame Marmet.

He had looked for them in the church, before the tabernacle. He should have recalled the irresistible attraction which Donatello's St. George held for Miss Bell. He too admired that famous figure. But he retained a particular friendship for St. Mark, rustic and frank, whom they could see in his niche at the left.

When Therese approached the statue which he was pointing out to her, she saw a post-box against the wall of the narrow street opposite the saint. Dechartre, placed at the most convenient point of view, talked of his St. Mark with abundant friendship.

"It is to him I make my first visit when I come to Florence. I failed to do this only once. He will forgive me; he is an excellent man. He is not appreciated by the crowd, and does not attract attention. I take pleasure in his society, however. He is vivid. I understand that Donatello, after giving a soul to him, exclaimed: 'Mark, why do you not speak?'"

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Madame Marmet, tired of admiring St. Mark, and feeling on her face the burning wind, dragged Miss Bell toward Calzaioli Street in search of a veil.

Therese and Dechartre remained.

"I like him," continued the sculptor; "I like Saint Mark because I feel in him, much more than in the Saint George, the hand and mind of Donatello, who was a good workman. I like him even more to-day, because he recalls to me, in his venerable and touching candor, the old cobbler to whom you were speaking so kindly this morning."

"Ah," she said, "I have forgotten his name. When we talk with Monsieur Choulette we call him Quentin Matsys, because he resembles the old men of that painter."

As they were turning the corner of the church to see the facade, she found herself before the post-box, which was so dusty and rusty that it seemed as if the postman never came near it. She put her letter in it under the ingenuous gaze of St. Mark.

Dechartre saw her, and felt as if a heavy blow had been struck at his heart. He tried to speak, to smile; but the gloved hand which had dropped the letter remained before his eyes. He recalled having seen in the morning Therese's letters on the hall tray. Why had she not put that one with the others? The reason was not hard to guess. He remained immovable, dreamy, and gazed without seeing. He tried to be reassured; perhaps it was an insignificant letter which she was trying to hide from the tiresome curiosity of Madame Marmet.

"Monsieur Dechartre, it is time to rejoin our friends at the dressmaker's."

Perhaps it was a letter to Madame Schmoll, who was not a friend of Madame Marmet, but immediately he realized that this idea was foolish.

All was clear. She had a lover. She was writing to him. Perhaps she was saying to him: "I saw Dechartre to-day; the poor fellow is deeply in love with me." But whether she wrote that or something else, she had a lover. He had not thought of that. To know that she belonged to another made him suffer profoundly. And that hand, that little hand dropping the letter, remained in his eyes and made them burn.

She did not know why he had become suddenly dumb and sombre. When she saw him throw an anxious glance back at the post-box, she guessed the reason. She thought it odd that he should be jealous without having the right to be jealous; but this did not displease her.

When they reached the Corso, they saw Miss Bell and Madame Marmet coming out of the dressmaker's shop.

Dechartre said to Therese, in an imperious and supplicating voice:

"I must speak to you. I must see you alone tomorrow; meet me at six o'clock at the Lungarno Acciaoli."

She made no reply.

CHAPTER XVI

"To-morrow?"

When, in her Carmelite mantle, she came to the Lungarno Acciaoli, at about half-past six, Dechartre greeted her with a humble look that moved her. The setting sun made the Arno purple. They remained silent for a moment. While they were walking past the monotonous line of palaces to the old bridge, she was the first to speak.

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"You see, I have come. I thought I ought to come. I do not think I am altogether innocent of what has happened. I know: I have done what was my fate in order that you should be to me what you are now. My attitude has put thoughts into your head which you would not have had otherwise."

He looked as if he did not understand. She continued:

"I was selfish, I was imprudent. You were agreeable to me; I liked your wit; I could not get along without you. I have done what I could to attract you, to retain you. I was a coquette—not coldly, nor perfidiously, but a coquette."

He shook his head, denying that he ever had seen a sign of this.

"Yes, I was a coquette. Yet it was not my habit. But I was a coquette with you. I do not say that you have tried to take advantage of it, as you had the right to do, nor that you are vain about it. I have not remarked vanity in you. It may be possible that you had not noticed. Superior men sometimes lack cleverness. But I know very well that I was not as I should have been, and I beg your pardon. That is the reason why I came. Let us be good friends, since there is yet time."

He repeated, with sombre softness, that he loved her. The first hours of that love had been easy and delightful. He had only desired to see her, and to see her again. But soon she had troubled him. The evil had come suddenly and violently one day on the terrace of Fiesole. And now he had not the courage to suffer and say nothing. He had not come with a fixed design. If he spoke of his passion he spoke by force and in spite of himself; in the strong necessity of talking of her to herself, since she was for him the only being in the world. His life was no longer in himself, it was in her. She should know it, then, that he was in love with her, not with vague tenderness, but with cruel ardor. Alas! his imagination was exact and precise. He saw her continually, and she tortured him.

And then it seemed to him that they might have joys which should make life worth living. Their existence might be a work of art, beautiful and hidden. They would think, comprehend, and feel together. It would be a marvellous world of emotions and ideas.

"We could make of life a delightful garden."

She feigned to think that the dream was innocent.

"You know very well that I am susceptible to the charm of your mind. It has become a necessity to see you and hear you. I have allowed this to be only too plain to you. Count upon my friendship and do not torment yourself." She extended her hand to him. He did not take it, but replied, brusquely:



"I do not desire your friendship. I will not have it. I must have you entirely or never see you again. You know that very well. Why do you extend your hand to me with derisive phrases? Whether you wished it or not, you have made me desperately in love with you. You have become my evil, my suffering, my torture, and you ask me to be an agreeable friend. Now you are coquettish and cruel. If you can not love me, let me go; I will go, I do not know where, to forget and hate you. For I have against you a latent feeling of hatred and anger. Oh, I love you, I love you!"

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She believed what he was saying, feared that he might go, and feared the sadness of living without him. She replied:

"I found you in my path. I do not wish to lose you. No, I do not wish to lose you."

Timid yet violent, he stammered; the words were stifled in his throat. Twilight descended from the far-off mountains, and the last reflections of the sun became pallid in the east. She said:

"If you knew my life, if you had seen how empty it was before I knew you, you would know what you are to me, and would not think of abandoning me."

But, with the tranquil tone of her voice and with the rustle of her skirts on the pavement, she irritated him.

He told her how he suffered. He knew now the divine malady of love.

"The grace of your thoughts, your magnificent courage, your superb pride, I inhale them like a perfume. It seems to me when you speak that your mind is floating on your lips. Your mind is for me only the odor of your beauty. I have retained the instincts of a primitive man; you have reawakened them. I feel that I love you with savage simplicity."

She looked at him softly and said nothing. They saw the lights of evening, and heard lugubrious songs coming toward them. And then, like spectres chased by the wind, appeared the black penitents. The crucifix was before them. They were Brothers of Mercy, holding torches, singing psalms on the way to the cemetery. In accordance with the Italian custom, the cortege marched quickly. The crosses, the coffin, the banners, seemed to leap on the deserted quay. Jacques and Therese stood against the wall in order that the funeral train might pass.

The black avalanche had disappeared. There were women weeping behind the coffin carried by the black phantoms, who wore heavy shoes.

Therese sighed:

"What will be the use of having tormented ourselves in this world?"

He looked as if he had not heard, and said:

"Before I knew you I was not unhappy. I liked life. I was retained in it by dreams. I liked forms, and the mind in forms, the appearances that caress and flatter. I had the joy of seeing and of dreaming. I enjoyed everything and depended upon nothing. My desires, abundant and light, I gratified without fatigue. I was interested in everything and wished for nothing. One suffers only through the will. Without knowing it, I was happy. Oh, it was not much, it was only enough to live. Now I have no joy in life. My pleasures, the

interest that I took in the images of life and of art, the vivid amusement of creating with my hands the figures of my dreams—you have made me lose everything and have not left me even regret. I do not want my liberty and tranquillity again. It seems to me that before I knew you I did not live; and now that I feel that I am living, I can not live either far from you or near you. I am more wretched than the beggars we saw on the road to Ema. They had air to breathe, and I can breathe only you, whom I have not. Yet I am glad to have known you. That alone counts in my existence. A moment ago I thought I hated you. I was wrong; I adore you, and I bless you for the harm you have done me. I love all that comes to me from you.”

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They were nearing the black trees at the entrance to San Niccola bridge. On the other side of the river the vague fields displayed their sadness, intensified by night. Seeing that he was calm and full of a soft languor, she thought that his love, all imagination, had fled in words, and that his desires had become only a reverie. She had not expected so prompt a resignation. It almost disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared.

She extended her hand to him, more boldly this time than before.

"Then, let us be friends. It is late. Let us return. Take me to my carriage. I shall be what I have been to you, an excellent friend. You have not displeased me."

But he led her to the fields, in the growing solitude of the shore.

"No, I will not let you go without having told you what I wish to say. But I know no longer how to speak; I can not find the words. I love you. I wish to know that you are mine. I swear to you that I will not live another night in the horror of doubting it."

He pressed her in his arms; and seeking the light of her eyes through the obscurity of her veil, said "You must love me. I desire you to love me, and it is your fault, for you have desired it too. Say that you are mine. Say it."

Having gently disengaged herself, she replied, faintly and slowly "I can not! I can not! You see I am acting frankly with you. I said to you a moment ago that you had not displeased me. But I can not do as you wish."

And recalling to her thought the absent one who was waiting for her, she repeated: "I can not!" Bending over her he anxiously questioned her eyes, the double stars that trembled and veiled themselves. "Why? You love me, I feel it, I see it. You love me. Why will you do me this wrong?"

He drew her to him, wishing to lay his soul, with his lips, on her veiled lips. She escaped him swiftly, saying: "I can not. Do not ask more. I can not be yours."

His lips trembled, his face was convulsed. He exclaimed "You have a lover, and you love him. Why do you mock me?"

"I swear to you I have no desire to mock you, and that if I loved any one in the world it would be you." But he was not listening to her.

"Leave me, leave me!" And he ran toward the dark fields. The Arno formed lagoons, upon which the moon, half veiled, shone fitfully. He walked through the water and the mud, with a step rapid, blind, like that of one intoxicated. She took fright and shouted. She called him. But he did not turn his head and made no answer. He fled with alarming recklessness. She ran after him. Her feet were hurt by the stones, and her skirt was heavy with water, but soon she overtook him.

“What were you about to do?”

He looked at her, and saw her fright in her eyes. “Do not be afraid,” he said. “I did not see where I was going. I assure you I did not intend to kill myself. I am desperate, but I am calm. I was only trying to escape from you. I beg your pardon. But I could not see you any longer. Leave me, I pray you. Farewell!”

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She replied, agitated and trembling: "Come! We shall do what we can."

He remained sombre and made no reply. She repeated "Come!"

She took his arm. The living warmth of her hand animated him. He said:

"Do you wish it?"

"I can not leave you."

"You promise?"

"I must."

And, in her anxiety and anguish, she almost smiled, in thinking that he had succeeded so quickly by his folly.

"To-morrow?" said he, inquiringly.

She replied quickly, with a defensive instinct:

"Oh, no; not to-morrow!"

"You do not love me; you regret that you have promised."

"No, I do not regret, but—"

He implored, he supplicated her. She looked at him for a moment, turned her head, hesitated, and said, in a low tone:

"Saturday."

CHAPTER XVII

MISS BELL ASKS A QUESTION

After dinner, Miss Bell was sketching in the drawing-room. She was tracing, on canvas, profiles of bearded Etruscans for a cushion which Madame Marmet was to embroider. Prince Albertinelli was selecting the wool with an almost feminine knowledge of shades. It was late when Choulette, having, as was his habit, played briscola with the cook at the caterer's, appeared, as joyful as if he possessed the mind of a god. He took a seat on a sofa, beside Madame Martin, and looked at her tenderly. Voluptuousness shone in his green eyes. He enveloped her, while talking to her, with poetic and picturesque phrases. It was like the sketch of a lovesong that he was improvising for her. In oddly involved sentences, he told her of the charm that she exhaled.

"He, too!" said she to herself.

She amused herself by teasing him. She asked whether he had not found in Florence, in the low quarters, one of the kind of women whom he liked to visit. His preferences were known. He could deny it as much as he wished: no one was ignorant of the door where he had found the cordon of his Third Order. His friends had met him on the boulevard. His taste for unfortunate women was evident in his most beautiful poems.

"Oh, Monsieur Choulette, so far as I am able to judge, you like very bad women."

He replied with solemnity:

"Madame, you may collect the grain of calumny sown by Monsieur Paul Vence and throw handfuls of it at me. I will not try to avoid it. It is not necessary you should know that I am chaste and that my mind is pure. But do not judge lightly those whom you call unfortunate, and who should be sacred to you, since they are unfortunate. The disdained and lost girl is the docile clay under the finger of the Divine Potter: she is the victim and the altar of the holocaust. The unfortunates are nearer God than the honest women: they have lost conceit. They do not glorify themselves with the untried virtue the matron prides herself on.

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They possess humility, which is the cornerstone of virtues agreeable to heaven. A short repentance will be sufficient for them to be the first in heaven; for their sins, without malice and without joy, contain their own forgiveness. Their faults, which are pains, participate in the merits attached to pain; slaves to brutal passion, they are deprived of all voluptuousness, and in this they are like the men who practise continence for the kingdom of God. They are like us, culprits; but shame falls on their crime like a balm, suffering purifies it like fire. That is the reason why God will listen to the first voice which they shall send to him. A throne is prepared for them at the right hand of the Father. In the kingdom of God, the queen and the empress will be happy to sit at the feet of the unfortunate; for you must not think that the celestial house is built on a human plan. Far from it, Madame."

Nevertheless, he conceded that more than one road led to salvation. One could follow the road of love.

"Man's love is earthly," he said, "but it rises by painful degrees, and finally leads to God."

The Prince had risen. Kissing Miss Bell's hand, he said:

"Saturday."

"Yes, the day after to-morrow, Saturday," replied Vivian.

Therese started. Saturday! They were talking of Saturday quietly, as of an ordinary day. Until then she had not wished to think that Saturday would come so soon or so naturally.

The guests had been gone for half an hour. Therese, tired, was thinking in her bed, when she heard a knock at the door of her room. The panel opened, and Vivian's little head appeared.

"I am not intruding, darling? You are not sleepy?"

No, Therese had no desire to sleep. She rose on her elbow. Vivian sat on the bed, so light that she made no impression on it.

"Darling, I am sure you have a great deal of reason. Oh, I am sure of it. You are reasonable in the same way that Monsieur Sadler is a violinist. He plays a little out of tune when he wishes. And you, too, when you are not quite logical, it is for your own pleasure. Oh, darling, you have a great deal of reason and of judgment, and I come to ask your advice."

Astonished, and a little anxious, Therese denied that she was logical. She denied this very sincerely. But Vivian would not listen to her.

“I have read Francois Rabelais a great deal, my love. It is in Rabelais and in Villon that I studied French. They are good old masters of language. But, darling, do you know the ‘Pantagruel?’ ‘Pantagruel’ is like a beautiful and noble city, full of palaces, in the resplendent dawn, before the street-sweepers of Paris have come. The sweepers have not taken out the dirt, and the maids have not washed the marble steps. And I have seen that French women do not read the ‘Pantagruel.’ You do not know it? Well, it is not necessary. In the ‘Pantagruel,’ Panurge asks whether he must marry, and he covers himself with ridicule, my love. Well, I am quite as laughable as he, since I am asking the same question of you.”

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Therese replied with an uneasiness she did not try to conceal:

“As for that, my dear, do not ask me. I have already told you my opinion.”

“But, darling, you have said that only men are wrong to marry. I can not take that advice for myself.”

Madame Martin looked at the little boyish face and head of Miss Bell, which oddly expressed tenderness and modesty.

Then she embraced her, saying:

“Dear, there is not a man in the world exquisite and delicate enough for you.”

She added, with an expression of affectionate gravity:

“You are not a child. If some one loves you, and you love him, do what you think you ought to do, without mingling interests and combinations that have nothing to do with sentiment. This is the advice of a friend.”

Miss Bell hesitated a moment. Then she blushed and arose. She had been a little shocked.

CHAPTER XVIII

“I kiss your feet because they have come!”

Saturday, at four o'clock, Therese went, as she had promised, to the gate of the English cemetery. There she found Dechartre. He was serious and agitated; he spoke little. She was glad he did not display his joy. He led her by the deserted walls of the gardens to a narrow street which she did not know. She read on a signboard: Via Alfieri. After they had taken fifty steps, he stopped before a sombre alley:

“It is in there,” he said.

She looked at him with infinite sadness.

“You wish me to go in?”

She saw he was resolute, and followed him without saying a word, into the humid shadow of the alley. He traversed a courtyard where the grass grew among the stones. In the back was a pavilion with three windows, with columns and a front ornamented with goats and nymphs. On the moss-covered steps he turned in the lock a key that creaked and resisted. He murmured,

"It is rusty."

She replied, without thought "All the keys are rusty in this country."

They went up a stairway so silent that it seemed to have forgotten the sound of footsteps. He pushed open a door and made Therese enter the room. She went straight to a window opening on the cemetery. Above the wall rose the tops of pine-trees, which are not funereal in this land where mourning is mingled with joy without troubling it, where the sweetness of living extends to the city of the dead. He took her hand and led her to an armchair. He remained standing, and looked at the room which he had prepared so that she would not find herself lost in it. Panels of old print cloth, with figures of Comedy, gave to the walls the sadness of past gayeties. He had placed in a corner a dim pastel which they had seen together at an antiquary's, and which, for its shadowy grace, she called the shade of Rosalba. There was a grandmother's armchair; white chairs; and on the table painted cups and Venetian glasses. In all the corners were screens of colored paper, whereon were masks, grotesque figures, the light soul of Florence, of Bologna, and of Venice in the time of the Grand Dukes and of the last Doges. A mirror and a carpet completed the furnishings.

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He closed the window and lighted the fire. She sat in the armchair, and as she remained in it erect, he knelt before her, took her hands, kissed them, and looked at her with a wondering expression, timorous and proud. Then he pressed his lips to the tip of her boot.

“What are you doing?”

“I kiss your feet because they have come.”

He rose, drew her to him softly, and placed a long kiss on her lips. She remained inert, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. Her toque fell, her hair dropped on her shoulders.

Two hours later, when the setting sun made immeasurably longer the shadows on the stones, Therese, who had wished to walk alone in the city, found herself in front of the two obelisks of Santa Maria Novella without knowing how she had reached there. She saw at the corner of the square the old cobbler drawing his string with his eternal gesture. He smiled, bearing his sparrow on his shoulder.

She went into the shop, and sat on a chair. She said in French:

“Quentin Matsys, my friend, what have I done, and what will become of me?”

He looked at her quietly, with laughing kindness, not understanding nor caring. Nothing astonished him. She shook her head.

“What I did, my good Quentin, I did because he was suffering, and because I loved him. I regret nothing.”

He replied, as was his habit, with the sonorous syllable of Italy:

“Si! si!”

“Is it not so, Quentin? I have not done wrong? But, my God! what will happen now?”

She prepared to go. He made her understand that he wished her to wait. He culled carefully a bit of basilick and offered it to her.

“For its fragrance, signora!”

CHAPTER XIX

CHOULETTE TAKES A JOURNEY

It was the next day.

Having carefully placed on the drawing-room table his knotty stick, his pipe, and his antique carpet-bag, Choulette bowed to Madame Martin, who was reading at the window. He was going to Assisi. He wore a sheepskin coat, and resembled the old shepherds in pictures of the Nativity.

“Farewell, Madame. I am quitting Fiesole, you, Dechartre, the too handsome Prince Albertinelli, and that gentle ogress, Miss Bell. I am going to visit the Assisi mountain, which the poet says must be named no longer Assisi, but the Orient, because it is there that the sun of love rose. I am going to kneel before the happy crypt where Saint Francis is resting in a stone manger, with a stone for a pillow. For he would not even take out of this world a shroud—out of this world where he left the revelation of all joy and of all kindness.”

“Farewell, Monsieur Choulette. Bring me a medal of Saint Clara. I like Saint Clara a great deal.”

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"You are right, Madame; she was a woman of strength and prudence. When Saint Francis, ill and almost blind, came to spend a few days at Saint Damien, near his friend, she built with her own hands a hut for him in the garden. Pain, languor, and burning eyelids deprived him of sleep. Enormous rats came to attack him at night. Then he composed a joyous canticle in praise of our splendid brother the Sun, and our sister the Water, chaste, useful, and pure. My most beautiful verses have less charm and splendor. And it is just that it should be thus, for Saint Francis's soul was more beautiful than his mind. I am better than all my contemporaries whom I have known, yet I am worth nothing. When Saint Francis had composed his Song of the Sun he rejoiced. He thought: 'We shall go, my brothers and I, into the cities, and stand in the public squares, with a lute, on the market-day. Good people will come near us, and we shall say to them: "We are the jugglers of God, and we shall sing a lay to you. If you are pleased, you will reward us." They will promise, and when we shall have sung, we shall recall their promise to them. We shall say to them: "You owe a reward to us. And the one that we ask of you is that you love one another." Doubtless, to keep their word and not injure God's poor jugglers, they will avoid doing ill to others.'"

Madame Martin thought St. Francis was the most amiable of the saints.

"His work," replied Choulette, "was destroyed while he lived. Yet he died happy, because in him was joy with humility. He was, in fact, God's sweet singer. And it is right that another poor poet should take his task and teach the world true religion and true joy. I shall be that poet, Madame, if I can despoil myself of reason and of conceit. For all moral beauty is achieved in this world through the inconceivable wisdom that comes from God and resembles folly."

"I shall not discourage you, Monsieur Choulette. But I am anxious about the fate which you reserve for the poor women in your new society. You will imprison them all in convents."

"I confess," replied Choulette, "that they embarrass me a great deal in my project of reform. The violence with which one loves them is harsh and injurious. The pleasure they give is not peaceful, and does not lead to joy. I have committed for them, in my life, two or three abominable crimes of which no one knows. I doubt whether I shall ever invite you to supper, Madame, in the new Saint Mary of the Angels." He took his pipe, his carpet-bag, and his stick:

"The crimes of love shall be forgiven. Or, rather, one can not do evil when one loves purely. But sensual love is formed of hatred, selfishness, and anger as much as of passion. Because I found you beautiful one night, on this sofa, I was assailed by a cloud of violent thoughts. I had come from the Albergo, where I had heard Miss Bell's cook improvise magnificently twelve hundred verses on Spring. I was inundated by a celestial joy which the sight of you made me lose. It must be that a profound truth is enclosed in the curse of Eve. For, near you, I felt reckless and wicked. I had soft words

on my lips. They were lies. I felt that I was your adversary and your enemy; I hated you. When I saw you smile, I felt a desire to kill you.”

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"Truly?"

"Oh, Madame, it is a very natural sentiment, which you must have inspired more than once. But common people feel it without being conscious of it, while my vivid imagination represents me to myself incessantly. I contemplate my mind, at times splendid, often hideous. If you had been able to read my mind that night you would have screamed with fright."

Therese smiled:

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette. Do not forget my medal of Saint Clara."

He placed his bag on the floor, raised his arm, and pointed his finger:

"You have nothing to fear from me. But the one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you. Farewell, Madame."

He took his luggage and went out. She saw his long, rustic form disappear behind the bushes of the garden.

In the afternoon she went to San Marco, where Dechartre was waiting for her. She desired yet she feared to see him again so soon. She felt an anguish which an unknown sentiment, profoundly soft, appeased. She did not feel the stupor of the first time that she had yielded for love; she did not feel the brusque vision of the irreparable. She was under influences slower, more vague, and more powerful. This time a charming reverie bathed the reminiscence of the caresses which she had received. She was full of trouble and anxiety, but she felt no regret. She had acted less through her will than through a force which she divined to be higher. She absolved herself because of her disinterestedness. She counted on nothing, having calculated nothing.

Doubtless, she had been wrong to yield, since she was not free; but she had exacted nothing. Perhaps she was for him only a violent caprice. She did not know him. She had not one of those vivid imaginations that surpass immensely, in good as in evil, common mediocrity. If he went away from her and disappeared she would not reproach him for it; at least, she thought not. She would keep the reminiscence and the imprint of the rarest and most precious thing one may find in the world. Perhaps he was incapable of real attachment. He thought he loved her. He had loved her for an hour. She dared not wish for more, in the embarrassment of the false situation which irritated her frankness and her pride, and which troubled the lucidity of her intelligence. While the carriage was carrying her to San Marco, she persuaded herself that he would say nothing to her of the day before, and that the room from which one could see the pines rise to the sky would leave to them only the dream of a dream.

He extended his hand to her. Before he had spoken she saw in his look that he loved her as much now as before, and she perceived at the same time that she wished him to be thus.

“You—” he said, “I have been here since noon. I was waiting, knowing that you would not come so soon, but able to live only at the place where I was to see you. It is you! Talk; let me see and hear you.”

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“Then you still love me?”

“It is now that I love you. I thought I loved you when you were only a phantom. Now, you are the being in whose hands I have put my soul. It is true that you are mine! What have I done to obtain the greatest, the only, good of this world? And those men with whom the earth is covered think they are living! I alone live! Tell me, what have I done to obtain you?”

“Oh, what had to be done, I did. I say this to you frankly. If we have reached that point, the fault is mine. You see, women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault. So, whatever may happen, I never will reproach you for anything.”

An agile troupe of yelling beggars, guides, and coachmen surrounded them with an importunity wherein was mingled the gracefulness which Italians never lose. Their subtlety made them divine that these were lovers, and they knew that lovers are prodigal. Dechartre threw coin to them, and they all returned to their happy laziness.

A municipal guard received the visitors. Madame Martin regretted that there was no monk. The white gown of the Dominicans was so beautiful under the arcades of the cloister!

They visited the cells where, on the bare plaster, Fra Angelico, aided by his brother Benedetto, painted innocent pictures for his companions.

“Do you recall the winter night when, meeting you before the Guimet Museum, I accompanied you to the narrow street bordered by small gardens which leads to the Billy Quay? Before separating we stopped a moment on the parapet along which runs a thin boxwood hedge. You looked at that boxwood, dried by winter. And when you went away I looked at it for a long time.”

They were in the cell wherein Savonarola lived. The guide showed to them the portrait and the relics of the martyr.

“What could there have been in me that you liked that day? It was dark.”

“I saw you walk. It is in movements that forms speak. Each one of your steps told me the secrets of your charming beauty. Oh! my imagination was never discreet in anything that concerned you. I did not dare to speak to you. When I saw you, it frightened me. It frightened me because you could do everything for me. When you were present, I adored you tremblingly. When you were far from me, I felt all the impieties of desire.”

“I did not suspect this. But do you recall the first time we saw each other, when Paul Vence introduced you? You were seated near a screen. You were looking at the miniatures. You said to me: ‘This lady, painted by Siccardi, resembles Andre Chenier’s

mother.' I replied to you: 'She is my husband's great-grandmother. How did Andre Chenier's mother look?' And you said: 'There is a portrait of her: a faded Levantine.'"

He excused himself and thought that he had not spoken so impertinently.

"You did. My memory is better than yours."

They were walking in the white silence of the convent. They saw the cell which Angelico had ornamented with the loveliest painting. And there, before the Virgin who, in the pale sky, receives from God the Father the immortal crown, he took Therese in his arms and placed a kiss on her lips, almost in view of two Englishwomen who were walking through the corridors, consulting their Baedeker. She said to him:

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"We must not forget Saint Anthony's cell."

"Therese, I am suffering in my happiness from everything that is yours and that escapes me. I am suffering because you do not live for me alone. I wish to have you wholly, and to have had you in the past."

She shrugged her shoulders a little.

"Oh, the past!"

"The past is the only human reality. Everything that is, is past."

She raised toward him her eyes, which resembled bits of blue sky full of mingled sun and rain.

"Well, I may say this to you: I never have felt that I lived except with you."

When she returned to Fiesole, she found a brief and threatening letter from Le Menil. He could not understand, her prolonged absence, her silence. If she did not announce at once her return, he would go to Florence for her.

She read without astonishment, but was annoyed to see that everything disagreeable that could happen was happening, and that nothing would be spared to her of what she had feared. She could still calm him and reassure him: she had only to say to him that she loved him; that she would soon return to Paris; that he should renounce the foolish idea of rejoining her here; that Florence was a village where they would be watched at once. But she would have to write: "I love you." She must quiet him with caressing phrases.

She had not the courage to do it. She would let him guess the truth. She accused herself in veiled terms. She wrote obscurely of souls carried away by the flood of life, and of the atom one is on the moving ocean of events. She asked him, with affectionate sadness, to keep of her a fond reminiscence in a corner of his soul.

She took the letter to the post-office box on the Fiesole square. Children were playing in the twilight. She looked from the top of the hill to the beautiful cup which carried beautiful Florence like a jewel. And the peace of night made her shiver. She dropped the letter into the box. Then only she had the clear vision of what she had done and of what the result would be.

CHAPTER XX

What is frankness?

In the square, where the spring sun scattered its yellow roses, the bells at noon dispersed the rustic crowd of grain-merchants assembled to sell their wares. At the foot of the Lanzi, before the statues, the venders of ices had placed, on tables covered with red cotton, small castles bearing the inscription: 'Bibite ghiacciate'. And joy descended from heaven to earth. Therese and Jacques, returning from an early promenade in the Boboli Gardens, were passing before the illustrious loggia. Therese looked at the Sabine by John of Bologna with that interested curiosity of a woman examining another woman. But Dechartre looked at Therese only. He said to her:

"It is marvellous how the vivid light of day flatters your beauty, loves you, and caresses the mother-of-pearl on your cheeks."

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"Yes," she said. "Candle-light hardens my features. I have observed this. I am not an evening woman, unfortunately. It is at night that women have a chance to show themselves and to please. At night, Princess Seniavine has a fine blond complexion; in the sun she is as yellow as a lemon. It must be owned that she does not care. She is not a coquette."

"And you are?"

"Oh, yes. Formerly I was a coquette for myself, now I am a coquette for you."

She looked at the Sabine woman, who with her waving arms, long and robust, tried to avoid the Roman's embraces.

"To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form and that length of limb? I am not shaped in that way."

He took pains to reassure her. But she was not disturbed about it. She was looking now at the little castle of the ice-vender. A sudden desire had come to her to eat an ice standing there, as the working-girls of the city stood.

"Wait a moment," said Dechartre.

He ran toward the street that follows the left side of the Lanzi, and disappeared.

After a moment he came back, and gave her a little gold spoon, the handle of which was finished in a lily of Florence, with its chalice enamelled in red.

"You must eat your ice with this. The man does not give a spoon with his ices. You would have had to put out your tongue. It would have been pretty, but you are not accustomed to it."

She recognized the spoon, a jewel which she had remarked the day before in the showcase of an antiquarian.

They were happy; they disseminated their joy, which was full and simple, in light words which had no sense. And they laughed when the Florentine repeated to them passages of the old Italian writers. She enjoyed the play of his face, which was antique in style and jovial in expression. But she did not always understand what he said. She asked Jacques:

"What did he say?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

Yes, she wished to know.

“Well, he said he should be happy if the fleas in his bed were shaped like you!”

When she had eaten the ice, he asked her to return to San Michele. It was so near! They would cross the square and at once discover the masterpiece in stone. They went. They looked at the St. George and at the bronze St. Mark. Dechartre saw again on the wall the post-box, and he recalled with painful exactitude the little gloved hand that had dropped the letter. He thought it hideous, that copper mouth which had swallowed Therese’s secret. He could not turn his eyes away from it. All his gayety had fled. She admired the rude statue of the Evangelist.

“It is true that he looks honest and frank, and it seems that, if he spoke, nothing but words of truth would come out of his mouth.”

He replied bitterly:

“It is not a woman’s mouth.”

She understood his thought, and said, in her soft tone:

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"My friend, why do you say this to me? I am frank."

"What do you call frank? You know that a woman is obliged to lie."

She hesitated. Then she said:

"A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly."

CHAPTER XXI

"I never have loved any one but you!"

Therese was dressed in sombre gray. The bushes on the border of the terrace were covered with silver stars and on the hillsides the laurel-trees threw their odoriferous flame. The cup of Florence was in bloom.

Vivian Bell walked, arrayed in white, in the fragrant garden.

"You see, darling, Florence is truly the city of flowers, and it is not inappropriate that she should have a red lily for her emblem. It is a festival to-day, darling."

"A festival, to-day?"

"Darling, do you not know this is the first day of May? You did not wake this morning in a charming fairy spectacle? Do you not celebrate the Festival of Flowers? Do you not feel joyful, you who love flowers? For you love them, my love, I know it: you are very good to them. You said to me that they feel joy and pain; that they suffer as we do."

"Ah! I said that they suffer as we do?"

"Yes, you said it. It is their festival to-day. We must celebrate it with the rites consecrated by old painters."

Therese heard without understanding. She was crumpling under her glove a letter which she had just received, bearing the Italian postage-stamp, and containing only these two lines:

"I am staying at the Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli. I shall expect you to-morrow morning. No. 18."

"Darling, do you not know it is the custom of Florence to celebrate spring on the first day of May every year? Then you did not understand the meaning of Botticelli's picture consecrated to the Festival of Flowers. Formerly, darling, on the first day of May the entire city gave itself up to joy. Young girls, crowned with sweetbrier and other flowers,

made a long cortege through the Corso, under arches, and sang choruses on the new grass. We shall do as they did. We shall dance in the garden.”

“Ah, we shall dance in the garden?”

“Yes, darling; and I will teach you Tuscan steps of the fifteenth century which have been found in a manuscript by Mr. Morrison, the oldest librarian in London. Come back soon, my love; we shall put on flower hats and dance.”

“Yes, dear, we shall dance,” said Therese.

And opening the gate, she ran through the little pathway that hid its stones under rose-bushes. She threw herself into the first carriage she found. The coachman wore forget-me-nots on his hat and on the handle of his whip:

“Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli.”

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She knew where that was, Lungarno Acciaoli. She had gone there at sunset, and she had seen the rays of the sun on the agitated surface of the river. Then night had come, the murmur of the waters in the silence, the words and the looks that had troubled her, the first kiss of her lover, the beginning of incomparable love. Oh, yes, she recalled Lungarno Acciaoli and the river-side beyond the old bridge—Great Britain Hotel—she knew: a big stone facade on the quay. It was fortunate, since he would come, that he had gone there. He might as easily have gone to the Hotel de la Ville, where Dechartre was. It was fortunate they were not side by side in the same corridor. Lungarno Acciaoli! The dead body which they had seen pass was at peace somewhere in the little flowery cemetery.

“Number 18.”

It was a bare hotel room, with a stove in the Italian fashion, a set of brushes displayed on the table, and a time-table. Not a book, not a journal. He was there; she saw suffering on his bony face, a look of fever. This produced on her a sad impression. He waited a moment for a word, a gesture; but she dared do nothing. He offered a chair. She refused it and remained standing.

“Therese, something has happened of which I do not know. Speak.”

After a moment of silence, she replied, with painful slowness:

“My friend, when I was in Paris, why did you go away from me?”

By the sadness of her accent he believed, he wished to believe, in the expression of an affectionate reproach. His face colored. He replied, ardently:

“Ah, if I could have foreseen! That hunting party—I cared little for it, as you may think! But you—your letter, that of the twenty-seventh”—he had a gift for dates—“has thrown me into a horrible anxiety. Something has happened. Tell me everything.”

“My friend, I believed you had ceased to love me.”

“But now that you know the contrary?”

“Now—”

She paused, her arms fell before her and her hands were joined.

Then, with affected tranquillity, she continued:

“Well, my friend, we took each other without knowing. One never knows. You are young; younger than I, since we are of the same age. You have, doubtless, projects for the future.”

He looked at her proudly. She continued:

“Your family, your mother, your aunts, your uncle the General, have projects for you. That is natural. I might have become an obstacle. It is better that I should disappear from your life. We shall keep a fond remembrance of each other.”

She extended her gloved hand. He folded his arms:

“Then, you do not want me? You have made me happy, as no other man ever was, and you think now to brush me aside? Truly, you seem to think you have finished with me. What have you come to say to me? That it was a liaison, which is easily broken? That people take each other, quit each other—well, no! You are not a person whom one can easily quit.”

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"Yes," said Therese, "you had perhaps given me more of your heart than one does ordinarily in such 180 cases. I was more than an amusement for you. But, if I am not the woman you thought I was, if I have deceived you, if I am frivolous—you know people have said so—well, if I have not been to you what I should have been—"

She hesitated, and continued in a brave tone, contrasting with what she said:

"If, while I was yours, I have been led astray; if I have been curious; if I say to you that I was not made for serious sentiment—"

He interrupted her:

"You are not telling the truth."

"No, I am not telling the truth. And I do not know how to lie. I wished to spoil our past. I was wrong. It was—you know what it was. But—"

"But?"

"I have always told you I was not sure of myself. There are women, it is said, who are sure of themselves. I warned you that I was not like them."

He shook his head violently, like an irritated animal.

"What do you mean? I do not understand. I understand nothing. Speak clearly. There is something between us. I do not know what. I demand to know what it is. What is it?"

"There is the fact that I am not a woman sure of herself, and that you should not rely on me. No, you should not rely on me. I had promised nothing—and then, if I had promised, what are words?"

"You do not love me. Oh, you love me no more! I can see it. But it is so much the worse for you! I love you. You should not have given yourself to me. Do not think that you can take yourself back. I love you and I shall keep you. So you thought you could get out of it very quietly? Listen a moment. You have done everything to make me love you, to attach me to you, to make it impossible for me to live without you.

"Six weeks ago you asked for nothing better. You were everything for me, I was everything for you. And now you desire suddenly that I should know you no longer; that you should be to me a stranger, a lady whom one meets in society. Ah, you have a fine audacity! Have I dreamed? All the past is a dream? I invented it all? Oh, there can be no doubt of it. You loved me. I feel it still. Well, I have not changed. I am what I was; you have nothing to complain of. I have not betrayed you for other women. It isn't credit that I claim. I could not have done it. When one has known you, one finds the prettiest women insipid. I never have had the idea of deceiving you. I have always



acted well toward you. Why should you not love me? Answer! Speak! Say you love me still. Say it, since it is true. Come, Therese, you will feel at once that you love as you loved me formerly in the little nest where we were so happy. Come!"

He approached her ardently. She, her eyes full of fright, pushed him away with a kind of horror.

He understood, stopped, and said:

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"You have a lover."

She bent her head, then lifted it, grave and dumb.

Then he made a gesture as if to strike her, and at once recoiled in shame. He lowered his eyes and was silent. His fingers to his lips, and biting his nails, he saw that his hand had been pricked by a pin on her waist, and bled. He threw himself in an armchair, drew his handkerchief to wipe off the blood, and remained indifferent and without thought.

She, with her back to the door, her face calm and pale, her look vague, arranged her hat with instinctive care. At the noise, formerly delicious, that the rustle of her skirts made, he started, looked at her, and asked furiously:

"Who is he? I will know."

She did not move. She replied with soft firmness:

"I have told you all I can. Do not ask more; it would be useless."

He looked at her with a cruel expression which she had never seen before.

"Oh, do not tell me his name. It will not be difficult for me to find it."

She said not a word, saddened for him, anxious for another, full of anguish and fear, and yet without regret, without bitterness, because her real soul was elsewhere.

He had a vague sensation of what passed in her mind. In his anger to see her so sweet and so serene, to find her beautiful, and beautiful for another, he felt a desire to kill her, and he shouted at her:

"Go!"

Then, weakened by this effort of hatred, which was not natural to him, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed.

His pain touched her, gave her the hope of quieting him. She thought she might perhaps console him for her loss. Amicably and comfortably she seated herself beside him.

"My friend, blame me. I am to blame, but more to be pitied. Disdain me, if you wish, if one can disdain an unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life. In fine, judge me as you wish. But keep for me a little friendship in your anger, a little bitter-sweet reminiscence, something like those days of autumn when there is sunlight and strong wind. That is what I deserve. Do not be harsh to the agreeable but frivolous visitor who



passed through your life. Bid good-by to me as to a traveller who goes one knows not where, and who is sad. There is so much sadness in separation! You were irritated against me a moment ago. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I only suffer for it. Reserve a little sympathy for me. Who knows? The future is always unknown. It is very gray and obscure before me. Let me say to myself that I have been kind, simple, frank with you, and that you have not forgotten it. In time you will understand, you will forgive; to-day have a little pity.”

He was not listening to her words. He was appeased simply by the caress of her voice, of which the tone was limpid and clear. He exclaimed:

“You do not love him. I am the one whom you love. Then—”

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She hesitated:

“Ah, to say whom one loves or loves not is not an easy thing for a woman, or at least for me. I do not know how other women do. But life is not good to me. I am tossed to and fro by force of circumstances.”

He looked at her calmly. An idea came to him. He had taken a resolution; he forgave, he forgot, provided she returned to him at once.

“Therese, you do not love him. It was an error, a moment of forgetfulness, a horrible and stupid thing that you did through weakness, through surprise, perhaps in spite. Swear to me that you never will see him again.”

He took her arm:

“Swear to me!”

She said not a word, her teeth were set, her face was sombre. He wrenched her wrist. She exclaimed:

“You hurt me!”

However, he followed his idea; he led her to the table, on which, near the brushes, were an ink-stand, and several leaves of letter-paper ornamented with a large blue vignette, representing the facade of the hotel, with innumerable windows.

“Write what I am about to dictate to you. I will call somebody to take the letter.”

And as she resisted, he made her fall on her knees. Proud and determined, she said:

“I can not, I will not.”

“Why?”

“Because—do you wish to know?—because I love him.”

Brusquely he released her. If he had had his revolver at hand, perhaps he would have killed her. But almost at once his anger was dampened by sadness; and now, desperate, he was the one who wished to die.

“Is what you say true? Is it possible?”

“How do I know? Can I say? Do I understand? Have I an idea, a sentiment, about anything?”

With an effort she added:

“Am I at this moment aware of anything except my sadness and your despair?”

“You love him, you love him! What is he, who is he, that you should love him?”

His surprise made him stupid; he was in an abyss of astonishment. But what she had said separated them. He dared not complain. He only repeated:

“You love him, you love him! But what has he done to you, what has he said, to make you love him? I know you. I have not told you every time your ideas shocked me. I would wager he is not even a man in society. And you believe he loves you? You believe it? Well, you are deceiving yourself. He does not love you. You flatter him, simply. He will quit you at the first opportunity. When he shall have compromised you, he will abandon you. Next year people will say of you: ‘She is not at all exclusive.’ I am sorry for your father; he is one of my friends, and will know of your behavior. You can not expect to deceive him.”

She listened, humiliated but consoled, thinking how she would have suffered had she found him generous.

In his simplicity he sincerely disdained her. This disdain relieved him.

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"How did the thing happen? You can tell me."

She shrugged her shoulders with so much pity that he dared not continue. He became contemptuous again.

"Do you imagine that I shall aid you in saving appearances, that I shall return to your house, that I shall continue to call on your husband?"

"I think you will continue to do what a gentleman should. I ask nothing of you. I should have liked to preserve of you the reminiscence of an excellent friend. I thought you might be indulgent and kind to, me, but it is not possible. I see that lovers never separate kindly. Later, you will judge me better. Farewell!"

He looked at her. Now his face expressed more pain than anger. She never had seen his eyes so dry and so black. It seemed as if he had grown old in an hour.

"I prefer to tell you in advance. It will be impossible for me to see you again. You are not a woman whom one may meet after one has been loved by her. You are not like others. You have a poison of your own, which you have given to me, and which I feel in me, in my veins. Why have I known you?"

She looked at him kindly.

"Farewell! Say to yourself that I am not worthy of being regretted so much."

Then, when he saw that she placed her hand on the latch of the door, when he felt at that gesture that he was to lose her, that he should never have her again, he shouted. He forgot everything. There remained in him only the dazed feeling of a great misfortune accomplished, of an irreparable calamity. And from the depth of his stupor a desire ascended. He desired to possess again the woman who was leaving him and who would never return. He drew her to him. He desired her, with all the strength of his animal nature. She resisted with all the force of her will, which was free and on the alert. She disengaged herself, crumpled, torn, without even having been afraid.

He understood that everything was useless; he realized she was no longer for him, because she belonged to another. As his suffering returned, he pushed her out of the door.

She remained a moment in the corridor, proudly waiting for a word.

But he shouted again, "Go!" and shut the door violently.

On the Via Alfieri, she saw again the pavilion in the rear of the courtyard where pale grasses grew. She found it silent and tranquil, faithful, with its goats and nymphs, to the lovers of the time of the Grand Duchess Eliza. She felt at once freed from the painful,



brutal world, and transported to ages wherein she had not known the sadness of life. At the foot of the stairs, the steps of which were covered with roses, Dechartre was waiting. She threw herself in his arms. He carried her inert, like a precious trophy before which he had become pallid and trembling. She enjoyed, her eyelids half closed, the superb humiliation of being a beautiful prey. Her fatigue, her sadness, her disgust with the day, the reminiscence of violence, her regained liberty, the need of forgetting, remains of fright, everything vivified, awakened her tenderness. She threw her arms around the neck of her lover.

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They were as gay as children. They laughed, said tender nothings, played, ate lemons, oranges, and other fruits piled up near-them on painted plates. Her lips, half-open, showed her brilliant teeth. She asked, with coquettish anxiety, if he were not disillusioned after the beautiful dream he had made of her.

In the caressing light of the day, for the enjoyment of which he had arranged, he contemplated her with youthful joy. He lavished praise and kisses upon her. They forgot themselves in caresses, in friendly quarrels, in happy glances.

He asked her how a little red mark on her temple had come there. She replied that she had forgotten; that it was nothing. She hardly lied; she had really forgotten.

They recalled to each other their short but beautiful history, all their life, which began upon the day when they had met.

"You know, on the terrace, the day after your arrival, you said vague things to me. I guessed that you loved me."

"I was afraid to seem stupid to you."

"You were, a little. It was my triumph. It made me impatient to see you so little troubled near me. I loved you before you loved me. Oh, I do not blush for it!"

He gave her a glass of Asti. But there was a bottle of Trasimene. She wished to taste it, in memory of the lake which she had seen silent and beautiful at night in its opal cup. That was when she had first visited Italy, six years before.

He chided her for having discovered the beauty of things without his aid.

She said:

"Without you, I did not know how to see anything. Why did you not come to me before?"

He closed her lips with a kiss. Then she said:

"Yes, I love you! Yes, I never have loved any one but you!"

CHAPTER XXII

A MEETING AT THE STATION

Le Menil had written: "I leave tomorrow evening at seven o'clock. Meet me at the station."

She had gone to meet him. She saw him in long coat and cape, precise and calm, in front of the hotel stages. He said only:

“Ah, you have come.”

“But, my friend, you called me.”

He did not confess that he had written in the absurd hope that she would love him again and that the rest would be forgotten, or that she would say to him: “It was only a trial of your love.”

If she had said so he would have believed her, however.

Astonished because she did not speak, he said, dryly:

“What have you to say to me? It is not for me to speak, but for you. I have no explanations to give you. I have not to justify a betrayal.”

“My friend, do not be cruel, do not be ungrateful. This is what I had to say to you. And I must repeat that I leave you with the sadness of a real friend.”

“Is that all? Go and say this to the other man. It will interest him more than it interests me.”

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"You called me, and I came; do not make me regret it."

"I am sorry to have disturbed you. You could doubtless find a better employment for your time. I will not detain you. Rejoin him, since you are longing to do so."

At the thought that his unhappy words expressed a moment of eternal human pain, and that tragedy had illustrated many similar griefs, she felt all the sadness and irony of the situation, which a curl of her lips betrayed. He thought she was laughing.

"Do not laugh; listen to me. The other day, at the hotel, I wanted to kill you. I came so near doing it that now I know what I escaped. I will not do it. You may rest secure. What would be the use? As I wish to keep up appearances, I shall call on you in Paris. It will grieve me to learn that you can not receive me. I shall see your husband, I shall see your father also. It will be to say good-bye to them, as I intend to go on a long voyage. Farewell, Madame!"

At the moment when he turned his back to her, Therese saw Miss Bell and Prince Albertinelli coming out of the freight-station toward her. The Prince was very handsome. Vivian was walking by his side with the lightness of chaste joy.

"Oh, darling, what a pleasant surprise to find you here! The Prince, and I have seen, at the customhouse, the new bell, which has just come."

"Ah, the bell has come?"

"It is here, darling, the Ghiberti bell. I saw it in its wooden cage. It did not ring, because it was a prisoner. But it will have a campanile in my Fiesole house.

"When it feels the air of Florence, it will be happy to let its silvery voice be heard. Visited by the doves, it will ring for all our joys and all our sufferings. It will ring for you, for me, for the Prince, for good Madame Marmet, for Monsieur Choulette, for all our friends."

"Dear, bells never ring for real joys and for real sufferings. Bells are honest functionaries, who know only official sentiments."

"Oh, darling, you are much mistaken. Bells know the secrets of souls; they know everything. But I am very glad to find you here. I know, my love, why you came to the station. Your maid betrayed you. She told me you were waiting for a pink gown which was delayed in coming and that you were very impatient. But do not let that trouble you. You are always beautiful, my love."

She made Madame Martin enter her wagon.



"Come, quick, darling; Monsieur Jacques Dechartre dines at the house to-night, and I should not like to make him wait."

And while they were driving through the silence of the night, through the pathways full of the fresh perfume of wildflowers, she said:

"Do you see over there, darling, the black distaffs of the Fates, the cypresses of the cemetery? It is there I wish to sleep."

But Therese thought anxiously: "They saw him. Did they recognize him? I think not. The place was dark, and had only little blinding lights. Did she know him? I do not recall whether she saw him at my house last year."

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What made her anxious was a sly smile on the Prince's face.

"Darling, do you wish a place near me in that rustic cemetery? Shall we rest side by side under a little earth and a great deal of sky? But I do wrong to extend to you an invitation which you can not accept. It will not be permitted to you to sleep your eternal sleep at the foot of the hill of Fiesole, my love. You must rest in Paris, in a handsome tomb, by the side of Count Martin-Belleme."

"Why? Do you think, dear, that the wife must be united to her husband even after death?"

"Certainly she must, darling. Marriage is for time and for eternity. Do you not know the history of a young pair who loved each other in the province of Auvergne? They died almost at the same time, and were placed in two tombs separated by a road. But every night a sweetbrier bush threw from one tomb to the other its flowery branches. The two coffins had to be buried together."

When they had passed the Badia, they saw a procession coming up the side of the hill. The wind blew on the candles borne in gilded wooden candlesticks. The girls of the societies, dressed in white and blue, carried painted banners. Then came a little St. John, blond, curly-haired, nude, under a lamb's fleece which showed his arms and shoulders; and a St. Mary Magdalene, seven years old, crowned only with her waving golden hair. The people of Fiesole followed. Countess Martin recognized Choulette among them. With a candle in one hand, a book in the other, and blue spectacles on the end of his nose, he was singing. His unkempt beard moved up and down with the rhythm of the song. In the harshness of light and shade that worked in his face, he had an air that suggested a solitary monk capable of accomplishing a century of penance.

"How amusing he is!" said Therese. "He is making a spectacle of himself for himself. He is a great artist."

"Darling, why will you insist that Monsieur Choulette is not a pious man? Why? There is much joy and much beauty in faith. Poets know this. If Monsieur Choulette had not faith, he could not write the admirable verses that he does."

"And you, dear, have you faith?"

"Oh, yes; I believe in God and in the word of Christ."

Now the banners and the white veils had disappeared down the road. But one could see on the bald cranium of Choulette the flame of the candle reflected in rays of gold.

Dechartre, however, was waiting alone in the garden. Therese found him resting on the balcony of the terrace where he had felt the first sufferings of love. While Miss Bell and

the Prince were trying to fix upon a suitable place for the campanile, Dechartre led his beloved under the trees.

“You promised me that you would be in the garden when I came. I have been waiting for you an hour, which seemed eternal. You were not to go out. Your absence has surprised and grieved me.”

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She replied vaguely that she had been compelled to go to the station, and that Miss Bell had brought her back in the wagon.

He begged her pardon for his anxiety, but everything alarmed him. His happiness made him afraid.

They were already at table when Choulette appeared, with the face of an antique satyr. A terrible joy shone in his phosphorous eyes. Since his return from Assisi, he lived only among paupers, drank chianti all day with girls and artisans to whom he taught the beauty of joy and innocence, the advent of Jesus Christ, and the imminent abolition of taxes and military service. At the beginning of the procession he had gathered vagabonds in the ruins of the Roman theatre, and had delivered to them in a macaronic language, half French and half Tuscan, a sermon, which he took pleasure in repeating:

"Kings, senators, and judges have said: 'The life of nations is in us.' Well, they lie; and they are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle.'

"The life of nations is in the crops of the fields yellowing under the eye of the Lord. It is in the vines, and in the smiles and tears with which the sky bathes the fruits on the trees.

"The life of nations is not in the laws, which were made by the rich and powerful for the preservation of riches and power.

"The chiefs of kingdoms and of republics have said in their books that the right of peoples is the right of war, and they have glorified violence. And they render honors unto conquerors, and they raise in the public squares statues to the victorious man and horse. But one has not the right to kill; that is the reason why the just man will not draw from the urn a number that will send him to the war. The right is not to pamper the folly and crimes of a prince raised over a kingdom or over a republic; and that is the reason why the just man will not pay taxes and will not give money to the publicans. He will enjoy in peace the fruit of his work, and he will make bread with the wheat that he has sown, and he will eat the fruits of the trees that he has cut."

"Ah, Monsieur Choulette," said Prince Albertinelli, gravely, "you are right to take interest in the state of our unfortunate fields, which taxes exhaust. What fruit can be drawn from a soil taxed to thirty-three per cent. of its net income? The master and the servants are the prey of the publicans."

Dechartre and Madame Martin were struck by the unexpected sincerity of his accent.

He added:

"I like the King. I am sure of my loyalty, but the misfortunes of the peasants move me."

The truth was, he pursued with obstinacy a single aim: to reestablish the domain of Casentino that his father, Prince Carlo, an officer of Victor Emmanuel, had left devoured by usurers. His affected gentleness concealed his stubbornness. He had only useful vices. It was to become a great Tuscan landowner that he had dealt in pictures, sold the famous ceilings of his palace, made love to rich old women, and, finally, sought the hand of Miss Bell, whom he knew to be skilful at earning money and practised in the art of housekeeping. He really liked peasants. The ardent praises of Choulette, which he understood vaguely, awakened this affection in him. He forgot himself enough to express his mind:

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"In a country where master and servants form one family, the fate of the one depends on that of the others. Taxes despoil us. How good are our farmers! They are the best men in the world to till the soil."

Madame Martin confessed that she should not have believed it. The country of Lombardy alone seemed to her to be well cultivated. Tuscany appeared a beautiful, wild orchard.

The Prince replied, smilingly, that perhaps she would not speak in that way if she had done him the honor of visiting his farms of Casentino, although these had suffered from long and ruinous lawsuits. She would have seen there what an Italian landscape really is.

"I take a great deal of care of my domain. I was coming from it to-night when I had the double pleasure of finding at the station Miss Bell, who had gone there to find her Ghiberti bell, and you, Madame, who were talking with a friend from Paris."

He had the idea that it would be disagreeable to her to hear him speak of that meeting. He looked around the table, and saw the expression of anxious surprise which Dechartre could not restrain. He insisted:

"Forgive, Madame, in a rustic, a certain pretension to knowing something about the world. In the man who was talking to you I recognized a Parisian, because he had an English air; and while he affected stiffness, he showed perfect ease and particular vivacity."

"Oh," said Therese, negligently, "I have not seen him for a long time. I was much surprised to meet him at Florence at the moment of his departure."

She looked at Dechartre, who affected not to listen.

"I know that gentleman," said Miss Bell. "It is Monsieur Le Menil. I dined with him twice at Madame Martin's, and he talked to me very well. He said he liked football; that he introduced the game in France, and that now football is quite the fashion. He also related to me his hunting adventures. He likes animals. I have observed that hunters like animals. I assure you, darling, that Monsieur Le Menil talks admirably about hares. He knows their habits. He said to me it was a pleasure to look at them dancing in the moonlight on the plains. He assured me that they were very intelligent, and that he had seen an old hare, pursued by dogs, force another hare to get out of the trail so as to deceive the hunters. Darling, did Monsieur Le Menil ever talk to you about hares?"

Therese replied she did not know, and that she thought hunters were tiresome.

Miss Bell exclaimed. She did not think M. Le Menil was ever tiresome when talking of the hares that danced in the moonlight on the plains and among the vines. She would like to raise a hare, like Phanion.

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“Darling, you do not know Phanion. Oh, I am sure that Monsieur Dechartre knows her. She was beautiful, and dear to poets. She lived in the Island of Cos, beside a dell which, covered with lemon-trees, descended to the blue sea. And they say that she looked at the blue waves. I related Phanion’s history to Monsieur Le Menil, and he was very glad to hear it. She had received from some hunter a little hare with long ears. She held it on her knees and fed it on spring flowers. It loved Phanion and forgot its mother. It died before having eaten too many flowers. Phanion lamented over its loss. She buried it in the lemon-grove, in a grave which she could see from her bed. And the shade of the little hare was consoled by the songs of the poets.”

The good Madame Marmet said that M. Le Menil pleased by his elegant and discreet manners, which young men no longer practise. She would have liked to see him. She wanted him to do something for her.

“Or, rather, for my nephew,” she said. “He is a captain in the artillery, and his chiefs like him. His colonel was for a long time under orders of Monsieur Le Menil’s uncle, General La Briche. If Monsieur Le Menil would ask his uncle to write to Colonel Faure in favor of my nephew I should be grateful to him. My nephew is not a stranger to Monsieur Le Menil. They met last year at the masked ball which Captain de Lassay gave at the hotel at Caen.”

Madame Marmet cast down her eyes and added:

“The invited guests, naturally, were not society women. But it is said some of them were very pretty. They came from Paris. My nephew, who gave these details to me, was dressed as a coachman. Monsieur Le Menil was dressed as a Hussar of Death, and he had much success.”

Miss Bell said that she was sorry not to have known that M. Le Menil was in Florence. Certainly, she should have invited him to come to Fiesole.

Dechartre remained sombre and distant during the rest of the dinner: and when, at the moment of leaving, Therese extended her hand to him, she felt that he avoided pressing it in his.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly
Disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared
Does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality
He knew now the divine malady of love
I do not desire your friendship
I have known things which I know no more
I wished to spoil our past



Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself
Incapable of conceiving that one might talk without an object
Jealous without having the right to be jealous
Lovers never separate kindly
Magnificent air of those beggars of whom small towns are proud
Nobody troubled himself about that originality
One who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel
Simple people who doubt



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neither themselves nor others

Superior men sometimes lack cleverness

The door of one's room opens on the infinite

The one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you

The past is the only human reality—Everything that is, is past

There are many grand and strong things which you do not feel

They are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle'

To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form

Trying to make Therese admire what she did not know

Unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life

What will be the use of having tormented ourselves in this world

Women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault

You must take me with my own soul!

THE RED LILY

By Anatole France

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIII

"One is never kind when one is in love"

The next day, in the hidden pavilion of the Via Alfieri, she found him preoccupied. She tried to distract him with ardent gayety, with the sweetness of pressing intimacy, with superb humility. But he remained sombre. He had all night meditated, labored over, and recognized his sadness. He had found reasons for suffering. His thought had brought together the hand that dropped a letter in the post-box before the bronze San Marco and the dreadful unknown who had been seen at the station. Now Jacques Dechartre gave a face and a name to the cause of his suffering. In the grandmother's armchair where Therese had been seated on the day of her welcome, and which she had this time offered to him, he was assailed by painful images; while she, bent over one of his arms, enveloped him with her warm embrace and her loving heart. She divined too well what he was suffering to ask it of him simply.

In order to bring him back to pleasanter ideas, she recalled the secrets of the room where they were and reminiscences of their walks through the city. She was gracefully familiar.

"The little spoon you gave me, the little red lily spoon, I use for my tea in the morning. And I know by the pleasure I feel at seeing it when I wake how much I love you."

Then, as he replied only in sentences sad and evasive, she said:

"I am near you, but you do not care for me. You are preoccupied by some idea that I do not fathom. Yet I am alive, and an idea is nothing."

"An idea is nothing? Do you think so? One may be wretched or happy for an idea; one may live and one may die for an idea. Well, I am thinking."

"Of what are you thinking?"

"Why do you ask? You know very well I am thinking of what I heard last night, which you had concealed from me. I am thinking of your meeting at the station, which was not due to chance, but which a letter had caused, a letter dropped—remember!—in the postbox of San Michele. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I have not the right. But why did you give yourself to me if you were not free?"



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She thought she must tell an untruth.

"You mean some one whom I met at the station yesterday? I assure you it was the most ordinary meeting in the world."

He was painfully impressed with the fact that she did not dare to name the one she spoke of. He, too, avoided pronouncing that name.

"Therese, he had not come for you? You did not know he was in Florence? He is nothing more to you than a man whom you meet socially? He is not the one who, when absent, made you say to me, 'I can not?' He is nothing to you?"

She replied resolutely:

"He comes to my house at times. He was introduced to me by General Lariviere. I have nothing more to say to you about him. I assure you he is of no interest to me, and I can not conceive what may be in your mind about him."

She felt a sort of satisfaction at repudiating the man who had insisted against her; with so much harshness and violence, upon his rights of ownership. But she was in haste to get out of her tortuous path. She rose and looked at her lover, with beautiful, tender, and grave eyes.

"Listen to me: the day when I gave my heart to you, my life was yours wholly. If a doubt or a suspicion comes to you, question me. The present is yours, and you know well there is only you, you alone, in it. As for my past, if you knew what nothingness it was you would be glad. I do not think another woman made as I was, to love, would have brought to you a mind newer to love than is mine. That I swear to you. The years that were spent without you—I did not live! Let us not talk of them. There is nothing in them of which I should be ashamed. To regret them is another thing. I regret to have known you so late. Why did you not come sooner? You could have known me five years ago as easily as to-day. But, believe me, we should not tire ourselves with speaking of time that has gone. Remember Lohengrin. If you love me, I am for you like the swan's knight. I have asked nothing of you. I have wanted to know nothing. I have not chided you about Mademoiselle Jeanne Tancrede. I saw you loved me, that you were suffering, and it was enough—because I loved you."

"A woman can not be jealous in the same manner as a man, nor feel what makes us suffer."

"I do not know that. Why can not she?"

"Why? Because there is not in the blood, in the flesh of a woman that absurd and generous fury for ownership, that primitive instinct of which man has made a right. Man is the god who wants his mate to himself. Since time immemorial woman is

accustomed to sharing men's love. It is the past, the obscure past, that determines our passions. We are already so old when we are born! Jealousy, for a woman, is only a wound to her own self-love. For a man it is a torture as profound as moral suffering, as continuous as physical suffering. You ask the reason why? Because, in spite of my submission and of my respect, in spite of the alarm

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you cause me, you are matter and I am the idea; you are the thing and I am the mind; you are the clay and I am the artisan. Do not complain of this. Near the perfect amphora, surrounded with garlands, what is the rude and humble potter? The amphora is tranquil and beautiful; he is wretched; he is tormented; he wills; he suffers; for to will is to suffer. Yes, I am jealous. I know what there is in my jealousy. When I examine it, I find in it hereditary prejudices, savage conceit, sickly susceptibility, a mingling of rudest violence and cruel feebleness, imbecile and wicked revolt against the laws of life and of society. But it does not matter that I know it for what it is: it exists and it torments me. I am the chemist who, studying the properties of an acid which he has drunk, knows how it was combined and what salts form it. Nevertheless the acid burns him, and will burn him to the bone."

"My love, you are absurd."

"Yes, I am absurd. I feel it better than you feel it yourself. To desire a woman in all the brilliancy of her beauty and her wit, mistress of herself, who knows and who dares; more beautiful in that and more desirable, and whose choice is free, voluntary, deliberate; to desire her, to love her for what she is, and to suffer because she is not puerile candor nor pale innocence, which would be shocking in her if it were possible to find them there; to ask her at the same time that she be herself and not be herself; to adore her as life has made her, and regret bitterly that life, which has made her so beautiful, has touched her—Oh, this is absurd! I love you! I love you with all that you bring to me of sensations, of habits, with all that comes of your experiences, with all that comes from him-perhaps, from them-how do I know? These things are my delight and they are my torture. There must be a profound sense in the public idiocy which says that love like ours is guilty. Joy is guilty when it is immense. That is the reason why I suffer, my beloved."

She knelt before him, took his hands, and drew him to her.

"I do not wish you to suffer; I will not have it. It would be folly. I love you, and never have loved any one but you. You may believe me; I do not lie."

He kissed her forehead.

"If you deceived me, my dear, I should not reproach you for that; on the contrary, I should be grateful to you. Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain. What would become of us if women had not for us the pity of untruth? Lie, my beloved, lie for the sake of charity. Give me the dream that colors black sorrow. Lie; have no scruples. You will only add another illusion to the illusion of love and beauty."

He sighed:

“Oh, common-sense, common wisdom!”

She asked him what he meant, and what common wisdom was. He said it was a sensible proverb, but brutal, which it was better not to repeat.

“Repeat it all the same.”

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"You wish me to say it to you: 'Kissed lips do not lose their freshness.'"

And he added:

"It is true that love preserves beauty, and that the beauty of women is fed on caresses as bees are fed on flowers."

She placed on his lips a pledge in a kiss.

"I swear to you I never loved any one but you. Oh, no, it is not caresses that have preserved the few charms which I am happy to have in order to offer them to you. I love you! I love you!"

But he still remembered the letter dropped in the post-box, and the unknown person met at the station.

"If you loved me truly, you would love only me."

She rose, indignant:

"Then you believe I love another? What you are saying is monstrous. Is that what you think of me? And you say you love me! I pity you, because you are insane."

"True, I am insane."

She, kneeling, with the supple palms of her hands enveloped his temples and his cheeks. He said again that he was mad to be anxious about a chance and commonplace meeting. She forced him to believe her, or, rather, to forget. He no longer saw or knew anything. His vanished bitterness and anger left him nothing but the harsh desire to forget everything, to make her forget everything.

She asked him why he was sad.

"You were happy a moment ago. Why are you not happy now?"

And as he shook his head and said nothing:

"Speak! I like your complaints better than your silence."

Then he said:

"You wish to know? Do not be angry. I suffer now more than ever, because I know now what you are capable of giving."

She withdrew brusquely from his arms and, with eyes full of pain and reproach, said:



“You can believe that I ever was to another what I am to you! You wound me in my most susceptible sentiment, in my love for you. I do not forgive you for this. I love you! I never have loved any one except you. I never have suffered except through you. Be content. You do me a great deal of harm. How can you be so unkind?”

“Therese, one is never kind when one is in love.”

She remained for a long time immovable and dreamy. Her face flushed, and a tear rose to her eyes.

“Therese, you are weeping!”

“Forgive me, my heart, it is the first time that I have loved and that I have been really loved. I am afraid.”

CHAPTER XXIV

CHOULETTE’S AMBITION

While the rolling of arriving boxes filled the Bell villa; while Pauline, loaded with parcels, lightly came down the steps; while good Madame Marmet, with tranquil vigilance, supervised everything; and while Miss Bell finished dressing in her room, Therese, dressed in gray, resting on the terrace, looked once again at the Flower City.

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She had decided to return home. Her husband recalled her in every one of his letters. If, as he asked her to do, she returned to Paris in the first days of May, they might give two or three dinners, followed by receptions. His political group was supported by public opinion. The tide was pushing him along, and Garain thought the Countess Martin's drawing-room might exercise an excellent influence on the future of the country. These reasons moved her not; but she felt a desire to be agreeable to her husband. She had received the day before a letter from her father, Monsieur Montessuy, who, without sharing the political views of his son-in-law and without giving any advice to his daughter, insinuated that society was beginning to gossip of the Countess Martin's mysterious sojourn at Florence among poets and artists. The Bell villa took, from a distance, an air of sentimental fantasy. She felt herself that she was too closely observed at Resole. Madame Marmet annoyed her. Prince Albertinelli disquieted her. The meetings in the pavilion of the Via Alfieri had become difficult and dangerous. Professor Arrighi, whom the Prince often met, had seen her one night as she was walking through the deserted streets leaning on Dechartre. Professor Arrighi, author of a treatise on agriculture, was the most amiable of wise men. He had turned his beautiful, heroic face, and said, only the next day, to the young woman "Formerly, I could discern from a long distance the coming of a beautiful woman. Now that I have gone beyond the age to be viewed favorably by women, heaven has pity on me. Heaven prevents my seeing them. My eyes are very bad. The most charming face I can no longer recognize." She had understood, and heeded the warning. She wished now to conceal her joy in the vastness of Paris.

Vivian, to whom she had announced her departure, had asked her to remain a few days longer. But Therese suspected that her friend was still shocked by the advice she had received one night in the lemon-decorated room; that, at least, she did not enjoy herself entirely in the familiarity of a confidante who disapproved of her choice, and whom the Prince had represented to her as a coquette, and perhaps worse. The date of her departure had been fixed for May 5th.

The day shone brilliant, pure, and charming on the Arno valley. Therese, dreamy, saw from the terrace the immense morning rose placed in the blue cup of Florence. She leaned forward to discover, at the foot of the flowery hills, the imperceptible point where she had known infinite joys. There the cemetery garden made a small, sombre spot near which she divined the Via Alfieri. She saw herself again in the room wherein, doubtless, she never would enter again. The hours there passed had for her the sadness of a dream. She felt her eyes becoming veiled, her knees weaken, and her soul shudder. It seemed to her that life was no longer in her, and that she had left it in that corner where she saw the

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black pines raise their immovable summits. She reproached herself for feeling anxiety without reason, when, on the contrary, she should be reassured and joyful. She knew she would meet Jacques Dechartre in Paris. They would have liked to arrive there at the same time, or, rather, to go there together. They had thought it indispensable that he should remain three or four days longer in Florence, but their meeting would not be retarded beyond that. They had appointed a rendezvous, and she rejoiced in the thought of it. She wore her love mingled with her being and running in her blood. Still, a part of herself remained in the pavilion decorated with goats and nymphs a part of herself which never would return to her. In the full ardor of life, she was dying for things infinitely delicate and precious. She recalled that Dechartre had said to her: "Love likes charms. I gathered from the terrace the leaves of a tree that you had admired." Why had she not thought of taking a stone of the pavilion wherein she had forgotten the world?

A shout from Pauline drew her from her thoughts. Choulette, jumping from a bush, had suddenly kissed the maid, who was carrying overcoats and bags into the carriage. Now he was running through the alleys, joyful, his ears standing out like horns. He bowed to the Countess Martin.

"I have, then, to say farewell to you, Madame."

He intended to remain in Italy. A lady was calling him, he said: it was Rome. He wanted to see the cardinals. One of them, whom people praised as an old man full of sense, would perhaps share the ideas of the socialist and revolutionary church. Choulette had his aim: to plant on the ruins of an unjust and cruel civilization the Cross of Calvary, not dead and bare, but vivid, and with its flowery arms embracing the world. He was founding with that design an order and a newspaper. Madame Martin knew the order. The newspaper was to be sold for one cent, and to be written in rhythmic phrases. It was a newspaper to be sung. Verse, simple, violent, or joyful, was the only language that suited the people. Prose pleased only people whose intelligence was very subtle. He had seen anarchists in the taverns of the Rue Saint Jacques. They spent their evenings reciting and listening to romances.

And he added:

"A newspaper which shall be at the same time a song-book will touch the soul of the people. People say I have genius. I do not know whether they are right. But it must be admitted that I have a practical mind."

Miss Bell came down the steps, putting on her gloves:



“Oh, darling, the city and the mountains and the sky wish you to lament your departure. They make themselves beautiful to-day in order to make you regret quitting them and desire to see them again.”

But Choulette, whom the dryness of the Tuscan climate tired, regretted green Umbria and its humid sky. He recalled Assisi. He said:

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"There are woods and rocks, a fair sky and white clouds. I have walked there in the footsteps of good Saint Francis, and I transcribed his canticle to the sun in old French rhymes, simple and poor."

Madame Martin said she would like to hear it. Miss Bell was already listening, and her face wore the fervent expression of an angel sculptured by Mino.

Choulette told them it was a rustic and artless work. The verses were not trying to be beautiful. They were simple, although uneven, for the sake of lightness. Then, in a slow and monotonous voice, he recited the canticle.

"Oh, Monsieur Choulette," said Miss Bell, "this canticle goes up to heaven, like the hermit in the Campo Santo of Pisa, whom some one saw going up the mountain that the goats liked. I will tell you. The old hermit went up, leaning on the staff of faith, and his step was unequal because the crutch, being on one side, gave one of his feet an advantage over the other. That is the reason why your verses are unequal. I have understood it."

The poet accepted this praise, persuaded that he had unwittingly deserved it.

"You have faith, Monsieur Choulette," said Therese. "Of what use is it to you if not to write beautiful verses?"

"Faith serves me to commit sin, Madame."

"Oh, we commit sins without that."

Madame Marmet appeared, equipped for the journey, in the tranquil joy of returning to her pretty apartment, her little dog Toby, her old friend Lagrange, and to see again, after the Etruscans of Fiesole, the skeleton warrior who, among the bonbon boxes, looked out of the window.

Miss Bell escorted her friends to the station in her carriage.

CHAPTER XXV

"We are robbing life"

Dechartre came to the carriage to salute the two travellers. Separated from him, Therese felt what he was to her: he had given to her a new taste of life, delicious and so vivid, so real, that she felt it on her lips. She lived under a charm in the dream of seeing him again, and was surprised when Madame Marmet, along the journey, said: "I think we are passing the frontier," or "Rose-bushes are in bloom by the seaside." She was joyful when, after a night at the hotel in Marseilles, she saw the gray olive-trees in

the stony fields, then the mulberry-trees and the distant profile of Mount Pilate, and the Rhone, and Lyons, and then the familiar landscapes, the trees raising their summits into bouquets clothed in tender green, and the lines of poplars beside the rivers. She enjoyed the plenitude of the hours she lived and the astonishment of profound joys. And it was with the smile of a sleeper suddenly awakened that, at the station in Paris, in the light of the station, she greeted her husband, who was glad to see her. When she kissed Madame Marmet, she told her that she thanked her with all her heart. And truly she was grateful to all things, like M. Choulette's St. Francis.

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In the coupe, which followed the quays in the luminous dust of the setting sun, she listened without impatience to her husband confiding to her his successes as an orator, the intentions of his parliamentary groups, his projects, his hopes, and the necessity to give two or three political dinners. She closed her eyes in order to think better. She said to herself: "I shall have a letter to-morrow, and shall see him again within eight days." When the coupe passed on the bridge, she looked at the water, which seemed to roll flames; at the smoky arches; at the rows of trees; at the heads of the chestnut-trees in bloom on the Cours-la-Reine; all these familiar aspects seemed to be clothed for her in novel magnificence. It seemed to her that her love had given a new color to the universe. And she asked herself whether the trees and the stones recognized her. She was thinking; "How is it that my silence, my eyes, and heaven and earth do not tell my dear secret?"

M. Martin-Belleme, thinking she was a little tired, advised her to rest. And at night, closeted in her room, in the silence wherein she heard the palpitations of her heart, she wrote to the absent one a letter full of these words, which are similar to flowers in their perpetual novelty: "I love you. I am waiting for you. I am happy. I feel you are near me. There is nobody except you and me in the world. I see from my window a blue star which trembles, and I look at it, thinking that you see it in Florence. I have put on my table the little red lily spoon. Come! Come!" And she found thus, fresh in her mind, the eternal sensations and images.

For a week she lived an inward life, feeling within her the soft warmth which remained of the days passed in the Via Alfieri, breathing the kisses which she had received, and loving herself for being loved. She took delicate care and displayed attentive taste in new gowns. It was to herself, too, that she was pleasing. Madly anxious when there was nothing for her at the postoffice, trembling and joyful when she received through the small window a letter wherein she recognized the large handwriting of her beloved, she devoured her reminiscences, her desires, and her hopes. Thus the hours passed quickly.

The morning of the day when he was to arrive seemed to her to be odiously long. She was at the station before the train arrived. A delay had been signalled. It weighed heavily upon her. Optimist in her projects, and placing by force, like her father, faith on the side of her will, that delay which she had not foreseen seemed to her to be treason. The gray light, which the three-quarters of an hour filtered through the window-panes of the station, fell on her like the rays of an immense hour-glass which measured for her the minutes of happiness lost. She was lamenting her fate, when, in the red light of the sun, she saw the locomotive of the express stop, monstrous and docile, on the quay, and, in the crowd of travellers coming out of the carriages, Jacques approached her. He was looking at her with that sort of sombre and violent joy which she had often observed in him. He said:

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"At last, here you are. I feared to die before seeing you again. You do not know, I did not know myself, what torture it is to live a week away from you. I have returned to the little pavilion of the Via Alfieri. In the room you know, in front of the old pastel, I have wept for love and rage."

She looked at him tenderly.

"And I, do you not think that I called you, that I wanted you, that when alone I extended my arms toward you? I had hidden your letters in the chiffonier where my jewels are. I read them at night: it was delicious, but it was imprudent. Your letters were yourself—too much and not enough."

They traversed the court where fiacres rolled away loaded with boxes. She asked whether they were to take a carriage.

He made no answer. He seemed not to hear. She said:

"I went to see your house; I did not dare go in. I looked through the grille and saw windows hidden in rose-bushes in the rear of a yard, behind a tree, and I said: 'It is there!' I never have been so moved."

He was not listening to her nor looking at her. He walked quickly with her along the paved street, and through a narrow stairway reached a deserted street near the station. There, between wood and coal yards, was a hotel with a restaurant on the first floor and tables on the sidewalk. Under the painted sign were white curtains at the windows. Dechartre stopped before the small door and pushed Therese into the obscure alley. She asked:

"Where are you leading me? What is the time? I must be home at half-past seven. We are mad."

When they left the house, she said:

"Jacques, my darling, we are too happy; we are robbing life."

CHAPTER XXVI

IN DECHARTRE'S STUDIO

A fiacre brought her, the next day, to a populous street, half sad, half gay, with walls of gardens in the intervals of new houses, and stopped at the point where the sidewalk passes under the arcade of a mansion of the Regency, covered now with dust and oblivion, and fantastically placed across the street. Here and there green branches lent gayety to that city corner. Therese, while ringing at the door, saw in the limited

perspective of the houses a pulley at a window and a gilt key, the sign of a locksmith. Her eyes were full of this picture, which was new to her. Pigeons flew above her head; she heard chickens cackle. A servant with a military look opened the door. She found herself in a yard covered with sand, shaded by a tree, where, at the left, was the janitor's box with bird-cages at the windows. On that side rose, under a green trellis, the mansard of the neighboring house. A sculptor's studio backed on it its glass-covered roof, which showed plaster figures asleep in the dust. At the right, the wall that closed the yard bore debris of monuments, broken bases of columnettes. In the rear, the house, not very large, showed the six windows of its facade, half hidden by vines and rosebushes.

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Philippe Dechartre, infatuated with the architecture of the fifteenth century in France, had reproduced there very cleverly the characteristics of a private house of the time of Louis XII. That house, begun in the middle of the Second Empire, had not been finished. The builder of so many castles died without being able to finish his own house. It was better thus. Conceived in a manner which had then its distinction and its value, but which seems to-day banal and outlandish, having lost little by little its large frame of gardens, cramped now between the walls of the tall buildings, Philippe Dechartre's little house, by the roughness of its stones, by the naive heaviness of its windows, by the simplicity of the roof, which the architect's widow had caused to be covered with little expense, by all the lucky accidents of the unfinished and unpremeditated, corrected the lack of grace of its new and affected antiquity and archeologic romanticism, and harmonized with the humbleness of a district made ugly by progress of population.

In fine, notwithstanding its appearance of ruin and its green drapery, that little house had its charm. Suddenly and instinctively, Therese discovered in it other harmonies. In the elegant negligence which extended from the walls covered with vines to the darkened panes of the studio, and even in the bent tree, the bark of which studded with its shells the wild grass of the courtyard, she divined the mind of the master, nonchalant, not skilful in preserving, living in the long solitude of passionate men. She had in her joy a sort of grief at observing this careless state in which her lover left things around him. She found in it a sort of grace and nobility, but also a spirit of indifference contrary to her own nature, opposite to the interested and careful mind of the Montessuys. At once she thought that, without spoiling the pensive softness of that rough corner, she would bring to it her well-ordered activity; she would have sand thrown in the alley, and in the angle wherein a little sunlight came she would put the gayety of flowers. She looked sympathetically at a statue which had come there from some park, a Flora, lying on the earth, eaten by black moss, her two arms lying by her sides. She thought of raising her soon, of making of her a centrepiece for a fountain. Dechartre, who for an hour had been watching for her coming, joyful, anxious, trembling in his agitated happiness, descended the steps. In the fresh shade of the vestibule, wherein she divined confusedly the severe splendor of bronze and marble statues, she stopped, troubled by the beatings of her heart, which throbbed with all its might in her chest. He pressed her in his arms and kissed her. She heard him, through the tumult of her temples, recalling to her the short delights of the day before. She saw again the lion of the Atlas on the carpet, and returned to Jacques his kisses with delicious slowness. He led her, by a wooden stairway, into the vast hall which had served formerly as a workshop, where he designed and modelled his figures, and, above all, read; he liked reading as if it were opium.

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Pale-tinted Gothic tapestries, which let one perceive in a marvellous forest a lady at the feet of whom a unicorn lay on the grass, extended above cabinets to the painted beams of the ceiling. He led her to a large and low divan, loaded with cushions covered with sumptuous fragments of Spanish and Byzantine cloaks; but she sat in an armchair. "You are here! You are here! The world may come to an end."

She replied "Formerly I thought of the end of the world, but I was not afraid of it. Monsieur Lagrange had promised it to me, and I was waiting for it. When I did not know you, I felt so lonely." She looked at the tables loaded with vases and statuettes, the tapestries, the confused and splendid mass of weapons, the animals, the marbles, the paintings, the ancient books. "You have beautiful things."

"Most of them come from my father, who lived in the golden age of collectors. These histories of the unicorn, the complete series of which is at Cluny, were found by my father in 1851 in an inn."

But, curious and disappointed, she said: "I see nothing that you have done; not a statue, not one of those wax figures which are prized so highly in England, not a figurine nor a plaque nor a medal."

"If you think I could find any pleasure in living among my works! I know my figures too well—they weary me. Whatever is without secret lacks charm." She looked at him with affected spite.

"You had not told me that one had lost all charm when one had no more secrets."

He put his arm around her waist.

"Ah! The things that live are only too mysterious; and you remain for me, my beloved, an enigma, the unknown sense of which contains the light of life. Do not fear to give yourself to me. I shall desire you always, but I never shall know you. Does one ever possess what one loves? Are kisses, caresses, anything else than the effort of a delightful despair? When I embrace you, I am still searching for you, and I never have you; since I want you always, since in you I expect the impossible and the infinite. What you are, the devil knows if I shall ever know! Because I have modelled a few bad figures I am not a sculptor; I am rather a sort of poet and philosopher who seeks for subjects of anxiety and torment in nature. The sentiment of form is not sufficient for me. My colleagues laugh at me because I have not their simplicity. They are right. And that brute Choulette is right too, when he says we ought to live without thinking and without desiring. Our friend the cobbler of Santa Maria Novella, who knows nothing of what might make him unjust and unfortunate, is a master of the art of living. I ought to love you naively, without that sort of metaphysics which is passionate and makes me absurd and wicked. There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget. Come, come,

I have thought of you too cruelly in the tortures of your absence; come, my beloved! I must forget you with you. It is with you only that I can forget you and lose myself."

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He took her in his arms and, lifting her veil, kissed her on the lips.

A little frightened in that vast, unknown hall, embarrassed by the look of strange things, she drew the black tulle to her chin.

“Here! You can not think of it.”

He said they were alone.

“Alone? And the man with terrible moustaches who opened the door?”

He smiled:

“That is Fusellier, my father’s former servant. He and his wife take charge of the house. Do not be afraid. They remain in their box. You shall see Madame Fusellier; she is inclined to familiarity. I warn you.”

“My friend, why has Monsieur Fusellier, a janitor, moustaches like a Tartar?”

“My dear, nature gave them to him. I am not sorry that he has the air of a sergeant-major and gives me the illusion of being a country neighbor.”

Seated on the corner of the divan, he drew her to his knees and gave to her kisses which she returned.

She rose quickly.

“Show me the other rooms. I am curious. I wish to see everything.”

He escorted her to the second story. Aquarelles by Philippe Dechartre covered the walls of the corridor. He opened the door and made her enter a room furnished with white mahogany:

It was his mother’s room. He kept it intact in its past. Uninhabited for nine years, the, room had not the air of being resigned to its solitude. The mirror waited for the old lady’s glance, and on the onyx clock a pensive Sappho was lonely because she did not hear the noise of the pendulum.

There were two portraits on the walls. One by Ricard represented Philippe Dechartre, very pale, with rumpled hair, and eyes lost in a romantic dream. The other showed a middle-aged woman, almost beautiful in her ardent slowness. It was Madame Philippe Dechartre.

“My poor mother’s room is like me,” said Jacques; “it remembers.”

"You resemble your mother," said Therese; "you have her eyes. Paul Vence told me she adored you."

"Yes," he replied, smilingly. "My mother was excellent, intelligent, exquisite, marvellously absurd. Her madness was maternal love. She did not give me a moment of rest. She tormented herself and tormented me."

Therese looked at a bronze figure by Carpeaux, placed on the chiffonier.

"You recognize," said Dechartre, "the Prince Imperial by his ears, which are like the wings of a zephyr, and which enliven his cold visage. This bronze is a gift of Napoleon III. My parents went to Compiegne. My father, while the court was at Fontainebleau, made the plan of the castle, and designed the gallery. In the morning the Emperor would come, in his frock-coat, and smoking his meerschaum pipe, to sit near him like a penguin on a rock. At that time I went to day-school. I listened to his stories at table, and I have not forgotten them. The Emperor stayed there, peaceful and quiet, interrupting his long silence with few words

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smothered under his big moustache; then he roused himself a little and explained his ideas of machinery. He was an inventor. He would draw a pencil from his pocket and make drawings on my father's designs. He spoiled in that way two or three studies a week. He liked my father a great deal, and promised works and honors to him which never came. The Emperor was kind, but he had no influence, as mamma said. At that time I was a little boy. Since then a vague sympathy has remained in me for that man, who was lacking in genius, but whose mind was affectionate and beautiful, and who carried through great adventures a simple courage and a gentle fatalism. Then he is sympathetic to me because he has been combated and insulted by people who were eager to take his place, and who had not, as he had, in the depths of their souls, a love for the people. We have seen them in power since then. Heavens, how ugly they are! Senator Loyer, for instance, who at your house, in the smoking-room, filled his pockets with cigars, and invited me to do likewise. That Loyer is a bad man, harsh to the unfortunate, to the weak, and to the humble. And Garain, don't you think his mind is disgusting? Do you remember the first time I dined at your house and we talked of Napoleon? Your hair, twisted above your neck, and shot through by a diamond arrow, was adorable. Paul Vence said subtle things. Garain did not understand. You asked for my opinion."

"It was to make you shine. I was already conceited for you."

"Oh, I never could say a single phrase before people who are so serious. Yet I had a great desire to say that Napoleon III pleased me more than Napoleon I; that I thought him more touching; but perhaps that idea would have produced a bad effect. But I am not so destitute of talent as to care about politics."

He looked around the room, and at the furniture with familiar tenderness. He opened a drawer:

"Here are mamma's eye-glasses. How she searched for these eye-glasses! Now I will show you my room. If it is not in order you must excuse Madame Fusellier, who is trained to respect my disorder."

The curtains at the windows were down. He did not lift them. After an hour she drew back the red satin draperies; rays of light dazzled her eyes and fell on her floating hair. She looked for a mirror and found only a looking-glass of Venice, dull in its wide ebony border. Rising on the tips of her toes to see herself in it, she said:

"Is that sombre and far-away spectre I? The women who have looked at themselves in this glass can not have complimented you on it."

As she was taking pins from the table she noticed a little bronze figure which she had not yet seen. It was an old Italian work of Flemish taste: a nude woman, with short legs and heavy stomach, who apparently ran with an arm extended. She thought the figure had a droll air. She asked what she was doing.

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"She is doing what Madame Mundanity does on the portal of the cathedral at Basle."

But Therese, who had been at Basle, did not know Madame Mundanity. She looked at the figure again, did not understand, and asked:

"Is it something very bad? How can a thing shown on the portal of a church be so difficult to tell here?"

Suddenly an anxiety came to her:

"What will Monsieur and Madame Fusellier think of me?"

Then, discovering on the wall a medallion wherein Dechartre had modelled the profile of a girl, amusing and vicious:

"What is that?"

"That is Clara, a newspaper girl. She brought the Figaro to me every morning. She had dimples in her cheeks, nests for kisses. One day I said to her: 'I will make your portrait.' She came, one summer morning, with earrings and rings which she had bought at the Neuilly fair. I never saw her again. I do not know what has become of her. She was too instinctive to become a fashionable demi-mondaine. Shall I take it out?"

"No; it looks very well in that corner. I am not jealous of Clara."

It was time to return home, and she could not decide to go. She put her arms around her lover's neck.

"Oh, I love you! And then, you have been to-day good-natured and gay. Gayety becomes you so well. I should like to make you gay always. I need joy almost as much as love; and who will give me joy if you do not?"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PRIMROSE PATH

After her return to Paris, for six weeks Therese lived in the ardent half sleep of happiness, and prolonged delightfully her thoughtless dream. She went to see Jacques every day in the little house shaded by a tree; and when they had at last parted at night, she took away with her adored reminiscences. They had the same tastes; they yielded to the same fantasies. The same capricious thoughts carried them away. They found pleasure in running to the suburbs that border the city, the streets where the wine-shops are shaded by acacia, the stony roads where the grass grows at the foot of walls, the



little woods and the fields over which extended the blue sky striped by the smoke of manufactories. She was happy to feel him near her in this region where she did not know herself, and where she gave to herself the illusion of being lost with him.

One day they had taken the boat that she had seen pass so often under her windows. She was not afraid of being recognized. Her danger was not great, and, since she was in love, she had lost prudence. They saw shores which little by little grew gay, escaping the dusty aridity of the suburbs; they went by islands with bouquets of trees shading taverns, and innumerable boats tied under willows. They debarked at Bas-Meudon. As she said she was warm and thirsty, he made her enter a wine-shop. It was a building with wooden galleries, which solitude made to appear larger, and which slept in rustic peace, waiting for Sunday to fill it with the laughter of girls, the cries of boatmen, the odor of fried fish, and the smoke of stews.

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They went up the creaking stairway, shaped like a ladder, and in a first-story room a maid servant brought wine and biscuits to them. On the mantelpiece, at one of the corners of the room, was an oval mirror in a flower-covered frame. Through the open window one saw the Seine, its green shores, and the hills in the distance bathed with warm air. The trembling peace of a summer evening filled the sky, the earth, and the water.

Therese looked at the running river. The boat passed on the water, and when the wake which it left reached the shore it seemed as if the house rocked like a vessel.

"I like the water," said Therese. "How happy I am!"

Their lips met.

Lost in the enchanted despair of love, time was not marked for them except by the cool splash of the water, which at intervals broke under the half-open window. To the caressing praise of her lover she replied:

"It is true I was made for love. I love myself because you love me."

Certainly, he loved her; and it was not possible for him to explain to himself why he loved her with ardent piety, with a sort of sacred fury. It was not because of her beauty, although it was rare and infinitely precious. She had exquisite lines, but lines follow movement, and escape incessantly; they are lost and found again; they cause aesthetic joys and despair. A beautiful line is the lightning which deliciously wounds the eyes. One admires and one is surprised. What makes one love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty. One finds one woman among a thousand whom one wants always. Therese was that woman whom one can not leave or betray.

She exclaimed, joyfully:

"I never shall be forsaken?"

She asked why he did not make her bust, since he thought her beautiful.

"Why? Because I am an ordinary sculptor, and I know it; which is not the faculty of an ordinary mind. But if you wish to think that I am a great artist, I will give you other reasons. To create a figure that will live, one must take the model like common material from which one will extract the beauty, press it, crush it, and obtain its essence. There is nothing in you that is not precious to me. If I made your bust I should be servilely attached to these things which are everything to me because they are something of you. I should stubbornly attach myself to the details, and should not succeed in composing a finished figure."

She looked at him astonished.

He continued:

“From memory I might. I tried a pencil sketch.” As she wished to see it, he showed it to her. It was on an album leaf, a very simple sketch. She did not recognize herself in it, and thought he had represented her with a kind of soul that she did not have.

“Ah, is that the way in which you see me? Is that the way in which you love me?”

He closed the album.

“No; this is only a note. But I think the note is just. It is probable you do not see yourself exactly as I see you. Every human creature is a different being for every one that looks at it.”



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He added, with a sort of gayety:

"In that sense one may say one woman never belonged to two men. That is one of Paul Vence's ideas."

"I think it is true," said Therese.

It was seven o'clock. She said she must go. Every day she returned home later. Her husband had noticed it. He had said: "We are the last to arrive at all the dinners; there is a fatality about it!" But, detained every day in the Chamber of Deputies, where the budget was being discussed, and absorbed by the work of a subcommittee of which he was the chairman, state reasons excused Therese's lack of punctuality. She recalled smilingly a night when she had arrived at Madame Garain's at half-past eight. She had feared to cause a scandal. But it was a day of great affairs. Her husband came from the Chamber at nine o'clock only, with Garain. They dined in morning dress. They had saved the Ministry.

Then she fell into a dream.

"When the Chamber shall be adjourned, my friend, I shall not have a pretext to remain in Paris. My father does not understand my devotion to my husband which makes me stay in Paris. In a week I shall have to go to Dinard. What will become of me without you?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him with a sadness infinitely tender. But he, more sombre, said:

"It is I, Therese, it is I who must ask anxiously, What will become of me without you? When you leave me alone I am assailed by painful thoughts; black ideas come and sit in a circle around me."

She asked him what those ideas were.

He replied:

"My beloved, I have already told you: I have to forget you with you. When you are gone, your memory will torment me. I have to pay for the happiness you give me."

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEWS OF LE MENIL

The blue sea, studded with pink shoals, threw its silvery fringe softly on the fine sand of the beach, along the amphitheatre terminated by two golden horns. The beauty of the



day threw a ray of sunlight on the tomb of Chateaubriand. In a room where a balcony looked out upon the beach, the ocean, the islands, and the promontories, Therese was reading the letters which she had found in the morning at the St. Malo post-office, and which she had not opened in the boat, loaded with passengers. At once, after breakfast, she had closeted herself in her room, and there, her letters unfolded on her knees, she relished hastily her furtive joy. She was to drive at two o'clock on the mall with her father, her husband, the Princess Seniavine; Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, the wife of the Deputy, and Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician. She had two letters that day. The first one she read exhaled a tender aroma of love. Jacques had never displayed more simplicity, more happiness, and more charm.

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Since he had been in love with her, he said, he had walked so lightly and was supported by such joy that his feet did not touch the earth. He had only one fear, which was that he might be dreaming, and might awake unknown to her. Doubtless he was only dreaming. And what a dream! He was like one intoxicated and singing. He had not his reason, happily. Absent, he saw her continually. "Yes, I see you near me; I see your lashes shading eyes the gray of which is more delicious than all the blue of the sky and the flowers; your lips, which have the taste of a marvellous fruit; your cheeks, where laughter puts two adorable dimples; I see you beautiful and desired, but fleeing and gliding away; and when I open my arms, you have gone; and I see you afar on the long, long beach, not taller than a fairy, in your pink gown, under your parasol. Oh, so small! —small as you were one day when I saw you from the height of the Campanile in the square at Florence. And I say to myself, as I said that day: 'A bit of grass would suffice to hide her from me, yet she is for me the infinite of joy and of pain.'"

He complained of the torments of absence. And he mingled with his complaints the smiles of fortunate love. He threatened jokingly to surprise her at Dinard. "Do not be afraid. They will not recognize me. I shall be disguised as a vender of plaster images. It will not be a lie. Dressed in gray tunic and trousers, my beard and face covered with white dust, I shall ring the bell of the Montessuy villa. You may recognize me, Therese, by the statuettes on the plank placed on my head. They will all be cupids. There will be faithful Love, jealous Love, tender Love, vivid Love; there will be many vivid Loves. And I shall shout in the rude and sonorous language of the artisans of Pisa or of Florence: 'Tutti gli Amori per la Signora Teersinal!'"

The last page of this letter was tender and grave. There were pious effusions in it which reminded Therese of the prayer-books she read when a child. "I love you, and I love everything in you: the earth that carries you, on which you weigh so lightly, and which you embellish; the light that allows me to see you; the air you breathe. I like the bent tree of my yard because you have seen it. I have walked tonight on the avenue where I met you one winter night. I have culled a branch of the boxwood at which you looked. In this city, where you are not, I see only you."

He said at the end of his letter that he was to dine out. In the absence of Madame Fusellier, who had gone to the country, he should go to a wine-shop of the Rue Royale where he was known. And there, in the indistinct crowd, he should be alone with her.

Therese, made languid by the softness of invisible caresses, closed her eyes and threw back her head on the armchair. When she heard the noise of the carriage coming near the house, she opened the second letter. As soon as she saw the altered handwriting of it, the lines precipitate and uneven, the distracted look of the address, she was troubled.

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Its obscure beginning indicated sudden anguish and black suspicion: "Therese, Therese, why did you give yourself to me if you were not giving yourself to me wholly? How does it serve me that you have deceived me, now that I know what I did not wish to know?"

She stopped; a veil came over her eyes. She thought:

"We were so happy a moment ago. What has happened? And I was so pleased at his joy, when it had already gone; it would be better not to write, since letters show only vanished sentiments and effaced ideas."

She read further. And seeing that he was full of jealousy, she felt discouraged.

"If I have not proved to him that I love him with all my strength, that I love him with all there is in me, how am I ever to persuade him of it?"

And she was impatient to discover the cause of his folly. Jacques told it. While taking breakfast in the Rue Royale he had met a former companion who had just returned from the seaside. They had talked together; chance made that man speak of the Countess Martin, whom he knew. And at once, interrupting the narration, Jacques exclaimed: "Therese, Therese, why did you lie to me, since I was sure to learn some day that of which I alone was ignorant? But the error is mine more than yours. The letter which you put into the San Michele post-box, your meeting at the Florence station, would have enlightened me if I had not obstinately retained my illusions and disdained evidence.

"I did not know; I wished to remain ignorant. I did not ask you anything, from fear that you might not be able to continue to lie; I was prudent; and it has happened that an idiot suddenly, brutally, at a restaurant table, has opened my eyes and forced me to know. Oh, now that I know, now that I can not doubt, it seems to me that to doubt would be delicious! He gave the name—the name which I heard at Fiesole from Miss Bell, and he added: 'Everybody knows about that.'

"So you loved him. You love him still! He is near you, doubtless. He goes every year to the Dinard races. I have been told so. I see him. I see everything. If you knew the images that worry me, you would say, 'He is mad,' and you would take pity on me. Oh, how I should like to forget you and everything! But I can not. You know very well I can not forget you except with you. I see you incessantly with him. It is torture. I thought I was unfortunate that night on the banks of the Arno. But I did not know then what it is to suffer. To-day I know."

As she finished reading that letter, Therese thought: "A word thrown haphazard has placed him in that condition, a word has made him despairing and mad." She tried to think who might be the wretched fellow who could have talked in that way. She suspected two or three young men whom Le Menil had introduced to her once, warning

her not to trust them. And with one of the white and cold fits of anger she had inherited from her father she said to herself:

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"I must know who he is." In the meanwhile what was she to do? Her lover in despair, mad, ill, she could not run to him, embrace him, and throw herself on him with such an abandonment that he would feel how entirely she was his, and be forced to believe in her. Should she write? How much better it would be to go to him, to fall upon his heart and say to him: "Dare to believe I am not yours only!" But she could only write. She had hardly begun her letter when she heard voices and laughter in the garden. Therese went down, tranquil and smiling; her large straw hat threw on her face a transparent shadow wherein her gray eyes shone.

"How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Princess Seniavine. "What a pity it is we never see her! In the morning she is promenading in the alleys of Saint Malo, in the afternoon she is closeted in her room. She runs away from us."

The coach turned around the large circle of the beach at the foot of the villas and gardens on the hillside. And they saw at the left the ramparts and the steeple of St. Malo rise from the blue sea. Then the coach went into a road bordered by hedges, along which walked Dinard women, erect under their wide headdresses.

"Unfortunately," said Madame Raymond, seated on the box by Montessuy's side, "old costumes are dying out. The fault is with the railways."

"It is true," said Montessuy, "that if it were not for the railways the peasants would still wear their picturesque costumes of other times. But we should not see them."

"What does it matter?" replied Madame Raymond. "We could imagine them."

"But," asked the Princess Seniavine, "do you ever see interesting things? I never do."

Madame Raymond, who had taken from her husband's books a vague tint of philosophy, declared that things were nothing, and that the idea was everything.

Without looking at Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, seated at her right, the Countess Martin murmured:

"Oh, yes, people see only their ideas; they follow only their ideas. They go along, blind and deaf. One can not stop them."

"But, my dear," said Count Martin, placed in front of her, by the Princess's side, "without leading ideas one would go haphazard. Have you read, Montessuy, the speech delivered by Loyer at the unveiling of the Cadet-Gassicourt statue? The beginning is remarkable. Loyer is not lacking in political sense."

The carriage, having traversed the fields bordered with willows, went up a hill and advanced on a vast, wooded plateau. For a long time it skirted the walls of the park.

“Is it the Gueric?” asked the Princess Seniavine.

Suddenly, between two stone pillars surmounted by lions, appeared the closed gate. At the end of a long alley stood the gray stones of a castle.

“Yes,” said Montessuy, “it is the Gueric.”

And, addressing Therese:



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"You knew the Marquis de Re? At sixty-five he had retained his strength and his youth. He set the fashion and was loved. Young men copied his frockcoat, his monocle, his gestures, his exquisite insolence, his amusing fads. Suddenly he abandoned society, closed his house, sold his stable, ceased to show himself. Do you remember, Therese, his sudden disappearance? You had been married a short time. He called on you often. One fine day people learned that he had quitted Paris. This is the place where he had come in winter. People tried to find a reason for his sudden retreat; some thought he had run away under the influence of sorrow or humiliation, or from fear that the world might see him grow old. He was afraid of old age more than of anything else. For seven years he has lived in retirement from society; he has not gone out of the castle once. He receives at the Gueric two or three old men who were his companions in youth. This gate is opened for them only. Since his retirement no one has seen him; no one ever will see him. He shows the same care to conceal himself that he had formerly to show himself. He has not suffered from his decline. He exists in a sort of living death."

And Therese, recalling the amiable old man who had wished to finish gloriously with her his life of gallantry, turned her head and looked at the Gueric lifting its four towers above the gray summits of oaks.

On their return she said she had a headache and that she would not take dinner. She locked herself in her room and drew from her jewel casket the lamentable letter. She read over the last page.

"The thought that you belong to another burns me. And then, I did not wish that man to be the one."

It was a fixed idea. He had written three times on the same leaf these words: "I did not wish that man to be the one."

She, too, had only one idea: not to lose him. Not to lose him, she would have said anything, she would have done anything. She went to her table and wrote, under the spur of a tender, and plaintive violence, a letter wherein she repeated like a groan: "I love you, I love you! I never have loved any one but you. You are alone, alone—do you hear?—in my mind, in me. Do not think of what that wretched man said. Listen to me! I never loved any one, I swear, any one, before you."

As she was writing, the soft sigh of the sea accompanied her own sigh. She wished to say, she believed she was saying, real things; and all that she was saying was true of the truth of her love. She heard the heavy step of her father on the stairway. She hid her letter and opened the door. Montessuy asked her whether she felt better.

"I came," he said, "to say good-night to you, and to ask you something. It is probable that I shall meet Le Menil at the races. He goes there every year. If I meet him, darling,

would you have any objection to my inviting him to come here for a few days? Your husband thinks he would be agreeable company for you. We might give him the blue room."

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"As you wish. But I should prefer that you keep the blue room for Paul Vence, who wishes to come. It is possible, too, that Choulette may come without warning. It is his habit. We shall see him some morning ringing like a beggar at the gate. You know my husband is mistaken when he thinks Le Menil pleases me. And then I must go to Paris next week for two or three days."

CHAPTER XXIX

JEALOUSY

Twenty-four hours after writing her letter, Therese went from Dinard to the little house in the Ternes. It had not been difficult for her to find a pretext to go to Paris. She had made the trip with her husband, who wanted to see his electors whom the Socialists were working over. She surprised Jacques in the morning, at the studio, while he was sketching a tall figure of Florence weeping on the shore of the Arno.

The model, seated on a very high stool, kept her pose. She was a long, dark girl. The harsh light which fell from the skylight gave precision to the pure lines of her hip and thighs, accentuated her harsh visage, her dark neck, her marble chest, the lines of her knees and feet, the toes of which were set one over the other. Therese looked at her curiously, divining her exquisite form under the miseries of her flesh, poorly fed and badly cared for.

Dechartre came toward Therese with an air of painful tenderness which moved her. Then, placing his clay and the instrument near the easel, and covering the figure with a wet cloth, he said to the model:

"That is enough for to-day."

She rose, picked up awkwardly her clothing, a handful of dark wool and soiled linen, and went to dress behind the screen.

Meanwhile the sculptor, having dipped in the water of a green bowl his hands, which the tenacious clay made white, went out of the studio with Therese.

They passed under the tree which studded the sand of the courtyard with the shells of its flayed bark. She said:

"You have no more faith, have you?"

He led her to his room.

The letter written from Dinard had already softened his painful impressions. She had come at the moment when, tired of suffering, he felt the need of calm and of

tenderness. A few lines of handwriting had appeased his mind, fed on images, less susceptible to things than to the signs of things; but he felt a pain in his heart.

In the room where everything spoke of her, where the furniture, the curtains, and the carpets told of their love, she murmured soft words:

“You could believe—do you not know what you are?—it was folly! How can a woman who has known you care for another after you?”

“But before?”

“Before, I was waiting for you.”

“And he did not attend the races at Dinard?”

She did not think he had, and it was very certain she did not attend them herself. Horses and horsey men bored her.

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“Jacques, fear no one, since you are not comparable to any one.”

He knew, on the contrary, how insignificant he was and how insignificant every one is in this world where beings, agitated like grains in a van, are mixed and separated by a shake of the rustic or of the god. This idea of the agricultural or mystical van represented measure and order too well to be exactly applied to life. It seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill. He had had a vivid sensation of this the day before, when he saw Madame Fusellier grinding coffee in her mill.

Therese said to him:

“Why are you not conceited?”

She added few words, but she spoke with her eyes, her arms, the breath that made her bosom rise.

In the happy surprise of seeing and hearing her, he permitted himself to be convinced.

She asked who had said so odious a thing.

He had no reason to conceal his name from her. It was Daniel Salomon.

She was not surprised. Daniel Salomon, who passed for not having been the lover of any woman, wished at least to be in the confidence of all and know their secrets. She guessed the reason why he had talked.

“Jacques, do not be cross at what I say to you. You are not skilful in concealing your sentiments. He suspected you were in love with me, and he wished to be sure of it. I am persuaded that now he has no doubt of our relations. But that is indifferent to me. On the contrary, if you knew better how to dissimulate, I should be less happy. I should think you did not love me enough.”

For fear of disquieting him, she turned to other thoughts:

“I have not told you how much I like your sketch. It is Florence on the Arno. Then it is we?”

“Yes, I have placed in that figure the emotion of my love. It is sad, and I wish it were beautiful. You see, Therese, beauty is painful. That is why, since life is beautiful, I suffer.”

He took out of his flannel coat his cigarette-holder, but she told him to dress. She would take him to breakfast with her. They would not quit each other that day. It would be delightful.

She looked at him with childish joy. Then she became sad, thinking she would have to return to Dinard at the end of the week, later go to Joinville, and that during that time they would be separated.

At Joinville, at her father's, she would cause him to be invited for a few days. But they would not be free and alone there, as they were in Paris.

"It is true," he said, "that Paris is good to us in its confused immensity."

And he added:

"Even in your absence I can not quit Paris. It would be terrible for me to live in countries that do not know you. A sky, mountains, trees, fountains, statues which do not know how to talk of you would have nothing to say to me."

While he was dressing she turned the leaves of a book which she had found on the table. It was *The Arabian Nights*. Romantic engravings displayed here and there in the text grand viziers, sultanas, black tunics, bazaars, and caravans.

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She asked:

“The Arabian Nights-does that amuse you?”

“A great deal,” he replied, tying his cravat. “I believe as much as I wish in these Arabian princes whose legs become black marble, and in these women of the harem who wander at night in cemeteries. These tales give me pleasant dreams which make me forget life. Last night I went to bed in sadness and read the history of the Three Calendars.”

She said, with a little bitterness:

“You are trying to forget. I would not consent for anything in the world to lose the memory of a pain which came to me from you.”

They went down together to the street. She was to take a carriage a little farther on and precede him at her house by a few minutes.

“My husband expects you to breakfast.”

They talked, on the way, of insignificant things, which their love made great and charming. They arranged their afternoon in advance in order to put into it the infinity of profound joy and of ingenious pleasure. She consulted him about her gowns. She could not decide to leave him, happy to walk with him in the streets, which the sun and the gayety of noon filled. When they reached the Avenue des Ternes they saw before them, on the avenue, shops displaying side by side a magnificent abundance of food. There were chains of chickens at the caterer's, and at the fruiterer's boxes of apricots and peaches, baskets of grapes, piles of pears. Wagons filled with fruits and flowers bordered the sidewalk. Under the awning of a restaurant men and women were taking breakfast. Therese recognized among them, alone, at a small table against a laurel-tree in a box, Choulette lighting his pipe.

Having seen her, he threw superbly a five-franc piece on the table, rose, and bowed. He was grave; his long frock-coat gave him an air of decency and austerity.

He said he should have liked to call on Madame Martin at Dinard, but he had been detained in the Vendee by the Marquise de Rieu. However, he had issued a new edition of the Jardin Clos, augmented by the Verger de Sainte-Claire. He had moved souls which were thought to be insensible, and had made springs come out of rocks.

“So,” he said, “I was, in a fashion, a Moses.”

He fumbled in his pocket and drew from a book a letter, worn and spotted.

“This is what Madame Raymond, the Academician’s wife, writes me. I publish what she says, because it is creditable to her.”

And, unfolding the thin leaves, he read:

“I have made your book known to my husband, who exclaimed: ‘It is pure spiritualism. Here is a closed garden, which on the side of the lilies and white roses has, I imagine, a small gate opening on the road to the Academie.’”

Choulette relished these phrases, mingled in his mouth with the perfume of whiskey, and replaced carefully the letter in its book.

Madame Martin congratulated the poet on being Madame Raymond’s candidate.

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"You should be mine, Monsieur Choulette, if I were interested in Academic elections. But does the Institute excite your envy?"

He kept for a few moments a solemn silence, then:

"I am going now, Madame, to confer with divers notable persons of the political and religious worlds who reside at Neuilly. The Marquise de Rieu wishes me to be a candidate, in her country, for a senatorial seat which has become vacant by the death of an old man, who was, they say, a general during his illusory life. I shall consult with priests, women and children—oh, eternal wisdom!—of the Bineau Boulevard. The constituency whose suffrages I shall attempt to obtain inhabits an undulated and wooded land wherein willows frame the fields. And it is not a rare thing to find in the hollow of one of these old willows the skeleton of a Chouan pressing his gun against his breast and holding his beads in his fleshless fingers. I shall have my programme posted on the bark of oaks. I shall say 'Peace to presbyteries! Let the day come when bishops, holding in their hands the wooden crook, shall make themselves similar to the poorest servant of the poorest parish! It was the bishops who crucified Jesus Christ. Their names were Anne and Caiph. And they still retain these names before the Son of God. While they were nailing Him to the cross, I was the good thief hanged by His side.'"

He lifted his stick and pointed toward Neuilly:

"Dechartre, my friend, do you not think the Bineau Boulevard is the dusty one over there, at the right?"

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette," said Therese. "Remember me when you are a senator."

"Madame, I do not forget you in any of my prayers, morning and evening. And I say to God: 'Since, in your anger, you gave to her riches and beauty, regard her, Lord, with kindness, and treat her in accordance with your sovereign mercy.'"

And he went erect, and dragging his leg, along the populous avenue.

CHAPTER XXX

A LETTER FROM ROBERT

Enveloped in a mantle of pink broad cloth, Therese went down the steps with Dechartre. He had come in the morning to Joinville. She had made him join the circle of her intimate friends, before the hunting-party to which she feared Le Menil had been invited, as was the custom. The light air of September agitated the curls of her hair, and the sun made golden darts shine in the profound gray of her eyes. Behind them, the

facade of the palace displayed above the three arcades of the first story, in the intervals of the windows, on long tables, busts of Roman emperors. The house was placed between two tall pavilions which their great slate roofs made higher, over pillars of the Ionic order. This style betrayed the art of the architect Leveau, who had constructed, in 1650, the castle of Joinville-sur-Oise for that rich Mareuilles, creature of Mazarin, and fortunate accomplice of Fouquet.

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Therese and Jacques saw before them the flower-beds designed by Le Notre, the green carpet, the fountain; then the grotto with its five rustic arcades crowned by the tall trees on which autumn had already begun to spread its golden mantle.

"This green geometry is beautiful," said Dechartre.

"Yes," said Therese. "But I think of the tree bent in the small courtyard where grass grows among the stones. We shall build a beautiful fountain in it, shall we not, and put flowers in it?"

Leaning against one of the stone lions with almost human faces, that guarded the steps, she turned her head toward the castle, and, looking at one of the windows, said:

"There is your room; I went into it last night. On the same floor, on the other side, at the other end, is my father's office. A white wooden table, a mahogany portfolio, a decanter on the mantelpiece: his office when he was a young man. Our entire fortune came from that place."

Through the sand-covered paths between the flowerbeds they walked to the boxwood hedge which bordered the park on the southern side. They passed before the orange-grove, the monumental door of which was surmounted by the Lorraine cross of Mareuilles, and then passed under the linden-trees which formed an alley on the lawn. Statues of nymphs shivered in the damp shade studded with pale lights. A pigeon, posed on the shoulder of one of the white women, fled. From time to time a breath of wind detached a dried leaf which fell, a shell of red gold, where remained a drop of rain. Therese pointed to the nymph and said:

"She saw me when I was a girl and wishing to die. I suffered from dreams and from fright. I was waiting for you. But you were so far away!"

The linden alley stopped near the large basin, in the centre of which was a group of tritons blowing in their shells to form, when the waters played, a liquid diadem with flowers of foam.

"It is the Joinville crown," she said.

She pointed to a pathway which, starting from the basin, lost itself in the fields, in the direction of the rising sun.

"This is my pathway. How often I walked in it sadly! I was sad when I did not know you."

They found the alley which, with other lindens and other nymphs, went beyond. And they followed it to the grottoes. There was, in the rear of the park, a semicircle of five large niches of rocks surmounted by balustrades and separated by gigantic Terminus

gods. One of these gods, at a corner of the monument, dominated all the others by his monstrous nudity, and lowered on them his stony look.

“When my father bought Joinville,” she said, “the grottoes were only ruins, full of grass and vipers. A thousand rabbits had made holes in them. He restored the Terminus gods and the arcades in accordance with prints by Perrelle, which are preserved at the Bibliotheque Nationale. He was his own architect.”

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A desire for shade and mystery led them toward the arbor near the grottoes. But the noise of footsteps which they heard, coming from the covered alley, made them stop for a moment, and they saw, through the leaves, Montessuy, with his arm around the Princess Seniavine's waist. Quietly they were walking toward the palace. Jacques and Therese, hiding behind the enormous Terminus god, waited until they had passed.

Then she said to Dechartre, who was looking at her silently:

"That is amazing! I understand now why the Princess Seniavine, this winter, asked my father to advise her about buying horses."

Yet Therese admired her father for having conquered that beautiful woman, who passed for being hard to please, and who was known to be wealthy, in spite of the embarrassments which her mad disorder had caused her. She asked Jacques whether he did not think the Princess was beautiful. He said she had elegance. She was beautiful, doubtless.

Therese led Jacques to the moss-covered steps which, ascending behind the grottoes, led to the Gerbe-de-l'Oise, formed of leaden reeds in the midst of a great pink marble vase. Tall trees closed the park's perspective and stood at the beginning of the forest. They walked under them. They were silent under the faint moan of the leaves.

He pressed her in his arms and placed kisses on her eyelids. Night was descending, the first stars were trembling among the branches. In the damp grass sighed the frog's flutes. They went no farther.

When she took with him, in darkness, the road to the palace, the taste of kisses and of mint remained on her lips, and in her eyes was the image of her lover. She smiled under the lindens at the nymphs who had seen the tears of her childhood. The Swan lifted in the sky its cross of stars, and the moon mirrored its slender horn in the basin of the crown. Insects in the grass uttered appeals to love. At the last turn of the boxwood hedge, Therese and Jacques saw the triple black mass of the castle, and through the wide bay-windows of the first story distinguished moving forms in the red light. The bell rang.

Therese exclaimed:

"I have hardly time to dress for dinner."

And she passed swiftly between the stone lions, leaving her lover under the impression of a fairy-tale vision.

In the drawing-room, after dinner, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles read the newspaper, and the Princess Seniavine played solitaire. Therese sat, her eyes half closed over a book.

The Princess asked whether she found what she was reading amusing.

"I do not know. I was reading and thinking. Paul Vence is right: 'We find only ourselves in books.'"

Through the hangings came from the billiard-room the voices of the players and the click of the balls.

"I have it!" exclaimed the Princess, throwing down the cards.

She had wagered a big sum on a horse which was running that day at the Chantilly races.

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Therese said she had received a letter from Fiesole. Miss Bell announced her forthcoming marriage with Prince Eusebia Albertinelli della Spina.

The Princess laughed:

“There’s a man who will render a service to her.”

“What service?” asked Therese.

“He will disgust her with men, of course.”

Montessuy came into the parlor joyfully. He had won the game.

He sat beside Berthier-d’Eyzelles, and, taking a newspaper from the sofa, said:

“The Minister of Finance announces that he will propose, when the Chamber reassembles, his savings-bank bill.”

This bill was to give to savings-banks the authority to lend money to communes, a proceeding which would take from Montessuy’s business houses their best customers.

“Berthier,” asked the financier, “are you resolutely hostile to that bill?”

Berthier nodded.

Montessuy rose, placed his hand on the Deputy’s shoulder, and said:

“My dear Berthier, I have an idea that the Cabinet will fall at the beginning of the session.”

He approached his daughter.

“I have received an odd letter from Le Menil.”

Therese rose and closed the door that separated the parlor from the billiard-room.

She was afraid of draughts, she said.

“A singular letter,” continued Montessuy. “Le Menil will not come to Joinville. He has bought the yacht Rosebud. He is on the Mediterranean, and can not live except on the water. It is a pity. He is the only one who knows how to manage a hunt.”

At this instant Dechartre came into the room with Count Martin, who, after beating him at billiards, had acquired a great affection for him and was explaining to him the dangers of a personal tax based on the number of servants one kept.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN UNWELCOME APPARITION

A pale winter sun piercing the mists of the Seine, illuminated the dogs painted by Oudry on the doors of the dining room.

Madame Martin had at her right Garain the Deputy, formerly Chancellor, also President of the Council, and at her left Senator Loyer. At Count Martin-Belleme's right was Monsieur Berthier-d'Eyzelles. It was an intimate and serious business gathering. In conformity with Montessuy's prediction, the Cabinet had fallen four days before. Called to the Elysee the same morning, Garain had accepted the task of forming a cabinet. He was preparing, while taking breakfast, the combination which was to be submitted in the evening to the President. And, while they were discussing names, Therese was reviewing within herself the images of her intimate life.

She had returned to Paris with Count Martin at the opening of the parliamentary session, and since that moment had led an enchanted life.

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Jacques loved her; he loved her with a delicious mingling of passion and tenderness, of learned experience and curious ingenuity. He was nervous, irritable, anxious. But the uncertainty of his humor made his gayety more charming. That artistic gayety, bursting out suddenly like a flame, caressed love without offending it. And the playful wit of her lover made Therese marvel. She never could have imagined the infallible taste which he exercised naturally in joyful caprice and in familiar fantasy. At first he had displayed only the monotony of passionate ardor. That alone had captured her. But since then she had discovered in him a gay mind, well stored and diverse, as well as the gift of agreeable flattery.

"To assemble a homogeneous ministry," exclaimed Garain, "is easily said. Yet one must be guided by the tendencies of the various factions of the Chamber."

He was uneasy. He saw himself surrounded by as many snares as those which he had laid. Even his collaborators became hostile to him.

Count Martin wished the new ministry to satisfy the aspirations of the new men.

"Your list is formed of personalities essentially different in origin and in tendency," he said. "Yet the most important fact in the political history of recent years is the possibility, I should say the necessity, to introduce unity of views in the government of the republic. These are ideas which you, my dear Garin, have expressed with rare eloquence."

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles kept silence.

Senator Loyer rolled crumbs with his fingers. He had been formerly a frequenter of beer-halls, and while moulding crumbs or cutting corks he found ideas. He raised his red face. And, looking at Garain with wrinkled eyes wherein red fire sparkled, he said:

"I said it, and nobody would believe it. The annihilation of the monarchical Right was for the chiefs of the Republican party an irreparable misfortune. We governed formerly against it. The real support of a government is the Opposition. The Empire governed against the Orleanists and against us; MacMahon governed against the Republicans. More fortunate, we governed against the Right. The Right—what a magnificent Opposition it was! It threatened, was candid, powerless, great, honest, unpopular! We should have nursed it. We did not know how to do that. And then, of course, everything wears out. Yet it is always necessary to govern against something. There are to-day only Socialists to give us the support which the Right lent us fifteen years ago with so constant a generosity. But they are too weak. We should reenforce them, make of them a political party. To do this at the present hour is the first duty of a State minister."

Garain, who was not cynical, made no answer.

“Garain, do you not yet know,” asked Count Martin, “whether with the Premiership you are to take the Seals or the Interior?”

Garain replied that his decision would depend on the choice which some one else would make. The presence of that personage in the Cabinet was necessary, and he hesitated between two portfolios. Garain sacrificed his personal convenience to superior interests.

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Senator Loyer made a wry face. He wanted the Seals. It was a long-cherished desire. A teacher of law under the Empire, he gave, in cafes, lessons that were appreciated. He had the sense of chicanery. Having begun his political fortune with articles skilfully written in order to attract to himself prosecution, suits, and several weeks of imprisonment, he had considered the press as a weapon of opposition which every good government should break. Since September 4, 1870, he had had the ambition to become Keeper of the Seals, so that everybody might see how the old Bohemian who formerly explained the code while dining on sauerkraut, would appear as supreme chief of the magistracy.

Idiots by the dozen had climbed over his back. Now having become aged in the ordinary honors of the Senate, unpolished, married to a brewery girl, poor, lazy, disillusioned, his old Jacobin spirit and his sincere contempt for the people surviving his ambition, made of him a good man for the Government. This time, as a part of the Garain combination, he imagined he held the Department of Justice. And his protector, who would not give it to him, was an unfortunate rival. He laughed, while moulding a dog from a piece of bread.

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles, calm and grave, caressed his handsome white beard.

"Do you not think, Monsieur Garain, that it would be well to give a place in the Cabinet to the men who have followed from the beginning the political principles toward which we are directing ourselves to-day?"

"They lost themselves in doing it," replied Garam, impatiently. "The politician never should be in advance of circumstances. It is an error to be in the right too soon. Thinkers are not men of business. And then—let us talk frankly—if you want a Ministry of the Left Centre variety, say so: I will retire. But I warn you that neither the Chamber nor the country will sustain you."

"It is evident," said Count Martin, "that we must be sure of a majority."

"With my list, we have a majority," said Garain. "It is the minority which sustained the Ministry against us. Gentlemen, I appeal to your devotion."

And the laborious distribution of the portfolios began again. Count Martin received, in the first place, the Public Works, which he refused, for lack of competency, and afterward the Foreign Affairs, which he accepted without objection.

But M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles, to whom Garain offered Commerce and Agriculture, reserved his decision.

Loyer got the Colonies. He seemed very busy trying to make his bread dog stand on the cloth. Yet he was looking out of the corners of his little wrinkled eyelids at the

Countess Martin and thinking that she was desirable. He vaguely thought of the pleasure of meeting her again.

Leaving Garain to his combination, he was preoccupied by his fair hostess, trying to divine her tastes and her habits, asking her whether she went to the theatre, and if she ever went at night to the coffee-house with her husband. And Therese was beginning to think he was more interesting than the others, with his apparent ignorance of her world and his superb cynicism.

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Gamin arose. He had to see several persons before submitting his list to the President of the Republic. Count Martin offered his carriage, but Garain had one.

"Do you not think," asked Count Martin, "that the President might object to some names?"

"The President," replied Garain, "will be inspired by the necessities of the situation."

He had already gone out of the door when he struck his forehead with his hand.

"We have forgotten the Ministry of War."

"We shall easily find somebody for it among the generals," said Count Martin.

"Ah," exclaimed Garain, "you believe the choice of a minister of war is easy. It is clear you have not, like me, been a member of three cabinets and President of the Council. In my cabinets, and during my presidency the greatest difficulties came from the Ministry of War. Generals are all alike. You know the one I chose for the cabinet that I formed. When we took him, he knew nothing of affairs. He hardly knew there were two Chambers. We had to explain to him all the wheels of parliamentary machinery; we had to teach him that there were an army committee, finance committee, subcommittees, presidents of committees, a budget. He asked that all this information be written for him on a piece of paper. His ignorance of men and of things amazed and alarmed us. In a fortnight he knew the most subtle tricks of the trade; he knew personally all the senators and all the deputies, and was intriguing with them against us. If it had not been for President Grevy's help, he would have overthrown us. And he was a very ordinary general, a general like any other. Oh, no; do not think that the portfolio of war may be given hastily, without reflection."

And Garain still shivered at the thought of his former colleague.

Therese rose. Senator Loyer offered his arm to her, with the graceful attitude that he had learned forty years before at Bullier's dancing-hall. She left the politicians in the drawing-room, and hastened to meet Dechartre.

A rosy mist covered the Seine, the stone quays, and the gilded trees. The red sun threw into the cloudy sky the last glories of the year. Therese, as she went out, relished the sharpness of the air and the dying splendor of the day. Since her return to Paris, happy, she found pleasure every morning in the changes of the weather. It seemed to her, in her generous selfishness, that it was for her the wind blew in the trees, or the fine, gray rain wet the horizon of the avenues; for her, so that she might say, as she entered the little house of the Ternes, "It is windy; it is raining; the weather is pleasant;" mingling thus the ocean of things in the intimacy of her love. And every day was beautiful for her, since each one brought her to the arms of her beloved.

While on her way that day to the little house of the Ternes she thought of her unexpected happiness, so full and so secure. She walked in the last glory of the sun already touched by winter, and said to herself:

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"He loves me; I believe he loves me entirely. To love is easier and more natural for him than for other men. They have in life ideas they think superior to love—faith, habits, interests. They believe in God, or in duties, or in themselves. He believes in me only. I am his God, his duty, and his life."

Then she thought:

"It is true, too, that he needs nobody, not even me. His thoughts alone are a magnificent world in which he could easily live by himself. But I can not live without him. What would become of me if I did not have him?"

She was not alarmed by the violent passion that he had for her. She recalled that she had said to him one day: "Your love for me is only sensual. I do not complain of it; it is perhaps the only true love." And he had replied: "It is also the only grand and strong love. It has its measure and its weapons. It is full of meaning and of images. It is violent and mysterious. It attaches itself to the flesh and to the soul of the flesh. The rest is only illusion and untruth." She was almost tranquil in her joy. Suspicions and anxieties had fled like the mists of a summer storm. The worst weather of their love had come when they had been separated from each other. One should never leave the one whom one loves.

At the corner of the Avenue Marceau and of the Rue Galilee, she divined rather than recognized a shadow that had passed by her, a forgotten form. She thought, she wished to think, she was mistaken. The one whom she thought she had seen existed no longer, never had existed. It was a spectre seen in the limbo of another world, in the darkness of a half light. And she continued to walk, retaining of this ill-defined meeting an impression of coldness, of vague embarrassment, and of pain in the heart.

As she proceeded along the avenue she saw coming toward her newspaper carriers holding the evening sheets announcing the new Cabinet. She traversed the square; her steps followed the happy impatience of her desire. She had visions of Jacques waiting for her at the foot of the stairway, among the marble figures; taking her in his arms and carrying her, trembling from kisses, to that room full of shadows and of delights, where the sweetness of life made her forget life.

But in the solitude of the Avenue MacMahon, the shadow which she had seen at the corner of the Rue Galilee came near her with a directness that was unmistakable.

She recognized Robert Le Menil, who, having followed her from the quay, was stopping her at the most quiet and secure place.

His air, his attitude, expressed the simplicity of motive which had formerly pleased Therese. His face, naturally harsh, darkened by sunburn, somewhat hollowed, but calm, expressed profound suffering.

“I must speak to you.”

She slackened her pace. He walked by her side.

“I have tried to forget you. After what had happened it was natural, was it not? I have done all I could. It was better to forget you, surely; but I could not. So I bought a boat, and I have been travelling for six months. You know, perhaps?”



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She made a sign that she knew.

He continued:

"The Rosebud, a beautiful yacht. There were six men in the crew. I manoeuvred with them. It was a pastime."

He paused. She was walking slowly, saddened, and, above all, annoyed. It seemed to her an absurd and painful thing, beyond all expression, to have to listen to such words from a stranger.

He continued:

"What I suffered on that boat I should be ashamed to tell you."

She felt he spoke the truth.

"Oh, I forgive you—I have reflected alone a great deal. I passed many nights and days on the divan of the deckhouse, turning always the same ideas in my mind. For six months I have thought more than I ever did in my life. Do not laugh. There is nothing like suffering to enlarge the mind. I understand that if I have lost you the fault is mine. I should have known how to keep you. And I said to myself: 'I did not know. Oh; if I could only begin again!' By dint of thinking and of suffering, I understand. I know now that I did not sufficiently share your tastes and your ideas. You are a superior woman. I did not notice it before, because it was not for that that I loved you. Without suspecting it, I irritated you."

She shook her head. He insisted.

"Yes, yes, I often wounded your feelings. I did not consider your delicacy. There were misunderstandings between us. The reason was, we have not the same temperament. And then, I did not know how to amuse you. I did not know how to give you the amusement you need. I did not procure for you the pleasures that a woman as intelligent as you requires."

So simple and so true was he in his regrets and in his pain, she found him worthy of sympathy. She said to him, softly:

"My friend, I never had reason to complain of you."

He continued:

"All I have said to you is true. I understood this when I was alone in my boat. I have spent hours on it to which I would not condemn my worst enemy. Often I felt like throwing myself into the water. I did not do it. Was it because I have religious principles



or family sentiments, or because I have no courage? I do not know. The reason is, perhaps, that from a distance you held me to life. I was attracted by you, since I am here. For two days I have been watching you. I did not wish to reappear at your house. I should not have found you alone; I should not have been able to talk to you. And then you would have been forced to receive me. I thought it better to speak to you in the street. The idea came to me on the boat. I said to myself: 'In the street she will listen to me only if she wishes, as she wished four years ago in the park of Joinville, you know, under the statues, near the crown.'

He continued, with a sigh:

"Yes, as at Joinville, since all is to be begun again. For two days I have been watching you. Yesterday it was raining; you went out in a carriage. I might have followed you and learned where you were going if I wished to do it. I did not do it. I do not wish to do what would displease you."

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She extended her hand to him.

"I thank you. I knew I should not regret the trust I have placed in you."

Alarmed, impatient, fearing what more he might say, she tried to escape him.

"Farewell! You have all life before you. You should be happy. Appreciate it, and do not torment yourself about things that are not worth the trouble."

He stopped her with a look. His face had changed to the violent and resolute expression which she knew.

"I have told you I must speak to you. Listen to me for a minute."

She was thinking of Jacques, who was waiting for her. An occasional passer-by looked at her and went on his way. She stopped under the black branches of a tree, and waited with pity and fright in her soul.

He said:

"I forgive you and forget everything. Take me back. I will promise never to say a word of the past."

She shuddered, and made a movement of surprise and distaste so natural that he stopped. Then, after a moment of reflection:

"My proposition to you is not an ordinary one, I know it well. But I have reflected. I have thought of everything. It is the only possible thing. Think of it, Therese, and do not reply at once."

"It would be wrong to deceive you. I can not, I will not do what you say; and you know the reason why."

A cab was passing slowly near them. She made a sign to the coachman to stop. Le Menil kept her a moment longer.

"I knew you would say this to me, and that is the reason why I say to you, do not reply at once."

Her fingers on the handle of the door, she turned on him the glance of her gray eyes.

It was a painful moment for him. He recalled the time when he saw those charming gray eyes gleam under half-closed lids. He smothered a sob, and murmured:



"Listen; I can not live without you. I love you. It is now that I love you. Formerly I did not know."

And while she gave to the coachman, haphazard, the address of a tailor, Le Menil went away.

The meeting gave her much uneasiness and anxiety. Since she was forced to meet him again, she would have preferred to see him violent and brutal, as he had been at Florence. At the corner of the avenue she said to the coachman:

"To the Ternes."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE RED LILY

It was Friday, at the opera. The curtain had fallen on Faust's laboratory. From the orchestra, opera-glasses were raised in a surveying of the gold and purple theatre. The sombre drapery of the boxes framed the dazzling heads and bare shoulders of women. The amphitheatre bent above the parquette its garland of diamonds, hair, gauze, and satin. In the proscenium boxes were the wife of the Austrian Ambassador and the Duchess Gladwin; in the amphitheatre Berthe d'Osigny and Jane Tulle, the latter made

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famous the day before by the suicide of one of her lovers; in the boxes, Madame Berard de La Malle, her eyes lowered, her long eyelashes shading her pure cheeks; Princess Seniavine, who, looking superb, concealed under her fan panther—like yawnings; Madame de Morlaine, between two young women whom she was training in the elegances of the mind; Madame Meillan, resting assured on thirty years of sovereign beauty; Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles, erect under iron-gray hair sparkling with diamonds. The bloom of her cheeks heightened the austere dignity of her attitude. She was attracting much notice. It had been learned in the morning that, after the failure of Garain's latest combination, M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles had, undertaken the task of forming a Ministry. The papers published lists with the name of Martin-Belleme for the treasury, and the opera-glasses were turned toward the still empty box of the Countess Martin.

A murmur of voices filled the hall. In the third rank of the parquette, General Lariviere, standing at his place, was talking with General de La Briche.

"I will do as you do, my old comrade, I will go and plant cabbages in Touraine."

He was in one of his moments of melancholy, when nothingness appeared to him to be the end of life. He had flattered Garain, and Garain, thinking him too clever, had preferred for Minister of War a shortsighted and national artillery general. At least, the General relished the pleasure of seeing Garain abandoned, betrayed by his friends Berthier-d'Eyzelles and Martin-Belleme. It made him laugh even to the wrinkles of his small eyes. He laughed in profile. Weary of a long life of dissimulation, he gave to himself suddenly the joy of expressing his thoughts.

"You see, my good La Briche, they make fools of us with their civil army, which costs a great deal, and is worth nothing. Small armies are the only good ones. This was the opinion of Napoleon I, who knew."

"It is true, it is very true," sighed General de La Briche, with tears in his eyes.

Montessuy passed before them; Lariviere extended his hand to him.

"They say, Montessuy, that you are the one who checked Garain. Accept my compliments."

Montessuy denied that he had exercised any political influence. He was not a senator nor a deputy, nor a councillor-general. And, looking through his glasses at the hall:

"See, Lariviere, in that box at the right, a very beautiful woman, a brunette."

And he took his seat quietly, relishing the sweets of power.

However, in the hall, in the corridors, the names of the new Ministers went from mouth to mouth in the midst of profound indifference: President of the Council and Minister of the Interior, Berthier-d'Eyzelles; justice and Religions, Loyer; Treasury, Martin-Belleme. All the ministers were known except those of Commerce, War, and the Navy, who were not yet designated.

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The curtain was raised on the wine-shop of Bacchus. The students were singing their second chorus when Madame Martin appeared in her box. Her white gown had sleeves like wings, and on the drapery of her corsage, at the left breast, shone a large ruby lily.

Miss Bell sat near her, in a green velvet Queen Anne gown. Betrothed to Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina, she had come to Paris to order her trousseau.

In the movement and the noise of the kermess she said:

“Darling, you have left at Florence a friend who retains the charm of your memory. It is Professor Arrighi. He reserves for you the praise-which he says is the most beautiful. He says you are a musical creature. But how could Professor Arrighi forget you, darling, since the trees in the garden have not forgotten you? Their unleaved branches lament your absence. Even they regret you, darling.”

“Tell them,” said Therese, “that I have of Fiesole a delightful reminiscence, which I shall always keep.”

In the rear of the opera-box M. Martin-Belleme was explaining in a low voice his ideas to Joseph Springer and to Duviquet. He was saying: “France’s signature is the best in the world.” He was inclined to prudence in financial matters.

And Miss Bell said:

“Darling, I will tell the trees of Fiesole that you regret them and that you will soon come to visit them on their hills. But I ask you, do you see Monsieur Dechartre in Paris? I should like to see him very much. I like him because his mind is graceful. Darling, the mind of Monsieur Dechartre is full of grace and elegance.”

Therese replied M. Jacques Dechartre was doubtless in the theatre, and that he would not fail to come and salute Miss Bell.

The curtain fell on the gayety of the waltz scene. Visitors crowded the foyers. Financiers, artists, deputies met in the anteroom adjoining the box. They surrounded M. Martin-Belleme, murmured polite congratulations, made graceful gestures to him, and crowded one another in order to shake his hand. Joseph Schmoll, coughing, complaining, blind and deaf, made his way through the throng and reached Madame Martin. He took her hand and said:

“They say your husband is appointed Minister. Is it true?”

She knew they were talking of it, but she did not think he had been appointed yet. Her husband was there, why not ask him?

Sensitive to literal truths only, Schmoll said:

“Your husband is not yet a Minister? When he is appointed, I will ask you for an interview. It is an affair of the highest importance.”

He paused, throwing from his gold spectacles the glances of a blind man and of a visionary, which kept him, despite the brutal exactitude of his temperament, in a sort of mystical state of mind. He asked, brusquely:

“Were you in Italy this year, Madame?”

And, without giving her time to answer:

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"I know, I know. You went to Rome. You have looked at the arch of the infamous Titus, that execrable monument, where one may see the seven-branched candlestick among the spoils of the Jews. Well, Madame, it is a shame to the world that that monument remains standing in the city of Rome, where the Popes have subsisted only through the art of the Jews, financiers and money-changers. The Jews brought to Italy the science of Greece and of the Orient. The Renaissance, Madame, is the work of Israel. That is the truth, certain but misunderstood."

And he went through the crowd of visitors, crushing hats as he passed.

Princess Seniavine looked at her friend from her box with the curiosity that the beauty of women at times excited in her. She made a sign to Paul Vence who was near her:

"Do you not think Madame Martin is extraordinarily beautiful this year?"

In the lobby, full of light and gold, General de La Briche asked Lariviere:

"Did you see my nephew?"

"Your nephew, Le Menil?"

"Yes—Robert. He was in the theatre a moment ago."

La Briche remained pensive for a moment. Then he said:

"He came this summer to Semanville. I thought him odd. A charming fellow, frank and intelligent. But he ought to have some occupation, some aim in life."

The bell which announced the end of an intermission between the acts had hushed. In the foyer the two old men were walking alone.

"An aim in life," repeated La Briche, tall, thin, and bent, while his companion, lightened and rejuvenated, hastened within, fearing to miss a scene.

Marguerite, in the garden, was spinning and singing. When she had finished, Miss Bell said to Madame Martin:

"Darling, Monsieur Choulette has written me a perfectly beautiful letter. He has told me that he is very celebrated. And I am glad to know it. He said also: 'The glory of other poets reposes in myrrh and aromatic plants. Mine bleeds and moans under a rain of stones and of oyster-shells.' Do the French, my love, really throw stones at Monsieur Choulette?"

While Therese reassured Miss Bell, Loyer, imperious and somewhat noisy, caused the door of the box to be opened. He appeared wet and spattered with mud.

"I come from the Elysee," he said.

He had the gallantry to announce to Madame Martin, first, the good news he was bringing:

"The decrees are signed. Your husband has the Finances. It is a good portfolio."

"The President of the Republic," inquired M. Martin—Belleme, "made no objection when my name was pronounced?"

"No; Berthier praised the hereditary property of the Martins, your caution, and the links with which you are attached to certain personalities in the financial world whose concurrence may be useful to the government. And the President, in accordance with Garain's happy expression, was inspired by the necessities of the situation. He has signed."

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On Count Martin's yellowed face two or three wrinkles appeared. He was smiling.

"The decree," continued Loyer, "will be published tomorrow. I accompanied myself the clerk who took it to the printer. It was surer. In Grevy's time, and Grevy was not an idiot, decrees were intercepted in the journey from the Elysee to the Quai Voltaire."

And Loyer threw himself on a chair. There, enjoying the view of Madame Martin, he continued:

"People will not say, as they did in the time of my poor friend Gambetta, that the republic is lacking in women. You will give us fine festivals, Madame, in the salons of the Ministry."

Marguerite, looking at herself in the mirror, with her necklace and earrings, was singing the jewel song.

"We shall have to compose the declaration," said Count Martin. "I have thought of it. For my department I have found, I think, a fine formula."

Loyer shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Martin, we have nothing essential to change in the declaration of the preceding Cabinet; the situation is unchanged."

He struck his forehead with his hand.

"Oh, I had forgotten. We have made your friend, old Lariviere, Minister of War, without consulting him. I have to warn him."

He thought he could find him in the boulevard cafe, where military men go. But Count Martin knew the General was in the theatre.

"I must find him," said Loyer.

Bowing to Therese, he said:

"You permit me, Countess, to take your husband?"

They had just gone out when Jacques Dechartre and Paul Vence came into the box.

"I congratulate you, Madame," said Paul Vence.

But she turned toward Dechartre:

"I hope you have not come to congratulate me, too."

Paul Vence asked her if she would move into the apartments of the Ministry.

“Oh, no,” she replied.

“At least, Madame,” said Paul Vence, “you will go to the balls at the Elysees, and we shall admire the art with which you retain your mysterious charm.”

“Changes in cabinets,” said Madame Martin, “inspire you, Monsieur Vence, with very frivolous reflections.”

“Madame,” continued Paul Vence, “I shall not say like Renan, my beloved master: ‘What does Sirius care?’ because somebody would reply with reason ‘What does little Earth care for big Sirius?’ But I am always surprised when people who are adult, and even old, let themselves be deluded by the illusion of power, as if hunger, love, and death, all the ignoble or sublime necessities of life, did not exercise on men an empire too sovereign to leave them anything other than power written on paper and an empire of words. And, what is still more marvellous, people imagine they have other chiefs of state and other ministers than their miseries, their desires, and their imbecility. He was a wise man who said: ‘Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges.’”

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"But, Monsieur Vence," said Madame Martin, laughingly, "you are the man who wrote that. I read it."

The two Ministers looked vainly in the theatre and in the corridors for the General. On the advice of the ushers, they went behind the scenes.

Two ballet-dancers were standing sadly, with a foot on the bar placed against the wall. Here and there men in evening dress and women in gauze formed groups almost silent.

Loyer and Martin-Belleme, when they entered, took off their hats. They saw, in the rear of the hall, Lariviere with a pretty girl whose pink tunic, held by a gold belt, was open at the hips.

She held in her hand a gilt pasteboard cup. When they were near her, they heard her say to the General:

"You are old, to be sure, but I think you do as much as he does."

And she was pointing disdainfully to a grinning young man, with a gardenia in his button-hole, who stood near them.

Loyer motioned to the General that he wished to speak to him, and, pushing him against the bar, said:

"I have the pleasure to announce to you that you have been appointed Minister of War."

Lariviere, distrustful, said nothing. That badly dressed man with long hair, who, under his dusty coat, resembled a clown, inspired so little confidence in him that he suspected a snare, perhaps a bad joke.

"Monsieur Loyer is Keeper of the Seals," said Count Martin.

"General, you cannot refuse," Loyer said. "I have said you will accept. If you hesitate, it will be favoring the offensive return of Garain. He is a traitor."

"My dear colleague, you exaggerate," said Count Martin; "but Garain, perhaps, is lacking a little in frankness. And the General's support is urgent."

"The Fatherland before everything," replied Lariviere with emotion.

"You know, General," continued Loyer, "the existing laws are to be applied with moderation."

He looked at the two dancers who were extending their short and muscular legs on the bar.

Lariviere murmured:

"The army's patriotism is excellent; the good-will of the chiefs is at the height of the most critical circumstances."

Loyer tapped his shoulder.

"My dear colleague, there is some use in having big armies."

"I believe as you do," replied Lariviere; "the present army fills the superior necessities of national defence."

"The use of big armies," continued Loyer, "is to make war impossible. One would be crazy to engage in a war these immeasurable forces, the management of which surpasses all human faculty. Is not this your opinion, General?"

General Lariviere winked.

"The situation," he said, "exacts circumspection. We are facing a perilous unknown."

Then Loyer, looking at his war colleague with cynical contempt, said:

"In the very improbable case of a war, don't you think, my dear colleague, that the real generals would be the station-masters?"

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The three Ministers went out by the private stairway. The President of the Council was waiting for them.

The last act had begun; Madame Martin had in her box only Dechartre and Miss Bell. Miss Bell was saying:

"I rejoice, darling, I am exalted, at the thought that you wear on your heart the red lily of Florence. Monsieur Dechartre, whose soul is artistic, must be very glad, too, to see at your corsage that charming jewel.

"I should like to know the jeweller that made it, darling. This lily is lithe and supple like an iris. Oh, it is elegant, magnificent, and cruel. Have you noticed, my love, that beautiful jewels have an air of magnificent cruelty?"

"My jeweller," said Therese, "is here, and you have named him; it is Monsieur Dechartre who designed this jewel."

The door of the box was opened. Therese half turned her head and saw in the shadow Le Menil, who was bowing to her with his brusque suppleness.

"Transmit, I pray you, Madame, my congratulations to your husband."

He complimented her on her fine appearance. He spoke to Miss Bell a few courteous and precise words.

Therese listened anxiously, her mouth half open in the painful effort to say insignificant things in reply. He asked her whether she had had a good season at Joinville. He would have liked to go in the hunting time, but could not. He had gone to the Mediterranean, then he had hunted at Semanville.

"Oh, Monsieur Le Menil," said Miss Bell, "you have wandered on the blue sea. Have you seen sirens?"

No, he had not seen sirens, but for three days a dolphin had swum in the yacht's wake.

Miss Bell asked him if that dolphin liked music.

He thought not.

"Dolphins," he said, "are very ordinary fish that sailors call sea-geese, because they have goose-shaped heads."

But Miss Bell would not believe that the monster which had earned the poet Arion had a goose-shaped head.

“Monsieur Le Menil, if next year a dolphin comes to swim near your boat, I pray you play to him on the flute the Delphic Hymn to Apollo. Do you like the sea, Monsieur Le Menil?”

“I prefer the woods.”

Self-contained, simple, he talked quietly.

“Oh, Monsieur Le Menil, I know you like woods where the hares dance in the moonlight.”

Dechartre, pale, rose and went out.

The church scene was on. Marguerite, kneeling, was wringing her hands, and her head drooped with the weight of her long tresses. The voices of the organ and the chorus sang the death-song.

“Oh, darling, do you know that that death-song, which is sung only in the Catholic churches, comes from a Franciscan hermitage? It sounds like the wind which blows in winter in the trees on the summit of the Alverno.”

Therese did not hear. Her soul had followed Dechartre through the door of her box.

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In the anteroom was a noise of overthrown chairs. It was Schmoll coming back. He had learned that M. Martin-Belleme had recently been appointed Minister. At once he claimed the cross of Commander of the Legion of Honor and a larger apartment at the Institute. His apartment was small, narrow, insufficient for his wife and his five daughters. He had been forced to put his workshop under the roof. He made long complaints, and consented to go only after Madame Martin had promised that she would speak to her husband.

“Monsieur Le Menil,” asked Miss Bell, “shall you go yachting next year?”

Le Menil thought not. He did not intend to keep the Rosebud. The water was tiresome.

And calm, energetic, determined, he looked at Therese.

On the stage, in Marguerite’s prison, Mephistopheles sang, and the orchestra imitated the gallop of horses. Therese murmured:

“I have a headache. It is too warm here.”

Le Menil opened the door.

The clear phrase of Marguerite calling the angels ascended to heaven in white sparks.

“Darling, I will tell you that poor Marguerite does not wish to be saved according to the flesh, and for that reason she is saved in spirit and in truth. I believe one thing, darling, I believe firmly we shall all be saved. Oh, yes, I believe in the final purification of sinners.”

Therese rose, tall and white, with the red flower at her breast. Miss Bell, immovable, listened to the music. Le Menil, in the anteroom, took Madame Martin’s cloak, and, while he held it unfolded, she traversed the box, the anteroom, and stopped before the mirror of the half-open door. He placed on her bare shoulders the cape of red velvet embroidered with gold and lined with ermine, and said, in a low tone, but distinctly:

“Therese, I love you. Remember what I asked you the day before yesterday. I shall be every day, at three o’clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini.”

At this moment, as she made a motion with her head to receive the cloak, she saw Dechartre with his hand on the knob of the door. He had heard. He looked at her with all the reproach and suffering that human eyes can contain. Then he went into the dim corridor. She felt hammers of fire beating in her chest and remained immovable on the threshold.

“You were waiting for me?” said Montessuy. “You are left alone to-day. I will escort you and Miss Bell.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

A WHITE NIGHT

In the carriage, and in her room, she saw again the look of her lover, that cruel and dolorous look. She knew with what facility he fell into despair, the promptness of his will not to will. She had seen him run away thus on the shore of the Arno. Happy then in her sadness and in her anguish, she could run after him and say, "Come." Now, again surrounded, watched, she should have found something to say, and not have let him go from her dumb and desolate. She had remained surprised, stunned. The accident had been so absurd and so rapid! She had against Le Menil the sentiment of simple anger which malicious things cause. She reproached herself bitterly for having permitted her lover to go without a word, without a glance, wherein she could have placed her soul.

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While Pauline waited to undress her, Therese walked to and fro impatiently. Then she stopped suddenly. In the obscure mirrors, wherein the reflections of the candles were drowned, she saw the corridor of the playhouse, and her beloved flying from her through it.

Where was he now? What was he saying to himself alone? It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him and see him again at once.

She pressed her heart with her hands; she was smothering.

Pauline uttered a cry. She saw drops of blood on the white corsage of her mistress.

Therese, without knowing it, had pricked her hand with the red lily.

She detached the emblematic jewel which she had worn before all as the dazzling secret of her heart, and, holding it in her fingers, contemplated it for a long time. Then she saw again the days of Florence—the cell of San Marco, where her lover's kiss weighed delicately on her mouth, while, through her lowered lashes, she vaguely perceived again the angels and the sky painted on the wall, and the dazzling fountain of the ice-vender against the bright cloth; the pavilion of the Via Alfieri, its nymphs, its goats, and the room where the shepherds and the masks on the screens listened to her sighs and noted her long silences.

No, all these things were not shadows of the past, spectres of ancient hours. They were the present reality of her love. And a word stupidly cast by a stranger would destroy these beautiful things! Happily, it was not possible. Her love, her lover, did not depend on such insignificant matters. If only she could run to his house! She would find him before the fire, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, sad. Then she would run her fingers through his hair, force him to lift his head, to see that she loved him, that she was his treasure, palpitating with joy and love.

She had dismissed her maid. In her bed she thought of only one thing.

It was an accident, an absurd accident. He would understand it; he would know that their love had nothing to do with anything so stupid. What folly for him to care about another! As if there were other men in the world!

M. Martin-Belleme half opened the bedroom door. Seeing a light he went in.

“You are not asleep, Therese?”

He had been at a conference with his colleagues. He wanted advice from his wife on certain points. He needed to hear sincere words.

"It is done," he said. "You will help me, I am sure, in my situation, which is much envied, but very difficult and even perilous. I owe it to you somewhat, since it came to me through the powerful influence of your father."

He consulted her on the choice of a Chief of Cabinet.

She advised him as best she could. She thought he was sensible, calm, and not sillier than many others.

He lost himself in reflections.

"I have to defend before the Senate the budget voted by the Chamber of Deputies. The budget contains innovations which I did not approve. When I was a deputy I fought against them. Now that I am a minister I must support them. I saw things from the outside formerly. I see them from the inside now, and their aspect is changed. And, then, I am free no longer."

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He sighed:

“Ah, if the people only knew the little that we can do when we are powerful!”

He told her his impressions. Berthier was reserved. The others were impenetrable. Loyer alone was excessively authoritative.

She listened to him without attention and without impatience. His pale face and voice marked for her like a clock the minutes that passed with intolerable slowness.

Loyer had odd sallies of wit. Immediately after he had declared his strict adhesion to the Concordat, he said: “Bishops are spiritual prefects. I will protect them since they belong to me. And through them I shall hold the guardians of souls, curates.”

He recalled to her that she would have to meet people who were not of her class and who would shock her by their vulgarity. But his situation demanded that he should not disdain anybody. At all events, he counted on her tact and on her devotion.

She looked at him, a little astonished.

“There is no hurry, my dear. We shall see later.”

He was tired. He said good-night and advised her to sleep. She was ruining her health by reading all night. He left her.

She heard the noise of his footsteps, heavier than usual, while he traversed the library, encumbered with blue books and journals, to reach his room, where he would perhaps sleep. Then she felt the weight on her of the night's silence. She looked at her watch. It was half-past one.

She said to herself: “He, too, is suffering. He looked at me with so much despair and anger.”

She was courageous and ardent. She was impatient at being a prisoner. When daylight came, she would go, she would see him, she would explain everything to him. It was so clear! In the painful monotony of her thought, she listened to the rolling of wagons which at long intervals passed on the quay. That noise preoccupied, almost interested her. She listened to the rumble, at first faint and distant, then louder, in which she could distinguish the rolling of the wheels, the creaking of the axles, the shock of horses' shoes, which, decreasing little by little, ended in an imperceptible murmur.

And when silence returned, she fell again into her reverie.

He would understand that she loved him, that she had never loved any one except him. It was unfortunate that the night was so long. She did not dare to look at her watch for fear of seeing in it the immobility of time.

She rose, went to the window, and drew the curtains. There was a pale light in the clouded sky. She thought it might be the beginning of dawn. She looked at her watch. It was half-past three.

She returned to the window. The sombre infinity outdoors attracted her. She looked. The sidewalks shone under the gas-jets. A gentle rain was falling. Suddenly a voice ascended in the silence; acute, and then grave, it seemed to be made of several voices replying to one another. It—was a drunkard disputing with the beings of his dream, to whom he generously gave utterance, and whom he confounded afterward with great gestures and in furious sentences. Therese could see the poor man walk along the parapet in his white blouse, and she could hear words recurring incessantly: “That is what I say to the government.”

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Chilled, she returned to her bed. She thought, "He is jealous, he is madly jealous. It is a question of nerves and of blood. But his love, too, is an affair of blood and of nerves. His love and his jealousy are one and the same thing. Another would understand. It would be sufficient to please his self-love." But he was jealous from the depth of his soul. She knew this; she knew that in him jealousy was a physical torture, a wound enlarged by imagination. She knew how profound the evil was. She had seen him grow pale before the bronze St. Mark when she had thrown the letter in the box on the wall of the old Florentine house at a time when she was his only in dreams.

She recalled his smothered complaints, his sudden fits of sadness, and the painful mystery of the words which he repeated frequently: "I can forget you only when I am with you." She saw again the Dinard letter and his furious despair at a word overheard at a wine-shop table. She felt that the blow had been struck accidentally at the most sensitive point, at the bleeding wound. But she did not lose courage. She would tell everything, she would confess everything, and all her avowals would say to him: "I love you. I have never loved any one except you!" She had not betrayed him. She would tell him nothing that he had not guessed. She had lied so little, as little as possible, and then only not to give him pain. How could he not understand? It was better he should know everything, since everything meant nothing. She represented to herself incessantly the same ideas, repeated to herself the same words.

Her lamp gave only a smoky light. She lighted candles. It was six o'clock. She realized that she had slept. She ran to the window. The sky was black, and mingled with the earth in a chaos of thick darkness. Then she was curious to know exactly at what hour the sun would rise. She had had no idea of this. She thought only that nights were long in December. She did not think of looking at the calendar. The heavy step of workmen walking in squads, the noise of wagons of milkmen and marketmen, came to her ear like sounds of good augury. She shuddered at this first awakening of the city.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"I see the other with you always!"

At nine o'clock, in the yard of the little house, she observed M. Fusellier sweeping, in the rain, while smoking his pipe. Madame Fusellier came out of her box. Both looked embarrassed. Madame Fusellier was the first to speak:

"Monsieur Jacques is not at home." And, as Therese remained silent, immovable, Fusellier came near her with his broom, hiding with his left hand his pipe behind his back—

"Monsieur Jacques has not yet come home."

“I will wait for him,” said Therese.

Madame Fusellier led her to the parlor, where she lighted the fire. As the wood smoked and would not flame, she remained bent, with her hands on her knees.

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"It is the rain," she said, "which causes the smoke."

Madame Martin said it was not worth while to make a fire, that she did not feel cold.

She saw herself in the glass.

She was livid, with glowing spots on her cheeks. Then only she felt that her feet were frozen. She approached the fire. Madame Fusellier, seeing her anxious, spoke softly to her:

"Monsieur Jacques will come soon. Let Madame warm herself while waiting for him."

A dim light fell with the rain on the glass ceiling.

Upon the wall, the lady with the unicorn was not beautiful among the cavaliers in a forest full of flowers and birds. Therese was repeating to herself the words: "He has not yet come home." And by dint of saying this she lost the meaning of it. With burning eyes she looked at the door.

She remained thus without a movement, without a thought, for a time the duration of which she did not know; perhaps half an hour. The noise of a footstep came to her, the door was opened. He came in. She saw that he was wet with rain and mud, and burning with fever.

She fixed on him a look so sincere and so frank that it struck him. But almost at once he recalled within himself all his sufferings.

He said to her:

"What do you want of me? You have done me all the harm you could do me."

Fatigue gave him an air of gentleness. It frightened her.

"Jacques, listen to me!"

He motioned to her that he wished to hear nothing from her.

"Jacques, listen to me. I have not deceived you. Oh, no, I have not deceived you. Was it possible? Was it—"

He interrupted her:

"Have some pity for me. Do not make me suffer again. Leave me, I pray you. If you knew the night I have passed, you would not have the courage to torment me again."

He let himself fall on the divan. He had walked all night. Not to suffer too much, he had tried to find diversions. On the Bercy Quay he had looked at the moon floating in the clouds. For an hour he had seen it veil itself and reappear. Then he had counted the windows of houses with minute care. The rain began to fall. He had gone to the market and had drunk whiskey in a wine-room. A big girl who squinted had said to him, "You don't look happy." He had fallen half asleep on the leather bench. It had been a moment of oblivion. The images of that painful night passed before his eyes. He said: "I recalled the night of the Arno. You have spoiled for me all the joy and beauty in the world." He asked her to leave him alone. In his lassitude he had a great pity for himself. He would have liked to sleep—not to die; he held death in horror—but to sleep and never to wake again. Yet, before him, as desirable as formerly, despite the painful fixity of her dry eyes, and more mysterious than ever, he saw her. His hatred was vivified by suffering.

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She extended her arms to him. "Listen to me, Jacques." He motioned to her that it was useless for her to speak. Yet he wished to listen to her, and already he was listening with avidity. He detested and rejected in advance what she would say, but nothing else in the world interested him.

She said:

"You may have believed I was betraying you, that I was not living for you alone. But can you not understand anything? You do not see that if that man were my lover it would not have been necessary for him to talk to me at the play-house in that box; he would have a thousand other ways of meeting me. Oh, no, my friend, I assure you that since the day when I had the happiness to meet you, I have been yours entirely. Could I have been another's? What you imagine is monstrous. But I love you, I love you! I love only you. I never have loved any one except you."

He replied slowly, with cruel heaviness:

"I shall be every day, at three o'clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini.' It was not a lover, your lover, who said these things? No! it was a stranger, an unknown person."

She straightened herself, and with painful gravity said:

"Yes, I had been his. You knew it. I have denied it, I have told an untruth, not to irritate or grieve you. I saw you so anxious. But I lied so little and so badly. You knew. Do not reproach me for it. You knew; you often spoke to me of the past, and then one day somebody told you at the restaurant—and you imagined much more than ever happened. While telling an untruth, I was not deceiving you. If you knew the little that he was in my life! There! I did not know you. I did not know you were to come. I was lonely."

She fell on her knees.

"I was wrong. I should have waited for you. But if you knew how slight a matter that was in my life!"

And with her voice modulated to a soft and singing complaint she said:

"Why did you not come sooner, why?"

She dragged herself to him, tried to take his hands. He repelled her.

"I was stupid. I did not think. I did not know. I did not wish to know."

He rose and exclaimed, in an explosion of hatred:



"I did not wish him to be that man."

She sat in the place which he had left, and there, plaintively, in a low voice, she explained the past. In that time she lived in a world horribly commonplace. She had yielded, but she had regretted at once. If he but knew the sadness of her life he would not be jealous. He would pity her. She shook her head and said, looking at him through the falling locks of her hair:

"I am talking to you of another woman. There is nothing in common between that woman and me. I exist only since I have known you, since I have belonged to you."

He walked about the room madly. He laughed painfully.

"Yes; but while you loved me, the other woman—the one who was not you?"

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She looked at him indignantly:

“Can you believe—”

“Did you not see him again at Florence? Did you not accompany him to the station?”

She told him that he had come to Italy to find her; that she had seen him; that she had broken with him; that he had gone, irritated, and that since then he was trying to win her back; but that she had not even paid any attention to him.

“My beloved, I see, I know, only you in the world.” He shook his head.

“I do not believe you.”

She revolted.

“I have told you everything. Accuse me, condemn me, but do not offend me in my love for you.”

He shook his head.

“Leave me. You have harmed me too much. I have loved you so much that all the pain which you could have given me I would have taken, kept, loved; but this is too hideous. I hate it. Leave me. I am suffering too much. Farewell!”

She stood erect.

“I have come. It is my happiness, it is my life, I am fighting for. I will not go.”

And she said again all that she had already said. Violent and sincere, sure of herself, she explained how she had broken the tie which was already loose and irritated her; how since the day when she had loved him she had been his only, without regret, without a wandering look or thought. But in speaking to him of another she irritated him. And he shouted at her:

“I do not believe you.”

She only repeated her declarations.

And suddenly, instinctively, she looked at her watch:

“Oh, it is noon!”

She had often given that cry of alarm when the farewell hour had surprised them. And Jacques shuddered at the phrase which was so familiar, so painful, and was this time so

desperate. For a few minutes more she said ardent words and shed tears. Then she left him; she had gained nothing.

At her house she found in the waiting-room the marketwoman, who had come to present a bouquet to her. She remembered that her husband was a State minister. There were telegrams, visiting-cards and letters, congratulations and solicitations. Madame Marmet wrote to recommend her nephew to General Lariviere.

She went into the dining-room and fell in a chair. M. Martin-Belleme was just finishing his breakfast. He was expected at the Cabinet Council and at the former Finance Minister's, to whom he owed a call.

"Do not forget, my dear friend, to call on Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles. You know how sensitive she is."

She made no answer. While he was dipping his fingers in the glass bowl, he saw she was so tired that he dared not say any more. He found himself in the presence of a secret which he did not wish to know; in presence of an intimate suffering which one word would reveal. He felt anxiety, fear, and a certain respect.

He threw down his napkin.

"Excuse me, dear."

He went out.

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She tried to eat, but could swallow nothing.

At two o'clock she returned to the little house of the Ternes. She found Jacques in his room. He was smoking a wooden pipe. A cup of coffee almost empty was on the table. He looked at her with a harshness that chilled her. She dared not talk, feeling that everything that she could say would offend and irritate him, and yet she knew that in remaining discreet and dumb she intensified his anger. He knew that she would return; he had waited for her with impatience. A sudden light came to her, and she saw that she had done wrong to come; that if she had been absent he would have desired, wanted, called for her, perhaps. But it was too late; and, at all events, she was not trying to be crafty.

She said to him:

"You see I have returned. I could not do otherwise. And then it was natural, since I love you. And you know it."

She knew very well that all she could say would only irritate him. He asked her whether that was the way she spoke in the Rue Spontini.

She looked at him with sadness.

"Jacques, you have often told me that there were hatred and anger in your heart against me. You like to make me suffer. I can see it."

With ardent patience, at length, she told him her entire life, the little that she had put into it; the sadness of the past; and how, since he had known her, she had lived only through him and in him.

The words fell as limpid as her look. She sat near him. He listened to her with bitter avidity. Cruel with himself, he wished to know everything about her last meetings with the other. She reported faithfully the events of the Great Britain Hotel; but she changed the scene to the outside, in an alley of the Casino, from fear that the image of their sad interview in a closed room should irritate her lover. Then she explained the meeting at the station. She had not wished to cause despair to a suffering man who was so violent. But since then she had had no news from him until the day when he spoke to her on the street. She repeated what she had replied to him. Two days later she had seen him at the opera, in her box. Certainly, she had not encouraged him to come. It was the truth.

It was the truth. But the old poison, slowly accumulating in his mind, burned him. She made the past, the irreparable past, present to him, by her avowals. He saw images of it which tortured him. He said:

"I do not believe you."

And he added:

“And if I believed you, I could not see you again, because of the idea that you have loved that man. I have told you, I have written to you, you remember, that I did not wish him to be that man. And since—”

He stopped.

She said:

“You know very well that since then nothing has happened.”

He replied, with violence:

“Since then I have seen him.”

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They remained silent for a long time. Then she said, surprised and plaintive:

“But, my friend, you should have thought that a woman such as I, married as I was—every day one sees women bring to their lovers a past darker than mine and yet they inspire love. Ah, my past—if you knew how insignificant it was!”

“I know what you can give. One can not forgive to you what one may forgive to another.”

“But, my friend, I am like others.”

“No, you are not like others. To you one can not forgive anything.”

He talked with set teeth. His eyes, which she had seen so large, glowing with tenderness, were now dry, harsh, narrowed between wrinkled lids and cast a new glance at her. He frightened her. She went to the rear of the room, sat on a chair, and there she remained, trembling, for a long time, smothered by her sobs. Then she broke into tears.

He sighed:

“Why did I ever know you?”

She replied, weeping:

“I do not regret having known you. I am dying of it, and I do not regret it. I have loved.”

He stubbornly continued to make her suffer. He felt that he was playing an odious part, but he could not stop.

“It is possible, after all, that you have loved me too.”

She answered, with soft bitterness:

“But I have loved only you. I have loved you too much. And it is for that you are punishing me. Oh, can you think that I was to another what I have been to you?”

“Why not?”

She looked at him without force and without courage.

“It is true that you do not believe me.”

She added softly:

“If I killed myself would you believe me?”



"No, I would not believe you."

She wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief; then, lifting her eyes, shining through her tears, she said:

"Then, all is at an end!"

She rose, saw again in the room the thousand things with which she had lived in laughing intimacy, which she had regarded as hers, now suddenly become nothing to her, and confronting her as a stranger and an enemy. She saw again the nude woman who made, while running, the gesture which had not been explained to her; the Florentine models which recalled to her Fiesole and the enchanted hours of Italy; the profile sketch by Dechartre of the girl who laughed in her pretty pathetic thinness. She stopped a moment sympathetically in front of that little newspaper girl who had come there too, and had disappeared, carried away in the irresistible current of life and of events.

She repeated:

"Then all is at an end?"

He remained silent.

The twilight made the room dim.

"What will become of me?" she asked.

"And what will become of me?" he replied.

They looked at each other with sympathy, because each was moved with self-pity.

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Therese said again:

“And I, who feared to grow old in your eyes, for fear our beautiful love should end! It would have been better if it had never come. Yes, it would be better if I had not been born. What a presentiment was that which came to me, when a child, under the lindens of Joinville, before the marble nymphs! I wished to die then.”

Her arms fell, and clasping her hands she lifted her eyes; her wet glance threw a light in the shadows.

“Is there not a way of my making you feel that what I am saying to you is true? That never since I have been yours, never—But how could I? The very idea of it seems horrible, absurd. Do you know me so little?”

He shook his head sadly. “I do not know you.”

She questioned once more with her eyes all the objects in the room.

“But then, what we have been to each other was vain, useless. Men and women break themselves against one another; they do not mingle.”

She revolted. It was not possible that he should not feel what he was to her. And, in the ardor of her love, she threw herself on him and smothered him with kisses and tears. He forgot everything, and took her in his arms—sobbing, weak, yet happy—and clasped her close with the fierceness of desire. With her head leaning back against the pillow, she smiled through her tears. Then, brusquely he disengaged himself.

“I do not see you alone. I see the other with you always.” She looked at him, dumb, indignant, desperate. Then, feeling that all was indeed at an end, she cast around her a surprised glance of her unseeing eyes, and went slowly away.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Does one ever possess what one loves?
Each was moved with self-pity
Everybody knows about that
(Housemaid) is trained to respect my disorder
I can forget you only when I am with you
I have to pay for the happiness you give me
I love myself because you love me
Ideas they think superior to love—faith, habits, interests
Immobility of time
It is an error to be in the right too soon
It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him
Kissess and caresses are the effort of a delightful despair



Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges
Little that we can do when we are powerful
Love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty
Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain
One is never kind when one is in love
One should never leave the one whom one loves
Seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill
Since she was in love, she had lost prudence
That absurd and generous fury for ownership
The politician never should be in advance of circumstances
The real support of a government is the Opposition
There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget
We are too happy; we are robbing life

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ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the red lily, entire:

A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly
A hero must be human. Napoleon was human
Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere
Brilliance of a fortune too new
Curious to know her face of that day
Disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared
Do you think that people have not talked about us?
Does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality
Does one ever possess what one loves?
Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone
Each was moved with self-pity
Everybody knows about that
Fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city
Gave value to her affability by not squandering it
He could not imagine that often words are the same as actions
He studied until the last moment
He is not intelligent enough to doubt
He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes
He knew now the divine malady of love
Her husband had become quite bearable
His habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth
(Housemaid) is trained to respect my disorder
I love myself because you love me
I can forget you only when I am with you
I wished to spoil our past
I feel in them (churches) the grandeur of nothingness
I have to pay for the happiness you give me
I gave myself to him because he loved me
I haven't a taste, I have tastes
I have known things which I know no more
I do not desire your friendship
Ideas they think superior to love—faith, habits, interests
Immobility of time
Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself
Incapable of conceiving that one might talk without an object
It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him
It is an error to be in the right too soon
It was too late: she did not wish to win
Jealous without having the right to be jealous
Kisses and caresses are the effort of a delightful despair
Knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope



Laughing in every wrinkle of his face
Learn to live without desire
Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges
Life as a whole is too vast and too remote
Life is made up of just such trifles
Life is not a great thing
Little that we can do when we are powerful
Love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty
Love was only a brief intoxication
Lovers never separate kindly
Made life give all it could yield
Magnificent air of those beggars of whom small towns are proud
Miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past

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Nobody troubled himself about that originality
None but fools resisted the current
Not everything is known, but everything is said
Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain
One would think that the wind would put them out: the stars
One who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel
One is never kind when one is in love
One should never leave the one whom one loves
Picturesquely ugly
Recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open
Relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her
Seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill
She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it
She is happy, since she likes to remember
Should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one
Simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others
Since she was in love, she had lost prudence
So well satisfied with his reply that he repeated it twice
Superior men sometimes lack cleverness
That sort of cold charity which is called altruism
That if we live the reason is that we hope
That absurd and generous fury for ownership
The most radical breviary of scepticism since Montaigne
The door of one's room opens on the infinite
The past is the only human reality—Everything that is, is past
The one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you
The violent pleasure of losing
The discouragement which the irreparable gives
The real support of a government is the Opposition
The politician never should be in advance of circumstances
There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget
There are many grand and strong things which you do not feel
They are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle'
To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form
Trying to make Therese admire what she did not know
Umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies
Unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life
Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?
We are too happy; we are robbing life
What will be the use of having tormented ourselves in this world

Whether they know or do not know, they talk
Women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault
You must take me with my own soul!

MONSIEUR, MADAME AND BEBE

By *Gustave Droz*

Antoine-Gustave Droz was born in Paris, June 9, 1832. He was the son of Jules-Antoine Droz, a celebrated French sculptor, and grand son of Jean Pierre Droz, master of the mint and medalist under the Directoire. The family is of Swiss origin. Gustave entered L'Ecole des Beaux Arts and became quite a noted artist, coming out in the Salon of 1857 with the painting 'L'Obole de Cesar'. He also exhibited a little later various 'tableaux de genre': 'Buffet de chemin de fer' (1863), 'A la Sacristie' and 'Un Succes de Salon' (1864), 'Monsieur le Cure, vous avez Raison' and 'Un Froid Sec' (1865).



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Toward this period, however, he abandoned the art of painting and launched on the career of an author, contributing under the name of Gustave Z.... to 'La Vie Parisienne'. His articles found great favor, he showed himself an exquisite raconteur, a sharp observer of intimate family life, and a most penetrating analyst. The very gallant sketches, later reunited in 'Monsieur, Madame, et Bebe' (1866), and crowned by the Academy, have gone through many editions. 'Entre nous' (1867) and 'Une Femme genante', are written in the same humorous strain, and procured him many admirers by the vivacious and sparkling representations of bachelor and connubial life. However, Droz knows very well where to draw the line, and has formally disavowed a lascivious novel published in Belgium—'Un Ete a la campagne', often, but erroneously, attributed to him.

It seems that Gustave Droz later joined the pessimistic camp. His works, at least, indicate other qualities than those which gained for him the favor of the reading public. He becomes a more ingenious romancer, a more delicate psychologist. If some of his sketches are realistic, we must consider that realism is not intended 'pour les jeunes filles du pensiannat'.

Beside the works mentioned in the above text, Gustave Droz wrote: 'Le Cahier bleu de Mademoiselle Cibot' (1868), 'Auteur d'une Source' (1869), 'Un Paquet de Lettres' (1870), 'Babolain' (1872), 'Les Etangs' (1875), 'Tristesses et Sourires' (1883), and 'L'Enfant' (1884).

He died in Paris, October 22, 1895.

Camille Doucet
de l'Academie Francaise.

CHAPTER I

MY FIRST SUPPER PARTY

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

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

I really think I should have married her, and that cheerfully, I can assure you, if it had not been that on certain details of moral weakness her past life inspired me with doubts, and her present with uneasiness. No man is perfect; I was a trifle jealous.

Well, one evening—it was Christmas eve—I called to take her to supper with a friend of mine whom I esteemed much, and who became an examining magistrate, I do not know where, but he is now dead.

I went upstairs to the room of the sweet girl, and was quite surprised to find her ready to start. She had on, I remember, a square-cut bodice, a little too low to my taste, but it became her so well that when she embraced me I was tempted to say: “I say, pet, suppose we remain here”; but she took my arm, humming a favorite air of hers, and we soon found ourselves in the street.

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You have experienced, have you not, this first joy of the youth who at once becomes a man when he has his sweetheart on his arm? He trembles at his boldness, and scents on the morrow the paternal rod; yet all these fears are dissipated in the presence of the ineffable happiness of the moment. He is free, he is a man, he loves, he is loved, he is conscious that he is taking a forward step in life. He would like all Paris to see him thus, yet he is afraid of being recognized; he would give his little finger to grow three hairs on his upper lip, and to have a wrinkle on his brow, to be able to smoke a cigar without being sick, and to polish off a glass of punch without coughing.

When we reached my friend's, the aforesaid examining magistrate, we found a numerous company; from the anteroom we could hear bursts of laughter, noisy conversation, accompanied by the clatter of plate and crockery, which was being placed upon the table. I was a little excited; I knew that I was the youngest of the party, and I was afraid of appearing awkward on that night of revelry. I said to myself: "Old boy, you must face the music, do the grand, and take your liquor like a little man; your sweetheart is here, and her eyes are fixed on you." The idea, however, that I might be ill next morning did indeed trouble me; in my mind's eye, I saw my poor mother bringing me a cup of tea, and weeping over my excesses, but I chased away all such thoughts and really all went well up till suppertime. My sweetheart had been pulled about a little, no doubt; one or two men had even kissed her under my very nose, but I at once set down these details to the profit and loss column, and in all sincerity I was proud and happy.

"My young friends," suddenly exclaimed our host, "it is time to use your forks vigorously. Let us adjourn to the diningroom."

Joyful shouts greeted these words, and, amid great disorder, the guests arranged themselves round the table, at each end of which I noticed two plates filled up with those big cigars of which I could not smoke a quarter without having a fit of cold shivers.

"Those cigars will lead to a catastrophe, if I don't use prudence and dissemble," said I to myself.

I do not know how it was, but my sweetheart found herself seated on the left of the host. I did not like that, but what could I say? And then, the said host, with his twenty-five summers, his moustache curled up at the ends, and his self-assurance, seemed to me the most ideal, the most astounding of young devils, and I felt for him a shade of respect.

"Well," he said, with captivating volubility, "you are feeling yourself at home, are you not? You know any guest who feels uncomfortable in his coat may take it off . . . and the ladies, too. Ha! ha! ha! That's the way to make one's self happy, is it not, my little dears?" And before he had finished laughing he printed a kiss right and left on the necks of his two neighbors, one of whom, as I have already said, was my beloved.

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The ill-bred dog! I felt my hair rise on end and my face glow like red-hot iron. For the rest, everybody burst out laughing, and from that moment the supper went on with increased animation.

“My young friends,” was the remark of that infernal examining magistrate, “let us attack the cold meat, the sausages, the turkey, the salad; let us at the cakes, the cheese, the oysters, and the grapes; let us attack the whole show. Waiter, draw the corks and we will eat up everything at once, eh, my cherubs? No ceremony, no false delicacy. This is fine fun; it is Oriental, it is splendid. In the centre of Africa everybody acts in this manner. We must introduce poetry into our pleasures. Pass me some cheese with my turkey. Ha! ha! ha! I feel queer, I am wild, I am crazy, am I not, pets?” And he bestowed two more kisses, as before. If I had not been already drunk, upon my honor, I should have made a scene.

I was stupid. Around me they were laughing, shouting, singing, and rattling their plates. A racket of popping corks and breaking glasses buzzed in my ears, but it seemed to me that a cloud had risen between me and the outer world; a veil separated me from the other guests, and, in spite of the evidence of my senses, I thought I was dreaming. I could distinguish, however, though in a confused manner, the animated glances and heightened color of the guests, and, above all, a disorder quite new to me in the toilettes of the ladies. Even my sweetheart appeared to have changed. Suddenly—it was as a flash of lightning—my beloved, my angel, my ideal, she whom that very morning I was ready to marry, leaned toward the examining magistrate and—I still feel the cold shudder—devoured three truffles which were on his plate.

I experienced keen anguish; it seemed to me as if my heart were breaking just then.

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

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

CHAPTER II

The soul in agony.

To monsieur Claude de L-----

Seminary of P-----sur-C-----

(Haute-Saone).

It affords me unspeakable pleasure to sit down to address you, dear Claude. Must I tell you that I can not think without pious emotion of that life which but yesterday we were leading together at the Jesuits' College. How well I remember our long talks under the great trees, the pious pilgrimages we daily made to the Father Superior's Calvary, our charming readings, the darting forth of our two souls toward the eternal source of all greatness and all goodness. I can still see the little chapel which you fitted up one day in your desk, the pretty wax tapers we made for it, which we lighted one day during the cosmography class.

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Oh, sweet recollections, how dear you are to me! Charming details of a calm and holy life, with what happiness do I recall you! Time in separating you from me seems only to have brought you nearer in recollection. I have seen life, alas! during these six long months, but, in acquiring a knowledge of the world, I have learned to love still more the innocent ignorance of my past existence. Wiser than myself, you have remained in the service of the Lord; you have understood the divine mission which had been reserved for you; you have been unwilling to step over the profane threshold and to enter the world, that cavern, I ought to say, in which I am now assailed, tossed about like a frail bark during a tempest. Nay, the anger of the waves of the sea compared to that of the passions is mere child's play. Happy friend, who art ignorant of what I have learned. Happy friend, whose eyes have not yet measured the abyss into which mine are already sunk.

But what was I to do? Was I not obliged—despite my vocation and the tender friendship which called me to your side—was I not obliged, I say, to submit to the exigencies imposed by the name I bear, and also to the will of my father, who destined me for a military career in order to defend a noble cause which you too would defend? In short, I obeyed and quitted the college of the Fathers never to return again.

I went into the world, my heart charged with the salutary fears which our pious education had caused to grow up there. I advanced cautiously, but very soon recoiled horror-stricken. I am eighteen; I am still young, I know, but I have already reflected much, while the experience of my pious instructors has imparted to my soul a precocious maturity which enables me to judge of many things; besides my faith is so firmly established and so deeply rooted in my being, that I can look about me without danger. I do not fear for my own salvation, but I am shocked when I think of the future of our modern society, and I pray the Lord fervently, from a heart untainted by sin, not to turn away His countenance in wrath from our unhappy country. Even here, at the seat of my cousin, the Marchioness K-----de C-----, where I am at the present moment, I can discover nothing but frivolity among the men, and dangerous coquetry among the women. The pernicious atmosphere of the period seems to pervade even the highest rank of the French aristocracy. Sometimes discussions occur on matters pertaining to science and morals, which aim a kind of indirect blow at religion itself, of which our Holy Father the Pope should alone be called on to decide. In this way God permits, at the present day, certain petty savants, flat-headed men of science, to explain in a novel fashion the origin of humanity, and, despite the excommunication which will certainly overtake them, to throw down a wild and impious challenge at the most venerable traditions.

I have not myself desired to be enlightened in regard to such base depravity, but I have heard with poignant grief men with great minds and illustrious names attach some importance to it.

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As to manners and customs, they are, without being immoral, which would be out of the question in our society, distinguished by a frivolity and a faculty for being carried away with allurements which are shocking in the extreme. I will only give you a single example of this, although it is one that has struck me most forcibly.

Ten minutes' walk from the house there is a charming little stream overshadowed by spreading willows; the current is slight, the water pellucid, and the bed covered with sand so fine that one's feet sink into it like a carpet. Now, would you believe it, dear friend, that, in this hot weather, all those staying at the house go at the same time, together, and, without distinction of sex, bathe in it? A simple garment of thin stuff, and very tight, somewhat imperfectly screens the strangely daring modesty of the ladies. Forgive me, my pious friend, for entering into all these details, and for troubling the peacefulness of your soul by this picture of worldly scenes, but I promised to share with you my impressions, as well as my most secret thoughts. It is a sacred contract which I am fulfilling.

I will, therefore, acknowledge that these bathing scenes shocked me greatly, the first time I heard them spoken of. I resented it with a species of disgust easy to understand, while I positively refused to take part in them. To speak the truth, I was chafed a little; still, these worldly railleries could not touch me, and had no effect on my determination.

Yesterday, however, about five in the afternoon, the Marchioness sent for me, and managed the affair so neatly, that it was impossible for me not to act as her escort.

We started. The maid carried the bathing costumes both of the Marchioness and of my sister, who was to join us later.

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

"I do not set much store by such paltry physical acquirements, cousin," I replied; "I swim fairly, nothing more."

And I turned my head to avoid an extremely penetrating aroma with which her hair was impregnated. You know very well that I am subject to nervous attacks.

"But, my dear child, physical advantages are not so much to be despised."

This "dear child" displeased me much. My cousin is twenty-six, it is true, but I am no longer, properly speaking, a "dear child," and besides, it denoted a familiarity which I did not care for. It was, on the part of the Marchioness, one of the consequences of that frivolity of mind, that carelessness of speech which I mentioned above, and nothing more; still, I was shocked at it. She went on:



“Exaggerated modesty is not good form in society,” she said, turning toward me with a smile. “You will, in time, make a very handsome cavalier, my dear Robert, and that which you now lack is easy to acquire. For instance, you should have your hair dressed by the Marquis’s valet. He will do it admirably, and then you will be charming.”

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You must understand, my dear Claude, that I met these advances with a frigidity of manner that left no doubt as to my intentions.

"I repeat, my cousin," said I to her, "I attach to all this very little importance," and I emphasized my words by a firm and icy look. Then only, for I had not before cast my eyes on her, did I notice the peculiar elegance of her toilette, an elegance for which, unhappily, the perishable beauty of her person served as a pretext and an encouragement.

Her arms were bare, and her wrists covered with bracelets; the upper part of her neck was insufficiently veiled by the too slight fabric of a transparent gauze; in short, the desire to please was displayed in her by all the details of her appearance. I was stirred at the aspect of so much frivolity, and I felt myself blush for pity, almost for shame.

We reached, at length, the verge of the stream. She loosed my arm and unceremoniously slid down, I can not say seated herself, upon the grass, throwing back the long curls depending from her chignon. The word chignon, in the language of society, denotes that prominence of the cranium which is to be seen at the back of ladies' heads. It is produced by making coils or plaits of their long hair. I have cause to believe, from certain allusions I have heard, that many of these chignons are not natural. There are women, most worthy daughters of Eve, who purchase for gold the hair—horyesco referens—of the wretched or the dead. It sickens one.

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

She exploded with laughter at this joke, an unbecoming one, and without much point. Monsieur de Beaulenard is a friend of the Marquis, who happens to have a high color. Out of politeness, I forced a smile, which she, no doubt, took for approbation, for she then launched out into conversation—an indescribable flow of chatter, blending the most profane sentiments with the strangest religious ideas, the quiet of the country with the whirl of society, and all this with a freedom of gesture, a charm of expression, a subtlety of glance, and a species of earthly poesy, by which any other soul than mine would have been seduced.

"This is a pretty spot, this charming little nook, is it not?"

"Certainly, my dear cousin."

"And these old willows with their large tops overhanging the stream; see how the field-flowers cluster gayly about their battered trunks! How strange, too, that young foliage, so elegant, so silvery, those branches so slender and so supple! So much elegance, freshness and youth shooting up from that old trunk which seems as if accursed!"

“God does not curse a vegetable, my cousin.”

“That is possible; but I can not help finding in willows something which is suggestive of humanity. Perpetual old age resembles punishment. That old reprobate of the bank there is expiating and suffering, that old Quasimodo of the fields. What would you that I should do about it, my cousin, for that is the impression that it gives me? What is there to tell me that the willow is not the final incarnation of an impenitent angler?” And she burst out laughing.

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"Those are pagan ideas, and as such are so opposed to the dogmas of faith, that I am obliged, in order to explain their coming from your mouth, to suppose that you are trying to make a fool of me."

"Not the least in the world; I am not making fun of you, my dear Robert. You are not a baby, you know! Come, go and get ready for a swim; I will go into my dressing-tent and do the same."

She saluted me with her hand, as she lifted one of the sides of the tent, with unmistakable coquetry. What a strange mystery is the heart of woman!

I sought out a spot shaded by the bushes, thinking over these things; but it was not long before I had got into my bathing costume. I thought of you, my pious friend, as I was buttoning the neck and the wrists of this conventional garment. How many times have you not helped me to execute this little task about which I was so awkward. Briefly, I entered the water and was about to strike out when the sound of the marchioness's voice assailed my ears. She was talking with her maid inside the tent. I stopped and listened; not out of guilty curiosity, I can assure you, but out of a sincere wish to become better acquainted with that soul.

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

"Your ladyship's hair will get wet."

"Then you can powder it. Nothing is better for drying than powder. And so, I shall wear my light blue dress this evening; blond powder will go with it exactly. My child, you are becoming foolish. I told you to shorten my bathing costume, by taking it up at the knees. Just see what it looks like!"

"I was fearful that your ladyship would find it too tight for swimming."

"Tight! Then why have you taken it in three good inches just here? See how it wrinkles up; it is ridiculous, don't you see it, my girl, don't you see it?"

The sides of the tent were moved; and I guessed that my cousin was somewhat impatiently assuming the costume in question, in order the better to point out its defects to her maid.

"I don't want to look as if I were wound up in a sheet, but yet I want to be left freedom of action. You can not get it into your head, Julie, that this material will not stretch. You see now that I stoop a little-Ah! you see it at last, that's well."

Weak minds! Is it not true, my pious friend, that there are those who can be absorbed by such small matters? I find these preoccupations to be so frivolous that I was pained at being even the involuntary recipient of them, and I splashed the water with my hands to announce my presence and put a stop to a conversation which shocked me.

"I am coming to you, Robert; get into the water. Has your sister arrived yet?" said my cousin, raising her voice; then softly, and addressing her maid, she added: "Yes, of course, lace it tightly. I want support."

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One side of the tent was raised, and my relative appeared. I know not why I shuddered, as if at the approach of some danger. She advanced two or three steps on the fine sand, drawing from her fingers as she did so, the gold rings she was accustomed to wear; then she stopped, handed them to Julie, and, with a movement which I can see now, but which it is impossible for me to describe to you, kicked off into the grass the slippers, with red bows, which enveloped her feet.

She had only taken three paces, but it sufficed to enable me to remark the singularity of her gait. She walked with short, timid steps, her bare arms close to her sides.

She had divested herself of all the outward tokens of a woman, save the tresses of her hair, which were rolled up in a net. As for the rest, she was a comical-looking young man, at once slender yet afflicted by an unnatural plumpness, one of those beings who appear to us in dreams, and in the delirium of fever, one of those creatures toward whom an unknown power attracts us, and who resemble angels too nearly not to be demons.

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

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

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

The fact is, I was not trembling either through fear or cold; but on approaching the Marchioness, the sharp perfume which emanated from her hair went to my head, and with my delicate nerves you will readily understand that I was about to faint. I mastered this sensation, however. She took a firm grip of my hand, as one would clasp the knob of a cane or the banister of a stair, and we advanced into the stream side by side.

As we advanced the stream became deeper. The Marchioness, as the water rose higher, gave vent to low cries of fear resembling the hiss of a serpent; then she broke out into ringing bursts of laughter, and drew closer and closer to me. Finally, she stopped, and turning she looked straight into my eyes. I felt then that moment was a solemn one. I thought a hidden precipice was concealed at my feet, my heart throbbed as if it would burst, and my head seemed to be on fire.

“Come now, teach me to float on my back, Robert. Legs straight and extended, arms close to the body, that’s the way, is it not?”

“Yes, my dear cousin, and move your hands gently under you.”



“Very good; here goes, then. One, two, three-off! Oh, what a little goose I am, I’m afraid! Oh cousin, support me, just a little bit.”

That was the moment when I ought to have said to her: “No, Madame, I am not the man to support coquettes, and I will not.” But I did not dare say that; my tongue remained silent, and I passed my arm round the Marchioness’s waist, in order to support her more easily.

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Alas! I had made a mistake; perhaps an irreparable one.

In that supreme moment it was but too true that I adored her seductive charms. Let me cut it short. When I held her thus it seemed to me that all the blood in my body rushed back to my heart—a deadly thrill ran through every limb—from shame and indignation, no doubt; my vision became obscure; it seemed as if my soul was leaving my body, and I fell forward fainting, and dragged her down to the bottom of the water in a mortal clutch.

I heard a loud cry. I felt her arms interlace my neck, her clenched fingers sink deep into my flesh, and all was over. I had lost consciousness.

When I came to myself I was lying on the grass. Julie was chafing my hands, and the Marchioness, in her bathing-dress, which was streaming with water, was holding a vinaigrette to my nose. She looked at me severely, although in her glance there was a shade of pleased satisfaction, the import of which escaped me.

“Baby! you great baby!” said she.

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

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

CHAPTER III

Madame de K.

It is possible that you know Madame de K.; if this be so, I congratulate you, for she is a very remarkable person. Her face is pretty, but they do not say of her, “Ah, what a pretty woman!” They say: “Madame de K.? Ah! to be sure, a fine woman!” Do you perceive the difference? it is easy to grasp it. That which charms in her is less what one sees than what one guesses at. Ah! to be sure, a fine woman! That is what is said after dinner when we have dined at her house, and when her husband, who unfortunately is in bad health and does not smoke, has gone to fetch cigars from his desk. It is said in a low tone, as though in confidence; but from this affected reserve, it is easy to read conviction on the part of each of the guests. The ladies in the drawing room do not suspect the charming freedom which characterizes the gossip of the gentlemen when they have gone into the smoking-room to puff their cigars over a cup of coffee.

“Yes, yes, she is a very fine woman.”



“Ah! the deuce, expansive beauty, opulent.”

“But poor De K. makes me feel anxious; he does not seem to get any better. Does it not alarm you, Doctor?”

Every one smiles ‘sub rosa’ at the idea that poor De K., who has gone to fetch cigars, pines away visibly, while his wife is so well.

“He is foolish; he works too hard, as I have told him. His position at the ministry—thanks, I never take sugar.”

“But, really, it is serious, for after all he is not strong,” ventures a guest, gravely, biting his lips meanwhile to keep from laughing.

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"I think even that within the last year her beauty has developed," says a little gentleman, stirring his coffee.

"De K.'s beauty? I never could see it."

"I don't say that."

"Excuse me, you did; is it not so, Doctor?"

"Forsooth!"—"How now! Come, let us make the distinction."—"Ha, ha, ha!" And there is a burst of that hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion. The ice is broken, they draw closer to each other and continue in low tones:

"She has a fine neck! for when she turned just now it looked as if it had been sculptured."

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

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

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

I have often dined with my friend De K., and I have always, or almost always, heard a conversation similar to the preceding. But I must avow that the evening on which I heard the impertinent remark of this gentleman I was particularly shocked; first, because De K. is my friend, and in the second place because I can not endure people who speak of that of which they know nothing. I make bold to say that I alone in Paris understand this matter to the bottom. Yes, yes, I alone; and the reason is not far to seek. Paul and his brother are in England; Ernest is a consul in America; as for Leon, he is at Hycres in his little subprefecture. You see, therefore, that in truth I am the only one in Paris who can—

"But hold, Monsieur Z., you must be joking. Explain yourself; come to the point. Do you mean to say that Madame de K.—oh! dear me! but that is most 'inconvenant'!"

Nothing, nothing! I am foolish. Let us suppose that I had not spoken, ladies; let us speak of something else. How could the idea have got into my head of saying anything about "all the rest"? Let us talk of something else.

It was a real spring morning, the rain fell in torrents and the north wind blew furiously, when the damsel, more dead than alive——

The fact is, I feel I can not get out of it. It will be better to tell all. Only swear to me to be discreet. On your word of honor? Well, then, here goes.

I am, I repeat, the only man in Paris who can speak from knowledge of “all the rest” in regard to Madame de K.

Some years ago—but do not let us anticipate—I say, some years ago I had an intimate friend at whose house we met many evenings. In summer the windows were left open, and we used to sit in armchairs and chat of affairs by the light of our cigars. Now, one evening, when we were talking of fishing—all these details are still fresh in my memory—we heard the sound of a powerful harpsichord, and soon followed the harsh notes of a voice more vigorous than harmonious, I must admit.

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"Aha! she has altered her hours," said Paul, regarding one of the windows of the house opposite.

"Who has changed her hours, my dear fellow?"

"My neighbor. A robust voice, don't you think so? Usually she practises in the morning, and I like that better, for it is the time I go out for a walk."

Instinctively I glanced toward the lighted window, and through the drawn curtains I distinctly perceived a woman, dressed in white, with her hair loose, and swaying before her instrument like a person conscious that she was alone and responding to her own inspirations.

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

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

The cigars were at once dropped—the window was even almost completely closed for greater security—and we began to watch.

This was not, I know, quite discreet, but, as the devil willed it, we were young bachelors, all five of us, and then, after all, dear reader, would not you have done the same?

When the song was concluded, the singer rose. It was very hot and her garment must have been very thin, for the light, which was at the farther end of the room, shone through the fabric. It was one of those long robes which fall to the feet, and which custom has reserved for night wear. The upper part is often trimmed with lace, the sleeves are wide, the folds are long and flowing, and usually give forth a perfume of ambergris or violet. But perhaps you know this garment as well as I. The fair one drew near the looking-glass, and it seemed to us that she was contemplating her face; then she raised her hands in the air, and, in the graceful movement she made, the sleeve, which was unbuttoned and very loose, slipped from her beautifully rounded arm, the outline of which we distinctly perceived.

"The devil!" said Paul, in a stifled voice, but he could say no more.

The songstress then gathered up her hair, which hung very low, in her two hands and twisted it in the air, just as the washerwomen do. Her head, which we saw in profile, inclined a little forward, and her shoulders, which the movement of her arms threw back, presented a more prominent and clear outline.

"Marble, Parian marble!" muttered Paul. "O Cypris! Cytherea! Paphia!"

“Be quiet, you donkey!”

It really seemed as if the flame of the candle understood our appreciation and ministered specially to our admiration. Placed behind the fair songstress, it illuminated her so perfectly that the garment with the long folds resembled those thin vapors which veil the horizon without hiding it, and in a word, the most inquisitive imagination, disarmed by so much courtesy, was ready to exclaim, “That is enough!”

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Soon the fair one moved forward toward her bed, sat down in a very low armchair, in which she stretched herself out at her ease, and remained for some moments, with her hands clasped over her head and her limbs extended. Just then midnight struck; we saw her take her right leg slowly and cross it over her left, when we perceived that she had not yet removed her shoes and stockings.

But what is the use of asking any more about it? These recollections trouble me, and, although they have fixed themselves in my mind—very firmly indeed, I can assure you—I feel an embarrassment mingled with modesty at relating all to you at length. Besides, at the moment she turned down the clothes, and prepared, to get into bed, the light went out.

On the morrow, about ten o'clock in the evening, we all five again found ourselves at Paul's, four of us with opera-glasses in our pockets. As on the previous evening, the fair songstress sat down at her piano, then proceeded slowly to make her night toilette. There was the same grace, the same charm, but when we came to the fatal moment at which on the preceding night the candle had gone out, a faint thrill ran through us all. To tell the truth, for my part, I was nervous. Heaven, very fortunately, was now on our side; the candle continued to burn. The young woman then, with her charming hand, the plump outlines of which we could easily distinguish, smoothed the pillow, patted it, arranged it with a thousand caressing precautions in which the thought was suggested, "With what happiness shall I now go and bury my head in it!"

Then she smoothed down the little wrinkles in the bed, the contact with which might have irritated her, and, raising herself on her right arm, like a horseman, about to get into the saddle, we saw her left knee, smooth and shining as marble, slowly bury itself. We seemed to hear a kind of creaking, but this creaking sounded joyful. The sight was brief, too brief, alas! and it was in a species of delightful confusion that we perceived a well-rounded limb, dazzlingly white, struggling in the silk of the quilt. At length everything became quiet again, and it was as much as we could do to make out a smooth, rose-tinted little foot which, not being sleepy, still lingered outside and fidgeted with the silken covering.

Delightful souvenir of my lively youth! My pen splutters, my paper seems to blush to the color of that used by the orange-sellers. I believe I have said too much.

I learned some time afterward that my friend De K. was about to be married, and, singularly enough, was going to wed this beautiful creature with whom I was so well acquainted.

"A charming woman!" I exclaimed one day.

"You know her, then?" said someone.

“I? No, not the least in the world.”

“But?”

“Yes-no, let me see; I have seen her once at high mass.”

“She is not very pretty,” some one remarked to me.

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"No, not her face," I rejoined, and added to myself, "No, not her face, but all the rest!"

It is none the less true that for some time past this secret has been oppressing me, and, though I decided to-day to reveal it to you, it was because it seems to me that to do so would quiet my conscience.

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

CHAPTER IV

SOUVENIRS OF LENT

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

Be quick, elbow your way through the crowd if you want a good place; the Abbe Gelon preaches to-day on abstinence, and when the Abbe Gelon preaches it is as if Patti were singing.

Enter Madame, pushes the triple door, which recloses heavily, brushes with rapid fingers the holywater sprinkler which that pious old man holds out, and carefully makes a graceful little sign of the cross so as not to spot her ribbons.

Do you hear these discreet and aristocratic whisperings?

"Good morning, my dear."

"Good morning, dear. It is always on abstinence that he preaches, is it not? Have you a seat?"

"Yes, yes, come with me. You have got on your famous bonnet, I see?"

"Yes; do you like it? It is a little showy, is it not? What a multitude of people! Where is your husband?"

"Showy! Oh, no, it is splendid. My husband is in the churchwarden's pew; he left before me; he is becoming a fanatic—he speaks of lunching on radishes and lentils."

"That ought to be very consoling to you."

“Don’t mention it. Come with me. See; there are Ernestine and Louise. Poor Louise’s nose, always the same; who would believe that she drinks nothing stronger than water?”

The ladies push their way among the chairs, some of which they upset with the greatest unconcern.

Arrived at their places they sink down on their knees, and, moist-eyed and full of feeling, cast a look of veiled adoration toward the high altar, then hide their faces with their gloved hands.

For a very few minutes they gracefully deprecate themselves in the eyes of the Lord, then, taking their seats, coquettishly arrange the immense bows of their bonnet-strings, scan the assembly through a gold eyeglass, with the little finger turning up; finally, while smoothing down the satin folds of a dress difficult to keep in place, they scatter, right and left, charming little recognitions and delightful little smiles.

“Are you comfortable, dear?”

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

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

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

With this single word he has already won all hearts. Slowly he casts over his audience a mellow glance, which penetrates and attracts; then, having uttered a few Latin words which he has the tact to translate quickly into French, he continues:

“What is it to abstain? Why should we abstain? How should we abstain? Those are the three points, ladies, I shall proceed to discuss.”

He blows his nose, coughs; a holy thrill stirs every heart. How will he treat this magnificent subject? Let us listen.

Is it not true, Madame, that your heart is piously stirred, and that at this moment you feel an actual thirst for abstinence and mortification?

The holy precincts are bathed in a soft obscurity, similar to that of your boudoir, and inducing revery.

I know not how much of the ineffable and of the vaguely exhilarating penetrates your being. But the voice of this handsome and venerated old man has, amidst the deep silence, something deliciously heavenly about it. Mysterious echoes repeat from the far end of the temple each of his words, and in the dim light of the sanctuary the golden candlesticks glitter like precious stones. The old stained-glass windows with their symbolic figures become suddenly illuminated, a flood of light and sunshine spreads



through the church like a sheet of fire. Are the heavens opening? Is the Spirit from on high descending among us?

While lost in pious reverie, which soothes and lulls, one gazes with ecstasy on the fanciful details of the sculptures which vanish in the groined roof above, and on the quaint pipes of the organ with its hundred voices. The beliefs of childhood piously inculcated in your heart suddenly reawaken; a vague perfume of incense again penetrates the air. The stone pillars shoot up to infinite heights, and from these celestial arches depends the golden lamp which sways to and fro in space, diffusing its eternal light. Truly, God is great.

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By degrees the sweet tones of the preacher enrapture one more and more, and the sense of his words are lost; and, listening to the divine murmur of that saint-like voice, your eyes, like those of a child falling asleep in the bosom of the Creator, close.

You do not go to sleep, but your head inclines forward, the ethereal light surrounds you, and your soul, delighting in the uncertain, plunges into celestial space, and loses itself in infinity.

What a sweet and holily intoxicating sensation, a delicious ecstasy! Nevertheless, there are those who smile at this religious raise-en-scene, these pomps and splendors, this celestial music, which soothes the nerves and thrills the brain! Pity on these scoffers who do not comprehend the ineffable delight of being able to open at will the gates of Paradise to themselves, and to become, at odd moments, one with the angels! But what purpose does it serve to speak of the faithless and of their harmless, smiles? As the Abbe Gelon has in his inimitable manner observed, "The heart is a fortress, incessantly assailed by the spirit of darkness."

The idea of a constant struggle with this powerful being has something about it that adds tenfold to our strength and flatters our vanity. What, alone in your fortress, Madame; alone with the spirit of darkness.

But hush! the Abbe Gelon is finishing in a quivering and fatigued voice. His right hand traces in the air the sign of peace. Then he wipes his humid forehead, his eyes sparkle with divine light, he descends the narrow stairs, and we hear on the pavement the regular taps of the rod of the verger, who is reconducting him to the vestry.

"Was he not splendid, dear?"

"Excellent! when he said, 'That my eyes might close forever, if.....' you remember?"

"Superb! and further on: 'Yes, ladies, you are coquettes.' He told us some hard truths; he speaks admirably."

"Admirably! He is divine!"

It is four o'clock, the church is plunged in shadow and silence. The confused rumble of the vehicles without hardly penetrates this dwelling of prayer, and the creak of one's boots, echoing in the distance, is the only human noise which ruffles the deep calm.

However, in proportion as we advance, we perceive in the chapels groups of the faithful, kneeling, motionless and silent. In viewing the despair that their attitude appears to

express, we are overwhelmed with sadness and uneasiness. Is it an appeal for the damned?

The aspects of one of these chapels is peculiar. A hundred or a hundred and fifty ladies, almost buried in silk and velvet, are crowded devoutly about the confessional. A sweet scent of violets and vervain permeates the vicinity, and one halts, in spite of one's self, in the presence of this large display of elegance.

From each of the two cells adjoining the confessional shoot out the folds of a rebellious skirt, for the penitent, held fast at the waist, has been able to get only half of her form into the narrow space. However, her head can be distinguished moving in the shadow, and we can guess from the contrite movements of her white feather that her forehead is bowed by reason of remonstrance and repentance.

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Hardly has she concluded her little story when a dozen of her neighbors rush forward to replace her. This eagerness is quite explicable, for this chapel is the one in which the Abbe Gelon hears confessions, and I need not tell you that when the Abbe Gelon confesses it is the same as if he were preaching—there is a crowd.

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

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

In coming to him with one's little burden of guilt, one feels somewhat embarrassed, but while one is hesitating about telling him all, he, with a discreet and skilful hand, disencumbers one of it rapidly, examines the contents, smiles or consoles, and the confession is made without one having uttered a single word; so that after all is over the penitent exclaims, prostrating one's self before God, "But, Lord, I was pure, pure as the lily, and yet how uneasy I was!"

Even when he assumes the sacerdotal habit and ceases to be a man, and speaks in the name of God, the tones of his voice, the refinement of his look, reveal innate distinction and that spotless courtesy which can not harm even a minister of God, and which one must cultivate on this side of the Rue du Bac.

If God wills that there must be a Faubourg St.-Germain in the world—and it can not be denied that He does—is it not proper that He should give us a minister who speaks our language and understands our weaknesses? Nothing is more obvious, and I really do not comprehend some of these ladies who talk to me about the Abbe Brice. Not that I wish to speak ill of the good Abbe, for this is neither the time nor the place for it; he is a holy man, but his sanctity is a little bourgeois and needs polish.

With him one has to dot one's i's; he is dull in perception, or does not perceive at all.

Acknowledge a peccadillo, and his brows knit, he must know the hour, the moment, the antecedents; he examines, he probes, he weighs, and finishes his thousand questions by being indiscreet and almost improper. Is there not, even in the holy mission of the priest, a way of being politely severe, and of acting the gentleman to people well born?

The Abbe Brice—and there is no reason why I should conceal it—smells of the stable, which must be prejudicial to him. He is slightly Republican, too, wears clumsy boots,

has awful nails, and when he gets new gloves, twice a year, his fingers stand out stiff and separate.

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I do not, I would have you remark, deny his admirable virtues; but say what you like, you will never get a woman of fashion to confide her "little affairs" to a farmer's son, and address him as "Father." Matters must not be carried the length of absurdity; besides, this Abbe Brice always smells detestably of snuff.

He confesses all sorts of people, and you will agree that it is not pleasant to have one's maid or one's cook for one's visa-vis at the confessional.

There is not a woman who understands Christian humility better than yourself, dear Madame; but all the same you are not accustomed to travel in an omnibus. You may be told that in heaven you will only be too happy to call your coachman "Brother," and to say to Sarah Jane, "Sister," but these worthy folk shall have first passed through purgatory, and fire purifies everything. Again, what is there to assure us that Sarah Jane will go to heaven, since you yourself, dear Madame, are not so sure of entering there?

It is hence quite well understood why the Abbe Gelon's chapel is crowded. If a little whispering goes on, it is because they have been waiting three long hours, and because everybody knows one another.

All the ladies, you may be sure, are there.

"Make a little room for me, dear," whispers a newcomer, edging her way through trains, kneeling-stools, and chairs.

"Ah! is that you, dear? Come here. Clementine and Madame de B. are there in the corner at the cannon's mouth. You will have to wait two good hours."

"If Madame de B. is there, it does not surprise me. She is inexhaustible, and there is no other woman who is so long in telling a thing. Have all these people not had their turn yet? Ah! there is Ernestine." (She waves her hand to her quietly.) "That child is an angel. She acknowledged to me the other day that her conscience troubled her because, on reading the 'Passion,' she could not make up her mind to kiss the mat."

"Ah! charming; but, tell me, do you kiss the mat yourself?"

"I! no, never in my life; it is so nasty, dear."

"You confess to the omission, at least?"

"Oh! I confess all those little trifles in a lump. I say, 'Father, I have erred out of human self-respect.' I give the total at once."

"That is just what I do, and that dear Abbe Gelon discharges the bill."

“Seriously, time would fail him if he acted otherwise. But it seems to me that we are whispering a little too much, dear; let me think over my little bill.”

Madame leans upon her praying-stool. Gracefully she removes, without taking her eyes off the altar, the glove from her right hand, and with her thumb turns the ring of Ste-Genevieve that serves her as a rosary, moving her lips the while. Then, with downcast eyes and set lips, she loosens the fleur-de-lys-engraved clasp of her Book of Hours, and seeks out the prayers appropriate to her condition.

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She reads with fervency: “My God, crushed beneath the burden of my sins I cast myself at thy feet’—how annoying that it should be so cold to the feet. With my sore throat, I am sure to have influenza,—’that I cast myself at thy feet’—tell me, dear, do you know if the chapel-keeper has a footwarmer? Nothing is worse than cold feet, and that Madame de P. sticks there for hours. I am sure she confesses her friends’ sins along with her own. It is intolerable; I no longer have any feeling in my right foot; I would pay that woman for her foot-warmer—I bow my head in the dust under the weight of repentance, and of.....”

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

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

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

“But I was here before you, Madame.”

“I beg a thousand pardons, Madame.”

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

“Hush, hush! Profit by the opportunity, Madame; slip through and take the vacant place. (Whispering.) Do not forget the big one last night, and the two little ones of this morning.”

CHAPTER V

MADAME AND HER FRIEND CHAT BY THE FIRESIDE

Madam—(moving her slender fingers)—It is ruched, ruched, ruched, loves of ruches, edged all around with blond.

Her Friend—That is good style, dear.

Madame—Yes, I think it will be the style, and over this snowlike foam fall the skirts of blue silk like the bodice; but a lovely blue, something like—a little less pronounced than skyblue, you know, like—my husband calls it a subdued blue.

Her Friend—Splendid. He is very happy in his choice of terms.

Madame—Is he not? One understands at once—a subdued blue. It describes it exactly.

Her Friend—But apropos of this, you know that Ernestine has not forgiven him his pleasantry of the other evening.

Madame—How, of my husband? What pleasantry? The other evening when the Abbe Gelon and the Abbe Brice were there?

Her Friend—And his son, who was there also.

Madame—What! the Abbe's son? (Both break into laughter.)

Her Friend—But—ha! ha! ha!—what are you saying, ha! ha! you little goose?

Madame—I said the Abbe Gelon and the Abbe Brice, and you add, 'And his son.' It is your fault, dear. He must be a choir-boy, that cherub. (More laughter.)

Her Friend—(placing her hand over her mouth)—Be quiet, be quiet; it is too bad; and in Lent, too!

Madame—Well, but of whose son are you speaking?

Her Friend—Of Ernestine's son, don't you know, Albert, a picture of innocence. He heard your husband's pleasantry, and his mother was vexed.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame—And respectful. His white hair is such an admirable frame for his pale face, which is so full of unction.

Her Friend—Oh! yes, he has unction, and his looks—those sweetly softened looks! The other day, when he was speaking on the mediation of Christ, he was divine. At one moment he wiped away a tear; he was no longer master of his emotions; but he grew calm almost immediately—his power of self-command is marvellous; then he went on quietly, but the emotion in turn had overpowered us. It was electrifying. The Countess de S., who was near me, was bubbling like a spring, under her yellow bonnet.

Madame—Ah! yes, I have seen that yellow bonnet. What a sight that Madame de S. is!

Her Friend—The truth is, she is always dressed like an applewoman. A bishopric has been offered these messieurs, I know, on good authority; my husband had it from De l'Euvre. Well—

Madame—(interrupting her)—A bishopric offered to Madame de S. It was wrong to do so.

Her Friend—You make fun of everything, my dear; there are, however, some subjects which should be revered. I tell you that the mitre and the ring have been offered to the Abby Gelon. Well, he refused them. God knows, however, that the pastoral ring would well become his hand.

Madame—Oh! yes, he has a lovely hand.

Her Friend—He has a white, slender, and aristocratic hand. Perhaps it is a wrong for us to dwell on these worldly details, but after all his hand is really beautiful. Do you know (enthusiastically) I find that the Abbe Gelon compels love of religion? Were you ever present at his lectures?

Madame—I was at the first one. I would have gone again on Thursday, but Madame Savain came to try on my bodice and I had a protracted discussion with her about the slant of the skirts.

Her Friend—Ah! the skirts are cut slantingly.

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Madame—Yes, yes, with little cross-bars, which is an idea of my own—I have not seen it anywhere else; I think it will not look badly.

Her Friend—Madame Savain told me that you had suppressed the shoulders of the corsage.

Madame—Ah! the gossip! Yes, I will have nothing on the shoulders but a ribbon, a trifle, just enough to fasten a jewel to—I was afraid that the corsage would look a little bare. Madame Savain had laid on, at intervals, some ridiculous frippery. I wanted to try something else—my plan of crossbars, there and then—and I missed the dear Abbe Gelon's lecture. He was charming, it seems.

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

Madame—You have read his book?

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

Madame—Well, what word?

Her Friend—I dare not tell you, for, really, if it is true it would make one shudder. He said that it was (whispering in her ear) the Antichrist! It makes one feel aghast, does it not! They sell his photograph; he has a satanic look. (Looking at the clock.) Half-past two—I must run away; I have given no orders about dinner. These three fast-days in the week are to me martyrdom. One must have a little variety; my husband is very fastidious. If we did not have water-fowl I should lose my head. How do you get on, dear?

Madame—Oh! with me it is very simple, provided I do not make my husband leaner; he eats anything. You know, Augustus is not very much——

Her Friend—Not very much! I think that he is much too spare; for, after all, if we do not in this life impose some privations upon ourselves—no, that would be too easy. I hope, indeed, that you have a dispensation?

Madame—Oh! yes, I am safe as to that.

Her Friend—I have one, of course, for butter and eggs, as vice-chancellor of the Association. The Abbe Gelon begged me to accept a complete dispensation on account of my headaches, but I refused. Yes! I refused outright. If one makes a compromise with one's principles—but then there are people who have no principles.

Madame—If you mean that to apply to my husband, you are wrong. Augustus is not a heathen—he has excellent principles.

Her Friend—Excellent principles! You make my blood boil. But there, I must go. Well, it is understood, I count upon you for Tuesday; he will preach upon authority, a magnificent subject, and we may expect allusions—Ah! I forgot to tell you; I am collecting and I expect your mite, dear. I take as low a sum as a denier (the twelfth of a penny). I have an idea of collecting with my little girl on my praying-stool. Madame de K. collected on Sunday at St. Thomas's and her baby held the alms-bag. The little Jesus had an immense success—immense!

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Madame—I must go now. How will you dress?

Her Friend—Oh! for the present, quite simply and in black; you understand.

Madame—Besides, black becomes you so well.

Her Friend—Yes, everything is for the best; black does not suit me at all ill. Tuesday, then. But my dear, try to bring your husband, he likes music so much.

Madame—Well, I can not promise that.

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

Madame—What for, in Heaven's name?

Her Friend—For her evening party. There are to be private theatricals at her house, but for a pious object, you may be sure, during Lent; it is so as to have a collection on behalf of the Association. I must fly. Good-by, dear.

Madame—Till Tuesday, dear; in full uniform?

Her Friend—(smiling)—In full uniform. Kind regards to your reprobate. I like him very much all the same. Good-by.

CHAPTER VI

A DREAM

Sleeplessness is almost always to be traced to indigestion. My friend, Dr. Jacques, is there and he will tell you so.

Now, on that particular evening, it was last Friday, I had committed the mistake of eating brill, a fish that positively disagrees with me.

God grant that the account of the singular dream which ensued may inspire you with some prudent reflections.

Be that as it may, this was my dream, in all its extravagance.

I had, in this dream, the honor to belong, as senior curate, to one of the most frequented parish churches in Paris. What could be more ridiculous! I was, moreover, respectably stout, possessed a head decked with silver locks, well-shaped hands, an aquiline nose, great unction, the friendship of the lady worshippers, and, I venture to add, the esteem of the rector.

While I was reciting the thanksgiving after service, and at the same time unfastening the cords of my alb, the rector came up to me (I see him even now) blowing his nose.

“My dear friend,” said he, “you hear confessions this evening, do you not?”

“Most certainly. Are you well this morning? I had a good congregation at mass.”

Having said this, I finished my thanksgiving, put my alb into the wardrobe, and, offering a pinch to the rector, added cheerily:

“This is not breaking the fast, is it?”

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

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

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

I will not undertake to describe to you one by one the different people who came and knelt before me. I will not tell you, for instance, how one of them, a lady in black, with a straight nose, thin lips, and sallow complexion, after reciting her Confiteor in Latin, touched me infinitely by the absolute confidence she placed in me, though I was not of her sex. In five minutes she found the opportunity to speak to me of her sister-in-law, her brother, an uncle who was on the point of death whose heiress she was, her nephews, and her servants; and I could perceive, despite the tender benevolence that appeared in all her words, that she was the victim of all these people. She ended by informing me she had a marriageable daughter, and that her stomach was an obstacle to her fasting.

I can still see a throng of other penitents, but it would take too long to tell you about them, and we will confine ourselves, with your permission, to the last two, who, besides, impressed upon my memory themselves particularly.

A highly adorned little lady rushed into the confessional; she was brisk, rosy, fresh. Despite her expression of deep thoughtfulness, she spoke very quickly in a musical voice, and rattled through her Confiteor, regardless of the sense.

"Father," she said, "I have one thing that is troubling me."

"Speak, my child; you know that a confessor is a father."

"Well, father—but I really dare not."

There are many of these timid little hearts that require to be encouraged. I said, "Go on, my child, go on."

"My husband," she murmured confusedly, "will not abstain during Lent. Ought I to compel him, father?"

"Yes, by persuasion."

“But he says that he will go and dine at the restaurant if I do not let him have any meat. Oh! I suffer terribly from that. Am I not assuming the responsibility of all that meat, father?”

This young wife really interested me; she had in the midst of one cheek, toward the corner of the mouth, a small hollow, a kind of little dimple, charming in the profane sense of the word, and giving a special expression to her face. Her tiny white teeth glittered like pearls when she opened her mouth to relate her pious inquietudes; she shed around, besides, a perfume almost as sweet as that of our altars, although of a different kind, and I breathed this perfume with an uneasiness full of scruples, which for all that inclined me to indulgence. I was so close to her that none of the details of her face escaped me; I could distinguish, almost in spite of myself, even a little quiver of her left eyebrow, tickled every now and again by a stray tress of her fair hair.

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

"Oh, yes, father."

"Well, my dear child"—I fancy I noticed at that moment that she had at the outer corner of her eyes a kind of dark mark something like an arrow-head—"try, my dear child, to convince your husband, who in his heart—" In addition, her lashes, very long and somewhat curled, were underlined, I might almost say, by a dark streak expanding and shading off delicately toward the middle of the eye. This physical peculiarity did not seem to me natural, but an effect of premeditated coquetry.

Strange fact, the verification of such weakness in this candid heart only increased my compassion. I continued in a gentle tone:

"Strive to bring your husband to God. Abstinence is not only a religious observance, it is also a salutary custom. 'Non solum lex Dei, sed etiam'. Have you done everything to bring back your husband?"

"Yes, father, everything."

"Be precise, my child; I must know all."

"Well, father, I have tried sweetness and tenderness."

I thought to myself that this husband must be a wretch.

"I have implored him for the sake of our child," continued the little angel, "not to risk his salvation and my own. Once or twice I even told him that the spinach was dressed with gravy when it was not. Was I wrong, father?"

"There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses, for in such cases it only takes into consideration the intention and the greater glory of God. I can not, therefore, say that you have done wrong. You have not, have you, been guilty toward your husband of any of those excusable acts of violence which may escape a Christian soul when it is struggling against error? For it really is not natural that an honest man should refuse to follow the prescription of the Church. Make a few concessions at first."

"I have, father, and perhaps too many," she said, contritely.

"What do you mean?"

"Hoping to bring him back to God, I accorded him favors which I ought to have refused him. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that I ought to have refused him."

“Do not be alarmed, my dear child, everything depends upon degrees, and it is necessary in these matters to make delicate distinctions.”

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

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

"But, father, when my husband has disturbed me for a moment, I soon repent of it. He has hardly gone before I pray for him."

"Good, very good."

"I have sewn a blessed medal up in his overcoat." This was said more boldly, though still with some timidity.

"And have you noticed any result?"

"In certain things he is better, yes, father, but as regards abstinence he is still intractable," she said with embarrassment.

"Do not be discouraged. We are in the holy period of Lent. Make use of pious subterfuges, prepare him some admissible viands, but pleasant to the taste."

"Yes, father, I have thought of that. The day before yesterday I gave him one of these salmon pasties that resemble ham."

"Yes, yes, I know them. Well?"

"Well, he ate the salmon, but he had a cutlet cooked afterward."

"Deplorable!" I exclaimed, almost in spite of myself, so excessive did the perversity of this man seem to me. "Patience, my child, offer up to Heaven the sufferings which your husband's impiety causes you, and remember that your efforts will be set down to you. You have nothing more to tell me?"

"No, father."

"Collect yourself, then. I will give you absolution."

The dear soul sighed as she joined her two little hands.

Hardly had my penitent risen to withdraw when I abruptly closed my little shutter and took a long pinch of snuff—snuff-takers know how much a pinch soothes the mind—then having thanked God rapidly, I drew from the pocket of my cassock my good old

watch, and found that it was earlier than I thought. The darkness of the chapel had deceived me, and my stomach had shared my error. I was hungry. I banished these carnal preoccupations from my mind, and after shaking my hands, on which some grains of snuff had fallen, I slackened one of my braces that was pressing a little on one shoulder, and opened my wicket.

“Well, Madame, people should be more careful,” said the penitent on my left, addressing a lady of whom I could only see a bonnet-ribbon; “it is excusable.”

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

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

This little smile was irreproachable. I replied by a similar smile, and I murmured in a very low tone, giving her, too, to understand by the expression of my face that I was making a unique concession in her favor, "Are you quite well, dear Madame?"

"Thanks, father, I am quite well." Her voice had resumed an angelic tone. "But I have just been in a passion."

"And why? Perhaps you have taken for a passion what was really only a passing moment of temper?"

It does not do to alarm penitents.

"Ah! not at all, it was really a passion, father. My dress had just been torn from top to bottom; and really it is strange that one should be exposed to such mishaps on approaching the tribunal of——"

"Collect yourself, my dear Madame, collect yourself," and assuming a serious look I bestowed my benediction upon her.

The Countess sought to collect herself, but I saw very well that her troubled spirit vainly strove to recover itself. By a singular phenomenon I could see into her brain, and her thoughts appeared to me one after the other. She was saying to herself, "Let me collect myself; our Father, give me grace to collect myself," but the more effort she made to restrain her imagination the more it became difficult to restrain and slipped through her fingers. "I had made a serious examination of my conscience, however," she added. "Not ten minutes ago as I was getting out of my carriage I counted up three sins; there was one above all I wished to mention. How these little things escape me! I must have left them in the carriage." And she could not help smiling to herself at the idea of these three little sins lost among the cushions. "And the poor Abbe waiting for me in his box. How hot it must be in there! he is quite red. Good Heavens! how shall I begin? I can not invent faults? It is that torn dress which has upset me. And there is Louise, who is to meet me at five o'clock at the dressmaker's. It is impossible for me to collect myself. O God, do not turn away your face from me, and you, Lord, who can read in my soul— Louise will wait till a quarter past five; besides, the bodice fits—there is only the skirt to try on. And to think that I had three sins only a minute ago."

All these different thoughts, pious and profane, were struggling together at once in the Countess's brain, so that I thought the moment had come to interfere and help her a little.

"Come," I said, in a paternal voice, leaning forward benevolently and twisting my snuff-box in my fingers. "Come, my dear Madame, and speak fearlessly; have you nothing to reproach yourself with? Have you had no impulses of—worldly coquetry, no wish to dazzle at the expense of your neighbor?"

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

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

“That good intention in some degree excuses you, but reflect and see how empty are these little triumphs of vanity, how unworthy of a truly poor soul and how they draw it aside from salvation. I know that there are certain social exigencies—society. Yes, yes, but after all one can even in those pleasures which the Church tolerates—I say tolerates—bring to bear that perfume of good-will toward one’s neighbor of which the Scriptures speak, and which is the appanage—in some degree . . . the glorious appanage. Yes, yes, go on.”

“Father, I have not been able to resist certain temptations to gluttony.”

“Again, again! Begin with yourself. You are here at the tribunal of penitence; well, promise God to struggle energetically against these little carnal temptations, which are not in themselves serious sins—oh! no, I know it—but, after all, these constant solicitations prove a persistent attachment—displeasing to Him—to the fugitive and deceitful delights of this world. Hum, hum! and has this gluttony shown itself by more blameworthy actions than usual—is it simply the same as last month?”

“The same as last month, father.”

“Yes, yes, pastry between meals,” I sighed gravely.

“Yes, father, and almost always a glass of Capri or of Syracuse after it.”

“Or of Syracuse after it. Well, let that pass, let that pass.”

I fancied that the mention of this pastry and those choice wines was becoming a source of straying thoughts on my part, for which I mentally asked forgiveness of heaven.

“What else do you recall?” I asked, passing my hand over my face.

“Nothing else, father; I do not recollect anything else.”

“Well let a sincere repentance spring up in your heart for the sins you have just admitted, and for those which you may have forgotten; commune with yourself, humble yourself in the presence of the great act you have just accomplished. I will give you absolution. Go in peace.”

The Countess rose, smiled at me with discreet courtesy, and, resuming her ordinary voice, said in a low tone, “Till Saturday evening, then?”



I bowed as a sign of assent, but felt rather embarrassed on account of my sacred character.

CHAPTER VII

AN EMBASSY BALL

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

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

"I do not deny that, they had a softness."

"And at the same time such a strange brilliancy beneath that half shadow, an expression of such delicious languor."

"Yes, certainly, but, after all, it is making an exhibition of one's self. But for that—it is very pretty sometimes—I have seen in the Bois charming creatures under their red, their black, and their blue, for they put on blue too, God forgive me!"

"Yes, aunt, Polish blue; it is put on with a stump; it is for the veins."

With interest: "They imitate veins! It is shocking, upon my word. But you seem to know all about it?"

"Oh, I have played so often in private theatricals; I have even quite a collection of little pots of color, hare's-foot stumps, pencils, et cetera."

"Ah! you have, you rascal! Are you going to the fancy ball at the Embassy to-morrow?"

"Yes, aunt; and you, are you going in character?"

"One must, since every one else will. They say the effect will be splendid." After a silence: "I shall wear powder; do you think it will suit me?"

"Better than any one, my dear aunt; you will look adorable, I feel certain."

"We shall see, you little courtier."

She rose, gave me her hand to kiss with an air of exquisite grace, and seemed about to withdraw, then, seemingly changing her mind:

"Since you are going to the Embassy to-morrow, Ernest, call for me; I will give you a seat in the carriage. You can give me your opinion on my costume, and then," she broke into a laugh, and taking me by the hand, added in my ear: "Bring your little pots and come early. This is between ourselves." She put her finger to her lip as a signal for discretion. "Till tomorrow, then."

The following evening my aunt's bedroom presented a spectacle of most wild disorder.

Her maid and the dressmaker, with haggard eyes, for they had been up all night, were both on their knees, rummaging amidst the bows of satin, and feverishly sticking in pins.

“How late you are,” said my aunt to me. “Do you know that it is eleven o’clock? and we have,” she continued, showing her white teeth, “a great many things to do yet. The horses have been put to this last hour. I am sure they will take cold in that icy courtyard.” As she spoke she stretched out her foot, shod with a red-heeled slipper, glittering with gold embroidery. Her plump foot seemed to overflow the side of the shoe a trifle, and through the openwork of her bright silk stocking the rosy skin of her ankle showed at intervals.

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

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

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



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"Yes, aunt, I have the whole apparatus, and if you will sit down—"

"I am frightfully pale—just a little, Ernest; you know what I told you," and she turned her head, presenting her right eye to me. I can still see that eye.

I do not know what strange perfume, foreign to aunts in general, rose from her garments.

"You understand, my dear boy, that it is only an occasion like the present, and the necessities of a historical costume, that make me consent to paint like this."

"My dear little aunt, if you move, my hand will shake." And, indeed, in touching her long lashes, my hand trembled.

"Ah! yes, in the corner, a little—you are right, it gives a softness, a vagueness, a—it is very funny, that little pot of blue. How ugly it must be! How things lead on one to another! Once one's hair is powdered, one must have a little pearl powder on one's face in order not to look as yellow as an orange; and one's cheeks once whitened, one can't—you are tickling me with your brush—one can't remain like a miller, so a touch of rouge is inevitable. And then—see how wicked it is—if, after all that, one does not enlarge the eyes a bit, they look as if they had been bored with a gimlet, don't they? It is like this that one goes on little by little, till one comes to the gallows."

My aunt began to laugh freely, as she studied her face.

"Ah! that is very effective what you have just done—well under the eye, that's it. What animation it gives to the look! How clever those creatures are, how well they know everything that becomes one! It is shameful, for with them it is a trick, nothing more. Oh! you may put on a little more of that blue of yours, I see what it does now. It has a very good effect. How you are arching the eyebrows. Don't you think it is a little too black? You know I should not like to look as if—you are right, though. Where did you learn all that? You might earn a deal of money, do you know, if you set up a practice."

"Well, aunt, are you satisfied?"

My aunt held her hand-glass at a distance, brought it near, held it away again, smiled, and, leaning back in her chair, said: "It must be acknowledged that it is charming, this. What do your friends call it?"

"Make-up, aunt."

"It is vexatious that it has not another name, for really I shall have recourse to it for the evening—from time to time. It is certain that it is attractive. Haven't you a little box for the lips?"

“Here it is.”

“Ah! in a bottle, it is liquid.”

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

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

“Willingly, aunt.”

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

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"Another of your bits of vanity."

"It is done, then. Thank you." She smiled at me mincingly, for the vinegar stung her lips a little.

With her moistened finger she took a patch which she placed with charming coquetry under her eye, and another which she placed near the corner of her mouth, and then, radiant and adorable, exclaimed: "Hide away your little color-pots; I hear your uncle coming for me. Clasp my bracelets for me. Midnight! O my poor horses!"

At that moment my uncle entered in silk shorts and a domino.

"I hope I do not intrude," said he, gayly, on seeing me.

"What nonsense!" said my aunt, turning toward him. "Ernest is going to the Embassy, like ourselves, and I have offered him a seat in the carriage."

At the aspect of my aunt, my uncle, dazzled, held out his gloved hand to her, saying, "You are enchanting this evening, my dear." Then, with a sly smile, "Your complexion has a fine brightness, and your eyes have a wonderful brilliancy."

"Oh, it is the fire they have been making up—it is stifling here. But you, my dear, you look splendid; I have never seen your beard so black."

"It is because I am so pale—I am frozen. Jean forgot to look after my fire at all, and it went out. Are you ready?"

My aunt smiled in turn as she took up her fan.

CHAPTER VIII

MY AUNT AS VENUS

Since that day when I kissed Madame de B. right on the centre of the neck, as she held out her forehead to me, there has crept into our intercourse an indescribable, coquettish coolness, which is nevertheless by no means unpleasant. The matter of the kiss has never been completely explained. It happened just as I left Saint-Cyr. I was full of ardor, and the cravings of my heart sometimes blinded me. I say that they sometimes blinded me; I repeat, blinded me, and this is true, for really I must have been possessed to have kissed my aunt on the neck as I did that day. But let that pass.

It was not that she was hardly worth it; my little auntie, as I used to call her then, was the prettiest woman in the world—coquettish, elegant; and what a foot! and, above all,

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

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

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

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I was in the ante-room, where the footman was helping me off with my top-coat, when Jean, approaching me with a suspicion of mystery, said: "My mistress expects to see you immediately, Monsieur, in her bedroom. If you will walk along the passage and knock at the door at the end, you will find her."

When one has just returned from the other side of the world, such words sound queer. The old affair of the kiss recurred to me in spite of myself. What could my aunt want with me?

I tapped quietly at the door, and heard at once an outburst of stifled laughter.

"Wait a moment," exclaimed a laughing voice.

"I won't be seen in this state," whispered another—"Yes"—"No"—"You are absurd, my dear, since it is an affair of art."—"Ha, ha, ha." And they laughed and laughed again.

At last a voice cried, "Come in," and I turned the handle.

At first glance I could only make out a confused chaos, impossible to describe, amidst which my aunt was bustling about clad in pink fleshings. Clad, did I say?—very airily.

The furniture, the carpet, the mantel-piece were encumbered, almost buried under a heterogeneous mass of things. Muslin petticoats, tossed down haphazard, pieces of lace, a cardboard helmet covered with gilt paper, open jewel-cases, bows of ribbon; curling-tongs, half hidden in the ashes; and on every side little pots, paint-brushes, odds and ends of all kinds. Behind two screens, which ran across the room, I could hear whisperings, and the buzzing sound peculiar to women dressing themselves. In one corner Silvani—the illustrious Silvani, still wearing the large white apron he assumes when powdering his clients—was putting away his powder-puff and turning down his sleeves with a satisfied air. I stood petrified. What was going on at my aunt's?

She discovered my astonishment, and without turning round she said in agitated tones:

"Ah! is it you, Ernest?" Then as if making up her mind, she broke into a hearty burst of laughter, like all women who have good teeth, and added, with a slightly superior air, "You see, we are having private theatricals."

Then turning toward me with her elegant coiffure powdered to excess, I could see that her face was painted like that of a priestess of antiquity. That gauze, that atmosphere, redolent with feminine perfumes, and behind those screens-behind those screens!

"Women in society," I said to myself, looking about me, "must be mad to amuse themselves in this fashion."

"And what piece are you going to play, aunt, in such an attractive costume?"

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

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

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

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"It is not a play," observed my aunt, modestly drawing together her sea-weed draperies. "How behind the age you are, to think that any one plays set-pieces nowadays. It is not a piece, it is a 'tableau vivant', 'The judgment of Paris.' You know 'The Judgment of Paris'? I take the part of Venus—I did not want to, but they all urged me—give me a pin—on the mantelpiece—near the bag of bonbons—there to the left, next to the jewel-case—close by the bottle of gum standing on my prayer-book. Can't you see? Ah! at last. In short, the knife to my throat to compel me to play Venus."

Turning to the screen on the right she said: "Pass me the red for the lips, dear; mine are too pale." To the hairdresser, who is making his way to the door: "Silvani, go to the gentlemen who are dressing in the billiard-room, and in the Baron's dressing-room, they perhaps may need you. Madame de S. and her daughters are in the boudoir—ah! see whether Monsieur de V. has found his apple again—he plays Paris," added my aunt, turning toward me once more; "the apple must not be lost—well, dear, and that red for the lips I asked you for? Pass it to the Captain over the screen."

"Here it is; but make haste, Captain, my cuirass cracks as soon as I raise my arm."

I descried above the screen two slender fingers, one of which, covered with glittering rings, held in the air a little pot without a cover.

"What,—is your cuirass cracking, Marchioness?"

"Oh! it will do, but make haste and take it, Captain."

"You may think it strange, but I tremble like a leaf," exclaimed my aunt. "I am afraid of being ill. Do you hear the gentlemen who are dressing in there in the Baron's dressing room? What a noise! Ha! ha! ha! it is charming, a regular gang of strollers. It is exhilarating, do you know, this feverish existence, this life in front of the footlights. But, for the love of Heaven, shut the door, Marie, there is a frightful draught blowing on me. This hourly struggle with the public, the hisses, the applause, would, with my impressionable nature, drive me mad, I am sure."

The old affair of the kiss recurred to me and I said to myself, "Captain, you misunderstood the nature of your relative."

"But that is not the question at all," continued my aunt; "ten o'clock is striking. Ernest, can you apply liquid white? As you are rather experienced—"

"Rather—ha! ha! ha!" said some one behind the screen.

"On the whole," continued the Baroness, "it would be very singular if, in the course of your campaigns, you had never seen liquid white applied."



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

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

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

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

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"You are sure that it has no effect on the skin—no, I really dare not." As she said this she looked as prim as a vestal. "It is the first time, do you know, that I ever used this liquid white, ah! ah! ah! What a baby I am! I am all in a shiver."

"But, my dear, you are foolish," exclaimed the lady of the screen, breaking into a laugh; "when one acts one must submit to the exigencies of the footlights."

"You hear, aunt? Come, give me your arm."

She held out her full, round arm, on the surface of which was spread that light and charming down, symbol of maturity. I applied the wet sponge.

"Oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed the Baroness; "it is like ice, a regular shower-bath, and you want to put that all over me?"

Just then there was a knock at the door which led out of the Baron's dressing-room, and instinctively I turned toward it.

"Who's there? Oh! you are letting it splutter all over me!" exclaimed the Baroness. "You can't come in; what is it?"

"What is the matter, aunt?"

"You can't come in," exclaimed some one behind the screen; "my cuirass has split. Marie, Rosine, a needle and thread, the gum."

"Oh! there is a stream all down my back, your horrid white is running down," said the Baroness, in a rage.

"I will wipe it. I am really very sorry."

"Can you get your hand down my back, do you think?"

"Why not, aunt?"

"Why not, why not! Because where there is room for a drop of water, there is not room for the hand of a lancer."

Another knock, this time at the door opening from the passage.

"What is it now?"

"The torches have come, Madame," said a footman. "Will you have them lighted?"

"Ah! the torches of Mesdemoiselles de N., who are dressing in the boudoir. No, certainly not, do not light them, they are not wanted till the second tableau."

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

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

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

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

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

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"Don't speak of it, it is quite a history. As it happened, the casting of the parts took place the very evening on which his Holiness's Encyclical was published, so that the gentlemen were somewhat excited. Monsieur de Saint P. took high ground, really very high ground; indeed, I thought for a moment that the General was going to flare out. In short, no one would have anything to do with Unbelief, and we had to have recourse to the General's coachman, John—you know him? He is a good-looking fellow; he is a Protestant, moreover, so that the part is not a novel one to him."

"No matter, it will be disagreeable for the De N.'s to appear side by side with a servant."

"Come! such scruples must not be carried too far; he is smeared over with black and lies stretched on his face, while the three ladies trample on him, so you see that social proprieties are observed after all. Come, have you done yet? My hair is rather a success, is it not? Silvani is the only man who understands how to powder one. He wanted to dye it red, but I prefer to wait till red hair has found its way a little more into society."

"There; it is finished, aunt. Is it long before you have to go on?"

"No. Good Heavens, it is close on eleven o'clock! The thought of appearing before all these people—don't the flowers drooping from my head make my neck appear rather awkward, Ernest? Will you push them up a little?"

Then going to the door of the dressing-room she tapped at it gently, saying, "Are you ready, Monsieur de V.?"

"Yes, Baroness, I have found my apple, but I am horribly nervous. Are Minerva and Juno dressed? Oh! I am nervous to a degree you have no idea of."

"Yes, yes, every one is ready; send word to the company in the drawing-room. My poor heart throbs like to burst, Captain."

CHAPTER IX

*Husband and wife
my dear sisters:*

Marriage, as it is now understood, is not exactly conducive to love. In this I do not think that I am stating an anomaly. Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease; he stretches himself with too great listlessness in armchairs too well cushioned. He assumes the unconstrained habits of dressing-gown and slippers; his digestion goes wrong, his appetite fails and of an evening, in the too-relaxing warmth of a nest, made for him, he yawns over his newspaper, goes to sleep, snores, and pines away. It is all

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

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

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

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But you say nothing, not knowing what you should say. Lacking self-confidence and ignorant of yourself, you have made it a virtue to keep silence and not wake your husband while he sleeps; you have got into the habit of walking on the tips of your toes so as not to disturb the household, and your husband, in the midst of this refreshing half-sleep, has begun to yawn luxuriously; then he has gone out to his club, where he has been received like the prodigal son, while you, poor poet without pen or ink, have consoled yourself by watching your sisters follow the same road as yourself.

You have, all of you, ladies, your pockets full of manuscripts, charming poems, delightful romances; it is a reader who is lacking to you, and your husband takes up his hat and stick at the very sight of your handwriting; he firmly believes that there are no more romances except those already in print. From having read so many, he considers that no more can be written.

This state of things I regard as absolutely detestable. I look upon you, my dear sisters, as poor victims, and if you will permit I will give you my opinion on the subject.

Esteem and friendship between husband and wife are like our daily bread, very pleasant and respectable; but a little jam would not spoil that, you will admit! If, therefore, one of your friends complains of the freedom that reigns in this little book, let her talk on and be sure beforehand that this friend eats dry bread. We have described marriage as we think it should be—depicting smiling spouses, delighted to be together.

Is it because love is rare as between husband and wife that it is considered unbecoming to relate its joys? Is it regret, or envy, that renders you fastidious on the subject, sisters? Reserve your blushes for the pictures of that society of courtesans where love is an article of commerce, where kisses are paid for in advance. Regard the relation of these coarse pleasures as immodest and revolting, be indignant, scold your brethren—I will admit that you are in the right beforehand; but for Heaven's sake do not be offended if we undertake your defence, when we try to render married life pleasant and attractive, and advise husbands to love their wives, wives to love their husbands.

You must understand that there is a truly moral side to all this. To prove that you are adorable; that there are pleasures, joys, happiness, to be found outside the society of those young women—such is our object; and since we are about to describe it, we venture to hope that after reflecting for a few minutes you will consider our intentions praiseworthy, and encourage us to persevere in them.

I do not know why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap, and all sorts of frightful things; to stick up all round it boards on which one reads: "Beware of the sacred ties of marriage;" "Do not jest with the sacred duties of a husband;" "Meditate on the sacred obligation of a father of a family;" "Remember that the serious side of life is beginning;" "No weakness; henceforth you are bound to find yourself face to face with stern reality," *etc.*, *etc.*

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I will not say that it is imprudent to set forth all those fine things; but when done it should be done with less affectation. To warn people that there are thorns in the path is all very well; but, hang it! there is something else in married life, something that renders these duties delightful, else this sacred position and these ties would soon be nothing more than insupportable burdens. One would really think that to take to one's self a pretty little wife, fresh in heart and pure in mind, and to condemn one's self to saw wood for the rest of one's days, were one and the same thing.

Well, my dear sisters, have you any knowledge of those who have painted the picture in these gloomy colors and described as a punishment that which should be a reward? They are the husbands with a past and having rheumatism. Being weary and—how shall I put it?—men of the world, they choose to represent marriage as an asylum, of which you are to be the angels. No doubt to be an angel is very nice, but, believe me, it is either too much or too little. Do not seek to soar so high all at once, but, instead, enter on a short apprenticeship. It will be time enough to don the crown of glory when you have no longer hair enough to dress in any other fashion.

But, O husbands with a past! do you really believe that your own angelic quietude and the studied austerity of your principles are taken for anything else than what they really mean—exhaustion?

You wish to rest; well and good; but it is wrong in you to wish everybody else about you to rest too; to ask for withered trees and faded grass in May, the lamps turned down and the lamp-shades doubled; to require one to put water in the soup and to refuse one's self a glass of claret; to look for virtuous wives to be highly respectable and somewhat wearisome beings; dressing neatly, but having had neither poetry, youth, gayety, nor vague desires; ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything; helpless, thanks to the weighty virtues with which you have crammed them; above all, to ask of these poor creatures to bless your wisdom, caress your bald forehead, and blush with shame at the echo of a kiss.

The deuce! but that is a pretty state of things for marriage to come to.

Delightful institution! How far are your sons, who are now five-and-twenty years of age, in the right in being afraid of it! Have they not a right to say to you, twirling their moustaches:

“But, my dear father, wait a bit; I am not quite ripe for it!”

“Yes; but it is a splendid match, and the young lady is charming.”

“No doubt, but I feel that I should not make her happy. I am not old enough—indeed, I am not.”



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

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Ah! my good little sisters who are so very much shocked and cry "Shame!" follow our reasoning a little further. It is all very well that you should be treated like saints, but do not let it be forgotten that you are women, and, listen to me, do not forget it yourselves.

A husband, majestic and slightly bald, is a good thing; a young husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better. If he rumples your dress a little, and imprints a kiss, in passing, on the back of your neck, let him. When, on coming home from a ball, he tears out the pins, tangles the strings, and laughs like a madman, trying to see whether you are ticklish, let him. Do not cry "Murder!" if his moustache pricks you, but think that it is all because at heart he loves you well. He worships your virtues; is it surprising hence that he should cherish their outward coverings? No doubt you have a noble soul; but your body is not therefore to be despised; and when one loves fervently, one loves everything at the same time. Do not be alarmed if in the evening, when the fire is burning brightly and you are chatting gayly beside it, he should take off one of your shoes and stockings, put your foot on his lap, and in a moment of forgetfulness carry irreverence so far as to kiss it; if he likes to pass your large tortoise-shell comb through your hair, if he selects your perfumes, arranges your plaits, and suddenly exclaims, striking his forehead: "Sit down there, darling; I have an idea how to arrange a new coiffure."

If he turns up his sleeves and by chance tangles your curls, where really is the harm? Thank Heaven if in the marriage which you have hit upon you find a laughing, joyous side; if in your husband you find the loved reader of the pretty romance you have in your pocket; if, while wearing cashmere shawls and costly jewels in your ears, you find the joys of a real intimacy—that is delicious! In short, reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover.

But before accepting my theories, ladies, although in your heart and conscience you find them perfect, you will have several little prejudices to overcome; above all, you will have to struggle against your education, which is deplorable, as I have already said, but that is no great matter. Remember that under the pretext of education you have been stuffed, my dear sisters. You have been varnished too soon, like those pictures painted for sales, which crack all over six months after purchase. Your disposition has not been properly directed; you are not cultivated; you have been stifled, pruned; you have been shaped like those yew-trees at Versailles which represent goblets and birds. Still, you are women at the bottom, though you no longer look it.

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You are handed over to us men swaddled, distorted, stuffed with prejudices and principles, heavy as paving-stones; all of which are the more difficult to dislodge since you look upon them as sacred; you are started on the matrimonial journey with so much luggage reckoned as indispensable; and at the first station your husband, who is not an angel, loses his temper amidst all these encumbrances, sends it all to the devil under some pretext or other, lets you go on alone, and gets into another carriage. I do not require, mark me, that you should be allowed to grow up uncared for, that good or evil instincts should be suffered to spring up in you anyhow: but it were better that they should not treat your poor mind like the foot of a well-born Chinese girl—that they should not enclose it in a porcelain slipper.

A marriageable young lady is a product of maternal industry, which takes ten years to fructify, and needs from five to six more years of study on the part of the husband to purify, strip, and restore to its real shape. In other words, it takes ten years to make a bride and six years at least to turn this bride into a woman again. Admit frankly that this is time lost as regards happiness, but try to make it up if your husband will permit you to do so.

The sole guaranty of fidelity between husband and wife is love. One remains side by side with a fellow-traveller only so long as one experiences pleasure and happiness in his company. Laws, decrees, oaths, may prevent faithlessness, or at least punish it, but they can neither hinder nor punish intention. But as regards love, intention and deed are the same.

Is it not true, my dear sisters, that you are of this opinion? Do not you thoroughly understand that if love is absent from marriage it should, on the contrary, be its real pivot? To make one's self lovable is the main thing. Believe my white hairs that it is so, and let me give you some more advice.

Yes, I favor marriage—I do not conceal it—the happy marriage in which we cast into the common lot our ideas and our sorrows, as well as our good-humor and our affections. Suppress, by all means, in this partnership, gravity and affectation, yet add a sprinkling of gallantry and good-fellowship. Preserve even in your intimacy that coquetry you so readily assume in society. Seek to please your husband. Be amiable. Consider that your husband is an audience, whose sympathy you must conquer.

In your manner of loving mark those shades, those feminine delicacies, which double the price of things. Do not be miserly, but remember that the manner in which one gives adds to the value of the gift; or rather do not give—make yourself sought after. Think of those precious jewels that are arranged with such art in their satin-lined jewel-case; never forget the case. Let your nest be soft, let your presence be felt in all its thousand trifles. Put a little of yourself into the ordering of everything. Be artistic, delicate, and refined—you can do so without effort—and let your husband perceive in everything that

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

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Do not say to him, "I love you"; that phrase may perhaps recall to him a recollection or two. But lead him on to say to you, "You do love me, then?" and answer "No," but with a little kiss which means "Yes." Make him feel beside you the present to be so pleasant that the past will fade from his memory; and to this end let nothing about you recall that past, for, despite himself, he would never forgive it in you. Do not imitate the women whom he may have known, nor their head-dresses or toilettes; that would tend to make him believe he has not changed his manner of life. You have in yourself another kind of grace, another wit, another coquetry, and above all that rejuvenescence of heart and mind which those women have never had. You have an eagerness in life, a need of expansion, a freshness of impression which are—though perhaps you may not imagine it—irresistible charms. Be yourselves throughout, and you will be for this loved spouse a novelty, a thousand times more charming in his eyes than all the by-gones possible. Conceal from him neither your inclinations nor your inexperience, your childish joys or your childish fears; but be as coquettish with all these as you are of the features of your face, of your fine, black eyes and your long, fair hair.

Nothing is more easily acquired than a little adroitness; do not throw yourself at his head, and always have confidence in yourself.

Usually, a man marries when he thinks himself ruined; when he feels in his waistcoat pocket—not a louis—he is then seasoned; he goes at once before the registrar. But let me tell you, sisters, he is still rich. He has another pocket of which he knows nothing, the fool! and which is full of gold. It is for you to act so that he shall find it out and be grateful to you for the happiness he has had in finding a fortune.

I will sum up, at once, as time is flying and I should not like you to be late for dinner. For Heaven's sake, ladies, tear from the clutches of the women, whose toilettes you do very wrong in imitating, your husbands' affections. Are you not more refined, more sprightly, than they? Do for him whom you love that which these women do for all the world; do not content yourselves with being virtuous—be attractive, perfume your hair, nurture illusion as a rare plant in a golden vase. Cultivate a little folly when practicable; put away your marriage-contract and look at it only once in ten years; love one another as if you had not sworn to do so; forget that there are bonds, contracts, pledges; banish from your mind the recollection of the Mayor and his scarf. Sometimes when you are alone fancy that you are only sweethearts; sister, is not that what you eagerly desire?

Ah! let candor and youth flourish. Let us love and laugh while spring blossoms. Let us love our babies, the little dears, and kiss our wives. Yes, that is moral and healthy; the world is not a shivering convent, marriage is not a tomb. Shame on those who find in it only sadness, boredom, and sleep.

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My sisters, my sisters, strive to be real; that is the blessing I wish you.

CHAPTER X

MADAME'S IMPRESSIONS

The marriage ceremony at the Town Hall has, no doubt, a tolerable importance; but is it really possible for a well-bred person to regard this importance seriously? I have been through it; I have undergone like every one else this painful formality, and I can not look back on it without feeling a kind of humiliation. On alighting from the carriage I descried a muddy staircase; walls placarded with bills of every color, and in front of one of them a man in a snuff-colored coat, bare-headed, a pen behind his ear, and papers under his arm, who was rolling a cigarette between his inky fingers. To the left a door opened and I caught a glimpse of a low dark room in which a dozen fellows belonging to the National Guard were smoking black pipes. My first thought on entering this barrack-room was that I had done wisely in not putting on my gray dress. We ascended the staircase and I saw a long, dirty, dim passage, with a number of half-glass doors, on which I read: "Burials. Turn the handle," "Expropriations," "Deaths. Knock loudly," "Inquiries," "Births," "Public Health," *etc.*, and at length "Marriages."

We entered in company with a small lad who was carrying a bottle of ink; the atmosphere was thick, heavy, and hot, and made one feel ill. Happily, an attendant in a blue livery, resembling in appearance the soldiers I had seen below, stepped forward to ask us to excuse him for not having at once ushered us into the Mayor's drawing-room, which is no other than the first-class waiting-room. I darted into it as one jumps into a cab when it begins to rain suddenly. Almost immediately two serious persons, one of whom greatly resembled the old cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas, brought in two registers, and, opening them, wrote for some time; only stopping occasionally to ask the name, age, and baptismal names of both of us, then, saying to themselves, "Semi-colon . . . between the aforesaid . . . fresh paragraph, *etc.*, *etc.*"

When he had done, the one like the man cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas read aloud, through his nose, that which he had put down, and of which I could understand nothing, except that my name was several times repeated as well as that of the other "aforesaid." A pen was handed to us and we signed. Voila.

"Is it over?" said I to Georges, who to my great surprise was very pale.

"Not yet, dear," said he; "we must now go into the hall, where the marriage ceremony takes place."

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We entered a large, empty hall with bare walls; a bust of the Emperor was at the farther end over a raised platform, some armchairs, and some benches behind them, and dust upon everything. I must have been in a wrong mood, for it seemed to me I was entering the waiting-room at a railway-station; nor could I help looking at my aunts, who were very merry, over the empty chairs. The gentlemen, who no doubt affected not to think as we did, were, on the contrary, all very serious, and I could discern very well that Georges was actually trembling. At length the Mayor came in by a little door and appeared before us, awkward and podgy in his dress-coat, which was too large for him, and which his scarf caused to rise up. He was a very respectable man who had amassed a decent fortune from the sale of iron bedsteads; yet how could I bring myself to think that this embarrassed-looking, ill-dressed, timid little creature could, with a word hesitatingly uttered, unite me in eternal bonds? Moreover, he had a fatal likeness to my piano-tuner.

The Mayor, after bowing to us, as a man bows when without his hat, and in a white cravat, that is to say, clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms which he did not know what to do with, and briskly began the little ceremony. He hurriedly mumbled over several passages of the Code, giving the numbers of the paragraphs; and I was given confusedly to understand that I was threatened with the police if I did not blindly obey all the orders and crotchets of my husband, and if I did not follow wherever he might choose to take me, even if it should be to a sixth floor in the Rue-Saint-Victor. A score of times I was on the point of interrupting the Mayor, and saying, "Excuse me, Monsieur, but those remarks are hardly polite as regards myself, and you yourself must know that they are devoid of meaning."

But I restrained myself for fear I might frighten the magistrate, who seemed to me to be in a hurry to finish. He added, however, a few words on the mutual duties of husband and wife—copartnership—paternity, *etc.*, *etc.*; but all these things, which would perhaps have made me weep anywhere else, seemed grotesque to me, and I could not forget that dozen of soldiers playing piquet round the stove, and that row of doors on which I had read "Public Health," "Burials," "Deaths," "Expropriations," *etc.* I should have been aggrieved at this dealer in iron bedsteads touching on my cherished dreams if the comic side of the situation had not absorbed my whole attention, and if a mad wish to laugh outright had not seized me.

"Monsieur Georges-----, do you swear to take for your wife Mademoiselle-----," said the Mayor, bending forward.

My husband bowed and answered "Yes" in a very low voice. He has since acknowledged to me that he never felt more emotion in his life than in uttering that "Yes."

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

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

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That was all. I was married!

My father and my husband shook hands like men who had not met for twenty years; the eyes of both were moist. As for myself, it was impossible for me to share their emotion. I was very hungry, and mamma and I had the carriage pulled up at the pastry-cook's before going on to the dressmaker's.

The next morning was the great event, and when I awoke it was hardly daylight. I opened the door leading into the drawing-room; there my dress was spread out on the sofa, the veil folded beside it, my shoes, my wreath in a large white box, nothing was lacking. I drank a glass of water. I was nervous, uneasy, happy, trembling. It seemed like the morning of a battle when one is sure of winning a medal. I thought of neither my past nor my future; I was wholly taken up with the idea of the ceremony, of that sacrament, the most solemn of all, of the oath I was about to take before God, and also by the thought of the crowd gathered expressly to see me pass.

We breakfasted early. My father was in his boots, his trousers, his white tie, and his dressing-gown. My mother also was half dressed. It seemed to me that the servants took greater pains in waiting on me and showed me more respect. I even remember that Marie said, "The hairdresser has come, Madame." Madame! Good girl, I have not forgotten it.

It was impossible for me to eat; my throat was parched and I experienced all over me shudders of impatience, something like the sensation one has when one is very-thirsty and is waiting for the sugar to melt. The tones of the organ seemed to haunt me, and the wedding of Emma and Louis recurred to my mind. I dressed; the hairdresser called me "Madame" too, and arranged my hair so nicely that I said, I remember, "Things are beginning well; this coiffure is a good omen." I stopped Marie, who wished to lace me tighter than usual. I know that white makes one look stouter and that Marie was right; but I was afraid lest it should send the blood to my head. I have always had a horror of brides who looked as if they had just got up from table. Religious emotions should be too profound to be expressed by anything save pallor. It is silly to blush under certain circumstances.

When I was dressed I entered the drawing-room to have a little more room and to spread out my trailing skirts. My father and Georges were already there, talking busily.

"Have the carriages come?—yes—and about the 'Salutaris'?—very good, then, you will see to everything—and the marriage coin—certainly, I have the ring—Mon Dieu! where is my certificate of confession? Ah! good, I left it in the carriage."

They were saying all this hurriedly and gesticulating like people having great business on hand. When Georges caught sight of me he kissed my hand, and while the maids

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

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He was not thinking in the least of what he was saying, and I answered mechanically:

“Do you think so? Not too short, the veil, Monsieur Silvani. Don’t forget the bow on the bodice, Marie.”

When one has to look after everything, one needs all one’s wits. However, Georges’ husky voice recurred to me, and I said to myself, “I am sure that he has caught a cold; it is plain that he has had his hair cut too short.”

I soon got at the true state of the case.

“You have a cold, my dear fellow,” said my father.

“Don’t speak of it,” he answered in a low voice. And still lower, and with a somewhat embarrassed smile: “Will you be so kind as to give me an extra pocket-handkerchief? I have but one—”

“Certainly, my dear boy.”

“Thanks, very much.”

It was a trifle, to be sure, but I felt vexed, and I remember that, when going downstairs with them holding up my train behind me, I said to myself, “I do hope that he does not sneeze at the altar.”

I soon forgot all about it. We got into the carriage; I felt that every one was looking at me, and I caught sight of groups of spectators in the street beyond the carriage gates. What I felt is impossible to describe, but it was something delightful. The sound of the beades’ canes on the pavement will forever reecho in my heart. We halted for a moment on the red druggat. The great organ poured forth the full tones of a triumphal march; thousands of eager faces turned toward me, and there in the background, amidst an atmosphere of sunshine, incense, velvet, and gold, were two gilt armchairs for us to seat ourselves on before the altar.

I do not know why an old engraving in my father’s study crossed my mind. It represents the entry of Alexander the Great into Babylon; he is on an elephant which is glittering with precious stones. You must know it. Only, Alexander was a heathen who had many things to reproach himself with, while I was not.

God smiled on me, and with His paternal hand invited me to seat myself in His house, on His red druggat, in His gilt armchair. The heavens, full of joy, made music for me, and on high, through the glittering stained-glass windows, the archangels, full of kind feeling, whispered as they watched me. As I advanced, heads were bent as a wheat-field bends beneath the breeze. My friends, my relatives, my enemies, bowed to us, and I saw—for one sees everything in spite of one’s self on these solemn occasions—



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

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The discourse of his Reverence who married us was a masterpiece, and was delivered, moreover, with that unction, that dignity, that persuasive charm peculiar to him. He spoke of our two families “in which pious belief was hereditary, like honor.” You could have heard a pin drop, such was the attention with which the prelate’s voice was listened to. Then at one point he turned toward me, and gave me to understand with a thousand delicacies that I was wedding one of the noblest officers in the army. “Heaven smiles,” said he, “on the warrior who places at the service of his country a sword blessed by God, and who, when he darts into the fray, can place his hand upon his heart and shout to the enemy that noble war-cry, ‘I believe!’” How well that was turned! What grandeur in this holy eloquence! A thrill ran through the assembly. But that was not all. His Lordship then addressed Georges in a voice as soft and unctuous as it had before been ringing and enthusiastic.

“Monsieur, you are about to take as your companion a young girl”—I scarcely dare recall the graceful and delicate things that his Reverence said respecting me—“piously reared by a Christian mother who has been able to share with her, if I may say so, all the virtues of her heart, all the charms of her mind.” (Mamma was sobbing.) “She will love her husband as she has loved her father, that father full of kindness, who, from the cradle, implanted in her the sentiments of nobility and disinterestedness which—” (Papa smiled despite himself.) “Her father, whose name is known to the poor, and who in the house of God has his place marked among the elect.” (Since his retirement, papa has become churchwarden.) “And you, Monsieur, will respect, I feel certain, so much purity, such ineffable candor”—I felt my eyes grow moist—“and without forgetting the physical and perishable charms of this angel whom God bestows upon you, you will thank Heaven for those qualities a thousand times more precious and more lasting contained in her heart and her mind.”

We were bidden to stand up, and stood face to face with one another like the divine spouses in the picture of Raphael. We exchanged the golden ring, and his Reverence, in a slow, grave voice, uttered some Latin words, the sense of which I did not understand, but which greatly moved me, for the prelate’s hand, white, delicate, and transparent, seemed to be blessing me. The censer, with its bluish smoke, swung by the hands of children, shed in the air its holy perfume. What a day, great heavens! All that subsequently took place grows confused in my memory. I was dazzled, I was transported. I can remember, however, the bonnet with white roses in which Louise had decked herself out. Strange it is how some people are quite wanting in taste!

Going to the vestry, I leaned on the General’s arm, and it was then that I saw the spectators’ faces. All seemed touched.

Soon they thronged round to greet me. The vestry was full, they pushed and pressed round me, and I replied to all these smiles, to all these compliments, by a slight bow in which religious emotion peeped forth in spite of me. I felt conscious that something

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

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By a strange fancy I then fell to thinking of the pitiful ceremony of the day before. I compared—God forgive me for doing so!—the ex-dealer in iron bedsteads, ill at ease in his dress-coat, to the priest; the trivial and commonplace words of the mayor, with the eloquent outbursts of the venerable prelate. What a lesson! There earth, here heaven; there the coarse prose of the man of business, here celestial poesy.

Georges, to whom I lately spoke about this, said:

“But, my dear, perhaps you don’t know that marriage at the Town Hall before the registrar is gratis, while—” I put my hand over his mouth to prevent him from finishing; it seemed to me that he was about to utter some impiety.

Gratis, gratis. That is exactly what I find so very unseemly.

CHAPTER XI

A WEDDING NIGHT

Thanks to country manners and the solemnity of the occasion, the guests had left fairly early. Almost every one had shaken hands with me, some with a cunning smile and others with a foolish one, some with an officious gravity that suggested condolence, and others with a stupid cordiality verging on indiscretion.

General de S. and the prefect, two old friends of the family, were lingering over a game of *ecarte*, and frankly, in spite of all the good-will I bore toward them, I should have liked to see them at the devil, so irritable did I feel that evening.

All this took place, I had forgotten to tell you, the very day of my marriage, and I was really rather tired. Since morning I had been overwhelmed by an average of about two hundred people, all actuated by the best intentions, but as oppressive as the atmosphere before a storm. Since morning I had kept up a perpetual smile for all, and then the good village priest who had married us had thought it his duty, in a very neat sermon so far as the rest of it went, to compare me to Saint Joseph, and that sort of thing is annoying when one is Captain in a lancer regiment. The Mayor, who had been good enough to bring his register to the chateau, had for his part not been able, on catching sight of the prefect, to resist the pleasure of crying, “Long live the Emperor!” On quitting the church they had fired off guns close to my ears and presented me with an immense bouquet. Finally—I tell you this between ourselves—since eight o’clock in the morning I had had on a pair of boots rather too tight for me, and at the moment this narrative begins it was about half an hour after midnight.

I had spoken to every one except my dear little wife, whom they seemed to take pleasure in keeping away from me. Once, however, on ascending the steps, I had squeezed her hand on the sly. Even then this rash act had cost me a look, half sharp



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

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What can you say to the cousins who kiss you, to the aunts who cling round your neck and weep into your waistcoat, to all these smiling faces ranged one beyond the other before you, to all those eyes which have been staring at you for twelve hours past, to all those outbursts of affection which you have not sought, but which claim a word from the heart in reply?

At the end of such a day one's very heart is foundered. You say to yourself: "Come, is it all over? Is there yet a tear to wipe away, a compliment to receive, an agitated hand to clasp? Is every one satisfied? Have they seen enough of the bridegroom? Does any one want any more of him? Can I at length give a thought to my own happiness, think of my dear little wife who is waiting for me with her head buried in the folds of her pillow? Who is waiting for me!" That flashes through your mind all at once like a train of powder. You had not thought of it. During the whole of the day this luminous side of the question had remained veiled, but the hour approaches, at this very moment the silken laces of her bodice are swishing as they are unloosed; she is blushing, agitated, and dare not look at herself in the glass for fear of noting her own confusion. Her aunt and her mother, her cousin and her bosom friend, surround and smile at her, and it is a question of who shall unhook her dress, remove the orange-blossoms from her hair, and have the last kiss.

Good! now come the tears; they are wiped away and followed by kisses. The mother whispers something in her ear about a sacrifice, the future, necessity, obedience, and finds means to mingle with these simple but carefully prepared words the hope of celestial benedictions and of the intercession of a dove or two hidden among the curtains.

The poor child does not understand anything about it, except it be that something unheard-of is about to take place, that the young man—she dare not call him anything else in her thoughts—is about to appear as a conqueror and address her in wondrous phrases, the very anticipation of which makes her quiver with impatience and alarm. The child says not a word—she trembles, she weeps, she quivers like a partridge in a furrow. The last words of her mother, the last farewells of her family, ring confusedly in her ears, but it is in vain that she strives to seize on their meaning; her mind—where is that poor mind of hers? She really does not know, but it is no longer under her control.

"Ah! Captain," I said to myself, "what joys are hidden beneath these alarms, for she loves you. Do you remember that kiss which she let you snatch coming out of church that evening when the Abbe What's-his-name preached so well, and those hand-squeezings and those softened glances, and—happy Captain, floods of love will inundate you; she is awaiting you!"

Here I gnawed my moustache, I tore my gloves off and then put them on again, I walked up and down the little drawing-room, I shifted the clock, which stood on the mantel-shelf; I could not keep still. I had already experienced such sensations on the morning

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

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"What a noise you are making, Georges!" said he. "Cards, if you please, Prefect."

"But, General, the fact is that I feel, I will not conceal from you, a certain degree of emotion and—"

"The king-one-and four trumps. My dear friend, you are not in luck," said he to the prefect, and pulling up with an effort the white waistcoat covering his stomach, he slipped some louis which were on the table L931 into his fob; then bethinking himself, he added: "In fact, my poor fellow, you think yourself bound to keep us company. It is late and we have three leagues to cover from here to B. Every one has left, too."

At last he departed. I can still see his thick neck, the back of which formed a roll of fat over his ribbon of the Legion of Honor. I heard him get into his carriage; he was still laughing at intervals. I could have thrashed him.

"At last!" I said to myself; "at last!" I mechanically glanced at myself in the glass. I was crimson, and my boots, I am ashamed to say, were horribly uncomfortable. I was furious that such a grotesque detail as tight boots should at such a moment have power to attract my attention; but I promised to be sincere, and I am telling you the whole truth.

Just then the clock struck one, and my mother-in-law made her appearance. Her eyes were red, and her ungloved hand was crumpling up a handkerchief visibly moistened.

At the sight of her my first movement was one of impatience. I said to myself, "I am in for a quarter of an hour of it at least."

Indeed, Madame de C. sank down on a couch, took my hand, and burst into tears. Amid her sobs she ejaculated, "Georges—my dear boy—Georges—my son."

I felt that I could not rise to the occasion. "Come, Captain," I said to myself, "a tear; squeeze forth a tear. You can not get out of this becomingly without a tear, or it will be, 'My son-in-law, it is all off.'"

When this stupid phrase, derived from I do not know where—a Palais Royal farce, I believe—had once got into my head, it was impossible for me to get rid of it, and I felt bursts of wild merriment welling up to my lips.

"Calm yourself, Madame; calm yourself."

"How can I, Georges? Forgive me, my dear boy."

"Can you doubt me, Madame?"

I felt that "Madame" was somewhat cold, but I was afraid of making Madame de C. seem old by calling her "mother." I knew her to be somewhat of a coquette.

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

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

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CHAPTER XII

THE HONEYMOON

It had been decided that we should pass the first week of our honeymoon at Madame de C.'s chateau. A little suite of apartments had been fitted up for us, upholstered in blue chintz, delightfully cool-looking. The term "cool-looking" may pass here for a kind of bad joke, for in reality it was somewhat damp in this little paradise, owing to the freshly repaired walls.

A room had been specially reserved for me, and it was thither that, after heartily kissing my dear mother-in-law, I flew up the stairs four at a time. On an armchair, drawn in front of the fire, was spread out my maroon velvet dressing-gown and close beside it were my slippers. I could not resist, and I frantically pulled off my boots. Be that as it may, my heart was full of love, and a thousand thoughts were whirling through my head in frightful confusion. I made an effort, and reflected for a moment on my position:

"Captain," said I to myself, "the approaching moment is a solemn one. On the manner in which you cross the threshold of married life depends your future happiness. It is not a small matter to lay the first stone of an edifice. A husband's first kiss"—I felt a thrill run down my back—"a husband's first kiss is like the fundamental axiom that serves as a basis for a whole volume. Be prudent, Captain. She is there beyond that wall, the fair young bride, who is awaiting you; her ear on the alert, her neck outstretched, she is listening to each of your movements. At every creak of the boards she shivers, dear little soul."

As I said this, I took off my coat and my cravat. "Your line of conduct lies before you ready traced out," I added; "be impassioned with due restraint, calm with some warmth, good, kind, tender; but at the same time let her have a glimpse of the vivacities of an ardent affection and the attractive aspect of a robust temperament." Suddenly I put my coat on again. I felt ashamed to enter my wife's room in a dressing-gown and night attire. Was it not equal to saying to her: "My dear, I am at home; see how I make myself so"? It was making a show of rights which I did not yet possess, so I rearranged my dress, and after the thousand details of a careful toilette I approached the door and gave three discreet little taps. Oh! I can assure you that I was all in a tremble, and my heart was beating so violently that I pressed my hand to my chest to restrain its throbs.

She answered nothing, and after a moment of anguish I decided to knock again. I felt tempted to say in an earnest voice, "It is I, dear; may I come in?" But I also felt that it was necessary that this phrase should be delivered in the most perfect fashion, and I was afraid of marring its effect; I remained, therefore, with a smile upon my lips as if she had been able to see me, and I twirled my moustache, which, without affectation, I had slightly perfumed.

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I soon heard a faint cough, which seemed to answer me and to grant me admission. Women, you see, possess that exquisite tact, that extreme delicacy, which is wholly lacking to us. Could one say more cleverly, in a more charming manner, “Come, I await you, my love, my spouse”? Saint Peter would not have hit upon it. That cough was heaven opening to me. I turned the handle, the door swept noiselessly over the soft carpet. I was in my wife’s room.

A delightful warmth met me face to face, and I breathed a vague perfume of violets and orris-root, or something akin, with which the air of the room was laden. A charming disorder was apparent, the ball dress was spread upon a lounging-chair, two candles were discreetly burning beneath rose-colored shades.

I drew near the bed where Louise was reposing, on the farther side of it, with her face to the wall, and her head buried in the pillows. Motionless and with closed eyes she appeared to be asleep, but her heightened color betrayed her emotion. I must acknowledge that at that moment I felt the most embarrassed of mankind. I resolved humbly to request hospitality. That would be delicate and irreproachable. Oh! you who have gone through these trials, search your memories and recall that ridiculous yet delightful moment, that moment of mingled anguish and joy, when it becomes necessary, without any preliminary rehearsal, to play the most difficult of parts, and to avoid the ridicule which is grinning at you from the folds of the curtains; to be at one and the same time a diplomatist, a barrister, and a man of action, and by skill, tact, and eloquence render the sternest of realities acceptable without banishing the most ideal of dreams.

I bent over the bed, and in the softest notes, the sweetest tones my voice could compass, I murmured, “Well, darling?”

One does what one can at such moments; I could not think of anything better, and yet, Heaven knows, I had tried.

No reply, and yet she was awake. I will admit that my embarrassment was doubled. I had reckoned—I can say as much between ourselves—upon more confidence and greater yielding. I had calculated on a moment of effusiveness, full of modesty and alarm, it is true, but, at any rate, I had counted upon such effusiveness, and I found myself strangely disappointed. The silence chilled me.

“You sleep very soundly, dear. Yet I have a great many things to say; won’t you talk a little?”

As I spoke I—touched her shoulder with the tip of my finger, and saw her suddenly shiver.

“Come,” said I; “must I kiss you to wake you up altogether?”



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

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

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

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"Please let me go to sleep," she said, with a supplicating air; "I am so tired."

"And how about myself, my dear child? I am ready to drop. See, I am in evening dress, and have not a pillow to rest my head on, not one, except this one." I had her hand in mine, and I squeezed it while kissing it. "Would you be very vexed to lend this pillow to your husband? Come, are you going to refuse me a little bit of room? I am not troublesome, I can assure you."

I thought I noted a smile on her lips, and, impatient to escape from my delicate position, in a moment I rose, and, while continuing to converse, hastelessly and noiselessly undressed. I was burning my ships. When my ships were burned there was absolutely nothing left for me to do but to get into bed.

Louise gave a little cry, then she threw herself toward the wall, and I heard a kind of sob.

I had one foot in bed and the other out, and remained petrified, a smile on my lips, and supporting myself wholly on one arm.

"What is the matter-dear; what is the matter? Forgive me if I have offended you."

I brought my head closer to her own, and, while inhaling the perfume of her hair, whispered in her ear:

"I love you, my dear child; I love you, little wife; don't you think that I do?"

She turned toward me her eyes, moistened with tears, and said in a voice broken by emotion and so soft, so low, so tender, that it penetrated to the marrow of my bones:

"I love you, too. But let me sleep!"

"Sleep, my loved angel; sleep fearlessly, my love. I am going away; sleep while I watch over you," I said.

Upon my honor I felt a sob rise to my throat, and yet the idea that my last remark was not badly turned shot through my brain. I pulled the coverings over her again and tucked her up like a child. I can still see her rosy face buried in that big pillow, the curls of fair hair escaping from under the lace of her little nightcap. With her left hand she held the counterpane close up under her chin, and I saw on one of her fingers the new and glittering wedding-ring I had given her that morning. She was charming, a bird nestling in cottonwool, a rosebud fallen amid snow. When she was settled I bent over her and kissed her on the forehead.

"I am repaid," said I to her, laughing; "are you comfortable, Louise?"



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

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"Now, Captain, settle yourself in this armchair and goodnight!" I said this to myself, and I made an effort to raise my unfortunate foot which I had forgotten, a heroic effort, but it was impossible to accomplish it. The leg was so benumbed that I could not move it. As well as I could I hoisted myself upon the other leg, and, hobbling, reached my armchair without appearing too lame. The room seemed to me twice as wide to cross as the Champ de Mars, for hardly had I taken a step in its chilly atmosphere—the fire had gone out, it was April, and the chateau overlooked the Loire—when the cold reminded me of the scantiness of my costume. What! to cross the room before that angel, who was doubtless watching me, in the most grotesque of costumes, and with a helpless leg into the bargain! Why had I forgotten my dressing-gown? However, I reached the armchair, into which I sank. I seized my dress-coat which was beside me, threw it over my shoulders, twisted my white cravat round my neck, and, like a soldier bivouacking, I sought a comfortable position.

It would have been all very well without the icy cold that assailed my legs, and I saw nothing in reach to cover me. I said to myself, "Captain, the position is not tenable," when at length I perceived on the couch—One sometimes is childishy ashamed, but I really dared not, and I waited for a long minute struggling between a sense of the ridiculous and the cold which I felt was increasing. At last, when I heard my wife's breathing become more regular and thought that she must be asleep, I stretched out my arm and pulled toward me her wedding-gown which was on the couch—the silk rustled enough to wake the dead—and with the energy which one always finds on an emergency, wrapped it round me savagely like a railway rug. Then yielding to an involuntary fit of sybaritism, I unhooked the bellows and tried to get the fire to burn.

"After all," I said to myself, arranging the blackened embers and working the little instrument with a thousand precautions, "after all, I have behaved like a gentleman. If the General saw me at this moment he would laugh in my face; but no matter, I have acted rightly."

Had I not sworn to be sincere, I do not know whether I should acknowledge to you that I suddenly felt horrible tinglings in the nasal regions. I wished to restrain myself, but the laws of nature are those which one can not escape. My respiration suddenly ceased, I felt a superhuman power contract my facial muscles, my nostrils dilated, my eyes closed, and all at once I sneezed with such violence that the bottle of Eau des Carmes shook again. God forgive me! A little cry came from the bed, and immediately afterward the most silvery frank and ringing outbreak of laughter followed. Then she added in her simple, sweet, musical tones:

"Have you hurt yourself—, Georges?" She had said Georges after a brief silence, and in so low a voice that I scarcely heard it.

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"I am very ridiculous, am I not, dear? and you are quite right to laugh at me. What would you have? I am camping out and I am undergoing the consequences."

"You are not ridiculous, but you are catching cold," and she began to laugh again.

"Naughty girl!"

"Cruel one, you ought to say, and you would not be wrong if I were to let you fall ill." She said this with charming grace. There was a mingling of timidity and tenderness, modesty and raillery, which I find it impossible to express, but which stupefied me. She smiled at me, then I saw her move nearer to the wall in order to leave room for me, and, as I hesitated to cross the room.

"Come, forgive me," she said.

I approached the bed; my teeth were chattering.

"How kind you are to me, dear," she said to me after a moment or so; "will you wish me good-night?" and she held out her cheek to me. I approached nearer, but as the candle had just gone out I made a mistake as to the spot, and my lips brushed hers. She quivered, then, after a brief silence, she murmured in a low tone, "You must forgive me; you frightened me so just now."

"I wanted to kiss you, dear."

"Well, kiss me, my husband."

Within the trembling young girl the coquetry of the woman was breaking forth in spite of herself.

I could not help it; she exhaled a delightful perfume which mounted to my brain, and the contact of this dear creature whom I touched, despite myself, swept away all my resolutions.

My lips—I do not know how it was—met hers, and we remained thus for a long moment; I felt against my breast the echo of the beating heart, and her rapid breathing came full into my face.

"You do love me a little, dear?" I whispered in her ear.

I distinguished amid a confused sigh a little "Yes!" that resembled a mere breath.

"I don't frighten you any longer?"

"No," she murmured, very softly.

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

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

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

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

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

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under certain circumstances

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

MONSIEUR, MADAME AND BEBE

By Gustave Droz

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

And she examined it from every point of view.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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And she went away, smiling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, yes! I am worn out."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes," said I.

.....

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

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

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK AGAIN

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Go on, my dear, go on; but see that you don't put any into my mouth."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XV

MY WIFE GOES TO A DANCE

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

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

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

Monsieur—A mystery?

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

Monsieur—Well, what is the surprise?

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

Monsieur—Then you would vex me very much.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame—When is what?

Monsieur—The party, of course.

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

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

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

Monsieur—You forgot! you forgot!

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame—I should—kiss my wife.

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

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

Monsieur—Why, for Madame de Lyr's—

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame—Au revoir.



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

In the courtyard the carriage is standing waiting.

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

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

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

Monsieur—The monster!

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

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

Madame—It is he!

Monsieur—It is he!

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

Madame—My dear Silvani, this is unbearable.

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

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

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

Madame—But dress my hair, Silvani.



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

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

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

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

Madame—Now you go upsetting my pins.

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



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

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

Monsieur—I will go to my study, then.

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

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

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

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

Madame—You were saying—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Monsieur—What is it, Jean?

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

Monsieur—Go on all the same to number 224.

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

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

Madame—(excitedly)—It is scandalous.

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

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CHAPTER XVI

A FALSE ALARM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“For your hair, Madame.”

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

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

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

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It seemed to me, however, at the end of a minute or so, that this young man was striving in a thousand ways to engage the attention of the little queen.

The latter, however, answered him in the most natural way in the world, neither betraying constraint nor embarrassment. I was mistaken, no doubt. Have you ever noticed, when you are suddenly brought into the midst of a circle where you are unacquainted, how certain little details, matters of indifference to every one else, assume importance in your eyes? The first impression is based upon a number of trifles that catch your attention at the outset. A stain in the ceiling, a nail in the wall, a feature of your neighbor's countenance impresses itself upon your mind, installs itself there, assumes importance, and, in spite of yourself, all the other observations subsequently made by you group around this spot, this nail, this grimace. Think over it, dear reader, and you will see that every opinion you may have as to a fact, a person, or an object has been sensibly influenced by the recollection of the little trifle that caught your eye at the first glance. What young girl victim of first impressions has not refused one or two husbands on account of a waistcoat too loose, a cravat badly tied, an inopportune sneeze, a foolish smile, or a boot too pointed at the toe?

One does not like admitting to one's self that such trifles can serve as a base to the opinion one has of any one, and one must seek attentively in order to discover within one's mind these unacknowledged germs.

I recollect quite well that the first time I had the honor of calling on Madame de M., I noticed that one of her teeth, the first molar on the right, was quite black. I only caught a glimpse of the little black monster, such was the care taken to hide it, yet I could not get this discovery out of my head. I soon noticed that Madame de M. made frightful grimaces to hide her tooth, and that she took only the smallest possible mouthfuls at table to spare the nervous susceptibilities of the little monster.

I arrived at the pitch of accounting for all the mental and physical peculiarities of Madame de M. by the presence of this slight blemish, and despite myself this black tooth personified the Countess so well that even now, although it has been replaced by another magnificent one, twice as big and as white as the bottom of a plate, even now, I say, Madame de M. can not open her mouth without my looking naturally at it.

But to return to our subject. Amid all this conjugal happiness, so delightfully surrounded, face to face with dear old Oscar, so good, so confiding, so much in love with this little cherub in a Louis XV dress, who carried grace and naivete to so strange a pitch, I had been struck by the too well combed and foppish head of the cousin in the white waistcoat. This head had attracted my attention like the stain on the ceiling of which I spoke just now, like the Countess's black tooth, and despite myself I did not take my eyes off the angler as he passed the silver blade of his knife through a slice of that indigestible fruit which I like to see on the plates of others, but can not tolerate on my own.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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"Oscar, you must, I beg of you—you are mistaken."

At these words he broke into a fearful laugh.

"Mistaken—mistaken!"

And he ran toward the pavilion.

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

"Don't go, my dear fellow, don't go; I beg of you on my knees not to go."

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

"What the devil is the matter with you?"

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

"Then why did not you tell me at once."

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

CHAPTER XVII

I SUP WITH MY WIFE

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

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

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

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

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

"Hush."

"But what are you doing that is so important?"

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

"Monsieur!" said Louise, suddenly turning round.

"Madame," I replied, and we both burst out laughing.



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"Christmas Eve," said I.

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

"Do you mean to complain?"

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

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

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

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

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

"To sup, to sup."

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

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

"A glass of sugar and water."

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Louise soon came and opened the door.

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

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"To sup?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And his, too, eh?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“How pretty you look, pet!”

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

“What is it you do not see, dear?”

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

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

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"Because it is difficult to do two things at once—to keep step and to kiss one's partner."

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

"Bah! it does not stain."

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

"But I was joking, dear. Hang it!—don't you think—yes, certainly, hang it!"

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

"I am sorry, dear; I quite forgot about it."

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

"Kind!"

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

"And to his baptism, little mamma."

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

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

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

“A capital pie, eh?”

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

CHAPTER XVIII



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FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—Then where lies the difficulty?

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

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



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

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

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



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Madame—You are pleased, are you not?

Monsieur—Pleased at what, dear?

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

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—Your religious wool.

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

Monsieur—Can you guess what I am thinking of?

Madame—How do you imagine I could guess that?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—If I had what? Tell me quickly.

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

Monsieur—Pea-green, eh?

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

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

Madame—You can not be serious.

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

Monsieur—What time, dear?

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

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

CHAPTER XIX

A LITTLE CHAT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame H—Impossible!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame H—And what was he like?

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

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

Madame F—Why? The brother is a guarantee.

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

Madame F—How do you make that out?



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

Madame F—What a child you are!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame H—You pity me, do you not?

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

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

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

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

Madame F—Ha! ha! ha!

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



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

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

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

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

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

MONSIEUR, MADAME AND BEBE

By Gustave Droz

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOT-WATER BOTTLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madame taps lightly on her husband's shoulder.

"Hum," growls Monsieur.

Madame taps again.

“Well, what is it?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She holds her neck toward her husband.

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

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

"I am digesting my kiss."

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

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

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

She turns round by resting her arm on his face.

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

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

"Good-night, my dear."

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Good-night.”

They clasp hands and fall asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

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A LONGING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—Like you? What do you mean?

Madame—Like me; that is plain enough.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—But it is madness, delirium, fol—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Exit *monsieur*.)

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—Quicker?

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monsieur—Never.

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

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

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

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

Madame—You were pretending.

Monsieur—I swear to you . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXII

FAMILY LIFE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It is frightful,” murmured my aunts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A boy!"

"And a fine one."

"Really, a boy!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They showed her her mother's apron.

"A boy, is it not?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXIII

NEW YEAR'S DAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It is we two, dear."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“A fur tippet!”

“A Noah’s ark!”

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

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

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

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It is absurd.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Poor aunt."

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

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

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

“I really don’t know, dear.”

“Neither do I, papa.”

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

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

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

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

"To express our hopes that—"

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

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

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

I place the bonbons on a side-table.

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

"Thank you, yes."

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

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

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

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

"Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

"And then we shall go, mamma?"

“You are very rude, my dear.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXIV

Letters of A young mother to her friend.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours affectionately.

CHAPTER XXV

FOUR YEARS LATER

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



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

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

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

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

Yours most affectionately.

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

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

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

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

Do I love him? I should die.

Nice.



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

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



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

Yours from my heart.

CHAPTER XXVI

OLD RECOLLECTIONS

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

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

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

Sunday requires all this in its honor.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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"Like papa," do you remember how these two words warm the heart, and how many transgressions they cause to be forgiven.

My great happiness,—is it yours too?—was to be present at my darling's awakening. I knew the time. I would gently draw aside the curtains of his cradle and watch him as I waited.

I usually found him stretched diagonally, lost in the chaos of sheets and blankets, his legs in the air, his arms crossed above his head. Often his plump little hand still clutched the toy that had helped to send him off to sleep, and through his parted lips came the regular murmur of his soft breathing. The warmth of his sleep had given his cheeks the tint of a well-ripened peach. His skin was warm, and the perspiration of the night glittered on his forehead in little imperceptible pearls.

Soon his hand would make a movement; his foot pushed away the blanket, his whole body stirred, he rubbed an eye, stretched out his arms, and then his look from under his scarcely raised eyelids would rest on me.

He would smile at me, murmuring softly, so softly that I would hold my breath to seize all the shades of his music.

"Dood mornin', papa."

"Good morning, my little man; have you slept well?"

We held out our arms to each other and embraced like old friends.

Then the talking would begin. He chatted as the lark would sing to the rising sun. Endless stories.

He would tell me his dreams, asking after each sentence for "his nice, warm bread and milk, with plenty of sugar." And when his breakfast came up, what an outburst of laughter, what joy as he drew himself up to reach it; then his eye would glitter with a tear in the corner, and the chatter begin again.

At other times he would come and surprise me in bed. I would pretend to be asleep, and he would pull my beard and shout in my ear. I feigned great alarm and threatened to be avenged. From this arose fights among the counterpanes, entrenchments behind the pillows. In sign of victory I would tickle him, and then he shuddered, giving vent to the frank and involuntary outburst of laughter of happy childhood. He buried his head between his two shoulders like a tortoise withdrawing into his shell, and threatened me with his plump rosy foot. The skin of his heel was so delicate that a young girl's cheek would have been proud of it. How many kisses I would cover those dear little feet with when I warmed his long nightdress before the fire.

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

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

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

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A child's expression is then so touching, there is so much grief in a warm tear slowly falling, in a little contracted face, a little heaving breast.

All this is long past. Yet years have gone by without effacing these loved recollections; and now that my baby is thirty years old and has a heavy moustache, when he holds out his large hand and says in his bass voice, "Good morning, father," it still seems to me that an echo repeats afar off the dear words of old, "Dood mornin', papa."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LITTLE BOOTS

In the morning when I left my room, I saw placed in line before the door his boots and mine. His were little laced-up boots rather out of shape, and dulled by the rough usage to which he subjects them. The sole of the left boot was worn thin, and a little hole was threatening at the toe of the right. The laces, worn and slack, hung to the right and left. Swellings in the leather marked the places of his toes, and the accustomed movements of his little foot had left their traces in the shape of creases, slight or deep.

Why have I remembered all this? I really do not know, but it seems to me that I can still see the boots of the dear little one placed there on the mat beside my own, two grains of sand by two paving stones, a tom tit beside an elephant. They were his every-day boots, his playfellows, those with which he ascended sand hills and explored puddles. They were devoted to him, and shared his existence so closely that something of himself was met with again in them. I should have recognized them among a thousand; they had an especial physiognomy about them; it seemed to me that an invisible tie attached them to him, and I could not look at their undecided shape, their comic and charming grace, without recalling their little master, and acknowledging to myself that they resembled him.

Everything belonging to a baby becomes a bit babyish itself, and assumes that expression of unstudied and simple grace peculiar to a child.

Beside these laughing, gay, good-humored little boots, only asking leave to run about the country, my own seemed monstrous, heavy, coarse, ridiculous, with their heels. From their heavy and disabused air one felt that for them life was a grave matter, its journeys long, and the burden borne quite a serious one.

The contrast was striking, and the lesson deep. I would softly approach these little boots in order not to wake the little man who was still asleep in the adjoining room; I felt them, I turned them over, I looked at them on all sides, and I found a delightful smile rise to my lips. Never did the old violet-scented glove that lay for so long in the inmost recess of my drawer procure me so sweet an emotion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His mother, who, however, laughed too, would say the next minute, “Come, baby, come, my little angel, you will get cold . . . But leave off. . . Will you have done, you little demon?”

She wanted to scold, but she could not be serious at the sight of his fair-haired head, and flushed, smiling, happy face, thrown back on my knee.

She would look at me, and say:

“He is unbearable. Good gracious! what a child.”

But I understood that this meant:

“Look how handsome, sturdy and healthy he is, our baby, our little man, our son.”

And indeed he was adorable; at least I thought so.

I had the wisdom—I can say it now that my hair is white—not to let one of those happy moments pass without amply profiting by it, and really I did well. Pity the fathers who do not know how to be papas as often as possible, who do not know how to roll on the carpet, play at being a horse, pretend to be the great wolf, undress their baby, imitate the barking of the dog, and the roar of the lion, bite whole mouthfuls without hurting, and hide behind armchairs so as to let themselves be seen.



Pity sincerely these unfortunates. It is not only pleasant child's play that they neglect, but true pleasure, delightful enjoyment, the scraps of that happiness which is greatly calumniated and accused of not existing because we expect it to fall from heaven in a solid mass when it lies at our feet in fine powder. Let us pick up the fragments, and not grumble too much; every day brings us with its bread its ration of happiness.

Let us walk slowly and look down on the ground, searching around us and seeking in the corners; it is there that Providence has its hiding-places.

I have always laughed at those people who rush through life at full speed, with dilated nostrils, uneasy eyes, and glance rivetted on the horizon. It seems as though the present scorched their feet, and when you say to them, "Stop a moment, alight, take a glass of this good old wine, let us chat a little, laugh a little, kiss your child."

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"Impossible," they reply; "I am expected over there. There I shall converse, there I shall drink delicious wine, there I shall give expansion to paternal love, there I shall be happy!"

And when they do get "there," breathless and tired out, and claim the price of their fatigue, the present, laughing behind its spectacles, says, "Monsieur, the bank is closed."

The future promises, it is the present that pays, and one should have a good understanding with the one that keeps the keys of the safe.

Why fancy that you are a dupe of Providence?

Do you think that Providence has the time to serve up to each of you perfect happiness, already dressed on a golden plate, and to play music during your repast into the bargain? Yet that is what a great many people would like.

We must be reasonable, tuck up our sleeves and look after our cooking ourselves, and not insist that heaven should put itself out of the way to skim our soup.

I used to muse on all this of an evening when my baby was in my arms, and his moist, regular breathing fanned my hand. I thought of the happy moments he had already given me, and was grateful to him for them.

"How easy it is," I said to myself, "to be happy, and what a singular fancy that is of going as far as China in quest of amusement."

My wife was of my opinion, and we would sit for hours by the fire talking of what we felt.

"You, do you see, dear? love otherwise than I do," she often said to me. "Papás calculate more. Their love requires a return. They do not really love their child till the day on which their self-esteem as its father is flattered. There is something of ownership in it. You can analyze paternal love, discover its causes, say 'I love my child because he is so and so, or so and so.' With the mother such analysis is impossible, she does not love her child because he is handsome or ugly, because he does or does not resemble her, has or has not her tastes. She loves him because she can not help it, it is a necessity. Maternal love is an innate sentiment in woman. Paternal love is, in man, the result of circumstances. In her love is an instinct, in him a calculation, of which, it is true, he is unconscious, but, in short, it is the outcome of several other feelings."

"That is all very fine; go on," I said. "We have neither heart nor bowels, we are fearful savages. What you say is monstrous." And I stirred the logs furiously with the tongs.

Yet my wife was right, I acknowledged to myself. When a child comes into the world the affection of the father is not to be compared to that of the mother. With her it is love already. It seems that she has known him for a long time, her pretty darling. At his first cry it might be said that she recognized him. She seems to say, "It is he." She takes him without the slightest embarrassment, her movements are natural, she shows no awkwardness,

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and in her two twining arms the baby finds a place to fit him, and falls asleep contentedly in the nest created for him. It would be thought that woman serves a mysterious apprenticeship to maternity. Man, on the other hand, is greatly troubled by the birth of a child. The first wail of the little creature stirs him, but in this emotion there is more astonishment than love. His affection is not yet born. His heart requires to reflect and to become accustomed to these fondnesses so new to him.

There is an apprenticeship to be served to the business of a father. There is none to that of a mother.

If the father is clumsy morally in his love for his firstborn, it must be acknowledged that he is so physically in the manifestation of his fondness.

It is only tremblingly, and with contortions and efforts, that he lifts the slight burden. He is afraid of smashing the youngster, who knows this, and thence bawls with all the force of his lungs. He expands more strength, poor man, in lifting up his child than he would in bursting a door open. If he kisses him, his beard pricks him; if he touches him, his big fingers cause him some disaster. He has the air of a bear threading a needle.

And yet it must be won, the affection of this poor father, who, at the outset, meets nothing but misadventures; he must be captivated, captured, made to have a taste for the business, and not be left too long to play the part of a recruit.

Nature has provided for it, and the father rises to the rank of corporal the day the baby lisps his first syllables.

It is very sweet, the first lisping utterance of a child, and admirably chosen to move—the “pa-pa” the little creature first murmurs. It is strange that the first word of a child should express precisely the deepest and tenderest sentiment of all?

Is it not touching to see that the little creature finds of himself the word that is sure to touch him of whom he stands most in need; the word that means, “I am yours, love me, give me a place in your heart, open your arms to me; you see I do not know much as yet, I have only just arrived, but, already, I think of you, I am one of the family, I shall eat at your table, and bear your name, pa-pa, pa-pa.”

He has discovered at once the most delicate of flatteries, the sweetest of caresses. He enters on life by a master stroke.

Ah! the dear little love! “Pa-pa, pa-pa,” I still hear his faint, hesitating voice, I can still see his two coral lips open and close. We were all in a circle around him, kneeling down to be on a level with him. They kept saying to him, “Say it again, dear, say it

again. Where is papa?" And he, amused by all these people about him, stretched out his arms, and turned his eyes toward me.

I kissed him heartily, and felt that two big tears hindered me from speaking.

From that moment I was a papa in earnest. I was christened.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

BABIES AND PAPAS

When the baby reaches three or four years of age, when his sex shows itself in his actions, his tastes and his eyes, when he smashes his wooden horses, cuts open his drums, blows trumpets, breaks the castors off the furniture, and evinces a decided hostility to crockery; in a word, when he is a man, it is then that the affection of a father for his son becomes love. He feels himself invaded by a need of a special fondness, of which the sweetest recollections of his past life can give no idea. A deep sentiment envelopes his heart, the countless roots of which sink into it in all directions. Defects or qualities penetrate and feed on this sentiment. Thus, we find in paternal love all the weaknesses and all the greatnesses of humanity. Vanity, abnegation, pride, and disinterestedness are united together, and man in his entirety appears in the papa.

It is on the day which the child becomes a mirror in which you recognize your features, that the heart is moved and awakens. Existence becomes duplicated, you are no longer one, but one and a half; you feel your importance increase, and, in the future of the little creature who belongs to you, you reconstruct your own past; you resuscitate, and are born again in him. You say to yourself: "I will spare him such and such a vexation which I had to suffer, I will clear from his path such and such a stone over which I stumbled, I will make him happy, and he shall owe all to me; he shall be, thanks to me, full of talents and attractions." You give him, in advance, all that you did not get yourself, and in his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own brows.

Human weakness, no doubt; but what matter, provided the sentiment that gives birth to this weakness is the strongest and purest of all? What matter if a limpid stream springs up between two paving stones? Are we to be blamed for being generous out of egotism, and for devoting ourselves to others for reasons of personal enjoyment?

Thus, in the father, vanity is the leading string. Say to any father: "Good heavens! how like you he is!" The poor man may hesitate at saying yes, but I defy him not to smile. He will say, "Perhaps . . . Do you think so? . . . Well, perhaps so, side face."

And do not you be mistaken; if he does so, it is that you may reply in astonishment: "Why, the child is your very image."

He is pleased, and that is easily explained; for is not this likeness a visible tie between him and his work? Is it not his signature, his trade-mark, his title-deed, and, as it were, the sanction of his rights?

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To this physical resemblance there soon succeeds a moral likeness, charming in quite another way. You are moved to tears when you recognize the first efforts of this little intelligence to grasp your ideas. Without check or examination it accepts and feeds on them. By degrees the child shares your tastes, your habits, your ways. He assumes a deep voice to be like papa, asks for your braces, sighs before your boots, and sits down with admiration on your hat. He protects his mamma when he goes out with her, and scolds the dog, although he is very much afraid of him; all to be like papa. Have you caught him at meals with his large observant eyes fixed on you, studying your face with open mouth and spoon in hand, and imitating his model with an expression of astonishment and respect. Listen to his long gossips, wandering as his little brain; does he not say:

“When I am big like papa I shall have a moustache and a stick like him, and I shall not be afraid in the dark, because it is silly to be afraid in the dark when you are big, and I shall say ‘damn it,’ for I shall then be grown up.”

“Baby, what did you say, sir?”

“I said just as papa does.”

What would you? He is a faithful mirror. You are for him an ideal, a model, the type of all that is great and strong, handsome and intelligent.

Often he makes mistakes, the little dear, but his error is all the more delicious in its sincerity, and you feel all the more unworthy of such frank admiration. You console yourself for your own imperfections in reflecting that he is not conscious of them.

The defects of children are almost always harrowed from their father; they are the consequences of a too literal copy. Provide, then, against them. Yes, no doubt, but I ask you what strength of mind is not needed by a poor man to undeceive his baby, to destroy, with a word, his innocent confidence, by saying to him: “My child, I am not perfect, and I have faults to be avoided?”

This species of devotion on the part of the baby for his father reminds me of the charming remark of one of my little friends. Crossing the road, the little fellow caught sight of a policeman. He examined him with respect, and then turning to me, after a moment’s reflection, said, with an air of conviction: “Papa is stronger than all the policemen, isn’t he?”

If I had answered “No,” our intimacy would have been broken off short.

Was it not charming? One can truly say, “Like baby, like papa.” Our life is the threshold of his. It is with our eyes that he has first seen.

Profit, young fathers, by the first moments of candor on the part of your dear baby, seek to enter his heart when this little heart opens, and establish yourself in it so thoroughly, that at the moment when the child is able to judge you, he will love you too well to be severe or to cease loving. Win his, affection, it is worth the trouble.

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To be loved all your life by a being you love—that is the problem to be solved, and toward the solution of which all your efforts should be directed. To make yourself loved, is to store up treasures of happiness for the winter. Each year will take away a scrap of your life, contract the circle of interests and pleasures in which you live; your mind by degrees will lose its vigor, and ask for rest, and as you live less and less by the mind, you will live more and more by the heart. The affection of others which was only a pleasant whet will become a necessary food, and whatever you may have been, statesmen or artists, soldiers or bankers, when your heads are white, you will no longer be anything but fathers.

But filial love is not born all at once, nor is it necessary it should be. The voice of nature is a voice rather poetical than truthful. The affection of children is earned and deserved; it is a consequence, not a cause, and gratitude is its commencement. At any cost, therefore, your baby must be made grateful. Do not reckon that he will be grateful to you for your solicitude, your dreams for his future, the cost of his nursing, and the splendid dowry that you are amassing for him; such gratitude would require from his little brain too complicated a calculation, besides social ideas as yet unknown to him. He will not be thankful to you for the extreme fondness you have for him; do not be astonished at it, and do not cry out at his ingratitude. You must first make him understand your affection; he must appreciate and judge it before responding to it; he must know his notes before he can play tunes.

The little man's gratitude will at first be nothing but a simple, egotistical and natural calculation. If you have made him laugh, if you have amused him, he will want you to begin again, he will hold out his little arms to you, crying: "Do it again." And the recollection of the pleasure you have given him becoming impressed upon his mind, he will soon say to himself: "No one amuses me so well as papa; it is he who tosses me into the air, plays at hide-and-seek with me and tells me tales." So, by degrees, gratitude will be born in him, as thanks spring to the lips of him who is made happy.

Therefore, learn the art of amusing your child, imitate the crowing of the cock, and gambol on the carpet, answer his thousand impossible questions, which are the echo of his endless dreams, and let yourself be pulled by the beard to imitate a horse. All this is kindness, but also cleverness, and good King Henry IV did not belie his skilful policy by walking on all fours on his carpet with his children on his back.

In this way, no doubt, your paternal authority will lose something of its austere prestige, but will gain the deep and lasting influence that affection gives. Your baby will fear you less but will love you more. Where is the harm.

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Do not be afraid of anything; become his comrade, in order to have the right of remaining his friend. Hide your paternal superiority as the commissary of police does his sash. Ask with kindness for that which you might rightly insist upon having, and await everything from his heart if you have known how to touch it. Carefully avoid such ugly words as discipline, passive obedience and command; let his submission be gentle to him, and his obedience resemble kindness. Renounce the stupid pleasure of imposing your fancies upon him, and of giving orders to prove your infallibility.

Children have a keenness of judgment, and a delicacy of impression which would not be imagined, unless one has studied them. Justice and equity are easily born in their minds, for they possess, above all things, positive logic. Profit by all this. There are unjust and harsh words which remain graven on a child's heart, and which he remembers all his life. Reflect that, in your baby, there is a man whose affection will cheer your old age; therefore respect him so that he may respect you; and be sure that there is not a single seed sown in this little heart which will not sooner or later bear fruit.

But there are, you will say, unmanageable children, rebels from the cradle. Are you sure that the first word they heard in their lives has not been the cause of their evil propensities? Where there has been rebellion, there has been clumsy pressure; for I will not believe in natural vice. Among evil instincts there is always a good one, of which an arm can be made to combat the others. This requires, I know, extreme kindness, perfect tact, and unlimited confidence, but the reward is sweet. I think, therefore, in conclusion, that a father's first kiss, his first look, his first caresses, have an immense influence on a child's life. To love is a great deal. To know how to love is everything.

Even were one not a father, it is impossible to pass by the dear little ones without feeling touched, and without loving them. Muddy and ragged, or carefully decked out; running in the roadway and rolling in the dust, or playing at skipping rope in the gardens of the Tuileries; dabbling among the ducklings, or building hills of sand beside well-dressed mammas—babies are charming. In both classes there is the same grace, the same unembarrassed movements, the same comical seriousness, the same carelessness as to the effect created, in short, the same charm; the charm that is called childhood, which one can not understand without loving—which one finds just the same throughout nature, from the opening flower and the dawning day to the child entering upon life.

A baby is not an imperfect being, an unfinished sketch—he is a man. Watch him closely, follow every one of his movements; they will reveal to you a logical sequence of ideas, a marvellous power of imagination, such as will not again be found at any period of life. There is more real poetry in the brain of these dear loves than in twenty epics. They are surprised and unskilled, no doubt; but nothing equals the vigor of these minds, unexperienced, fresh, simple, sensible of the slightest impressions, which make their way through the midst of the unknown.

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What immense labor is gone through by them in a few months! To notice noises, classify them, understand that some of these sounds are words, and that these words are thoughts; to find out of themselves alone the meaning of everything, and distinguish the true from the false, the real from the imaginary; to correct, by observation, the errors of their too ardent imagination; to unravel a chaos, and during this gigantic task to render the tongue supple and strengthen the staggering little legs, in short, to become a man. If ever there was a curious and touching sight it is that of this little creature setting out upon the conquest of the world. As yet he knows neither doubt nor fear, and opens his heart fully. There is something of Don Quixote about a baby. He is as comic as the Knight, but he has also a sublime side.

Do not laugh too much at the hesitations, the countless gropings, the preposterous follies of this virgin mind, which a butterfly lifts to the clouds, to which grains of sand are mountains, which understands the twittering of birds, ascribes thoughts to flowers, and souls to dolls, which believes in far-off realms, where the trees are sugar, the fields chocolate, and the rivers syrup, for which Punch and Mother Hubbard are real and powerful individuals, a mind which peoples silence and vivifies night. Do not laugh at his love; his life is a dream, and his mistakes poetry.

This touching poetry which you find in the infancy of man you also find in the infancy of nations. It is the same. In both cases there is the same necessity of idealization, the same tendency to personify the unknown. And it may be said that between Punch and Jupiter, Mother Hubbard and Venus, there is only a hair's breadth.

CHAPTER XXIX

HIS FIRST BREECHES

The great desire in a child is to become a man. But the first symptom of virility, the first serious step taken in life, is marked by the assumption of breeches.

This first breeching is an event that papa desires and mamma dreads. It seems to the mother that it is the beginning of her being forsaken. She looks with tearful eyes at the petticoat laid aside for ever, and murmurs to herself, "Infancy is over then? My part will soon become a small one. He will have fresh tastes, new wishes; he is no longer only myself, his personality is asserting itself; he is some one's boy."

The father, on the contrary, is delighted. He laughs in his moustache to see the little arching calves peeping out beneath the trousers; he feels the little body, the outline of which can be clearly made out under the new garment, and says to himself; "How well he is put together, the rascal. He will have broad shoulders and strong loins like myself. How firmly his little feet tread the ground." Papa would like to see him in jackboots; for a trifle he would buy him spurs. He begins to see himself in this little one

sprung from him; he looks at him in a fresh light, and, for the first time, he finds a great charm in calling him “my boy.”

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As to the baby, he is intoxicated, proud, triumphant, although somewhat embarrassed as to his arms and legs, and, be it said, without any wish to offend him, greatly resembling those little poodles we see freshly shaven on the approach of summer. What greatly disturbed the poor little fellow is past. How many men of position are there who do not experience similar inconvenience. He knows very well that breeches, like nobility, render certain things incumbent on their possessor, that he must now assume new ways, new gestures, a new tone of voice; he begins to scan out of the corner of his eye the movements of his papa, who is by no means ill pleased at this: he clumsily essays a masculine gesture or two; and this struggle between his past and his present gives him for some time the most comical air in the world. His petticoats haunt him, and really he is angry that it is so.

Dear first pair of breeches! I love you, because you are a faithful friend, and I encounter at every step in life you and your train of sweet sensations. Are you not the living image of the latest illusion caressed by our vanity? You, young officer, who still measure your moustaches in the glass, and who have just assumed for the first time the epaulette and the gold belt, how did you feel when you went downstairs and heard the scabbard of your sabre go clink-clank on the steps, when with your cap on one side and your arm akimbo you found yourself in the street, and, an irresistible impulse urging you on, you gazed at your figure reflected in the chemist's bottles? Will you dare to say that you did not halt before those bottles? First pair of breeches, lieutenant.

You will find them again, these breeches, when you are promoted to be Captain and are decorated. And later on, when, an old veteran with a gray moustache, you take a fair companion to rejuvenate you, you will again put them on; but this time the dear creature will help you to wear them.

And the day when you will no longer have anything more to do with them, alas! that day you will be very low, for one's whole life is wrapped up in this precious garment. Existence is nothing more than putting on our first pair of breeches, taking them off, putting them on again, and dying with eyes fixed on them.

Is it the truth that most of our joys have no more serious origin than those of children? Are we then so simple? Ah! yes, my dear sir, we are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are. We never quite get rid of our swaddling clothes; do you see, there is always a little bit sticking out? There is a baby in every one of us, or, rather, we are only babies grown big.

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See the young barrister walking up and down the lobby of the courts. He is freshly shaven: in the folds of his new gown he hides a pile of documents, and on his head, in which a world of thought is stirring, is a fine advocate's coif, which he bought yesterday, and which this morning he coquettishly crushed in with a blow from his fist before putting it on. This young fellow is happy; amid the general din he can distinguish the echo of his own footsteps, and the ring of his bootheels sounds to him like the great bell of Notre Dame. In a few minutes he will find an excuse for descending the great staircase, and crossing the courtyard in costume. You may be sure that he will not disrobe except to go to dinner. What joy in these five yards of black stuff; what happiness in this ugly bit of cloth stretched over stiff cardboard!

First pair of breeches—I think I recognize you.

And you, Madame, with what happiness do you renew each season the enjoyment caused by new clothes? Do not say, I beg of you, that such enjoyments are secondary ones, for their influence is positive upon your nature and your character. Why, I ask you, did you find so much captivating logic, so much persuasive eloquence, in the sermon of Father Paul? Why did you weep on quitting the church, and embrace your husband as soon as you got home? You know better than I do, Madame, that it was because on that day you had put on for the first time that little yellow bonnet, which is a gem, I acknowledge, and which makes you look twice as pretty. These impressions can scarcely be explained, but they are invincible. There may be a trifle of childishness in it all, you will admit, but it is a childishness that can not be got rid of.

As a proof of it, the other day, going to St. Thomas's to hear Father Nicholas, who is one of our shining lights, you experienced totally different sentiments; a general feeling of discontent and doubt and nervous irritability at every sentence of the preacher. Your soul did not soar heavenward with the same unreserved confidence; you left St. Thomas's with your head hot and your feet cold; and you so far forgot yourself as to say, as you got into your carriage, that Father Nicholas was a Gallican devoid of eloquence. Your coachman heard it. And, finally, on reaching home you thought your drawing-room too small and your husband growing too fat. Why, I again ask you, this string of vexatious impressions? If you remember rightly, dear Madame, you wore for the first time the day before yesterday that horrible little violet bonnet, which is such a disgusting failure. First pair of breeches, dear Madame.

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Would you like a final example? Observe your husband. Yesterday he went out in a bad temper—he had breakfasted badly—and lo! in the evening, at a quarter to seven, he came home from the Chamber joyful and well-pleased, a smile on his lips, and good-humor in his eye. He kissed you on the forehead with a certain unconstraint, threw a number of pamphlets and papers with an easy gesture on the sidetable, sat down to table, found the soup delicious, and ate joyously. “What is the matter with my husband?” you asked yourself . . . I will explain. Your husband spoke yesterday for the first time in the building, you know. He said—the sitting was a noisy one, the Left were threshing out some infernal questions—he said, during the height of the uproar, and rapping with his paper-knife on his desk: “But we can not hear!” And as these words were received on all sides with universal approbation and cries of “Hear, hear!” he gave his thoughts a more parliamentary expression by adding: “The voice of the honorable gentleman who is speaking does not reach us.” It was not much certainly, and the amendment may have been carried all the same, but after all it was a step; a triumph, to tell the truth, since your husband has from day to day put off the delivery of his maiden speech. Behold a happy deputy, a deputy who has just—put on his first pair of breeches.

What matter whether the reason be a serious or a futile one, if your blood flows faster, if you feel happier, if you are proud of yourself? To win a great victory or put on a new bonnet, what matters it if this new bonnet gives you the same joy as a laurel crown?

Therefore do not laugh too much at baby if his first pair of breeches intoxicates him, if, when he wears them, he thinks his shadow longer and the trees less high. He is beginning his career as a man, dear child, nothing more.

How many things have not people been proud of since the beginning of the world? They were proud of their noses under Francis the First, of their perukes under Louis XIV, and later on of their appetites and stoutness. A man is proud of his wife, his idleness, his wit, his stupidity, the beard on his chin, the cravat round his neck, the hump on his back.

CHAPTER XXX

COUNTRY CHILDREN

I love the baby that runs about under the trees of the Tuileries; I love the pretty little fair-haired girls with nice white stockings and unmanageable crinolines. I like to watch the tiny damsels decked out like reliquaries, and already affecting coquettish and lackadaisical ways. It seems to me that in each of them I can see thousands of charming faults already peeping forth. But all these miniature men and women, exchanging postage stamps and chattering of dress, have something of the effect of adorable monstrosities on me.

I like them as I like a bunch of grapes in February, or a dish of green peas in December.

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In the babies' kingdom, my friend, my favorite is the country baby, running about in the dust on the highway barefoot and ragged, and searching for black birds' and chaffinches' nests on the outskirts of the woods. I love his great black wondering eye, which watches you fixedly from between two locks of un combed hair, his firm flesh bronzed by the sun, his swarthy forehead, hidden by his hair, his smudged face and his picturesque breeches kept from falling off by the paternal braces fastened to a metal button, the gift of a gendarme.

Ah! what fine breeches; not very long in the legs, but, then, what room everywhere else! He could hide away entirely in this immense space which allows a shirt-tail, escaping through a slit, to wave like a flag. These breeches preserve a remembrance of all the garments of the family; here is a piece of maternal petticoat, here a fragment of yellow waistcoat, here a scrap of blue handkerchief; the whole sewn with a thread that presents the twofold advantage of being seen from a distance, and of not breaking.

But under these patched clothes you can make out a sturdy little figure; and, besides, what matters the clothes? Country babies are not coquettish; and when the coach comes down the hill with jingling bells and they rush after it, stumbling over their neighbors, tumbling with them in the dust, and rolling into the ditches, what would all these dear little gamins do in silk stockings?

I love them thus because they are wild, taking alarm, and fleeing away at your approach like the young rabbits you surprise in the morning playing among the wild thyme. You must have recourse to a thousand subterfuges in order to triumph over their alarm and gain their confidence. But if at length, thanks to your prudence, you find yourself in their company, at the outset play ceases, shouts and noise die away; the little group remain motionless, scratching their heads, and all their uneasy eyes look fixedly at you. This is the difficult moment.

A sharp word, a stern gesture, may cause an eternal misunderstanding with them, just as a kind remark, a smile, a caress will soon accomplish their conquest. And this conquest is worth the trouble, believe me.

One of my chief methods of winning them was as follows: I used to take my watch out of my pocket and look at it attentively. Then I would see my little people stretch their necks, open their eyes, and come a step nearer; and it would often happen that the chickens, ducklings, and geese, which were loitering close by in the grass, imitated their comrades and drew near too. I then would put my watch to my ear and smile like a man having a secret whispered to him. In presence of this prodigy my youngsters could no longer restrain themselves, and would exchange among themselves those keen, simple, timid, mocking looks, which must have been seen to be understood. They advanced this time in earnest, and if I offered to let the boldest listen, by holding out my watch to him, he would draw back alarmed, although smiling, while the band would

break into an outburst of joy; the ducklings flapping their wings, the white geese cackling, and the chickens going chk, chk. The game was won.

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How many times have I not played this little farce, seated under a willow on the banks of my little stream, which ripples over the white stones, while the reeds bend tremblingly. The children would crowd round me to hear the watch, and soon questions broke forth in chorus to an accompaniment of laughter. They inspected my gaiters, rummaged in my pockets and leant against my knees. The ducklings glided under my feet, and the big geese tickled my back.

How enjoyable it is not to alarm creatures that tremble at everything. I would not move for fear of interrupting their joy, and was like a child who is building a house of cards and who has got to the third story. But I marked all these happy little faces standing out against the blue sky; I watched the rays of the sun stealing into the tangles of their fair hair, or spreading in a patch of gold on their little brown necks; I followed their gestures full of awkwardness and grace; I sat down on the grass to be the nearer to them; and if an unfortunate chicken came to grief, between two daisies, I quickly stretched out my arm and replaced it on its legs.

I assure you that they were all grateful. If one loves these little people at all, there is one thing that strikes you when you watch them closely. Ducklings dabbling along the edge of the water or turning head over heels in their feeding trough, young shoots thrusting forth their tender little leaves above ground, little chickens running along before their mother hen, or little men staggering among the grass—all these little creatures resemble one another. They are the babies of the great mother Nature; they have common laws, a common physiognomy; they have something inexplicable about them which is at once comic and graceful, awkward and tender, and which makes them loved at once; they are relations, friends, comrades, under the same flag. This pink and white flag, let us salute it as it passes, old graybeards that we are. It is blessed, and is called childhood.

All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft to the touch as a handful of wadding. Protected by cushions of good rosy flesh or by a coating of soft down, they go rolling, staggering, dragging along their little unaccustomed feet, shaking in the air their plump hands or featherless wing. See them stretched haphazard in the sun without distinction of species, swelling themselves with milk or meal, and dare to say that they are not alike. Who knows whether all these children of nature have not a common point of departure, if they are not brothers of the same origin?

Since men with green spectacles have existed, they have amused themselves with ticketing the creatures of this world. These latter are arranged, divided into categories and classified, as though by a careful apothecary who wants everything about him in order. It is no slight matter to stow away each one in the drawer that suits him, and I have heard that certain subjects still remain on the counter owing to their belonging to two show-cases at once.

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And what proves to me, indeed, that these cases exist? What is there to assure me that the whole world is not one family, the members of which only differ by trifles which we are pleased to regard as everything?

Have you fully established the fact of these drawers and compartments? Have you seen the bars of these imaginary cages in which you imprison kingdoms and species? Are there not infinite varieties which escape your analysis, and are, as it were, the unknown links uniting all the particles of the animated world? Why say, "For these eternity, for those annihilation?"

Why say, "This is the slave, that is the sovereign?" Strange boldness for men who are ignorant of almost everything!

Man, animal or plant, the creature vibrates, suffers or enjoys—exists and encloses in itself the trace of the same mystery. What assures me that this mystery, which is everywhere the same, is not the sign of a similar relationship, is not the sign of a great law of which we are ignorant?

I am dreaming, you will say. And what does science do herself when she reaches that supreme point at which magnifying glasses become obscure and compasses powerless? It dreams, too; it supposes. Let us, too, suppose that the tree is a man, rough skinned dreamy and silent, who loves, too, after his fashion and vibrates to his very roots when some evening a warm breeze, laden with the scents of the plain, blows through his green locks and overwhelms him with kisses. No, I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us. Childish pride, which would be ridiculous did not its very simplicity lend it something poetic, alone inspires it. Man is but one of the links of an immense chain, of the two ends of which we are ignorant. [See Mark Twain's essay: 'What is Man.' D.W.]

Is it not consoling to fancy that we are not an isolated power to which the remainder of the world serves as a pedestal, that one is not a licensed destroyer, a poor, fragile tyrant, whom arbitrary decrees protect, but a necessary note of an infinite harmony? To fancy that the law of life is the same in the immensity of space and irradiates worlds as it irradiates cities and as it irradiates ant-hills. To fancy that each vibration in ourselves is the echo of another vibration. To fancy a sole principle, a primordial axiom, to think the universe envelops us as a mother clasps her child in her two arms; and say to one's self, "I belong to it and it to me; it would cease to be without me. I should not exist without it." To see, in short, only the divine unity of laws, which could not be nonexistent, where others have only seen a ruling fancy or an individual caprice.

It is a dream. Perhaps so, but I have often dreamed it when watching the village children rolling on the fresh grass among the ducklings.



CHAPTER XXXI

AUTUMN

Do you know the autumn, dear reader, autumn away in the country with its squalls, its long gusts, its yellow leaves whirling in the distance, its sodden paths, its fine sunsets, pale as an invalid's smile, its pools of water in the roadway; do you know all these? If you have seen all these they are certainly not indifferent to you. One either detests or else loves them.

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I am of the number of those who love them, and I would give two summers for a single autumn. I adore the big blazing fires; I like to take refuge in the chimney corner with my dog between my wet gaiters. I like to watch the tall flames licking the old ironwork and lighting up the black depths. You hear the wind whistling in the stable, the great door creak, the dog pull at his chain and howl, and, despite the noise of the forest trees which are groaning and bending close by, you can make out the lugubrious cawings of a flock of rooks struggling against the storm. The rain beats against the little panes; and, stretching your legs toward the fire, you think of those without. You think of the sailors, of the old doctor driving his little cabriolet, the hood of which sways to and fro as the wheels sink into the ruts, and Cocotte neighs in the teeth of the wind. You think of the two gendarmes, with the rain streaming from their cocked hats; you see them, chilled and soaked, making their way along the path among the vineyards, bent almost double in the saddle, their horses almost covered with their long blue cloaks. You think of the belated sportsman hastening across the heath, pursued by the wind like a criminal by justice, and whistling to his dog, poor beast, who is splashing through the marshland. Unfortunate doctor, unfortunate gendarmes, unfortunate sportsman!

And all at once the door opens and Baby rushes in exclaiming: "Papa, dinner is ready." Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

"What is there for dinner?"

The cloth was as white as snow in December, the plate glittered in the lamplight, the steam from the soup rose up under the lamp-shade, veiling the flame and spreading an appetizing smell of cabbage. Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

The doors were well closed, the curtains carefully drawn. Baby hoisted himself on to his tall chair and stretched out his neck for his napkin to be tied round it, exclaiming at the same time with his hands in the air: "Nice cabbage soup." And, smiling to myself, I said: "The youngster has all my tastes."

Mamma soon came, and cheerfully pulling off her tight gloves: "There, sir, I think, is something that you are very fond of," she said to me.

It was a pheasant day, and instinctively I turned round a little to catch a glimpse on the sideboard of a dusty bottle of my old Chambertin. Pheasant and Chambertin! Providence created them for one another and my wife has never separated them.

"Ah! my children, how comfortable you are here," said I, and every one burst out laughing. Poor gendarmes! poor doctor!

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Yes, yes, I am very fond of the autumn, and my darling boy liked it as well as I did, not only on account of the pleasure there is in gathering round a fine large fire, but also on account of the squalls themselves, the wind and the dead leaves. There is a charm in braving them. How many times we have both gone out for a walk through the country despite cold and threatening clouds. We were wrapped up and shod with thick boots; I took his hand and we started off at haphazard. He was five years old then and trotted along like a little man. Heavens! it is five-and-twenty years ago. We went up the narrow lane strewn with damp black leaves; the tall gray poplars stripped of their foliage allowed a view of the horizon, and we could see in the distance, under a violet sky streaked with cold and yellowish bands, the low thatched roofs and the red chimneys from which issued little bluish clouds blown away by the wind. Baby jumped for joy, holding with his hand his hat which threatened to fly off, and looking at me with eyes glittering through tears brought into them by the breeze. His cheeks were red with cold, and quite at the tip of his nose hung ready to drop a small transparent pearl. But he was happy, and we skirted the wet meadows overflowed by the swollen river. No more reeds, no more water lilies, no more flowers on the banks. Some cows, up to mid-leg in damp herbage, were grazing quietly.

At the bottom of a ditch, near a big willow trunk, two little girls were huddled together under a big cloak wrapped about them. They were watching their cows, their half bare feet in split wooden shoes and their two little chilled faces under the large hood. From time to time large puddles of water in which the pale sky was reflected barred the way, and we remained for a moment beside these miniature lakes, rippling beneath the north wind, to see the leaves float on them. They were the last. We watched them detach themselves from the tops of the tall trees, whirl through the air and settle in the puddles. I took my little boy in my arms and we went through them as we could. At the boundaries of the brown and stubble fields was an overturned plough or an abandoned harrow. The stripped vines were level with the ground, and their damp and knotty stakes were gathered in large piles.

I remember that one day in one of these autumnal walks, as we gained the top of the hill by a broken road which skirts the heath and leads to the old bridge, the wind suddenly began to blow furiously. My darling, overwhelmed by it, caught hold of my leg and sheltered himself in the skirt of my coat. My dog, for his part, stiffening his four legs, with his tail between the hind ones and his ears waving in the wind, looked up at me too. I turned, the horizon was as gloomy as the interior of a church. Huge black clouds were sweeping toward us, and the trees were bending and groaning on every side under the torrents of rain driven before the squall.



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I only had time to catch up my little man, who was crying with fright, and to run and squeeze myself against a hedge which was somewhat protected by the old willows. I opened my umbrella, crouched down behind it, and, unbuttoning my big coat, stuffed Baby inside. He clung closely to me. My dog placed himself between my legs, and Baby, thus sheltered by his two friends, began to smile from the depths of his hiding-place. I looked at him and said:

“Well, little man, are you all right?”

“Yes, dear papa.”

I felt his two arms clasp round my waist—I was much thinner than I am now—and I saw that he was grateful to me for acting as a roof to him. Through the opening he stretched out his little lips and I bent mine down.

“Is it still raining outside, papa?”

“It will soon be over.”

“Already, I am so comfortable inside you.”

How all this stays in your heart. It is perhaps silly to relate these little joys, but how sweet it is to recall them.

We reached home as muddy as two water-dogs and we were well scolded. But when evening had come and Baby was in bed and I went to kiss him and tickle him a little, as was our custom, he put his two little arms round my neck and whispered: “When it rains we will go again, eh?”

CHAPTER XXXII

HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORTY NOW

When you have seen your child born, have watched his first steps in life, have noted him smile and weep, have heard him call you papa as he stretches out his little arms to you, you think that you have become acquainted with all the joys of paternity, and, as though satiated with these daily joys that are under your hand, you already begin to picture those of the morrow. You rush ahead, and explore the future; you are impatient, and gulp down present happiness in long draughts, instead of tasting it drop by drop. But Baby’s illness suffices to restore you to reason.

To realize the strength of the ties that bind you to him, it is necessary to have feared to see them broken; to know that a river is deep, you must have been on the point of drowning in it.

Recall the morning when, on drawing aside the curtain of his bed, you saw on the pillow his little face, pale and thin. His sunken eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were half closed. You met his glance, which seemed to come through a veil; he saw you, without smiling at you. You said, "Good morning," and he did not answer. His face only expressed dejection and weakness, it was no longer that of your child. He gave a kind of sigh, and his heavy eyelids drooped. You took his hands, elongated, transparent, and with colorless nails; they were warm and moist. You kissed them, those poor little hands, but there was no responsive thrill to the contact of your lips. Then you turned round, and saw your wife weeping behind you. It was at that moment when you felt yourself shudder from

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head to foot, and that the idea of a possible woe seized on you, never more to leave you. Every moment you kept going back to the bed and raising the curtains again, hoping perhaps that you had not seen aright, or that a miracle had taken place; but you withdrew quickly, with a lump in your throat. And yet you strove to smile, to make him smile himself; you sought to arouse in him the wish for something, but in vain; he remained motionless, exhausted, not even turning round, indifferent to all you said, to everything, even yourself.

And what is all that is needed to strike down this little creature, to reduce him to this pitch? Only a few hours. What, is that all that is needed to put an end to him? Five minutes. Perhaps.

You know that life hangs on a thread in this frail body, so little fitted to suffer. You feel that life is only a breath, and say to yourself: "Suppose this one is his last." A little while back he was complaining. Already he does so no longer. It seems as though someone is claspng him, bearing him away, tearing him from your arms. Then you draw near him, and clasp him to you almost involuntarily, as though to give him back some of your own life. His bed is damp with fever sweats, his lips are losing their color. The nostrils of his little nose, grown sharp and dry, rise and fall. His mouth remains wide open. It is that little rosy mouth which used to laugh so joyfully, those are the two lips that used to press themselves to yours, and . . . all the joys, the bursts of laughter, the follies, the endless chatter, all the bygone happiness, flock to your recollection at the sound of that gasping, breathing, while big hot tears fall slowly from your eyes. Poor wee man. Your hand seeks his little legs, and you dare not touch his chest, which you have kissed so often, for fear of encountering that ghastly leanness which you foresee, but the contact of which would make you break out in sobs. And then, at a certain moment, while the sunlight was flooding the room, you heard a deeper moan, resembling a cry. You darted forward; his face was contracted, and he looked toward you with eyes that no longer saw. And then all was calm, silent and motionless, while his hollow cheeks became yellow and transparent as the amber of his necklaces.

The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime in the hearts of those who have loved; and even in old age, when time has softened your grief, when other joys and other sorrows have filled your days, his dying bed still appears to you when sitting of an evening beside the fire. You see amid the sparkling flames the room of the lost child, the table with the drinks, the bottles, the arsenal of illness, the little garments, carefully folded, that waited for him so long, his toys abandoned in a corner. You even see the marks of his little fingers on the wall paper, and the zigzags he made with his pencil on the door; you see the corner scribbled over with lines and dates, in which he was measured every month, you see him playing, running, rushing up in a perspiration to throw himself into your arms, and, at the same time, you also see him fixing his glazing eyes on you, or motionless and cold under a white sheet, wet with holy water.

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Does not this recollection recur to you sometimes, Grandma, and do not you still shed a big tear as you say to yourself: "He would have been forty now?" Do we not know, dear old lady, whose heart still bleeds, that at the bottom of your wardrobe, behind your jewels, beside packets of yellow letters, the handwriting of which we will not guess at, there is a little museum of sacred relics—the last shoes in which he played about on the gravel the day he complained of being cold, the remains of some broken toys, a dried sprig of box, a little cap, his last, in a triple wrapper, and a thousand trifles that are a world to you, poor woman, that are the fragments of your broken heart?

The ties that unite children to parents are unloosed. Those which unite parents to children are broken. In one case, it is the past that is wiped out; in the other, the future that is rent away.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONVALESCENCE

But, my patient reader, forget what have just said. Baby does not want to leave you, he does not want to die, poor little thing, and if you want a proof of it, watch him very closely; there, he smiles.

A very faint smile like those rays of sunlight that steal between two clouds at the close of a wet winter. You rather guess at than see this smile, but it is enough to warm your heart. The cloud begins to disperse, he sees you, he hears you, he knows that papa is there, your child is restored to you. His glance is already clearer. Call him softly. He wants to turn, but he can not yet, and for his sole answer his little hand, which is beginning to come to life again, moves and crumples the sheet. Just wait a little, poor impatient father, and tomorrow, on his awakening, he will say "Papa." You will see what good it will do you, this "Papa," faint as a mere breath, this first scarcely intelligible sign of a return to life. It will seem to you that your child has been born again a second time.

He will still suffer, he will have further crises, the storm does not become a calm all at once, but he will be able now to rest his head on your shoulder, nestle in your arms among the blankets; he will be able to complain, to ask help and relief of you with eye and voice; you will, in short, be reunited, and you will be conscious that he suffers less by suffering on your knees. You will hold his hand in yours, and if you seek to go away he will look at you and grasp your finger. How many things are expressed in this grasp. Dear sir, have you experienced it?

"Papa, do stay with me, you help to make me better; when I am alone I am afraid of the pain. Hold me tightly to you, and I shall not suffer so much."

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The more your protection is necessary to another the more you enjoy granting it. What is it then when this other is a second self, dearer than the first. With convalescence comes another childhood, so to speak. Fresh astonishments, fresh joys, fresh desires come one by one as health is restored. But what is most touching and delightful, is that delicate coaxing by the child who still suffers and clings to you, that abandonment of himself to you, that extreme weakness that gives him wholly over to you. At no period of his life has he so enjoyed your presence, has he taken refuge so willingly in your dressing-gown, has he listened more attentively to your stories and smiled more intelligently at your merriment. Is it true, as it seems to you, that he has never been more charming? Or is it simply that threatened danger has caused you to set a higher value on his caresses, and that you count over your treasures with all the more delight because you have been all but ruined?

But the little man is up again. Beat drums; sound trumpets; come out of your hiding-places, broken horses; stream in, bright sun; a song from you little birds. The little king comes to life again—long live the king! And you, your majesty, come and kiss your father.

What is singular is that this fearful crisis you have gone through becomes in some way sweet to you; you incessantly recur to it, you speak of it, you speak of it and cherish it in your mind; and, like the companions of Aeneas, you seek by the recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy.

“Do you remember,” you say, “the day when he was so ill? Do you remember his dim eyes, his poor; thin, little arm, and his pale lips? And that morning the doctor went away after clasping our hands?”

It is only Baby who does not remember anything. He only feels an overpowering wish to restore his strength, fill out his cheeks and recover his calves.

“Papa, are we going to have dinner soon, eh, papa?”

“Yes, it is getting dusk, wait a little.”

“But, papa, suppose we don’t wait?”

“In twenty minutes, you little glutton.”

“Twenty, is twenty a great many? If you eat twenty cutlets would it make you ill? But with potatoes, and jam, and soup, and—is it still twenty minutes?”

Then again: “Papa, when there is beef with sauce,” he has his mouth full of it, “red tomato sauce.”

“Yes, dear, well?”



“Well, a bullock is much bigger than what is on the dish; why don’t they bring the rest of the bullock? I could eat it all and then some bread and then some haricots, and then—”

He is insatiable when he has his napkin under his chin, and it is a happiness to see the pleasure he feels in working his jaws. His little eyes glisten, his cheeks grow red; what he puts away into his little stomach it is impossible to say, and so busy is he that he has scarcely time to laugh between two mouthfuls. Toward dessert his ardor slackens, his look becomes more and more languid, his fingers relax and his eyes close from time to time.

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"Mamma, I should like to go to bed," he says, rubbing his eyes. Baby is coming round.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FAMILY TIES

The exhilaration of success and the fever of life's struggle take a man away from his family, or cause him to live amid it as a stranger, and soon he no longer finds any attractions in the things which charmed him at the outset. But let ill luck come, let the cold wind blow rather strongly, and he falls back upon himself, he seeks near him something to support him in his weakness, a sentiment to replace his vanished dream, and he bends toward his child, he takes his wife's hand and presses it. He seems to invite these two to share his burden. Seeing tears in the eyes of those he loves, his own seem diminished to that extent. It would seem that moral suffering has the same effect as physical pain. The drowning wretch clutches at straws; in the same way, the man whose heart is breaking clasps his wife and children to him. He asks in turn for help, protection, and comfort, and it is a touching thing to see the strong shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage in their kiss. Children have the instinct of all this; and the liveliest emotion they are capable of feeling is that which they experience on seeing their father weep.

Recall, dear reader, your most remote recollections, seek in that past which seems to you all the clearer the farther you are removed from it. Have you ever seen your father come home and sit down by the fire with a tear in his eye? Then you dared not draw near him at first, so deeply did you feel his grief. How unhappy he must be for his eyes to be wet. Then you felt that a tie attached you to this poor man, that his misfortune struck you too, that a part of it was yours, and that you were smitten because your father was. And no one understands better than the child this joint responsibility of the family to which he owes everything. You have felt all this; your heart has swollen as you stood silent in the corner, and sobs have broken forth as, without knowing why, you have held out your arms toward him. He has turned, he has understood all, he has not been able to restrain his grief any further, and you have remained clasped in one another's arms, father, mother, and child, without saying anything, but gazing at and understanding one another. Did you, however, know the cause of the poor man's grief?

Not at all.

This is why filial love and paternal love have been poetized, why the family is styled holy. It is because one finds therein the very source of that need of loving, helping and sustaining one another, which from time to time spreads over the whole of society, but in the shape of a weakened echo. It is only from time to time in history that we see a whole nation gather together, retire within itself and experience the same thrill.

A frightful convulsion is needed to make a million men hold out their hands to one another and understand one another at a glance; it needs a superhuman effort for the family to become the nation, and for the boundaries of the hearth to extend to the frontiers.

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A complaint, a pang, a tear, is enough to make a man, a woman, and a child, blend their hearts together and feel that they are but one.

Laugh at marriage; the task is easy. All human contracts are tainted with error, and an error is always smiled at by those who are not the victims of it. There are husbands, it is certain; and when we see a man tumble down, even if he knocks his brains out, our first impulse is to burst out laughing. Hence the great and eternal mirth that greets Sganarelle.

But search to the bottom and behold that beneath all these trifles, beneath all this dust of little exploded vanities, ridiculous mistakes and comical passions, is hidden the very pivot of society. Verify that in this all is for the best, since this family sentiment, which is the basis of society, is also its consolation and joy.

The honor of our flag, the love of country, and all that urges a man to devote himself to something or some one not himself, are derived from this sentiment, and in it, you may assert, is to be found the source whence flow the great streams at which the human heart quenches its thirst.

Egotism for three, you say. What matter, if this egotism engenders devotion?

Will you reproach the butterfly with having been a caterpillar?

Do not accuse me in all this of exaggeration, or of poetic exaltation.

Yes, family life is very often calm and commonplace, the stock-pot that figures on its escutcheon has not been put there without reason, I admit. To the husband who should come and say to me: "Sir, for two days running I have fallen asleep by the fireside," I should reply: "You are too lazy, but after all I understand you."

I also understand that Baby's trumpet is noisy, that articles of jewellery are horribly dear, that lace flounces and sable trimmings are equally so, that balls are wearisome, that Madame has her vapors, her follies, exigencies; I understand, in short, that a man whose career is prosperous looks upon his wife and child as two stumbling blocks.

But I am waiting for the happy man, for the moment when his forehead will wrinkle, when disappointment will descend upon his head like a leaden skull-cap, and when picking up the two blocks he has cursed he will make two crutches of them.

I admit that Alexander the Great, Napoleon the First, and all the demi-gods of humanity, have only felt at rare intervals the charm of being fathers and husbands; but we other poor little men, who are less occupied, must be one or the other.

I do not believe in the happy old bachelor; I do not believe in the happiness of all those who, from stupidity or calculation, have withdrawn themselves from the best of social

laws. A great deal has been said on this subject, and I do not wish to add to the voluminous documents in this lawsuit. Acknowledge frankly all you who have heard the cry of your new-born child and felt your heart tingle like a glass on the point

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of breaking, unless you are idiots, acknowledge that you said to yourselves: "I am in the right. Here, and here alone, lies man's part. I am entering on a path, beaten and worn, but straight; I shall cross the weary downs, but each step will bring me nearer the village spire. I am not wandering through life, I am marching on, I stir with my feet the dust in which my father has planted his. My child, on the same road, will find the traces of my footsteps, and, perhaps, on seeing that I have not faltered, will say: 'Let me act like my old father and not lose myself in the ploughed land.'"

If the word holy has still a meaning, despite the uses it has been put to, I do not see that a better use can be made of it than by placing it beside the word family.

They speak of progress, justice, general well-being, infallible policies, patriotism, devotion. I am for all these good things, but this bright horizon is summed up in these three words: "Love your neighbor," and this is precisely, in my opinion, the thing they forget to teach.

To love your neighbor is as simple as possible, but the mischief is that you do not meet with this very natural feeling. There are people who will show you the seed in the hollow of their hand, but even those who deal in this precious grain are the last to show you it in leaf.

Well, my dear reader, this little plant which should spring up like the poppies in the wheat, this plant which has never been seen growing higher than watercress, but which should overtop the oaks, this undiscoverable plant, I know where it grows.

It grows beside the domestic hearth, between the shovel and tongs; it is there that it perpetuates itself, and if it still exists, it is to the family that we owe it. I love pretty nearly all the philanthropists and saviours of mankind; but I only believe in those who have learned to love others by embracing their own children.

Mankind can not be remodelled to satisfy the wants of humanitarian theories; man is egotistical, and he loves, above all, those who are about him. This is the natural human sentiment, and it is this which must be enlarged, extended and cultivated. In a word, it is in family love that is comprised love of country and consequently of humanity. It is from fathers that citizens are made.

Man has not twenty prime movers, but only one in his heart; do not argue but profit by it.

Affection is catching. Love between three—father, mother, and child—when it is strong, soon requires space; it pushes back the walls of the house, and by degrees invites the neighbors. The important thing, then, is to give birth to this love between three; for it is

madness, I am afraid, to thrust the whole human species all at once on a man's heart. Such large mouthfuls are not to be swallowed at a gulp, nor without preparation.

This is why I have always thought that with the numerous sous given for the redemption of the little Chinese, we might in France cause the fire to sparkle on hearths where it sparkles no longer, make many eyes grow brighter round a tureen of smoking soup, warm chilled mothers, bring smiles to the pinched faces of children, and give pleasure and happiness to poor discouraged ones on their return home.

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What a number of hearty kisses you might have brought about with all these sous, and, in consequence, what a sprinkling with the watering-pot for the little plant you wot of.

“But then what is to become of the redemption of the little Chinese?”

We will think of this later; we must first know how to love our own before we are able to love those of others.

No doubt, this is brutal and egotistical, but you can not alter it; it is out of small faults that you build up great virtues. And, after all, do not grumble, this very vanity is the foundation stone of that great monument—at present still propped up by scaffolding—which is called Society.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Affection is catching
All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft
And I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up
He Would Have Been Forty Now
How many things have not people been proud of
I am not wandering through life, I am marching on
I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us
I would give two summers for a single autumn
In his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own
It (science) dreams, too; it supposes
Learned to love others by embracing their own children
Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded
Man is but one of the links of an immense chain
Recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy
Respect him so that he may respect you
Shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage
The future promises, it is the present that pays
The future that is rent away
The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime
Their love requires a return
Ties that unite children to parents are unloosed
Ties which unite parents to children are broken
To love is a great deal—To know how to love is everything
We are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are
When time has softened your grief

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire monsieur, madame and Bebe:



A ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree
Affection is catching
All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft
And I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up
Answer "No," but with a little kiss which means "Yes"
As regards love, intention and deed are the same
But she thinks she is affording you pleasure
Clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms
Do not seek too much
Emotion when one does not share it
First impression is based upon a number of trifles
He Would Have Been Forty Now
Hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion

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How many things have not people been proud of
How rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers
Husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better
I would give two summers for a single autumn
I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us
I came here for that express purpose
I am not wandering through life, I am marching on
Ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything
In his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own
It (science) dreams, too; it supposes
It is silly to blush under certain circumstances
Learned to love others by embracing their own children
Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded
Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease
Man is but one of the links of an immense chain
Rather do not give—make yourself sought after
Reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover
Recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy
Respect him so that he may respect you
Shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage
Sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past
The heart requires gradual changes
The future that is rent away
The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime
The future promises, it is the present that pays
Their love requires a return
There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses
Ties that unite children to parents are unloosed
Ties which unite parents to children are broken
To be able to smoke a cigar without being sick
To love is a great deal—To know how to love is everything
We are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are
When time has softened your grief
Why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap

PRINCE ZILAH

By Jules Claretie

With a Preface by Comte d'Haussonville of the French Academy

JULES CLARETIE

Arsene Arnaud Claretie (commonly called Jules), was born on December 3, 1840, at Limoges, the picturesque and smiling capital of Limousin. He has been rightly called the “Roi de la Chronique” and the “Themistocle de la Litterature Contemporaine.” In fact, he has written, since early youth, romances, drama, history, novels, tales, chronicles, dramatic criticism, literary criticism, military correspondence, virtually everything! He was elected to the French Academy in 1888.

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Claretie was educated at the Lycee Bonaparte, and was destined for a commercial career. He entered a business-house as bookkeeper, but was at the same time contributing already to newspapers and reviews. In 1862 we find him writing for the *Diogene*; under the pseudonym, "Olivier de Jalin," he sends articles to *La France*; his nom-deplume in *L'Illustration* is "Perdican"; he also contributes to the *Figaro*, '*L'Independence Belge*, *Opinion Nationale*' (1867-1872); he signs articles in the '*Rappel*' as "Candide"; in short, his fecundity in this field of literature is very great. He is today a most popular journalist and writes for the '*Presse*, *Petit Journal*, *Temps*', and others. He has not succeeded as a politician. Under the second Empire he was often in collision with the Government; in 1857 he was sentenced to pay a fine of 1,000 francs, which was a splendid investment; more than once lectures to be given by him were prohibited (1865-1868); in 1871 he was an unsuccessful candidate for *L'Assemblee Nationale*, both for *La Haute Vienne* and *La Seine*. Since that time he has not taken any active part in politics. Perhaps we should also mention that as a friend of Victor Noir he was called as a witness in the process against Peter Bonaparte; and that as administrator of the *Comedie Francaise* he directed, in 1899, an open letter to the "President and Members of the Court Martial trying Captain Dreyfus" at Rennes, advocating the latter's acquittal. So much about Claretie as a politician!

The number of volumes and essays written by Jules Claretie surpasses imagination, and it is, therefore, almost impossible to give a complete list. As a historian he has selected mostly revolutionary subjects. The titles of some of his prominent works in this field are '*Les Derniers Montagnards* (1867); *Histoire de la Revolution de 1870-71* (second edition, 1875, 5 vols.); *La France Envahie* (1871); *Le Champ de Bataille de Sedan* (1871); *Paris assiege* and *Les Prussiens chez eux* (1872); *Cinq Ans apres, L'Alsace et la Lorraine depuis l'Annexion* (1876); *La Guerre Nationale 1870-1871*', etc., most of them in the hostile, anti-German vein, natural to a "Chauvinist"; '*Ruines et Fantomes* (1873). *Les Femmes de la Revolution* (1898)' contains a great number of portraits, studies, and criticisms, partly belonging to political, partly to literary, history. To the same category belong: *Moliere, sa Vie et ses OEuvres* (1873); *Peintres et Sculpteurs Contemporains*, and *T. B. Carpeaux* (1875); *L'Art et les Artistes Contemporains* (1876)', and others. Quite different from the above, and in another phase of thought, are: '*Voyages d'un Parisien* (1865); *Journees de Voyage en Espagne et France* (1870); *Journees de Vacances* (1887)'; and others.

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It is, however, as a novelist that the fame of Claretie will endure. He has followed the footsteps of George Sand and of Balzac. He belongs to the school of "Impressionists," and, although he has a liking for exceptional situations, wherefrom humanity does not always issue without serious blotches, he yet is free from pessimism. He has no nervous disorder, no "brain fag," he is no pagan, not even a nonbeliever, and has happily preserved his wholesomeness of thought; he is averse to exotic ideas, extravagant depiction, and inflammatory language. His novels and tales contain the essential qualities which attract and retain the reader. Some of his works in chronological order, omitting two or three novels, written when only twenty or twenty-one years old, are: 'Pierrille, Histoire de Village (1863); Mademoiselle Cachemire (1867); Un Assassin, also known under the title Robert Burat (1867); Madeleine Bertin, replete with moderated sentiment, tender passion, and exquisite scenes of social life (1868); Les Muscadins (1874, 2 vols.); Le Train No. 17 (1877); La Maison Vide (1878); Le Troisieme dessous (1879); La Maitresse (1880); Monsieur le Ministre (1882); Moeurs du Jour (1883); Le Prince Zilah (1884), crowned by the Academy four years before he was elected; Candidat! (1887); Puyjoli (1890); L'Americaine (1892); La Frontiere (1894); Mariage Manque (1894); Divette (1896); L'Accusateur (1897), and others.

It is, perhaps, interesting to know that after the flight of the Imperial family from the Tuileries, Jules Claretie was appointed to put into order the various papers, documents, and letters left behind in great chaos, and to publish them, if advisable.

Very numerous and brilliant have also been the incursions of Jules Claretie into the theatrical domain, though he is a better novelist than playwright. He was appointed director of the Comedie Francaise in 1885. His best known dramas and comedies are: 'La Famille de Gueux, in collaboration with Della Gattina (Ambigu, 1869); Raymond Lindey (Menus Plaisirs, 1869, forbidden for some time by French censorship); Les Muscadins (Theatre Historique, 1874); Un Pyre (with Adrien Decourcelle, Gymnase, 1874); Le Regiment de Champagne (Theatre Historique, 1877); Monsieur le Ministre, together with Dumas fils and Busnach (Gymnase, 1883); and Prince Zilah (Gymnase, 1885).

Some of them, as will be noticed, are adapted to the stage from his novels. In Le Regiment de Champagne, at least, he has written a little melodramatically. But thanks to the battles, fumes of powder, muskets, and cannons upon the stage the descendants of Jean Chauvin accept it with frenetic applause. In most of the plays, however, he exhibits a rather nervous talent, rich imagination, and uses very scintillating and picturesque language, if he is inclined to do so—and he is very often inclined. He received the "Prix Vitet" in 1879 from the Academy for Le Drapeau. Despite our unlimited admiration for Claretie the journalist, Claretie the historian, Claretie the dramatist, and Claretie the art-critic, we think his novels conserve a precious and inexhaustible mine for the Faguets and Lansons of the twentieth century, who, while frequently utilizing him for the exemplification of the art of fiction, will salute him as "Le Roi de la Romance."



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Compte D'HAUSSONVILLE
de L'Academie Francaise.

Prince Zilah

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE BETROTHAL FETE

"Excuse me, Monsieur, but pray tell me what vessel that is over there."

The question was addressed to a small, dark man, who, leaning upon the parapet of the Quai des Tuileries, was rapidly writing in a note-book with a large combination pencil, containing a knife, a pen, spare leads, and a paper-cutter—all the paraphernalia of a reporter accustomed to the expeditions of itinerant journalism.

When he had filled, in his running hand, a leaf of the book, the little man tore it hastily off, and extended it to a boy in dark blue livery with silver buttons, bearing the initial of the newspaper, L'Actualite; and then, still continuing to write, he replied:

"Prince Andras Zilah is giving a fete on board one of the boats belonging to the Compagnie de la Seine."

"A fete? Why?"

"To celebrate his approaching marriage, Monsieur."

"Prince Andras! Ah!" said the first speaker, as if he knew the name well; "Prince Andras is to be married, is he? And who does Prince Andras Zil—"

"Zilah! He is a Hungarian, Monsieur."

The reporter appeared to be in a hurry, and, handing another leaf to the boy, he said:

"Wait here a moment. I am going on board, and I will send you the rest of the list of guests by a sailor. They can prepare the article from what you have, and set it up in advance, and I will come myself to the office this evening and make the necessary additions."

"Very well, Monsieur Jacquemin."

"And don't lose any of the leaves."



“Oh, Monsieur Jacquemin! I never lose anything!”

“They will have some difficulty, perhaps, in reading the names—they are all queer; but I shall correct the proof myself.”

“Then, Monsieur,” asked the loungeur again, eager to obtain all the information he could, “those people who are going on board are almost all foreigners?”

“Yes, Monsieur; yes, Monsieur; yes, Monsieur!” responded jacquemin, visibly annoyed. “There are many foreigners in the city, very many; and I prefer them, myself, to the provincials of Paris.”

The other did not seem to understand; but he smiled, thanked the reporter, and strolled away from the parapet, telling all the people he met: “It is a fete! Prince Andras, a Hungarian, is about to be married. Prince Andras Zilah! A fete on board a steamer! What a droll idea!”

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Others, equally curious, leaned over the Quai des Tuileries and watched the steamer, whose tricolor flag at the stern, and red streamers at the mastheads, floated with gay flutterings in the fresh morning breeze. The boat was ready to start, its decks were waxed, its benches covered with brilliant stuffs, and great masses of azaleas and roses gave it the appearance of a garden or conservatory. There was something highly attractive to the loungers on the quay in the gayly decorated steamer, sending forth long puffs of white smoke along the bank. A band of dark-complexioned musicians, clad in red trousers, black waistcoats heavily embroidered in sombre colors, and round fur caps, played odd airs upon the deck; while bevvies of laughing women, almost all pretty in their light summer gowns, alighted from coupes and barouches, descended the flight of steps leading to the river, and crossed the plank to the boat, with little coquettish graces and studied raising of the skirts, allowing ravishing glimpses of pretty feet and ankles. The defile of merry, witty Parisiennes, with their attendant cavaliers, while the orchestra played the passionate notes of the Hungarian czardas, resembled some vision of a painter, some embarkation for the dreamed-of Cythera, realized by the fancy of an artist, a poet, or a great lord, here in nineteenth century Paris, close to the bridge, across which streamed, like a living antithesis, the realism of crowded cabs, full omnibuses, and hurrying foot-passengers.

Prince Andras Zilah had invited his friends, this July morning, to a breakfast in the open air, before the moving panorama of the banks of the Seine.

Very well known in Parisian society, which he had sought eagerly with an evident desire to be diverted, like a man who wishes to forget, the former defender of Hungarian independence, the son of old Prince Zilah Sandor, who was the last, in 1849, to hold erect the tattered standard of his country, had been prodigal of his invitations, summoning to his side his few intimate friends, the sharers of his solitude and his privacy, and also the greater part of those chance fugitive acquaintances which the life of Paris inevitably gives, and which are blown away as lightly as they appeared, in a breath of air or a whirlwind.

Count Yanski Varhely, the oldest, strongest, and most devoted friend of all those who surrounded the Prince, knew very well why this fanciful idea had come to Andras. At forty-four, the Prince was bidding farewell to his bachelor life: it was no folly, and Yanski saw with delight that the ancient race of the Zilahs, from time immemorial servants of patriotism and the right, was not to be extinct with Prince Andras. Hungary, whose future seemed brightening; needed the Zilahs in the future as she had needed them in the past.

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"I have only one objection to make to this marriage," said Varhely; "it should have taken place sooner." But a man can not command his heart to love at a given hour. When very young, Andras Zilah had cared for scarcely anything but his country; and, far from her, in the bitterness of exile, he had returned to the passion of his youth, living in Paris only upon memories of his Hungary. He had allowed year after year to roll by, without thinking of establishing a home of his own by marriage. A little late, but with heart still warm, his spirit young and ardent, and his body strengthened rather than worn out by life, Prince Andras gave to a woman's keeping his whole being, his soul with his name, the one as great as the other. He was about to marry a girl of his own choice, whom he loved romantically; and he wished to give a surrounding of poetic gayety to this farewell to the past, this greeting to the future. The men of his race, in days gone by, had always displayed a gorgeous, almost Oriental originality: the generous eccentricities of one of Prince Andras's ancestors, the old Magyar Zilah, were often cited; he it was who made this answer to his stewards, when, figures in hand, they proved to him, that, if he would farm out to some English or German company the cultivation of his wheat, corn, and oats, he would increase his revenue by about six hundred thousand francs a year:

"But shall I make these six hundred thousand francs from the nourishment of our laborers, farmers, sowers, and gleaners? No, certainly not; I would no more take that money from the poor fellows than I would take the scattered grains from the birds of the air."

It was also this grandfather of Andras, Prince Zilah Ferency, who, when he had lost at cards the wages of two hundred masons for an entire year, employed these men in constructing chateaux, which he burned down at the end of the year to give himself the enjoyment of fireworks upon picturesque ruins.

The fortune of the Zilahs was then on a par with the almost fabulous, incalculable wealth of the Esterhazys and Batthyanyis. Prince Paul Esterhazy alone possessed three hundred and fifty square leagues of territory in Hungary. The Zichys, the Karolyis and the Szchenyis, poorer, had but two hundred at this time, when only six hundred families were proprietors of six thousand acres of Hungarian soil, the nobles of Great Britain possessing not more than five thousand in England. The Prince of Lichtenstein entertained for a week the Emperor of Austria, his staff and his army. Old Ferency Zilah would have done as much if he had not always cherished a profound, glowing, militant hatred of Austria: never had the family of the magnate submitted to Germany, become the master, any more than it had bent the knee in former times to the conquering Turk.

From his ancestors Prince Andras inherited, therefore, superb liberality, with a fortune greatly diminished by all sorts of losses and misfortunes—half of it confiscated by Austria in 1849, and enormous sums expended for the national cause, Hungarian emigrants and proscribed compatriots. Zilah nevertheless remained very rich, and was an imposing figure in Paris, where, some years before, after long journeyings, he had taken up his abode.

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The little fete given for his friends on board the Parisian steamer was a trifling matter to the descendant of the magnificent Magyars; but still there was a certain charm about the affair, and it was a pleasure for the Prince to see upon the garden-like deck the amusing, frivolous, elegant society, which was the one he mingled with, but which he towered above from the height of his great intelligence, his conscience, and his convictions. It was a mixed and bizarre society, of different nationalities; an assemblage of exotic personages, such as are met with only in Paris in certain peculiar places where aristocracy touches Bohemianism, and nobles mingle with quasi-adventurers; a kaleidoscopic society, grafting its vices upon Parisian follies, coming to inhale the aroma and absorb the poison of Paris, adding thereto strange intoxications, and forming, in the immense agglomeration of the old French city, a sort of peculiar syndicate, an odd colony, which belongs to Paris, but which, however, has nothing of Paris about it except its eccentricities, which drive post-haste through life, fill the little journals with its great follies, is found and found again wherever Paris overflows—at Dieppe, Trouville, Vichy, Cauteret, upon the sands of Etretat, under the orange-trees of Nice, or about the gaming tables of Monaco, according to the hour, season, and fashion.

This was the sort of assemblage which, powdered, perfumed, exquisitely dressed, invaded, with gay laughter and nervous desire to be amused, the boat chartered by the Prince. Above, pencil in hand, the little dark man with the keen eyes, black, pointed beard and waxed moustache, continued to take down, as the cortege defiled before him, the list of the invited guests: and upon the leaves fell, briskly traced, names printed a hundred times a day in Parisian chronicles among the reports of the races of first representations at the theatres; names with Slav, Latin, or Saxon terminations; Italian names, Spanish, Hungarian, American names; each of which represented fortune, glory, power, sometimes scandal—one of those imported scandals which break out in Paris as the trichinae of foreign goods are hatched there.

The reporter wrote on, wrote ever, tearing off and handing to the page attached to 'L'Actualite' the last leaves of his list, whereon figured Yankee generals of the War of the Rebellion, Italian princesses, American girls flirting with everything that wore trousers; ladies who, rivals of Prince Zilah in wealth, owned whole counties somewhere in England; great Cuban lords, compromised in the latest insurrections and condemned to death in Spain; Peruvian statesmen, publicists, and military chiefs at once, masters of the tongue, the pen, and the revolver; a crowd of originals, even a Japanese, an elegant young man, dressed in the latest fashion, with a heavy sombrero which rested upon his straight, inky-black hair, and which every minute or two he took off and placed under his left arm, to salute the people of his acquaintance with low bows in the most approved French manner.

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All these odd people, astonishing a little and interesting greatly the groups of Parisians gathered above on the sidewalks, crossed the gangway leading to the boat, and, spreading about on the deck, gazed at the banks and the houses, or listened to the czardas which the Hungarian musicians were playing with a sort of savage frenzy beneath the French tricolor united to the three colors of their own country.

The Tzigani thus saluted the embarkation of the guests; and the clear, bright sunshine enveloped the whole boat with a golden aureole, joyously illuminating the scene of feverish gayety and childish laughter.

CHAPTER II

THE BARONESS'S MATCHMAKING

The Prince Zilah met his guests with easy grace, on the deck in front of the foot-bridge. He had a pleasant word for each one as they came on board, happy and smiling at the idea of a breakfast on the deck of a steamer, a novel amusement which made these insatiable pleasure-seekers forget the fashionable restaurants and the conventional receptions of every day.

"What a charming thought this was of yours, Prince, so unexpected, so Parisian, ah, entirely Parisian!"

In almost the same words did each newcomer address the Prince, who smiled, and repeated a phrase from Jacquemin's chronicles: "Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves."

A smile lent an unexpected charm to the almost severe features of the host. His usual expression was rather sad, and a trifle haughty. His forehead was broad and high, the forehead of a thinker and a student rather than that of a soldier; his eyes were of a deep, clear blue, looking directly at everything; his nose was straight and regular, and his beard and moustache were blond, slightly gray at the corners of the mouth and the chin. His whole appearance, suggesting, as it did, reserved strength and controlled passion, pleased all the more because, while commanding respect, it attracted sympathy beneath the powerful exterior, you felt there was a tender kindness of heart.

There was no need for the name of Prince Andras Zilah—or, as they say in Hungary, Zilah Andras—to have been written in characters of blood in the history of his country, for one to divine the hero in him: his erect figure, the carriage of his head, braving life as it had defied the bullets of the enemy, the strange brilliance of his gaze, the sweet inflections of his voice accustomed to command, and the almost caressing gestures of his hand used to the sword—all showed the good man under the brave, and, beneath the indomitable soldier, the true gentleman.



When they had shaken the hand of their host, the guests advanced to the bow of the boat to salute a young girl, an exquisite, pale brunette, with great, sad eyes, and a smile of infinite charm, who was half-extended in a low armchair beneath masses of brilliant parti-colored flowers. A stout man, of the Russian type, with heavy reddish moustaches streaked with gray, and an apoplectic neck, stood by her side, buttoned up in his frock-coat as in a military uniform.

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Every now and then, leaning over and brushing with his moustaches her delicate white ear, he would ask:

“Are you happy, Marsa?”

And Marsa would answer with a smile ending in a sigh, as she vaguely contemplated the scene before her:

“Yes, uncle, very happy.”

Not far from these two was a little woman, still very pretty, although of a certain age—the age of embonpoint—a brunette, with very delicate features, a little sensual mouth, and pretty rosy ears peeping forth from skilfully arranged masses of black hair. With a plump, dimpled hand, she held before her myopic eyes a pair of gold-mounted glasses; and she was speaking to a man of rather stern aspect, with a Slav physiognomy, a large head, crowned with a mass of crinkly hair as white as lamb’s wool, a long, white moustache, and shoulders as broad as an ox; a man already old, but with the robust strength of an oak. He was dressed neither well nor ill, lacking distinction, but without vulgarity.

“Indeed, my dear Varhely, I am enchanted with this idea of Prince Andras. I am enjoying myself excessively already, and I intend to enjoy myself still more. Do you know, this scheme of a breakfast on the water is simply delightful! Don’t you find it so? Oh! do be a little jolly, Varhely!”

“Do I seem sad, then, Baroness?”

Yanski Varhely, the friend of Prince Andras, was very happy, however, despite his rather sombre air. He glanced alternately at the little woman who addressed him, and at Marsa, two very different types of beauty: Andras’s fiancée, slender and pale as a beautiful lily, and the little Baroness Dinati, round and rosy as a ripe peach. And he was decidedly pleased with this Marsa Laszlo, against whom he had instinctively felt some prejudice when Zilah spoke to him for the first time of marrying her. To make of a Tzigana—for Marsa was half Tzigana—a Princess Zilah, seemed to Count Varhely a slightly bold resolution. The brave old soldier had never understood much of the fantastic caprices of passion, and Andras seemed to him in this, as in all other things, just a little romantic. But, after all, the Prince was his own master, and whatever a Zilah did was well done. So, after reflection, Zilah’s marriage became a joy to Varhely, as he had just been declaring to the fiancée’s uncle, General Vogotzine.

Baroness Dinati was therefore wrong to suspect old Yanski Varhely of any ‘arriere-pensee’. How was it possible for him not to be enchanted, when he saw Andras absolutely beaming with happiness?

They were now about to depart, to raise the anchor and glide down the river along the quays. Already Paul Jacquemin, casting his last leaves to the page of L'Actualite, was quickly descending the gangplank. Zilah scarcely noticed him, for he uttered a veritable cry of delight as he perceived behind the reporter a young man whom he had not expected.

"Menko! My dear Michel!" he exclaimed, stretching out both hands to the newcomer, who advanced, excessively pale. "By what happy chance do I see you, my dear boy?"

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"I heard in London that you were to give this fete. The English newspapers had announced your marriage, and I did not wish to wait longer—I——."

He hesitated a little as he spoke, as if dissatisfied, troubled, and a moment before (Zilah had not noticed it) he had made a movement as if to go back to the quay and leave the boat.

Michel Menko, however, had not the air of a timid man. He was tall, thin, of graceful figure, a man of the world, a military diplomat. For some reason or other, at this moment, he exhibited a certain uneasiness in his face, which ordinarily bore a rather brilliant color, but which was now almost sallow. He was instinctively seeking some one among the Prince's guests, and his glance wandered about the deck with a sort of dull anger.

Prince Andras saw only one thing in Menko's sudden appearance; the young man, to whom he was deeply attached, and who was the only relative he had in the world (his maternal grandmother having been a Countess Menko), his dear Michel, would be present at his marriage. He had thought Menko ill in London; but the latter appeared before him, and the day was decidedly a happy one.

"How happy you make me, my dear fellow!" he said to him in a tone of affection which was almost paternal.

Each demonstration of friendship by the Prince seemed to increase the young Count's embarrassment. Beneath a polished manner, the evidence of an imperious temperament appeared in the slightest glance, the least gesture, of this handsome fellow of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. Seeing him pass by, one could easily imagine him with his fashionable clothes cast aside, and, clad in the uniform of the Hungarian hussars, with closely shaven chin, and moustaches brushed fiercely upward, manoeuvring his horse on the Prater with supple grace and nerves like steel.

Menko's gray eyes, with blue reflections in them, which made one think of the reflection of a storm in a placid lake, became sad when calm, but were full of a threatening light when animated. The gaze of the young man had precisely this aggressive look when he discovered, half hidden among the flowers, Marsa seated in the bow of the boat; then, almost instantaneously a singular expression of sorrow or anguish succeeded, only in its turn to fade away with the rapidity of the light of a falling star; and there was perfect calm in Menko's attitude and expression when Prince Zilah said to him:

"Come, Michel, let me present you to my fiancée. Varhely is there also."

And, taking Menko's arm, he led him toward Marsa. "See," he said to the young girl, "my happiness is complete."

She, as Michel Menko bowed low before her, coldly and almost imperceptibly inclined her dark head, while her large eyes, under the shadow of their heavy lashes, seemed vainly trying to meet the gray eyes of the young man.

Andras beckoned Varhely to come to Marsa, who was white as marble, and said softly, with a hand on the shoulder of each of the two friends, who represented to him his whole life—Varhely, the past; Michel Menko, his recovered youth and the future.

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"If it were not for that stupid superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness, I should tell you how happy I am, very happy. Yes, the happiest of men," he added.

Meanwhile, the little Baroness Dinati, the pretty brunette, who had just found Varhely a trifle melancholy, had turned to Paul Jacquemin, the accredited reporter of her salon.

"That happiness, Jacquemin," she said, with a proud wave of the hand, "is my work. Without me, those two charming savages, so well suited to each other, Marsa and Andras Zilah, would never have met. On what does happiness depend!"

"On an invitation card engraved by Stern," laughed Jacquemin. "But you have said too much, Baroness. You must tell me the whole story. Think what an article it would make: The Baroness's Matchmaking! The romance! Quick, the romance! The romance, or death!"

"You have no idea how near you are to the truth, my dear Jacquemin: it is indeed a romance; and, what is more, a romantic romance. A romance which has no resemblance to—you have invented the word—those brutalistic stories which you are so fond of."

"Which I am very fond of, Baroness, I confess, especially when they are just a little—you know!"

"But this romance of Prince Andras is by no means just a little—you know! It is—how shall I express it? It is epic, heroic, romantic—what you will. I will relate it to you."

"It will sell fifty thousand copies of our paper," gayly exclaimed Jacquemin, opening his ears, and taking notes mentally.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THE ZILAHS

Andras Zilah, Transylvanian Count and Prince of the Holy Empire, was one of those heroes who devote their whole lives to one aim, and, when they love, love always.

Born for action, for chivalrous and incessant struggle, he had sacrificed his first youth to battling for his country. "The Hungarian was created on horseback," says a proverb, and Andras did not belie the saying. In '48, at the age of fifteen, he was in the saddle, charging the Croatian hussars, the redcloaks, the terrible darkskinned Ottochan horsemen, uttering frightful yells, and brandishing their big damascened guns. It seemed then to young Andras that he was assisting at one of the combats of the Middle Ages, during one of those revolts against the Osmanlis, of which he had heard so much when a child.



In the old castle, with towers painted red in the ancient fashion, where he was born and had grown up, Andras, like all the males of his family and his country, had been imbued with memories of the old wars. A few miles from his father's domain rose the Castle of the Isle, which, in the middle of the sixteenth century, Zringi had defended against the Turks, displaying lofty courage and unconquerable audacity, and forcing Soliman the Magnificent to leave thirty thousand soldiers

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beneath the walls, the Sultan himself dying before he could subjugate the Hungarian. Often had Andras's father, casting his son upon a horse, set out, followed by a train of cavaliers, for Mohacz, where the Mussulmans had once overwhelmed the soldiers of young King Louis, who died with his own family and every Hungarian who was able to carry arms. Prince Zilah related to the little fellow, who listened to him with burning tears of rage, the story of the days of mourning and the terrible massacres which no Hungarian has ever forgotten. Then he told him of the great revolts, the patriotic uprisings, the exploits of Botzkai, Bethlen Gabor, or Rakoczy, whose proud battle hymn made the blood surge through the veins of the little prince.

Once at Buda, the father had taken the son to the spot, where, in 1795, fell the heads of noble Hungarians, accused of republicanism; and he said to him, as the boy stood with uncovered head:

"This place is called the Field of Blood. Martinowitz was beheaded here for his faith. Remember, that a man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness."

And when he returned to the great sombre halls of the castle, whence in bygone days the Turks had driven out his ancestors, and whence, in their turn, throwing off the yoke of the conquerors, his ancestors had driven out the Turks, little Prince Andras found again examples before him in the giants in semi-oriental costumes, glittering in steel or draped in purple, who looked down upon him from their frames; smoke-blackened paintings wherein the eagle eyes and long moustaches of black hussars, contemporaries of Sobieski, or magnates in furred robes, with aigrettes in their caps, and curved sabres garnished with precious stones and enamel, attracted and held spellbound the silent child, while through the window floated in, sung by some shepherd, or played by wandering Tzigani, the refrain of the old patriotic ballad 'Czaty Demeter', the origin of which is lost in the mist of ages—

Remember, oh, yes! remember our ancestors! Brave, proud Magyars, when you left the land of the Scythians, brave ancestors, great forefathers, you did not suspect that your sons would be slaves! Remember, oh, yes! remember our ancestors!

Andras did remember them, and he knew by heart their history. He knew the heroism of Prince Zilah Sandor falling in Mohacz in 1566 beside his wife Hanska who had followed him, leaving in the cradle her son Janski, whose grandson, Zilah Janos, in 1867, at the very place where his ancestor had been struck, sabred the Turks, crying: "Sandor and Hanska, look down upon me; your blood avenges you!"

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There was not one of those men, whose portraits followed the child with their black eyes, who was not recorded in the history of his country for some startling deed or noble sacrifice. All had fought for Hungary: the greater part had died for her. There was a saying that the deathbed of the Zilahs was a bloody battleground. When he offered his name and his life to Maria Theresa, one of the Zilah princes had said proudly to the Empress: "You demand of the Hungarians gold, they bring you steel. The gold was to nourish your courtiers, the steel will be to save your crown. Forward!" These terrible ancestors were, besides, like all the magnates of Hungary, excessively proud of their nobility and their patriarchal system of feudalism. They knew how to protect their peasants, who were trained soldiers, how to fight for them, and how to die at their head; but force seemed to them supreme justice, and they asked nothing but their sword with which to defend their right. Andras's father, Prince Sandor, educated by a French tutor who had been driven from Paris by the Revolution, was the first of all his family to form any perception of a civilization based upon justice and law, and not upon the almighty power of the sabre. The liberal education which he had received, Prince Sandor transmitted to his son. The peasants, who detested the pride of the Magyars, and the middle classes of the cities, mostly tradesmen who envied the castles of these magnates, soon became attracted, fascinated, and enraptured with this transformation in the ancient family of the Zilahs. No man, not even Georgei, the Spartanlike soldier, nor the illustrious Kossuth, was more popular in 1849, at the time of the struggle against Austria, than Prince Sandor Zilah and his son, then a handsome boy of sixteen, but strong and well built as a youth of twenty.

At this youthful age, Andras Zilah had been one of those magnates, who, the 'kalpach' on the head, the national 'attila' over the shoulder and the hand upon the hilt of the sword, had gone to Vienna to plead before the Emperor the cause of Hungary. They were not listened to, and one evening, the negotiations proving futile, Count Batthyanyi said to Jellachich:

"We shall soon meet again upon the Drave!"

"No," responded the Ban of Croatia, "I will go myself to seek you upon the Danube!"

This was war; and Prince Sandor went, with his son, to fight bravely for the old kingdom of St. Stephen against the cannon and soldiers of Jellachich.

All these years of blood and battle were now half forgotten by Prince Andras; but often Yanski Varhely, his companion of those days of hardship, the bold soldier who in former times had so often braved the broadsword of the Bohemian cuirassiers of Auersperg's regiment, would recall to him the past with a mournful shake of the head, and repeat, ironically, the bitter refrain of the song of defeat:



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Dance, dance, daughters of Hungary!
Tread now the measure so long delayed.
Murdered our sons by the shot or the hangman!
In this land of pleasure, oh! be not dismayed;—
Now is the time, brown daughters of Hungary,
To dance to the measure of true hearts betrayed!

And then, these melancholy words calling up the memory of disaster, all would revive before Andras Zilah's eyes—the days of mourning and the days of glory; the exploits of Bem; the victories of Dembiski; the Austrian flags taken at Goedolloe; the assaults of Buda; the defence of Comorn; Austria, dejected and defeated, imploring the aid of Russia; Hungary, beaten by the force of numbers, yet resisting Paskiewich as she had resisted Haynau, and appealing to Europe and the world in the name of the eternal law of nations, which the vanquished invoke, but which is never listened to by the countries where the lion is tearing his prey. And again, Zilah would remember the heroic fatherland struck down at Temesvar; the remnants of an armed people in refuge at Arad; and Klapka still holding out in the island of Comorn at the moment when Georgei had surrendered. Then, again, the obscure deaths of his comrades; the agonies in the ditches and in the depths of the woods; the last despairing cries of a conquered people overwhelmed by numbers:

Dance, dance, daughters of Hungary!

All this bloody past, enveloped as in a crimson cloud, but glorious with its gleams of hope and its flashes of victory, the Prince would revive with old Varhely, in the corner of whose eye at intervals a tear would glisten.

They both saw again the last days of Comorn, with the Danube at the foot of the walls, and the leaves of the trees whirling in the September wind, and dispersed like the Hungarians themselves; and the shells falling upon the ramparts; and the last hours of the siege; and the years of mournful sadness and exile; their companions decimated, imprisoned, led to the gallows or the stake; the frightful silence and ruin falling like a winding-sheet over Hungary; the houses deserted, the fields laid waste, and the country, fertile yesterday, covered now with those Muscovite thistles, which were unknown in Hungary before the year of massacre, and the seeds of which the Cossack horses had imported in their thick manes and tails.

Beloved Hungary, whose sons, disdaining the universe, used proudly to boast: "Have we not all that man needs? Banat, which gives us wheat; Tisza, wine; the mountain, gold and salt. Our country is sufficient for her children!" And this country, this fruitful country, was now covered with gibbets and corpses.

CHAPTER IV

"When Hungary is free!"

All these bitter memories Prince Andras, in spite of the years that had passed, kept ever in his mind one sad and tragic event—the burial of his father, Sandor Zilah, who was shot in the head by a bullet during an encounter with the Croats early in the month of January, 1849.

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Prince Sandor was able to grasp the hand of his son, and murmur in the ear of this hero of sixteen:

“Remember! Love and defend the fatherland!”

Then, as the Austrians were close at hand, it was necessary to bury the Prince in a trench dug in the snow, at the foot of a clump of fir-trees.

Some Hungarian ‘honveds, bourgeois’ militia, and Varhely’s hussars held at the edge of the black opening resinous torches, which the wintry wind shook like scarlet plumes, and which stained the snow with great red spots of light. Erect, at the head of the ditch, his fingers grasping the hand of Yanski Varhely, young Prince Andras gazed upon the earthy bed, where, in his hussar’s uniform, lay Prince Sandor, his long blond moustache falling over his closed mouth, his blood-stained hands crossed upon his black embroidered vest, his right hand still clutching the handle of his sabre, and on his forehead, like a star, the round mark of the bit of lead that had killed him.

Above, the whitened branches of the firs looked like spectres, and upon the upturned face of the dead soldier fell flakes of snow like congealed tears. Under the flickering of the torch-flames, blown about by the north wind, the hero seemed at times to move again, and a wild desire came to Andras to leap down into the grave and snatch away the body. He was an orphan now, his mother having died when he was an infant, and he was alone in the world, with only the stanch friendship of Varhely and his duty to his country to sustain him.

“I will avenge you, father,” he whispered to the patriot, who could no longer hear his words.

The hussars and honveds had advanced, ready to fire a final salvo over the grave of the Prince, when, suddenly, gliding between the ranks of the soldiers, appeared a band of Tzigani, who began to play the March of Rakoczy, the Hungarian Marseillaise, the stirring melody pealing forth in the night-air, and lending a certain mysteriously touching element to the sad scene. A quick shudder ran through the ranks of the soldiers, ready to become avengers.

The national hymn rang out like a song of glory over the resting-place of the vanquished. The soul of the dead seemed to speak in the voice of the heroic music, recalling to the harassed contestants for liberty the great days of the revolts of the fatherland, the old memories of the struggles against the Turks, the furious charges of the cavaliers across the free puszta, the vast Hungarian plain.

And while, with long sweeps of his arm, the chief of the Tzigani marked the measure, and the ‘czimbalom’ poured forth its heartrending notes, it seemed to the poor fellows gathered about that the music of the March of Rakoczy summoned a whole fantastic



squadron of avengers, horsemen with floating pelisses and herons' plumes in their hats, who, erect in their saddles and with sabres drawn, struck, struck the frightened enemy, and recovered, foot by foot, the conquered territory. There was in this exalted march a sound of horses' hoofs, the clash of arms, a shaking of the earth under the gallop of horsemen, a flash of agraffes, a rustle of pelisses in the wind, an heroic gayety and a chivalrous bravery, like the cry of a whole people of cavaliers sounding the charge of deliverance.

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And the young Prince, gazing down upon his dead father, remembered how many times those mute lips had related to him the legend of the czardas, that legend, symbolic of the history of Hungary, summing up all the bitter pain of the conquest, when the beautiful dark girls of Transylvania danced, their tears burning their cheeks, under the lash of the Osmanlis. At first, cold and motionless, like statues whose calm looks silently insulted their possessors, they stood erect beneath the eye of the Turk; then little by little, the sting of the master's whip falling upon their shoulders and tearing their sides and cheeks, their bodies twisted in painful, revolted spasms; the flesh trembled under the cord like the muscles of a horse beneath the spur; and, in the morbid exaltation of suffering, a sort of wild delirium took possession of them, their arms were waved in the air, their heads with hair dishevelled were thrown backward, and the captives, uttering a sound at once plaintive and menacing, danced, their dance, at first slow and melancholy, becoming gradually active, nervous, and interrupted by cries which resembled sobs. And the Hungarian czardas, symbolizing thus the dance of these martyrs, kept still, will always keep, the characteristic of contortions under the lash of bygone days; and, slow and languishing at first, then soon quick and agitated, tragically hysterical, it also is interrupted by melancholy chords, dreary, mournful notes and plaintive accents like drops of blood from a wound-from the mortal wound of Prince Sandor, lying there in his martial uniform.

The bronzed Tzigani, fantastically illumined by the red glare of the torches, stood out against the white background like demons of revenge; and the hymn, feverish, bold, ardent, echoed through the snow-covered branches like a hurricane of victory. They were wandering musicians, who, the evening before, had been discovered in a neighboring village by some of Jellachich's Croats, and whom Prince Sandor had unceremoniously rescued at the head of his hussars; and they had come, with their ancient national airs, the voice of their country, to pay their debt to the fallen hero.

When they had finished, the wintry night-wind bearing away the last notes of their war-song, the pistols of the hussars and the guns of the honveds discharged a salute over the grave. The earth and snow were shovelled in upon the body of Sandor Zilah, and Prince Andras drew away, after marking with a cross the place where his father reposed.

A few paces away, he perceived, among the Tzigani musicians, a young girl, the only woman of the tribe, who wept with mournful sobbings like the echoes of the deserts of the Orient.

He wondered why the girl wept so bitterly, when he, the son, could not shed a tear.

"Because Prince Zilah Sandor was valiant among the valiant," she replied, in answer to his question, "and he died because he would not wear the talisman which I offered him."

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Andras looked at the girl.

“What talisman?”

“Some pebbles from the lakes of Tatra, sewn up in a little leather bag.”

Andras knew what a powerful superstition is attached by the people of Hungary to these deep lakes of Tatra, the “eyes of the sea,” where, say the old legends, the most beautiful carbuncle in the world lies hidden, a carbuncle which would sparkle like the sun, if it could be discovered, and which is guarded by frogs with diamond eyes and with lumps of pure gold for feet. He felt more touched than astonished at the superstition of the Tzigana, and at the offer which, the evening before, Prince Sandor had refused with a smile.

“Give me what you wished to give my father,” he said. “I will keep it in memory of him.”

A bright, joyous light flashed for a moment across the face of the Tzigana. She extended to the young Prince the little bag of leather containing several small, round pebbles like grains of maize.

“At all events,” exclaimed the young girl, “there will be one Zilah whom the balls of the Croats will spare for the safety of Hungary.”

Andras slowly detached from his shoulder the silver agraffe, set with opals, which clasped his fur pelisse, and handed it to the gypsy, who regarded it with admiring eyes as it flashed in the red light.

“The day when my father is avenged,” he said, “and our Hungary is free, bring me this jewel, and you and yours come to the castle of the Zilahs. I will give you a life of peace in memory of this night of mourning.”

Already, at a distance, could be heard a rapid fusillade about the outposts. The Austrians had perhaps perceived the light from the torches, and were attempting a night attack.

“Extinguish the torches!” cried Yanski Varhely.

The resinous knots hissed as they were thrust into the snow, and the black, sinister night of winter, with the cries of the wind in the branches, fell upon the troop of men, ready to die as their chief had died; and all disappeared vision, phantoms—the Tzigani silently taking refuge in the sombre forest, while here and there could be heard the rattle of the ramrods as the honveds loaded their guns.

This January night appeared now to Andras as an almost fantastic dream. Since then he had erected a mausoleum of marble on the very spot where Prince Sandor fell; and

of all the moments of that romantic, picturesque war, the agonizing moment, the wild scene of the burial of his father, was most vivid in his memory—the picture of the warrior stretched in the snow, his hand on the handle of his sword, remained before his eyes, imperishable in its melancholy majesty.

CHAPTER V

“My father was A Russian!”

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When the war was over, the Prince roamed sadly for years about Europe—Europe, which, unmindful of the martyrs, had permitted the massacre of the vanquished. It was many years before he could accustom himself to the idea that he had no longer a country. He counted always upon the future; it was impossible that fate would forever be implacable to a nation. He often repeated this to Yanski Varhely, who had never forsaken him—Yanski Varhely, the impoverished old hussar, the ruined gentleman, now professor of Latin and mathematics at Paris, and living near the Prince off the product of his lessons and a small remnant he had managed to save from the wreck of his property.

“Hungary will spring up again, Yanski; Hungary is immortal!” Andras would exclaim.

“Yes, on one condition,” was Varhely’s response. “She must arrive at a comprehension that if she has succumbed, it is because she has committed faults. All defeats have their geneses. Before the enemy we were not a unit. There were too many discussions, and not enough action; such a state of affairs is always fatal.”

The years brought happy changes to Hungary. She practically regained her freedom; by her firmness she made the conquest of her own autonomy by the side of Austria. Deak’s spirit, in the person of Andrassy, recovered the possession of power. But neither Andras nor Varhely returned to their country. The Prince had become, as he himself said with a smile, “a Magyar of Paris.” He grew accustomed to the intellectual, refined life of the French city; and this was a consolation, at times, for the exile from his native land.

“It is not a difficult thing to become bewitched with Paris,” he would say, as if to excuse himself.

He had no longer, it is true, the magnificent landscapes of his youth; the fields of maize, the steppes, dotted here and there with clumps of wild roses; the Carpathian pines, with their sombre murmur; and all the evening sounds which had been his infancy’s lullaby; the cowbells, melancholy and indistinct; the snapping of the great whips of the czikos; the mounted shepherds, with their hussar jackets, crossing the plains where grew the plants peculiar to the country; and the broad horizons with the enormous arms of the windmills outlined against the golden sunset. But Paris, with its ever-varying seductions, its activity in art and science, its perpetual movement, had ended by becoming a real need to him, like a new existence as precious and as loved as the first. The soldier had become a man of letters, jotting down for himself, not for the public, all that struck him in his observation and his reading; mingling in all societies, knowing them all, but esteeming only one, that of honest people; and thus letting the years pass by, without suspecting that they were flying, regarding himself somewhat as a man away on a visit, and suddenly awaking one fine morning almost old, wondering how he had lived all this time of exile which, despite many mental troubles, seemed to him to have lasted only a few months.

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"We resemble," he said to Varhely, "those emigrants who never unpack their boxes, certain that they are soon to return home. They wait, and some day, catching a glimpse of themselves in a glass, they are amazed to find wrinkles and gray hairs."

No longer having a home in his own country, Prince Andras had never dreamed of making another abroad. He hired the sumptuous hotel he inhabited at the top of the Champs Elysees, when houses were rather scattered there. Fashion, and the ascensional movement of Paris toward the Arc de Triomphe, had come to seek him. His house was rich in beautiful pictures and rare books, and he sometimes received there his few real friends, his companions in troublous times, like Varhely. He was generally considered a little of a recluse, although he loved society and showed himself, during the winter, at all entertainments where, by virtue of his fame and rank, he would naturally be expected to be present. But he carried with him a certain melancholy and gravity, which contrasted strongly with the frivolous trivialities and meaningless smiles of our modern society. In the summer, he usually passed two months at the seashore, where Varhely frequently joined him; and upon the leafy terrace of the Prince's villa the two friends had long and confidential chats, as they watched the sun sink into the sea.

Andras had never thought of marrying. At first, he had a sort of feeling that he was doomed to an early death, ever expecting a renewal of the struggle with Austria; and he thought at that time that the future would bring to him his father's fate—a ball in the forehead and a ditch. Then, without knowing it, he had reached and passed his fortieth year.

"Now it is too late," he said, gayly. "The psychological moment is long gone by. We shall both end old bachelors, my good Varhely, and spend our evenings playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men."

"Yes, that is all very well for me, who have no very famous name to perpetuate; but the Zilahs should not end with you. I want some sturdy little hussar whom I can teach to sit a horse, and who also will call me his good old Yanski."

The Prince smiled, and then replied, gravely, almost sadly: "I greatly fear that one can not love two things at once; the heart is not elastic. I chose Hungary for my bride, and my life must be that of a widower."

In the midst of the austere and thoughtful life he led, Andras preserved, nevertheless, a sort of youthful buoyancy. Many men of thirty were less fresh in mind and body than he. He was one of those beings who die, as they have lived, children: even the privations of the hardest kind of an existence can not take away from them that purity and childlike trust which seem to be an integral part of themselves, and which, although they may be betrayed, deceived and treated harshly by life, they never wholly lose; very manly and heroic in time of need and danger, they are by nature peculiarly exposed to treasons and deceptions which astonish but do not alter them. Since man, in the



progress of time, must either harden or break to pieces, the hero in them is of iron; but, on the other hand, their hearts are easily wounded by the cruel hand of some woman or the careless one of a child.

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Andras Zilah had not yet loved deeply, as it was in his nature to love. More or less passing caprices had not dried up the spring of real passion which was at the bottom of his heart. But he had not sought this love; for he adored his Hungary as he would have loved a woman, and the bitter recollection of her defeat gave him the impression of a love that had died or been cruelly betrayed.

Yanski, on the whole, had not greatly troubled himself to demonstrate mathematically or philosophically that a "hussar pupil" was an absolute necessity to him. People can not be forced, against their will, to marry; and the Prince, after all, was free, if he chose, to let the name of Zilah die with him.

"Taking life as it is," old Varhely would growl, "perhaps it isn't necessary to bring into the world little beings who never asked to come here." And yet breaking off in his pessimism, and with a vision before his eyes of another Andras, young, handsome, leading his hussars to the charge "and yet, it is a pity, Andras, it is a pity."

The decisions of men are more often dependent upon chance than upon their own will. Prince Andras received an invitation to dinner one day from the little Baroness Dinati, whom he liked very much, and whose husband, Orso Dinati, one of the defenders of Venice in the time of Manin, had been his intimate friend. The house of the Baroness was a very curious place; the reporter Jacquemin, who was there at all times, testing the wines and correcting the menus, would have called it "bizarre." The Baroness received people in all circles of society; oddities liked her, and she did not dislike oddities. Very honest, very spirituelle, an excellent woman at heart, she gave evening parties, readings from unheard-of books, and performances of the works of unappreciated musicians; and the reporters, who came to absorb her salads and drink her punch, laughed at her in their journals before their supper was digested.

The Prince, as we have said, was very fond of the Baroness, with an affection which was almost fraternal. He pardoned her childishness and her little absurdities for the sake of her great good qualities. "My dear Prince," she said to him one day, "do you know that I would throw myself into the fire for you?"

"I am sure of it; but there would not be any great merit in your doing so."

"And why not, please?"

"Because you would not run any risk of being burned. This must be so, because you receive in your house a crowd of highly suspicious people, and no one has ever suspected you yourself. You are a little salamander, the prettiest salamander I ever met. You live in fire, and you have neither upon your face nor your reputation the slightest little scorch."

"Then you think that my guests are"——

“Charming. Only, they are of two kinds: those whom I esteem, and who do not amuse me—often; and those who amuse me, and whom I esteem—never.”

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"I suppose you will not come any more to the Rue Murillo, then?"

"Certainly I shall—to see you."

And it really was to see her that the Prince went to the Baroness Dinati's, where his melancholy characteristics clashed with so many worldly follies and extravagances. The Baroness seemed to have a peculiar faculty in choosing extraordinary guests: Peruvians, formerly dictators, now become insurance agents, or generals transformed into salesmen for some wine house; Cuban chiefs half shot to pieces by the Spaniards; Cretes exiled by the Turks; great personages from Constantinople, escaped from the Sultan's silken bowstring, and displaying proudly their red fez in Paris, where the opera permitted them to continue their habits of polygamy; Americans, whose gold-mines or petroleum-wells made them billionaires for a winter, only to go to pieces and make them paupers the following summer; politicians out of a place; unknown authors; misunderstood poets; painters of the future—in short, the greater part of the people who were invited by Prince Andras to his water-party, Baroness Dinati having pleaded for her friends and obtained for them cards of invitation. It was a sort of ragout of real and shady celebrities, an amusing, bustling crowd, half Bohemian, half aristocratic, entirely cosmopolitan. Prince Andras remembered once having dined with a staff officer of Garibaldi's army on one side of him, and the Pope's nuncio on the other.

On a certain evening the Baroness was very anxious that the Prince should not refuse her latest invitation.

"I am arranging a surprise for you," she said. "I am going to have to dinner"—

"Whom? The Mikado? The Shah of Persia?"

"Better than the Mikado. A charming young girl who admires you profoundly, for she knows by heart the whole history of your battles of 1849. She has read Georgei, Klapka, and all the rest of them; and she is so thoroughly Bohemian in heart, soul and race, that she is universally called the Tzigana."

"The Tzigana?"

This simple word, resembling the clank of cymbals, brought up to Prince Andras a whole world of recollections. 'Hussad czigany'! The rallying cry of the wandering musicians of the puszta had some element in it like the cherished tones of the distant bells of his fatherland.

"Ah! yes, indeed, my dear Baroness," he said; "that is a charming surprise. I need not ask if your Tzigana is pretty; all the Tzigani of my country are adorable, and I am sure I shall fall in love with her."



The Prince had no notion how prophetic his words were. The Tzigana, whom the Baroness requested him to take in to dinner, was Marsa, Marsa Laszlo, dressed in one of the black toilettes which she affected, and whose clear, dark complexion, great Arabian eyes, and heavy, wavy hair seemed to Andras's eyes to be the incarnation, in a prouder and more refined type, of the warm, supple, nervous beauty of the girls of his country.

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He was surprised and strangely fascinated, attracted by the incongruous mixture of extreme refinement and a sort of haughty unconventionality he found in Marsa. A moment before, he had noticed how silent, almost rigid she was, as she leaned back in her armchair; but now this same face was strangely animated, illumined by some happy emotion, and her eyes burned like coals of fire as she fixed them upon Andras.

During the whole dinner, the rest of the dining-room disappeared to the Prince; he saw only the girl at his side; and the candles and polished mirrors were only there to form a sparkling background for her pale, midnight beauty.

"Do you know, Prince," said Marsa, in her rich, warm contralto voice, whose very accents were like a caress, "do you know that, among all those who fought for our country, you are the one admiration of my life?"

He smiled, and mentioned more illustrious names.

"No, no," she answered; "those are not the names I care for, but yours. I will tell you why."

And she recalled, in a voice vibrating with emotion, all that Prince Zilah Sandor and his son had attempted, twenty years before, for the liberty of Hungary. She told the whole story in the most vivid manner; had her age permitted her to have been present at those battles, she could not have related them with more spirited enthusiasm.

"I know, perfectly, how, at the head of your hussars, you wrested from the soldiers of Jellachich the first standard captured by the Hungarians from the ranks of Austria. Shall I tell you the exact date? and the day of the week? It was Thursday."

The whole history, ignored, forgotten, lost in the smoke of more recent wars, the strange, dark-eyed girl, knew day by day, hour by hour; and there, in that Parisian dining-room, surrounded by all that crowd, where yesterday's 'bon mot', the latest scandal, the new operetta, were subjects of paramount importance, Andras, voluntarily isolated, saw again, present and living, his whole heroic past rise up before him, as beneath the wave of a fairy's wand.

"But how do you know me so well?" he asked, fixing his clear eyes upon Marsa Laszlo's face. "Was your father one of my soldiers?"

"My father was a Russian," responded Marsa, abruptly, her voice suddenly becoming harsh and cutting.

"A Russian?"

“Yes, a Russian,” she repeated, emphasizing the word with a sort of dull anger. “My mother alone was a Tzigana, and my mother’s beauty was part of the spoils of those who butchered your soldiers?”

In the uproar of conversation, which became more animated with the dessert, she could not tell him of the sorrows of her life; and yet, he guessed there was some sad story in the life of the young girl, and almost implored her to speak, stopping just at the limit where sympathy might change into indiscretion.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, as she was silent, with a dark shadow overspreading her face. “I have no right to know your life simply because you are so well acquainted with mine.”

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"Oh! you!" she said, with a sad smile; "your life is history; mine is drama, melodrama even. There is a great difference."

"Pardon my presumption!"

"Oh! I will willingly tell you of my life, if the existence of a useless being like myself can interest you; but not here in the noise of this dinner. It would be absurd," with a change of tone, "to mingle tears with champagne. By-and-bye! By-and-bye!"

She made an evident effort to appear gay, like the pretty women who were there, and who, despite their prettiness, seemed to Andras perfectly insignificant; but she did not succeed in driving away the cloud of sadness which overshadowed her exquisite, dark face. And in the ears of the Prince rang again the bitter accents of that voice saying in a harsh, almost revolted tone:

"Yes, a Russian! My father was a Russian!"

CHAPTER VI

A GYPSY PRINCESS

The mystery which seemed to envelop Marsa, the flash of anger with which she had spoken of the Russian who was her father, all attracted the Prince toward her; and he experienced a deliciously disquieting sentiment, as if the secret of this girl's existence were now grafted upon his own life.

She seemed to have no wish to keep her secret from him. At their first meeting, during the conversation which followed the dinner and the musical exhibition given by extraordinary musicians with long, unkempt locks, Marsa, trusting with a sort of joy to the one whom she regarded as a hero, told Prince Andras the story of her life.

She related to him the assault made by soldiers of Paskiewich upon the little Hungarian village, and how her grandfather, leaving his czimbalom, had fired upon the Russians from the ranks of the honveds. There was a combat, or rather a butchery, in the sole street of the town, one of the last massacres of the campaign. The Russians destroyed everything, shooting down the prisoners, and burning the poor little houses. There were some women among the Hungarians and Tzigani; they had loaded the guns of the wounded, comforted the dying and avenged the dead. Many of them were killed. One of them, the youngest and prettiest, a gypsy, was seized by the Russian officer, and, when peace was declared soon after, carried off by him to Russia. This was Tisza Laszlo, Marsa's mother. The officer, a great Russian nobleman, a handsome fellow and extremely rich, really loved her with a mad sort of love. He forced her to become his mistress; but he tried in every way to make her pardon the brutality of his passion; keeping her half a captive in his castle near Moscow, and yet offering her, by way of



expiation, not only his fortune but his name, the princely title of which the Tcheretteff s, his ancestors, had been so proud, and which the daughter of wandering Tzigani refused with mingled hatred and disgust. Princess? She, the gypsy, a Russian princess? The title

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would have appeared to her like a new and still more abhorrent stigma. He implored her, but she was obdurate. It was a strange, tragic existence these two beings led, shut up in the immense castle, from the windows of which Tisza could perceive the gilded domes of Moscow, the superb city in which she would never set her foot, preferring the palace, sad and gloomy as a cell. Alone in the world, the sole survivor of her massacred tribe, the Russians to her were the murderers of her people, the assassins of the free musicians with eagle profiles she used to follow as they played the czardas from village to village.

She never saw Prince Tcheretteff, handsome, generous, charming, loving her and trembling before her glance although he had ruthlessly kidnapped her from her country, that she did not think of him, sword in hand, entering the burning Hungarian village, his face reddened by the flames, as the bayonets of his soldiers were reddened with blood. She hated this tall young man, his drooping moustache, his military uniform, his broad figure, his white-gloved hands: he represented to the imprisoned Tzigana the conqueror and murderer of her people. And yet a daughter was born to them. She had defended herself with the cries of a tigress; and then she had longed to die, to die of hunger, since, a close prisoner, she could not obtain possession of a weapon, nor cast herself into the water. She had lived, nevertheless, and then her daughter reconciled her to life. The child which was born to her was all in all to Tisza. Marsa was an exact reproduction, feature by feature, of her mother, and, strange to say, daughters generally resembling the father, had nothing of Tcheretteff, nothing Russian about her: on the contrary, she was all Tzigana—Tzigana in the clear darkness of her skin, in her velvety eyes, and her long, waving black hair, with its bronze reflections, which the mother loved to wind about her thin fingers.

Her beauty, faded by long, slow sorrow, Tisza found again in her child, a true daughter of Hungary like herself; and, as Marsa grew up, she told her the legends, the songs, the heroism, the martyrdom, of Hungary, picturing to the little girl the great, grassy plain, the free puszta, peopled with a race in whose proud language the word honor recurs again and again.

Marsa grew up in the Muscovite castle, loving nothing in the world except her mother, and regarding with frightened eyes the blond stranger who sometimes took her upon his knees and gazed sadly into her face. Before this man, who was her father, she felt as if she were in the presence of an enemy. As Tisza never went out, Marsa rarely quitted the castle; and, when she went to Moscow, she hastened to return to her mother. The very gayeties of that noisy city weighed upon her heart; for she never forgot the war-tales of the Tzigana, and, perhaps, among the passers-by was the wretch who had shot down her grandfather, old Mihal.

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The Tzigana cultivated, with a sort of passion, a love of far-off Hungary and a hatred for the master in the impressionable mind of her daughter. There is a Servian proverb which says, that when a Wallachian has crossed the threshold the whole house becomes Wallachian. Tisza did not wish the house to become Hungarian; but she did wish that the child of her loins should be and should remain Hungarian.

The servants of Prince Tcheretteff never spoke of their mistress except as The Tzigana, and this was the name which Marsa wished to bear also. It seemed to her like a title of nobility.

And the years passed without the Tzigana pardoning the Russian, and without Marsa ever having called him father.

In the name of their child, the Prince one day solemnly asked Tisza Laszlo to consent to become his wife, and the mother refused.

“But our daughter?” said the Prince.

“My daughter? She will bear the name of her mother, which at least is not a Russian name.”

The Prince was silenced.

As Marsa grew up, Moscow became displeasing to the Prince. He had his daughter educated as if she were destined to be the Czarina. He summoned to the castle a small army of instructors, professors of music and singing; French, English, and German masters, drawing masters, *etc.*, *etc.* The young girl, with the prodigious power of assimilation peculiar to her race, learned everything, loving knowledge for its own sake, but, nevertheless, always deeply moved by the history of that unknown country, which was that of her mother, and even her own, the land of her heart and her soul-Hungary. She knew, from her mother, about all its heroes: Klapka, Georgei, Dembiski; Bem, the conqueror of Buda; Kossuth, the dreamer of a sort of feudal liberty; and those chivalrous Zilah princes, father and son, the fallen martyr and the living hero.

Prince Tcheretteff, French in education and sentiment, wished to take to France the child, who did not bear his name, but whom he adored. France also exercised a powerful fascination over Marsa's imagination; and she departed joyously for Paris, accompanied by the Tzigana, her mother, who felt like a prisoner set at liberty. To quit Russian soil was in itself some consolation, and who knew? perhaps she might again see her dear fatherland.

Tisza, in fact, breathed more freely in Paris, repeating however, like a mournful refrain, the proverb of her country: Away from Hungary, life is not life. The Prince purchased, at Maisons-Lafitte, not far from the forest of Saint-Germain, a house surrounded by an



immense garden. Here, as formerly at Moscow, Tisza and the Prince lived together, and yet apart—the Tzigana, implacable in her resentment, bitterly refusing all pardon to the Russian, and always keeping alive in Marsa a hatred of all that was Muscovite; the Prince, disconsolate, gloomy, discouraged between the woman whom he adored and whose heart he could not win, and the girl, so wonderfully beautiful, the living portrait of her mother, and who treated him with the cold respect one shows to a stranger.

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Not long after their arrival in Paris, a serious heart trouble attacked Marsa's father. He summoned to his deathbed the Tzigana and her daughter; and, in a sort of supreme confession, he openly asked his child, before the mother, to forgive him for her birth.

"Marsa," he said, slowly, "your birth, which should make the joy of my existence, is the remorse of my whole life. But I am dying of the love which I can not conquer. Will you kiss me as a token that you have pardoned me?"

For the first time, perhaps, Marsa's lips, trembling with emotion, then touched the Prince's forehead. But, before kissing him, her eyes had sought those of her mother, who bowed her head in assent.

"And you," murmured the dying Prince, "will you forgive me, Tisza?"

The Tzigana saw again her native village in flames, her brothers dead, her father murdered, and this man, now lying thin and pale amid the pillows, erect, with sabre drawn, crying: "Courage! Charge! Forward!"

Then she saw herself dragged almost beneath a horse's hoofs, cast into a wagon with wrists bound together, carried in the rear of an army with the rest of the victor's spoils, and immured within Russian walls. She felt again on her lips the degradation of the first kiss of this man whose suppliant, pitiful love was hideous to her.

She made a step toward the dying man as if to force herself to whisper, "I forgive you;" but all the resentment and suffering of her life mounted to her heart, almost stifling her, and she paused, going no farther, and regarding with a haggard glance the man whose eyes implored her pardon, and who, after raising his pale face from the pillow, let his head fall back again with one long, weary sigh.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF MARSÁ

Prince Tcheretteff left his whole fortune to Marsa Laszlo, leaving her in the hands of his uncle Vogotzine, an old, ruined General, whose property had been confiscated by the Czar, and who lived in Paris half imbecile with fear, having become timid as a child since his release from Siberia, where he had been sent on some pretext or other, no one knew exactly the reason why.

It had been necessary to obtain the sovereign intervention of the Czar—that Czar whose will is the sole law, a law above laws—to permit Prince Tcheretteff to give his property to a foreigner, a girl without a name. The state would gladly have seized upon the fortune, as the Prince had no other relative save an outlaw; but the Czar graciously gave his permission, and Marsa inherited.



Old General Vogotzine was, in fact, the only living relative of Prince Tchereteff. In consideration of a yearly income, the Prince charged him to watch over Marsa, and see to her establishment in life. Rich as she was, Marsa would have no lack of suitors; but Tisza, the half-civilized Tzigana, was not the one to guide and protect a young girl in Paris. The Prince believed Vogotzine to be less old and more acquainted with Parisian life than he really was, and it was a consolation to the father to feel that his daughter would have a guardian.



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Tisza did not long survive the Prince. She died in that Russian house, every stone of which she hated, even to the Muscovite crucifix over the door, which her faith, however, forbade her to have removed; she died making her daughter swear that the last slumber which was coming to her, gently lulling her to rest after so much suffering, should be slept in Hungarian soil; and, after the Tzigana's death, this young girl of twenty, alone with Vogotzine, who accompanied her on the gloomy journey with evident displeasure, crossed France, went to Vienna, sought in the Hungarian plain the place where one or two miserable huts and some crumbling walls alone marked the site of the village burned long ago by Tchereteff's soldiers; and there, in Hungarian soil, close to the spot where the men of her tribe had been shot down, she buried the Tzigana, whose daughter she so thoroughly felt herself to be, that, in breathing the air of the puszta, she seemed to find again in that beloved land something already seen, like a vivid memory of a previous existence.

And yet, upon the grave of the martyr, Marsa prayed also for the executioner. She remembered that the one who reposed in the cemetery of Pere-Lachaise, beneath a tomb in the shape of a Russian dome, was her father, as the Tzigana, interred in Hungary, was her mother; and she asked in her prayer, that these two beings, separated in life, should pardon each other in the unknown, obscure place of departed souls.

So Marsa Laszlo was left alone in the world. She returned to France, which she had become attached to, and shut herself up in the villa of Maisons-Lafitte, letting old Vogotzine install himself there as a sort of Mentor, more obedient than a servant, and as silent as a statue; and this strange guardian, who had formerly fought side by side with Schamyl, and cut down the Circassians with the sang-froid of a butcher's boy wringing the neck of a fowl, and who now scarcely dared to open his lips, as if the entire police force of the Czar had its eye upon him; this old soldier, who once cared nothing for privations, now, provided he had his chocolate in the morning, his kummel with his coffee at breakfast, and a bottle of brandy on the table all day—left Marsa free to think, act, come and go as she pleased.

She had accepted the Prince's legacy, but with this mental reservation and condition, that the Hungarian colony of Paris should receive half of it. It seemed to her that the money thus given to succor the compatriots of her mother would be her father's atonement. She waited, therefore, until she had attained her majority; and then she sent this enormous sum to the Hungarian aid society, saying that the donor requested that part of the amount should be used in rebuilding the little village in Transylvania which had been burned twenty years before by Russian troops. When they asked what name should be attached to so princely a gift, Marsa replied: "That which was my mother's and which is mine, The Tzigana." More than ever now did she cling to that cognomen of which she was so proud.

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"And," she said to Zilah, after she had finished the recital of her story, "it is because I am thus named that I have the right to speak to you of yourself."

Prince Andras listened with passionate attention to the beautiful girl, thus evoking for him the past, confident and even happy to speak and make herself known to the man whose life of heroic devotion she knew so well.

He was not astonished at her sudden frankness, at the confidence displayed at a first meeting; and it seemed to him that he had long been acquainted with this Tzigana, whose very name he had been ignorant of a few hours before. It appeared to him quite simple that Marsa should confide in him, as he on his side would have related to her his whole life, if she had asked it with a glance from her dark eyes. He felt that he had reached one of the decisive moments of his life. Marsa called up visions of his youth—his first tender dreams of love, rudely broken by the harsh voice of war; and he felt as he used to feel, in the days long gone by, when he sat beneath the starry skies of a summer night and listened to the old, heart-stirring songs of his country and the laughter of the brown maidens of Budapest.

"Prince," said Marsa Laszlo, suddenly, "do you know that I have been seeking you for a long time, and that when the Baroness Dinati presented you to me, she fulfilled one of my most ardent desires?"

"Me, Mademoiselle? You have been seeking me?"

"Yes, you. Tisza, of whom I spoke to you, my Tzigana mother, who bore the name of the blessed river of our country, taught me to repeat your name. She met you years ago, in the saddest moment of your life."

"Your mother?" said Andras, waiting anxiously for the young girl to continue.

"Yes, my mother."

She pointed to the buckle which clasped the belt of her dress.

"See," she said.

Andras felt a sudden pang, which yet was not altogether pain, dart through his heart, and his eyes wandered questioningly from the buckle to Marsa's face. Smiling, but her beautiful lips mute, Marsa seemed to say to him: "Yes, it is the agraffe which you detached from your soldier's pelisse and gave to an unknown Tzigana near your father's grave."

The silver ornament, incrusting with opals, recalled sharply to Prince Zilah that sad January night when the dead warrior had been laid in his last resting-place. He saw again the sombre spot, the snowy fir-trees, the black trench, and the broad, red

reflections of the torches, which, throwing a flickering light upon the dead, seemed to reanimate the pale, cold face.

And that daughter of the wandering musicians who had, at the open grave, played as a dirge, or, rather, as a ringing hymn of resurrection and deliverance, the chant of the fatherland—that dark girl to whom he had said: “Bring me this jewel, and come and live in peace with the Zilahs”—was the mother of this beautiful, fascinating creature, whose every word, since he had first met her a few hours before, had exercised such a powerful effect upon him.

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"So," he said, slowly, with a sad smile, "your mother's talisman was worth more than mine. I have kept the lake pebbles she gave me, and death has passed me by; but the opals of the agraffe did not bring happiness to your mother. It is said that those stones are unlucky. Are you superstitious?"

"I should not be Tisza's daughter if I did not believe a little in all that is romantic, fantastic, improbable, impossible even. Besides, the opals are forgiven now: for they have permitted me to show you that you were not unknown to me, Prince; and, as you see, I wear this dear agraffe always. It has a double value to me, since it recalls the memory of my poor mother and the name of a hero."

She spoke these words in grave, sweet accents, which seemed more melodious to Prince Andras than all the music of Baroness Dinati's concert. He divined that Marsa Laszlo found as much pleasure in speaking to him as he felt in listening. As he gazed at her, a delicate flush spread over Marsa's pale, rather melancholy face, tingeing even her little, shell-like ears, and making her cheeks glow with the soft, warm color of a peach.

Just at this moment the little Baroness came hastily up to them, and, with an assumed air of severity, began to reproach Marsa for neglecting the unfortunate musicians, suddenly breaking off to exclaim:

"Really, you are a hundred times prettier than ever this evening, my dear Marsa. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh! it is because I am very happy, I suppose," replied Marsa.

"Ah! my dear Prince," and the Baroness broke into a merry peal of laughter, "it is you, O ever-conquering hero, who have worked this miracle."

But, as if she had been too hasty in proclaiming aloud her happiness, the Tzigana suddenly frowned, a harsh, troubled look crept into her dark eyes, and her cheeks became pale as marble, while her gaze was fixed upon a tall young man who was crossing the salon and coming toward her.

Instinctively Andras Zilah followed her look. Michel Menko was advancing to salute Marsa Laszlo, and take with affectionate respect the hand which Andras extended to him.

Marsa coldly returned the low bow of the young man, and took no part in the conversation which followed. Menko remained but a few moments, evidently embarrassed at his reception; and after his departure, Zilah, who had noticed the Tzigana's coldness, asked her if she knew his friend.

"Very well," she said, in a peculiar tone.

“It would be difficult to imagine so from the way in which you received him,” said Andras, laughing. “Poor Michel! Have you any reason to be angry with him?”

“None.”

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"I like him very much. He is a charming boy, and his father was one of my companions in arms. I have been almost a guardian to his son. We are kinsmen, and when the young count entered diplomacy he asked my advice, as he hesitated to serve Austria. I told him that, after having fought Austria with the sword, it was our duty to absorb it by our talents and devotion. Was I not right? Austria is to-day subservient to Hungary, and, when Vienna acts, Vienna glances toward Pesth to see if the Magyars are satisfied. Michel Menko has therefore served his country well; and I don't understand why he gave up diplomacy. He makes me uneasy: he seems to me, like all young men of his generation, a little too undecided what object to pursue, what duty to fulfil. He is nervous, irresolute. We were more unfortunate but more determined; we marched straight on without that burden of pessimism with which our successors are loaded down. I am sorry that Michel has resigned his position: he had a fine future before him, and he would have made a good diplomatist."

"Too good, perhaps," interrupted Marsa, dryly.

"Ah, decidedly," retorted the Prince, with a smile, "you don't like my poor Menko."

"He is indifferent to me;" and the way in which she pronounced the words was a terrible condemnation of Michel Menko. "But," added the Tzigana, "he himself has told me all that you have said of him. He, on his side, has a great affection and a deep veneration for you; and it is not astonishing that it should be so, for men like you are examples for men like him, and—"

She paused abruptly, as if unwilling to say more.

"And what?" asked the Prince.

"Nothing. 'Examples' is enough; I don't know what I was going to say."

She made a little gesture with her pretty hand as if to dismiss the subject; and, after wondering a moment at the girl's singular reticence after her previous frankness, Andras thought only of enjoying her grace and charm, until the Tzigana gave him her hand and bade him good-night, begging him to remember that she would be very happy and proud to receive him in her own house.

"But, indeed," she added, with a laugh which displayed two rows of pearly teeth, "it is not for me to invite you. That is a terrible breach of the proprieties. General!"

At her call, from a group near by, advanced old General Vogotzine, whom Zilah had not noticed since the beginning of the evening. Marsa laid her hand on his arm, and said, distinctly, Vogotzine being a little deaf:

"Prince Andras Zilah, uncle, will do us the honor of coming to see us at Maisons-Lafitte."

“Ah! Ah! Very happy! Delighted! Very flattering of you, Prince,” stammered the General, pulling his white moustache, and blinking his little round eyes. “Andras Zilah! Ah! 1848! Hard days, those! All over now, though! All over now! Ah! Ah! We no longer cut one another’s throats! No! No! No longer cut one another’s throats!”

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He held out to Andras his big, fat hand, and repeated, as he shook that of the Prince:

“Delighted! Enchanted! Prince Zilah! Yes! Yes!”

In another moment they were gone, and the evening seemed to Andras like a vision, a beautiful, feverish dream.

He sent away his coupe, and returned home on foot, feeling the need of the night air; and, as he walked up the Champs-Elysees beneath the starry sky, he was surprised to find a new, youthful feeling at his heart, stirring his pulses like the first, soft touch of spring.

CHAPTER VIII

“Have I no right to be happy”

There was a certain womanly coquetry, mingled with a profound love of the soil where her martyred mother reposed, in the desire which Marsa Laszlo had to be called the Tzigana, instead of by her own name. The Tzigana! This name, as clear cut, resonant and expressive as the czimbaloms of the Hungarian musicians, lent her an additional, original charm. She was always spoken of thus, when she was perceived riding her pure-blooded black mare, or driving, attached to a victoria, a pair of bay horses of the Kisber breed. Before the horses ran two superb Danish hounds, of a lustrous dark gray, with white feet, eyes of a peculiar blue, rimmed with yellow, and sensitive, pointed ears—Duna and Bundas, the Hungarian names for the Danube and the Velu.

These hounds, and an enormous dog of the Himalayas, with a thick, yellow coat and long, sharp teeth, a half-savage beast, bearing the name of Ortog (Satan), were Marsa’s companions in her walks; and their submission to their young mistress, whom they could have knocked down with one pat of their paws, gave the Tzigana reputation for eccentricity; which, however, neither pleased nor displeased her, as she was perfectly indifferent to the opinion of the public at large.

She continued to inhabit, near the forest of Saint-Germain, beyond the fashionable avenues, the villa, ornamented with the holy Muscovite icon, which Prince Tcheretteff had purchased; and she persisted in remaining there alone with old Vogotzine, who regarded her respectfully with his round eyes, always moist with ‘kwass’ or brandy.

Flying the crowded city, eager for space and air, a true daughter of Hungary, Marsa loved to ride through the beautiful, silent park, down the long, almost deserted avenues, toward the bit of pale blue horizon discernible in the distance at the end of the sombre arch formed by the trees. Birds, startled by the horses’ hoofs, rose here and there out of the bushes, pouring forth their caroling to the clear ether; and Marsa, spurring her thoroughbred, would dash in a mad gallop toward a little, almost unknown grove of

oaks, with thickets full of golden furze and pink heather, where woodcutters worked, half buried in the long grass peppered with blue cornflowers and scarlet poppies.

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Or, at other times, with Duna and Bundas bounding before her, disappearing, returning, disappearing again with yelps of joy, it was Marsa's delight to wander alone under the great limes of the Albine avenue—shade over her head, silence about her—and then slowly, by way of a little alley bordered with lofty poplars trembling at every breath of wind, to reach the borders of the forest. In ten steps she would suddenly find herself plunged in solitude as in a bath of verdure, shade and oblivion. The sweet silence surrounding her calmed her, and she would walk on and on though the thick grass under the great trees. The trunks of the giant oaks were clothed in robes of emerald moss, and wild flowers of all descriptions raised their heads amid the grass. There was no footstep, no sound; a bee lazily humming, a brilliant butterfly darting across the path, something quick and red flashing up a tree—a squirrel frightened by the Danish hounds; that was all. And Marsa was happy with the languorous happiness which nature gives, her forehead cooled by the fresh breeze, her eyes rested by the deep green which hid the shoes, her whole being refreshed by the atmosphere of peace which fell from the trees.

Then, calling her dogs, she would proceed to a little farmhouse, and, sitting down under the mulberry trees, wait until the farmer's wife brought her some newly baked bread and a cup of milk, warm from the cows. Then she would remain idly there, surrounded by chickens, ducks, and great, greedy geese, which she fed, breaking the bread between her white fingers, while Duna and Bundas crouched at her feet, pricking up their ears, and watching these winged denizens of the farmyard, which Marsa forbade them to touch. Finally the Tzigana would slowly wend her way home, enter the villa, sit down before the piano, and play, with ineffable sweetness, like souvenirs of another life, the free and wandering life of her mother, the Hungarian airs of Janos Nemeth, the sad "Song of Plevna," the sparkling air of "The Little Brown Maid of Budapest," and that bitter; melancholy romance, "The World holds but One Fair Maiden," a mournful and despairing melody, which she preferred to all others, because it responded, with its tearful accents, to a particular state of her own heart.

The girl was evidently concealing some secret suffering. The bitter memory of her early years? Perhaps. Physical pain? Possibly. She had been ill some years before, and had been obliged to pass a winter at Pau. But it seemed rather some mental anxiety or torture which impelled the Tzigana to seek solitude and silence in her voluntary retreat.

The days passed thus in that villa of Maisons-Lafitte, where Tisza died. Very often, in the evening, Marsa would shut herself up in the solitude of that death-chamber, which remained just as her mother had left it. Below, General Vogotzine smoked his pipe, with a bottle of brandy for company: above, Marsa prayed.

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One night she went out, and through the sombre alleys, in the tender light of the moon, made her way to the little convent in the Avenue Egle, where the blue sisters were established; those sisters whom she often met in the park, with their full robes of blue cloth, their white veils, a silver medallion and crucifix upon their breasts, and a rosary of wooden beads suspended at their girdles. The little house of the community was shut, the grating closed. The only sign of life was in the lighted windows of the chapel.

Marsa paused there, leaning her heated brow against the cold bars of iron, with a longing for death, and a terrible temptation to end all by suicide.

"Who knows?" she murmured. "Perhaps forgetfulness, deep, profound forgetfulness, lies within these walls." Forgetfulness! Marsa, then, wished to forget? What secret torture gave to her beautiful face that expression so bitter, so terrible in its agony?

She stood leaning there, gazing at the windows of the chapel. Broken words of prayers, of muttered verses and responses, reached her like the tinkling of far-off chimes, like the rustling of invisible wings. The blue sisters, behind those walls, were celebrating their vesper service.

Does prayer drive away anguish and heartrending memories?

Marsa was a Catholic, her mother having belonged to the minority of Tzigani professing the faith of Rome; and Tisza's daughter could, therefore, bury her youth and beauty in the convent of the blue sisters.

The hollow murmur of the verses and prayers, which paused, began again, and then died away in the night like sighs, attracted her, and, like the trees of the forest, gave her an impression of that peace, that deep repose, which was the longed-for dream of her soul.

But, suddenly, the Tzigana started, removed her gaze from the light streaming through the blue and crimson glass, and hurried away, crying aloud in the darkness:

"No! repose is not there. And, after all, where is repose? Only in ourselves! It can be found nowhere, if it is not in the heart!"

Then, after these hours of solitude, this longing for the cloister, this thirsting for annihilation and oblivion, Marsa would experience a desire for the dashing, false, and frivolous life of Paris. She would quit Maisons, taking with her a maid, or sometimes old Vogotzine, go to some immense hotel, like the Continental or the Grand, dine at the table d'hôte, or in the restaurant, seeking everywhere bustle and noise, the antithesis of the life of shade and silence which she led amid the leafy trees of her park. She would show herself everywhere, at races, theatres, parties—as when she accepted the Baroness Dinati's invitation; and, when she became nauseated with all the artificiality of

worldly life, she would return eagerly to her woods, her dogs and her solitude, and, if it were winter, would shut herself up for long months in her lonely, snow-girt house.

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And was not this existence sweet and pleasant, compared with the life led by Tisza in the castle of the suburbs of Moscow?

In this solitude, in the villa of Maisons-Lafitte, Andras Zilah was again to see Marsa Laszlo. He came not once, but again and again. He was, perhaps, since the death of Prince Tcheretteff, the only man General Vogotzine had seen in his niece's house, and Marsa was always strangely happy when Andras came to see her.

"Mademoiselle is very particular when Prince Zilah is coming to Maisons," said her maid to her.

"Because Prince Zilah is not a man like other men. He is a hero. In my mother's country there is no name more popular than his."

"So I have heard Count Menko say to Mademoiselle."

If it were the maid's wish to remove all happiness from her mistress's face, she had met with complete success.

At the name of Menko, Marsa's expression became dark and threatening. Prince Andras had noticed this same change in the Tzigana's face, when he was speaking to her at Baroness Dinati's.

The Prince had forgotten no detail of that first fascinating interview, at which his love for the Tzigana was born. This man, who had hardly any other desire than to end in peace a life long saddened by defeat and exile, suddenly awoke to a happy hope of a home and family joys. He was rich, alone in the world, and independent; and he was, therefore, free to choose the woman to be made his princess. No caste prejudice prevented him from giving his title to the daughter of Tisza. The Zilahs, in trying to free their country, had freed themselves from all littleness; and proud, but not vain, they bore but slight resemblance to those Magyars of whom Szechenyi, the great count, who died of despair in 1849, said: "The overweening haughtiness of my people will be their ruin."

The last of the Zilahs did not consider his pride humiliated by loving and wedding a Tzigana. Frankly, in accents of the deepest love and the most sincere devotion, Andras asked Marsa Laszlo if she would consent to become his wife. But he was terrified at the expression of anguish which passed over the pale face of the young girl.

Marsa, Princess Zilah! Like her mother, she would have refused from a Tcheretteff this title of princess which Andras offered her, nay, laid at her feet with passionate tenderness. But—Princess Zilah!

She regarded with wild eyes the Prince, who stood before her, timid and with trembling lips, awaiting her reply. But, as she did not answer, he stooped over and took her hands in his.

“What is it?” he cried; for Marsa’s fingers were icy.

It cost the young girl a terrible effort to prevent herself from losing consciousness.

“But speak to me, Marsa,” exclaimed Andras, “do not keep me in suspense.”

He had loved her now for six months, and an iron hand seemed to clutch the heart of this man, who had never known what it was to fear, at the thought that perhaps Marsa did not return his love.

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He had, doubtless, believed that he had perceived in her a tender feeling toward himself which had emboldened him to ask her to be his wife. But had he been deceived? Was it only the soldier in him that had pleased Marsa? Was he about to suffer a terrible disappointment? Ah, what folly to love, and to love at forty years, a young and beautiful girl like Marsa!

Still, she made him no answer, but sat there before him like a statue, pale to the lips, her dark eyes fixed on him in a wild, horrified stare.

Then, as he pressed her, with tears in his voice, to speak, she forced her almost paralyzed tongue to utter a response which fell, cruel as a death-sentence, upon the heart of the hero:

“Never!”

Andras stood motionless before her in such terrible stillness that she longed to throw herself at his feet and cry out: “I love you! I love you! But your wife—no, never!”

She loved him? Yes, madly-better than that, with a deep, eternal passion, a passion solidly anchored in admiration, respect and esteem; with an unconquerable attraction toward what represented, to her harassed soul, honor without a blemish, perfect goodness in perfect courage, the immolation of a life to duty, all incarnate in one man, radiant in one illustrious name—Zilah.

And Andras himself divined something of this feeling; he felt that Marsa, despite her enigmatical refusal, cared for him in a way that was something more than friendship; he was certain of it. Then, why did she command him thus with a single word to despair? “Never!” She was not free, then? And a question, for which he immediately asked her pardon by a gesture, escaped, like the appeal of a drowning man, from his lips:

“Do you love some one else, Marsa?”

She uttered a cry.

“No! I swear to you—no!”

He urged her, then, to explain what was the meaning of her refusal, of the fright she had just shown; and, in a sort of nervous hysteria which she forced herself to control, in the midst of stifled sobs, she told him that if she could ever consent to unite herself to anyone, it would be to him, to him alone, to the hero of her country, to him whose chivalrous devotion she had admired long before she knew him, and that now—And here she stopped short, just on the brink of an avowal.

“Well, now? Now?” demanded Andras, awaiting the word which, in her overstrung condition, Marsa had almost spoken. “Now?”

But she did not speak these words which Zilah begged for with newly awakened hope. She longed to end this interview which was killing her, and in broken accents asked him to excuse her, to forgive her—but she was really ill.

“But if you are suffering, I can not, I will not leave you.”

“I implore you. I need to be alone.”

“At least you will permit me to come to-morrow, Marsa, and ask for your answer?”

“My answer? I have given it to you.”



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"No! No! I do not accept that refusal. No! you did not know what you were saying. I swear to you, Marsa, that without you life is impossible to me; all my existence is bound up in yours. You will reflect there was an accent in your voice which bade me hope. I will come again to-morrow. Tomorrow, Marsa. What you have said to-day does not count. Tomorrow, to-morrow; and remember that I adore you."

And she, shuddering at the tones of his voice, not daring to say no, and to bid him an eternal farewell, let him depart, confident, hopeful, despite the silence to which she obstinately, desperately clung. Then, when Andras was gone, at the end of her strength, she threw herself, like a mad woman, down upon the divan. Once alone, she gave way utterly, sobbing passionately, and then, suddenly ceasing, with wild eyes fixed upon vacancy, to mutter with dry, feverish lips:

"Yet—it is life he brings to me—happiness he offers me. Have I no right to be happy—I? My God! To be the wife of such a man! To love him—to devote myself to him—to make his existence one succession of happy days! To be his slave, his thing! Shall I marry him? Or—shall I kill myself? Kill myself!" with a horrible, agonizing laugh. "Yes, that is the only thing for me to do. But—but—I am a coward, now that I love him—a coward! a coward! a miserable wretch!" And she fell headlong forward, crouching upon the floor in a fierce despair, as if either life or reason was about to escape from her forever.

CHAPTER IX

"O liberty! O love! These two I need!"

When Zilah came the next day he found Marsa perfectly calm. At first he only questioned her anxiously as to her health.

"Oh! I am well," she replied, smiling a little sadly; and, turning to the piano at which she was seated, she began to play the exquisitely sad romance which was her favorite air.

"That is by Janos Nemeth, is it not?" asked the Prince.

"Yes, by Janos Nemeth. I am very fond of his music; it is so truly Hungarian in its spirit."

The music fell upon the air like sighs—like the distant tones of a bell tolling a requiem—a lament, poetic, mournful, despairing, yet ineffably sweet and tender, ending in one deep, sustained note like the last clod of earth falling upon a new-made grave.

"What is that called, Marsa?" said Andras.

She made no reply.

Rising, he looked at the title, printed in Hungarian; then, leaning over the Tzigana till his breath fanned her cheek, he murmured:

“Janos Nemeth was right. The world holds but one fair maiden.”

She turned very pale, rose from the piano, and giving him her hand, said:

“It is almost a madrigal, my dear Prince, is it not? I am going to be frank with you. You love me, I know; and I also love you. Will you give me a month to reflect? A whole month?”

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"My entire life belongs to you now," said the Prince. "Do with it what you will."

"Well! Then in a month I will give you your answer," she said firmly.

"But," said Andras, smiling beneath his blond moustache, "remember that I once, took for my motto the verses of Petoefi. You know well those beautiful verses of our country:

O Liberty! O Love!
These two I need.
My chosen meed,
To give my love for Liberty,
My life for Love.

"Well," he added, "do you know, at this moment the Andras Zilah of 'forty-eight would almost give liberty, that passion of his whole life, for your love, Marsa, my own Marsa, who are to me the living incarnation of my country."

Marsa was moved to the depths of her heart at hearing this man speak such words to her. The ideal of the Tzigana, as it is of most women, was loyalty united with strength. Had she ever, in her wildest flights of fancy, dreamed that she should hear one of the heroes of the war of independence, a Zilah Andras, supplicate her to bear his name?

Marsa knew Yanski Varhely. The Prince had brought him to see her at Maisons-Lafitte. She was aware that Count Varhely knew the Prince's most secret thoughts, and she was certain that Andras had confided all his hopes and his fears to his old friend.

"What do you think would become of the Prince if I should not marry him?" she asked him one day without warning.

"That is a point-blank question which I hardly expected," said Yanski, gazing at her in astonishment. "Don't you wish to become a Zilah?"

Any hesitation even seemed to him insulting, almost sacrilegious.

"I don't say that," replied the Tzigana, "but I ask you what would become of the Prince if, for one reason or another—"

"I can very easily inform you," interrupted Varhely. "The Prince, as you must be aware, is one of those men who love but once during their lives. Upon my word of honor, I believe that, if you should refuse him, he would commit some folly, some madness, something—fatal. Do you understand?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Marsa, with an icy chill in her veins.

“That is my opinion,” continued Yanski, harshly. “He is wounded. It remains with you to decide whether the bullet be mortal or not.”

Varhely’s response must have had great weight in Marsa Laszlo’s reflections, full of anguish, fever, revolt and despair as they were, during the few weeks preceding the day upon which she had promised to tell Prince Andras if she would consent to become his wife or not. It was a yes, almost as curt as another refusal, which fell at last from the lips of the Tzigana. But the Prince was not cool enough to analyze an intonation.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “I have suffered so much during these weeks of doubt; but this happiness makes amends for all.”

“Do you know what Varhely said to me?” asked Marsa.

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"Yes, I know."

"Well, since the Zilahs treat their love-affairs as they do their duels, and risk their whole existence, so be it! I accept. Your existence for mine! Gift for gift! I do not wish you to die!"

He did not try to understand her; but he took her burning hands between his own, and covered them with kisses. And she, with trembling lip, regarded, through her long eyelashes, the brave man who now bent before her, saying: "I love you."

Then, in that moment of infinite happiness, on the threshold of the new life which opened before her, she forgot all to think only of the reality, of the hero whose wife she was to be. His wife! So, as in a dream, without thinking, without resisting, abandoning herself to the current which bore her along, not trying to take account of time or of the future, loving, and beloved, living in a sort of charmed somnambulism, the Tzigana watched the preparations for her marriage.

The Prince, with the impatience of a youth of twenty, had urged an early day for their union. He announced his engagement to the society, at once Parisian and foreign, of which he formed a part; and this marriage of the Magyar with the Tzigana was an event in aristocratic circles. There was an aroma of chivalrous romance about this action of Prince Andras, who was rich enough and independent enough to have married, if he had wished, a shepherdess, like the kings of fairy tales.

"Isn't it perfectly charming?" exclaimed the little Baroness Dinati, enthusiastically. "Jacquemin, my dear friend, I will give you all the details of their first meeting. You can make a delicious article out of it, delicious!"

The little Baroness was almost as delighted as the Prince. Ah! what a man that Zilah was! He would give, as a wedding-gift to the Tzigana, the most beautiful diamonds in the world, those famous Zilah diamonds, which Prince Joseph had once placed disdainfully upon his hussar's uniform when he charged the Prussian cuirassiers of Ziethen, sure of escaping the sabre cuts, and not losing a single one of the stones during the combat. It was said that Marsa, until she was his wife, would not accept any jewels from the Prince. The opals in the silver agraffe were all she wanted.

"You know them, don't you, Jacquemin? The famous opals of the Tzigana? Put that all in, every word of it."

"Yes, it is chic enough," answered the reporter. "It is very romantic, a little too much so; my readers will never believe it. Never mind, though, I will write it all up in my best manner."

The fete on board the steamer, given by the Prince in honor of his betrothal, had been as much talked of as a sensational first night at the Francais, and it added decidedly to the romantic prestige of Andras Zilah. There was not a marriageable young girl who was not a little in love with him, and their mothers envied the luck of the Tzigana.

"It is astonishing how jealous the mammas are," said the Baroness, gayly. "They will make me pay dearly for having been the matchmaker; but I am proud of it, very proud. Zilah has good taste, that is all. And, as for him, I should have been in love with him myself, if I had not had my guests to attend to. Ah, society is as absorbing as a husband!"

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Upon the boat, Paul Jacquemin did not leave the side of the matchmaker. He followed her everywhere. He had still to obtain a description of the bride's toilettes, the genealogy of General Vogotzine, a sketch of the bridegroom's best friend, Varhely, and a thousand other details.

"Where will the wedding take place?" he asked the Baroness.

"At Maisons-Lafitte. Oh! everything is perfect, my dear Jacquemin, perfect! An idyl! All the arrangements are exquisite, exquisite! I only wish that you had charge of the supper."

Jacquemin, general overseer of the Baroness's parties in the Rue Murillo, did not confess himself inferior to any one as an epicure. He would taste the wines, with the air of a connoisseur, holding his glass up to the light, while the liquor caressed his palate, and shutting his eyes as if more thoroughly to decide upon its merits.

"Pomard!" would slowly fall from his lips, or "Acceptable Musigny!" "This Chambertin is really very fair!" "The Chateau Yquem is not half bad!" *etc., etc.* And the next morning would appear in the reports, which he wrote himself under various pseudonyms: "Our compliments to our friend Jacquemin, if he had anything to do with the selection of the wines, in addition to directing the rehearsals of the Baroness's operetta, which latter work he most skilfully accomplished. Jacquemin possesses talents of all kinds; he knows how to make the best of all materials. As the proverb says, 'A good mill makes everything flour.'"

Jacquemin had already cast an eye over the menu of the Prince's fete, and declared it excellent, very correct, very pure.

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The steamer was at last ready to depart, and Prince Zilah had done the honors to all his guests. It started slowly off, the flags waving coquettishly in the breeze, while the Tzigani musicians played with spirit the vibrating notes of the March of Rakoczy, that triumphant air celebrating the betrothal of Zilah, as it had long ago saluted the burial of his father.

CHAPTER X

"Is fate so just?"

"We are moving! We are off!" cried the lively little Baroness. "I hope we shan't be shipwrecked," retorted Jacquemin; and he then proceeded to draw a comical picture of

possible adventures wherein figured white bears, icebergs, and death by starvation. “A subject for a novel,—’The Shipwreck of the Betrothed.’”

As they drew away from Paris, passing the quays of Passy and the taverns of Point-du-jour, tables on wooden horses were rapidly erected, and covered with snowy cloths; and soon the guests of the Prince were seated about the board, Andras between Marsa and the Baroness, and Michel Menko some distance down on the other side of the table. The pretty women and fashionably dressed men made the air resound with gayety and laughter, while the awnings flapped joyously in

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the wind, and the boat glided on, cutting the smooth water, in which were reflected the long shadows of the aspens and willows on the banks, and the white clouds floating in the clear sky. Every now and then a cry of admiration would be uttered at some object in the panorama moving before them, the slopes of Suresnes, the black factories of Saint-Denis with their lofty chimneys, the red-roofed villas of Asnieres, or the heights of Marly dotted with little white houses.

"Ah! how pretty it is! How charming!"

"Isn't it queer that we have never known anything about all this? It is a veritable voyage of discovery."

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried, above the other voices, Jacquemin, whom Zilah did not know, and to whom the Baroness had made him give a card of invitation, "we are now entering savage countries. It is Kamtschatka, or some such place, and there must be cannibals here."

The borders of the Seine, which were entirely fresh to them, and which recalled the pictures of the salon, were a delightful novelty to these people, accustomed to the dusty streets of the city.

Seated between the Prince and the Japanese, and opposite Varhely and General Vogotzine, the Baroness thoroughly enjoyed her breakfast. Prince Andras had not spared the Tokay—that sweet, fiery wine, of which the Hungarians say proudly: "It has the color and the price of gold;" and the liquor disappeared beneath the moustache of the Russian General as in a funnel. The little Baroness, as she sipped it with pretty little airs of an epicure, chatted with the Japanese, and, eager to increase her culinary knowledge, asked him for the receipt for a certain dish which the little yellow fellow had made her taste at a dinner given at his embassy.

"Send it to me, will you, Yamada? I will have my cook make it; nothing gives me so much pleasure as to be able to offer to my guests a new and strange dish. I will give you the receipt also, Jacquemin. Oh! it is such an odd-tasting dish! It gives you a sensation of having been poisoned."

"Like the guests in Lucrezia Borgia," laughed the Parisian Japanese.

"Do you know Lucrezia Borgia?"

"Oh, yes; they have sung it at Yokohama. Oh! we are no longer savages, Baroness, believe me. If you want ignorant barbarians, you must seek the Chinese."



The little Japanese was proud of appearing so profoundly learned in European affairs, and his gimlet eyes sought an approving glance from Paul Jacquemin or Michel Menko; but the Hungarian was neither listening to nor thinking of Yamada. He was entirely absorbed in the contemplation of Marsa; and, with lips a little compressed, he fixed a strange look upon the beautiful young girl to whom Andras was speaking, and who, very calm, almost grave, but evidently happy, answered the Prince with a sweet smile.

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There was a sort of Oriental grace about Marsa, with her willowy figure, flexible as a Hindoo convolvulus, and her dark Arabian eyes fringed with their heavy lashes. Michel Menko took in all the details of her beauty, and evidently suffered, suffered cruelly, his eyes invincibly attracted toward her. In the midst of these other women, attired in robes of the last or the next fashion, of all the colors of the rainbow, Marsa, in her gown of black lace, was by far the loveliest of them all. Michel watched her every movement; but she, quiet, as if a trifle weary, spoke but little, and only in answer to the Prince and Varhely, and, when her beautiful eyes met those of Menko, she turned them away, evidently avoiding his look with as much care as he sought hers.

The breakfast over, they rose from the table, the men lighting cigars, and the ladies seeking the mirrors in the cabin to rearrange their tresses disheveled by the wind.

The boat stopped at Marly until it was time for the lock to be opened, before proceeding to Maisons-Lafitte, where Marsa was to land. Many of the passengers, with almost childish gayety, landed, and strolled about on the green bank.

Marsa was left alone, glad of the silence which reigned on the steamer after the noisy chatter of a moment ago. She leaned over the side of the boat, listening idly to the swish of the water along its sides.

Michel Menko was evidently intending to approach her, and he had made a few steps toward her, when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. He turned, thinking it was the Prince; but it was Yanski Varhely, who said to the young man:

"Well, my dear Count, you did right to come from London to this fete. Not only is Zilah delighted to see you, but the fantastic composition of the guests is very curious. Baroness Dinati has furnished us with an 'ollapodrida' which would have pleased her husband. There is a little of everything. Doesn't it astonish you?"

"No," said Michel. "This hybrid collection is representative of modern society. I have met almost all these faces at Nice; they are to be seen everywhere."

"To me," retorted Yanski, in his guttural voice, "these people are phenomena."

"Phenomena? Not at all. Life of to-day is so complicated that the most unexpected people and events find their place in it. You have not lived, Varhely, or you have lived only for your idol, your country, and everything amazes you. If you had, like me, wandered all over the world, you would not be astonished at anything; although, to tell the truth"—and the young man's voice became bitter, trenchant, and almost threatening—"we have only to grow old to meet with terrible surprises, very hard to bear."

As he spoke, he glanced, involuntarily perhaps, at Marsa Laszlo, leaning on the railing just below him.



“Oh! don’t speak of old age before you have passed through the trials that Zilah and I have,” responded Varhely. “At eighteen, Andras Zilah could have said: ‘I am old.’ He was in mourning at one and the same time for all his people and for our country. But you! You have grown up, my dear fellow, in happy times. Austria, loosening her clutch, has permitted you to love and serve our cause at your ease. You were born rich, you married the most charming of women”—

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Michel frowned.

"That is, it is true, the sorrow of your life," continued Varhely. "It seems to me only yesterday that you lost the poor child."

"It is over two years, however," said Michel, gravely. "Two years! How time flies!"

"She was so charming," said old Yanski, not perceiving the expression of annoyance mingled with sadness which passed over the young man's face. "I knew your dear wife when she was quite small, in her father's house. He gave me an asylum at Prague, after the capitulation signed by Georgei. Although I was an Hungarian, and he a Bohemian, her father and I were great friends."

"Yes," said Menko, rapidly, "she often spoke of you, my dear Varhely. They taught her to love you, too. But," evidently seeking to turn the conversation to avoid a subject which was painful to him, "you spoke of Georgei. Ah! our generation has never known your brave hopes; and your grief, believe me, was better than our boredom. We are useless encumberers of the earth. Upon my word, it seems to me that we are unsettled, enfeebled, loving nothing and loving everything, ready to commit all sorts of follies. I envy you those days of battle, those magnificent deeds of 'forty-eight and 'forty-nine. To fight thus was to live!"

But even while he spoke, his thin face became more melancholy, and his eyes again sought the direction of Prince Andras's fiancée.

After a little more desultory conversation, he strolled away from Varhely, and gradually approached Marsa, who, her chin resting on her hand, and her eyes lowered, seemed absorbed in contemplation of the ceaseless flow of the water.

Greatly moved, pulling his moustache, and glancing with a sort of uneasiness at Prince Andras, who was promenading on the bank with the Baroness, Michel Menko paused before addressing Marsa, who had not perceived his approach, and who was evidently far away in some day-dream.

Gently, hesitatingly, and in a low voice, he at last spoke her name:

"Marsa!"

The Tzigana started as if moved by an electric shock, and, turning quickly, met the supplicating eyes of the young man.

"Marsa!" repeated Michel, in a humble tone of entreaty.

"What do you wish of me?" she said. "Why do you speak to me? You must have seen what care I have taken to avoid you."

"It is that which has wounded me to the quick. You are driving me mad. If you only knew what I am suffering!"

He spoke almost in a whisper, and very rapidly, as if he felt that seconds were worth centuries.

She answered him in a cutting, pitiless tone, harsher even than the implacable look in her dark eyes. "You suffer? Is fate so just as that? You suffer?"

Her tone and expression made Michel Menko tremble as if each syllable of these few words was a blow in the face.

"Marsa!" he exclaimed, imploringly. "Marsa!"



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"My name is Marsa Laszlo; and, in a few days, I shall be Princess Zilah," responded the young girl, passing haughtily by him, "and I think you will hardly force me to make you remember it."

She uttered these words so resolutely, haughtily, almost disdainfully, and accompanied them with such a flash from her beautiful eyes that Menko instinctively bowed his head, murmuring:

"Forgive me!"

But he drove his nails into the palm of his clenched hand as he saw her leave that part of the boat, and retire as far from him as she could, as if his presence were an insult to her. Tears of rage started into the young man's eyes as he watched her graceful figure resume its former posture of dreamy absorption.

CHAPTER XI

A RIVER FETE

Close alongside of the Prince's boat, waiting also for the opening of the lock, was one of those great barges which carry wood or charcoal up and down the Seine.

A whole family often lives on board these big, heavy boats. The smoke of the kitchen fire issues from a sort of wooden cabin where several human beings breathe, eat, sleep, are born and die, sometimes without hardly ever having set foot upon the land. Pots of geranium or begonia give a bit of bright color to the dingy surroundings; and the boats travel slowly along the river, impelled by enormous oars, which throw long shadows upon the water.

It was this motionless barge that Marsa was now regarding.

The hot sun, falling upon the boat, made its brown, wet sides sparkle like the brilliant wings of some gigantic scarabee; and, upon the patched, scorched deck, six or seven half-naked, sunburned children, boys and girls, played at the feet of a bundle of rags and brown flesh, which was a woman, a young woman, but prematurely old and wasted, who was nursing a little baby.

A little farther off, two men—one tough and strong, a man of thirty, whom toil had made forty, the other old, wrinkled, white-haired and with skin like leather, father and grandfather, doubtless, of the little brats beyond—were eating bread and cheese, and drinking, turn by turn, out of a bottle of wine, which they swallowed in gulps. The halt was a rest to these poor people.

As Marsa watched them, she seemed to perceive in these wanderers of the river, as in a vision, those other wanderers of the Hungarian desert, her ancestors, the Tzigani, camped in the puszta, the boundless plain, crouched down in the long grass beneath the shade of the bushes, and playing their beautiful national airs. She saw the distant fires of the bivouac of those unknown Tzigani whose daughter she was; she seemed to breathe again the air of that country she had seen but once, when upon a mournful pilgrimage; and, in the presence of that poor bargeman's wife, with her skin tanned by the sun, she thought of her dead, her cherished dead, Tisza.

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Tisza! To the gipsy had doubtless been given the name of the river on the banks of which she had been born. They called the mother Tisza, in Hungary, as in Paris they called the daughter the Tzigana. And Marsa was proud of her nickname; she loved these Tzigani, whose blood flowed in her veins; sons of India, perhaps, who had descended to the valley of the Danube, and who for centuries had lived free in the open air, electing their chiefs, and having a king appointed by the Palatine—a king, who commanding beggars, bore, nevertheless, the name of Magnificent; indestructible tribes, itinerant republics, musicians playing the old airs of their nation, despite the Turkish sabre and the Austrian police; agents of patriotism and liberty, guardians of the old Hungarian honor.

These poor people, passing their lives upon the river as the Tzigani lived in the fields and hedges, seemed to Marsa like the very spectres of her race. More than the musicians with embroidered vests did the poor prisoners of the solitary barge recall to her the great proscribed family of her ancestors.

She called to the children playing upon the sunbeaten deck: “Come here, and hold up your aprons!”

They obeyed, spreading out their little tattered garments. “Catch these!” she cried.

They could not believe their eyes. From the steamer she threw down to them mandarins, grapes, ripe figs, yellow apricots, and great velvety peaches; a rain of dainties which would have surprised a gourmand: the poor little things, delighted and afraid at the same time, wondered if the lady, who gave them such beautiful fruit, was a fairy.

The mother then rose; and, coming toward Marsa to thank her, her sunburnt skin glowing a deeper red, the poor woman, with tears in her tired eyes, and a wan smile upon her pale lips, touched, surprised, happy in the pleasure of her children, murmured, faltering and confused:

“Ah! Madame! Madame! how good you are! You are too good, Madame!”

“We must share what we have!” said Marsa, with a smile. “See how happy the children are!”

“Very happy, Madame. They are not accustomed to such things. Say ‘Thank you,’ to the beautiful lady. Say ‘Thank you,’ Jean; you are the oldest. Say like this: ‘Thank-you-Ma-dame.’”

“Thank-you-Ma-dame” faltered the boy, raising to Marsa big, timid eyes, which did not understand why anybody should either wish him ill or do him a kindness. And other low, sweet little voices repeated, like a refrain: “Thank-you-Ma-dame.”

The two men, in astonishment, came and stood behind the children, and gazed silently at Marsa.

“And your baby, Madame?” said the Tzigana, looking at the sleeping infant, that still pressed its rosy lips to the mother’s breast. “How pretty it is! Will you permit me to offer it its baptismal dress?”

“Its baptismal dress?” repeated the mother.

“Oh, Madame!” ejaculated the father, twisting his cap between his fingers.

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"Or a cloak, just as you please," added Marsa.

The poor people on the barge made no reply, but looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Is it a little girl?" asked the Tzigana.

"No, Madame, no," responded the mother. "A boy."

"Come here, jean," said Marsa to the oldest child. "Yes, come here, my little man."

Jean came forward, glancing askance at his mother, as if to know whether he should obey.

"Here, jean," said the young girl, "this is for your baby brother."

And into the little joined hands of the boy, Marsa let fall a purse, through whose meshes shone yellow pieces of gold.

The people of the barge thought they were dreaming, and stood open-mouthed in amazement, while Jean cried out:

"Mamma, see, mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

Then the younger bargeman said to Marsa:

"Madame, no, no! we can not accept. It is too much. You are too good. Give it back, Jean."

"It is true, Madame," faltered his wife. "It is impossible. It is too much."

"You will cause me great pain if you refuse to accept it," said Marsa. "Chance has brought us together for a moment, and I am superstitious. I would like to have the little children pray that those I love—that the one I love may be happy." And she turned her eyes upon Prince Andras, who had returned to the deck, and was coming toward her.

The lock was now opened.

"All aboard!" shouted the captain of the steamer.

The poor woman upon the barge tried to reach the hand of Marsa to kiss it.

"May you be happy, Madame, and thank you with all our hearts for your goodness to both big and little."

The two bargemen bowed low in great emotion, and the whole bevy of little ones blew kisses to the beautiful lady in the black dress, whom the steamer was already bearing away.

“At least tell us your name, Madame,” cried the father. “Your name, that we may never forget you.”

A lovely smile appeared on Marsa’s lips, and, in almost melancholy accents, she said:

“My name!” Then, after a pause, proudly: “The Tzigana!”

The musicians, as she spoke, suddenly struck up one of the Hungarian airs. Then, as in a flying vision, the poor bargemen saw the steamer move farther and farther away, a long plume of smoke waving behind it.

Jacquemin, hearing one of those odd airs, which in Hungary start all feet moving and keeping time to the music, exclaimed:

“A quadrille! Let us dance a quadrille! An Hungarian quadrille!”

The poor people on the barge listened to the music, gradually growing fainter and fainter; and they would have believed that they had been dreaming, if the purse had not been there, a fortune for them, and the fruit which the children were eating. The mother, without understanding, repeated that mysterious name: “The Tzigana.”

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And Marsa also gazed after them, her ears caressed by the czardas of the musicians. The big barge disappeared in the distance in a luminous haze; but the Tzigana could still vaguely perceive the little beings perched upon the shoulders of the men, and waving, in sign of farewell, pieces of white cloth which their mother had given them.

A happy torpor stole over Marsa; and, while the guests of the Baroness Dinati, the Japanese Yamada, the English heiresses, the embassy attaches, all these Parisian foreigners, led by Jacquemin, the director of the gayety, were organizing a ballroom on the deck, and asking the Tzigani for polkas of Fahrbach and waltzes of Strauss, the young girl heard the voice of Andras murmur low in her ear:

“Ah! how I love you! And do you love me, Marsa?”

“I am happy,” she answered, without moving, and half closing her eyes, “and, if it were necessary for me to give my life for you, I would give it gladly.”

In the stern of the boat, Michel Menko watched, without seeing them, perhaps, the fields, the houses of Pecq, the villas of Saint-Germain, the long terrace below heavy masses of trees, the great plain beside Paris with Mont Valerien rising in its midst, the two towers of the Trocadero, whose gilded dome sparkled in the sun, and the bluish-black cloud which hung over the city like a thick fog.

The boat advanced very slowly, as if Prince Andras had given the order to delay as much as possible the arrival at Maisons-Lafitte, where the whole fete would end for him, as Marsa was to land there. Already, upon the horizon could be perceived the old mill, with its broad, slated roof. The steeple of Sartrouville loomed up above the red roofs of the houses and the poplars which fringe the bank of the river. A pale blue light, like a thin mist, enveloped the distant landscape.

“The dream is over,” murmured Marsa.

“A far more beautiful one will soon begin,” said Andras, “and that one will be the realization of what I have waited for all my life and never found—love.”

Marsa turned to the Prince with a look full of passionate admiration and devotion, which told him how thoroughly his love was returned.

The quadrille had ended, and a waltz was beginning. The little Japanese, with his eternal smile, like the bronze figures of his country, was dancing with a pre-raphaelite English girl.

“How well you dance,” she said.

“If we only had some favors,” replied the Japanese, showing his teeth in a grin, “I would lead the cotillon.”

The boat stopped at last at Maisons-Lafitte. The great trees of the park formed a heavy mass, amid which the roof of the villa was just discernible.

“What a pity it is all over,” cried the Baroness, who was ruddy as a cherry with the exercise of dancing. “Let us have another; but Maisons-Lafitte is too near. We will go to Rouen the next time; or rather, I invite you all to a day fete in Paris, a game of polo, a lunch, a garden party, whatever you like. I will arrange the programme with Yamada and Jacquemin.”

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"Willingly," responded the Japanese, with a low bow. "To collaborate with Monsieur Jacquemin will be very amusing."

As Marsa Laszlo was leaving the boat, Michel Menko stood close to the gangway, doubtless on purpose to speak to her; and, in the confusion of landing, without any one hearing him, he breathed in her ear these brief words:

"At your house this evening. I must see you."

She gave him an icy glance. Michel Menko's eyes were at once full of tears and flames.

"I demand it!" he said, firmly.

The Tzigana made no reply; but, going to Andras Zilah, she took his arm; while Michel, as if nothing had happened, raised his hat.

General Vogotzine, with flaming face, followed his niece, muttering, as he wiped the perspiration unsteadily from his face:

"Fine day! Fine day! By Jove! But the sun was hot, though! Ah, and the wines were good!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness
All defeats have their geneses
Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves
One of those beings who die, as they have lived, children
Playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men
Superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness
The Hungarian was created on horseback
There were too many discussions, and not enough action
Would not be astonished at anything
You suffer? Is fate so just as that

PRINCE ZILAH

By Jules Claretie

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XII

A DARK PAGE

As Marsa departed with Vogotzine in the carriage which had been waiting for them on the bank, she waved her hand to Zilah with a passionate gesture, implying an infinity of trouble, sadness, and love. The Prince then returned to his guests, and the boat, which Marsa watched through the window of the carriage, departed, bearing away the dream, as she had said to Andras. During the drive home she did not say a word. By her side the General grumbled sleepily of the sun, which, the Tokay aiding, had affected his head. But, when Marsa was alone in her chamber, the cry which was wrung from her breast was a cry of sorrow, of despairing anger:

“Ah, when I think—when I think that I am envied!”

She regretted having allowed Andras to depart without having told him on the spot, the secret of her life. She would not see him again until the next day, and she felt as if she could never live through the long, dull hours. She stood at the window, wrapped in thought, gazing mechanically before her, and still hearing the voice of Michel Menko hissing like a snake in her ear. What was it this man had said? She did not dare to believe it. “I demand it!” He had said: “I demand it!” Perhaps some one standing near had heard it. “I demand it!”

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Evening came. Below the window the great masses of the chestnut-trees and the lofty crests of the poplars waved in the breeze like forest plumes, their peaks touched by the sun setting in a sky of tender blue, while the shadowy twilight crept over the park where, through the branches, patches of yellow light, like golden and copper vapors, still gave evidence of the god of day.

Marsa, her heart full of a melancholy which the twilight increased, repeated over and over again, with shudders of rage and disgust, those three words which Michel Menko had hurled at her like a threat: "I demand it!" Suddenly she heard in the garden the baying of dogs, and she saw, held in check by a domestic, Duna and Bundas, bounding through the masses of flowers toward the gate, where a man appeared, whom Marsa, leaning over the balcony, recognized at once.

"The wretch!" she exclaimed between her clenched teeth. It was Menko.

He must have debarked before reaching Paris, and have come to Maisons-Lafitte in haste.

Marsa's only thought, in the first moment of anger, was to refuse to see him. "I can not," she thought, "I will not!" Then suddenly her mind changed. It was braver and more worthy of her to meet the danger face to face. She rang, and said to the domestic who answered the bell: "Show Count Menko into the little salon."

"We shall see what he will dare," muttered the Tzigana, glancing at the mirror as if to see whether she appeared to tremble before danger and an enemy.

The little salon into which the young Count was introduced was in the left wing of the villa; and it was Marsa's favorite room, because it was so quiet there. She had furnished it with rare taste, in half Byzantine and half Hindoo fashion—a long divan running along the wall, covered with gray silk striped with garnet; Persian rugs cast here and there at random; paintings by Petenkofen—Hungarian farms and battle-scenes, sentinels lost in the snow; two consoles loaded with books, reviews, and bric-a-brac; and a round table with Egyptian incrustations, covered with an India shawl, upon which were fine bronzes of Lanceray, and little jewelled daggers.

This salon communicated with a much larger one, where General Vogotzine usually took his siesta, and which Marsa abandoned to him, preferring the little room, the windows of which, framed in ivy, looked out upon the garden, with the forest in the distance.

Michel Menko was well acquainted with this little salon, where he had more than once seen Marsa seated at the piano playing her favorite airs. He remembered it all so well, and, nervously twisting his moustache, he longed for her to make her appearance. He

listened for the frou-frou of Marsa's skirts on the other side of the lowered portiere which hung between the two rooms; but he heard no sound.

The General had shaken hands with Michel, as he passed through the large salon, saying, in his thick voice:

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"Have you come to see Marsa? You have had enough of that water-party, then? It was very pretty; but the sun was devilish hot. My head is burning now; but it serves me right for not remaining quiet at home."

Then he raised his heavy person from the armchair he had been sitting in, and went out into the garden, saying: "I prefer to smoke in the open air; it is stifling in here." Marsa, who saw Vogotzine pass out, let him go, only too willing to have him at a distance during her interview with Michel Menko; and then she boldly entered the little salon, where the Count, who had heard her approach, was standing erect as if expecting some attack.

Marsa closed the door behind her; and, before speaking a word, the two faced each other, as if measuring the degree of hardihood each possessed. The Tzigana, opening fire first, said, bravely and without preamble:

"Well, you wished to see me. Here I am! What do you want of me?"

"To ask you frankly whether it is true, Marsa, that you are about to marry Prince Zilah."

She tried to laugh; but her laugh broke nervously off. She said, however, ironically:

"Oh! is it for that that you are here?"

"Yes."

"It was perfectly useless, then, for you to take the trouble: you ask me a thing which you know well, which all the world knows, which all the world must have told you, since you had the audacity to be present at that fete to-day."

"That is true," said Michel, coldly; "but I only learned it by chance. I wished to hear it from your own lips."

"Do I owe you any account of my conduct?" asked Marsa, with crushing hauteur.

He was silent a moment, strode across the room, laid his hat down upon the little table, and suddenly becoming humble, not in attitude, but in voice, said:

"Listen, Marsa: you are a hundred times right to hate me. I have deceived you, lied to you. I have conducted myself in a manner unworthy of you, unworthy of myself. But to atone for my fault—my crime, if you will—I am ready to do anything you order, to be your miserable slave, in order to obtain the pardon which I have come to ask of you, and which I will ask on my knees, if you command me to do so."

The Tzigana frowned.

"I have nothing to pardon you, nothing to command you," she said with an air more wearied than stern, humiliating, and disdainful. "I only ask you to leave me in peace, and never appear again in my life."

"So! I see that you do not understand me," said Michel, with sudden brusqueness.

"No, I acknowledge it, not in the least."

"When I asked you whether you were to marry Prince Andras, didn't you understand that I asked you also another thing: Will you marry me, me—Michel Menko?"

"You!" cried the Tzigana.

And there was in this cry, in this "You!" ejaculated with a rapid movement of recoil-amazement, fright, scorn, and anger.

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"You!" she said again. And Michel Menko felt in this word a mass of bitter rancor and stifled hatred which suddenly burst its bonds.

"Yes, me!" he said, braving the insult of Marsa's cry and look. "Me, who love you, and whom you have loved!"

"Ah, don't dare to say that!" she cried, drawing close to the little table where the daggers rested amid the objects of art. "Don't be vile enough to speak to me of a past of which nothing remains to me but disgust! Let not one word which recalls it to me mount to your lips, not one, you understand, or I will kill you like the coward you are!"

"Do so, Marsa!" he cried with wild, mad passion. "I should die by your hand, and you would not marry that man!"

Afraid of herself, wresting her eyes from the glittering daggers, she threw herself upon the divan, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, and watched, with the look of a tigress, Michel, who said to her now, in a voice which trembled with the tension of his feelings: "You must know well, Marsa, that death is not the thing that can frighten a man like me! What does frighten me is that, having lost you once, I may lose you forever; to know that another will be your husband, will love you, will receive your kisses. The very idea that that is possible drives me insane. I feel myself capable of any deed of madness to prevent it. Marsa! Marsa! You did love me once!"

"I love honor, truth, justice," said Marsa, sternly and implacably. "I thought I loved you; but I never did."

"You did not love me?" he said.

This cruel recalling of the past, which was the remorse of her life, was like touching her flesh with a red-hot iron.

"No, no, no! I did not love you! I repeat, I thought I loved you. What did I know of life when I met you? I was suffering, ill; I thought myself dying, and I never heard a word of pity fall from any other lips than yours. I thought you were a man of honor. You were only a wretch. You deceived me; you represented yourself to me as free—and you were married. Weakly—oh, I could kill myself at the very thought!—I listened to you! I took for love the trite phrases you had used to dozens of other women; half by violence, half by ruse, you became my lover. I do not know when—I do not know how. I try to forget that horrible dream; and when, deluded by you, thinking that what I felt for you was love, for I did think so, I imagined that I had given myself for life to a man worthy of the deepest devotion, ready for all sacrifices for me, as I felt myself to be for him; when you had taken me, body and soul, I learn by what? by a trifling conversation, by a chance, in a crowded ballroom—that, this Michel Menko, whose name I was to bear, who was to be my husband; this Count Menko, this man of honor, the one in whom I

believed blindly, was married! Married at Vienna, and had already given away the name on which he traded! Oh, it is hideous!" And the Tzigana, whose whole body was shuddering with horror, recoiled instinctively to the edge of the divan as at the approach of some detested contact.

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Michel, his face pale and convulsed, had listened to her with bowed head.

"All that you say is the truth, Marsa; but I will give my life, my whole life, to expiate that lie!"

"There are infamies which are never effaced. There is no pardon for him who has no excuse."

"No excuse? Yes, Marsa; I have one! I have one: I loved you!"

"And because you loved me, was it necessary for you to betray me, lie to me, ruin me?"

"What could I do? I did not love the woman I had married; you dawned on me like a beautiful vision; I wished, hoping I know not what impossible future, to be near you, to make you love me, and I did not dare to confess that I was not free. If I lied to you, it was because I trembled at not being able to surround you with my devotion; it was because I was afraid to lose your love, knowing that the adoration I had for you would never die till my heart was cold and dead! Upon all that is most sacred, I swear this to you! I swear it!"

He then recalled to her, while she sat rigid and motionless with an expression of contempt and disdain upon her beautiful, proud lips, their first meetings; that evening at Lady Brolway's, in Pau, where he had met her for the first time; their conversation; the ineffaceable impression produced upon him by her beauty; that winter season; the walks they had taken together beneath the trees, which not a breath of wind stirred; their excursions in the purple and gold valleys, with the Pyrenees in the distance crowned with eternal snow. Did she not remember their long talks upon the terrace, the evenings which felt like spring, and that day when she had been nearly killed by a runaway horse, and he had seized the animal by the bridle and saved her life? Yes, he had loved her, loved her well; and it was because, possessing her love, he feared, like a second Adam, to see himself driven out of paradise, that he had hidden from Marsa the truth. If she had questioned one of the Hungarians or Viennese, who were living at Pau, she could doubtless have known that Count Menko, the first secretary of the embassy of Austria-Hungary at Paris, had married the heiress of one of the richest families of Prague; a pretty but unintelligent girl, not understanding at all the character of her husband; detesting Vienna and Paris, and gradually exacting from Menko that he should live at Prague, near her family, whose ancient ideas and prejudices and inordinate love of money displeased the young Hungarian. He was left free to act as he pleased; his wife would willingly give up a part of her dowry to regain her independence. It was only just, she said insolently, that, having been mistaken as to the tastes of the man she had married for reasons of convenience rather than of inclination, she should pay for her stupidity. Pay! The word made the blood mount to Menko's face. If he had not been rich, as he was, he would have hewn stone to gain his daily bread rather than touch a penny of her money. He shook off the yoke the obstinate

daughter of the Bohemian gentleman would have imposed upon him, and departed, brusquely breaking a union in which both husband and wife so terribly perceived their error.

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Marsa might have known of all this if she had, for a moment, doubted Menko's word. But how was she to suspect that the young Count was capable of a lie or of concealing such a secret? Besides, she knew hardly any one at Pau, as her physicians had forbidden her any excitement; at the foot of the Pyrenees, she lived, as at Maisons-Lafitte, an almost solitary life; and Michel Menko had been during that winter, which he now recalled to Marsa, speaking of it as of a lost Eden, her sole companion, the only guest of the house she inhabited with Vogotzine in the neighborhood of the castle.

Poor Marsa, enthusiastic, inexperienced, her heart enamored with chivalrous audacity, intrepid courage, all the many virtues which were those of Hungary herself; Marsa, her mind imbued from her infancy with the almost fantastic recitals of the war of independence, and later, with her readings and reflections; Marsa, full of the stories of the heroic past-must necessarily have been the dupe of the first being who, coming into her life, was the personal representative of the bravery and charm of her race. So, when she encountered one day Michel Menko, she was invincibly attracted toward him by something proud, brave, and chivalrous, which was characteristic of the manly beauty of the young Hungarian. She was then twenty, very ignorant of life, her great Oriental eyes seeing nothing of stern reality; but, with all her gentleness, there was a species of Muscovite firmness which was betrayed in the contour of her red lips. It was in vain that sorrow had early made her a woman; Marsa remained ignorant of the world, without any other guide than Vogotzine; suffering and languid, she was fatally at the mercy of the first lie which should caress her ear and stir her heart. From the first, therefore, she had loved Michel; she had, as she herself said, believed that she loved him with a love which would never end, a very ingenuous love, having neither the silliness of a girl who has just left the convent, nor the knowledge of a Parisienne whom the theatre and the newspapers have instructed in all things. Michel, then, could give to this virgin and pliable mind whatever bent he chose; and Marsa, pure as the snow and brave as her own favorite heroes, became his without resistance, being incapable of divining a treachery or fearing a lie. Michel Menko, moreover, loved her madly; and he thought only of winning and keeping the love of this incomparable maiden, exquisite in her combined gentleness and pride. The folly of love mounted to his brain like intoxication, and communicated itself to the poor girl who believed in him as if he were the living faith; and, in the madness of his passion, Michel, without being a coward, committed a cowardly action.

No: a coward he certainly was not. He was one of those nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair, going to all extremes, at times foolishly gay, and at others as grave and melancholy as Hamlet. There were days when Menko did not value his life at a penny, and when he asked himself seriously if suicide were not the simplest means to reach the end; and again, at the least ray of sunshine, he became sanguine and hopeful to excess. Of undoubted courage, he would have faced the muzzle of a loaded cannon out of mere bravado, at the same time wondering, with a sarcastic smile upon his lips, 'Cui bono'?

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He sometimes called heroism a trick; and yet, in everyday life, he had not much regard for tricksters. Excessively fond of movement, activity, and excitement, he yet counted among his happiest days those spent in long meditations and inactive dreams. He was a strange combination of faults and good qualities, without egregious vices, but all his virtues capable of being annihilated by passion, anger, jealousy, or grief. With such a nature, everything was possible: the sublimity of devotion, or a fall into the lowest infamy. He often said, in self-analysis: "I am afraid of myself." In short, his strength was like a house built upon sand; all, in a day, might crumble.

"If I had to choose the man I should prefer to be," he said once, "I would be Prince Andras Zilah, because he knows neither my useless discouragements, apropos of everything and nothing, nor my childish delights, nor my hesitations, nor my confidence, which at times approaches folly as my misanthropy approaches injustice; and because, in my opinion, the supreme virtue in a man is firmness."

The Zilahs were connected by blood with the Menkos, and Prince Andras was very fond of this young man, who promised to Hungary one of those diplomats capable of wielding at once the pen and the sword, and who in case of war, before drawing up a protocol, would have dictated its terms, sabre in hand. Michel indeed stood high with his chief in the embassy, and he was very much sought after in society. Before the day he met Marsa, he had, to tell the truth, only experienced the most trivial love-affairs.

He did not speak of his wife at Pau any more than he did on the boulevards. She lived far away, in the old city of Prague, and troubled Michel no more than if she had never existed. Perhaps he had forgotten, really forgotten, with that faculty of forgetfulness which belongs to the imaginative, that he was married, when he encountered Marsa, the candid, pure-hearted girl, who did not reflect nor calculate, but simply believed that she had met a man of honor.

So, what sudden revolt, humiliation, and hatred did the poor child feel when she learned that the man in whom she had believed as in a god had deceived her, lied to her! He was married. He had treated her as the lowest of women; perhaps he had never even loved her! The very thought made her long to kill herself, or him, or both. She, unhappy, miserable woman, was ruined, ruined forever!

She had certainly never stopped to think where the love she had for Michel would lead her. She thought of nothing except that Michel was hers, and she was his, and she believed that their love would last forever. She did not think that she had long to live, and her existence seemed to her only a breath which any moment might cease. Why had she not died before she knew that Menko had lied?

All deception seemed hideous to Marsa Laszlo, and this hideousness she had discovered in the man to whom she had given herself, believing in the eternity as well as in the loyalty of his love.

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It was at a ball, at the English embassy, after her return from Pau, that, while smiling and happy, she overheard between two Viennese, strangers to her, this short dialogue, every word of which was like a knife in her heart: "What a charming fellow that Menko is!" "Yes; is his wife ugly or a humpback? or is he jealous as Othello? She is never seen." "His wife! Is he married?" "Yes: he married a Blavka, the daughter of Angel Blavka, of Prague. Didn't you know it?"

Married!

Marsa felt her head reel, and the sudden glance she cast at the speakers silenced, almost terrified them. Half insane, she reached home, she never knew how. The next day Michel Menko presented himself at her apartments in the hotel where she was living; she ordered him out of her presence, not allowing him to offer any excuse or explanation.

"You are married, and you are a coward!"

He threw himself at her knees, and implored her to listen to him.

"Go! Go!"

"But our love, Marsa? For I love you, and you love me."

"I hate and scorn you. My love is dead. You have killed it. All is over. Go! And let me never know that there exists a Michel Menko in the world! Never! Never! Never!"

He felt his own cowardice and shame, and he disappeared, not daring again to see the woman whose love haunted him, and who shut herself away from the world more obstinately than ever. She left Paris, and in the solitude of Maisons-Lafitte lived the life of a recluse, while Michel tried in vain to forget the bitterness of his loss. The Tzigana hoped that she was going to die, and bear away with her forever the secret of her betrayal. But no; science had been mistaken; the poor girl was destined to live. In spite of her sorrow and anguish, her beauty blossomed in the shade, and she seemed each day to grow more lovely, while her heart became more sad, and her despair more poignant.

Then death, which would not take Marsa, came to another, and gave Menko an opportunity to repair and efface all. He learned that his wife had died suddenly at Prague, of a malady of the heart. This death, which freed him, produced a strange effect upon him, not unmingled with remorse. Poor woman! She had worthily borne his name, after all. Unintelligent, cold, and wrapped up in her money, she had never understood him; but, perhaps, if he had been more patient, things might have gone better between them.



But no; Marsa was his one, his never-to-be-forgotten love. As soon as he heard of his freedom, he wrote her a letter, telling her that he was able now to dispose of his future as he would, imploring her to pardon him, offering her not his love, since she repelled it, but his name, which was her right—a debt of honor which he wished her to acquit with the devotion of his life. Marsa answered simply with these words: “I will never bear the name of a man I despise.”

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The wound made in her heart by Menko's lie was incurable; the Tzigana would never forgive. He tried to see her again, confident that, if he should be face to face with her, he could find words to awaken the past and make it live again; but she obstinately refused to see him, and, as she did not go into society, he never met her. Then he cast himself, with a sort of frenzy, into the dissipation of Paris, trying to forget, to forget at any cost: failing in this, he resigned his position at the embassy, and went away to seek adventure, going to fight in the Balkans against the Russians, only to return weary and bored as he had departed, always invincibly and eternally haunted by the image of Marsa, an image sad as a lost love, and grave as remorse.

CHAPTER XIII

"My letters or myself"

It was that past, that terrible past, which Michel Menko had dared to come and speak of to the Tzigana. At first, she had grown crimson with anger, as if at an insult; now, by a sudden opposite sentiment, as she listened to him recalling those days, she felt an impression of deadly pain as if an old wound had been reopened. Was it true that all this had ever existed? Was it possible, even?

The man who had been her lover was speaking to her; he was speaking to her of his love; and, if the terrible agony of memory had not burned in her heart, she would have wondered whether this man before her, this sort of stranger, had ever even touched her hand.

She waited, with the idle curiosity of a spectator who had no share in the drama, for the end of Menko's odious argument: "I lied because I loved you!"

He returned again and again, in the belief that women easily forgive the ill-doing of which they are the cause, to that specious plea, and Marsa asked herself, in amazement, what aberration had possession of this man that he should even pretend to excuse his infamy thus.

"And is that," she said at last, "all that you have to say to me? According to you, the thief has only to cry 'What could I do? I loved that money, and so I stole it.' Ah," rising abruptly, "this interview has lasted too long! Good-evening!"

She walked steadily toward the door; but Michel, hastening round the other side of the table, barred her exit, speaking in a suppliant tone, in which, however, there was a hidden threat:

"Marsa! Marsa, I implore you, do not marry Prince Andras! Do not marry him if you do not wish some horrible tragedy to happen to you and me!"

“Really?” she retorted. “Do I understand that it is you who now threaten to kill me?”

“I do not threaten; I entreat, Marsa. But you know all that there is in me at times of madness and folly. I am almost insane: you know it well. Have pity upon me! I love you as no woman was ever loved before; I live only in you; and, if you should give yourself to another—”

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"Ah!" she said, interrupting him with a haughty gesture, "you speak to me as if you had a right to dictate my actions. I have given you my forgetfulness after giving you my love. That is enough, I think. Leave me!"

"Marsa!"

"I have hoped for a long time that I was forever delivered from your presence. I commanded you to disappear. Why have you returned?"

"Because, after I saw you one evening at Baroness Dinati's (do you remember? you spoke to the Prince for the first time that evening), I learned, in London, of this marriage. If I have consented to live away from you previously, it was because, although you were no longer mine, you at least were no one else's; but I will not—pardon me, I can not—endure the thought that your beauty, your grace, will be another's. Think of the self-restraint I have placed upon myself! Although living in Paris, I have not tried to see you again, Marsa, since you drove me from your presence; it was by chance that I met you at the Baroness's; but now—"

"It is another woman you have before you. A woman who ignores that she has listened to your supplications, yielded to your prayers. It is a woman who has forgotten you, who does not even know that a wretch has abused her ignorance and her confidence, and who loves—who loves as one loves for the first time, with a pure and holy devotion, the man whose name she is to bear."

"That man I respect as honor itself. Had it been another, I should already have struck him in the face. But you who accuse me of having lied, are you going to lie to him, to him?"

Marsa became livid, and her eyes, hollow as those of a person sick to death, flamed in the black circles which surrounded them.

"I have no answer to make to one who has no right to question me," she said. "But, should I have to pay with my life for the moment of happiness I should feel in placing my hand in the hand of a hero, I would grasp that moment!"

"Then," cried Menko, "you wish to push me to extremities! And yet I have told you there are certain hours of feverish insanity in which I am capable of committing a crime."

"I do not doubt it," replied the young girl, coldly. "But, in fact, you have already done that. There is no crime lower than that of treachery."

"There is one more terrible," retorted Michel Menko. "I have told you that I loved you. I love you a hundred times more now than ever before. Jealousy, anger, whatever sentiment you choose to call it, makes my blood like fire in my veins! I see you again as you were. I feel your kisses on my lips. I love you madly, passionately! Do you

understand, Marsa? Do you understand?" and he approached with outstretched hands the Tzigana, whose frame was shaken with indignant anger. "Do you understand? I love you still. I was your lover, and I will, I will be so again."

"Ah, miserable coward!" cried the Tzigana, with a rapid glance toward the daggers, before which stood Menko, preventing her from advancing, and regarding her with eyes which burned with reckless passion, wounded self-love, and torturing jealousy. "Yes, coward!" she repeated, "coward, coward to dare to taunt me with an infamous past and speak of a still more infamous future!"

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"I love you!" exclaimed Menko again.

"Go!" she cried, crushing him with look and gesture. "Go! I order you out of my presence, lackey! Go!"

All the spirit of the daughters of the puszta, the violent pride of her Hungarian blood, flashed from her eyes; and Menko, fascinated, gazed at her as if turned to stone, as she stood there magnificent in her anger, superb in her contempt.

"Yes, I will go to-day," he said at last, "but tomorrow night I shall come again, Marsa. As my dearest treasure, I have preserved the key of that gate I opened once to meet you who were waiting for me in the shadow of the trees. Have you forgotten that, also? You say you have forgotten all."

And as he spoke, she saw again the long alley behind the villa, ending in a small gate which, one evening after the return from Pau, Michel opened, and came, as he said, to meet her waiting for him. It was true. Yes, it was true. Menko did not lie this time! She had waited for him there, two years before, unhappy girl that she was! All that hideous love she had believed lay buried in Pau as in a tomb.

"Listen, Marsa," continued Menko, suddenly recovering, by a strong effort of the will, his coolness, "I must see you once again, have one more opportunity to plead my cause. The letters you wrote to me, those dear letters which I have covered with my kisses and blistered with my tears, those letters which I have kept despite your prayers and your commands, those letters which have been my only consolation—I will bring them to you to-morrow night. Do you understand me?"

Her great eyes fixed, and her lips trembling horribly, Marsa made no reply.

"Do you understand me, Marsa?" he repeated, imploring and threatening at once.

"Yes," she murmured at last.

She paused a moment; then a broken, feverish laugh burst from her lips, and she continued, with stinging irony:

"Either my letters or myself! It is a bargain pure and simple! Such a proposition has been made once before—it is historical—you probably remember it. In that case, the woman killed herself. I shall act otherwise, believe me!"

There was in her icy tones a threat, which gave pleasure to Michel Menko. He vaguely divined a danger. "You mean?" he asked.

"I mean, you must never again appear before me. You must go to London, to America; I don't care where. You must be dead to the one you have cowardly betrayed. You must



burn or keep those letters, it little matters to me which; but you must still be honorable enough not to use them as a weapon against me. This interview, which wearies more than it angers me, must be the last. You must leave me to my sorrows or my joys, without imagining that you could ever have anything in common with a woman who despises you. You have crossed the threshold of this house for the last time. Or, if not—Ah! if not—I swear to you that I have energy enough and resolution enough to defend myself alone, and alone to punish you! In your turn, you understand me, I imagine?”

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"Certainly," said Michel. "But you are too imprudent, Marsa. I am not a man to make recoil by speaking of danger. Through the gate, or over the wall if the gate is barricaded, I shall come to you again, and you will have to listen to me."

The lip of the Tzigana curled disdainfully.

"I shall not even change the lock of that gate, and besides, the large gate of the garden remains open these summer nights. You see that you have only to come. But I warn you neither to unlock the one nor to pass through the other. It is not I whom you will find at the rendezvous."

"Still, I am sure that it would be you, blarsa, if I should tell you that to-morrow evening I shall be under the window of the pavilion at the end of the garden, and that you must meet me there to receive from my hand your letters, all your letters, which I shall bring you."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"Certain? Why?"

"Because you will reflect."

"I have had time to reflect. Give me another reason."

"Another reason is that you can not afford to leave such proofs in my hands. I assure you that it would be folly to make of a man like me, who would willingly die for you, an open and implacable enemy."

"I understand. A man like you would die willingly for a woman, but he insults and threatens her, like the vilest of men, with a punishment more cruel than death itself. Well! it matters little to me. I shall not be in the pavilion where you have spoken to me of your love, and I will have it torn down and the debris of it burned within three days. I shall not await you. I shall never see you again. I do not fear you. And I leave you the right of doing with those letters what you please!"

Then, surveying him from head to foot, as if to measure the degree of audacity to which he could attain, "Adieu!" she said.

"Au revoir!" he rejoined coldly, giving to the salutation an emphasis full of hidden meaning.

The Tzigana stretched out her hand, and pulled a silken bellcord.



A servant appeared.

"Show this gentleman out," she said, very quietly.

CHAPTER XIV

"Have I the right to lie?"

Then the Tzigana,'s romance, in which she had put all her faith and her belief, had ended, like a bad dream, she said to herself: "My life is over!"

What remained to her? Expiation? Forgetfulness?

She thought of the cloister and the life of prayer of those blue sisters she saw under the trees of Maisons-Lafitte. She lived in the solitude of her villa, remaining there during the winter in a melancholy tete-a-tete with old Vogotzine, who was always more or less under the effect of liquor. Then, as death would not take her, she gradually began to go into Parisian society, slowly forgetting the past, and the folly

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which she had taken for love little by little faded mistily away. It was like a recovery from an illness, or the disappearance of a nightmare in the dawn of morning. Now, Marsa Laszlo, who, two years before, had longed for annihilation and death, occasionally thought the little Baroness Dinati right when she said, in her laughing voice: "What are you thinking of, my dear child? Is it well for a girl of your age to bury herself voluntarily and avoid society?" She was then twenty-four: in three or four years she had aged mentally ten; but her beautiful oval face had remained unchanged, with the purity of outline of a Byzantine Madonna.

Then—life has its awakenings—she met Prince Andras: all her admirations as a girl, her worship of patriotism and heroism, flamed forth anew; her heart, which she had thought dead, throbbed, as it had never throbbed before, at the sound of the voice of this man, truly loyal, strong and gentle, and who was (she knew it well, the unhappy girl!) the being for whom she was created, the ideal of her dreams. She loved him silently, but with a deep and eternal passion; she loved him without saying to herself that she no longer had any right to love. Did she even think of her past? Does one longer think of the storm when the wind has driven off the heavy, tear-laden clouds, and the thunder has died away in the distance? It seemed to her now that she had never had but one name in her heart, and upon her lips—Zilah.

And then this man, this hero, her hero, asked her hand, and said to her, "I love you."

Andras loved her! With what a terrible contraction of the heart did she put to herself the formidable question: "Have I the right to lie? Shall I have the courage to confess?"

She held in her grasp the most perfect happiness a woman could hope for, the dream of her whole life; and, because a worthless scoundrel had deceived her, because there were, in her past, hours which she remembered only to curse, effaced hours, hours which appeared to her now never to have existed, was she obliged to ruin her life, to break her heart, and, herself the victim, to pay for the lie uttered by a coward? Was it right? Was it just? Was she to be forever bound to that past, like a corpse to its grave? What! She had no longer the right to love? no longer the right to live?

She adored Andras; she would have given her life for him. And he also loved her; she was the first woman who had ever touched his heart. He had evidently felt himself isolated, with his old chivalrous ideas, in a world devoted to the worship of low things, tangible successes, and profitable realities. He was, so to speak, a living anachronism in the midst of a society which had faith in nothing except victorious brutalities, and which marched on, crushing, beneath its iron-shod heels, the hopes and visions of the enthusiastic. He recalled those evenings after a battle when, in the woods reddened by the setting sun, his father and Varhely said to him: "Let us remain to the last, and protect the retreat!" And it seemed to him that, amid the bestialities of the moment and

the vulgarities of the century, he still protected the retreat of misunderstood virtues and generous enthusiasms; and it pleased him to be the rear guard of chivalry in defeat.

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He shut himself up obstinately in his isolation, like Marsa in her solitude; and he did not consider himself ridiculously absurd or foolishly romantic, when he remembered that his countrymen, the Hungarians, were the only people, perhaps, who, in the abasement of all Europe before the brutality of triumph and omnipotent pessimism, had preserved their traditions of idealism, chivalry, and faith in the old honor; the Hungarian nationality was also the only one which had conquered its conquerors by its virtues, its persistence in its hopes, its courage, its contempt of all baseness, its extraordinary heroism, and had finally imposed its law upon Austria, bearing away the old empire as on the croup of its horse toward the vast plains of liberty. The ideal would, therefore, have its moments of victory: an entire people proved it in history.

“Let this world boast,” said Andras, “of the delights of its villainy, and grovel in all that is low and base. Life is not worth living unless the air one breathes is pure and free! Man is not the brother of swine!”

And these same ideas, this same faith, this same dreamy nature and longing for all that is generous and brave, he suddenly found again in the heart of Marsa. She represented to him a new and happy existence. Yes, he thought, she would render him happy; she would understand him, aid him, surround him with the fondest love that man could desire. And she, also, thinking of him, felt herself capable of any sacrifice. Who could tell? Perhaps the day would come when it would be necessary to fight again; then she would follow him, and interpose her breast between him and the balls. What happiness to die in saving him! But, no, no! To live loving him, making him happy, was her duty now; and was it necessary to renounce this delight because hated kisses had once soiled her lips? No, she could not! And yet—and yet, strict honor whispered to Marsa, that she should say No to the Prince; she had no right to his love.

But, if she should reject Andras, he would die, Varhely had said it. She would then slay two beings, Andras and herself, with a single word. She! She did not count! But he! And yet she must speak. But why speak? Was it really true that she had ever loved another? Who was it? The one whom she worshipped with all her heart, with all the fibres of her being, was Andras! Oh, to be free to love him! Marsa's sole hope and thought were now to win, some day, forgiveness for having said nothing by the most absolute devotion that man had ever encountered. Thinking continually these same thoughts, always putting off taking a decision till the morrow, fearing to break both his heart and hers, the Tzigana let the time slip by until the day came when the fete in celebration of her betrothal was to take place. And on that very day Michel Menko appeared before her, not abashed, but threatening. Her dream of happiness ended in this reality—Menko saying: “You have been mine; you shall be mine again, or you are lost!”

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Lost! And how?

With cold resolution, Marsa Laszlo asked herself this question, terrible as a question of life or death:

“What would the Prince do, if, after I became his wife, he should learn the truth?”

“What would he do? He would kill me,” thought the Tzigana. “He would kill me. So much the better!” It was a sort of a bargain which she proposed to herself, and which her overwhelming love dictated.

“To be his wife, and with my life to pay for that moment of happiness! If I should speak now, he would fly from me, I should never see him again—and I love him. Well, I sacrifice what remains to me of existence to be happy for one short hour!” She grew to think that she had a right thus to give her life for her love, to belong to Andras, to be the wife of that hero if only for a day, and to die then, to die saying to him: “I was unworthy of you, but I loved you; here, strike!” Or rather to say nothing, to be loved, to take opium or digitalis, and to fall asleep with this last supremely happy thought: “I am his wife, and he loves me!” What power in the world could prevent her from realizing her dream? Would she resemble Michel in lying thus? No; since she would immediately sacrifice herself without hesitation, with joy, for the honor of her husband.

“Yes, my life against his love. I shall be his wife and die!”

She did not think that, in sacrificing her life, she would condemn Zilah to death. Or rather, with one of those subterfuges by which we voluntarily deceive ourselves, she thought: “He will be consoled for my death, if he ever learns what I was.” But why should he ever learn it? She would take care to die so that it should be thought an accident.

Marsa’s resolve was taken. She had contracted a debt, and she would pay it with her blood. Michel now mattered little to her, let him do what he would. The young man’s threat: “To-morrow night!” returned to her mind without affecting her in the least. The contemptuous curl of her lip seemed silently to brave Michel Menko.

In all this there was a different manifestation of her double nature: in her love for Andras and her longing to become his wife, the blood of the Tzigana, her mother, spoke; Prince Tcheretteff, the Russian, on the other hand, revived in her silent, cold bravado.

She lay down to rest, still feverish from the struggle, and worn out, slept till morning, to awaken calm, languid, but almost happy.

She passed the whole of the following day in the garden, wondering at times if the appearance of Menko and his tomorrow were not a dream, a nightmare. Tomorrow? That was to-day.

“Yes, yes, he will come! He is quite capable of coming,” she murmured.

She despised him enough to believe that he would dare, this time, to keep his word.

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Lying back in a low wicker chair, beneath a large oak, whose trunk was wreathed with ivy, she read or thought the hours away. A Russian belt, enamelled with gold and silver, held together her trailing white robes of India muslin, trimmed with Valenciennes, and a narrow scarlet ribbon encircled her throat like a line of blood. The sunlight, filtering through the leaves, flickered upon her dress and clear, dark cheeks, while, near by, a bush of yellow roses flung its fragrance upon the air. The only sound in the garden was the gentle rustle of the trees, which recalled to her the distant murmur of the sea. Gradually she entirely forgot Michel, and thought only of the happy moments of the previous day, of the boat floating down the Seine past the silvery willows on the banks of the sparkling water, of the good people on the barge calling out to her, "Be happy! be happy!" and the little children throwing smiling kisses to her.

A gentle languor enveloped the warm, sunny garden. Old Sol poured his golden light down upon the emerald turf, the leafy trees, the brilliant flowerbeds and the white walls of the villa. Under the green arch of the trees, where luminous insects, white and flame-colored butterflies, aimlessly chased one another, Marsa half slumbered in a sort of voluptuous oblivion, a happy calm, in that species of nirvana which the open air of summer brings. She felt herself far away from the entire world in that corner of verdure, and abandoned herself to childish hopes and dreams, in profound enjoyment of the beautiful day.

The Baroness Dinati came during the afternoon to see Marsa; she fluttered out into the garden, dressed in a clinging gown of some light, fluffy material, with a red umbrella over her head; and upon her tiny feet, of all things in the world, ebony sabots, bearing her monogram in silver upon the instep. It was a short visit, made up of the chatter and gossip of Paris. Little Jacquemin's article upon Prince Zilah's nautical fete had created a furore. That little Jacquemin was a charming fellow; Marsa knew him. No! Really? What! she didn't know Jacquemin of 'L'Actualite'? Oh! but she must invite him to the wedding, he would write about it, he wrote about everything; he was very well informed, was Jacquemin, on every subject, even on the fashions.

"Look! It was he who told me that these sabots were to be worn. The miserable things nearly madame break my neck when I entered the carriage; but they are something new. They attract attention. Everybody says, What are they? And when one has pretty feet, not too large, you know," *etc.*, *etc.*

She rattled on, moistening her pretty red lips with a lemonade, and nibbling a cake, and then hastily departed just as Prince Andras's carriage stopped before the gate. The Baroness waved her hand to him with a gay smile, crying out:

"I will not take even a minute of your time. You have to-day something pleasanter to do than to occupy yourself with poor, insignificant me!"

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Marsa experienced the greatest delight in seeing Andras, and listening to the low, tender accents of his voice; she felt herself to be loved and protected. She gave herself up to boundless hopes—she, who had before her, perhaps, only a few days of life. She felt perfectly happy near Andras; and it seemed to her that to-day his manner was tenderer, the tones of his voice more caressing, than usual.

“I was right to believe in chimeras,” he said, “since all that I longed for at twenty years is realized to-day. Very often, dear Marsa, when I used to feel sad and discouraged, I wondered whether my life lay behind me. But I was longing for you, that was all. I knew instinctively that there existed an exquisite woman, born for me, my wife—my wife! and I waited for you.”

He took her hands, and gazed upon her face with a look of infinite tenderness.

“And suppose that you had not found me?” she asked.

“I should have continued to drag out a weary existence. Ask Varhely what I have told him of my life.”

Marsa felt her heart sink within her; but she forced herself to smile. All that Varhely had said to her returned to her mind. Yes, Zilah had staked his very existence upon her love. To drag aside the veil from his illusion would be like tearing away the bandages from a wound. Decidedly, the resolution she had taken was the best one—to say nothing, but, in the black silence of suicide, which would be at once a deliverance and a punishment, to disappear, leaving to Zilah only a memory.

But why not die now? Ah! why? why? To this eternal question Marsa made reply, that, for deceiving him by becoming his wife, she would pay with her life. A kiss, then death. In deciding to act a lie, she condemned herself. She only sought to give to her death the appearance of an accident, not wishing to leave to Andras the double memory of a treachery and a crime.

She listened to the Prince as he spoke of the future, of all the happiness of their common existence. She listened as if her resolution to die had not been taken, and as if Zilah was promising her, not a minute, but an eternity, of joy.

General Vogotzine and Marsa accompanied the Prince to the station, he having come to Maisons by the railway. The Tzigana's Danish hounds went with them, bounding about Andras, and licking his hands as he caressed them.

“They already know the master,” laughed Vogotzine. “I have rarely seen such gentle animals,” remarked the Prince.

“Gentle? That depends!” said Marsa.



After separating from the Prince, she returned, silent and abstracted, with Vogotzine. She saw Andras depart with a mournful sadness, and a sudden longing to have him stay—to protect her, to defend her, to be there if Michel should come.

It was already growing dark when they reached home. Marsa ate but little at dinner, and left Vogotzine alone to finish his wine.

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Later, the General came, as usual, to bid his niece goodnight. He found Marsa lying upon the divan in the little salon.

"Don't you feel well? What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

"I feel a little tired, and I was going to bed. You don't care to have me keep you company, do you, my dear?"

Sometimes he was affectionate to her, and sometimes he addressed her with timid respect; but Marsa never appeared to notice the difference.

"I prefer to remain alone," she answered.

The General shrugged his shoulders, bent over, took Marsa's delicate hand in his, and kissed it as he would have kissed that of a queen.

Left alone, Marsa lay there motionless for more than an hour. Then she started suddenly, hearing the clock strike eleven, and rose at once.

The domestics had closed the house. She went out by a back door which was used by the servants, the key of which was in the lock.

She crossed the garden, beneath the dark shadows of the trees, with a slow, mechanical movement, like that of a somnambulist, and proceeded to the kennel, where the great Danish hounds and the colossus of the Himalayas were baying, and rattling their chains.

"Peace, Ortog! Silence, Duna!"

At the sound of her voice, the noise ceased as by enchantment.

She pushed open the door of the kennel, entered, and caressed the heads of the dogs, as they placed their paws upon her shoulders. Then she unfastened their chains, and in a clear, vibrating voice, said to them:

"Go!"

She saw them bound out, run over the lawn, and dash into the bushes, appearing and disappearing like great, fantastic shadows, in the pale moonlight. Then, slowly, and with the Muscovite indifference which her father, Prince Tcheretteff, might have displayed when ordering a spy or a traitor to be shot, she retraced her steps to the house, where all seemed to sleep, murmuring, with cold irony, in a sort of impersonal affirmation, as if she were thinking not of herself, but of another:

“Now, I hope that Prince Zilah’s fiancée is well guarded!”

CHAPTER XV

“As clings the leaf unto the tree”

Michel Menko was alone in the little house he had hired in Paris, in the Rue d’Aumale. He had ordered his coachman to have his coupe in readiness for the evening. “Take Trilby,” he said. “He is a better horse than Jack, and we have a long distance to go; and take some coverings for yourself, Pierre. Until this evening, I am at home to no one.”

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The summer day passed very slowly for him in the suspense of waiting. He opened and read the letters of which he had spoken to Marsa the evening before; they always affected him like a poison, to which he returned again and again with a morbid desire for fresh suffering—love-letters, the exchange of vows now borne away as by a whirlwind, but which revived in Michel's mind happy hours, the only hours of his life in which he had really lived, perhaps. These letters, dated from Pau, burned him like a live coal as he read them. They still retained a subtle perfume, a fugitive aroma, which had survived their love, and which brought Marsa vividly before his eyes. Then, his heart bursting with jealousy and rage, he threw the package into the drawer from which he had taken it, and mechanically picked up a volume of De Musset, opening to some page which recalled his own suffering. Casting this aside, he took up another book, and his eyes fell upon the passionate verses of the soldier-poet, Petoefi, addressed to his Etelka:

Thou lovest me not? What matters it?
My soul is linked to thine,
As clings the leaf unto the tree:
Cold winter comes; it falls; let be!
So I for thee will pine. My fate pursues me to the tomb.
Thou fliest? Even in its gloom
Thou art not free.
What follows in thy steps? Thy shade?
Ah, no! my soul in pain, sweet maid,
E'er watches thee.

"My soul is linked to thine, as clings the leaf unto the tree!" Michel repeated the lines with a sort of defiance in his look, and longed impatiently and nervously for the day to end.

A rapid flush of anger mounted to his face as his valet entered with a card upon a salver, and he exclaimed, harshly:

"Did not Pierre give you my orders that I would receive no one?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; but Monsieur Labanoff insisted so strongly—"

"Labanoff?" repeated Michel.

"Monsieur Labanoff, who leaves Paris this evening, and desires to see Monsieur before his departure."

The name of Labanoff recalled to Michel an old friend whom he had met in all parts of Europe, and whom he had not seen for a long time. He liked him exceedingly for a sort of odd pessimism of aggressive philosophy, a species of mysticism mingled with

bitterness, which Labanoff took no pains to conceal. The young Hungarian had, perhaps, among the men of his own age, no other friend in the world than this Russian with odd ideas, whose enigmatical smile puzzled and interested him.

He looked at the clock. Labanoff's visit might make the time pass until dinner.

"Admit Monsieur Labanoff!"

In a few moments Labanoff entered. He was a tall, thin young man, with a complexion the color of wax, flashing eyes, and a little pointed mustache. His hair, black and curly, was brushed straight up from his forehead. He had the air of a soldier in his long, closely buttoned frock-coat.

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It was many months since these two men had met; but they had been long bound together by a powerful sympathy, born of quiet talks and confidences, in which each had told the other of similar sufferings. A long deferred secret hope troubled Labanoff as the memory of Marsa devoured Menko; and they had many times exchanged dismal theories upon the world, life, men, and laws. Their common bitterness united them. And Michel received Labanoff, despite his resolution to receive no one, because he was certain that he should find in him the same suffering as that expressed by De Musset and Petoefi.

Labanoff, to-day, appeared to him more enigmatical and gloomy than ever. From the lips of the Russian fell only words of almost tragical mystery.

Menko made him sit down by his side upon a divan, and he noticed that an extraordinary fever seemed to burn in the blue eyes of his friend.

"I learned that you had returned from London," said Labanoff; "and, as I was leaving Paris, I wished to see you before my departure. It is possible that we may never see each other again."

"Why?"

"I am going to St. Petersburg on pressing business."

"Have you finished your studies in Paris?"

"Oh! I had already received my medical diploma when I came here. I have been living in Paris only to be more at my ease to pursue—a project which interests me."

"A project?"

Menko asked the question mechanically, feeling very little curiosity to know Labanoff's secret; but the Russian's face wore a strange, ironical smile as he answered:

"I have nothing to say on that subject, even to the man for whom I have the most regard."

His brilliant eyes seemed to see strange visions before them. He remained silent for a moment, and then rose with an abrupt movement.

"There," he said, "that is all I had to tell you, my dear Menko. Now, 'au revoir', or rather, good-by; for, as I said before, I shall probably never see you again."

"And why, pray?"

“Oh! I don’t know; it is an idea of mine. And then, my beloved Russia is such a strange country. Death comes quickly there.”

He had still upon his lips that inexplicable smile, jesting and sad at once.

Menko grasped the long, white hand extended to him.

“My dear Labanoff, it is not difficult to guess that you are going on some dangerous errand.” Smiling: “I will not do you the injustice to believe you a nihilist.”

Labanoff’s blue eyes flashed.

“No,” he said, “no, I am not a nihilist. Annihilation is absurd; but liberty is a fine thing!”

He stopped short, as if he feared that he had already said too much.

“Adieu, my dear Menko.”

The Hungarian detained him with a gesture, saying, with a tremble in his voice:

“Labanoff! You have found me when a crisis in my life is also impending. I am about, like yourself, to commit a great folly; a different one from yours, no doubt. However, I have no right to tell you that you are about to commit some folly.”

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"No," calmly replied the Russian, very pale, but still smiling, "it is not a folly."

"But it is a danger?" queried Menko.

Labanoff made no reply.

"I do not know either," said Michel, "how my affair will end. But, since chance has brought us together today, face to face—"

"It was not chance, but my own firm resolution to see you again before my departure."

"I know what your friendship for me is, and it is for that reason that I ask you to tell me frankly where you will be in a month."

"In a month?" repeated Labanoff.

"Give me the route you are going to take? Shall you be a fixture at St. Petersburg?"

"Not immediately," responded the Russian, slowly, his gaze riveted upon Menko. "In a month I shall still be at Warsaw. At St. Petersburg the month after."

"Thanks. I only ask you to let me know, in some way, where you are."

"Why?"

"Because, I should like to join you."

"You!"

"It is only a fancy," said Menko, with an attempt at a laugh. "I am bored with life—you know it; I find it a nuisance. If we did not spur it like an old, musty horse, it would give us the same idiotic round of days. I do not know—I do not wish to know—why you are going to Russia, and what this final farewell of which you have just spoken signifies; I simply guess that you are off on some adventure, and it is possible that I may ask you to allow me to share it."

"Why?" said Labanoff, coldly. "You are not a Russian."

Menko smiled, and, placing his hands upon the thin shoulders of his friend, he said:

"Those words reveal many things. It is well that they were not said before an agent of police."

"Yes," responded Labanoff, firmly. "But I am not in the habit of recklessly uttering my thoughts; I know that I am speaking now to Count Menko."

“And Count Menko will be delighted, my dear Labanoff, if you will let him know where, in Poland or Russia, he must go, soon, to obtain news of you. Fear nothing: neither there nor here will I question you. But I shall be curious to know what has become of you, and you know that I have enough friendship for you to be uneasy about you. Besides, I long to be on the move; Paris, London, the world, in short, bores me, bores me, bores me!”

“The fact is, it is stupid, egotistical and cowardly,” responded Labanoff.

He again held out to Menko his nervous hand, burning, like his blue eyes, with fever.

“Farewell!” he said.

“No, no, 'au revoir'!”

“‘Au revoir’ be it then. I will let you know what has become of me.”

“And where you are?”

“And where I am.”

“And do not be astonished if I join you some fine morning.”

“Nothing ever astonishes me,” said the Russian. “Nothing!”

And in that word nothing were expressed profound disgust with life and fierce contempt of death.

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Menko warmly grasped his friend's thin and emaciated hand; and, the last farewell spoken to the fanatic departing for some tragical adventure, the Hungarian became more sombre and troubled than before, and Labanoff's appearance seemed like a doubtful apparition. He returned to his longing to see the end of the most anxious day of his life.

At last, late in the evening, Michel entered his coupe, and was driven away-down the Rue d'Aumale, through the Rue Pigalle and the Rue de Douai, to the rondpoint of the Place Clichy, the two lanterns casting their clear light into the obscurity. The coupe then took the road to Maisons-Lafitte, crossing the plain and skirting wheat-fields and vineyards, with the towering silhouette of Mont Valerien on the left, and on the right, sharply defined against the sky, a long line of hills, dotted with woods and villas, and with little villages nestling at their base, all plunged in a mysterious shadow.

Michel, with absent eyes, gazed at all this, as Trilby rapidly trotted on. He was thinking of what lay before him, of the folly he was about to commit, as he had said to Labanoff. It was a folly; and yet, who could tell? Might not Marsa have reflected? Might she not; alarmed at his threats, be now awaiting him? Her exquisite face, like a lily, rose before him; an overwhelming desire to annihilate time and space took possession of him, and he longed to be standing, key in hand, before the little gate in the garden wall.

He was well acquainted with the great park of Maisons-Lafitte, with the white villas nestling among the trees. On one side Prince Tchereteff's house looked out upon an almost desert tract of land, on which a racecourse had been mapped out; and on the other extended with the stables and servants' quarters to the forest, the wall of the Avenue Lafitte bounding the garden. In front of the villa was a broad lawn, ending in a low wall with carved gates, allowing, through the branches of the oaks and chestnuts, a view of the hills of Corneilles.

After crossing the bridge of Sartrouville, Michel ordered his coachman to drive to the corner of the Avenue Corneille, where he alighted in the shadow of a clump of trees.

"You will wait here, Pierre," he said, "and don't stir till I return."

He walked past the sleeping houses, under the mysterious alleys of the trees, until he reached the broad avenue which, cutting the park in two, ran from the station to the forest. The alley that he was seeking descended between two rows of tall, thick trees, forming an arch overhead, making it deliciously cool and shady in the daytime, but now looking like a deep hole, black as a tunnel. Pushing his way through the trees and bushes, and brushing aside the branches of the acacias, the leaves of which fell in showers about him, Michel reached an old wall, the white stones of which were overgrown with ivy. Behind the wall the wind rustled amid the pines and oaks like the vague murmur of a coming storm. And there, at the end of the narrow path, half hidden by the ivy, was the little gate he was seeking. He cautiously brushed aside the leaves

and felt for the keyhole; but, just as he was about to insert the key, which burned in his feverish fingers, he stopped short.

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Was Marsa awaiting him? Would she not call for help, drive him forth, treat him like a thief?

Suppose the gate was barred from within? He looked at the wall, and saw that by clinging to the ivy he could reach the top. He had not come here to hesitate. No, a hundred times no!

Besides, Marsa was certainly there, trembling, fearful, cursing him perhaps, but still there.

"No," he murmured aloud in the silence, "were even death behind that gate, I would not recoil."

CHAPTER XVI

"It is A man they are devouring!"

Michel Menko was right. The beautiful Tzigana was awaiting him.

She stood at her window, like a spectre in her white dress, her hands clutching the sill, and her eyes striving to pierce the darkness which enveloped everything, and opened beneath her like a black gulf. With heart oppressed with fear, she started at the least sound.

All she could see below in the garden were the branches defined against the sky; a single star shining through the leaves of a poplar, like a diamond in a woman's tresses; and under the window the black stretch of the lawn crossed by a band of a lighter shade, which was the sand of the path. The only sound to be heard was the faint tinkle of the water falling into the fountain.

Her glance, shifting as her thoughts, wandered vaguely over the trees, the open spaces which seemed like masses of heavy clouds, and the sky set with constellations. She listened with distended ears, and a shudder shook her whole body as she heard suddenly the distant barking of a dog.

The dog perceived some one. Was it Menko?

No: the sound, a howling rather than a barking, came from a long distance, from Sartrouville, beyond the Seine.

"It is not Duna or Bundas," she murmured, "nor Ortog. What folly to remain here at the window! Menko will not come. Heaven grant that he does not come!"

And she sighed a happy sigh as if relieved of a terrible weight.

Suddenly, with a quick movement, she started violently back, as if some frightful apparition had risen up before her.

Hoarse bayings, quite different from the distant barking of a moment before, rent the air, and were repeated more and more violently below there in the darkness. This time it was indeed the great Danish hounds and the shaggy colossus of the Himalayas, which were precipitating themselves upon some prey.

“Great God! He is there, then! He is there!” whispered Marsa, paralyzed with horror.

There was something gruesome in the cries of the dogs, By the continued repetition of the savage noises, sharp, irritated, frightful snarls and yelps, Marsa divined some horrible struggle in the darkness, of a man against the beasts. Then all her terror seemed to mount to her lips in a cry of pity, which was instantly repressed. She steadied herself against the window, striving, with all her strength, to reason herself into calmness.

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"It was his own wish," she thought.

Did she not know, then, what she was doing when, wishing to place a living guard between herself and danger, she had descended to the kennel and unloosed the ferocious animals, which, recognizing her voice, had bounded about her and licked her hands with many manifestations of joy? She had ascended again to her chamber and extinguished the light, around which fluttered the moths, beating the opal shade with their downy wings; and, in the darkness, drinking in the nightair at the open window, she had waited, saying to herself that Michel Menko would not come; but, if he did come, it was the will of fate that he should fall a victim to the devoted dogs which guarded her.

Why should she pity him?

She hated him, this Michel. He had threatened her, and she had defended herself, that was all. Ortog's teeth were made for thieves and intruders. No pity! No, no—no pity for such a coward, since he had dared—

But yet, as the ferocious bayings of the dogs below became redoubled in their fury, she imagined, in terror, a crunching of bones and a tearing of flesh; and, as her imagination conjured up before her Michel fighting, in hideous agony, against the bites of the dogs, she shuddered; she was afraid, and again a stifled cry burst forth from her lips. A sort of insanity took possession of her. She tried to cry out for mercy as if the animals could hear her; she sought the door of her chamber, groping along the wall with her hands outspread before her, in order to descend the staircase and rush out into the garden; but her limbs gave way beneath her, and she sank an inert mass upon the carpet in an agony of fear and horror.

"My God! My God! It is a man they are devouring;" and her voice died away in a smothered call for help.

Then she suddenly raised her head, as if moved by an electric shock.

There was no more noise! Nothing! The black night had all at once returned to its great, mysterious silence. Marsa experienced a sensation of seeing a pall stretched over a dead body. And in the darkness there seemed to float large spots of blood.

"Ah! the unhappy man!" she faltered.

Then, again, the voices of the dogs broke forth, rapid, angry, still frightfully threatening. The animals appeared now to be running, and their bayings became more and more distant.

What had happened?

One would have said that they were dragging away their prey, tearing it with hideous crimson fangs.

CHAPTER XVII

Marsa's guardians.

Was Michel Menko indeed dead? We left him just as he was turning the key in the little gate in the wall. He walked in boldly, and followed a path leading to an open space where was the pavilion he had spoken of to Marsa. He looked to see whether the windows of the pavilion were lighted, or whether there were a line of light under the door. No: the delicate tracery of the pagoda-like structure showed dimly against the sky; but there was no sign of life. Perhaps, however, Marsa was there in the darkness.

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He would glide under the window and call. Then, hearing him and frightened at so much audacity, she would descend.

He advanced a few steps toward the pavilion; but, all at once, in the part of the garden which seemed lightest, upon the broad gravel walk, he perceived odd, creeping shadows, which the moon, emerging from a cloud, showed to be dogs, enormous dogs, with their ears erect, which, with abound and a low, deep growl, made a dash toward him with outspread limbs—a dash terrible as the leap of a tiger.

A quick thought illumined Michel's brain like a flash of electricity: "Ah! this is Marsa's answer!" He had just time to mutter, with raging irony:

"I was right, she was waiting for me!"

Then, before the onslaught of the dogs, he recoiled, clasping his hands upon his breast and boldly thrusting out his elbows to ward off their ferocious attacks. With a sudden tightening of the muscles he repulsed the Danish hounds, which rolled over writhing on the ground, and then, with formidable baying, returned more furiously still to the charge.

Michel Menko had no weapon.

With a knife he could have defended himself, and slit the bellies of the maddened animals; but he had nothing! Was he to be forced, then, to fly, pursued like a fox or a deer?

Suppose the servants, roused by the noise of the dogs, should come in their turn, and seize him as a thief? At all events, that would be comparative safety; at least, they would rescue him from these monsters. But no: nothing stirred in the silent, impassive house.

The hounds, erect upon their hind legs, rushed again at Michel, who, overturning them with blows from his feet, and striking them violently in the jaws, now staggered back, Ortog having leaped at his throat. By a rapid movement of recoil, the young man managed to avoid being strangled; but the terrible teeth of the dog, tearing his coat and shirt into shreds, buried themselves deep in the flesh of his shoulder.

The steel-like muscles and sinewy strength of the Hungarian now stood him in good stead. He must either free himself, or perish there in the hideous carnage of a quarry. He seized with both hands, in a viselike grip, Ortog's enormous neck, and, at the same time, with a desperate jerk, shook free his shoulder, leaving strips of his flesh between the jaws of the animal, whose hot, reeking breath struck him full in the face. With wild, staring eyes, and summoning up, in an instinct of despair, all his strength and courage, he buried his fingers in Ortog's neck, and drove his nails through the skin of the colossus, which struck and beat with his paws against the young man's breast. The

dog's tongue hung out of his mouth, under the suffocating pressure of the hands of the human being struggling for his life. As he fought thus against Ortog, the Hungarian gradually retreated, the two hounds leaping about him, now driven off by kicks (Duna's jaw was broken), and now, with roars of rage and fiery eyes, again attacking their human prey.

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One of them, Bundas, his teeth buried in Michel's left thigh, shook him, trying to throw him to the ground. A slip, and all would be over; if he should fall upon the gravel, the man would be torn to pieces and crunched like a deer caught by the hounds.

A terrible pain nearly made Michel faint—Bundas had let go his hold, stripping off a long tongue of flesh; but, in a moment, it had the same effect upon him as that of the knife of a surgeon opening a vein, and the weakness passed away. The unfortunate man still clutched, as in a death-grip, Ortog's shaggy neck, and he perceived that the struggles of the dog were no longer of the same terrible violence; the eyes of the ferocious brute were rolled back in his head until they looked like two large balls of gleaming ivory. Michel threw the heavy mass furiously from him, and the dog, suffocated, almost dead, fell upon the ground with a dull, heavy sound.

Menko had now to deal only with the Danish hounds, which were rendered more furious than ever by the smell of blood. One of them, displaying his broken teeth in a hideous, snarling grin, hesitated a little to renew the onslaught, ready, as he was, to spring at his enemy's throat at the first false step; but the other, Bundas, with open mouth, still sprang at Michel, who repelled, with his left arm, the attacks of the bloody jaws. Suddenly a hollow cry burst from his lips like a death-rattle, forced from him as the dog buried his fangs in his forearm, until they nearly met. It seemed to him that the end had now come.

Each second took away more and more of his strength. The tremendous tension of muscles and nerves, which had been necessary in the battle with Ortog, and the blood he had lost, his whole left side being gashed as with cuts from a knife, weakened him. He calculated, that, unless he could reach the little gate before the other dog should make up his mind to leap upon him, he was lost, irredeemably lost.

Bundas did not let go his hold, but twisting himself around Michel's body, he clung with his teeth to the young man's lacerated arm; the other, Duna, bayed horribly, ready to spring at any moment.

Michel gathered together all the strength that remained to him, and ran rapidly backward, carrying with him the furious beast, which was crushing the very bones of his arm.

He reached the end of the walk, and the gate was there before him. Groping in the darkness with his free hand, he found the key, turned it, and the gate flew open. Fate evidently did not wish him to perish.

Then, in the same way as he had shaken off Ortog, whom he could now hear growling and stumbling over the gravel a little way off, Michel freed his arm from Bundas, forcing his fingers and nails into the animal's ears; and the moment he had thrown the brute to

the ground, he dashed through the gate, and slammed it to behind him, just as the two dogs together were preparing to leap again upon him.

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Then, leaning against the gate, and steadying himself, so as not to fall, he stood there weak and faint, while the dogs, on the other side of the wooden partition which now separated him from death—and what a death! erect upon their hind legs, like rampant, heraldic animals, tried to break through, cracking, in their gory jaws, long strips of wood torn from the barrier which kept them from their human prey.

Michel never knew how long he remained there, listening to the hideous growling of his bloodthirsty enemies. At last the thought came to him that he must go; but how was he to drag himself to the place where Pierre was waiting for him? It was so far! so far! He would faint twenty times before reaching there. Was he about to fail now after all he had gone through?

His left leg was frightfully painful; but he thought he could manage to walk with it. His left shoulder and arm, however, at the least movement, caused him atrocious agony, as if the bones had been crushed by the wheel of some machine. He sought for his handkerchief, and enveloped his bleeding arm in it, tying the ends of it with his teeth. Then he tottered to a woodpile near by, and, taking one of the long sticks, he managed with its aid to drag himself along the alley, while through the branches the moon looked calmly down upon him.

He was worn out, and his head seemed swimming in a vast void, when he reached the end of the alley, and saw, a short way off down the avenue, the arch of the old bridge near which the coupe had stopped. One effort more, a few steps, and he was there! He was afraid now of falling unconscious, and remaining there in a dying condition, without his coachman even suspecting that he was so near him.

“Courage!” he murmured. “On! On!”

Two clear red lights appeared—the lanterns of the coup. “Pierre!” cried Michel in the darkness, “Pierre!” But he felt that his feeble voice would not reach the coachman, who was doubtless asleep on his box. Once more he gathered together his strength, called again, and advanced a little, saying to himself that a step or two more perhaps meant safety. Then, all at once, he fell prostrate upon his side, unable to proceed farther; and his voice, weaker and weaker, gradually failed him.

Fortunately, the coachman had heard him cry, and realized that something had happened. He jumped from his box, ran to his master, lifted him up, and carried him to the carriage. As the light of the lamps fell on the torn and bloody garments of the Count, whose pallid and haggard face was that of a dead man, Pierre uttered a cry of fright.

“Great heavens! Where have you been?” he exclaimed. “You have been attacked?”

“The coup—place me in the coup.”

“But there are doctors here. I will go—”

“No—do nothing. Make no noise. Take me to Paris—I do not wish any one to know—To Paris—at once,” and he lost consciousness.



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Pierre, with some brandy he luckily had with him, bathed his master's temples, and forced a few drops between his lips; and, when the Count had recovered, he whipped up his horse and galloped to Paris, growling, with a shrug of the shoulders:

"There must have been a woman in this. Curse the women! They make all the trouble in the world."

It was daybreak when the coup reached Paris.

Pierre heard, as they passed the barrier, a laborer say to his mate

"That's a fine turnout. I wish I was in the place of the one who is riding inside!"

"So do I!" returned the other.

And Pierre thought, philosophically: "Poor fools! If they only knew!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"There is no need of accusing anyone."

At the first streak of daylight, Marsa descended, trembling, to the garden, and approached the little gate, wondering what horror would meet her eyes.

Rose-colored clouds, like delicate, silky flakes of wool, floated across the blue sky; the paling crescent of the moon, resembling a bent thread of silver wire, seemed about to fade mistily away; and, toward the east, in the splendor of the rising sun, the branches of the trees stood out against a background of burnished gold as in a Byzantine painting. The dewy calm and freshness of the early morning enveloped everything as in a bath of purity and youth.

But Marsa shuddered as she thought that perhaps this beautiful day was dawning upon a dead body. She stopped abruptly as she saw the gardener, with very pale face, come running toward her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, something terrible has happened! Last night the dogs barked and barked; but they bark so often at the moon and the shadows, that no one got up to see what was the matter."

"Well—well?" gasped Marsa, her hand involuntarily seeking her heart.

"Well, there was a thief here last night, or several of them, for poor Ortog is half strangled; but the rascals did not get away scot free. The one who came through the

little path to the pavilion was badly bitten; his tracks can be followed in blood for a long distance a very long distance."

"Then," asked Marsa, quickly, "he escaped? He is not dead?"

"No, certainly not. He got away."

"Ah! Thank heaven for that!" cried the Tzigana, her mind relieved of a heavy weight.

"Mademoiselle is too good," said the gardener. "When a man enters, like that, another person's place, he exposes himself to be chased like a rabbit, or to be made mincemeat of for the dogs. He must have had big muscles to choke Ortog, the poor beast!—not to mention that Duna's teeth are broken. But the scoundrel got his share, too; for he left big splashes of blood upon the gravel."

"Blood!"

"The most curious thing is that the little gate, to which there is no key, is unlocked. They came in and went out there. If that idiot of a Saboureau, whom General Vogotzine discharged—and rightly too, Mademoiselle—were not dead, I should say that he was at the bottom of all this."

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"There is no need of accusing anyone," said Marsa, turning away.

The gardener returned to the neighborhood of the pavilion, and, examining the red stains upon the ground, he said: "All the same, this did not happen by itself. I am going to inform the police!"

CHAPTER XIX

"A beautiful dream"

It was the eve of the marriage-day of Prince Andras Zilah and Mademoiselle Marsa Laszlo, and Marsa sat alone in her chamber, where the white robes she was to wear next day were spread out on the bed; alone for the last time—to-morrow she would be another's.

The fiery Tzigana, who felt in her heart, implacable as it was to evil and falsehood, all capabilities of devotion and truth, was condemned to lie, or to lose the love of Prince Andras, which was her very life. There was no other alternative. No, no: since she had met this man, superior to all others, since he loved her and she loved him, she would take an hour of his life and pay for that hour with her own. She had no doubt but that an avowal would forever ruin her in Andras's eyes. No, again and forever no: it was much better to take the love which fate offered her in exchange for her life.

And, as she threw herself back in her chair with an expression of unchangeable determination in her dark, gazelle-like eyes, there suddenly came into her mind the memory of a day long ago, when, driving along the road from Maisons-Lafitte to Saint-Germain, she had met some wandering gipsies, two men and a woman, with copper-colored skins and black eyes, in which burned, like a live coal, the passionate melancholy of the race. The woman, a sort of long spear in her hand, was driving some little shaggy ponies, like those which range about the plains of Hungary. Bound like parcels upon the backs of these ponies were four or five little children, clothed in rags, and covered with the dust of the road. The woman, tall, dark and faded, a sort of turban upon her head, held out her hand toward Marsa's carriage with a graceful gesture and a broad smile—the supplicating smile of those who beg. A muscular young fellow, his crisp hair covered with a red fez, her brother—the woman was old, or perhaps she was less so than she seemed, for poverty brings wrinkles—walked by her side behind the sturdy little ponies. Farther along, another man waited for them at a corner of the road near a laundry, the employees of which regarded him with alarm, because, at the end of a rope, the gipsy held a small gray bear. As she passed by them, Marsa involuntarily exclaimed, in the language of her mother "Be szomorú!" (How sad it is!) The man, at her words, raised his head, and a flash of joy passed over his face, which showed, or Marsa thought so (who knows? perhaps she was mistaken), a love for his forsaken country. Well, now, she did not know why, the remembrance of these poor beings returned to

her, and she said to herself that her ancestors, humble and insignificant as these unfortunates in the dust and dirt of the highway, would have been astonished and incredulous if any one had told them that some day a girl born of their blood would wed a Zilah, one of the chiefs of that Hungary whose obscure and unknown minstrels they were! Ah! what an impossible dream it seemed, and yet it was realized now.

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At all events, a man's death did not lie between her and Zilah. Michel Menko, after lying at death's door, was cured of his wounds. She knew this from Baroness Dinati, who attributed Michel's illness to a sword wound secretly received for some woman. This was the rumor in Paris. The young Count had, in fact, closed his doors to every one; and no one but his physician had been admitted. What woman could it be? The little Baroness could not imagine.

Marsa thought again, with a shudder, of the night when the dogs howled; but, to tell the truth, she had no remorse. She had simply defended herself! The inquiry begun by the police had ended in no definite result. At Maisons-Lafitte, people thought that the Russian house had been attacked by some thieves who had been in the habit of entering unoccupied houses and rifling them of their contents. They had even arrested an old vagabond, and accused him of the attempted robbery at General Vogotzine's; but the old man had answered: "I do not even know the house." But was not this Menko a hundred times more culpable than a thief? It was more and worse than money or silver that he had dared to come for: it was to impose his love upon a woman whose heart he had well-nigh broken. Against such an attack all weapons were allowable, even Ortog's teeth. The dogs of the Tzigana had known how to defend her; and it was what she had expected from her comrades.

Had Michel Menko died, Marsa would have said, with the fatalism of the Orient: "It was his own will!" She was grateful, however, to fate, for having punished the wretch by letting him live. Then she thought no more of him except to execrate him for having poisoned her happiness, and condemned her either to a silence as culpable as a lie, or to an avowal as cruel as a suicide.

The night passed and the day came at last, when it was necessary for Marsa to become the wife of Prince Andras, or to confess to him her guilt. She wished that she had told him all, now that she had not the courage to do so. She had accustomed herself to the idea that a woman is not necessarily condemned to love no more because she has encountered a coward who has abused her love. She was in an atmosphere of illusion and chimera; what was passing about her did not even seem to exist. Her maids dressed her, and placed upon her dark hair the bridal veil: she half closed her eyes and murmured:

"It is a beautiful dream."

A dream, and yet a reality, consoling as a ray of light after a hideous nightmare. Those things which were false, impossible, a lie, a phantasmagoria born of a fever, were Michel Menko, the past years, the kisses of long ago, the threats of yesterday, the bayings of the infuriated dogs at that shadow which did not exist.

General Vogotzine, in a handsome uniform, half suffocated in his high vest, and with a row of crosses upon his breast—the military cross of St. George, with its red and black

ribbon; the cross of St. Anne, with its red ribbon; all possible crosses—was the first to knock at his niece's door, his sabre trailing upon the floor.

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"Who is it?" said Marsa.

"I, Vogotzine."

And, permission being given him, he entered the room.

The old soldier walked about his niece, pulling his moustache, as if he were conducting an inspection. He found Marsa charming. Pale as her white robe, with Tizsa's opal agraffe at her side, ready to clasp the bouquet of flowers held by one of her maids, she had never been so exquisitely beautiful; and Vogotzine, who was rather a poor hand at turning a compliment, compared her to a marble statue.

"How gallant you are this morning, General," she said, her heart bursting with emotion.

She waved away, with a brusque gesture, the orange-flowers which her maid was about to attach to her corsage.

"No," she said. "Not that! Roses."

"But, Mademoiselle—"

"Roses," repeated Marsa. "And for my hair white rosebuds also."

At this, the old General risked another speech.

"Do you think orange-blossoms are too vulgar, Marsa? By Jove! They don't grow in the ditches, though!"

And he laughed loudly at what he considered wit. But a frowning glance from the Tzigana cut short his hilarity; and, with a mechanical movement, he drew himself up in a military manner, as if the Czar were passing by.

"I will leave you to finish dressing, my dear," he said, after a moment.

He already felt stifled in the uniform, which he was no longer accustomed to wear, and he went out in the garden to breathe freer. While waiting there for Zilah, he ordered some cherry cordial, muttering, as he drank it:

"It is beautiful August weather. They will have a fine day; but I shall suffocate!"

The avenue was already filled with people. The marriage had been much discussed, both in the fashionable colony which inhabited the park and in the village forming the democratic part of the place; even from Sartrouville and Mesnil, people had come to see the Tzigana pass in her bridal robes.

“What is all that noise?” demanded Vogotzine of the liveried footman.

“That noise, General? The inhabitants of Maisons who have come to see the wedding procession.”

“Really? Ah! really? Well, they haven’t bad taste. They will see a pretty woman and a handsome uniform.” And the General swelled out his breast as he used to do in the great parades of the time of Nicholas, and the reviews in the camp of Tsarskoe-Selo.

Outside the garden, behind the chestnut-trees which hid the avenue, there was a sudden sound of the rolling of wheels, and the gay cracking of whips.

“Ah!” cried the General, “It is Zilah!”

And, rapidly swallowing a last glass of the cordial, he wiped his moustache, and advanced to meet Prince Andras, who was descending from his carriage.

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Accompanying the Prince were Yanski Varhely, and an Italian friend of Zilah's, Angelo Valla, a former minister of the Republic of Venice, in the time of Manin. Andras Zilah, proud and happy, appeared to have hardly passed his thirtieth year; a ray of youth animated his clear eyes. He leaped lightly out upon the gravel, which cracked joyously beneath his feet; and, as he advanced through the aromatic garden, to the villa where Marsa awaited him, he said to himself that no man in the world was happier than he.

Vogotzine met him, and, after shaking his hand, asked him why on earth he had not put on his national Magyar costume, which the Hungarians wore with such graceful carelessness.

"Look at me, my dear Prince! I am in full battle array!"

Andras was in haste to see Marsa. He smiled politely at the General's remark, and asked him where his niece was.

"She is putting on her uniform," replied Vogotzine, with a loud laugh which made his sabre rattle.

Most of the invited guests were to go directly to the church of Maisons. Only the intimate friends came first to the house, Baroness Dinati, first of all, accompanied by Paul Jacquemin, who took his eternal notes, complimenting both Andras and the General, the latter especially eager to detain as many as possible to the lunch after the ceremony. Vogotzine, doubtless, wished to show himself in all the eclat of his majestic appetite.

Very pretty, in her Louis Seize gown of pink brocade, and a Rembrandt hat with a long white feather (Jacquemin, who remained below, had already written down the description in his note-book), the little Baroness entered Marsa's room like a whirlwind, embracing the young girl, and going into ecstasy over her beauty.

"Ah! how charming you are, my dear child! You are the ideal of a bride! You ought to be painted as you are! And what good taste to wear roses, and not orange-flowers, which are so common, and only good for shopgirls. Turn around! You are simply exquisite."

Marsa, paler than her garments, looked at herself in the glass, happy in the knowledge of her beauty, since she was about to be his, and yet contemplating the tall, white figure as if it were not her own image.

She had often felt this impression of a twofold being, in those dreams where one seems to be viewing the life of another, or to be the disinterested spectator of one's own existence.

It seemed to her that it was not she who was to be married, or that suddenly the awakening would come.

"The Prince is below," said the Baroness Dinati.

"Ah!" said Marsa.

She started with a sort of involuntary terror, as this very name of Prince was at once that of a husband and that of a judge. But when, superb in the white draperies, which surrounded her like a cloud of purity, her long train trailing behind her, she descended the stairs, her little feet peeping in and out like two white doves, and appeared at the door of the little salon where Andras was waiting, she felt herself enveloped in an atmosphere of love. The Prince advanced to meet her, his face luminous with happiness; and, taking the young girl's hands, he kissed the long lashes which rested upon her cheek, saying, as he contemplated the white vision of beauty before him:

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"How lovely you are, my Marsa! And how I love you!"

The Prince spoke these words in a tone, and with a look, which touched the deepest depths of Marsa's heart.

Then they exchanged those words, full of emotion, which, in their eternal triteness, are like music in the ears of those who love. Every one had withdrawn to the garden, to leave them alone in this last, furtive, happy minute, which is never found again, and which, on the threshold of the unknown, possesses a joy, sad as a last farewell, yet full of hope as the rising of the sun.

He told her how ardently he loved her, and how grateful he was to her for having consented, in her youth and beauty, to become the wife of a quasi-exile, who still kept, despite his efforts, something of the melancholy of the past.

And she, with an outburst of gratitude, devotion, and love, in which all the passion of her nature and her race vibrated, said, in a voice which trembled with unshed tears:

"Do not say that I give you my life. It is you who make of a girl of the steppes a proud and honored wife, who asks herself why all this happiness has come to her." Then, nestling close to Andras, and resting her dark head upon his shoulder, she continued: "We have a proverb, you remember, which says, Life is a tempest. I have repeated it very often with bitter sadness. But now, that wicked proverb is effaced by the refrain of our old song, Life is a chalet of pearls."

And the Tzigana, lost in the dream which was now a tangible reality, saying nothing, but gazing with her beautiful eyes, now moist, into the face of Andras, remained encircled in his arms, while he smiled and whispered, again and again, "I love you!"

All the rest of the world had ceased to exist for these two beings, absorbed in each other.

CHAPTER XX

THE BRIDAL DAY

The little Baroness ran into the room, laughing, and telling them how late it was; and Andras and Marsa, awakened to reality, followed her to the hall, where Varhely, Vogotzine, Angelo Valla, Paul Jacquemin and other guests were assembled as a sort of guard of honor to the bride and groom.

Andras and the Baroness, with Varhely, immediately entered the Prince's carriage; Vogotzine taking his place in the coupe with Marsa. Then there was a gay crackling of the gravel, a flash of wheels in the sunlight, a rapid, joyous departure. Clustered

beneath the trees in the ordinarily quiet avenues of Maisons, the crowd watched the cortege; and old Vogotzine good-humoredly displayed his epaulettes and crosses for the admiration of the people who love uniforms.

As she descended from the carriage, Marsa cast a superstitious glance at the facade of the church, a humble facade, with a Gothic porch and cheap stained-glass windows, some of which were broken; and above a plaster tower covered with ivy and surmounted with a roughly carved cross. She entered the church almost trembling, thinking again how strange was this fate which united, before a village altar, a Tzigana and a Magyar. She walked up the aisle, seeing nothing, but hearing about her murmurs of admiration, and knelt down beside Andras, upon a velvet cushion, near which burned a tall candle, in a white candlestick.

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The little church, dimly lighted save where the priest stood, was hushed to silence, and Marsa felt penetrated with deep emotion. She had really drunk of the cup of oblivion; she was another woman, or rather a young girl, with all a young girl's purity and ignorance of evil. It seemed to her that the hated past was a bad dream; one of those unhealthy hallucinations which fly away at the dawn of day.

She saw, in the luminous enclosure of the altar, the priest in his white stole, and the choir boys in their snowy surplices. The waxen candles looked like stars against the white hangings of the chancel; and above the altar, a sweet-faced Madonna looked down with sad eyes upon the man and woman kneeling before her. Through the parti-colored windows, crossed with broad bands of red, the branches of the lindens swayed in the wind, and the fluttering tendrils of the ivy cast strange, flickering shadows of blue, violet, and almost sinister scarlet upon the guests seated in the nave.

Outside, in the square in front of the church, the crowd waited the end of the ceremony. Shopgirls from the Rue de l'Eglise, and laundresses from the Rue de Paris, curiously contemplated the equipages, with their stamping horses, and the coachmen, erect upon their boxes, motionless, and looking neither to the right nor the left. Through the open door of the church, at the end of the old oak arches, could be seen Marsa's white, kneeling figure, and beside her Prince Zilah, whose blond head, as he stood gazing down upon his bride, towered above the rest of the party.

The music of the organ, now tremulous and low, now strong and deep, caused a profound silence to fall upon the square; but, as the last note died away, there was a great scrambling for places to see the procession come out.

Above the mass of heads, the leaves of the old lindens rustled with a murmur which recalled that of the sea; and now and then a blossom of a yellowish white would flutter down, which the girls disputed, holding up their hands and saying:

"The one who catches it will have a husband before the year is out!"

A poor old blind man, cowering upon the steps of the sanctuary, was murmuring a monotonous prayer, like the plaint of a night bird.

Yanski Varhely regarded the scene with curiosity, as he waited for the end of the ceremony. Somewhat oppressed by the heavy atmosphere of the little church, and being a Huguenot besides, the old soldier had come out into the open air, and bared his head to the fresh breeze under the lindens.

His rugged figure had at first a little awed the crowd; but they soon began to rattle on again like a brook over the stones.



Varhely cast, from time to time, a glance into the interior of the church. Baroness Dinati was now taking up the collection for the poor, holding the long pole of the alms-box in her little, dimpled hands, and bowing with a pretty smile as the coins rattled into the receptacle.

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Varhely, after a casual examination of the ruins of an old castle which formed one side of the square, was about to return to the church, when a domestic in livery pushed his way through the crowd, and raising himself upon his toes, peered into the church as if seeking some one. After a moment the man approached Yanski, and, taking off his hat, asked, respectfully:

“Is it to Monsieur Varhely that I have the honor to speak?”

“Yes,” replied Yanski, a little surprised.

“I have a package for Prince Andras Zilah: would Monsieur have the kindness to take charge of it, and give it to the Prince? I beg Monsieur’s pardon; but it is very important, and I am obliged to go away at once. I should have brought it to Maisons yesterday.”

As he spoke, the servant drew from an inside pocket a little package carefully wrapped, and sealed with red sealing-wax.

“Monsieur will excuse me,” he said again, “but it is very important.”

“What is it?” asked Varhely, rather brusquely. “Who sent it?”

“Count Michel Menko.”

Varhely knew very well (as also did Andras), that Michel had been seriously ill; otherwise, he would have been astonished at the young man’s absence from the wedding of the Prince.

He thought Michel had probably sent a wedding present, and he took the little package, twisting it mechanically in his hands. As he did so, he gave a slight start of surprise; it seemed as if the package contained letters.

He looked at the superscription. The name of Prince Andras Zilah was traced in clear, firm handwriting, and, in the left-hand corner, Michel Menko had written, in Hungarian characters: “Very important! With the expression of my excuses and my sorrow.” And below, the signature “Menko Mihaly.”

The domestic was still standing there, hat in hand. “Monsieur will be good enough to pardon me,” he said; “but, in the midst of this crowd, I could not perhaps reach his Excellency, and the Count’s commands were so imperative that—”

“Very well,” interrupted Varhely. “I will myself give this to the Prince immediately.”

The domestic bowed, uttered his thanks, and left Varhely vaguely uneasy at this mysterious package which had been brought there, and which Menko had addressed to the Prince.

With the expression of his excuses and his sorrow! Michel doubtless meant that he was sorry not to be able to join Andras's friends—he who was one of the most intimate of them, and whom the Prince called “my child.” Yes, it was evidently that. But why this sealed package? and what did it contain? Yanski turned it over and over between his fingers, which itched to break the wrapper, and find out what was within.

He wondered if there were really any necessity to give it to the Prince. But why should he not? What folly to think that any disagreeable news could come from Michel Menko! The young man, unable to come himself to Maisons, had sent his congratulations to the Prince, and Zilah would be glad to receive them from his friend. That was all. There was no possible trouble in all this, but only one pleasure the more to Andras.

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And Varhely could not help smiling at the nervous feeling a letter received under odd circumstances or an unexpected despatch sometimes causes. The envelope alone, of some letters, sends a magnetic thrill through one and makes one tremble. The rough soldier was not accustomed to such weaknesses, and he blamed himself as being childish, for having felt that instinctive fear which was now dissipated.

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned toward the church.

From the interior came the sound of the organ, mingled with the murmur of the guests as they rose, ready to depart. The wedding march from the *Midsummer Night's Dream* pealed forth majestically as the newly-married pair walked slowly down the aisle. Marsa smiled happily at this music of Mendelssohn, which she had played so often, and which was now singing for her the chant of happy love. She saw the sunshine streaming through the open doorway, and, dazzled by this light from without, her eyes fixed upon the luminous portal, she no longer perceived the dim shadows of the church.

Murmurs of admiration greeted her as she appeared upon the threshold, beaming with happiness. The crowd, which made way for her, gazed upon her with fascinated eyes. The door of Andras's carriage was open; Marsa entered it, and Andras, with a smile of deep, profound content, seated himself beside her, whispering tenderly in the Tzigana's ear as the carriage drove off:

"Ah! how I love you! my beloved, my adored Marsa! How I love you, and how happy I am!"

CHAPTER XXI

"The Tzigana is the most loved of all!"

The chimes rang forth a merry peal, and Mendelssohn's music still thundered its triumphal accents, as the marriage guests left the church.

"It is a beautiful wedding, really a great success! The bride, the decorations, the good peasants and the pretty girls—everything is simply perfect. If I ever marry again," laughed the Baroness, "I shall be married in the country."

"You have only to name the day, Baroness," said old Vogotzine, inspired to a little gallantry.

And Jacquemin, with a smile, exclaimed, in Russian:

"What a charming speech, General, and so original! I will make a note of it."



The carriages rolled away toward Marsa's house through the broad avenues, turning rapidly around the fountains of the park, whose jets of water laughed as they fell and threw showers of spray over the masses of flowers. Before the church, the children disputed for the money and bonbons Prince Andras had ordered to be distributed. In Marsa's large drawing-rooms, where glass and silver sparkled upon the snowy cloth, servants in livery awaited the return of the wedding-party. In a moment there was an assault, General Vogotzine leading the column. All appetites were excited by the drive in the fresh air, and the guests did honor to the pates, salads, and cold chicken, accompanied by Leoville, which Jacquemin tasted and pronounced drinkable.

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The little Baroness was ubiquitous, laughing, chattering, enjoying herself to her heart's content, and telling every one that she was to leave that very evening for Trouville, with trunks, and trunks, and trunks—a host of them! But then, it was race-week, you know!

With her eyeglasses perched upon her little nose, she stopped before a statuette, a picture, no matter what, exclaiming, merrily:

“Oh, how pretty that is! How pretty it is! It is a Tanagra! How queer those Tanagras are. They prove that love existed in antiquity, don't they, Varhely? Oh! I forgot; what do you know about love?”

At last, with a glass of champagne in her hand, she paused before a portrait of Marsa, a strange, powerful picture, the work of an artist who knew how to put soul into his painting.

“Ah! this is superb! Who painted it, Marsa?”

“Zichy,” replied Marsa.

“Ah, yes, Zichy! I am no longer astonished. By the way, there is another Hungarian artist who paints very well. I have heard of him. He is an old man; I don't exactly remember his name, something like Barabas.”

“Nicolas de Baratras,” said Varhely.

“Yes, that's it. It seems he is a master. But your Zichy pleases me infinitely. He has caught your eyes and expression wonderfully; it is exactly like you, Princess. I should like to have my portrait painted by him. His first name is Michel, is it not?”

She examined the signature, peering through her eyeglass, close to the canvas.

“Yes, I knew it was. Michel Zichy!”

This name of “Michel!” suddenly pronounced, sped like an arrow through Marsa's heart. She closed her eyes as if to shut out some hateful vision, and abruptly quitted the Baroness, who proceeded to analyze Zichy's portrait as she did the pictures in the salon on varnishing day. Marsa went toward other friends, answering their flatteries with smiles, and forcing herself to talk and forget.

Andras, in the midst of the crowd where Vogotzine's loud laugh alternated with the little cries of the Baroness, felt a complex sentiment: he wished his friends to enjoy themselves and yet he longed to be alone with Marsa, and to take her away. They were to go first to his hotel in Paris; and then to some obscure corner, probably to the villa of Sainte-Adresse, until September, when they were going to Venice, and from there to Rome for the winter.

It seemed to the Prince that all these people were taking away from him a part of his life. Marsa belonged to them, as she went from one to another, replying to the compliments which desperately resembled one another, from those of Angelo Valla, which were spoken in Italian, to those of little Yamada, the Parisianized Japanese. Andras now longed for the solitude of the preceding days; and Baroness Dinati, shaking her finger at him, said: "My dear Prince, you are longing to see us go, I know you are. Oh! don't say you are not! I am sure of it, and I can understand it. We had no lunch at my marriage. The Baron simply carried me off at the door of the church. Carried me off! How romantic that sounds! It suggests an elopement with a coach and four! Have no fear, though; leave it to me, I will disperse your guests!"

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She flew away before Zilah could answer; and, murmuring a word in the ears of her friends, tapping with her little hand upon the shoulders of the obstinate, she gradually cleared the rooms, and the sound of the departing carriages was soon heard, as they rolled down the avenue.

Andras and Marsa were left almost alone; Varhely still remaining, and the little Baroness, who ran up, all rosy and out of breath, to the Prince, and said, gayly, in her laughing voice:

“Well! What do you say to that? all vanished like smoke, even Jacquemin, who has gone back by train. The game of descampativos, which Marie Antoinette loved to play at Trianon, must have been a little like this. Aren’t you going to thank me? Ah! you ingrate!”

She ran and embraced Marsa, pressing her cherry lips to the Tzigana’s pale face, and then rapidly disappeared in a mock flight, with a gay little laugh and a tremendous rustle of petticoats.

Of all his friends, Varhely was the one of whom Andras was fondest; but they had not been able to exchange a single word since the morning. Yanski had been right to remain till the last: it was his hand which the Prince wished to press before his departure, as if Varhely had been his relative, and the sole surviving one.

“Now,” he said to him, “you have no longer only a brother, my dear Varhely; you have also a sister who loves and respects you as I love and respect you myself.”

Yanski’s stern face worked convulsively with an emotion he tried to conceal beneath an apparent roughness.

“You are right to love me a little,” he said, brusquely, “because I am very fond of you—of both of you,” nodding his head toward Marsa. “But no respect, please. That makes me out too old.”

The Tzigana, taking Vogotzine’s arm, led him gently toward the door, a little alarmed at the purple hue of the General’s cheeks and forehead. “Come, take a little fresh air,” she said to the old soldier, who regarded her with round, expressionless eyes.

As they disappeared in the garden, Varhely drew from his pocket the little package given to him by Menko’s valet.

“Here is something from another friend! It was brought to me at the door of the church.”

“Ah! I thought that Menko would send me some word of congratulation,” said Andras, after he had read upon the envelope the young Count’s signature. “Thanks, my dear Varhely.”

“Now,” said Yanski, “may happiness attend you, Andras! I hope that you will let me hear from you soon.”

Zilah took the hand which Varhely extended, and clasped it warmly in both his own.

Upon the steps Varhely found Marsa, who, in her turn, shook his hand.

“Au revoir, Count.”

“Au revoir, Princess.”

She smiled at Andras, who accompanied Varhely, and who held in his hand the package with the seals unbroken.

“Princess!” she said. “That is a title by which every one has been calling me for the last hour; but it gives me the greatest pleasure to hear it spoken by you, my dear Varhely. But, Princess or not, I shall always be for you the Tzigana, who will play for you, whenever you wish it, the airs of her country—of our country—!”

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There was, in the manner in which she spoke these simple words, a gentle grace which evoked in the mind of the old patriot memories of the past and the fatherland.

"The Tzigana is the most charming of all! The Tzigana is the most loved of all!" he said, in Hungarian, repeating a refrain of a Magyar song.

With a quick, almost military gesture, he saluted Andras and Marsa as they stood at the top of the steps, the sun casting upon them dancing reflections through the leaves of the trees.

The Prince and Princess responded with a wave of the hand; and General Vogotzine, who was seated under the shade of a chestnut-tree, with his coat unbuttoned and his collar open, tried in vain to rise to his feet and salute the departure of the last guest.

CHAPTER XXII

A DREAM SHATTERED

They were alone at last; free to exchange those eternal vows which they had just taken before the altar and sealed with a long, silent pressure when their hands were united; alone with their love, the devoted love they had read so long in each other's eyes, and which had burned, in the church, beneath Marsa's lowered lids, when the Prince had placed upon her finger the nuptial ring.

This moment of happiness and solitude after all the noise and excitement was indeed a blessed one!

Andras had placed upon the piano of the salon Michel Menko's package, and, seated upon the divan, he held both Marsa's hands in his, as she stood before him.

"My best wishes, Princess!" he said. "Princess! Princess Zilah! That name never sounded so sweet in my ears before! My wife! My dear and cherished wife!" As she listened to the music of the voice she loved, Marsa said to herself, that sweet indeed was life, which, after so many trials, still had in reserve for her such joys. And so deep was her happiness, that she wished everything could end now in a beautiful dream which should have no awakening.

"We will depart for Paris whenever you like," said the Prince.

"Yes," she exclaimed, sinking to his feet, and throwing her arms about his neck as he bent over her, "let us leave this house; take me away, take me away, and let a new life begin for me, the life I have longed for with you and your love!"

There was something like terror in her words, and in the way she clung to this man who was her hero. When she said "Let us leave this house," she thought, with a shudder, of all her cruel suffering, of all that she hated and which had weighed upon her like a nightmare. She thirsted for a different air, where no phantom of the past could pursue her, where she should feel free, where her life should belong entirely to him.

"I will go and take off this gown," she murmured, rising, "and we will run away like two eloping lovers."

"Take off that gown? Why? It would be such a pity! You are so lovely as you are!"

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"Well," said Marsa, glancing down upon him with an almost mutinous smile, which lent a peculiar charm to her beauty, "I will not change this white gown, then; a mantle thrown over it will do. And you will take your wife in her bridal dress to Paris, my Prince, my hero—my husband!"

He rose, threw his arms about her, and, holding her close to his heart, pressed one long, silent kiss upon the exquisite lips of his beautiful Tzigana.

She gently disengaged herself from his embrace, with a shivering sigh; and, going slowly toward the door, she turned, and threw him a kiss, saying:

"I will come back soon, my Andras!"

And, although wishing to go for her mantle, nevertheless she still stood there, with her eyes fixed upon the Prince and her mouth sweetly tremulous with a passion of feeling, as if she could not tear herself away.

The piano upon which Andras had cast the package given him by Varhely was there between them; and the Prince advanced a step or two, leaning his hand upon the ebony cover. As Marsa approached for a last embrace before disappearing on her errand, her glance fell mechanically upon the small package sealed with red wax; and, as she read, in the handwriting she knew so well, the address of the Prince and the signature of Michel Menko, she raised her eyes violently to the face of Prince Zilah, as if to see if this were not a trap; if, in placing this envelope within her view, he were not trying to prove her. There was in her look fright, sudden, instinctive fright, a fright which turned her very lips to ashes; and she recoiled, her eyes returning fascinated to the package, while Andras, surprised at the unexpected expression of the Tzigana's convulsed features, exclaimed, in alarm:

"What is it, Marsa? What is the matter?"

"I—I"

She tried to smile.

"Nothing—I do not know! I—"

She made a desperate effort to look him in the face; but she could not remove her eyes from that sealed package bearing the name Menko.

Ah! that Michel! She had forgotten him! Miserable wretch! He returned, he threatened her, he was about to avenge himself: she was sure of it!

That paper contained something horrible. What could Michel Menko have to say to Prince Andras, writing him at such an hour, except to tell him that the wretched woman he had married was branded with infamy?

She shuddered from head to foot, steadying herself against the piano, her lips trembling nervously.

“I assure you, Marsa—” began the Prince, taking her hands. “Your hands are cold. Are you ill?”

His eyes followed the direction of Marsa’s, which were still riveted upon the piano with a dumb look of unutterable agony.

He instantly seized the sealed package, and, holding it up, exclaimed:

“One would think that it was this which troubled you!”

“O Prince! I swear to you!—”

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"Prince?"

He repeated in amazement this title which she suddenly gave him; she, who called him Andras, as he called her Marsa. Prince? He also, in his turn, felt a singular sensation of fright, wondering what that package contained, and if Marsa's fate and his own were not connected with some unknown thing within it.

"Let us see," he said, abruptly breaking the seals, "what this is."

Rapidly, and as if impelled, despite herself, Marsa caught the wrist of her husband in her icy hand, and, terrified, supplicating, she cried, in a wild, broken voice:

"No, no, I implore you! No! Do not read it! Do not read it!"

He contemplated her coldly, and, forcing himself to be calm, asked:

"What does this parcel of Michel Menko's contain?"

"I do not know," gasped Marsa. "But do not read it! In the name of the Virgin" (the sacred adjuration of the Hungarians occurring to her mind, in the midst of her agony), "do not read it!"

"But you must be aware, Princess," returned Andras, "that you are taking the very means to force me to read it."

She shivered and moaned, there was such a change in the way Andras pronounced this word, which he had spoken a moment before in tones so loving and caressing—Princess.

Now the word threatened her.

"Listen! I am about to tell you: I wished—Ah! My God! My God! Unhappy woman that I am! Do not read, do not read!"

Andras, who had turned very pale, gently removed her grasp from the package, and said, very slowly and gravely, but with a tenderness in which hope still appeared:

"Come, Marsa, let us see; what do you wish me to think? Why do you wish me not to read these letters? for letters they doubtless are. What have letters sent me by Count Menko to do with you? You do not wish me to read them?"

He paused a moment, and then, while Marsa's eyes implored him with the mute prayer of a person condemned to death by the executioner, he repeated:

"You do not wish me to read them? Well, so be it; I will not read them, but upon one condition: you must swear to me, understand, swear to me, that your name is not traced in these letters, and that Michel Menko has nothing in common with the Princess Zilah."

She listened, she heard him; but Andras wondered whether she understood, she stood so still and motionless, as if stupefied by the shock of a moral tempest.

"There is, I am certain," he continued in the same calm, slow voice, "there is within this envelope some lie, some plot. I will not even know what it is. I will not ask you a single question, and I will throw these letters, unread, into the fire; but swear to me, that, whatever this Menko, or any other, may write to me, whatever any one may say, is an infamy and a calumny. Swear that, Marsa."

"Swear it, swear again? Swear always, then? Oath upon oath? Ah! it is too much!" she cried, her torpor suddenly breaking into an explosion of sobs and cries. "No! not another lie, not one! Monsieur, I am a wretch, a miserable woman! Strike me! Lash me, as I lash my dogs! I have deceived you! Despise me! Hate me! I am unworthy even of pity! The man whose letters you hold revenges himself, and stabs me, has been—my lover!"

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“Michel!”

“The most cowardly, the vilest being in the world! If he hated me, he might have killed me; he might have torn off my veil just now, and struck me across the lips. But to do this, to do this! To attack you, you, you! Ah! miserable dog; fit only to be stoned to death! Judas! Liar and coward! Would to heaven I had planted a knife in his heart!”

“Ah! My God!” murmured the Prince, as if stabbed himself.

At this cry of bitter agony from Andras Zilah, Marsa's imprecations ceased; and she threw herself madly at his feet; while he stood erect and pale—her judge.

She lay there, a mass of white satin and lace, her loosened hair falling upon the carpet, where the pale bridal flowers withered beneath her husband's heel; and Zilah, motionless, his glance wandering from the prostrate woman to the package of letters which burned his fingers, seemed ready to strike, with these proofs of her infamy, the distracted Tzigana, a wolf to threaten, a slave to supplicate.

Suddenly he leaned over, seized her by the wrists, and raised her almost roughly.

“Do you know,” he said, in low, quivering tones, “that the lowest of women is less culpable than you? Ten times, a hundred times, less culpable! Do you know that I have the right to kill you?”

“Ah! that, yes! Do it! do it! do it!” she cried, with the smile of a mad woman.

He pushed her slowly from him.

“Why have you committed this infamy? It was not for my fortune; you are rich.”

Marsa moaned, humiliated to the dust by this cold contempt. She would have preferred brutal anger; anything, to this.

“Ah! your fortune!” she said, finding a last excuse for herself out of the depth of her humiliation, which had now become eternal; “it was not that, nor your name, nor your title that I wished: it was your love!”

The heart of the Prince seemed wrung in a vise as this word fell from those lips, once adored, nay, still adored, soiled as they were.

“My love!”

“Yes, your love, your love alone! I would have confessed all, been your mistress, your slave, your thing, if I—I had not feared to lose you, to see myself abased in the eyes of you, whom I adored! I was afraid, afraid of seeing you fly from me—yes, that was my



crime! It is infamous, ah! I know it; but I thought only of keeping you, you alone; you, my admiration, my hero, my life, my god! I deserve to be punished; yes, yes, I deserve it—But those letters—those letters which you would have cast into the fire if I had not revealed the secret of my life—you told me so yourself—I might have sworn what you asked, and you would have believed me—I might have done so; but no, it would have been too vile, too cowardly! Ah! kill me! That is what I deserve, that is what—”

“Where are you going?” she cried, interrupting herself, her eyes dilated with fear, as she saw that Zilah, without answering, was moving toward the door.

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She forgot that she no longer had the right to question; she only felt, that, once gone, she would never see him again. Ah! a thousand times a blow with a knife rather than that! Was this the way the day, which began so brightly, was to end?

“Where are you going?”

“What does that matter to you?”

“True! I beg your pardon. At least—at least, Monsieur, one word, I implore. What are your commands? What do you wish me to do? There must be laws to punish those who have done what I have done! Shall I accuse myself, give myself up to justice? Ah! speak to me! speak to me!”

“Live with Michel Menko, if he is still alive after I have met him!” responded Andras, in hard, metallic tones, waving back the unhappy woman who threw herself on her knees, her arms outstretched toward him.

The door closed behind him. For a moment she gazed after him with haggard eyes: and then, dragging herself, her bridal robes trailing behind her, to the door, she tried to call after him, to detain the man whom she adored, and who was flying from her; but her voice failed her, and, with one wild, inarticulate cry, she fell forward on her face, with a horrible realization of the immense void which filled the house, this morning gay and joyous, now silent as a tomb.

And while the Prince, in the carriage which bore him away, read the letters in which Marsa spoke of her love for another, and that other the man whom he called “my child;” while he paused in this agonizing reading to ask himself if it were true, if such a sudden annihilation of his happiness were possible, if so many misfortunes could happen in such a few hours; while he watched the houses and trees revolve slowly by him, and feared that he was going mad—Marsa’s servants ate the remnants of the lunch, and drank what was left of the champagne to the health of the Prince and Princess Zilah.

CHAPTER XXIII

“The world holds but one fair maiden”

Paris, whose everyday gossip has usually the keenness and eagerness of the tattle of small villages, preserves at times, upon certain serious subjects, a silence which might be believed to be generous. Whether it is from ignorance or from respect, at all events it has little to say. There are vague suspicions of the truth, surmises are made, but nothing is affirmed; and this sort of abdication of public malignity is the most complete homage that can be rendered either to character or talent.

The circle of foreigners in Paris, that contrasted society which circled and chattered in the salon of the Baroness Dinati, could not, of necessity, be ignorant that the Princess Zilah, since the wedding which had attracted to Maisons-Lafitte a large part of the fashionable world, had not left her house, while Prince Andras had returned to Paris alone.

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There were low-spoken rumors of all sorts. It was said that Marsa had been attacked by an hereditary nervous malady; and in proof of this were cited the visits made at Maisons-Lafitte by Dr. Fargeas, the famous physician of Salpetriere, who had been summoned in consultation with Dr. Villandry. These two men, both celebrated in their profession, had been called in by Vogotzine, upon the advice of Yanski Varhely, who was more Parisian and better informed than the General.

Vogotzine was dreadfully uneasy, and his brain seemed ready to burst with the responsibility thrust upon him. Since the terrible day of the marriage—Vogotzine shrugged his shoulders in anger and amazement when he uttered this word marriage—Marsa had not recovered from a sort of frightened stupor; and the General, terrified at his niece's condition, was really afraid of going insane himself.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said, "all this is deplorably sad."

After the terrible overthrow of all her hopes, Marsa was seized with a fever, and she lay upon her bed in a frightful delirium, which entirely took away the little sense poor old Vogotzine had left. Understanding nothing of the reason of Zilah's disappearance, the General listened in childish alarm to Marsa, wildly imploring mercy and pity of some invisible person. The unhappy old man would have faced a battalion of honveds or a charge of bashi-bazouks rather than remain there in the solitary house, with the delirious girl whose sobs and despairing appeals made the tears stream down the face of this soldier, whose brain was now weakened by drink, but who had once contemplated with a dry eye, whole ditches full of corpses, which some priest, dressed in mourning, blessed in one mass.

Vogotzine hastened to Paris, and questioned Andras; but the Prince answered him in a way that permitted of no further conversation upon the subject.

"My personal affairs concern myself alone."

The General had not energy enough to demand an explanation; and he bowed, saying that it was certainly not his business to interfere; but he noticed that Zilah turned very pale when he told him that it would be a miracle if Marsa recovered from the fever.

"It is pitiful!" he said.

Zilah cast a strange look at him, severe and yet terrified.

Vogotzine said no more; but he went at once to Dr. Fargeas, and asked him to come as soon as possible to Maisons-Lafitte.

The doctor's coupe in a few hours stopped before the gate through which so short a time ago the gay marriage cortege had passed, and Vogotzine ushered him into the little salon from which Marsa had once driven Menko.

Then the General sent for Mademoiselle—or, rather, Madame, as he corrected himself with a shrug of his shoulders. But suddenly he became very serious as he saw upon the threshold Marsa, whose fever had temporarily left her, and who could now manage to drag herself along, pale and wan, leaning upon the arm of her maid.

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Dr. Fargeas cast a keen glance at the girl, whose eyes, burning with inward fire, alone seemed to be living.

“Madame,” said the doctor, quietly, when the General had made a sign to his niece to listen to the stranger, “General Vogotzine has told me that you were suffering. I am a physician. Will you do me the honor and the kindness to answer my questions?”

“Yes,” said the General, “do, my dear Marsa, to please me.”

She stood erect, not a muscle of her face moving; and, without replying, she looked steadily into the doctor’s eyes. In her turn, she was studying him. It was like a defiance before a duel.

Then she said suddenly, turning to Vogotzine:

“Why have you brought a physician? I am not ill.”

Her voice was clear, but low and sad, and it was an evident effort for her to speak.

“No, you are not ill, my dear child; but I don’t know—I don’t understand—you make me a little uneasy, a very little. You know if I, your old uncle, worried you even a little, you would not feel just right about it, would you now?”

With which rather incoherent speech, he tried to force a smile; but Marsa, taking no notice of him, turned slowly to the doctor, who had not removed his eyes from her face.

“Well,” she said, dryly, “what do you want? What do you wish to ask me? What shall I tell you? Who requested you to come here?”

Vogotzine made a sign to the maid to leave the room.

“I told you, I have come at the General’s request,” said Fargeas, with a wave of his hand toward Vogotzine.

Marsa only replied: “Ah!” But it seemed to the doctor that there was a world of disappointment and despair expressed in this one ejaculation.

Then she suddenly became rigid, and lapsed into one of those stupors which had succeeded the days of delirium, and had frightened Vogotzine so much.

“There! There! Look at her!” exclaimed the old man.

Fargeas, without listening to the General, approached Marsa, and placed her in a chair near the window. He looked in her eyes, and placed his hand upon her burning forehead; but Marsa made no movement.

“Are you in pain?” he asked, gently.

The young girl, who a moment before had asked questions and still seemed interested a little in life, stirred uneasily, and murmured, in an odd, singing voice:

“I do not know!”

“Did you sleep last night?”

“I do not know!”

“How old are you?” asked Fargeas, to test her mental condition.

“I do not know!”

The physician’s eyes sought those of the General. Vogotzine, his face crimson, stood by the chair, his little, round eyes blinking with emotion at each of these mournful, musical responses.

“What is your name?” asked the doctor, slowly.

She raised her dark, sad eyes, and seemed to be seeking what to reply; then, wearily letting her head fall backward, she answered, as before:

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"I do not know!"

Vogotzine, who had become purple, seized the doctor's arm convulsively.

"She no longer knows even her own name!"

"It will be only temporary, I hope," said the doctor. "But in her present state, she needs the closest care and attention."

"I have never seen her like this before, never since—since the first day," exclaimed the General, in alarm and excitement. "She tried to kill herself then; but afterward she seemed more reasonable, as you saw just now. When she asked you who sent you, I thought Ah! at last she is interested in something. But now it is worse than ever. Oh! this is lively for me, devilish lively!"

Fargeas took between his thumb and finger the delicate skin of the Tzigana, and pinched her on the neck, below the ear. Marsa did not stir.

"There is no feeling here," said the doctor; "I could prick it with a pin without causing any sensation of pain." Then, again placing his hand upon Marsa's forehead, he tried to rouse some memory in the dormant brain:

"Come, Madame, some one is waiting for you. Your uncle—your uncle wishes you to play for him upon the piano! Your uncle! The piano!"

"The World holds but One Fair Maiden!" hummed Vogotzine, trying to give, in his husky voice, the melody of the song the Tzigana was so fond of.

Mechanically, Marsa repeated, as if spelling the word: "The piano! piano!" and then, in peculiar, melodious accents, she again uttered her mournful: "I do not know!"

This time old Vogotzine felt as if he were strangling; and the doctor, full of pity, gazed sadly down at the exquisitely beautiful girl, with her haggard, dark eyes, and her waxen skin, sitting there like a marble statue of despair.

"Give her some bouillon," said Fargeas. "She will probably refuse it in her present condition; but try. She can be cured," he added; "but she must be taken away from her present surroundings. Solitude is necessary, not this here, but—"

"But?" asked Vogotzine, as the doctor paused.

"But, perhaps, that of an asylum. Poor woman!" turning again to Marsa, who had not stirred. "How beautiful she is!"



The doctor, greatly touched, despite his professional indifference, left the villa, the General accompanying him to the gate. It was decided that he should return the next day with Villandry and arrange for the transportation of the invalid to Dr. Sims's establishment at Vaugirard. In a new place her stupor might disappear, and her mind be roused from its torpor; but a constant surveillance was necessary. Some pretext must be found to induce Marsa to enter a carriage; but once at Vaugirard, the doctor gave the General his word that she should be watched and taken care of with the utmost devotion.

Vogotzine felt the blood throb in his temples as he listened to the doctor's decision. The establishment at Vaugirard! His niece, the daughter of Prince Tcheretteff, and the wife of Prince Zilah, in an insane asylum!

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But he himself had not the right to dispose of Marsa's liberty; the consent of the Prince was necessary. It was in vain for Andras to refuse to have his life disturbed; it was absolutely necessary to find out from him what should be done with Marsa, who was his wife and Princess Zilah.

The General also felt that he was incapable of understanding anything, ignorant as he was of the reasons of the rupture, of Zilah's anger against the Tzigana, and of the young girl's terrible stupor; and, as he drank his cherry cordial or his brandy, wondered if he too were insane, as he repeated, like his niece:

"I do not know! I do not know!"

He felt obliged, however, to go and tell the Prince of the opinion of the illustrious physician of Salpetriere.

Then he asked Zilah:

"What is your decision?"

"General," replied Andras, "whatever you choose to do is right. But, once for all, remember that I wish henceforth to live alone, entirely alone, and speak to me neither of the future nor of the past, which is cruel, nor of the present, which is hopeless. I have determined——"

"What?"

"To live hereafter an absolutely selfish life!"

"That will change you," returned the General, in amazement.

"And will console me," added Andras.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Life is a tempest
Nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair
No answer to make to one who has no right to question me
Nothing ever astonishes me
Poverty brings wrinkles

PRINCE ZILAH

By Jules Claretie

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LITTLE PARISIAN ROMANCE

The very evening of the day when the package of letters had killed in Andras all happiness and all faith, the Hungarian prince presented himself in the Rue d'Aumale, to seek Michel Menko.

Menko! That boy whom he had loved almost as a brother, that man for whom he had hoped a glorious future, Michel, Michel Menko, had betrayed him, and struck him with the perfidy of a coward. Yes, at the door of the church, when it was too late, or rather, at a time when the blow would be surer and the wound more deadly—then Menko had said to him: “My dear Prince, the woman whom you love, the woman whom you have married, has been my mistress. Here, read, see how she loved me!”

Had Michel been before him, Andras would have seized the young man by the throat, and strangled him on the spot; but, when he reached the Rue d'Aumale, he did not find Menko.

“The Count left town yesterday,” said the servant, in answer to his question.

“Yesterday! Where has he gone?”

“The Count must have taken the steamer to-day at Havre for New York. The Count did not tell us exactly where he was going, however, but to America, somewhere. We only know, the coachman Pierre, and myself, that the Count will not return again to Paris. We are still in his service, however, and are to await his orders.”

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Hesitating a little, the servant added:

“Have I not the honor to speak to Prince Zilah?”

“Why?” asked Andras.

The valet replied with a humble but very sincere air:

“Because, if Monseigneur should hear from the Count, and there is any question of the package which I took to Maisons-Lafitte this morning for Monseigneur—”

“Well?” said Andras.

“Monseigneur would greatly oblige me if he would not let the Count know that I did not fulfil his orders last evening.”

“Last evening? What do you mean? Explain yourself!” said the Prince, sternly.

“When he left yesterday, the Count expressly ordered me to take the package to Monseigneur that very evening. I beg Monseigneur’s pardon; but I had an invitation to a wedding, and I did not carry out the Count’s instructions until this morning. But, as Monseigneur was not at home, I took the train to Maisons-Lafitte. I hope that I did not arrive too late. The Count was very particular about it, and I should be very sorry if my negligence has done any harm.”

Andras listened, gazing intently upon the face of the servant, who was a little discountenanced by this silent inquisition.

“So Count Menko wished the package to be delivered to me yesterday?”

“I beg Monseigneur not to tell the Count that he was not obeyed.”

“Yesterday?” repeated Andras.

“Yes, yesterday, Monseigneur. The Count departed, thinking it would be done; and, indeed, he had a right to think so. I am very careful, Monseigneur, very careful; and if Monseigneur should some day have need of a—”

The Prince stopped the valet with a gesture. It was repugnant to Andras to have this man mixed up in a secret of his life; and such a secret! But the domestic was evidently ignorant what a commission Menko had confided to him: in his eyes, the package, containing such letters, was like any other package. Andras was persuaded of this by the attitude of the man, humiliated at having failed in his duty.



A word more exchanged with the valet, and Andras would have felt humiliated himself. But he had gained from the conversation the idea that Menko had not wished to insult him in his happiness, but to reveal all to him before the ceremony had yet been celebrated. It was as atrocious, but not so cowardly. Menko had wished to attack Marsa, rather than Andras; this was visible in the express commands given to his valet. And upon what a trifle had it depended, whether the name of Zilah should be borne by this woman! Upon what? Upon a servant's feast! Life is full of strange chances. The hands of that low-born valet had held for hours his happiness and his honor—his honor, Andras Zilah's—the honor of all his race!

The Prince returned to his hotel, which he had left that morning thinking that he would soon bring there the woman he then adored, but whom he now despised and hated. Oh! he would know where Menko had gone; him he could punish; as for Marsa, she was now dead to him.

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But where, in the whirlpool of the New World, would this Michel Menko disappear? and how could he find him?

The days passed; and Zilah had acquired almost the certainty that Menko had not embarked at Havre. Perhaps he had not quitted Europe. He might, some day or another, in spite of what the valet had said, reappear in Paris; and then—

Meanwhile, the Prince led the life of a man wounded to the heart; seeking solitude, and shutting himself in his hotel, in the Rue Balzac, like a wolf in his den; receiving no one but Varhely, and sometimes treating even old Yanski coldly; then, suddenly emerging from his retirement, and trying to take up his life again; appearing at the meetings of the Hungarian aid society, of which he was president; showing himself at the races, at the theatre, or even at Baroness Dinati's; longing to break the dull monotony of his now ruined life; and, with a sort of bravado, looking society and opinion full in the face, as if to surprise a smile or a sneer at his expense, and punish it.

He had, however, no right to complain of the sentiment which was felt for him, for every one respected and admired him. At first, it is true, society, and in particular that society of Parisian foreigners in which Prince Andras mingled, had tried to find out why he had broken so suddenly with the woman he had certainly married for love. Public curiosity, aroused and excited, had sought to divine the secret of the romance. "If it does not get into the newspapers," they said, "it will be fortunate." And society was even astonished that the journals had not already discovered the key to this Parisian mystery.

But society, after all as fickle as it is curious (one of its little vices chasing away the other), turned suddenly to another subject; forgot the rupture of Marsa and Andras, and saw in Zilah only a superior being, whose lofty soul forced respect from the frivolous set accustomed to laugh at everything.

A lofty soul, yes, but a soul in torment. Varhely alone, among them all, knew anything of the suffering which Andras endured. He was no longer the same man. His handsome face, with its kindly eyes and grave smile, was now constantly overshadowed. He spoke less, and thought more. On the subject of his sadness and his grief, Andras never uttered a word to any one, not even to his old friend; and Yanski, silent from the day when he had been an unconscious messenger of ill, had not once made any allusion to the past.

Although he knew nothing, Varhely had, nevertheless, guessed everything, and at once. The blow was too direct and too cruelly simple for the old Hungarian not to have immediately exclaimed, with rage:

"Those were love-letters, and I gave them to him! Idiot that I was! I held those letters in my hand; I might have destroyed them, or crammed them one by one down Menko's throat! But who could have suspected such an infamy? Menko! A man of honor! Ah,

yes; what does honor amount to when there is a woman in question? Imbecile! And it is irreparable now, irreparable!"

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Varhely also was anxious to know where Menko had gone. They did not know at the Austro-Hungarian embassy. It was a complete disappearance, perhaps a suicide. If the old Hungarian had met the young man, he would at least have gotten rid of part of his bile. But the angry thought that he, Varhely, had been associated in a vile revenge which had touched Andras, was, for the old soldier, a constant cause for ill-humor with himself, and a thing which, in a measure, poisoned his life.

Varhely had long been a misanthrope himself; but he tried to struggle against his own temperament when he saw Andras wrapping himself up in bitterness and gloomy thoughts.

Little by little, Zilah allowed himself to sink into that state where not only everything becomes indifferent to us, but where we long for another suffering, further pain, that we may utter more bitter cries, more irritated complaints against fate. It seems then that everything is dark about us, and our endless night is traversed by morbid visions, and peopled with phantoms. The sick man—for the one who suffers such torture is sick—would willingly seek a new sorrow, like those wounded men who, seized with frenzy, open their wounds themselves, and irritate them with the point of a knife. Then, misanthropy and disgust of life assume a phase in which pain is not without a certain charm. There is a species of voluptuousness in this appetite for suffering, and the sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony.

With Zilah, this sad state was due to a sort of insurrection of his loyalty against the many infamies to be met with in this world, which he had believed to be only too full of virtues.

He now considered himself an idiot, a fool, for having all his life adored chimeras, and followed, as children do passing music, the fanfares of poetic chivalry. Yes, faith, enthusiasm, love, were so many cheats, so many lies. All beings who, like himself, were worshippers of the ideal, all dreamers of better things, all lovers of love, were inevitably doomed to deception, treason, and the stupid ironies of fate. And, full of anger against himself, his pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday, he abandoned himself with delight to his bitterness, and he took keen joy in repeating to himself that the secret of happiness in this life was to believe in nothing except treachery, and to defend oneself against men as against wolves.

Very rarely, his real frank, true nature would come to the fore, and he would say:

“After all, are the cowardice of one man, and the lie of one woman, to be considered the crime of entire humanity?”

Why should he curse, he would think, other beings than Marsa and Menko? He had no right to hate any one else; he had no enemy that he knew of, and he was honored in Paris, his new country.

No enemy? No, not one. And yet, one morning, with his letters, his valet brought him a journal addressed to “Prince Zilah,” and, on unfolding it, Andras’s attention was attracted to two paragraphs in the column headed “Echoes of Paris,” which were marked with a red-lead pencil.

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It was a number of 'L'Actualite', sent through the post by an unknown hand, and the red marks were evidently intended to point out to the Prince something of interest to himself.

Andras received few journals. A sudden desire seized him, as if he had a presentiment of what it contained, to cast this one into the fire without reading it. For a moment he held it in his fingers ready to throw it into the grate. Then a few words read by accident invincibly prevented him.

He read, at first with poignant sorrow, and then with a dull rage, the two paragraphs, one of which followed the other in the paper.

"A sad piece of news has come to our ears," ran the first paragraph, "a piece of news which has afflicted all the foreign colony of Paris, and especially the Hungarians. The lovely and charming Princess Z., whose beauty was recently crowned with a glorious coronet, has been taken, after a consultation of the princes of science (there are princes in all grades), to the establishment of Dr. Sims, at Vaugirard, the rival of the celebrated asylum of Dr. Luys, at Ivry. Together with the numerous friends of Prince A. Z., we hope that the sudden malady of the Princess Z. will be of short duration."

So Marsa was now the patient, almost the prisoner, of Dr. Sims! The orders of Dr. Fargeas had been executed. She was in an insane asylum, and Andras, despite himself, felt filled with pity as he thought of it.

But the red mark surrounded both this first "Echo of Paris," and the one which followed it; and Zilah, impelled now by eager curiosity, proceeded with his reading.

But he uttered a cry of rage when he saw, printed at full length, given over to common curiosity, to the eagerness of the public for scandal, and to the malignity of blockheads, a direct allusion to his marriage—worse than that, the very history of his marriage placed in an outrageous manner next to the paragraph in which his name was almost openly written. The editor of the society journal passed directly from the information in regard to the illness of Princess Z. to an allegorical tale in which Andras saw the secret of his life and the wounds of his heart laid bare.

A little Parisian romance

Like most of the Parisian romances of to-day, the little romance in question is an exotic one. Paris belongs to foreigners. When the Parisians, whose names appear in the chronicles of fashion, are not Americans, Russians, Roumanians, Portuguese, English, Chinese, or Hungarians, they do not count; they are no longer Parisians. The Parisians of the day are Parisians of the Prater, of the Newski Perspective or of Fifth Avenue; they are no longer pureblooded Parisians. Within ten years from now the boulevards will be

situated in Chicago, and one will go to pass his evenings at the Eden Theatre of Pekin. So, this is the latest Parisian romance:

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Once upon a time there was in Paris a great lord, a Moldavian, or a Wallachian, or a Moldo-Wallachian (in a word, a Parisian—a Parisian of the Danube, if you like), who fell in love with a young Greek, or Turk, or Armenian (also of Paris), as dark-browed as the night, as beautiful as the day. The great lord was of a certain age, that is, an uncertain age. The beautiful Athenian or Georgian, or Circassian, was young. The great lord was generally considered to be imprudent. But what is to be done when one loves? Marry or don't marry, says Rabelais or Moliere. Perhaps they both said it. Well, at all events, the great lord married. It appears, if well-informed people are to be believed, that the great Wallachian lord and the beautiful Georgian did not pass two hours after their marriage beneath the same roof. The very day of their wedding, quietly, and without scandal, they separated, and the reason of this rupture has for a long time puzzled Parisian high-life. It was remarked, however, that the separation of the newly-married pair was coincident with the disappearance of a very fashionable attache who, some years ago, was often seen riding in the Bois, and who was then considered to be the most graceful waltzer of the Viennese, or Muscovite, or Castilian colony of Paris. We might, if we were indiscreet, construct a whole drama with these three people for our *dramatis personae*; but we wish to prove that reporters (different in this from women) sometimes know how to keep a secret. For those ladies who are, perhaps, still interested in the silky moustaches of the fugitive ex-diplomat, we can add, however, that he was seen at Brussels a short time ago. He passed through there like a shooting star. Some one who saw him noticed that he was rather pale, and that he seemed to be still suffering from the wounds received not long ago. As for the beautiful Georgian, they say she is in despair at the departure of her husband, the great Wallachian lord, who, in spite of his ill-luck, is really a Prince Charming.

Andras Zilah turned rapidly to the signature of this article. The "Echoes of Paris" were signed Puck. Puck? Who was this Puck? How could an unknown, an anonymous writer, a retailer of scandals, be possessed of his secret? For Andras believed that his suffering was a secret; he had never had an idea that any one could expose it to the curiosity of the crowd, as this editor of *L'Actualite* had done. He felt an increased rage against the invisible Michel Menko, who had disappeared after his infamy; and it seemed to him that this Puck, this unknown journalist, was an accomplice or a friend of

Michel Menko, and that, behind the pseudonym of the writer, he perceived the handsome face, twisted moustache and haughty smile of the young Count.

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"After all," he said to himself, "we shall soon find out. Monsieur Puck must be less difficult to unearth than Michel Menko."

He rang for his valet, and was about to go out, when Yanski Varhely was announced.

The old Hungarian looked troubled, and his brows were contracted in a frown. He could not repress a movement of anger when he perceived, upon the Prince's table, the marked number of *L'Actualite*.

Varhely, when he had an afternoon to get rid of, usually went to the Palais-Royal. He had lived for twenty years not far from there, in a little apartment near Saint-Roch. Drinking in the fresh air, under the striped awning of the Cafe de la Rotunde, he read the journals, one after the other, or watched the sparrows fly about and peck up the grains in the sand. Children ran here and there, playing at ball; and, above the noise of the promenaders, arose the music of the brass band.

It was chiefly the political news he sought for in the French or foreign journals. He ran through them all with his nose in the sheets, which he held straight out by the wooden file, like a flag. With a rapid glance, he fell straight upon the Hungarian names which interested him—Deak sometimes, sometimes Andrassy; and from a German paper he passed to an English, Spanish, or Italian one, making, as he said, a tour of Europe, acquainted as he was with almost all European languages.

An hour before he appeared at the Prince's house, he was seated in the shade of the trees, scanning '*L'Actualite*', when he suddenly uttered an oath of anger (an Hungarian '*teremtete!*') as he came across the two paragraphs alluding to Prince Andras.

Varhely read the lines over twice, to convince himself that he was not mistaken, and that it was Prince Zilah who was designated with the skilfully veiled innuendo of an expert journalist. There was no chance for doubt; the indistinct nationality of the great lord spoken of thinly veiled the Magyar characteristics of Andras, and the paragraph which preceded the "*Little Parisian Romance*" was very skilfully arranged to let the public guess the name of the hero of the adventure, while giving to the anecdote related the piquancy of the anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers.

Then Varhely had only one idea.

"Andras must not know of this article. He scarcely ever reads the journals; but some one may have sent this paper to him."

And the old misanthrope hurried to the Prince's hotel, thinking this: that there always exist people ready to forward paragraphs of this kind.

When he perceived '*L'Actualite*' upon the Prince's table, he saw that his surmise was only too correct, and he was furious with himself for arriving too late.

“Where are you going?” he asked Andras, who was putting on his gloves.

The Prince took up the marked paper, folded it slowly, and replied:

“I am going out.”

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"Have you read that paper?"

"The marked part of it, yes."

"You know that that sheet is never read, it has no circulation whatever, it lives from its advertisements. There is no use in taking any notice of it."

"If there were question only of myself, I should not take any notice of it. But they have mixed up in this scandal the name of the woman to whom I have given my name. I wish to know who did it, and why he did it."

"Oh! for nothing, for fun! Because this Monsieur—how does he sign himself?—Puck had nothing else to write about."

"It is certainly absurd," remarked Zilah, "to imagine that a man can live in the ideal. At every step the reality splashes you with mud."

As he spoke, he moved toward the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Varhely again.

"To the office of this journal."

"Do not commit such an imprudence. The article, which has made no stir as yet, will be read and talked of by all Paris if you take any notice of it, and it will be immediately commented upon by the correspondents of the Austrian and Hungarian journals."

"That matters little to me!" said the Prince, resolutely. "Those people will only do what their trade obliges them to. But, before everything, I am resolved to do my duty. That is my part in this matter."

"Then I will accompany you."

"No," replied Andras, "I ask you not to do that; but it is probable that to-morrow I shall request you to serve as my second."

"A duel?"

"Exactly."

"With Monsieur—Puck?"

"With whoever insults me. The name is perfectly immaterial. But since he escapes me and she is irresponsible—and punished—I regard as an accomplice of their infamy any man who makes allusion to it with either tongue or pen. And, my dear Varhely, I wish to

act alone. Don't be angry; I know that in your hands my honor would be as faithfully guarded as in my own."

"Without any doubt," said Varhely, in an odd tone, pulling his rough moustache, "and I hope to prove it to you some day."

CHAPTER XXV

The home of "Puck"

Prince Zilah did not observe at all the marked significance old Yanski gave to this last speech. He shook Varhely's hand, entered a cab, and, casting a glance at the journal in his hands, he ordered the coachman to drive to the office of 'L'Actualite', Rue Halevy, near the Opera.

The society journal, whose aim was represented by its title, had its quarters on the third floor in that semi-English section where bars, excursion agencies, steamboat offices, and manufacturers of travelling-bags give to the streets a sort of Britannic aspect. The office of 'L'Actualite' had only recently been established there. Prince Zilch read the number of the room upon a brass sign and went up.

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In the outer office there were only two or three clerks at work behind the grating. None of these had the right to reveal the names hidden under pseudonyms; they did not even know them. Zilch perceived, through an open door, the reporters' room, furnished with a long table covered with pens, ink, and pads of white paper. This room was empty; the journal was made up in the evening, and the reporters were absent.

"Is there any one who can answer me?" asked the Prince.

"Probably the secretary can," replied a clerk. "Have you a card, Monsieur? or, if you will write your name upon a bit of paper, it will do."

Andras did so; the clerk opened a door in the corridor and disappeared. After a minute or two he reappeared, and said to the Prince:

"If you will follow me, Monsieur Fremin will see you."

Andras found himself in the presence of a pleasant-looking middle-aged man, who was writing at a modest desk when the Hungarian entered, and who bowed politely, motioning him to be seated.

As Zilch sat down upon the sofa, there appeared upon the threshold of a door, opposite the one by which he had entered, a small, dark, elegantly dressed young man, whom Andras vaguely remembered to have seen somewhere, he could not tell where. The newcomer was irreproachable in his appearance, with his clothes built in the latest fashion, snowy linen, pale gray gloves, silver-headed cane, and a single eyeglass, dangling from a silken cord.

He bowed to Zilch, and, going up to the secretary, he said, rapidly:

"Well! since Tourillon is away, I will report the Enghien races. I am going there now. Enghien isn't highly diverting, though. The swells and the pretty women so rarely go there; they don't affect Enghien any more. But duty before everything, eh, Fremin?"

"You will have to hurry," said Fremin, looking at his watch, "or you will miss your train."

"Oh! I have a carriage below."

He clapped his confrere on the shoulder, bowed again to Zilah, and hurried away, while Fremin, turning to the Prince, said:

"I am at your service, Monsieur," and waited for him to open the conversation.

Zilah drew from his pocket the copy of *L'Actualite*, and said, very quietly:

"I should like to know, Monsieur, who is meant in this article here."

And, folding the paper, with the passage which concerned him uppermost, he handed it to the secretary.

Fremin glanced at the article.

“Yes, I have seen this paragraph,” he said; “but I am entirely ignorant to whom it alludes. I am not even certain that it is not a fabrication, invented out of whole cloth.”

“Ah!” said Zilah. “The author of the article would know, I suppose?”

“It is highly probable,” replied Fremin, with a smile.

“Will you tell me, then, the name of the person who wrote this?”

“Isn’t the article signed?”

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"It is signed Puck. That is not a name."

"A pseudonym is a name in literature," said Fremin. "I am of the opinion, however, that one has always the right to demand to see a face which is covered by a mask. But the person who makes this demand should be personally interested. Does this story, to which you have called my attention, concern you, Monsieur?"

"Suppose, Monsieur," answered Zilah, a little disconcerted, for he perceived that he had to do with a courteous, well-bred man, "suppose that the man who is mentioned, or rather insulted, here, were my best friend. I wish to demand an explanation of the person who wrote this article, and to know, also, if it was really a journalist who composed those lines."

"You mean?—"

"I mean that there may be people interested in having such an article published, and I wish to know who they are."

"You are perfectly justified, Monsieur; but only one person can tell you that—the writer of the article."

"It is for that reason, Monsieur, that I desire to know his name."

"He does not conceal it," said Fremin. "The pseudonym is only designed as a stimulant to curiosity; but Puck is a corporeal being."

"I am glad to hear it," said Zilah. "Now, will you be kind enough to give me his name?"

"Paul Jacquemin."

Zilah knew the name well, having seen it at the end of a report of his river fete; but he hardly thought Jacquemin could be so well informed. Since he had lived in France, the Hungarian exile had not been accustomed to regard Paris as a sort of gossiping village, where everything is found out, talked over, and commented upon with eager curiosity, and where every one's aim is to appear to have the best and most correct information.

"I must ask you now, Monsieur, where Monsieur Paul Jacquemin lives?"

"Rue Rochechouart, at the corner of the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said Andras, rising, the object of his call having been accomplished.

"One moment," said Fremin, "if you intend to go at once to Monsieur Jacquemin's house, you will not find him at home just now."



“Why not?”

“Because you saw him here a few minutes ago, and he is now on his way to Enghien.”

“Indeed!” said the Prince. “Very well, I will wait.”

He bade farewell to Fremin, who accompanied him to the door; and, when seated in his carriage, he read again the paragraph of Puck—that Puck, who, in the course of the same article, referred many times to the brilliancy of “our colleague Jacquemin,” and complacently cited the witticisms of “our clever friend Jacquemin.”

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Zilah remembered this Jacquemin now. It was he whom he had seen taking notes upon the parapet of the quay, and afterward at the wedding, where he had been brought by the Baroness Dinati. It was Jacquemin who was such a favorite with the little Baroness; who was one of the licensed distributors of celebrity and quasi-celebrity for all those who live upon gossip and for gossip-great ladies who love to see their names in print, and actresses wild over a new role; who was one of the chroniclers of fashion, received everywhere, flattered, caressed, petted; whom the Prince had just seen, very elegant with his stick and eyeglass, and his careless, disdainful air; and who had said, like a man accustomed to every magnificence, fatigued with luxury, blase with pleasure, and caring only for what is truly pschutt (to use the latest slang): "Pretty women so rarely go there!"

Zilah thought that, as the Baroness had a particular predilection for Jacquemin, it was perhaps she, who, in her gay chatter, had related the story to the reporter, and who, without knowing it probably, assuredly without wishing it, had furnished an article for 'L'Actualite'. In all honor, Jacquemin was really the spoiled child of the Baroness, the director of the entertainments at her house. With a little more conceit, Jacquemin, who was by no means lacking in that quality, however, might have believed that the pretty little woman was in love with him. The truth is, the Baroness Dinati was only in love with the reporter's articles, those society articles in which he never forgot her, but paid, with a string of printed compliments, for his champagne and truffles.

"And yet," thought Zilah, "no, upon reflection, I am certain that the Baroness had nothing to do with this outrage. Neither with intention nor through imprudence would she have given any of these details to this man."

Now that the Prince knew his real name, he might have sent to Monsieur Puck, Varhely, and another of his friends. Jacquemin would then give an explanation; for of reparation Zilah thought little. And yet, full of anger, and not having Menko before him, he longed to punish some one; he wished, that, having been made to suffer so himself, some one should expiate his pain. He would chastise this butterfly reporter, who had dared to interfere with his affairs, and wreak his vengeance upon him as if he were the coward who had fled. And, besides, who knew, after all, if this Jacquemin were not the confidant of Menko? Varhely would not have recognized in the Prince the generous Zilah of former times, full of pity, and ready to forgive an injury.

Andras could not meet Jacquemin that day, unless he waited for him at the office of 'L'Actualite' until the races were over, and he therefore postponed his intended interview until the next day.

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About eleven o'clock in the morning, after a sleepless night, he sought the Rue Rochechouart, and the house Fremin had described to him. It was there: an old weather-beaten house, with a narrow entrance and a corridor, in the middle of which flowed a dirty, foul-smelling stream of water; the room of the concierge looked like a black hole at the foot of the staircase, the balusters and walls of which were wet with moisture and streaked with dirt; a house of poor working-people, many stories high, and built in the time when this quarter of Paris was almost a suburb.

Andras hesitated at first to enter, thinking that he must be mistaken. He thought of little Jacquemin, dainty and neat as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox, and his disdainful remarks upon the races of Enghien, where the swells no longer went. It was not possible that he lived here in this wretched, shabby place.

The concierge replied to the Prince, however, when he asked for Jacquemin: "Yes, Monsieur, on the fifth floor, the door to the right;" and Zilah mounted the dark stairs.

When he reached the fifth floor, he did not yet believe it possible that the Jacquemin who lived there was the one he had seen the day before, the one whom Baroness Dinati petted, "our witty colleague Jacquemin."

He knocked, however, at the door on the right, as he had been directed. No one came to open it; but he could hear within footsteps and indistinct cries. He then perceived that there was a bell-rope, and he pulled it. Immediately he heard some one approaching from within.

He felt a singular sensation of concentrated anger, united to a fear that the Jacquemin he was in search of was not there.

The door opened, and a woman appeared, young, rather pale, with pretty blond hair, somewhat disheveled, and dressed in a black skirt, with a white dressing-sack thrown over her shoulders.

She smiled mechanically as she opened the door, and, as she saw a strange face, she blushed crimson, and pulled her sack together beneath her chin, fastening it with a pin.

"Monsieur Jacquemin?" said Andras, taking off his hat.

"Yes, Monsieur, he lives here," replied the young woman, a little astonished.

"Monsieur Jacquemin, the journalist?" asked Andras.

"Yes, yes, Monsieur," she answered with a proud little smile, which Zilah was not slow to notice. She now opened the door wide, and said, stepping aside to let the visitor pass:



"Will you take the trouble to come in, Monsieur?" She was not accustomed to receive calls (Jacquemin always making his appointments at the office); but, as the stranger might be some one who brought her husband work, as she called it, she was anxious not to let him go away before she knew what his errand was.

"Please come in, Monsieur!"

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The Prince entered, and, crossing the entry in two steps, found himself in a small dining-room opening directly out of the kitchen, where three tiny little children were playing, the youngest, who could not have been more than eighteen months, crawling about on the floor. Upon the ragged oilcloth which covered the table, Zilah noticed two pairs of men's gloves, one gray, the other yellow, and a heap of soiled white cravats. Upon a wooden chair, by the open door of the kitchen, was a tub full of shirts, which the young woman had doubtless been washing when the bell rang.

The cries Zilah had heard came from the children, who were now silent, staring at the tall gentleman, who looked at them in surprise.

The young woman was small and very pretty, but with the pallor of fatigue and overwork; her lips were beautifully chiselled, but almost colorless; and she was so thin that her figure had the frail appearance of an unformed girl.

"Will you sit down, Monsieur?" she asked, timidly, advancing a cane-bottomed chair.

Everything in these poor lodgings was of the most shabby description. In a cracked mirror with a broken frame were stuck cards of invitation, theatre checks, and race tickets admitting to the grand stand. Upon a cheap little table with broken corners was a heap of New Year's cards, bonbon boxes, and novels with soiled edges. Upon the floor, near the children, were some remnants of toys; and the cradle in which the baby slept at night was pushed into a corner with a child's chair, the arms of which were gone.

Zilah was both astonished and pained. He had not expected to encounter this wretched place, the poorly clad children, and the woman's timid smile.

"Is Monsieur Jacquemin at home?" he asked abruptly, desiring to leave at once if the man whom he sought was not there.

"No, Monsieur; but he will not be long away. Sit down, Monsieur, please!"

She entreated so gently, with such an uneasy air at the threatened departure of this man who had doubtless brought some good news for her husband, that the Prince mechanically obeyed, thinking again that there was evidently some mistake, and that it was not, it could not be, here that Jacquemin lived.

"Is it really your husband, Madame, who writes under the signature of Puck in 'L'Actualite'?" he asked. The same proud smile appeared again upon her thin, wan face.

"Yes, Monsieur, yes, it is really he!" she replied. She was so happy whenever any one spoke to her of her Paul. She was in the habit of taking copies of L'Actualite to the concierge, the grocer, and the butcher; and she was so proud to show how well Paul wrote, and what fine connections he had—her Paul, whom she loved so much, and for

whom she sat up late at night when it was necessary to prepare his linen for some great dinner or supper he was invited to.

“Oh! it is indeed he, Monsieur,” she said again, while Zilah watched her and listened in silence. “I don’t like to have him use pseudonyms, as he calls them. It gives me so much pleasure to see his real name, which is mine too, printed in full. Only it seems that it is better sometimes. Puck makes people curious, and they say, Who can it be? He also signed himself Gavroche in the Rabelais, you know, which did not last very long. You are perhaps a journalist also, Monsieur?”

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"No," said Zilah.

"Ah! I thought you were! But, after all, perhaps you are right. It is a hard profession, I sometimes think. You have to be out so late. If you only knew, Monsieur, how poor Paul is forced to work even at night! It tires him so, and then it costs so much. I beg your pardon for leaving those gloves like that before you. I was cleaning them. He does not like cleaned gloves, though; he says it always shows. Well, I am a woman, and I don't notice it. And then I take so much care of all that. It is necessary, and everything costs so dear. You see I—Gustave, don't slap your little sister! you naughty boy!"

And going to the children, her sweet, frank eyes becoming sad at a quarrel between her little ones, she gently took the baby away from the oldest child, who cried, and went into a corner to pout, regarding his mother with the same impudent air which Zilah had perceived in the curl of Jacquemin's lips when the reporter complained of the dearth of pretty women.

"It is certainly very astonishing that he does not come home," continued the young wife, excusing to Zilah the absence of her Paul. "He often breakfasts, however, in the city, at Brebant's. It seems that it is necessary for him to do so. You see, at the restaurant he talks and hears news. He couldn't learn all that he knows here very well, could he? I don't know much of things that must be put in a newspaper."

And she smiled a little sad smile, making even of her humility a pedestal for the husband so deeply loved and admired.

Zilah was beginning to feel ill at ease. He had come with anger, expecting to encounter the little fop whom he had seen, and he found this humble and devoted woman, who spoke of her Paul as if she were speaking of her religion, and who, knowing nothing of the life of her husband, only loving him, sacrificed herself to him in this almost cruel poverty (a strange contrast to the life of luxury Jacquemin led elsewhere), with the holy trust of her unselfish love.

"Do you never accompany your husband anywhere?" asked Andras.

"I? Oh, never!" she replied, with a sort of fright. "He does not wish it—and he is right. You see, Monsieur, when he married me, five years ago, he was not what he is now; he was a railway clerk. I was a working-girl; yes, I was a seamstress. Then it was all right; we used to walk together, and we went to the theatre; he did not know any one. It is different now. You see, if the Baroness Dinati should see me on his arm, she would not bow to him, perhaps."

"You are mistaken, Madame," said the Hungarian, gently. "You are the one who should be bowed to first."

She did not understand, but she felt that a compliment was intended, and she blushed very red, not daring to say any more, and wondering if she had not chatted too much, as Jacquemin reproached her with doing almost every day.

“Does Monsieur Jacquemin go often to the theatre?” asked Andras, after a moment’s pause.

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“Yes; he is obliged to do so.”

“And you?”

“Sometimes. Not to the first nights, of course. One has to dress handsomely for them. But Paul gives me tickets, oh, as many as I want! When the plays are no longer drawing money, I go with the neighbors. But I prefer to stay at home and see to my babies; when I am sitting in the theatre, and they are left in charge of the concierge, I think, Suppose anything should happen to them! And that idea takes away all my pleasure. Still, if Paul stayed here—but he can not; he has his writing to do in the evenings. Poor fellow, he works so hard! Well!” with a sigh, “I don’t think that he will be back to-day. The children will eat his beefsteak, that’s all; it won’t do them any harm.”

As she spoke, she took some pieces of meat from an almost empty cupboard, and placed them on the table, excusing herself for doing so before Zilah.

And he contemplated, with an emotion which every word of the little woman increased, this poor, miserable apartment, where the wife lived, taking care of her children, while the husband, Monsieur Puck or Monsieur Gavroche, paraded at the fancy fairs or at the theatres; figured at the races; tasted the Baroness Dinati’s wines, caring only for Johannisberg with the blue and gold seal of 1862; and gave to Potel and Chabot, in his articles, lessons in gastronomy.

Then Madame Jacquemin, feeling instinctively that she had the sympathy of this sad-faced man who spoke to her in such a gentle voice, related her life to him with the easy confidence which poor people, who never see the great world, possess. She told him, with a tender smile, the entirely Parisian idyl of the love of the working-girl for the little clerk who loved her so much and who married her; and of the excursions they used to take together to Saint-Germain, going third-class, and eating their dinner upon the green grass under the trees, and then enjoying the funny doings of the painted clowns, the illuminations, the music, and the dancing. Oh! they danced and danced and danced, until she was so tired that she slept all the way home with her head on his shoulder, dreaming of the happy day they had had.

“That was the best time of my life, Monsieur. We were no richer than we are now; but we were more free. He was with me more, too: now, he certainly makes me very proud with his beautiful articles; but I don’t see him; I don’t see him any more, and it makes me very sad. Oh! if it were not for that, although we are not millionaires, I should be very happy; yes, entirely, entirely happy.”

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There was, in the simple, gentle resignation of this poor girl, sacrificed without knowing it, such devoted love for the man who, in reality, abandoned her, that Prince Andras felt deeply moved and touched. He thought of the one leading a life of pleasure, and the other a life of fatigue; of this household touching on one side poverty, and, on the other, wealth and fashion; and he divined, from the innocent words of this young wife, the hardships of this home, half deserted by the husband, and the nervousness and peevishness of Jacquemin returning to this poor place after a night at the restaurants or a ball at Baroness Dinati's. He heard the cutting voice of the elegant little man whom his humble wife contemplated with the eyes of a Hindoo adoring an idol; he was present, in imagination, at those tragically sorrowful scenes which the wife bore with her tender smile, poor woman, knowing of the life of her Paul only those duties of luxury which she herself imagined, remaining a seamstress still to sew the buttons on the shirts and gloves of her husband, and absolutely ignorant of all the entertainments where, in an evening, would sometimes be lost, at a game of cards, the whole monthly salary of Monsieur Puck! And Zilah said to himself, that this was, perhaps, the first time that this woman had ever been brought in contact with anything pertaining to her husband's fashionable life—and in what shape?—that of a man who had come to demand satisfaction for an injury, and to say to Jacquemin: "I shall probably kill you, Monsieur!"

And gradually, before the spectacle of this profound love, of this humble and holy devotion of the unselfish martyr with timid, wistful eyes, who leaned over her children, and said to them, sweetly, "Yes, you are hungry, I know, but you shall have papa's beefsteak," while she herself breakfasted off a little coffee and a crust of bread, Andras Zilah felt all his anger die away; and an immense pity filled his breast, as he saw, as in a vision of what the future might have brought forth, a terrible scene in this poor little household: the pale fair-haired wife, already wasted and worn with constant labor, leaning out of the window yonder, or running to the stairs and seeing, covered with blood, wounded, wounded to death perhaps, her Paul, whom he, Andras, had come to provoke to a duel.

Ah! poor woman! Never would he cause her such anguish and sorrow. Between his sword and Jacquemin's impertinent little person, were now this sad-eyed creature, and those poor little children, who played there, forgotten, half deserted, by their father, and who would grow up, Heaven knows how!

"I see that Monsieur Jacquemin will not return," he said, rising hurriedly, "and I will leave you to your breakfast, Madame."

"Oh! you don't trouble me at all, Monsieur. I beg your pardon again for having given my children their breakfast before you."

"Farewell, Madame," said Andras, bowing with the deepest respect.

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"Then, you are really going, Monsieur? Indeed, I am afraid he won't come back. But please tell me what I shall say to him your errand was. If it is some good news, I should be so glad, so glad, to be the first to tell it to him. You are, perhaps, although you say not, the editor of some paper which is about to be started. He spoke to me, the other day, of a new paper. He would like to be a dramatic critic. That is his dream, he says. Is it that, Monsieur?"

"No, Madame; and, to tell you the truth, there is no longer any need for me to see your husband. But I do not regret my visit; on the contrary—I have met a noble woman, and I offer her my deepest respect."

Poor, unhappy girl! She was not used to such words; she blushinglly faltered her thanks, and seemed quite grieved at the departure of this man, from whom she had expected some good luck for her husband.

"The life of Paris has its secrets!" thought Zilah, as he slowly descended the stairs, which he had mounted in such a different frame of mind, so short a time before.

When he reached the lower landing, he looked up, and saw the blond head of the young woman, leaning over above, and the little hands of the children clutching the damp railing.

Then Prince Andras Zilah took off his hat, and again bowed low.

On his way from the Rue Rochechouart to his hotel he thought of the thin, pale face of the Parisian grisette, who would slowly pine away, deceived and disdained by the man whose name she bore. Such a fine name! Puck or Gavroche!

"And she would die rather than soil that name. This Jacquemin has found this pearl of great price, and hid it away under the gutters of Paris! And I—I have encountered—what? A miserable woman who betrayed me! Ah! men and women are decidedly the victims of chance; puppets destined to bruise one another!"

On entering his hotel, he found Yanski Varhely there, with an anxious look upon his rugged old face.

"Well?"

"Well-nothing!"

And Zilah told his friend what he had seen.

"A droll city, this Paris!" he said, in conclusion. "I see that it is necessary to go up into the garrets to know it well."

He took a sheet of paper, sat down, and wrote as follows:

Monsieur:—You have published an article in regard to Prince Andras Zilah, which is an outrage. A devoted friend of the Prince had resolved to make you pay dearly for it; but there is some one who has disarmed him. That some one is the admirable woman who bears so honorably the name which you have given her, and lives so bravely the life you have doomed her to. Madame Jacquemin has redeemed the infamy of Monsieur Puck. But when, in the future, you have to speak of the misfortunes of others, think a little of your own existence, and profit by the moral lesson given you by—*an unknown*.

“Now,” said Zilah, “be so kind, my dear Varhely, as to have this note sent to Monsieur Puck, at the office of ‘L’Actualite’ and ask your domestic to purchase some toys, whatever he likes—here is the money—and take them to Madame Jacquemin, No. 25 Rue Rochechouart. Three toys, because there are three children. The poor little things will have gained so much, at all events, from this occurrence.”

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CHAPTER XXVI

"Am I avenged?"

After this episode, the Prince lived a more solitary existence than before, and troubled himself no further about the outside world. Why should he care, that some penny-aliner had slipped those odious lines into a newspaper? His sorrow was not the publishing of the treachery, it was the treachery itself; and his hourly suffering caused him to long for death to end his torture.

"And yet I must live," he thought, "if to exist with a dagger through one's heart is to live."

Then, to escape from the present, he plunged into the memories of the war, as into a bath of oblivion, a strange oblivion, where he found all his patriotic regrets of other days. He read, with spasmodic eagerness, the books in which Georgei and Klapka, the actors of the drama, presented their excuses, or poured forth their complaints; and it seemed to him that his country would make him forget his love.

In the magnificent picture-gallery, where he spent most of his time, his eyes rested upon the battle-scenes of Matejks, the Polish artist, and the landscapes of Munkacsy, that painter of his own country, who took his name from the town of Munkacs, where tradition says that the Magyars settled when they came from the Orient, ages ago. Then a bitter longing took possession of him to breathe a different air, to fly from Paris, and place a wide distance between himself and Marsa; to take a trip around the world, where new scenes might soften his grief, or, better still, some accident put an end to his life; and, besides, chance might bring him in contact with Menko.

But, just as he was ready to depart, a sort of lassitude overpowered him; he felt the inert sensation of a wounded man who has not the strength to move, and he remained where he was, sadly and bitterly wondering at times if he should not appeal to the courts, dissolve his marriage, and demand back his name from the one who had stolen it.

Appeal to the courts? The idea of doing that was repugnant to him. What! to hear the proud and stainless name of the Zilahs resound, no longer above the clash of sabres and the neighing of furious horses, but within the walls of a courtroom, and in presence of a gaping crowd of sensation seekers? No! silence was better than that; anything was better than publicity and scandal. Divorce! He could obtain that, since Marsa, her mind destroyed, was like one dead. And what would a divorce give him? His freedom? He had it already. But what nothing could give back, was his ruined faith, his shattered hopes, his happiness lost forever.

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At times he had a wild desire to see Marsa again, and vent once more upon her his anger and contempt. When he happened to see the name of Maisons-Lafitte, his body tingled from head to foot, as by an electric shock. Maisons! The sunlit garden, the shaded alleys, the glowing parterres of flowers, the old oaks, the white-walled villa, all appeared before him, brutally distinct, like a lost, or rather poisoned, Eden! And, besides, she, Marsa, was no longer there; and the thought that the woman whom he had so passionately loved, with her exquisite, flower-like face, was shut up among maniacs at Vaugirard, caused him the acutest agony. The asylum which was Marsa's prison was so constantly in his mind that he felt the necessity of flight, in order not to allow his weakness to get the better of him, lest he should attempt to see Marsa again.

"What a coward I am!" he thought.

One evening he announced to Varhely that he was going to the lonely villa of Sainte-Adresse, where they had so many times together watched the sea and talked of their country.

"I am going there to be alone, my dear Yanski," he said, "but to be with you is to be with myself. I hope that you will accompany me."

"Most certainly," replied Varhely.

The Prince took only one domestic, wishing to live as quietly and primitively as possible; but Varhely, really alarmed at the rapid change in the Prince, and the terrible pallor of his face, followed him, hoping at least to distract him and arouse him from his morbidness by talking over with him the great days of the past, and even, if possible, to interest him in the humble lives of the fishermen about him.

Zilah and his friend, therefore, passed long hours upon the terrace of the villa, watching the sun set at their feet, while the grayish-blue sea was enveloped in a luminous mist, and the fading light was reflected upon the red walls and white blinds of the houses, and tinged with glowing purple the distant hills of Ingouville.

This calm, quiet spot gradually produced upon Andras the salutary effect of a bath after a night of feverish excitement. His reflections became less bitter, and, strange to relate, it was rough old Yanski Varhely, who, by his tenderness and thoughtfulness, led his friend to a more resigned frame of mind.

Very often, after nightfall, would Zilah descend with him to the shore below. The sea lay at their feet a plain of silver, and the moonbeams danced over the waves in broken lines of luminous atoms; boats passed to and fro, their red lights flashing like glowworms; and it seemed to Andras and Varhely, as they approached the sea, receding over the wet, gleaming sands, that they were walking upon quicksilver.

As they strolled and talked together here, it seemed to Andras that this grief was, for the moment, carried away by the fresh, salt breeze; and these two men, in a different manner buffeted by fate, resembled two wounded soldiers who mutually aid one another to advance, and not to fall by the way before the combat is over. Yanski made special efforts to rouse in Andras the old memories of his fatherland, and to inspire in him again his love for Hungary.

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"Ah! I used to have so many hopes and dreams for her future," said Andras; "but idealists have no chance in the world of to-day; so now I am a man who expects nothing of life except its ending. And yet I would like to see once again that old stone castle where I grew up, full of hopes! Hopes? Bah! pretty bubbles, that is all!"

One morning they walked along the cliffs, past the low shanties of the fishermen, as far as Havre; and, as they were sauntering through the streets of the city, Varhely grasped the Prince's arm, and pointed to an announcement of a series of concerts to be given at Frascati by a band of Hungarian gipsies.

"There," he said, "you will certainly emerge from your retreat to hear those airs once more."

"Yes," replied Andras, after a moment's hesitation.

That evening found him at the casino; but his wound seemed to open again, and his heart to be grasped as in an iron hand, as he listened to the plaintive cries and moans of the Tzigani music. Had the strings of the bows played these czardas upon his own sinews, laid bare, he would not have trembled more violently. Every note of the well-known airs fell upon his heart like a corrosive tear, and Marsa, in all her dark, tawny beauty, rose before him. The Tzigani played now the waltzes which Marsa used to play; then the slow, sorrowful plaint of the "Song of Plevna;" and then the air of Janos Nemeth's, the heart-breaking melody, to the Prince like the lament of his life: 'The World holds but One Fair Maiden'. And at every note he saw again Marsa, the one love of his existence.

"Let us go!" he said suddenly to Yanski.

But, as they were about to leave the building, they almost ran into a laughing, merry group, led by the little Baroness Dinati, who uttered a cry of delight as she perceived Andras.

"What, you, my dear Prince! Oh, how glad I am to see you!"

And she took his arm, all the clan which accompanied her stopping to greet Prince Zilah.

"We have come from Etretat, and we are going back there immediately. There was a fair at Havre in the Quartier Saint-Francois, and we have eaten up all we could lay our hands on, broken all Aunt Sally's pipes, and purchased all the china horrors and hideous pincushions we could find. They are all over there in the break. We are going to raffle them at Etretat for the poor."

The Prince tried to excuse himself and move on, but the little Baroness held him tight.

“Why don’t you come to Etretat? It is charming there. We don’t do anything but eat and drink and talk scandal—Oh, yes! Yamada sometimes gives us some music. Come here, Yamada!”

The Japanese approached, in obedience to her call, with his eternal grin upon his queer little face.

“My dear Prince,” rattled on the Baroness, “you don’t know, perhaps, that Yamada is the most Parisian of Parisians? Upon my word, these Japanese are the Parisians of Asia! Just fancy what he has been doing at Etretat! He has been writing a French operetta!”

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"Japanese!" corrected Yamada, with an apologetic bow.

"Oh, Japanese! Parisian Japanese, then! At all events, it is very funny, and the title is Little Moo-Moo! There is a scene on board a flower-decked boat! Oh, it is so amusing, so original, so natural! and a delightful song for Little Moo-Moo!"

Then, as Zilah glanced at Varhely, uneasy, and anxious to get away, the Baroness puckered up her rosy lips and sang the stanzas of the Japanese maestro.

Why, sung by Judic or Theo, it would create a furore! All Paris would be singing.

"Oh, by the way," she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, "what have you done to Jacquemin? Yes, my friend Jacquemin?"

"Jacquemin?" repeated Zilah; and he thought of the garret in the Rue Rochechouart, and the gentle, fairhaired woman, who was probably at this very moment leaning over the cribs of her little children—the children of Monsieur Puck, society reporter of 'L'Actualite'

"Yes! Why, Jacquemin has become a savage; oh, indeed! a regular savage! I wanted to bring him to Etretat; but no, he wouldn't come. It seems that he is married. Jacquemin married! Isn't it funny? He didn't seem like a married man! Poor fellow! Well, when I invited him, he refused; and the other day, when I wanted to know the reason, he answered me (that is why I speak to you about it), 'Ask Prince Zilah'! So, tell me now, what have you done to poor Jacquemin?"

"Nothing," said the Prince.

"Oh, yes, you have; you have changed him! He, who used to go everywhere and be so jolly, now hides himself in his den, and is never seen at all. Just see how disagreeable it is! If he had come with us, he would have written an account in 'L'Actualite' of Little Moo-Moo, and Yamada's operetta would already be celebrated."

"So," continued the Baroness, "when I return to Paris, I am going to hunt him up. A reporter has no right to make a bear of himself!"

"Don't disturb him, if he cares for his home now," said Zilah, gravely. "Nothing can compensate for one's own fireside, if one loves and is loved."

At the first words of the Prince, the Baroness suddenly became serious.

"I beg your pardon," she said, dropping his arm and holding out her tiny hand: "please forgive me for having annoyed you. Oh, yes, I see it! I have annoyed you. But be consoled; we are going at once, and then, you know, that if there is a creature who

loves you, respects you, and is devoted to you, it is this little idiot of a Baroness! Goodnight!"

"Good-night'." said Andras, bowing to the Baroness's friends, Yamada and the other Parisian exotics.

Glad to escape, Varhely and the Prince returned home along the seashore. Fragments of the czardas from the illuminated casino reached their ears above the swish of the waves. Andras felt irritated and nervous. Everything recalled to him Marsa, and she seemed to be once more taking possession of his heart, as a vine puts forth fresh tendrils and clings again to the oak after it has been torn away.



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"She also suffers!" he said aloud, after they had walked some distance in silence.

"Fortunately!" growled Varhely; and then, as if he wished to efface his harshness, he added, in a voice which trembled a little: "And for that reason she is, perhaps, not unworthy of pardon."

"Pardon!"

This cry escaped from Zilah in accents of pain which struck Varhely like a knife.

"Pardon before punishing—the other!" exclaimed the Prince, angrily.

The other! Yanski Varhely instinctively clinched his fist, thinking, with rage, of that package of letters which he had held in his hands, and which he might have destroyed if he had known.

It was true: how was pardon possible while Menko lived?

No word more was spoken by either until they reached the villa; then Prince Zilah shook Yanski's hand and retired to his chamber. Lighting his lamp, he took out and read and reread, for the hundredth time perhaps, certain letters—letters not addressed to him—those letters which Varhely had handed him, and with which Michel Menko had practically struck him the day of his marriage.

Andras had kept them, reading them over at times with an eager desire for further suffering, drinking in this species of poison to irritate his mental pain as he would have injected morphine to soothe a physical one. These letters caused him a sensation analogous to that which gives repose to opium-eaters, a cruel shock at first, sharp as the prick of a knife, then, the pain slowly dying away, a heavy stupor.

The whole story was revived in these letters of Marsa to Menko:—all the ignorant, credulous love of the young girl for Michel, then her enthusiasm for love itself, rather than for the object of her love, and then, again—for Menko had reserved nothing, but sent all together—the bitter contempt of Marsa, deceived, for the man who had lied to her.

There were, in these notes, a freshness of sentiment and a youthful credulity which produced the impression of a clear morning in early spring, all the frankness and faith of a mind ignorant of evil and destitute of guile; then, in the later ones, the spontaneous outburst of a heart which believes it has given itself forever, because it thinks it has encountered incorruptible loyalty and undying devotion.

As he read them over, Andras shook with anger against the two who had deceived him; and also, and involuntarily, he felt an undefined, timid pity for the woman who had

trusted and been deceived—a pity he immediately drove away, as if he were afraid of himself, afraid of forgiving.

“What did Varhely mean by speaking to me of pardon?” he thought. “Am I yet avenged?”

It was this constant hope that the day would come when justice would be meted out to Menko’s treachery. The letters proved conclusively that Menko had been Marsa’s lover; but they proved, at the same time, that Michel had taken advantage of her innocence and ignorance, and lied outrageously in representing himself as free, when he was already bound to another woman.

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All night long Andras Zilah sat there, inflicting torture upon himself, and taking a bitter delight in his own suffering; engraving upon his memory every word of love written by Marsa to Michel, as if he felt the need of fresh pain to give new strength to his hatred.

The next morning at breakfast, Varhely astonished him by announcing that he was going away.

"To Paris?"

"No, to Vienna," replied Yanski, who looked somewhat paler than usual.

"What an idea! What are you going to do there, Varhely?"

"Angelo Valla arrived yesterday at Havre. He sent for me to come to his hotel this morning. I have just been there. Valla has given me some information in regard to a matter of interest to myself, which will require my presence at Vienna. So I am going there."

Prince Zilah was intimately acquainted with the Valla of whom Varhely spoke; he had been one of the witnesses of his marriage. Valla was a former minister of Manin; and, since the siege of Venice, he had lived partly in Paris and partly in Florence. He was a man for whom Andras Zilah had the greatest regard.

"When do you go?" asked the Prince of Varhely.

"In an hour. I wish to take the fast mail from Paris this evening."

"Is it so very pressing, then?"

"Very pressing," replied Varhely. "There is another to whose ears the affair may possibly come, and I wish to get the start of him."

"Farewell, then," said Andras, considerably surprised; "come back as soon as you can."

He was astonished at the almost violent pressure of the hand which Varhely gave him, as if he were departing for a very long journey.

"Why didn't Valla come to see me?" he asked. "He is one of the few I am always glad to see."

"He had no time. He had to be away again at once, and he asked me to excuse him to you."

The Prince did not make any further attempt to find out what was the reason of his friend's sudden flight, for Varhely was already descending the steps of the villa.

Andras then felt a profound sensation of loneliness, and he thought again of the woman whom his imagination pictured haggard and wan in the asylum of Vaugirard.

CHAPTER XXVII

"What matters it how much we suffer?"

Two hours after Varhely had gone, a sort of feverish attraction drew Prince Andras to the spot where, the night before, he had listened to the Tzigana airs.

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Again, but alone this time, he drank in the accents of the music of his country, and sought to remember the impression produced upon him when Marsa had played this air or that one, this sad song or that czardas. He saw her again as she stood on the deck of the steamer, watching the children on the barge as they threw her kisses of farewell. More troubled than ever, nervous and suffering, Zilah returned home late in the afternoon, opened the desk where he kept Marsa's letters, and one by one, impelled by some inexplicable sentiment, he burned them, the flame of the candle devouring the paper, whose subtle perfume mounted to his nostrils for the last time like a dying sigh, while the wind carried off, through the window into the infinite, the black dust of those fateful letters, those remnants of dead passion and of love betrayed—and the past was swept away.

The sun was slowly descending in an atmosphere of fire, while toward Havre a silvery mist over the hills and shore heralded the approach of chaste Dian's reign. The reflections of the sunset tinged with red and orange the fishing boats floating over the calm sea, while a long fiery streak marked the water on the horizon, growing narrower and narrower, and changing to orange and then to pale yellow as the disk of the sun gradually disappeared, and the night came on, enveloping the now inactive city, and the man who watched the disappearance of the last fragments of a detested love, of the love of another, of a love which had torn and bruised his heart. And, strange to say, for some inexplicable reason, Prince Andras Zilah now regretted the destruction of those odious letters. It seemed to him, with a singular displacement of his personality, that it was something of himself, since it was something of her, that he had destroyed. He had hushed that voice which said to another, "I love you," but which caused him the same thrill as if she had murmured the words for him. They were letters received by his rival which the wind carried out, an impalpable dust, over the sea; and he felt—such folly is the human heart capable of—the bitter regret of a man who has destroyed a little of his past.

The shadows crept over him at the same time that they crept over the sea.

"What matters it how much we suffer, or how much suffering we cause," he murmured, "when, of all our loves, our hearts, ourselves, there remains, after a short lapse of time—what? That!" And he watched the last atom of burned paper float away in the deepening twilight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRICKEN SOUL

His loneliness now weighed heavily upon Andras. His nerves were shaken by the memories which the czardas of the Tzigani musicians had evoked; and it seemed to him that the place was deserted now that they had departed, and Varhely had gone with



them. In the eternal symphony of the sea, the lapping of the waves upon the shingle at the foot of the terrace, one note was now lacking, the resonant note of the czimbalom yonder in the gardens of Frascati. The vibration of the czimbalom was like a call summoning up the image of Marsa, and this image took invincible possession of the Prince, who, with a sort of sorrowful anger which he regarded as hatred, tried in vain to drive it away.

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What was the use of remaining at Sainte-Adresse, when the memories he sought to flee came to find him there, and since Marsa's presence haunted it as if she had lived there by his side?

He quitted Havre, and returned to Paris; but the very evening of his return, in the bustle and movement of the Champs-Elysees, the long avenue dotted with lights, the flaming gas-jets of the cafe concerts, the bursts of music, he found again, as if the Tzigana were continually pursuing him, the same phantom; despite the noise of people and carriages upon the asphalt, the echoes of the "Song of Plevna," played quite near him by some Hungarian orchestra, reached him as upon the seashore at Havre; and he hastened back to his hotel, to shut himself up, to hear nothing, see nothing, and escape from the fantastic, haunting pursuit of this inevitable vision.

He could not sleep; fever burned in his blood. He rose, and tried to read; but before the printed page he saw continually Marsa Laszlo, like the spectre of his happiness.

"How cowardly human nature is!" he exclaimed, hurling away the book. "Is it possible that I love her still? Shall I love her forever?"

And he felt intense self-contempt at the temptation which took possession of him to see once more Maisons-Lafitte, where he had experienced the most terrible grief of his life. What was the use of struggling? He had not forgotten, and he never could forget.

If he had been sincere with himself, he would have confessed that he was impelled by his ever-living, ever-present love toward everything which would recall Marsa to him, and that a violent, almost superhuman effort was necessary not to yield to the temptation.

About a week after the Prince's return to Paris, his valet appeared one day with the card of General Vogotzine. It was on Andras's lips to refuse to see him; but, in reality, the General's visit caused him a delight which he would not acknowledge to himself. He was about to hear of her. He told the valet to admit Vogotzine, hypocritically saying to himself that it was impossible, discourteous, not to receive him.

The old Russian entered, timid and embarrassed, and was not much reassured by Zilah's polite but cold greeting.

The General, who for some extraordinary reason had not had recourse to alcohol to give him courage, took the chair offered him by the Prince. He was a little flushed, not knowing exactly how to begin what he had to say; and, being sober, he was terribly afraid of appearing, like an idiot.

"This is what is the matter," he said, plunging at once in medias res. "Doctor Fargeas, who sent me, might have come himself; but he thought that I, being her uncle, should—"



"You have come to consult me about Marsa," said Andras, unconsciously glad to pronounce her name.

"Yes," began the General, becoming suddenly intimidated, "of—of Marsa. She is very ill—Marsa is. Very ill. Stupor, Fargeas says. She does not say a word—nothing. A regular automaton! It is terrible to see her—terrible—terrible."

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He raised his round, uneasy eyes to Andras, who was striving to appear calm, but whose lips twitched nervously.

"It is impossible to rouse her," continued Vogotzine. "The, doctors can do nothing. There is no hope except in an—an—an experiment."

"An experiment?"

"Yes, exactly, exactly—an experiment. You see he—he wanted to know if—(you must pardon me for what I am about to propose; it is Doctor Fargeas's idea)—You see—if—if—she should see—(I suppose—these are not my words)—if she should see you again at Doctor Sims's establishment—the emotion—the—the—Well, I don't know exactly what Doctor Fargeas does hope; but I have repeated to you his words—I am simply, quite simply, his messenger."

"The doctor," said Andras, calmly, "would like—your niece to see me again?"

"Yes, yes; and speak to you. You see, you are the only one for whom—"

The Prince interrupted the General, who instantly became as mute as if he were in the presence of the Czar.

"It is well. But what Doctor Fargeas asks of me will cause me intense suffering."

Vogotzine did not open his lips.

"See her again? He wishes to revive all my sorrow, then!"

Vogotzine waited, motionless as if on parade.

After a moment or two, Andras saying no more, the General thought that he might speak.

"I understand. I knew very well what your answer would be. I told the doctor so; but he replied, 'It is a question of humanity. The Prince will not refuse.'"

Fargeas must have known Prince Zilah's character well when he used the word humanity. The Prince would not have refused his pity to the lowest of human beings; and so, never mind what his sufferings might be, if his presence could do any good, he must obey the doctor.

"When does Doctor Fargeas wish me to go?"

"Whenever you choose. The doctor is just now at Vaugirard, on a visit to his colleague, and—"

“Do not let us keep him waiting!”

Vogotzine’s eyes brightened.

“Then you consent? You will go?”

He tried to utter some word of thanks, but Andras cut him short, saying:

“I will order the carriage.”

“I have a carriage,” said Vogotzine, joyously. “We can go at once.”

Zilah was silent during the drive; and Vogotzine gazed steadily out of the window, without saying a word, as the Prince showed no desire to converse.

They stopped before a high house, evidently built in the last century, and which was probably formerly a convent. The General descended heavily from the coupe, rang the bell, and stood aside to let Zilah pass before him.

The Prince’s emotion was betrayed in a certain stiffness of demeanor, and in his slow walk, as if every movement cost him an effort. He stroked his moustache mechanically, and glanced about the garden they were crossing, as if he expected to see Marsa at once.

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Dr. Fargeas appeared very much pleased to see the Prince, and he thanked him warmly for having come. A thin, light-haired man, with a pensive look and superb eyes, accompanied Fargeas, and the physician introduced him to the Prince as Dr. Sims.

Dr. Sims shared the opinion of his colleague. Having taken the invalid away, and separated her from every thing that could recall the past, the physicians thought, that, by suddenly confronting her with a person so dear to her as Prince Zilah, the shock and emotion might rouse her from her morbid state.

Fargeas explained to the Prince why he had thought it best to transport the invalid from Maisons-Lafitte to Vaugirard, and he thanked him for having approved of his determination.

Zilah noticed that Fargeas, in speaking of Marsa, gave her no name or title. With his usual tact, the doctor had divined the separation; and he did not call Marsa the Princess, but, in tones full of pity, spoke of her as the invalid.

"She is in the garden," said Dr. Sims, when Fargeas had finished speaking. "Will you see her now?"

"Yes," said the Prince, in a voice that trembled slightly, despite his efforts to control it.

"We will take a look at her first; and then, if you will be so kind, show yourself to her suddenly. It is only an experiment we are making. If she does not recognize you, her condition is graver than I think. If she does recognize you, well, I hope that we shall be able to cure her. Come!"

Dr. Sims motioned the Prince to precede them.

"Shall I accompany you, gentlemen?" asked Vogotzine.

"Certainly, General!"

"You see, I don't like lunatics; they produce a singular effect upon me; they don't interest me at all. But still, after all, she is my niece!"

And he gave a sharp pull to his frock-coat, as he would have tightened his belt before an assault.

They descended a short flight of steps, and found themselves in a large garden, with trees a century old, beneath which were several men and women walking about or sitting in chairs.

A large, new building, one story high, appeared at one end of the garden; in this were the dormitories of Dr. Sims's patients.

“Are those people insane?” asked Zilah, pointing to the peaceful groups.

“Yes,” said Dr. Sims; “it requires a stretch of the imagination to believe it, does it not? You can speak to them as we pass by. All these here are harmless.”

“Shall we cross the garden?”

“Our invalid is below there, in another garden, behind that house.”

As he passed by, Zilah glanced curiously at these poor beings, who bowed, or exchanged a few words with the two physicians. It seemed to him that they had the happy look of people who had reached the desired goal. Vogotzine, coughing nervously, kept close to the Prince and felt very ill at ease. Andras, on the contrary, found great difficulty in realizing that he was really among lunatics.

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"See," said Dr. Sims, pointing out an old gentleman, dressed in the style of 1840, like an old-fashioned lithograph of a beau of the time of Gavarni, "that man has been more than thirty-five years in the institution. He will not change the cut of his garments, and he is very careful to have his tailor make his clothes in the same style he dressed when he was young. He is very happy. He thinks that he is the enchanter Merlin, and he listens to Vivian, who makes appointments with him under the trees."

As they passed the old man, his neck imprisoned in a high stock, his surtout cut long and very tight in the waist, and his trousers very full about the hips and very close about the ankles, he bowed politely.

"Good-morning, Doctor Sims! Good-morning, Doctor Fargeas!"

Then, as the director of the establishment approached to speak, he placed a finger upon his lips:

"Hush," he said. "She is there! Don't speak, or she will go away." And he pointed with a sort of passionate veneration to an elm where Vivian was shut up, and whence she would shortly emerge.

"Poor devil!" murmured Vogotzine.

This was not what Zilah thought, however. He wondered if this happy hallucination which had lasted so many years, these eternal love-scenes with Vivian, love-scenes which never grew stale, despite the years and the wrinkles, were not the ideal form of happiness for a being condemned to this earth. This poetical monomaniac lived with his dreams realized, finding, in an asylum of Vaugirard, all the fascinations and chimeras of the Breton land of golden blossoms and pink heather, all the intoxicating, languorous charm of the forest of Broceliande.

"He has within his grasp what Shakespeare was content only to dream of. Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized:"

"Ah!" replied Dr. Fargeas, "but the real never loses its grip. Why does this monomaniac preserve both the garments of his youth, which prevent him from feeling his age, and the dream of his life, which consoles him for his lost reason? Because he is rich. He can pay the tailor who dresses him, the rent of the pavilion he inhabits by himself, and the special servants who serve him. If he were poor, he would suffer."

"Then," said Zilah, "the question of bread comes up everywhere, even in insanity."

"And money is perhaps happiness, since it allows of the purchase of happiness."

"Oh!" said the Prince, "for me, happiness would be—"

“What?”

“Forgetfulness.”

And he followed with his eyes Vivian’s lover, who now had his ear glued to the trunk of the tree, and was listening to the voice which spoke only to him.

“That man yonder,” said Dr. Sims, indicating a man, still young, who was coming toward them, “is a talented writer whose novels you have doubtless read, and who has lost all idea of his own personality. Once a great reader, he now holds all literature in intense disgust; from having written so much, he has grown to have a perfect horror of words and letters, and he never opens either a book or a newspaper. He drinks in the fresh air, cultivates flowers, and watches the trains pass at the foot of the garden.”



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"Is he happy?" asked Andras.

"Very happy."

"Yes, he has drunk of the waters of Lethe," rejoined the Prince.

"I will not tell you his name," whispered Dr. Sims, as the man, a thin, dark-haired, delicate-featured fellow, approached them; "but, if you should speak to him and chance to mention his name, he would respond 'Ah! yes, I knew him. He was a man of talent, much talent.' There is nothing left to him of his former life."

And Zilah thought again that it was a fortunate lot to be attacked by one of these cerebral maladies where the entire being, with its burden of sorrows, is plunged into the deep, dark gulf of oblivion.

The novelist stopped before the two physicians.

"The mid-day train was three minutes and a half late," he said, quietly: "I mention the fact to you, doctor, that you may have it attended to. It is a very serious thing; for I am in the habit of setting my watch by that train."

"I will see to it," replied Dr. Sims. "By the way, do you want any books?"

In the same quiet tone the other responded:

"What for?"

"To read."

"What is the use of that?"

"Or any newspapers? To know—"

"To know what?" he interrupted, speaking with extreme volubility. "No, indeed! It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing! Do the newspapers announce that there are no more wars, no more poverty, illness, murders, envy, hatred or jealousy? No! The newspapers do not announce that. Then, why should I read the newspapers? Good-day, gentlemen."

The Prince shuddered at the bitter logic of this madman, speaking with the shrill distinctness of the insane. But Vogotzine smiled.

"Why, these idiots have rather good sense, after all," he remarked.

When they reached the end of the garden, Dr. Sims opened a gate which separated the male from the female patients, and Andras perceived several women walking about in the alleys, some of them alone, and some accompanied by attendants. In the distance, separated from the garden by a ditch and a high wall, was the railway.

Zilah caught his breath as he entered the enclosure, where doubtless among the female forms before him was that of the one he had loved. He turned to Dr. Sims with anxious eyes, and asked:

“Is she here?”

“She is here,” replied the doctor.

The Prince hesitated to advance. He had not seen her since the day he had felt tempted to kill her as she lay in her white robes at his feet. He wondered if it were not better to retrace his steps and depart hastily without seeing her.

“This way,” said Fargeas. “We can see through the bushes without being seen, can we not, Sims?”

“Yes, doctor.”

Zilah resigned himself to his fate; and followed the physicians without saying a word; he could hear the panting respiration of Vogotzine trudging along behind him. All at once the Prince felt a sensation as of a heavy hand resting upon his heart. Fargeas had exclaimed:

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"There she is!"

He pointed, through the branches of the lilac-bushes, to two women who were approaching with slow steps, one a light-haired woman in a nurse's dress, and the other in black garments, as if in mourning for her own life, Marsa herself.

Marsa! She was coming toward Zilah; in a moment, he would be able to touch her, if he wished, through the leaves! Even Vogotzine held his breath.

Zilah eagerly questioned Marsa's face, as if to read thereon a secret, to decipher a name—Menko's or his own. Her exquisite, delicate features had the rigidity of marble; her dark eyes were staring straight ahead, like two spots of light, where nothing, nothing was reflected. Zilah shuddered again; she alarmed him.

Alarm and pity! He longed to thrust aside the bushes, and hasten with extended arms toward the pale vision before him. It was as if the moving spectre of his love were passing by. But, with a strong effort of will, he remained motionless where he was.

Old Vogotzine seemed very ill at ease. Dr. Fargeas was very calm; and, after a questioning glance at his colleague, he said distinctly to the Prince:

"Now you must show yourself!"

The physician's order, far from displeasing Zilah, was like music in his ears. He was beginning to doubt, if, after all, Fargeas intended to attempt the experiment. He longed, with keen desire, to speak to Marsa; to know if his look, his breath, like a puff of wind over dying ashes, would not rekindle a spark of life in those dull, glassy eyes.

What was she thinking of, if she thought at all? What memory vacillated to and fro in that vacant brain? The memory of himself, or of—the other? He must know, he must know!

"This way," said Dr. Sims. "We will go to the end of the alley, and meet her face to face."

"Courage!" whispered Fargeas.

Zilah followed; and, in a few steps, they reached the end of the alley, and stood beneath a clump of leafy trees. The Prince saw, coming to him, with a slow but not heavy step, Marsa—no, another Marsa, the spectre or statue of Marsa.

Fargeas made a sign to Vogotzine, and the Russian and the two doctors concealed themselves behind the trees.

Zilah, trembling with emotion, remained alone in the middle of the walk.

The nurse who attended Marsa, had doubtless received instructions from Dr. Sims; for, as she perceived the Prince, she fell back two or three paces, and allowed Marsa to go on alone.

Lost in her stupor, the Tzigana advanced, her dark hair ruffled by the wind; and, still beautiful although so thin, she moved on, without seeing anything, her lips closed as if sealed by death, until she was not three feet from Zilah.

He stood waiting, his blue eyes devouring her with a look, in which there were mingled love, pity, and anger. When the Tzigana reached him, and nearly ran into him in her slow walk, she stopped suddenly, like an automaton. The instinct of an obstacle before her arrested her, and she stood still, neither recoiling nor advancing.

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A few steps away, Dr. Fargeas and Dr. Sims studied her stony look, in which there was as yet neither thought nor vision.

Still enveloped in her stupor, she stood there, her eyes riveted upon Andras. Suddenly, as if an invisible knife had been plunged into her heart, she started back. Her pale marble face became transfigured, and an expression of wild terror swept across her features; shaking with a nervous trembling, she tried to call out, and a shrill cry, which rent the air, burst from her lips, half open, like those of a tragic mask. Her two arms were stretched out with the hands clasped; and, falling upon her knees, she—whose light of reason had been extinguished, who for so many days had only murmured the sad, singing refrain: “I do not know; I do not know!”—faltered, in a voice broken with sobs: “Forgive! Forgive!”

Then her face became livid, and she would have fallen back unconscious if Zilah had not stooped over and caught her in his arms.

Dr. Sims hastened forward, and, aided by the nurse, relieved him of his burden.

Poor Vogotzine was as purple as if he had had a stroke of apoplexy.

“But, gentlemen,” said the Prince, his eyes burning with hot tears, “it will be horrible if we have killed her!”

“No, no,” responded Fargeas; “we have only killed her stupor. Now leave her to us. Am I not right, my dear Sims? She can and must be cured!”

CHAPTER XXIX

“Let the dead past bury its dead”

Prince Andras had heard no news of Varhely for a long time. He only knew that the Count was in Vienna.

Yanski had told the truth when he said that he had been summoned away by his friend, Angelo Valla.

They were very much astonished, at the Austrian ministry of foreign affairs, to see Count Yanski Varhely, who, doubtless, had come from Paris to ask some favor of the minister. The Austrian diplomats smiled as they heard the name of the old soldier of '48 and '49. So, the famous fusion of parties proclaimed in 1875 continued! Every day some sulker of former times rallied to the standard. Here was this Varhely, who, at one time, if he had set foot in Austria-Hungary, would have been speedily cast into the Charles barracks, the jail of political prisoners, now sending in his card to the minister of

the Emperor; and doubtless the minister and the old commander of hussars would, some evening, together pledge the new star of Hungary, in a beaker of rosy Crement!

“These are queer days we live in!” thought the Austrian diplomats.

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The minister, of whom Yanski Varhely demanded an audience, his Excellency Count Josef Ladany, had formerly commanded a legion of Magyar students, greatly feared by the grenadiers of Paskiewisch, in Hungary. The soldiers of Josef Ladany, after threatening to march upon Vienna, had many times held in check the grenadiers and Cossacks of the field-marshal. Spirited and enthusiastic, his fair hair floating above his youthful forehead like an aureole, Ladany made war like a patriot and a poet, reciting the verses of Petoefi about the camp-fires, and setting out for battle as for a ball. He was magnificent (Varhely remembered him well) at the head of his students, and his floating, yellow moustaches had caused the heart of more than one little Hungarian patriot to beat more quickly.

Varhely would experience real pleasure in meeting once more his old companion in arms. He remembered one afternoon in the vineyards, when his hussars, despite the obstacles of the vines and the irregular ground, had extricated Ladany's legion from the attack of two regiments of Russian infantry. Joseph Ladany was standing erect upon one of his cannon for which the gunners had no more ammunition, and, with drawn sabre, was rallying his companions, who were beginning to give way before the enemy. Ah, brave Ladany! With what pleasure would Varhely grasp his hand!

The former leader had doubtless aged terribly—he must be a man of fifty-five or fifty-six, to-day; but Varhely was sure that Joseph Ladany, now become minister, had preserved his generous, ardent nature of other days.

As he crossed the antechambers and lofty halls which led to the minister's office, Varhely still saw, in his mind's eye, Ladany, sabre in hand, astride of the smoking cannon.

An usher introduced him into a large, severe-looking room, with a lofty chimney-piece, above which hung a picture of the Emperor-King in full military uniform. Varhely at first perceived only some large armchairs, and an enormous desk covered with books; but, in a moment, from behind the mass of volumes, a man emerged, smiling, and with outstretched hand: the old hussar was amazed to find himself in the presence of a species of English diplomat, bald, with long, gray side-whiskers and shaven lip and chin, and scrupulously well dressed.

Yanski's astonishment was so evident that Josef Ladany said, still smiling:

"Well, don't you recognize me, my dear Count?" His voice was pleasant, and his manner charming; but there was something cold and politic in his whole appearance which absolutely stupefied Varhely. If he had seen him pass in the street, he would never have recognized, in this elegant personage, the young man, with yellow hair and long moustaches, who sang war songs as he sabred the enemy.

And yet it was indeed Ladany; it was the same clear eye which had once commanded his legion with a single look; but the eye was often veiled now beneath a lowered eyelid, and only now and then did a glance shoot forth which seemed to penetrate a man's most secret thoughts. The soldier had become the diplomat.

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"I had forgotten that thirty years have passed!" thought Varhely, a little saddened.

Count Ladany made his old comrade sit down in one of the armchairs, and questioned him smilingly as to his life, his friendships, Paris, Prince Zilah, and led him gradually and gracefully to confide what he, Varhely, had come to ask of the minister of the Emperor of Austria.

Varhely felt more reassured. Josef Ladany seemed to him to have remained morally the same. The moustache had been cut off, the yellow hair had fallen; but the heart was still young and without doubt Hungarian.

"You can," he said, abruptly, "render me a service, a great service. I have never before asked anything of anybody; but I have taken this journey expressly to see you, and to ask you, to beg you rather, to—"

"Go on, my dear Count. What you desire will be realized, I hope."

But his tone had already become colder, or perhaps simply more official.

"Well," continued Varhely, "what I have come to ask of you is; in memory of the time when we were brothers in arms" (the minister started slightly, and stroked his whiskers a little nervously), "the liberty of a certain man, of a man whom you know."

"Ah! indeed!" said Count Josef.

He leaned back in his chair, crossed one leg over the other, and, through his half-opened eyelids, examined Varhely, who looked him boldly in the face.

The contrast between these two men was striking; the soldier with his hair and moustache whitened in the harness, and the elegant government official with his polished manners; two old-time companions who had heard the whistling of the same balls.

"This is my errand," said Varhely. "I have the greatest desire that one of our compatriots, now a prisoner in Warsaw, I think—at all events, arrested at Warsaw a short time ago—should be set at liberty. It is of the utmost importance to me," he added, his lips turning almost as white as his moustache.

"Oh!" said the minister. "I fancy I know whom you mean."

"Count Menko."

"Exactly! Menko was arrested by the Russian police on his arrival at the house of a certain Labanoff, or Ladanoff—almost my name in Russian. This Labanoff, who had lately arrived from Paris, is suspected of a plot against the Czar. He is not a nihilist, but

simply a malcontent; and, besides that, his brain is not altogether right. In short, Count Menko is connected in some way, I don't know how, with this Labanoff. He went to Poland to join him, and the Russian police seized him. I think myself that they were quite right in their action."

"Possibly," said Varhely; "but I do not care to discuss the right of the Russian police to defend themselves or the Czar. What I have come for is to ask you to use your influence with the Russian Government to obtain Menko's release."

"Are you very much interested in Menko?"

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"Very much," replied Yanski, in a tone which struck the minister as rather peculiar.

"Then," asked Count Ladany with studied slowness, "you would like?—"

"A note from you to the Russian ambassador, demanding Menko's release. Angelo Valla—you know him—Manin's former minister—"

"Yes, I know," said Count Josef, with his enigmatical smile.

"Valla told me of Menko's arrest. I knew that Menko had left Paris, and I was very anxious to find where he had gone. Valla learned, at the Italian embassy in Paris, of the affair of this Labanoff and of the real or apparent complicity of Michel Menko; and he told me about it. When we were talking over the means of obtaining the release of a man held by Muscovite authority, which is not an easy thing, I know, we thought of you, and I have come to your Excellency as I would have gone to the chief of the Legion of Students to demand his aid in a case of danger!"

Yanski Varhely was no diplomat; and his manner of appealing to the memories of the past was excessively disagreeable to the minister, who, however, allowed no signs of his annoyance to appear.

Count Ladany was perfectly well acquainted with the Warsaw affair. As an Hungarian was mixed up in it, and an Hungarian of the rank and standing of Count Menko, the Austro-Hungarian authorities had immediately been advised of the whole proceeding. There were probably no proofs of actual complicity against Menko; but, as Josef Ladany had said, it seemed evident that he had come to Poland to join Labanoff. An address given to Menko by Labanoff had been found, and both were soon to depart for St. Petersburg. Labanoff had some doubtful acquaintances in the Russian army: several officers of artillery, who had been arrested and sent to the mines, were said to be his friends.

"The matter is a grave one," said the Count. "We can scarcely, for one particular case, make our relations more strained with a—a friendly nation, relations which so many others—I leave you to divine who, my dear Varhely—strive to render difficult. And yet, I would like to oblige you; I would, I assure you."

"If Count Menko is not set at liberty, what will happen to him?" asked Yanski.

"Hmm—he might, although a foreigner, be forced to take a journey to Siberia."

"Siberia! That is a long distance off, and few return from that journey," said Varhely, his voice becoming almost hoarse. "I would give anything in the world if Menko were free!"

"It would have been so easy for him not to have been seized by the Russian police."

“Yes; but he is. And, I repeat, I have come to you to demand his release. Damn it! Such a demand is neither a threat nor a *cases belli*.”

The minister calmed the old hussar with a gesture.

“No,” he replied, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth; “but it is embarrassing, embarrassing! Confound Menko! He always was a feather-brain! The idea of his leaving diplomacy to seek adventures! He must know, however, that his case is—what shall I say?—embarrassing, very embarrassing. I don’t suppose he had any idea of conspiring. He is a malcontent, this Menko, a malcontent! He would have made his mark in our embassies. The devil take him! Ah! my dear Count, it is very embarrassing, very embarrassing!”

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The minister uttered these words in a calm, courteous, polished manner, even when he said "The devil take him!" He then went on to say, that he could not make Varhely an absolute promise; he would look over the papers in the affair, telegraph to Warsaw and St. Petersburg, make a rapid study of what he called again the "very embarrassing" case of Michel Menko, and give Varhely an answer within twenty-four hours.

"That will give you a chance to take a look at our city, my dear Count. Vienna has changed very much. Have you seen the opera-house? It is superb. Hans Makart is just exhibiting a new picture. Be sure to see it, and visit his studio, too; it is well worth examining. I have no need to tell you that I am at your service to act as your cicerone, and show you all the sights."

"Are any of our old friends settled here?" asked Varhely.

"Yes, yes," said the minister, softly. "But they are deputies, university professors, or councillors of the administration. All changed! all changed!"

Then Varhely wished to know if certain among them whom he had not forgotten had "changed," as the minister said.

"Where is Armand Bitto?"

"Dead. He died very poor."

"And Arpad Ovody, Georgei's lieutenant, who was so brave at the assault of Buda? I thought that he was killed with that bullet through his cheek."

"Ovody? He is at the head of the Magyar Bank, and is charged by the ministry with the conversion of the six per cent. Hungarian loan. He is intimately connected with the Rothschild group. He has I don't know how many thousand florins a year, and a castle in the neighborhood of Presburg. A great collector of pictures, and a very amiable man!"

"And Hieronymis Janos, who wrote such eloquent proclamations and calls to arms? Kossuth was very fond of him."

"He is busy, with Maurice Jokai, preparing a great book upon the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a book patronized by the Archduke Rudolph. He will doubtless edit the part relative to the kingdom of Saint Stephen."

"Ha! ha! He will have a difficult task when he comes to the recital of the battle at Raab against Francis Joseph in person! He commanded at Raab himself, as you must remember well."

"Yes, he did, I remember," said the minister. Then, with a smile, he added: "Bah! History is written, not made. Hieronymis Janos's book will be very good, very good!"

"I don't doubt it. What about Ferency Szilogyi? Is he also writing books under the direction of the Archduke Rudolph?"

"No! no! Ferency Szilogyi is president of the court of assizes, and a very good magistrate he is."

"He! an hussar?"

"Oh! the world changes! His uniform sleeps in some chest, preserved in camphor. Szilogyi has only one fault: he is too strongly anti-Semitic."

"He! a Liberal?"

"He detests the Israelites, and he allows it to be seen a little too much. He embarrasses us sometimes. But there is one extenuating circumstance—he has married a Jewess!"

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This was said in a light, careless, humorously sceptical tone.

“On the whole,” concluded the minister, “Armand Bitto, who is no longer in this world, is perhaps the most fortunate of all.”

Then, turning to Yanski with his pleasant smile, and holding out his delicate, well-kept hand, which had once brandished the sabre, he said:

“My dear Varhely, you will dine with me to-morrow, will you not? It is a great pleasure to see you again! Tomorrow I shall most probably give you an answer to your request—a request which I am happy, very happy, to take into consideration. I wish also to present you to the Countess. But no allusions to the past before her! She is a Spaniard, and she would not understand the old ideas very well. Kossuth, Bem, and Georgei would astonish her, astonish her! I trust to your tact, Varhely. And then it is so long ago, so very long ago, all that. Let the dead past bury its dead! Is it understood?”

Yanski Varhely departed, a little stunned by this interview. He had never felt so old, so out of the fashion, before. Prince Zilah and he now seemed to him like two ancestors of the present generation—Don Quixotes, romanticists, imbeciles. The minister was, as Jacquemin would have said, a sly dog, who took the times as he found them, and left spectres in peace. Well, perhaps he was right!

“Ah, well,” thought the old hussar, with an odd smile, “there is the age of moustaches and the age of whiskers, that is all. Ladany has even found a way to become bald: he was born to be a minister!”

It little mattered to him, however, this souvenir of his youth found with new characteristics. If Count Josef Ladany rescued Menko from the police of the Czar, and, by setting him free, delivered him to him, Varhely, all was well. By entering the ministry, Ladany would thus be at least useful for something.

CHAPTER XXX

“To seek forgetfulness”

The negotiations with Warsaw, however, detained Yanski Varhely at Vienna longer than he wished. Count Josef evidently went zealously to work to obtain from the Russian Government Menko’s release. He had promised Varhely, the evening he received his old comrade at dinner, that he would put all the machinery at work to obtain the fulfilment of his request. “I only ask you, if I attain the desired result, that you will do something to cool off that hotheaded Menko. A second time he would not escape Siberia.”

Varhely had made no reply; but the very idea that Michel Menko might be free made his head swim. There was, in the Count's eagerness to obtain Menko's liberty, something of the excitement of a hunter tracking his prey. He awaited Michel's departure from the fortress as if he were a rabbit in its burrow.

"If he is set at liberty, I suppose that we shall know where he goes," he said to the minister.

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"It is more than probable that the government of the Czar will trace his journey for him. You shall be informed."

Count Ladany did not seek to know for what purpose Varhely demanded, with such evident eagerness, this release. It was enough for him that his old brother-in-arms desired it, and that it was possible.

"You see how everything is for the best, Varhely," he said to him one morning. "Perhaps you blamed me when you learned that I had accepted a post from Austria. Well, you see, if I did not serve the Emperor, I could not serve you!"

During his sojourn at Vienna, Varhely kept himself informed, day by day, as to what was passing in Paris. He did not write to Prince Zilah, wishing, above everything, to keep his errand concealed from him; but Angelo Valla, who had remained in France, wrote or telegraphed whatever happened to the Prince.

Marsa Laszlo was cured; she had left Dr. Sims's institution, and returned to the villa of Maisons-Lafitte.

The poor girl came out of her terrible stupor with the distaste to take up the thread of life which sometimes comes after a night of forgetfulness in sleep. This stupor, which might have destroyed her, and the fever which had shaken her, seemed to her sweet and enviable now compared to this punishment: To live! To live and think!

And yet—yes, she wished to live to once more see Andras, whose look, fixed upon her, had rekindled the extinct intellectual flame of her being. She wished to live, now that her reason had returned to her, to live to wrest from the Prince a word of pardon. It could not be possible that her existence was to end with the malediction of this man. It seemed to her, that, if she should ever see him face to face, she would find words of desperate supplication which would obtain her absolution.

Certainly—she repented it bitterly every hour, now that the punishment of thinking and feeling had been inflicted upon her—she had acted infamously, been almost as criminal as Menko, by her silence and deceit—her deceit! She, who hated a lie! But she longed to make the Prince understand that the motive of her conduct was the love which she had for him. Yes, her love alone! There was no other reason, no other, for her unpardonable treachery. He did not think it now, without any doubt. He must accuse her of some base calculation or vile intrigue. But she was certain that, if she could see him again, she would prove to him that the only cause of her conduct was her unquenchable love for him.

"Let him only believe that, and then let him fly me forever, if he likes! Forever! But I cannot endure to have him despise me, as he must!"

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It was this hope which now attached her to life. After her return to Maisons-Lafitte from Vaugirard, she would have killed herself if she had not so desired another interview where she could lay bare her heart. Not daring to appear before Andras, not even thinking of such a thing as seeking him, she resolved to wait some opportunity, some chance, she knew not what. Suddenly, she thought of Yanski Varhely. Through Varhely, she might be able to say to Andras all that she wished her husband—her husband! the very word made her shudder with shame—to know of the reason of her crime. She wrote to the old Hungarian; but, as she received no response, she left Maisons-Lafitte and went to Varhely's house. They did not know there, where the Count was; but Monsieur Angelo Valla would forward any letters to him.

She then begged the Italian to send to Varhely a sort of long confession, in which she asked his aid to obtain from the Prince the desired interview.

The letter reached Yanski while he was at Vienna. He answered it with a few icy words; but what did that matter to Marsa? It was not Varhely's rancor she cared for, but Zilah's contempt. She implored him again, in a letter in which she poured out her whole soul, to return, to be there when she should tell the Prince all her remorse—the remorse which was killing her, and making of her detested beauty a spectre.

There was such sincerity in this letter, wherein a conscience sobbed, that, little by little, in spite of his rough exterior, the soldier, more accessible to emotion than he cared to have it appear, was softened, and growled beneath his moustache—

“So! So! She suffers. Well, that is something.”

He answered Marsa that he would return when he had finished a work he had vowed to accomplish; and, without explaining anything to the Tzigana, he added, at the end of his letter, these words, which, enigmatical as they were, gave a vague, inexplicable hope to Marsa “And pray that I may return soon!”

The day after he had sent this letter to Maisons-Lafitte, Varhely received from Ladany a message to come at once to the ministry.

On his arrival there, Count Josef handed him a despatch. The Russian minister of foreign affairs telegraphed to his colleague at Vienna, that his Majesty the Czar consented to the release of Count Menko, implicated in the Labanoff affair. Labanoff would probably be sent to Siberia the very day that Count Menko would receive a passport and an escort to the frontier. Count Menko had chosen Italy for his retreat, and he would start for Florence the day his Excellency received this despatch.

“Well, my dear minister,” exclaimed Varhely, “thank you a thousand times. And, with my thanks, my farewell. I am also going to Florence.”

“Immediately?”

“Immediately.”

“You will arrive there before Menko.”

“I am in a hurry,” replied Varhely, with a smile.

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He went to the telegraph office, after leaving the ministry, and sent a despatch to Angelo Valla, at Paris, in which he asked the Venetian to join him in Florence. Valla had assured him that he could rely on him for any service; and Varhely left Vienna, certain that he should find Manin's old minister at Florence.

"After all, he has not changed so much," he said to himself, thinking of Josef Ladany. "Without his aid, Menko would certainly have escaped me. Ladany has taken the times as they are: Zilah and I desire to have them as they should be. Which is right?"

Then, while the train was carrying him to Venice, he thought: Bah! it was much better to be a dupe like himself and Zilah, and to die preserving, like an unsundered flag, one's dream intact.

To die?

Yes! After all, Varhely might, at this moment, be close to death; but, whatever might be the fate which awaited him at the end of his journey, he found the road very long and the engine very slow.

At Venice he took a train which carried him through Lombardy into Tuscany; and at Florence he found Angelo Valla.

The Italian already knew, in regard to Michel Menko, all that it was necessary for him to know. Before going to London, Menko, on his return from Pau, after the death of his wife, had retired to a small house he owned in Pistoja; and here he had undoubtedly gone now.

It was a house built on the side of a hill, and surrounded with olive-trees. Varhely and Valla waited at the hotel until one of Balla's friends, who lived at Pistoja, should inform him of the arrival of the Hungarian count. And Menko did, in fact, come there three days after Varhely reached Florence.

"To-morrow, my dear Valla," said Yanski, "you will accompany me to see Menko?"

"With pleasure," responded the Italian.

Menko's house was some distance from the station, at the very end of the little city.

The bell at the gate opening into the garden, had been removed, as if to show that the master of the house did not wish to be disturbed. Varhely was obliged to pound heavily upon the wooden barrier. The servant who appeared in answer to his summons, was an Hungarian, and he wore the national cap, edged with fur.

"My master does not receive visitors," he answered when Yanski asked him, in Italian, if Count Menko were at home.

“Go and say to Menko Mihaly,” said Varhely, this time in Hungarian, “that Count Varhely is here as the representative of Prince Zilah!”

The domestic disappeared, but returned almost immediately and opened the gate. Varhely and Valla crossed the garden, entered the house, and found themselves face to face with Menko.

Varhely would scarcely have recognized him.

The former graceful, elegant young man had suddenly aged: his hair was thin and gray upon the temples, and, instead of the carefully trained moustache of the embassy attache, a full beard now covered his emaciated cheeks.

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Michel regarded the entrance of Varhely into the little salon where he awaited him, as if he were some spectre, some vengeance which he had expected, and which did not astonish him. He stood erect, cold and still, as Yanski advanced toward him; while Angelo Valla remained in the doorway, mechanically stroking his smoothly shaven chin.

"Monsieur," said Varhely, "for months I have looked forward impatiently to this moment. Do not doubt that I have sought you."

"I did not hide myself," responded Menko.

"Indeed? Then may I ask what was your object in going to Warsaw?"

"To seek-forgetfulness," said the young man, slowly and sadly.

This simple word—so often spoken by Zilah—which had no more effect upon the stern old Hungarian than a tear upon a coat of mail, produced a singular impression upon Valla. It seemed to him to express unconquerable remorse.

"What you have done can not be forgotten," said Varhely.

"No more than what I have suffered."

"You made me the accomplice of the most cowardly and infamous act a man could commit. I have come to you to demand an explanation."

Michel lowered his eyes at these cutting words, his thin face paling, and his lower lip trembling; but he said nothing. At last, after a pause, he raised his eyes again to the face of the old Hungarian, and, letting the words fall one by one, he replied:

"I am at your disposal for whatever you choose to demand, to exact. I only desire to assure you that I had no intention of involving you in an act which I regarded as a cruel necessity. I wished to avenge myself. But I did not wish my vengeance to arrive too late, when what I had assumed the right to prevent had become irreparable."

"I do not understand exactly," said Varhely.

Menko glanced at Valla as if to ask whether he could speak openly before the Italian.

"Monsieur Angelo Valla was one of the witnesses of the marriage of Prince Andras Zilah," said Yanski.

"I know Monsieur," said Michel, bowing to Valla.

"Ah!" he exclaimed abruptly, his whole manner changing. "There was a man whom I respected, admired and loved. That man, without knowing it, wrested from me the

woman who had been the folly, the dream, and the sorrow of my life. I would have done anything to prevent that woman from bearing the name of that man.”

“You sent to the Prince letters written to you by that woman, and that, too, after the Tzigana had become Princess Zilah.”

“She had let loose her dogs upon me to tear me to pieces. I was insane with rage. I wished to destroy her hopes also. I gave those letters to my valet with absolute orders to deliver them to the Prince the evening before the wedding. At the same hour that I left Paris, the letters should have been in the hands of the man who had the right to see them, and when there was yet time for him to refuse his name to the woman who had written them. My servant did not obey, or did not understand. Upon my honor, this is true. He kept the letters twenty-four hours longer than I had ordered him to do; and it was not she whom I punished, but I struck the man for whom I would have given my life.”

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“Granted that there was a fatality of this sort in your conduct,” responded Varhely, coldly, “and that your lackey did not understand your commands: the deed which you committed was none the less that of a coward. You used as a weapon the letters of a woman, and of a woman whom you had deceived by promising her your name when it was no longer yours to give!”

“Are you here to defend Mademoiselle Marsa Laszlo?” asked Michel, a trifle haughtily.

“I am here to defend the Princess Zilah, and to avenge Prince Andras. I am here, above all, to demand satisfaction for your atrocious action in having taken me as the instrument of your villainy.”

“I regret it deeply and sincerely,” replied Menko; “and I am at your orders.”

The tone of this response admitted of no reply, and Yanski and Valla took their departure.

Valla then obtained another second from the Hungarian embassy, and two officers in garrison at Florence consented to serve as Menko’s friends. It was arranged that the duel should take place in a field near Pistoja.

Valla, anxious and uneasy, said to Varhely:

“All this is right and proper, but—”

“But what?”

“But suppose he kills you? The right is the right, I know; but leaden bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right, and—”

“Well,” interrupted Yanski, “in case of the worst, you must charge yourself, my dear Valla, with informing the Prince how his old friend Yanski Varhely defended his honor—and also tell him of the place where Count Menko may be found. I am going to attempt to avenge Zilah. If I do not succeed, ‘Teremtete!’” ripping out the Hungarian oath, “he will avenge me, that is all! Let us go to supper.”

CHAPTER XXXI

“If Menko were dead!”

Prince Zilah, wandering solitary in the midst of crowded Paris, was possessed by one thought, one image impossible to drive away, one name which murmured eternally in his ears—Marsa; Marsa, who was constantly before his eyes, sometimes in the silvery shimmer of her bridal robes, and sometimes with the deathly pallor of the promenader in



the garden of Vaugirard; Marsa, who had taken possession of his being, filling his whole heart, and, despite his revolt, gradually overpowering all other memories, all other passions! Marsa, his last love, since nothing was before him save the years when the hair whitens, and when life weighs heavily upon weary humanity; and not only his last love, but his only love!

Oh! why had he loved her? Or, having loved her, why had she not confessed to him that that coward of a Menko had deceived her! Who knows? He might have pardoned her, perhaps, and accepted the young girl, the widow of that passion. Widow? No, not while Menko lived. Oh! if he were dead!

And Zilah repeated, with a fierce longing for vengeance: "If he were dead!" That is, if there were not between them, Zilah and Marsa, the abhorred memory of the lover!

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Well! if Menko were dead?

When he feverishly asked himself this question, Zilah recalled at the same time Marsa, crouching at his feet, and giving no other excuse than this: "I loved you! I wished to belong to you, to be your wife!"

His wife! Yes, the beautiful Tzigana he had met at Baroness Dinati's was now his wife! He could punish or pardon. But he had punished, since he had inflicted upon her that living death—insanity. And he asked himself whether he should not pardon Princess Zilah, punished, repentant, almost dying.

He knew that she was now at Maisons, cured of her insanity, but still ill and feeble, and that she lived there like a nun, doing good, dispensing charity, and praying—praying for him, perhaps.

For him or for Menko?

No, for him! She was not vile enough to have lied, when she asked, implored, besought death from Zilah who held her life or death in his hands.

"Yes, I had the right to kill her, but—I have the right to pardon also," thought Zilah.

Ah, if Menko were dead!

The Prince gradually wrought himself into a highly nervous condition, missing Varhely, uneasy at his prolonged absence, and never succeeding in driving away Marsa's haunting image. He grew to hate his solitary home and his books.

"I shall not want any breakfast," he said one morning to his valet; and, going out, he descended the Champs-Elysees on foot.

At the corner of the Place de la Madeleine, he entered a restaurant, and sat down near a window, gazing mechanically at this lively corner of Paris, at the gray facade of the church, the dusty trees, the asphalt, the promenaders, the yellow omnibuses, the activity of Parisian life.

All at once he was startled to hear his name pronounced and to see before him, with his hand outstretched, as if he were asking alms, old General Vogotzine, who said to him, timidly:

"Ah, my dear Prince, how glad I am to see you! I was breakfasting over there, and my accursed paper must have hidden me. Ouf! If you only knew! I am stifling!"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Andras.

“Matter? Look at me! I must be as red as a beet!”

Poor Vogotzine had entered the restaurant for breakfast, regretting the cool garden of Maisons-Lafitte, which, now that Marsa no longer sat there, he had entirely to himself. After eating his usual copious breakfast, he had imprudently asked the waiter for a Russian paper; and, as he read, and sipped his kummel, which he found a little insipid and almost made him regret the vodka of his native land, his eyes fell upon a letter from Odessa, in which there was a detailed description of the execution of three nihilists, two of them gentlemen. It told how they were dragged, tied to the tails of horses, to the open square, each of them bearing upon his breast a white placard with this inscription, in black letters: “Guilty of high treason.”

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Then the wretched General shivered from head to foot. Every detail of the melodramatic execution seemed burned into his brain as with a red-hot iron. He fancied he could see the procession and the three gibbets, painted black; beside each gibbet was an open ditch and a black coffin covered with a dark gray pall. He saw, in the hollow square formed by a battalion of Cossack infantry, the executioner, Froloff, in his red shirt and his plush trousers tucked into his boots, and, beside him, a pale, black-robed priest.

“Who the devil is such an idiot as to relate such things in the newspapers?” he growled.

And in terror he imagined he could hear the sheriff read the sentence, see the priest present the cross to the condemned men, and Froloff, before putting on the black caps, degrade the gentlemen by breaking their swords over their heads.

Then, half suffocated, Vogotzine flung the paper on the floor; and, with eyes distended with horror, drawing the caraffe of kummel toward him, he half emptied it, drinking glass after glass to recover his self-control. It seemed to him that Froloff was there behind him, and that the branches of the candelabra, stretching over his heated head, were the arms of gibbets ready to seize him. To reassure himself, and be certain that he was miles and miles from Russia, he was obliged to make sure of the presence of the waiters and guests in the gay and gilded restaurant.

“The devil take the newspapers!” he muttered.

“They are cursed stupid! I will never read another! All that stuff is absurd! Absurd! A fine aid to digestion, truly!”

And, paying his bill, he rose to go, passing his hand over his head as if his sword had been broken upon it and left a contusion, and glancing timidly into the mirrors, as if he feared to discover the image of Froloff there.

It was at this moment that he discovered Prince Zilah, and rushed up to him with the joyful cry of a child discovering a protector.

The Prince noticed that poor Vogotzine, who sat heavily down by his side, was not entirely sober. The enormous quantity of kummel he had absorbed, together with the terror produced by the article he had read, had proved too much for the good man: his face was fiery, and he constantly moistened his dry lips.

“I suppose it astonishes you to see me here?” he said, as if he had forgotten all that had taken place. “I—I am astonished to see myself here! But I am so bored down there at Maisons, and I rust, rust, as little—little—ah! Stephanie said to me once at Odessa. So

I came to breathe the air of Paris. A miserable idea! Oh, if you knew! When I think that that might happen to me!"

"What?" asked Andras, mechanically.

"What?" gasped the General, staring at him with dilated eyes. "Why, Froloff, of course! Froloff! The sword broken over your head! The gallows! Ach! I am not a nihilist—heaven forbid—but I have displeased the Czar. And to displease the Czar—Brr! Imagine the open square—Odessa—No, no, don't let us talk of it any more!" glancing suddenly about him, as if he feared the platoon of Cossacks were there, in the restaurant, come to drag him away in the name of the Emperor. "Oh! by the way, Prince," he exclaimed abruptly—"why don't you ever come to Maisons-Lafitte?"

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He must, indeed, have been drunk to address such a question to the Prince.

Zilah looked him full in the face; but Vogotzine's eyes blinked stupidly, and his head fell partially forward on his breast. Satisfied that he was not responsible for what he was saying, Andras rose to leave the restaurant, and the General with difficulty stumbled to his feet, and instinctively grasped Andras's arm, the latter making no resistance, the mention of Maisons-Lafitte interesting him, even from the lips of this intoxicated old idiot.

"Do you know," stuttered Vogotzine, "I, myself, should be glad—very glad—if you would come there. I am bored-bored to death! Closed shutters—not the least noise. The creaking of a door—the slightest bit of light—makes her ill. The days drag—they drag—yes, they do. No one speaks. Most of the time I dine alone. Shall I tell you?—no—yes, I will. Marsa, yes, well! Marsa, she is good, very good—thinks only of the poor—the poor, you know! But whatever Doctor Fargeas may say about it, she is mad! You can't deceive me! She is insane!—still insane!"

"Insane?" said Andras, striving to control his emotion.

The General, who was now staggering violently, clung desperately to the Prince. They had reached the boulevard, and Andras, hailing a cab, made Vogotzine get in, and instructed the coachman to drive to the Bois.

"I assure you that she is insane," proceeded the General, throwing his head back on the cushions. "Yes, insane. She does not eat anything; she never rests. Upon my word, I don't know how she lives. Once—her dogs—she took walks. Now, I go with them into the park—good beasts—very gentle. Sometimes, all that she says, is: 'Listen! Isn't that Duna or Bundas barking?' Ah! if I wasn't afraid of Froloffyes, Froloff—how soon I should return to Russia! The life of Paris—the life of Paris wearies me. You see, I come here today, I take up a newspaper, and I see what? Froloff! Besides, the life of Paris—at Maisons-Lafitte—between four walls, it is absurd! Now, acknowledge, old man, isn't it absurd? Do you know what I should like to do? I should like to send a petition to the Czar. What did I do, after all, I should like to know? It wasn't anything so horrible. I stayed, against the Emperor's orders, five days too long at Odessa—that was all—yes, you see, a little French actress who was there, who sang operettas; oh, how she did sing operettas! Offenbach, you know;" and the General tried to hum a bar or two of the 'Dites lui', with ludicrous effect. "Charming! To leave her, ah! I found that very hard. I remained five days: that wasn't much, eh, Zilah? five days? But the devil! There was a Grand Duke—well—humph! younger than I, of course—and—and—the Grand Duke was jealous. Oh! there was at that time a conspiracy at Odessa! I was accused of spending my time at the theatre, instead of watching the conspirators. They even said I was in the

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conspiracy! Oh, Lord! Odessa! The gallows! Froloff! Well, it was Stephanie Gavaud who was the cause of it. Don't tell that to Marsa! Ah! that little Stephanie! 'J'ai vu le vieux Bacchus sur sa roche fertile!' Tautin—no, Tautin couldn't sing like that little Stephanie! Well," continued Vogotzine, hiccoughing violently, "because all that happened then, I now lead here the life of an oyster! Yes, the life of an oyster, of a turtle, of a clam! alone with a woman sad as Mid-Lent, who doesn't speak, doesn't sing, does nothing but weep, weep, weep! It is crushing! I say just what I think! Crushing, then, whatever my niece may be—cr-r-rushing! And—ah—really, my dear fellow, I should be glad if you would come. Why did you go away? Yes, yes, that is your affair, and I don't ask any questions. Only—only you would do well to come—"

"Why?" interrupted Andras, turning quickly to Vogotzine.

"Ah! why? Because!" said the General, trying to give to his heavy face an expression of shrewd, dignified gravity.

"What has happened?" asked the Prince. "Is she suffering again? Ill?"

"Oh, insane, I tell you! absolutely insane! mad as a March hare! Two days ago, you see —"

"Well, what? two days ago?"

"Because, two days ago!—"

"Well, what? What is it? Speak, Vogotzine!"

"The despatch," stammered the General.

"What despatch?"

"The des—despatch from Florence."

"She has received a despatch from Florence?"

"A telegram—blue paper—she read it before me; upon my word, I thought it was from you! She said—no; those miserable bits of paper, it is astonishing how they alarm you. There are telegrams which have given me a fit of indigestion, I assure you—and I haven't the heart of a chicken!"

"Go on! Marsa? This despatch? Whom was it from? What did Marsa say?"

“She turned white as a sheet; she began to tremble—an attack of the nerves—and she said: ‘Well, in two days I shall know, at last, whether I am to live!’ Queer, wasn’t it? I don’t know what she meant! But it is certain—yes, certain, my dear fellow—that she expects, this evening, some one who is coming—or who is not coming, from Florence—that depends.”

“Who is it? Who?” cried Andras. “Michel Menko?”

“I don’t know,” faltered Vogotzine in alarm, wondering whether it were Froloff’s hand that had seized him by the collar of his coat.

“It is Menko, is it not?” demanded Andras; while the terrified General gasped out something unintelligible, his intoxication increasing every yard the carriage advanced in the Bois.

Andras was almost beside himself with pain and suspense. What did it mean? Who had sent that despatch? Why had it caused Marsa such emotion? “In two days I shall know, at last, whether I am to live!” Who could make her utter such a cry? Who, if not Michel Menko, was so intimately connected with her life as to trouble her so, to drive her insane, as Vogotzine said?

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"It is Menko, is it not? it is Menko?" repeated Andras again.

And Vogotzine gasped:

"Perhaps! anything is possible!"

But he stopped suddenly, as if he comprehended, despite his inebriety, that he was in danger of going too far and doing some harm.

"Come, Vogotzine, come, you have told me too much not to tell me all!"

"That is true; yes, I have said too much! Ah! The devil! this is not my affair!—Well, yes, Count Menko is in Florence or near Florence—I don't know where. Marsa told me that—without meaning to. She was excited—very excited—talked to herself. I did not ask her anything—but—she is insane, you see, mad, mad! She first wrote a despatch to Italy—then she tore it up like this, saying: 'No, what is to happen, will happen!' There! I don't know anything but that. I don't know anything!"

"Ah! she is expecting him!" cried Andras. "When?"

"I don't know!"

"You told me it was to be this evening. This evening, is it not?"

The old General felt as ill at ease as if he had been before a military commission or in the hands of Froloff.

"Yes, this evening."

"At Maisons-Lafitte?"

"At Maisons," responded Vogotzine, mechanically. "And all this wearies me—wearies me. Was it for this I decided to come to Paris? A fine idea! At least, there are no Russian days at Maisons!"

Andras made no reply.

He stopped the carriage, got out, and, saluting the General with a brief "Thank you!" walked rapidly away, leaving Vogotzine in blank amazement, murmuring, as he made an effort to sit up straight:

"Well, well, are you going to leave me here, old man? All alone? This isn't right!"

And, like a forsaken child, the old General, with comic twitchings of his eyebrows and nostrils, felt a strong desire to weep.

“Where shall I drive you, Monsieur?” asked the coachman.

“Wherever you like, my friend,” responded Vogotzine, modestly, with an appealing look at the man. “You, at least, must not leave me!”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE VALE OF VIOLETS

In the Prince’s mind the whole affair seemed clear as day, and he explained the vague anxiety with which he had been afflicted for several days as a mysterious premonition of a new sorrow. Menko was at Florence! Menko, for it could be no other than he, had telegraphed to Marsa, arranging a meeting with her. That very evening he was to be in the house of Marsa Laszlo—Marsa who bore, in spite of all, the title and name of the Zilahs. Was it possible? After the marriage, after this woman’s vows and tears, these two beings, separated for a time, were to be united again. And he, Andras, had almost felt pity for her! He had listened to Varhely, an honest man; drawing a parallel between a vanquished soldier and this fallen girl—Varhely, the rough, implacable Varhely, who had also been the dupe of the Tzigana, and one evening at Sainte-Adresse had even counselled the deceived husband to pardon her.

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In a state bordering on frenzy, Zilah returned to his hotel, thinking:

“He will be with her this evening!”

This was worse than all the rest. How could he punish her?

Punish her?

Why not? Was not Marsa Laszlo his wife? That villa of Maisons-Lafitte, where she thought herself so safe, was his by law. He, the husband, had a right to enter there at any hour and demand of his wife an account of his honor.

“She wished this name of Zilah! Well! she shall know at least what it costs and what it imposes upon her!” he hissed through his clenched teeth. He walked nervously to and fro in the library of his hotel, his excitement increasing at every step.

“She is Princess Zilah! She—a princess! Nothing can wrest from her that title which she has stolen! Princess be it, then; but the Prince has the right to deal out life or death to his wife—to his wife and to the lover of his wife!” with a spasmodic burst of laughter. “Her lover is to be there; Menko is to be there, and I complain! The man whom I have sought in vain will be before me. I shall hold him at my mercy, and I do not thank the kind fate which gives me that joy! This evening! He will be at her house this evening! Good! Justice shall be done!”

Every moment added to his fever. He would have given ten years of his life if it were already evening. He waited impatiently for the hour to come when he could go and surprise them. He even thought of meeting Menko at the railway station on his arrival from Italy: but what would be the use? Menko would be at Maisons; and he would kill him before her face, in a duel if Menko would fight, or like a thief caught in the act if he attempted to fly. That would be better. Yes, he would kill him like a dog, if the other—but no! The Hungarian, struck in the presence of the Tzigana, would certainly not recoil before a pistol. Marsa should be the sole witness of the duel, and the blood of the Prince or of Menko should spatter her face—a crimson stain upon her pale cheek should be her punishment.

Early in the evening Andras left the hotel, after slipping into the pocket of his overcoat a pair of loaded pistols: one of them he would cast at Menko’s feet. It was not assassination he wished, but justice.

He took the train to Maisons, and, on his arrival there, crossed the railway bridge, and found himself almost alone in the broad avenue which runs through the park. As he walked on through the rapidly darkening shadows, he began to feel a strange sensation, as if nothing had happened, and as if he were shaking off, little by little, a hideous nightmare. In a sort of voluntary hallucination, he imagined that he was going, as in

former days, to Marsa's house; and that she was awaiting him in one of those white frocks which became her so well, with her silver belt clasped with the agraffe of opals. As he advanced, a host of memories overwhelmed him.

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He had walked with Marsa under these great lindens forming an arch overhead like that of a cathedral. He remembered conversations they had had in the evening, when a slight mist silvered the majestic park, and the white villa loomed vaguely before them like some phantom palace of fairyland. With the Tzigana clinging to his arm, he had seen those fountains, with their singing waters, that broad lawn between the two long lines of trees, those winding paths through the shrubbery; and, in the emotion aroused by these well-remembered places, there was a sensation of bitter pain at the thought of the happiness that might have been his had fate fulfilled her promises, which increased, rather than appeased, the Prince's anger.

As his steps led him mechanically nearer and nearer to the house where she lived, all the details of his wedding-day rose in his memory, and he turned aside to see again the little church, the threshold of which they had crossed together—she exquisitely lovely in her white draperies, and he overflowing with happiness.

The square in front of the sanctuary was now deserted and the leaves were beginning to fall from the trees. A man was lying asleep upon the steps before the bolted door. Zilah stood gazing at the Gothic portal, with a statue of the Virgin Mother above it, and wondered whether it were he who had once led there a lovely girl, about to become his wife; and the sad, closed church produced upon him the effect of a tomb.

He dragged himself away from the contemplation of the stone threshold, where slept the tired man—drunk perhaps, at all events happier than the Prince—and proceeded on his way through the woods to the abode of Marsa Laszlo.

There was, Zilah remembered well, quite near there, a sort of narrow valley (where the Mayor of Maisons was said to have royally entertained Louis XIV and his courtiers, as they were returning from Marly), a lovely spot, surrounded by grassy slopes covered with violets, a little shady, Virgilian wood, where he and Marsa had dreamed away many happy hours. They had christened it The Vale of Violets. How many memories were in that sweet name, each one of which stabbed and exasperated Zilah, rising before him like so many spectres.

He hastened his steps, repeating:

“He is there! She is waiting for him! Her lover is there!”

At the end of the road, before the villa, closed and silent like the old church, he stopped. He had reached his destination; but what was he about to do, he who—who up to this time had protected his name from the poisonous breath of scandal?



He was about to kill Menko, or to be killed himself. A duel! But what was the need of proposing a duel, when, exercising his rights as a husband, he could punish both the man and the woman?

He did not hesitate long, however, but advanced to the gate, saying, aloud:

“I have a right to enter my own house.”

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The ringing of the bell was answered by the barking of Duna, Bundas, and Ortog, who tore furiously at their iron chains.

A man presently appeared on the other side of the gate. It was a domestic whom Andras did not know and had never seen.

"Whom do you wish to see?" asked the man.

"The Princess Zilah!"

"Who are you?" demanded the man, his hand upon the inner bolt of the gate.

"Prince Zilah!"

The other stood stock-still in amazement, trying to see, through the darkness, the Prince's face.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Andras.

And, as the domestic opened the gate, as if to observe the appearance of the visitor, the Prince gave it a nervous push, which threw the servant backward; and, once within the garden, he came close to him, and said:

"Look well at me, in order that you may recognize me again. I am master here."

Zilah's clear eye and imperious manner awed the man, and he bowed humbly, not daring to speak.

Andras turned on his heel, mounted the steps, and entered the house; then he stopped and listened.

She was with him. Yes, a man was there, and the man was speaking, speaking to Marsa, speaking doubtless of love.

Menko, with his twisted moustache, his pretty smile and his delicate profile, was there, behind that door. A red streak of light from the salon where Marsa was showed beneath the door, which the Prince longed to burst open with his foot. With anger and bitterness filling his heart, he felt capable of entering there, and striking savagely, madly, at his rival.

How these two beings had played with him; the woman who had lied to him, and the coward who had sent him those letters.

Suddenly Marsa's voice fell upon his ear, that rich, contralto voice he knew so well, speaking in accents of love or joy.

What was he waiting for? His hot, feverish hand sought the handle of his pistol, and, striding forward, he threw open the door of the room.

The light from an opal-tinted lamp fell full upon his face. He stood erect upon the threshold, while two other faces were turned toward him, two pale faces, Marsa's and another's.

Andras paused in amazement.

He had sought Menko; he found—Varhely!

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DUEL

"Yanski!"

Marsa recoiled in fear at hearing this cry and the sudden appearance of the Prince; and, trembling like a leaf, with her face still turned toward that threshold where Andras stood, she murmured, in a voice choked with emotion:

"Who is there? Who is it?"

Yanski Varhely, unable to believe his eyes, advanced, as if to make sure.

"Zilah!" he exclaimed, in his turn.

He could not understand; and Zilah himself wondered whether he were not the victim of some illusion, and where Menko could be, that Menko whom Marsa had expected, and whom he, the husband, had come to chastise.

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But the most bewildered, in her mute amazement, was Marsa, her lips trembling, her face ashen, her eyes fixed upon the Prince, as she leaned against the marble of the mantelpiece to prevent herself from falling, but longing to throw herself on her knees before this man who had suddenly appeared, and who was master of her destiny.

"You here?" said Varhely at last. "You followed me, then?"

"No," said Andras. "The one whom I expected to find here was not you."

"Who was it, then?"

"Michel Menko!"

Yanski Varhely turned toward Marsa.

She did not stir; she was looking at the Prince.

"Michel Menko is dead," responded Varhely, shortly. "It was to announce that to the Princess Zilah that I am here."

Andras gazed alternately upon the old Hungarian, and upon Marsa, who stood there petrified, her whole soul burning in her eyes.

"Dead?" repeated Zilah, coldly.

"I fought and killed him," returned Varhely.

Andras struggled against the emotion which seized hold of him. Pale as death, he turned from Varhely to the Tzigana, with an instinctive desire to know what her feelings might be.

The news of this death, repeated thus before the man whom she regarded as the master of her existence, had, apparently, made no impression upon her, her thoughts being no longer there, but her whole heart being concentrated upon the being who had despised her, hated her, fled from her, and who appeared there before her as in one of her painful dreams in which he returned again to that very house where he had cursed her.

"There was," continued Varhely, slowly, "a martyr who could not raise her head, who could not live, so long as that man breathed. First of all, I came to her to tell her that she was delivered from a detested past. Tomorrow I should have informed a man whose honor is my own, that the one who injured and insulted him has paid his debt."

With lips white as his moustache, Varhely spoke these words like a judge delivering a solemn sentence.

A strange expression passed over Zilah's face. He felt as if some horrible weight had been lifted from his heart.

Menko dead!

Yet there was a time when he had loved this Michel Menko: and, of the three beings present in the little salon, the man who had been injured by him was perhaps the one who gave a pitying thought to the dead, the old soldier remaining as impassive as an executioner, and the Tzigana remembering only the hatred she had felt for the one who had been her ruin.

Menko dead!

Varhely took from the mantelpiece the despatch he had sent from Florence, three days before, to the Princess Zilah, the one of which Vogotzine had spoken to Andras.

He handed it to the Prince, and Andras read as follows:

"I am about to risk my life for you. Tuesday evening either I shall be at Maisons-Lafitte, or I shall be dead. I fight tomorrow with Count M. If you do not see me again, pray for the soul of Varhely."

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Count Varhely had sent this despatch before going to keep his appointment with Michel Menko.

.....

It had been arranged that they were to fight in a field near Pistoja.

Some peasant women, who were braiding straw hats, laughed as they saw the men pass by.

One of them called out, gayly:

“Do you wish to find your sweethearts, signori? That isn’t the way!”

A little farther, Varhely and his adversary encountered a monk with a cowl drawn over his head so that only his eyes could be seen, who, holding out a zinc money-box, demanded ‘elemosina’, alms for the sick in hospitals.

Menko opened his pocketbook, and dropped in the box a dozen pieces of gold.

“Mille grazie, signor!”

“It is of no consequence.”

They arrived on the ground, and the seconds loaded the pistols.

Michel asked permission of Yanski to say two words to him.

“Speak!” said Varhely.

The old Hungarian stood at his post with folded arms and lowered eyes, while Michel approached him, and said:

“Count Varhely, I repeat to you that I wished to prevent this marriage, but not to insult the Prince. I give you my word of honor that this is true. If you survive me, will you promise to repeat this to him?”

“I promise.”

“I thank you.”

They took their positions.

Angelo Valla was to give the signal to fire.



He stood holding a white handkerchief in his outstretched hand, and with his eyes fixed upon the two adversaries, who were placed opposite each other, with their coats buttoned up to the chin, and their pistols held rigidly by their side.

Varhely was as motionless as if made of granite. Menko smiled.

“One! Two!” counted Valla.

He paused as if to take breath: then—

“Three!” he exclaimed, in the tone of a man pronouncing a death-sentence; and the handkerchief fell.

There were two reports in quick succession.

Varhely stood erect in his position; Menko’s ball had cut a branch above his head, and the green leaves fell fluttering to the ground.

Michel staggered back, his hand pressed to his left side.

His seconds hastened toward him, seized him under the arms, and tried to raise him.

“It is useless,” he said. “It was well aimed!”

And, turning to Varhely, he cried, in a voice which he strove to render firm:

“Remember your promise!”

They opened his coat. The ball had entered his breast just above the heart.

They seated him upon the grass, with his back against a tree.

He remained there, with fixed eyes, gazing, perhaps, into the infinite, which was now close at hand.

His lips murmured inarticulate names, confused words:

“Pardon—punishment—Marsa—”

As Yanski Varhely, with his two seconds, again passed the straw-workers, the girls saluted them with:

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"Well, where are your other friends? Have they found their sweethearts?"

And while their laughter rang out upon the air, the gay, foolish laughter of youth and health, over yonder they were bearing away the dead body of Michel Menko.

.....

Andras Zilah, with a supreme effort at self-control, listened to his old friend relate this tale; and, while Varhely spoke, he was thinking:

It was not a lover, it was not Menko, whom Marsa expected. Between the Tzigana and himself there was now nothing, nothing but a phantom. The other had paid his debt with his life. The Prince's anger disappeared as suddenly in proportion as his exasperation had been violent.

He contemplated Marsa, thin and pale, but beautiful still. The very fixedness of her great eyes gave her a strange and powerful attraction; and, in the manner in which Andras regarded her, Count Varhely, with his rough insight, saw that there were pity, astonishment, and almost fear.

He pulled his moustache a moment in reflection, and then made a step toward the door.

Marsa saw that he was about to leave the room; and, moving away from the marble against which she had been leaning, with a smile radiant with the joy of a recovered pride, she held out her hand to Yanski, and, in a voice in which there was an accent of almost terrible gratitude for the act of justice which had been accomplished, she said, firmly:

"I thank you, Varhely!"

Varhely made no reply, but passed out of the room, closing the door behind him.

The husband and wife, after months of torture, anguish, and despair, were alone, face to face with each other.

Andras's first movement was one of flight. He was afraid of himself. Of his own anger? Perhaps. Perhaps of his own pity.

He did not look at Marsa, and in two steps he was at the door.

Then, with a start, as one drowning catches at a straw, as one condemned to death makes a last appeal for mercy, with a feeble, despairing cry like that of a child, a strange contrast to the almost savage thanks given to Varhely, she exclaimed:

“Ah! I implore you, listen to me!”

Andras stopped.

“What have you to say to me?” he asked.

“Nothing—nothing but this: Forgive! ah, forgive! I have seen you once more; forgive me, and let me disappear; but, at least, carrying away with me a word from you which is not a condemnation.”

“I might forgive,” said Andras; “but I could not forget.”

“I do not ask you to forget, I do not ask you that! Does one ever forget? And yet—yes, one does forget, one does forget, I know it. You are the only thing in all my existence, I know only you, I think only of you. I have loved only you!”

Andras shivered, no longer able to fly, moved to the depths of his being by the tones of this adored voice, so long unheard.

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"There was no need of bloodshed to destroy that odious past," continued Marsa. "Ah! I have atoned for it! There is no one on earth who has suffered as I have. I, who came across your path only to ruin your life! Your life, my God, yours!"

She looked at him with worshipping eyes, as believers regard their god.

"You have not suffered so much as the one you stabbed, Marsa. He had never had but one love in the world, and that love was you. If you had told him of your sufferings, and confessed your secret, he would have been capable of pardoning you. You deceived him. There was something worse than the crime itself—the lie."

"Ah!" she cried, "if you knew how I hated that lie! Would to heaven that some one would tear out my tongue for having deceived you!"

There was an accent of truth in this wild outburst of the Tzigana; and upon the lips of this daughter of the puszta, Hungarian and Russian at once, the cry seemed the very symbol of her exceptional nature.

"What is it you wish that I should do?" she said. "Die? yes, I would willingly, gladly die for you, interposing my breast between you and a bullet. Ah! I swear to you, I should be thankful to die like one of those who bore your name. But, there is no fighting now, and I can not shed my blood for you. I will sacrifice my life in another manner, obscurely, in the shadows of a cloister. I shall have had neither lover nor husband, I shall be nothing, a recluse, a prisoner. It will be well! yes, for me, the prison, the cell, death in a life slowly dragged out! Ah! I deserve that punishment, and I wish my sentence to come from you; I wish you to tell me that I am free to disappear, and that you order me to do so—but, at the same time, tell me, oh, tell me, that you have forgiven me!"

"I!" said Andras.

In Marsa's eyes was a sort of wild excitement, a longing for sacrifice, a thirst for martyrdom.

"Do I understand that you wish to enter a convent?" asked Andras, slowly.

"Yes, the strictest and gloomiest. And into that tomb I shall carry, with your condemnation and farewell, the bitter regret of my love, the weight of my remorse!"

The convent! The thought of such a fate for the woman he loved filled Andras Zilah with horror. He imagined the terrible scene of Marsa's separation from the world; he could hear the voice of the officiating bishop casting the cruel words upon the living, like earth upon the dead; he could almost see the gleam of the scissors as they cut through her beautiful dark hair.



Kneeling before him, her eyes wet with tears, Marsa was as lovely in her sorrow as a Mater Dolorosa. All his love surged up in his heart, and a wild temptation assailed him to keep her beauty, and dispute with the convent this penitent absolved by remorse.

She knelt there repentant, weeping, wringing her hands, asking nothing but pardon—a word, a single word of pity—and the permission to bury herself forever from the world.

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"So," he said, abruptly, "the convent cell, the prison, does not terrify you?"

"Nothing terrifies me except your contempt."

"You would live far from Paris, far from the world, far from everything?"

"In a kennel of dogs, under the lash of a slavedriver; breaking stones, begging my bread, if you said to me: 'Do that, it is atonement!'"

"Well!" cried Andras, passionately, his lips trembling, his blood surging through his veins. "Live buried in our Hungary, forgetting, forgotten, hidden, unknown, away from all, away from Paris, away from the noise of the world, in a life with me, which will be a new life! Will you?"

She looked at him with staring, terrified eyes, believing his words to be some cruel jest.

"Will you?" he said again, raising her from the floor, and straining her to his breast, his burning lips seeking the icy ones of the Tzigana. "Answer me, Marsa. Will you?"

Like a sigh, the word fell on the air: "Yes."

CHAPTER XXXIV

A NEW LIFE

The following day, with tender ardor, he took her away to his old Hungarian castle, with its red towers still bearing marks of the ravages of the cannon—the castle which he never had beheld since Austria had confiscated it, and then, after long years, restored it to its rightful owner. He fled from Paris, seeking a pure existence, and returned to his Hungary, to the country of his youth, the land of the vast plains. He saw again the Danube and the golden Tisza. In the Magyar costume, his heart beating more proudly under the national attila, he passed before the eyes of the peasants who had known him when a child, and had fought under his orders; and he spoke to them by name, recognizing many of his old companions in these poor people with cheeks tanned by the sun, and heads whitened by age.

He led Marsa, trembling and happy, to the door of the castle, where they offered him the wine of honor, drank from the 'tschouttora', the Hungarian drinking-vessel, the 'notis' and cakes made of maize cooked in cream.

Upon the lawns about the castle, the 'tschiko' shepherds, who had come on horseback to greet the Prince, drank plum brandy, and drank with their red wine the 'kadostas' and the bacon of Temesvar. They had come from their farms, from their distant pusztas, peasant horsemen, like soldiers, with their national caps; and they joyously celebrated

the return of Zilah Andras, the son of those Zilahs whose glorious history they all knew. The dances began, the bright copper heels clinked together, the blue jackets, embroidered with yellow, red, or gold, swung in the wind, and it seemed that the land of Hungary blossomed with flowers and rang with songs to do honor to the coming of Prince Andras and his Princess.

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Then Andras entered with Marsa the abode of his ancestors. And, in the great halls hung with tapestry and filled with pictures which the conquerors had respected, before those portraits of magnates superb in their robes of red or green velvet edged with fur, curved sabres by their sides and aigrettes upon their heads, all reproducing a common trait of rough frankness, with their long moustaches, their armor and their hussar uniforms—Marsa Laszlo, who knew them well, these heroes of her country, these Zilah princes who had fallen upon the field of battle, said to the last of them all, to Andras Zilah, before Ferency Zilah, before Sandor, before the Princesses Zilah who had long slept in “dull, cold marble,” and who had been no prouder than she of the great name they bore:

“Do you know the reason why, equal to these in devotion and courage, you are superior to them all! It is because you are good, as good as they were brave.

“To their virtues, you, who forgive, add this virtue, which is your own: pity!”

She looked at him humbly, raising to his face her beautiful dark eyes, as if to let him read her heart, in which was only his image and his name. She pressed closely to his side, with an uneasy, timid tenderness, as if she were a stranger in the presence of his great ancestors, who seemed to demand whether the newcomer were one of the family; and he, putting his arm about her, and pressing to his beating heart the Tzigana, whose eyes were dim with tears, said: “No, I am not better than these. It is not pity which is my virtue, Marsa: it is my love. For—I love you!”

Yes, he loved her, and with all the strength of a first and only love. He loved her so that he forgot everything, so that he did not see that in Marsa’s smile there was a look of the other side of the great, eternal river. He loved her so that he thought only of this woman, of her beauty, of the delight of her caresses, of his dream of love realized in the air of the adored fatherland. He loved her so that he left without answers the charming letters which Baroness Dinati wrote him from Paris, so far away now, and the more serious missives which he received from his compatriots, wishing him to utilize for his country, now that he had returned to it, his superior intelligence, as he had formerly utilized his courage.

“The hour is critical,” wrote his old friends. “An attempt is being made to awaken in Hungary, against the Russians, whom we like, memories of combats and extinct hatreds, and that to the profit of a German alliance, which is repugnant to our race. Bring the support of your name and your valor to our cause. Enter the Diet of Hungary. Your place is marked out for you there in the first rank, as it was in the old days upon the battlefield.”

Andras only smiled.

“If I were ambitious!” he said to Marsa. Then he added: “But I am ambitious only for your happiness.”

Marsa’s happiness! It was deep, calm, and clear as a lake. It seemed to the Tzigana that she was dreaming a dream, a beautiful dream, a dream peaceful, sweet, and restful. She abandoned herself to her profound happiness with the trustfulness of a child. She was all the more happy because she had the exquisite sensation that her dream would have no awakening. It would end in all the charm of its poetry.

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She was sure that she could not survive the immense joy which destiny had accorded her; and she did not rebel against this decree. It seemed to her right and just. She had never desired any other ending to her love than to die beloved, to die with Andras's kiss of forgiveness upon her lips, with his arms about her, and to sink with a smile into the eternal sleep. What more beautiful thing could she, the Tzigana, have wished?

When the Prince's people saluted her by that title of "Princess" which was hers, she trembled as if she had usurped it; she wished to be Marsa to the Prince, Marsa, his devoted slave, who looked at him with her great eyes full of gratitude and love. And she wished to be only that. It seemed to her that, in the ancient home of the Zilahs, the birthplace of soldiers, the eyrie of eagles, she was a sort of stranger; but, at the same time, she thought, with a smile:

"What matters it? It is for so short a time."

One day Prince Zilah received from Vienna a large sealed envelope. Minister Ladany earnestly entreated him to come to the Austrian capital and present, in the salons of Vienna and at the imperial court, Princess Zilah, of whose beauty the Austrian colony of Paris raved.

Marsa asked the Prince what the letter contained.

"Nothing. An invitation to leave our solitude. We are too happy here."

Marsa questioned him no further; but she resolved that she would never allow the Prince to take her to that court which claimed his presence. In her eyes, she was always the Tzigana; and, although Menko was dead, she would never permit Zilah to present her to people who might have known Count Michel.

No, no, let them remain in the dear old castle, he living only for her, she breathing only for him; and let the world go, with its fascinations and its pleasures, its false joys and its false friendships! Let them ask of life only what truth it possesses; an hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs, and—the right to love each other. To love each other until that fatal separation which she felt was coming, until that end which was fast advancing; her poor, frail body being now only the diaphanous prison of her soul. She did not complain, as she felt the hour gently approach when, with a last kiss, a last sigh, she must say to Andras, Adieu!

He, seeing her each day more pale, each day more feeble, was alarmed; but he hoped, that, when the winter, which was very severe there, was over, Marsa would regain her strength. He summoned to the castle a physician from Vienna, who battled obstinately and skilfully against the malady from which the Tzigana was suffering. Her weakness and languor kept Marsa, during the cold months, for whole days before the lofty, sculptured chimney-piece, in which burned enormous logs of oak. As the flames gave a

rosy tinge to her cheeks and made her beautiful eyes sparkle, Andras said to herself, as he watched her, that she would live, live and be happy with him.

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The spring came, with the green leaflets and the white blossoms at the ends of the branches. The buds opened and the odors of the rejuvenated earth mounted subtly into the soft air.

At her window, regarding the young grass and the masses of tender verdure in which clusters of pale gold or silvery white gleamed like aigrettes, Marsa said to Andras:

"It must be lovely at Maisons, in the Vale of Violets!" but she added, quickly:

"We are better here, much better! And it even seems to me that I have always, always lived here in this beautiful castle, where you have sheltered me, like a swallow beaten by the wind."

There was, beneath the window, stretching out like a ribbon of silver, a road, which the mica dust caused, at times, in the sunlight to resemble a river. Marsa often looked out on this road, imagining that she saw again the massive dam upon the Seine, or wondering whether a band of Tzigani would not appear there with the April days.

"I should like," she said one day to Andras, "to hear again the airs my people used to play."

She found that, with the returning spring, she was more feeble than she had ever been. The first warmth in the air entered her veins like a sweet intoxication. Her head felt heavy, and in her whole body she felt a pleasant languor. She had wished to sink thus to rest, as nature was awakening.

The doctor seemed very uneasy at this languidness, of which Marsa said:

"It is delicious!"

He whispered one evening to Andras:

"It is grave!"

Another sorrow was to come into the life of the Prince, who had known so many.

A few days after, with a sort of presentiment, he wrote to Yanski Varhely to come and spend a few months with him. He felt the need of his old friend; and the Count hastened to obey the summons.

Varhely was astonished to see the change which so short a time had produced in Marsa. In seven months her face, although still beautiful, had become emaciated, and had a transparent look. The little hand, white as snow, which she gave to Varhely, burned him; the skin was dry and hot.

“Well, my dear Count,” said Marsa, as she lay extended in a reclining-chair, “what news of General Vogotzine?”

“The General is well. He hopes to return to Russia. The Czar has been appealed to, and he does not say no.”

“Ah! that is good news,” she said. “He must be greatly bored at Maisons; poor Vogotzine!”

“He smokes, drinks, takes the dogs out—”

The dogs! Marsa started. Those hounds would survive Menko, herself, the love which she now tasted as the one joy of her life! Mechanically her lips murmured, too low to be heard: “Ortog! Bundas!”

Then she said, aloud:

“I shall be very, glad if the poor General can return to St. Petersburg or Odessa. One is best off at home, in one’s own country. If you only knew, Varhely, how happy I am, happy to be in Hungary. At home!”

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She was very weak. The doctor made a sign to Andras to leave her for a moment.

“Well,” asked the Prince anxiously of Varhely, “how do you think she is?”

“What does the doctor say?” replied Yanski. “Does he hope to save her?”

Zilah made no response. Varhely’s question was the most terrible of answers.

Ensnconced in an armchair, the Prince then laid bare his heart to old Varhely, sitting near him. She was about to die, then! Solitude! Was that to be the end of his life? After so many trials, it was all to end in this: an open grave, in which his hopes were to be buried. What remained to him now? At the age when one has no recourse against fate, love, the one love of his life, was to be taken away from him. Varhely had administered justice, and Zilah had pardoned—for what? To watch together a silent tomb; yes, yes, what remained to him now?

“What remains to you if she dies?” said old Yanski, slowly. “There remains to you what you had at twenty years, that which never dies. There remains to you what was the love and the passion of all the Zilah princes who lie yonder, and who experienced the same suffering, the same torture, the same despair, as you. There remains to you our first love, my dear Andras, the fatherland!”

The next day some Tzigana musicians, whom the Prince had sent for, arrived at the castle. Marsa felt invigorated when she heard the czimbalom and the piercing notes of the czardas. She had been longing for those harmonies and songs which lay so near her heart. She listened, with her hand clasped in that of Andras, and through the open window came the “March of Rakoczy,” the same strains which long ago had been played in Paris, upon the boat which bore them down the Seine that July morning.

An heroic air, a song of triumph, a battle-cry, the gallop of horses, a chant of victory. It was the air which had saluted their betrothal like a fanfare. It was the chant which the Tzigani had played that sad night when Andras’s father had been laid in the earth of Attila.

“I would like,” said Marsa, when the music had ceased, “to go to the little village where my mother rests. She was a Tzigana also! Like them, like me! Can I do so, doctor?”

The doctor shook his head.

“Oh, Princess, not yet! Later, when the warm sun comes.”

“Is not that the sun?” said Marsa, pointing to the April rays entering the old feudal hall and making the bits of dust dance like sparks of gold.

“It is the April sun, and it is sometimes dangerous for—”

The doctor paused; and, as he did not finish, Marsa said gently, with a smile which had something more than resignation in it—happiness:

“For the dying?”

Andras shuddered; but Marsa’s hand, which held his, did not even tremble.

Old Varhely’s eyes were dim with tears.

She knew that she was about to die. She knew it, and smiled at kindly death. It would take away all shame. Her memory would be to Andras the sacred one of the woman he adored. She would die without being held to keep that oath she had made not to survive her dreamed-of happiness, the union she had desired and accepted. Yes, it was sweet and welcome, this death, which taking her from Andras’s love, washed away all stain.

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She whispered in his ear the oft-repeated avowal:

"I love you! I love you! I love you! And I die content, for I feel that you will love me always. Think a moment! Could I live? Would there not be a spectre between you and your Marsa?"

She threw her arms about him as he leaned over the couch upon which she lay, and he made a gesture of denial, unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob.

"Oh, do not deny it!" she said. "Now, no. But later, who knows? On the other hand, you see, there will be no other phantom near you but mine, no other image but mine. I feel that I shall be always near you, yes, always, eternally, my beloved! Dear death! blessed death! which renders our love infinite, yes, infinite. Ah, I love you! I love you!"

She wished to see once more, through the open window, the sunny woods and the new blossoms. Behind those woods, a few leagues away, was the place where Tisza was buried.

"I should like to rest by her side," said the Tzigana. "I am not of your family, you see. A princess, I? your wife? I have been only your sweetheart, my Andras."

Andras, whiter than the dying girl, seemed petrified by the approach of the inevitable grief.

Now, as they went slowly down the white road, the Tzigani played the plaintive melancholy air of Janos Nemeth, that air impregnated with tears, that air which she used so often to play to herself—"The World holds but One Fair Maiden!"

And this time, bursting into tears, he said to her, with his heart breaking in his breast:

"Yes, there is but thee, Marsa! but thee, my beloved, thee, thee alone! Do not leave me! Stay with me! Stay with me, Marsa, my only love!"

Then, as she listened, over the lovely face of the Tzigana passed an expression of absolute, perfect happiness, as if, in Zilah's tears, she read all his forgiveness, all his love, all his devotion. She raised herself, her little hands resting upon the window-sill, her head heavy with sleep—the deep, dreamless sleep—and held up her sweet lips to him: when she felt Andras's kiss, she whispered, so that he barely heard it:

"Do not forget me! Never forget me, my darling!" Then her head drooped slowly, and fell upon the Prince's shoulder, like that of a tired child, with a calm sweet smile upon her flower-like face.

Like the salute they had once given to Prince Sandor, the Tzigani began proudly the heroic march of free Hungary, their music sending a fast farewell to the dead as the sun gave her its last kiss.

Then, as the hymn died slowly away in the distance, soft as a sigh, with one last, low, heart-breaking note, Andras Zilah laid the light form of the Tzigana upon the couch; and, winding his arms about her, with his head pillowed upon her breast, he murmured, in a voice broken with sobs: "I will love only, now, what you loved so much, my poor Tzigana. I will love only the land where you lie asleep."

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ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

An hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs
Anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers
At every step the reality splashes you with mud
Bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right
Does one ever forget?
History is written, not made.
"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget"
If well-informed people are to be believe
Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized
It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Man who expects nothing of life except its ending
Not only his last love, but his only love
Pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday
Sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony
Taken the times as they are
Unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob
What matters it how much we suffer
Why should I read the newspapers?
Willingly seek a new sorrow

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire set:

A man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness
All defeats have their geneses
An hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs
Anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers
At every step the reality splashes you with mud
Bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right
Does one ever forget?
Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves
History is written, not made.
"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget"
If well-informed people are to be believe
Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized
It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Life is a tempest
Man who expects nothing of life except its ending
Nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair
No answer to make to one who has no right to question me
Not only his last love, but his only love



Nothing ever astonishes me
One of those beings who die, as they have lived, children
Pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday
Playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men
Poverty brings wrinkles
Sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony
Superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness
Taken the times as they are
The Hungarian was created on horseback
There were too many discussions, and not enough action
Unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob
What matters it how much we suffer
Why should I read the newspapers?
Willingly seek a new sorrow
Would not be astonished at anything
You suffer? Is fate so just as that

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ZIBELINE

By *Philippe de Massa*

Translated by D. Knowlton RANOUS

ALEXANDRE-PHILIPPE-REGNIER DE MASSA

Marquis de Massa, soldier, composer, and French dramatist, was born in Paris, December 5, 1831. He selected the military career and received a commission in the cavalry after leaving the school of St. Cyr. He served in the Imperial Guards, took part in the Italian and Franco-German Wars and was promoted Chief of Squadron, Fifth Regiment, Chasseurs a Cheval, September 10, 1871. Having tendered his resignation from active service, he was appointed a lieutenant-colonel in the territorial army February 3, 1880. He has been decorated with the Legion of Honor.

The Marquis de Massa is known as a composer of music and as a dramatic author and novelist. At the Opera Comique there was represented in 1861 *Royal-Cravate*, written by him. Fragments of two operas by him were performed at the Paris Conservatory of Music in 1865, and in 1868. The list of his principal plays follows: '*Le Service en campagne*, comedy (1882); *La Cicatrice*, comedy (1885); *Au Mont Ida*, *Fronsac a La Bastille*, and *La Coeur de Paris*, all in 1887; *La Czarine* and *Brouille depuis Magenta* (1888), and *La Bonne Aventure*—all comedies—1889. Together with Petipa he also wrote a ballet *Le Roi d'Yvetot* (1866); music by Charles Labarre. He further wrote *Zibeline*, a most brilliant romance (1892) with an Introduction by Jules Claretie; crowned by the Academie Francaise. This odd and dainty little story has a heroine of striking originality, in character and exploits. Her real name is Valentine de Vermont, and she is the daughter of a fabulously wealthy French-American dealer in furs, and when, after his death, she goes to Paris to spend her colossal fortune, and to make restitution to the man from whom her father won at play the large sum that became the foundation of his wealth, certain lively Parisian ladies, envying her her rich furs, gave her the name of *Zibeline*, that of a very rare, almost extinct, wild animal. *Zibeline's* American unconventionality, her audacity, her wealth, and generosity, set all Paris by the ears. There are fascinating glimpses into the drawing-rooms of the most exclusive Parisian society, and also into the historic greenroom of the Comedie Francaise, on a brilliant "first night." The man to whom she makes graceful restitution of his fortune is a hero of the Franco-Mexican and Franco-Prussian wars, and when she gives him back his property, she throws her heart in with the gift. The story is an interesting study of a brilliant and unconventional American girl as seen by the eyes of a clever Frenchman.

Later came '*La Revue quand meme*, comedy, (1894); *Souvenirs et Impressions* (1897); *La Revue retrospective*, comedy (1899); and *Sonnets*' the same year.

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Paul HERVIEU
de l'Academe Francaise.

LETTER FROM JULES CLARETIE TO THE AUTHOR

My dear friend:

I have often declared that I never would write prefaces! But how can one resist a fine fellow who brings one an attractive manuscript, signed with a name popular among all his friends, who asks of one, in the most engaging way, an opinion on the same—then a word, a simple word of introduction, like a signal to saddle?

I have read your Zibeline, my dear friend, and this romance—your first—has given me a very keen pleasure. You told me once that you felt a certain timidity in publishing it. Reassure yourself immediately. A man can not be regarded as a novice when he has known, as you have, all the Parisian literary world so long; or rather, perhaps, I may more accurately say, he is always a novice when he tastes for the first time the intoxication of printer's ink.

You have the quickest of wits and the least possible affectation of gravity, and you have made as well known in Mexico as in Paris your couplets on the end of the Mexican conflict with France. 'Tout Mexico y passera!' Where are they, the 'tol-de-rols' of autumn?

Yesterday I found, in a volume of dramatic criticism by that terrible and charming Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, an appreciation of one of your comedies which bears a title very appropriate to yourself: 'Honor.' "And this play does him honor," said Barbey d'Aurevilly, "because it is charming, light, and supple, written in flowing verse, the correctness of which does not rob it of its grace."

That which the critic said of your comedy I will say of your romance. It is a pretty fairy-story—all about Parisian fairies, for a great many fairies live in Paris! In fact, more are to be found there than anywhere else! There are good fairies and bad fairies among them. Your own particular fairy is good and she is charming. I am tempted to ask whether you have drawn your characters from life. That is a question which was frequently put to me recently, after I had published 'L'Americaine.' The public longs to possess keys to our books. It is not sufficient for them that a romance is interesting; it must possess also a spice of scandal.

Portraits? You have not drawn any—neither in the drawing-rooms where Zibeline scintillates, nor in the foyer of the Comedie Francaise, where for so long a time you have felt yourself at home. Your women are visions and not studies from life—and I do not believe that you will object to my saying this.

You should not dislike the “romantic romance,” which every one in these days advises us to write—as if that style did not begin as far back as the birth of romance itself: as if the Princess of Cleves had not written, and as if Balzac himself, the great realist, had not invented, the finest “romantic romances” that can be found—for example, the amorous adventure of General de Montriveau and the Duchesse de Langlais!

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Apropos, in your charming story there is a General who pleases me very much. How was it that you did not take, after the fashion of Paul de Molenes, a dashing cavalry officer for your hero?—you, for whom the literary cavalier has all the attractions of a gentleman and a soldier?

Nothing could be more piquant, alert, chivalrous—in short, worthy of a Frenchman—than the departure of your hero for the war after that dramatic card-party, which was also a battle—and what a battle!—where, at the end of the conflict, he left his all upon the green cloth. That is an attractive sketch of the amiable comedienne, who wishes for fair weather and a smooth sea for the soldier lover who is going so far away. It seems to me that I have actually known that pretty girl at some time or another! That chapter is full of the perfume of pearl powder and iris! It is only a story, of course, but it is a magnificent story, which will please many readers.

The public will ask you to write others, be sure of that; and you will do well, my dear friend, for your own sake and for ours, to follow the precept of Denis Diderot: “My friends, write stories; while one writes them he amuses himself, and the story of life goes on, and that is less gay than the stories we can tell.”

I do not know precisely whether these last words, which are slightly pessimistic, are those of the good Diderot himself. But they are those of a Parisian of 1892, who has been able to forget his cares and annoyances in reading the story that you have told so charmingly.

With much affection to you, and wishing good luck to Zibeline, I am

Your friend,

Jules Claretie

de l'Academie Francaise.

April 26, 1892.

ZIBELINE

BOOK 1

CHAPTER I

LES FRERES-PROVENCAUX

In the days of the Second Empire, the Restaurant des Freres-Provencaux still enjoyed a wide renown to which its fifty years of existence had contributed more than a little to heighten its fame.

This celebrated establishment was situated near the Beaujolais Gallery of the Palais-Royal, close to the narrow street leading to the Rue Vivienne, and it had been the rendezvous of epicures, either residents of Paris or birds of passage, since the day it was opened.

On the ground floor was the general dining-room, the gathering-place for honest folk from the provinces or from other lands; the next floor had been divided into a succession of private rooms, comfortably furnished, where, screened behind thick curtains, dined somewhat “irregular” patrons: lovers who were in either the dawn, the zenith, or the decline of their often ephemeral fancies. On the top floor, spacious salons, richly decorated, were used for large and elaborate receptions of various kinds.

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At times the members of certain social clubs gave in these rooms subscription balls of anacreontic tendencies, the feminine element of which was recruited among the popular gay favorites of the period. Occasionally, also, young fellows about town, of different social rank, but brought together by a pursuit of amusement in common, met here on neutral ground, where, after a certain hour, the supper-table was turned into a gaming-table, enlivened by the clinking of glasses and the rattle of the croupier's rake, and where to the excitement of good cheer was added that of high play, with its alternations of unexpected gains and disastrous losses.

It was at a reunion of this kind, on the last evening in the month of May, 1862, that the salons on the top floor were brilliantly illuminated. A table had been laid for twenty persons, who were to join in a banquet in honor of the winner of the great military steeplechase at La Marche, which had taken place a few days before. The victorious gentleman-rider was, strange to say, an officer of infantry—an unprecedented thing in the annals of this sport.

Heir to a seigneurial estate, which had been elevated to a marquisate in the reign of Louis XII, son of a father who had the strictest notions as to the preservation of pure blood, Henri de Prerolles, early initiated into the practice of the breaking and training of horses, was at eighteen as bold and dashing a rider as he was accomplished in other physical exercises; and although, three years later, at his debut at St. Cyr, he expressed no preference for entering the cavalry service, for which his early training and rare aptitude fitted him, it was because, in the long line of his ancestors—which included a marshal of France and a goodly number of lieutenants-general—all, without exception, from Ravenna to Fontenoy, had won renown as commanders of infantry.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, Henri's grandfather, who had distinguished himself in the American War for Independence, left his native land only when he was in the last extremity. As soon as circumstances permitted, he reentered France with his son, upon whom Napoleon conferred a brevet rank, which the recipient accepted of his free will. He began his military experience in Spain, returned safe and well from the retreat from Russia, and fought valiantly at Bautzen and at Dresden. The Restoration—by which time he had become chief of his battalion—could not fail to advance his career; and the line was about to have another lieutenant-general added to its roll, when the events of 1830 decided Field-Marshal the Marquis de Prerolles to sheathe his sword forever, and to withdraw to his own estate, near the forest of l'Ile-d'Adam, where hunting and efforts toward the improvement of the equine race occupied his latter years.

He died in 1860, a widower, leaving two children: Jeanne, recently married to the Duc de Montgeron, and his son Henri, then a pupil in a military school, who found himself, on reaching his majority, in possession of the chateau and domains of Prerolles, the value of which was from fifteen to eighteen hundred thousand francs.

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Having been made sub-lieutenant by promotion on the first day of October, 1861, the young Marquis, already the head of his house and a military leader, asked and obtained the favor of being incorporated with a battalion of chasseurs garrisoned at Vincennes.

Exact in the performance of his military duties, and at the same time ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, he was able, thanks to his robust health, to conciliate the exigencies of the one with the fatigues of the other.

Unfortunately, Henri was fond of gaming, and his natural impetuosity, which showed itself by an emulation of high standards in his military duties, degenerated into recklessness before the baccarat-table. At the end of eighteen months, play, and an expensive liaison with an actress, had absorbed half his fortune, and his paternal inheritance had been mortgaged as well. The actress was a favorite in certain circles and had been very much courted; and this other form of rivalry, springing from the glitter of the footlights, added so much the more fuel to the prodigalities of the inflammable young officer.

Affairs were in this situation when, immediately after Henri's triumph at the race-track, a bettor on the opposite side paid one of his wagers by offering to the victor a grand dinner at the Freres-Provencaux.

CHAPTER II

BIRDS OF PREY

The hero of the night was seated at the middle of one side of the table, in the place of honor. For his 'vis-a-vis' he had his lively friend Fanny Dorville, star of the Palais Royal, while at his right sat Heloise Viro, the "first old woman," or duenna, of the same theatre, whose well known jests and eccentricities added their own piquancy to gay life in Paris. The two artists, being compelled to appear in the after-piece at their theatre that evening, had come to the dinner made up and in full stage costume, ready to appear behind the footlights at the summons of the call-boy.

The other guests were young men accustomed to the surroundings of the weighing-stand and the betting-room, at a time when betting had not yet become a practice of the masses; and most of them felt highly honored to rub elbows with a nobleman of ancient lineage, as was Henri de Prerolles.

Among these persons was Andre Desvanneaux, whose father, a churchwarden at *Ste.-Clotilde*, had attained a certain social prestige by his good works, and Paul Landry, in his licentiate in a large banking house in Paris. The last named was the son of a ship-owner at Havre, and his character was ambitious and calculating. He cherished, under a quiet demeanor, a strong hope of being able to supply, by the rapid acquisition of a



fortune, the deficiencies of his inferior birth, from which his secret vanity suffered severely. Being an expert in all games of chance, he had already accumulated, while waiting for some brilliant coup, enough to lead a life of comparative elegance, thus giving a certain satisfaction to his instincts. He and Henri de Prerolles never yet had played cards together, but the occasion was sure to come some day, and Paul Landry had desired it a long time.

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The company, a little silent at first, was becoming somewhat more animated, when a head-waiter, correct, and full of a sense of his own importance, entered the salon, holding out before him with both hands a large tray covered with slender glasses filled with a beverage called "the cardinal's drink," composed of champagne, Bordeaux, and slices of pineapple. The method of blending these materials was a professional secret of the Freres-Provencaux.

Instantly the guests were on their feet, and Heloise, who had been served first, proposed that they should drink the health of the Marquis, but, prompted by one of her facetious impulses, instead of lifting the glass to her own lips, she presented it to those of the waiter, and, raising her arm, compelled him to swallow the contents. Encouraged by laughter and applause, she presented to him a second glass, then a third; and the unhappy man drank obediently, not being able to push away the glasses without endangering the safety of the tray he carried.

Fanny Dorville interceded in vain for the victim; the inexorable duenna had already seized a fourth glass, and the final catastrophe would have been infallibly brought about, had not providence intervened in the person of the call-boy, who, thrusting his head through the half-open doorway, cried, shrilly:

"Ladies, they are about to begin!"

The two actresses hastened away, escorted by Andre Desvanneaux, a modern Tartufe, who, though married, was seen everywhere, as much at home behind the scenes as in church.

Coffee and liqueurs were then served in a salon adjoining the large dining-room, which gave the effect of a private club-room to this part of the restaurant.

Cigars were lighted, and conversation soon turned on feminine charms and the performances of various horses, particularly those of Franc-Comtois, the winner of the military steeplechase. This animal was one of the products of the Prerolles stud, and was ordinary enough on flat ground, but a jumper of the first rank.

At last the clock struck the half hour after eleven, and some of the guests had already manifested their intention to depart, when Paul Landry, who had been rather silent until then, said, carelessly:

"You expect to sleep to-night in Paris, no doubt, Monsieur de Prerolles?"

"Oh, no," Henri replied, "I am on duty this week, and am obliged to return to Vincennes early in the morning. So I shall stay here until it is time for me to go."

"In that case, might we not have a game of cards?" proposed Captain Constantin Lenaieff, military attache to the suite of the Russian ambassador.

“As you please,” said Henri.

This proposal decided every one to remain. The company returned to the large dining-room, which, in the mean time, had been again transformed into a gaming-hall, with the usual accessories: a frame for the tally-sheet, a metal bowl to hold rejected playing-cards set in one end of the table, and, placed at intervals around it, were tablets on which the punter registered the amount of the stakes.

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On reentering this apartment, Henri de Prerolles approached a sort of counter, and, drawing from his pocket thirty thousand francs in bank-notes, he exchanged them for their value in mother-of-pearl "chips" of different sizes, representing sums from one to five, ten, twenty-five, or a hundred louis. Paul Landry took twenty-five thousand francs' worth; Constantin Unaieff, fifteen thousand; the others, less fortunate or more prudent, took smaller sums; and about midnight the game began.

CHAPTER III

THE GAME

It began quietly enough, the two principal players waiting, before making any bold strokes, to see how the luck should run. The first victory was in favor of Henri, who, at the end of a hand dealt by Constantin Lenaieff, had won about three hundred Louis. Just at this moment the two women returned, accompanied by Desvanneaux.

"I had some difficulty in persuading our charming friends to return," said he; "Mademoiselle Dorville was determined that some one should escort her to her own house."

"You, perhaps, Desvanneaux," said Henri, twisting up the ends of his moustache.

"Not at all," said Fanny; "I wished Heloise to go with me. I have noticed that when I am here you always lose. I fear I have the evil eye."

"Say, rather, that you have no stomach," said Heloise. "Had you made your debut, as I made mine, with Frederic Lemaitre in 'Thirty Years in the Life of an Actor'"

"It certainly would not rejuvenate her," said Henri, finishing the sentence.

"Marquis, you are very impertinent," said the duenna, laughing. "As a penalty, you must lend me five louis."

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you!"

And, as a new hand was about to be dealt, Heloise seated herself at one of the tables. This time Paul Landry put fifteen thousand francs in the bank.

"Will you do me the favor to cut the cards?" he asked of Fanny, who stood behind Henri's chair.

"What! in spite of my evil eye, Monsieur?"

"I do not fear that, Mademoiselle. Your eyes have always been too beautiful for one of them to change now."

Stale as was this compliment, it had the desired effect, and the young woman thrust vertically into the midst of the pack the cards he held out to her.

"Play, messieurs," said the banker.

"Messieurs and Madame," corrected Heloise, placing her five chips before her, while Henri, at the other table, staked the six thousand francs which he had just won.

"Don't put up more than there is in the bank," objected Paul Landry, throwing a keen glance at the stakes. Having assured himself that on the opposing side to this large sum there were hardly thirty louis, he dealt the cards.

"Eight!" said he, laying down his card.

"Nine!" said Heloise.

"Baccarat!" said Henri, throwing two court-cards into the basket.

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The rake rattled on the losing table, but after the small stakes of the winners had been paid, the greater part of the six thousand francs passed into the hands of the banker.

Five times in succession, at the first deal, the same thing happened; and at the sixth round Heloise won six hundred francs, and Henri found himself with no more counters.

"This is the proper moment to retire!" said the duenna, rising from the table. "Are you coming, Fanny?"

"I beg you, let us go now," murmured Mademoiselle Dorville in the ear of her lover.

Her voice was caressing and full of tender promise. The young man hesitated an instant. But to desert the game at his first loss seemed to him an act unworthy of his reputation, and, as between love and pride, the latter finally prevailed.

"I have only an hour or two more to wait. Can not you go home by yourself?" he replied to Fanny's appeal, while Heloise exchanged her counters for tinkling coin, forgetting, no doubt, to reimburse her creditor, who, in fact, gave no thought to the matter.

Henri accompanied the two women to a coach at the door, which had been engaged by the thoughtful and obliging Desvanneaux; and, pressing tenderly the hand of his mistress, he murmured:

"Till to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" she echoed, her heart oppressed with sad forebodings.

Desvanneaux, whose wife was very jealous of him, made all haste to regain his conjugal abode.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULT

Meanwhile, Paul Landry had begun badly, and had had some ill turns of luck; nevertheless, feeling that his fortune was about to change, he raised the stakes.

"Does any one take him up?" asked Constantin Lenaeiff.

"I do," said De Prerolles, who had returned to the table.

And, seizing a pencil that lay on the card-table, he signed four cheques of twenty-five thousand francs each. Unfortunately for him, the next hand was disastrous. The stakes were increased, and the bank was broken several times, when Paul Landry, profiting by

a heavy gain, doubled and redoubled the preceding stakes, and beheld mounting before him a pile of cheques and counters.

But, as often happens in such circumstances, his opponent, Henri de Prerolles, persisted in his vain battle against ill-luck, until at three o'clock in the morning, controlling his shaken nerves and throwing down his cards, without any apparent anger, he said:

"Will you tell me, gentlemen, how much I owe you?"

After all accounts had been reckoned, he saw that he had lost two hundred and ninety thousand francs, of which two hundred and sixty thousand in cheques belonged to Paul Landry, and the thirty thousand francs' balance to the bank.

"Monsieur de Prerolles," said Paul Landry, hypocritically, "I am ashamed to win such a sum from you. If you wish to seek your revenge at some other game, I am entirely at your service."

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The Marquis looked at the clock, calculated that he had still half an hour to spare, and, not more for the purpose of “playing to the gallery” than in the hope of reducing the enormous sum of his indebtedness, he replied:

“Will it be agreeable to you to play six hands of bezique?”

“Certainly, Monsieur. How much a point?”

“Ten francs, if that is not too much.”

“Not at all! I was about to propose that amount myself.”

A quick movement of curiosity ran through the assembly, and a circle was formed around the two opponents in this exciting match.

Every one knows that bezique is played with four packs of cards, and that the number of points may be continued indefinitely. The essential thing is to win at least one thousand points at the end of each hand; unless a player does this he is said to “pass the Rubicon,” becoming twice a loser—that is, the victor adds to his own score the points lost by his adversary. Good play, therefore, consists largely in avoiding the “Rubicon” and in remaining master of the game to the last trick, in order to force one’s adversary over the “Rubicon,” if he stands in danger of it. The first two hands were lost by Landry, who, having each time approached the “Rubicon,” succeeded in avoiding it only by the greatest skill and prudence. Immediately his opponent, still believing that good luck must return to him, began to neglect the smaller points in order to make telling strokes, but he became stranded at the very port of success, as it were; so that, deducting the amount of his first winning, he found at the end of the fifth hand that he had lost six thousand points. Notwithstanding his wonderful self-control, it was not without difficulty that the young officer preserved a calm demeanor under the severe blows dealt him by Fortune. Paul Landry, always master of himself, lowered his eyes that their expression of greedy and merciless joy should not be seen. The nearer the game drew to its conclusion, the closer pressed the circle of spectators, and in the midst of a profound silence the last hand began. Favored from the beginning with the luckiest cards, followed by the most fortunate returns, Paul Landry scored successively “forty, bezique,” five hundred and fifteen hundred. He lacked two cards to make the highest point possible, but Henri, by their absence from his own hand, could measure the peril that menaced him. So, surveying the number of cards that remained in stock, he guarded carefully three aces of trumps which might help him to avert disaster. But, playing the only ace that would allow him to score again, Paul Landry announced coldly, laying on the table four queens of spades and four knaves of diamonds:

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"Four thousand five hundred!" This was the final stroke. The last hand had wiped out, by eight thousand points, the possessions of Landry's adversary. The former losses of the unfortunate Marquis were now augmented by one hundred and forty thousand francs. Henri became very pale, but, summoning all his pride to meet the glances of the curious, he arose, rang a bell, and called for a pen and a sheet of stamped paper. Then, turning to Paul Landry, he said, calmly "Monsieur, I owe you four hundred thousand francs. Debts of honor are payable within twenty-four hours, but in order to realize this sum, I shall require more time. How long a delay will you grant me?"

"As long as you wish, Monsieur."

"I thank you. I ask a month."

A waiter appeared, bringing the pen and paper.

"Oh, your word will be sufficient for me," said Landry.

"Pardon me!" said the Marquis. "One never knows what may happen. I insist that you shall accept a formal acknowledgment of the debt."

And he wrote:

"I, the undersigned, acknowledge that I owe to Monsieur Paul Landry the sum of four hundred thousand francs, which I promise to pay in thirty days, counting from this date."

He dated, signed, and folded the paper, and handed it to Paul Landry. Then, glancing at the clock, whose hands pointed to a quarter before four, he said:

"Permit me to take leave of you, gentlemen. I have barely time to reach Vincennes before roll-call."

He lighted a cigar, saluted the astonished assembly with perfect coolness, slowly descended the stairs, and jumped into his carriage, the chasseur of the restaurant holding open the door for him.

"To Vincennes!" he cried to the coachman; "and drive like the devil!"

CHAPTER V

A DESPERATE RESOLUTION

The chimneys and roofs of the tall houses along the boulevards stood out sharp and clear in the light of the rising sun. Here and there squads of street-cleaners appeared, and belated hucksters urged their horses toward the markets; but except for these, the

streets were deserted, and the little coupe that carried Caesar and his misfortunes rolled rapidly toward the Barriere du Trone.

With all the coach-windows lowered, in order to admit the fresh morning air, the energetic nobleman, buffeted by ill-luck, suddenly raised his head and steadily looked in the face the consequences of his defeat. He, too, could say that all was lost save honor; and already, from the depths of his virile soul, sprang the only resolution that seemed to him worthy of himself.

When he entered his own rooms in order to dress, his mind was made up; and although, during the military exercises that morning, his commands were more abrupt than usual, no one would have suspected that his mind was preoccupied by any unusual trouble.

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He decided to call upon his superior officer that afternoon to request from him authorization to seek an exchange for Africa. Then he went quietly to breakfast at the pension of the officers of his own rank, who, observing his calm demeanor, in contrast to their own, knew that he must be unaware of the important news just published in the morning journals. General de Lorencez, after an unsuccessful attack upon the walls of Puebla, had been compelled to retreat toward Orizaba, and to intrench there while waiting for reenforcements.

This military event awakened the liveliest discussions, and in the midst of the repast a quartermaster entered to announce the reply to the report, first presenting his open register to the senior lieutenant.

"Ah! By Jove, fellows! what luck!" cried that officer, joyously.

"What is it?" demanded the others in chorus.

"Listen to this!" And he read aloud: "'General Order: An expedition corps, composed of two divisions of infantry, under the command of General Forey, is in process of forming, in order to be sent to Mexico on urgent business. The brigade of the advance guard will be composed of the First Regiment of Zouaves and the Eighteenth Battalion of infantry. As soon as these companies shall be prepared for war, this battalion will proceed by the shortest route to Toulon; thence they will embark aboard the Imperial on the twenty-sixth day of June next.'"

Arousing cheer drowned the end of the reading of this bulletin, the tenor of which gave to Henri's aspirations an immediate and more advantageous prospect immediate, because, as his company was the first to march, he was assured of not remaining longer at the garrison; more advantageous, because the dangers of a foreign expedition opened a much larger field for his chances of promotion.

Consequently, less than a month remained to him in which to settle his indebtedness. After the reading of the bulletin, he asked one of his brother officers to take his place until evening, caught the first train to town, and, alighting at the Bastille, went directly to the Hotel de Montgeron, where he had temporary quarters whenever he chose to use them.

"Is the Duke at home?" he inquired of the Swiss.

Receiving an affirmative reply, he crossed the courtyard, and was soon announced to his brother-in-law, the noble proprietor of La Sarthe, deputy of the Legitimist opposition to the Corps Legislatif of the Empire.

The Duc de Montgeron listened in silence to his relative's explanation of his situation. When the recital was finished, without uttering a syllable he opened a drawer, drew out a legal paper, and handed it to Henri, saying:

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"This is my marriage contract. Read it, and you will see that I have had, from the head of my family, three hundred and fifteen thousand livres income. I do not say this to you in order to contrast my riches with your ruin, but only to prove to you that I was perfectly well able to marry your sister even had she possessed no dot. That dot yields seven hundred and fifteen thousand francs' income, at three per cent. We were married under the law of community of goods, which greatly simplifies matters when husband and wife have, as have Jeanne and myself, but one heart and one way of looking at things. To consult her would be, perhaps, to injure her. To-morrow I will sell the necessary stock, and ere the end of the week Monsieur Durand, your notary and ours, shall hold at your disposal the amount of the sum you lost last night."

The blood rose to the cheeks of the young officer.

"I—I" he stammered, pressing convulsively the hands of his brother-in-law. "Shall I let you pay the ransom for my madness and folly? Shall I a second time despoil my sister, already robbed by me of one half her rightful share? I should die of shame! Or, rather—wait a moment! Let us reverse our situations for an instant, and if you will swear to me that, were you in my place, you would accept—Ah, you see! You hesitate as much now as you hesitated little a moment ago in your simple and cordial burst of generosity: Consequently, I refuse!"

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"To sell Prerolles immediately-to-day, if possible. This determination troubles you because of the grief it will cause Jeanne. It will grieve me, too. And the courage to tell this to her is the only effort to which my strength is unequal. Only you can tell it in such a way as to soften the blow—"

"I will try to do it," said the Duke.

"I thank you! As to the personal belongings and the family portraits, their place is at Montgeron, is it not?"

"That is understood. Now, one word more, Henri."

"Speak!"

"Have you not another embarrassment to settle?"

"I have indeed, and the sooner the better. Unhappily—"

"You have not enough money," finished the Duke. "I have received this morning twenty-five thousand francs' rent from my farms. Will you allow me to lend them to you?"

"To be repaid from the price of the sale? Very willingly, this time."

And he placed in an envelope the notes handed him by his brother-in-law.

“This is the last will and testament of love,” said the Marquis, as he departed, to give the necessary instructions to his notary.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAREWELL

His debts were easily reckoned. He owed eight hundred thousand francs to the Credit Foncier; four hundred thousand to Paul Landry; more than one hundred thousand to various jewellers and shopkeepers; twenty-five thousand to the Duc de Montgeron. It was necessary to sell the chateau and the property at one million four hundred thousand francs, and the posters advertising the sale must be displayed without delay.

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Then he must say farewell to Fanny Dorville. Nothing should disturb a sensible mind; the man who, with so much resolution, deprives himself of his patrimonial estates should not meet less bravely the separation imposed by necessity.

As soon as Henri appeared in Fanny's boudoir, she divined that her presentiments of the previous night had not deceived her.

"You have lost heavily?" she asked.

"Very heavily," he replied, kissing her brow.

"And it was my fault!" she cried. "I brought you bad luck, and that wretch of a Landry knew well what he was about when he made me cut the cards that brought you misfortune!"

"No, no, my dear—listen! The only one in fault was I, who allowed myself, through false pride, to be persuaded that I should not seem to fear him."

"Fear him—a professional gambler, who lives one knows not how! Nonsense! It is as if one should fight a duel with a fencing-master."

"What do you wish, my dear? The evil is done—and it is so great—"

"That you have not the means to pay the sum? Oh, but wait a moment."

And taking up a casket containing a superb collar of pearls, she said:

"This is worth fourteen thousand francs. You may well take them from me, since it was you that gave them to me."

No doubt, she had read De Musset, and this action was perhaps a refection of that of Marion, but the movement was sincere. Something of the stern pride of this other Rolla was stirred; a sob swelled his bosom, and two tears—those tears that rise to a soldier's eyes in the presence of nobility and goodness—fell from his eyes upon the hair of the poor girl.

"I have not come to that yet," he said, after a short silence. "But we must part—"

"You are about to marry?" she cried.

"Oh, no!"

"Ah, so much the better!"

In a few words he told her of his approaching departure, and said that he must devote all his remaining time to the details of the mobilization of troops.

“So—it is all over!” said Fanny, sadly. “But fear nothing! I have courage, and even if I have the evil eye at play, I know of something that brings success in war. Will you accept a little fetich from me?”

“Yes, but you persist in trying to give me something,” he said, placing on a table the sealed envelope he had brought.

“How good you are!” she murmured. “Now promise me one thing: let us dine together once more. Not at the Provencaux, however. Oh, heavens! no! At the Cafe Anglais—where we dined before the play the first time we—”

The entrance of Heloise cut short the allusion to a memory of autumn.

“Ah, it is you,” said Fanny nervously. “You come apropos.”

“Is there a row in the family?” inquired Heloise.

“As if there could be!”

“What is it, then?”

“You see Henri, do you not?”

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"Well, yes, I do, certainly. What then?"

"Then look at him long and well, for you will not see him again in many a day. He is going to Mexico!"

"To exploit a mine?"

"Yes, Heloise," the officer replied, "a mine that will make the walls of Puebla totter."

"In that case, good luck, my General!" said the duenna, presenting arms with her umbrella.

Fanny could not repress a smile in spite of her tears. Her lover seized this moment to withdraw from her arms and reach the stairs.

"And now, Marquis de Prerolles, go forth to battle!" cried the old actress to him over the banisters, with the air of an artist who knows her proper cue.

CHAPTER VII

THE VOW

Notwithstanding the desire expressed by his mistress, Henri firmly decided not to repeat that farewell scene.

The matter that concerned him most was the wish not to depart without having freed himself wholly from his debt to Paul Landry. Fortunately, because of a kindly interest, as well as on account of the guaranty of the Duc de Montgeron, a rich friend consented to advance the sum; so that, one week before the day appointed for payment, the losing player was able to withdraw his signature from the hands of his greedy creditor.

Relieved from this anxiety, Henri had asked, the night before the day set for departure, for leave of absence for several hours, in order to visit for the last time a spot very dear to him, upon whose walls placards now hung, announcing the sale of the property to take place on the following morning.

No one received warning of this visit in extremis save the steward, who awaited his master before the gates of the chateau, the doors and windows of which had been flung wide open.

At the appointed hour the visitor appeared at the end of the avenue, advancing with a firm step between two hedges bordered with poplars, behind which several brood-mares, standing knee-deep in the rich grass, suckled their foal.

The threshold of the gate crossed, master and man skirted the lawn, traversed the garden, laid out in the French fashion, and, side by side, without exchanging a word, mounted the steps of the mansion. Entering the main hall, the Marquis, whose heart was full of memories of his childhood, stopped a long time to regard alternately the two suites of apartments that joined the vestibule to the two opposite wings. Making a sign to his companion not to follow him, Henri then entered the vast gallery, wherein hung long rows of the portraits of his ancestors; and there, baring his head before that of the Marshal of France whose name he bore, he vowed simply, without excitement, and in a low tone, either to vanquish the enemy or to add, after the manner of his forbears, a glorious page to his family's history.

The object of his pilgrimage having thus been accomplished, the Marquis ordered the steward to see that all the portraits were sent to the Chateau de Montgeron; then, after pressing his hand in farewell, he returned to the station by the road whence he had come, avoiding the village in order to escape the curious eyes of the peasantry.

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CHAPTER VIII

IN SEARCH OF GLORY

The next morning the 18th battalion of 'chasseurs', in dress uniform, with knapsacks on their backs and fully armed, awaited in the Gare de Lyon the moment to board the train destined to transport them to the coast.

At a trumpet-call this movement was executed in silence, and in perfect order; and only after all the men were installed did the functionaries who kept the crowd in order take their own places in the carriages, leaving a throng of relatives and friends jostling one another upon the quay.

Fanny Dorville and her friend the duenna tried in vain to reach the compartment wherein Henri had his place, already in marching order; the presence of the Duc and the Duchesse de Montgeron prevented the two women from approaching him. Nevertheless, at the moment when the train began to move slowly out of the station, an employee found the means to slip into the hands of the Marquis a small packet containing the little fetich which his mistress had kept for him. It was a medallion of the Holy Virgin, which had been blessed at Notre-Dame des-Victoires, and it was attached to a long gold chain.

Thirty-six hours later, on the evening of the 26th of June, the battalion embarked aboard the Imperial, which, with steam up, was due to leave the Toulon roadstead at daybreak. At the moment of getting under weigh, the officer in charge of the luggage, who was the last to leave the shore, brought several despatches aboard the ship, and handed to Lieutenant de Prerolles a telegram, which had been received the evening before at the quay.

The Marquis opened it and read: "Chateau and lands sold for 1,450,000 francs. Everything paid, 1600 francs remain disposable."

"That is to say," thought the officer, sadly, "I have my pay and barely three thousand francs' income!"

Leaning both elbows upon the taffrail, he gazed long at the shores of France, which appeared to fly toward the horizon; then, brusquely turning his eyes to the quarters filled with the strong figures and manly faces of the young foot-soldiers of the 18th battalion, he said to himself that among such men, under whatever skies or at whatever distance, one found his country—glancing aloft where floated above his head the folds of his flag.

CHAPTER IX

Twenty-three years after the events already recorded, on a cold afternoon in February, the Bois de Boulogne appeared to be draped in a Siberian mantle rarely seen at that season. A deep and clinging covering of snow hid the ground, and the prolonged freezing of the lakes gave absolute guaranty of their solidity.

A red sun, drowned in mist, threw a mild radiance over the landscape, and many pedestrians stamped their feet around the borders of the lake belonging to the Skaters' Club, and watched the hosts of pretty women descending from their carriages, delighted at the opportunity afforded them, by this return of winter, to engage in their favorite exercise.

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Received on her arrival by one of the attendants posted at the entrance, each of the fair skaters entered in turn a small building reserved for ladies, whence she soon came forth in full skating array, ready to risk herself on the ice, either alone or guided by the hand of some expert cavalier.

Here and there, around the enclosure, large garden-seats, shaped like sentry-boxes, were reserved for the mothers and sisters of the members of the club, so that they could observe, from a comfortable shelter, the evolutions of those in whom they were interested.

Within two of these nooks, side by side, sat the Duchesse de Montgeron, president, and the Comtesse Desvanneaux, vice-president of the Charity Orphan Asylum; the latter had come to look on at the first essay on the ice of her daughter, Madame de Thomery; the former, to judge the skill of her brother, General the Marquis de Prerolles, past-master in all exercises of strength and skill.

At forty-five years of age, the young General had preserved the same grace and slenderness that had distinguished him when he had first donned the elegant tunic of an officer of chasseuys. His hair, cut rather short, had become slightly gray on his temples, but his jaunty moustache and well-trimmed beard were as yet innocent of a single silver thread. The same energy shone in his eyes, the same sonority rang in his voice, which had become slightly more brusque and authoritative from his long-continued habit of command.

In a small round hat, with his hands in the pockets of an outing-jacket, matching his knickerbockers in color, he strolled to and fro near his sister, now encouraging Madame de Thomery, hesitating on the arm of her instructor, now describing scientific flourishes on the ice, in rivalry against the crosses dashed off by Madame de Lisieux and Madame de Nointel—two other patronesses of the orphanage—the most renowned among all the fashionable skaters. This sort of tourney naturally attracted all eyes, and the idlers along the outer walks had climbed upon the paling in order to gain a better view of the evolutions, when suddenly a spectacle of another kind called their attention to the entrance-gate in their rear.

Passing through the Porte Dauphine, and driven by a young woman enveloped in furs, advanced swiftly, over the crisp snow, a light American sleigh, to which was harnessed a magnificent trotter, whose head and shoulders emerged, as from an aureole, through that flexible, circular ornament which the Russians call the 'douga'.

Having passed the last turn of the path, the driver slackened her grasp, and the horse stopped short before the entrance. His owner, throwing the reins to a groom perched up behind, sprang lightly to the ground amid a crowd of curious observers, whose interest was greatly enhanced by the sight of the odd-looking vehicle.

The late-comer presented her card of invitation to the proper functionary, and went across the enclosure toward the ladies' salon.

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“Ah! there is Zibeline!” cried Madame Desvanneaux, with an affected air. “Do you know her?” she inquired of the Duchesse de Montgeron.

“Not yet,” the Duchess replied. “She did not arrive in Paris until the end of spring, just at the time I was leaving town for the seashore. But I know that she says her real name is Mademoiselle de Vermont, and that she was born in Louisiana, of an old French family that emigrated to the North, and recently became rich in the fur trade—from which circumstance Madame de Nointel has wittily named her ‘Zibeline.’ I know also that she is an orphan, that she has an enormous fortune, and has successively refused, I believe, all pretenders who have thus far aspired to her hand.”

“Yes—gamblers, and fortune-hunters, in whose eyes her millions excuse all her eccentricities.”

“Do I understand that she has been presented to you?” asked the Duchess, surprised.

“Well, yes—by the old Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, one of her so-called cousins—rather distant, I fancy! But the independent airs of this young lady, and her absolute lack of any respectable chaperon, have decided me to break off any relations that might throw discredit on our patriarchal house,” Madame Desvanneaux replied volubly, as ready to cross herself as if she had been speaking of the devil!

The Duchess could not repress a smile, knowing perfectly that her interlocutor had been among the first to demand for her son the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont!

During this dialogue, the subject of it had had time to cast aside her fur cloak, to fasten upon her slender, arched feet, clad in dainty, laced boots, a pair of steel skates, with tangent blades, and without either grooves or straps, and to dart out upon this miniature sheet of water with the agility of a person accustomed to skating on the great lakes of America.

She was a brunette, with crisply waving hair, a small head, well-set, and deep yet brilliant eyes beneath arched and slightly meeting brows. Her complexion was pale, and her little aquiline nose showed thin, dilating nostrils. Her rosy lips, whose corners drooped slightly, revealed dazzling teeth, and her whole physiognomy expressed an air of haughty disdain, somewhat softened by her natural elegance.

Her cloth costume, which displayed to advantage her slender waist and graceful bust, was of simple but elegant cut, and was adorned with superb trimmings of black fox, which matched her toque and a little satin-lined muff, which from time to time she raised to her cheek to ward off the biting wind.

Perhaps her skirt was a shade too short, revealing in its undulations a trifle too much of the dainty hose; but the revelation was so shapely it would have been a pity to conceal it!

“Very bad form!” murmured Madame Desvanneaux.

“But one can not come to a place like this in a skirt with a train,” was the more charitable thought of the Duchess.

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Meantime the aforesaid tournament went on in the centre of the sheet of ice, and Zibeline, without mingling with the other skaters, contented herself with skirting the borders of the lake, rapidly designing a chain of pierced hearts on the smooth surface, an appropriate symbol of her own superiority.

Annoyed to see himself eclipsed by a stranger, the General threw a challenging glance in her direction, and, striking out vigorously in a straight line, he sped swiftly toward the other end of the lake.

Stung to the quick by his glance, Mademoiselle de Vermont darted after him, passed him halfway along the course, and, wheeling around with a wide, outward curve, her body swaying low, she allowed him to pass before her, maintaining an attitude which her antagonist might interpret as a salute, courteous or ironic, as he chose.

By this time the crowd was gradually diminishing. The daylight was waning, and a continued sound of closing gates announced the retreat of the gay world toward Paris.

Zibeline alone, taking advantage of the free field, lingered a few moments to execute some evolutions in the deepening twilight, looking like the heroines in the old ballads, half-visible, through the mists, \ to the vivid imagination of the Scottish bards.

Henri de Prerolles had entered his sister's carriage, in company with Madame Desvanneaux and Madame Thomery, and during the drive home, these two gentle dames—for the daughter was worthy of the mother—did not fail to sneer at the fair stranger, dilating particularly upon the impropriety of the challenging salute she had given to the General, with whom she was unacquainted.

"But my brother could hardly request his seconds to call upon her for that!" laughingly said the Duchess who, it seemed, had decided to defend the accused one in all attacks made upon her.

"Look! Here she comes! She is passing us again. One would think she was deliberately trying to do it!" exclaimed Madame Desvanneaux, just before their carriage reached the Arc de Triomphe.

Zibeline's sleigh, which had glided swiftly, and without hindrance, along the unfrequented track used chiefly by equestrians, had indeed overtaken the Duchess's carriage. Turning abruptly to the left, it entered the open gateway belonging to one of the corner houses of the Rond-Point de l'Etoile.

"Decidedly, the young lady is very fond of posing," said the General, with a shrug, and, settling himself in his corner, he turned his thoughts elsewhere.

Having deposited her two friends at their own door, the Duchess ordered the coachman to take her home, and at the foot of the steps she said to her brother:

“Will you dine with us to-night?”

“No, not to-night,” he replied, “but we shall meet at the theatre.”

And, crossing the court, he entered his little bachelor apartment, which he had occupied from time to time since the days when he was only a sub-lieutenant.

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CHAPTER X

GENERAL DE PREROLLES

The sub-lieutenant had kept his word, and the progress of his career deserves detailed mention.

He was a lieutenant at the taking of Puebla, where he was first to mount in the assault of the Convent of Guadalupita. Captain of the Third Zouaves after the siege of Oajaca, he had exercised, during the rest of the expedition, command over a mounted company, whose duty was to maintain communications between the various columns, continuing, at the same time, their operations in the Michoacan.

This confidential mission, requiring as much power to take the initiative as it demanded a cool head, gave the Marquis opportunity to execute, with rapidity and decision, several master-strokes, which, in the following circumstances, won for him the cross of the Legion of Honor.

The most audacious of the guerrillas who had devastated this fertile country was a chief called Regulas. He pillaged the farms, stopped railway trains, boldly demanding ransom from captives from the municipal governments of large towns. He was continually, active, and always inaccessible.

Warned by his scouts that the followers of this villain menaced the town of Pazcuaro, Captain de Prerolles prepared himself eagerly to meet them. He overtook them in a night march, and fell upon them unexpectedly, just as they were holding up the diligence from Morelia to Guadalajara. His plans had been so well laid that not a man escaped. What was the surprise of the French officer to find, among the travellers, delivered by himself from certain death, Paul Landry, the principal cause of his ruin, who the chances of war now laid under obligations to him!

"This is my revenge," said the Captain, simply, to Landry, attempting to avoid his thanks, and returning to him intact his luggage, of which the chinacos had not had time to divide the contents.

Reconciled in Algiers with his regiment, Henri de Prerolles did not again quit the province of Constantine except to serve in the army of the Rhine, as chief of battalion in the line, until the promotions which followed the declaration of war in 1870. Officer of the Legion of Honor for his gallantry at Gravelotte and at St. Privat, and assigned for his ability to the employ of the chief of corps, he had just been called upon to assume command of his former battalion of chasseurs, when the disastrous surrender of Metz left him a prisoner of war in the hands of the Germans.



Profoundly affected by this disaster, but learning that the conflict still continued, he refused to avail himself of the offer of comparative freedom in the city, provided he would give his parole not to attempt to escape. He was therefore conducted to a distant fortress near the Russian frontier, and handed over to the captain of the landwehr, who received instructions to keep a strict guard over him.

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This officer belonged to the engineering corps, and directed, at the same time, the work of repairs within the citadel, in charge of a civilian contractor.

Taking into consideration the rank of his prisoner, the captain permitted the Marquis to have with him his orderly, an Alsatian, who twice a day brought from the inn his chief's repasts. This functionary had permission also, from ten o'clock in the morning until sunset, to promenade in the court under the eye of the sentinel on guard at the entrance. At five o'clock in the evening, the officer of the landwehr politely shut up his guest in his prison, double-locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and appeared no more until the next morning.

The middle of November had arrived; heavy snows had already fallen, and the prisoner amused himself by constructing fortifications of snow—a work which his amiable jailer followed with a professional interest, giving him advice regarding modifications proper to introduce in the defense of certain places, himself putting a finger in the pie in support of his demonstration.

This sort of amusement was followed so industriously that in a few days a kind of rampart was erected in front of the casemate of the fortress, behind which, by stooping a little, a man of ordinary height could easily creep along unseen by the sentinel.

While pursuing his work of modelling in snow, the Marquis de Prerolles had taken care to observe the goings and comings of the civilian contractor, who, wearing a tall hat and attired in a black redingote, departed regularly every day at half-past four, carrying a large portfolio under his arm. To procure such a costume and similar accessories for himself was easy, since the Marquis's orderly spoke the language of the country; and to introduce them into the prison, hidden in a basket of provisions, was not difficult to accomplish.

To execute all this required only four trips to and fro. At the end of forty-eight hours, the necessary aids to escape were in the proper place, hidden under the snow behind the bastion. More than this, the clever Alsatian had slipped a topographical map of the surrounding country between two of the plates in the basket. According to the scale, the frontier was distant only about five leagues, across open country, sparsely settled with occasional farms which would serve as resting-places.

By that time, the plan of escape was drawn up. Upon the day fixed for his flight, the Marquis assumed his disguise, rolled up his own uniform to look like a man asleep in his bed, lying after the fashion of a sleeping soldier; and pleading a slight illness as an excuse for not dining that evening, and, not without emotion, curled himself up behind the snowy intrenchment which his jailer himself had helped to fashion. That worthy man, only too glad to be able to rejoin his 'liebe frau' a little earlier than usual, peeped through the half-open door of the prisoner's room and threw a glance at the little cot-bed.

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“Good-night, Commander!” said the honest fellow, in a gentle voice.

Then he double-locked the door, according to custom, and disappeared whistling a national air. A quarter of an hour later the contractor left the place, and as soon as the functionary who had seen him depart was relieved by another, the prisoner left his hiding-place, crossed the drawbridge in his turn, simulating the gait of his twin, and, without any hindrance, rejoined his orderly at the place agreed upon. The trick was played!

A matter of twenty kilometres was a mere trifle for infantry troopers. They walked as lightly as gymnasts, under a clear sky, through the fields, guided by the lights in the farmhouses, and at nine o'clock, having passed the frontier, they stumbled upon a post of Cossacks ambuscaded behind a hedge!

Unfortunately, at that time the Franco-Russian alliance was still in embryo, and an agreement between the two neighboring States interdicted all passage to Frenchmen escaping from the hands of their conquerors. The two deserters were therefore conducted to the major of the nearest garrison, who alone had the right to question them.

As soon as they were in his presence, Henri could not restrain a start of surprise, for he recognized Constantin Lenaieff, one of his adversaries on the fatal night of the Freres-Provencaux.

“Who are you?” demanded the Major, brusquely.

“A dealer in Belgian cattle, purveyor to the German intendant,” hazarded the prisoner, who had his reply all prepared.

“You—nonsense! You are a French officer; that is plain enough to be seen, in spite of your disguise.”

The Major advanced a step in order to examine the prisoner more closely.

“Good heavens!” he muttered, “I can not be mistaken—”

He made a sign to his soldiers to retire, then, turning to Henri, he said:

“You are the Marquis de Prerolles!” and he extended his hand cordially to the former companion of his pleasures.

In a few words Henri explained to him the situation.

“My fate is in your hands,” he concluded. “Decide it!”

“You are too good a player at this game not to win it,” Lenaieff replied, “and I am not a Paul Landry, to dispute it with you. Here is a letter of safe-conduct made out in due form; write upon it any name you choose. As for myself, I regard you absolutely as a Belgian citizen, and I shall make no report of this occurrence. Only, let me warn you, as a matter of prudence, you would do well not to linger in this territory, and if you need money—”

“I thank you!” replied the nobleman, quickly, declining with his customary proud courtesy. “But I never shall forget the service you have rendered me!”

A few moments later, the two travellers drove away in a carriage toward the nearest railway, in order to reenter France by way of Vienna and Turin.

They passed the Austrian and Italian frontiers without difficulty; but at the station at Modena a too-zealous detective of the French police, struck with the Alsatian accent of the orderly, immediately decided that they were two Prussian spies, and refused to allow them to proceed, since they could show him no passports.

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"Passports!" cried Henri de Prerolles, accompanying his exclamation with the most Parisian oath that ever had reverberated from the Rue Laffitte to the Madeleine.

"Here is my passport!" he added, drawing from his pocket his officer's cross, which he had taken good care not to allow to become a souvenir in the hands of his jailer. "And if that does not satisfy you, give me a pen."

Suiting the action to the word, he seized a pen and wrote out the following telegram:

"Deputy of war, Tours:

"Escaped from prisons of the enemy, I demand admittance to France, and official duties suitable to my rank, that I may cooperate in the national defence.

"De Prerolles, Commandant."

He handed the paper to the police agent, saying: "Do me the favor to forward this despatch with the utmost expedition."

As soon as the agent had glanced at the message, he swept a profound salute. "Pass on, Commandant," said he, in a tone of great respect.

Promoted to a higher rank, and appointed commander of a regiment of foot, the Lieutenant-Colonel de Prerolles rejoined the army of Chanzy, which, having known him a long time, assigned to him the duties of a brigadier-general, and instructed him to cover his retreat from the Loire on the Sarthe.

In the ensuing series of daily combats, the auxiliary General performed all that his chief expected of him, from Orleans to the battle of Maus, where, in the thick of the fight, a shell struck him in the breast. It is necessary to say that on the evening before he had noticed that the little medallion which had been given to him by Fanny Dorville, worn from its chain by friction, had disappeared from his neck. Scoffing comrades smiled at the coincidence; the more credulous looked grave.

The wound was serious, for, transported to the Chateau de Montgeron, a few leagues distant, the Marquis was compelled to remain there six months before he was in fit condition to rejoin his command. Toward the end of his convalescence, in June, 1871, the brother and sister resolved to make a pious pilgrimage to the cradle of their ancestors.

Exactly nine years had elapsed since the castle and lands had been sold at auction and fallen into the possession of a company of speculators, who had divided it and resold it to various purchasers. Only the farm of Valpendant, with a house of ancient and vast

construction, built in the time of Philippe-Auguste, remained to an old tenant, with his dependencies and his primitive methods of agriculture.

Leaving the train at the Beaumont tunnel, the two travellers made their way along a road which crosses the high plateau that separates the forest of Carnelle from the forest of the Ile-d'Adam, whence one can discern the steeple of Prerolles rising above the banks of the Oise.

From this culminating point they beheld the chateau transformed into a factory, the park cut up into countryseats, the fields turned into market-gardens! With profound sadness the brother and the sister met each other's glance, and their eyes filled with tears, as if they stood before a tomb on All Souls' Day.

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"No expiation is possible," said Henri to Jeanne, pressing her hand convulsively. "I must go—I must move on forever and ever, like the Wandering Jew."

Thanks to the influence of the Duke of Montgeron, whose faithful constituents had sent him to the National Assembly, his brother-in-law had been transferred to a regiment of zouaves, of which he became colonel in 1875, whereupon he decided to remain in Africa during the rest of his life.

But Tunis and Tonquin opened new horizons to him. Landing as a brigadier-general at Haiphong, he was about to assume, at Bac-Ninh, his third star, when the Minister of War, examining the brilliant record of this officer who, since 1862, never had ceased his service to his country, called him to take command of one of the infantry divisions of the army of Paris, a place which he had occupied only a few months before the events related in the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XI

EUGENIE GONTIER

Few salons in Paris have so imposing an air as the foyer of the dramatic artists of the Comedie Francaise, a rectangular room of fine proportions, whose walls are adorned with portraits of great actors, representing the principal illustrations of the plays that have been the glory of the house Mademoiselle Duclos, by Largilliere; Fleury, by Gerard; Moliere crowned, by Mignard; Baron, by De Troy, and many others.

At the left of the entrance, separated by a large, high mirror which faced the fireplace, two other canvases, signed by Geffroy, represent the foyer itself, in costumes of the classic repertoire, the greater part of the eminent modern 'societaires', colleagues and contemporaries of the great painter.

Between the windows, two pedestals, surmounted by busts of Mademoiselle Clairon and Mademoiselle Dangeville, stood, one on each side of the great regulator—made by Robin, clockmaker to the king—which dominated the bust of Moliere—after Houdon—seeming to keep guard over all this gathering of artistic glory.

Opposite this group, hanging above a large table of finely chiselled iron, were two precious autographs under glass: a brevet of pension, dated 1682, signed Louis and countersigned Colbert; an act of notary, dated 1670, bearing the signature of Moliere, the master of the house.

Disposed about the room were sofas, armchairs, and tete-a-tete seats in oak, covered with stamped green velvet.

Here, at the first representations of new plays, or at important revivals of old ones, flocked literary notables and the regular frequenters of the theatre, eager to compliment the performers; here, those favored strangers who have the proper introduction, and who wish to see the place at close range, are graciously conducted by the administrator-general or by the officer for the week.

Here it was that the Marquis de Prerolles appeared in the evening after his experience at the skating-pond. He had dressed, and had dined in great haste at a restaurant near the theatre.

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The posters announced a revival of 'Adrienne Lecouvreur', with Mademoiselle Gontier in the principal role, in which she was to appear for the first time.

Eugenie Gontier was, it was said, the natural daughter of a great foreign lord, who had bequeathed to her a certain amount of money. Therefore, she had chosen the theatrical life less from necessity than from inclination.

She was distinguished in presence, a great favorite with the public, and had a wide circle of friends, among whom a rich banker, the Baron de Samoreau, greatly devoted to her, had made for her investments sufficiently profitable to enable her to occupy a mansion of her own, and to open a salon which became a favorite rendezvous with many persons distinguished in artistic, financial, and even political circles. Talent being the guaranty of good companionship, this salon became much frequented, and General de Prerolles had become one of its most assiduous visitors.

The first act had begun. Although the charming artist was not to appear until the second act, she had already descended from her dressing-room, and, finding herself alone in the greenroom, was putting a final touch to her coiffure before the mirror when the General entered.

He kissed her hand gallantly, and both seated themselves in a retired corner between the fireplace and the window.

"I thank you for coming so early," said Eugenie. "I wished very much to see you to-night, in order to draw from your eyes a little of your courage before I must face the footlights in a role so difficult and so superb."

"The fire of the footlights is not that of the enemy—above all, for you, who are so sure of winning the battle."

"Alas! does one ever know? Although at the last rehearsal Monsieur Legouve assured me that all was perfect, look up there at that portrait of Rachel, and judge for yourself whether I have not reason to tremble at my audacity in attempting this role after such a predecessor."

"But you yourself caused this play to be revived," said Henri.

"I did it because of you," Eugenie replied.

"Of me?"

"Yes. Am I not your Adrienne, and is not Maurice de Saxe as intrepid as you, and as prodigal as you have been? Was he not dispossessed of his duchy of Courlande, as you were of your—"

A gesture from Henri prevented her from finishing the sentence.

“Pardon me!” said she. “I had forgotten how painful to you is any reference to that matter. We will speak only of your present renown, and of the current of mutual sympathy that attracts each of us toward the other. For myself, that attraction began on the fourteenth of last July. You had just arrived at Paris, and a morning journal, in mentioning the troops, and the names of the generals who appeared at the review, related, apropos of your military exploits, many exciting details of your escape during the war. Do you recall the applause that greeted you when you marched past the tribunes? I saw you then for the first time, but I should have known you among a thousand! The next day—”

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"The next day," Henri interrupted, "it was my turn to applaud you. I had been deprived a long time of the pleasures of the theatre, of which I am very fond, and I began by going to the Comedie Francaise, where you played, that night, the role of Helene in 'Mademoiselle de la Seigliere.' Do you remember?"

"Do I remember! I recognized you instantly, sitting in the third row in the orchestra."

"I had never seen you until then," Henri continued, "but that sympathetic current was soon established, from the moment you appeared until the end of the second piece. As it is my opinion that any officer is sufficiently a gentleman to have the right to love a girl of noble birth, I fell readily under the spell in which she whom you represented echoed my own sentiments. Bernard Stamply also had just returned from captivity, and the more enamored of you he became the more I pleased myself with fancying my own personality an incarnation of his, with less presumption than would be necessary for me to imagine myself the hero of which you spoke a moment ago. After the play, a friend brought me here, presented me to you—"

"And the sympathetic current did the rest!" added Eugenie Gontier, looking at him tenderly. "Since then you have consecrated to me a part of whatever time is at your disposal, and I assure you that I never have been so happy, nor have felt so flattered, in my life."

"Second act!" came the voice of the call-boy from the corridor.

"Will you return here after the fourth act?" said the actress, rising. "I shall wish to know how you find me in the great scene, and whether there is another princess de Bouillon among the audience—beware of her!"

"You know very well that there is not."

"Not yet, perhaps, but military men are so inconstant! By and by, Maurice!" she murmured, with a smile.

"By and by, Adrienne!" Henri replied, kissing her hand.

He accompanied her to the steps that led to the stage, and, lounging along the passage that ends at the head of the grand stairway, he entered the theatre and hastened to his usual seat in the third row of the orchestra.

CHAPTER XII

RIVAL BEAUTIES

It was Tuesday, the subscription night; the auditorium was as much the more brilliant as the play was more interesting than on other nights. In one of the proscenium boxes sat the Duchesse de Montgeron with the Comtesse de Lisieux; in another the Vicomtesse de Nointel and Madame Thomery. In the first box on the left Madame Desvanneaux was to be seen, with her husband and her son, the youthful and recently rejected pretender to the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont.

Among the subscription seats in the orchestra sat the Baron de Samoreau, the notary Durand, treasurer of the Industrial Orphan Asylum; the aide-de-camp of General Lenaieff, beside his friend the Marquis de Prerolles. One large box, the first proscenium loge on the right, was still unoccupied when the curtain rose on the second act.

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The liaison of Eugenie Gontier with the Marquis de Prerolles was not a mystery; from the moment of her entrance upon the scene, it was evident that she “played to him,” to use a phrase in theatrical parlance. Thus, after the recital of the combat undertaken in behalf of Adrienne by her defender—a recital which she concluded in paraphrasing these two lines:

‘Paraissez, Navarrois, Maures et Castilians,
Et tout ce que l’Espagne a produit de vaillants,’

many opera-glasses were directed toward the spectator to whom the actress appeared to address herself, when suddenly a new object of interest changed the circuit of observation. The door of the large, right-hand box opened, and Zibeline appeared, accompanied by the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, an elderly gallant, carefully dressed and wearing many decorations, and whose respectable tale of years could give no occasion for malicious comment on his appearance in the role of ‘cavalier servente’. Having assisted his companion to remove her mantle, he profited by the instant of time she took to settle her slightly ruffled plumage before the mirror, to lay upon the railing of the box her bouquet and her lorgnette. Then he took up a position behind the chair she would occupy, ready to assist her when she might deign to sit down. His whole manner suggested a chamberlain of the ancient court in the service of a princess.

Mademoiselle de Vermont disliked bright colors, and wore on this occasion a robe of black velvet, of which the ‘decolletee’ bodice set off the whiteness of her shoulders and her neck, the latter ornamented with a simple band of cherry-colored velvet, without jewels, as was suitable for a young girl. Long suede gloves, buttoned to the elbow, outlined her well-modelled arms, of which the upper part emerged, without sleeves, from lace ruffles gathered in the form of epaulets.

The men admired her; the women sought some point to criticise, and had the eyes of Madame Desvanneaux been able to throw deadly projectiles, her powerful lorgnette would have become an instrument of death for the object of her resentment.

“This morning,” said the irreconcilable matron, “she showed us her ankles; this evening she allows us to see the remainder.”

“I should have been very well pleased, however—” murmured young Desvanneaux, with regret.

“If you had married her, Victor,” said his mother, “I should have taken full charge of her wardrobe, and should have made some decided changes, I assure you.”

Perfectly indifferent to the general curiosity, Zibeline in her turn calmly reviewed the audience. After exploring the boxes with her opera-glass, she lowered it to examine the orchestra stalls, and, perceiving the Marquis, she fixed her gaze upon him.

Undoubtedly she knew the reason for the particular attention which he paid to the stage, because, until the end of the act, her glance was divided alternately between the General and the actress.

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As the curtain fell on this act the spectators turned their backs to the footlights, and Lenaieff, indicating Zibeline to his friend, said in his slightly Slavonic accent:

“Who is that pretty woman, my dear Henri?”

“One of Jules Verne’s personages, a product of the land of furs.”

“Do you know her?”

“Not at all. I have a prejudice against girls that are too rich. Why do you ask?”

“Because it seems to me that she looks at you very attentively.”

“Indeed! I had not noticed it.”

In saying this, the General—exaggerated! He had been perfectly well aware of the gaze of Mademoiselle de Vermont, but whether he still cherished a slight resentment against the lady, or whether her appearance really displeased him, he cut the conversation short and went to pay his respects to the occupants of several boxes.

Evidently Zibeline knew few persons in society, for no visitor appeared in her box. However, after the next act she made a sign to M. Durand. That gentleman rejoined the Baron de Samoreau in the corridor and took him to meet Zibeline, and a sort of council appeared to be going on in the rear of her box.

“What the deuce can she be talking about to them?” said Desvanneaux to his wife.

“A new offer of marriage, probably. They say she declares she will marry no one of lower rank than a prince, in order to complete our chagrin! Perhaps they have succeeded in finding one for her!”

The instructions that Mademoiselle de Vermont gave to the two men must have been easy to execute, for neither the notary nor the banker seemed to raise the least objection. The conversation was finished, and both gentlemen saluted her, preparing to take leave, when she said to M. Durand:

“You understand that the meeting is for tomorrow?”

“At five o’clock,” he replied.

“Very well. I will stop for you at your door at a quarter of an hour before that time.”

The fourth act had begun, that scene in which Adrienne accomplishes her generous sacrifice in furnishing herself the ransom which must deliver her unfaithful lover. The rapt attention that Zibeline paid to this scene, and the slight movements of her head,

showed her approval of this disinterested act. Very touching in her invocation to her “old Corneille,” Mademoiselle Gontier was superb at the moment when the comedienne, knowing at last who is her rival, quotes from Racine that passage in ‘Phedre’ which she throws, so to speak, in the face of the patrician woman:

. . . . Je sais ses perfidies, OEnone! et ne suis point de ces femmes hardies Qui,
goutant dans la crime une honteuse paix, Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais.

From the place she was to obliged to take in the arrangement of the scene, the apostrophe and the gestures of the actress appeared to be unconsciously directed toward Mademoiselle de Vermont, who could not restrain a startled movement.

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"Look! One would think that Zibeline took that allusion for herself," said Madame Desvanneaux, whom nothing escaped.

On reentering the greenroom, after two well-deserved recalls, Eugenie Gontier was soon surrounded by a throng of admirers who had come to congratulate her upon her success.

"Were you pleased, Henri?" she said in a low tone to the General.

"Enthusiastically!" he replied.

"Ah, then I can die happy!" she said, laughingly.

As she traversed the ranks of her admirers to go to change her costume for the last act, she found herself face to face with Zibeline, who, having quickly recovered from her emotion, was advancing on the arm of the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy.

"My dear child," said the old nobleman to the actress, "I bring to you Mademoiselle de Vermont, who wishes to say to you herself—"

"That Mademoiselle must be very tired of listening to our praises," interrupted Zibeline. "But if the tribute of a foreigner can prove to her that her prestige is universal, I beg that she will accept these flowers which I dared not throw to her from my box."

"Really, Mademoiselle, you embarrass me!" Eugenie replied, somewhat surprised.

"Oh, you need not fear to take them—they are not poisoned!" added Zibeline, smiling.

And, after a gracious inclination of her head, to which the actress responded with a deep courtesy, Zibeline took again the arm of her escort in order to seek her carriage, without waiting for the end of the play.

Three-quarters of an hour later, as, the audience was leaving the theatre, M. Desvanneaux recounted to whoever chose to listen that Mademoiselle de Vermont had passed the whole of the last 'entr'acte' in the greenroom corridor, in a friendly chat with Eugenie Gontier.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Life goes on, and that is less gay than the stories
Men admired her; the women sought some point to criticise

ZIBELINE

By Philippe de Massa

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INDUSTRIAL ORPHAN ASYLUM

When the prefectoral axe of the Baron Haussmann hewed its way through the Faubourg St. Germain in order to create the boulevard to which this aristocratic centre has given its flame, the appropriation of private property for public purposes caused to disappear numerous ancient dwellings bearing armorial devices, torn down in the interest of the public good, to the equalizing level of a line of tramways. In the midst of this sacrilegious upheaval, the Hotel de Montgeron, one of the largest in the Rue St. Dominique, had the good fortune to be hardly touched by the surveyor's line; in exchange for a few yards sliced obliquely from the garden, it received a generous addition of air and light on that side of the mansion which formerly had been shut in.

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The Duke lived there in considerable state. His electors, faithful in all things, had made of their deputy a senator who sat in the Luxembourg, in virtue of the Republican Constitution, as he would have sat as a peer of France had the legitimate monarchy followed its course. He was a great lord in the true meaning of the word: gracious to the humble, affable among his equals, inclined, among the throng of new families, to take the part of the disinherited against that of the usurpers.

In Mademoiselle de Prerolles he had found a companion animated with the same sentiments, and the charitable organization, meeting again at the Duchess's residence, on the day following the revival of 'Adrienne Lecouvreur', to appoint officers for the Industrial Orphan Asylum, could not have chosen a president more worthy or more devoted.

Besides such austere patronesses as Madame Desvanneaux and her daughter, the organization included several persons belonging to the world of fashion, such as Madame de Lisieux and Madame de Nointel, whose influence was the more effective because their circle of acquaintance was more extensive. The gay world often fraternizes willingly with those who are interested in philanthropic works.

The founders of the Industrial Orphan Asylum intended that the institution should harbor, bring up, and instruct as great a number as possible of the children of infirm or deceased laborers.

The secretary, M. Andre Desvanneaux, churchwarden of *Ste.-Clotilde*, as was his father before him, and in addition a Roman count, had just finished his address, concluding by making the following double statement: First, the necessity for combining all available-funds for the purchase of the land required, and for the building of the asylum itself; second, to determine whether the institution could be maintained by the annual resources of the organization.

"I should like to observe," said the Duchesse de Montgeron, "that the first of these two questions is the only order of the day. Not counting the purchase of the land, the architect's plan calls for an estimate of five hundred thousand francs in round numbers."

"And we have on hand—" said the Comtesse de Lisieux.

"One hundred and sixty-odd thousand francs from the first subscriptions," said M. Desvanneaux. "It has been decided that the work shall not begin until we have disposed of half of the sum total. Therefore, the difference we have to make up at present is about one hundred and forty thousand francs. In order to realize this sum, the committee of action proposes to organize at the Palais de l'Industrie a grand kermess, with the assistance of the principal artists from the theatres of Paris, including that of Mademoiselle Gontier, of the Comedie Francaise," added the secretary, with a sly smile on observing the expression of General de Prerolles.

“Good!” Henri promptly rejoined. “That will permit Monsieur Desvanneaux to combine very agreeably the discharge of his official duties with the making of pleasant acquaintances!”

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"The object of my action in this matter is above all suspicion," remarked the churchwarden, with great dignity, while his wife darted toward him a furious glance.

"You? Come, come!" continued the General, who took a mischievous delight in making trouble for the worthy Desvanneaux. "Every one knows quite well that you have by no means renounced Satan, his pomps—"

"And his good works!" added Madame de Nointel, with a burst of laughter somewhat out of place in this formal gathering for the discussion of charitable works.

"We are getting outside of the question," said the Duchess, striking her bell. "Moreover, is not the assistance of these ladies necessary?"

"Indispensable," the secretary replied. "Their assistance will greatly increase the receipts."

"What sum shall we decide upon as the price of admission?" asked Madame de Lisieux.

"Twenty francs," said Desvanneaux. "We have a thousand tickets printed already, and, if the ladies present wish to solicit subscriptions, each has before her the wherewithal to inscribe appropriate notes of appeal."

"To be drawn upon at sight," said the Comtesse de Lisieux, taking a pen. "A tax on vanity, I should call it."

She wrote rapidly, and then read aloud:

"My dear baron:

"Your proverbial generosity justifies my new appeal. You will accept, I am sure, the ten tickets which I enclose, when you know that your confreres, the Messieurs Axenstein, have taken double that number."

"And here," said the Vicomtesse de Nointel, "is a tax on gallantry." And she read aloud:

"My dear prince:

"You have done me the honor to write to me that you love me. I suppose I ought to show your note to my husband, who is an expert swordsman; but I prefer to return to you your autograph letter for the price of these fifteen tickets. Go—and sin again, should your heart prompt you!"

"But that is a species of blackmail, Madame!" cried Madame Desvanneaux.

"The end justifies the means," replied the Vicomtesse gayly. "Besides, I am accountable only to the Duc de Montgeron. What is his opinion?"

"I call it a very clever stroke," said the Duke.

"You hear, Madame! Only, of course, not every lady has a collection of similar little notes!" said the Vicomtesse de Nointel.

The entrance of M. Durand, treasurer of the society, interrupted the progress of this correspondence.

"Do not trouble yourselves so much, Mesdames," said the notary. "The practical solution of the matter I am about to lay before you, if Madame the president will permit me to speak."

"I should think so!" said the Duchess. "Speak, by all means!"

"A charitable person has offered to assume all the expenses of the affair," said the notary, "on condition that carte blanche is granted to her in the matter of the site. In case her offer is accepted, she will make over to the society, within three months, the title to the real estate, in regular order."

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"Do you guarantee the solvency of this person?" demanded M. Desvanneaux, who saw the project of the kermess falling to the ground.

"It is one of my rich clients; but I have orders not to reveal her name unless her offer is accepted."

The unanimity with which all hands were raised did not even give time to put the question.

"Her name?" demanded the Duchess.

"Here it is," replied the notary, handing her a visiting card.

"Valentine de Vermont," she read aloud.

"Zibeline?" cried Madame de Nointel. "Bravo! I offer her the assurance of my esteem!"

"And I also," added Madame de Lisieux.

"I can not offer mine," said Madame Desvanneaux, dryly. "A young woman who is received nowhere!"

"So generous an act should open all doors to her, beginning with mine," said the Duchesse de Montgeron. "I beg that you will tell her so from me, Monsieur Durand."

"At once, Madame. She is waiting below in her carriage."

"Why did you not say so before? I must beg her myself to join us here," said the master of the house, leaving the room in haste.

"See how any one can purchase admission to our world in these days!" whispered Madame Desvanneaux in her daughter's ear.

"Heavens! yes, dear mother! The only question is whether one is able to pay the price."

We must render justice to the two titled patronesses by saying that the immediate admission of Mademoiselle de Vermont to their circle seemed to them the least they could do, and that they greeted her appearance, as she entered on the arm of the Duke, with a sympathetic murmur which put the final stroke to the exasperation of the two malicious dames.

"You are very welcome here, Mademoiselle," said the Duchess, advancing to greet her guest. "I am delighted to express to you, in behalf of all these ladies, the profound gratitude with which your generous aid inspires them!"

"It is more than I deserve, Madame la Duchesse!" said Valentine. "The important work in which they have taken the initiative is so interesting that each of us should contribute to it according to his means. I am alone in Paris, without relatives or friends, and these ladies have furnished me the means to cure my idleness; so it is I, rather, who am indebted to them."

Whether this speech were studied or not, it was pronounced to be in very good taste, and the stranger's conquest of the assemblage was more and more assured.

"Since you wish to join us," resumed the Duchess, "allow me to present to you these gentlemen: Monsieur Desvanneaux, our zealous general secretary—"

"I have already had the pleasure of seeing Monsieur at my house," said Valentine, "also Madame Desvanneaux; and although I was unable to accede to their wishes, I retain, nevertheless, the pleasantest recollections of their visit."

"Good hit!" whispered Madame de Nointel to her neighbor.

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"The Marquis de Prerolles, my brother," the Duchess continued.

"The smiles of Fortune must be sweet, Mademoiselle," said the General, bowing low.

"Not so sweet as those of Glory, General," Zibeline replied, with a pretty air of deference.

"She possesses a decidedly ready wit," said Madame de Lisieux in a confidential aside.

"Now, ladies," added the president, "I believe that the best thing we can do is to leave everything in the hands of Mademoiselle and our treasurer. The examination of the annual resources will be the object of the next meeting. For to-day, the meeting is adjourned."

Then, as Mademoiselle de Vermont was about to mingle with the other ladies, the Duchess detained her an instant, inquiring:

"Have you any engagement for this evening, Mademoiselle?"

"None, Madame."

"Will you do us the honor to join us in my box at the opera?"

"But—I have no one to accompany me," said Zibeline. "I dismissed my cousin De Sainte-Foy, thinking that I should have no further need of his escort to-day."

"That does not matter at all," the Duchess replied. "We will stop for you on our way."

"I should not like to trouble you so much, Madame. If you will allow me, I will stop at your door at whatever hour will be agreeable to you, and my carriage shall follow yours."

"Very well. At nine o'clock, if you please. They sing *Le Prophete* tonight, and we shall arrive just in time for the ballet."

"The 'Skaters' Ballet,'" said the General.

This remark recalled to Mademoiselle her triumph of the evening before. "Do you bear a grudge against me?" she said, with a smile.

"Less and less of one," the General replied.

"Then, let us make a compact of peace," said Zibeline, holding out her hand in the English fashion.

With these words she left the room on the arm of the Duke, who claimed the honor of escorting her to her carriage.



“Shall you go to the opera also?” asked the Duchess of her brother.

“Yes, but later. I shall dine in town.”

“Then-au-revoir—this evening!”

“This evening!”

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN’S INSTINCT

The General had been more favorably impressed with Zibeline’s appearance than he cared to show. The generous action of this beautiful girl, her frankness, her ease of manner, her cleverness in repartee, were likely to attract the attention of a man of his character. He reproached himself already for having allowed himself to be influenced by the rancorous hostility of the Desvanneaux, and, as always happens with just natures, the sudden change of his mind was the more favorable as his first opinion had been unjust.

Such was the theme of his reflections on the route from the Hotel de Montgeron to that of Eugenic Gontie’s, with whom he was engaged to dine with some of her friends, invited to celebrate her success of the evening before.

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On entering her dining-room Eugenie took the arm of Lenaieff, placed Henri de Prerolles on her left and Samoreau opposite her—in his character of senior member, so that no one could mistake his transitory function with that of an accredited master of the house.

The four other guests were distinguished writers or artists, including the painter Edmond Delorme, and, like him, all were intimate friends of the mistress of the house.

Naturally the conversation turned upon the representation of Adrienne, and on the applause of the fashionable audience, usually rather undemonstrative.

“Never have I received so many flowers as were given to me last night,” said Eugenic, displaying an enormous beribboned basket which ornamented the table. “But that which particularly flattered me,” she added, “was the spontaneous tribute from that pretty foreigner who sought me in the greenroom expressly to offer me her bouquet.”

“The young lady in the proscenium box, I will wager,” said Lenaieff.

“Precisely. I know that they call her Zibeline, but I did not catch her real name.”

“It is Mademoiselle de Vermont,” said Edmond Delorme. “She is, in my opinion, the most dashing of all the Amazons in the Bois de Boulogne. The Chevalier de Sainte-Foy brought her to visit my studio last autumn, and I am making a life-size portrait of her on her famous horse, Seaman, the winner of the great steeplechase at Liverpool, in 1882.”

“What were you pencilling on the back of your menu while you were talking?” asked the actress, curiously.

“The profile of General de Prerolles,” the painter replied. “I think that his mare Aida would make a capital companion picture for Seaman, and that he himself would be an appropriate figure to adorn a canvas hung on the line opposite her at the next Salon!”

“Pardon me, dear master!” interrupted the General. “Spare me, I pray, the honor of figuring in this equestrian contradance. I have not the means to bequeath to posterity that your fair model possesses—”

“Is she, then, as rich as they say?” inquired one of the guests.

“I can answer for that,” said the Baron de Samoreau. “She has a letter of credit upon me from my correspondent in New York. Last night, during an entr’acte, she gave me an order to hold a million francs at her disposal before the end of the week.”

“I know the reason why,” added Henri.

“But,” Lenaieff exclaimed, “you told me that you did not know her!”

"I have made her acquaintance since then."

"Ah! Where?" Eugenie inquired, with interest.

"At my sister's house, during the meeting of a charitable society."

"Had it anything to do with the society for which Monsieur Desvanneaux asked me to appear in a kermess?"

"Well, yes. In fact, he has gone so far as to announce that he is assured of your cooperation."

"I could not refuse him," said Eugenie. "Under the mantle of charity, the holy man paid court to me!"

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"I knew well enough that he had not yet laid down his arms forever," said the General.

"Oh, he is not the only one. His son-in-law also honored me with an attack."

"What, Monsieur de Thomery? Well, that is a good joke!"

"But what is funnier yet," continued the actress, "is the fact that the first-named gentleman was on his knees, just about to make me a declaration, apparently, when the second was announced! Immediately the father-in-law jumped to his feet, entreating me not to allow them to meet. I was compelled to open for him the door leading to the servants' stairway—"

"And what did you do with the other man?" asked Lenaieff, laughing loudly.

"I rid myself of him in the same way. At a sign from me, my maid announced the name of the father-in-law, and the alarmed son-in-law escaped by the same road! Oh, but I know them! They will come back!"

"Under some other pretext, however," said the General. "Because Mademoiselle de Vermont's million francs have destroyed their amorous designs."

"So now we see Zibeline fairly launched," remarked the banker. "Since the Duchesse de Montgeron has taken her up, all the naughty tales that have been fabricated about her will go to pieces like a house of cards."

"That is very probable," the General concluded, "for she has made a complete conquest of my sister."

At these words a slight cloud passed over the actress's face. The imagination of a jealous mistress sees rivals everywhere; especially that of an actress.

After dinner, while her other guests went into the smoking-room, Eugenic made a sign to her lover to remain with her, and seated herself beside him.

"I wish to ask you a question, Henri," said she.

"What is it?"

"Do you still love me?"

"What reason have you to doubt it?"

"None that warrants me in reproaching you for anything. But so many things separate us! Your career, to which you owe everything! Your social standing, so different from

mine! Oh, I know that you are sincere, and that if you ever have a scruple regarding our liaison, you will not be able to hide it from me. It is this possibility of which I think.”

“You are quite wrong, I assure you. Did I hide myself last night in order to prove openly my admiration for you? Did I appear to disclaim the allusions which you emphasized in seeming to address me in the course of your role?”

“No, that is true. Shall I make a confession? When I am on the stage, I fear nothing, because there the points of comparison are all in my favor, since you can say to yourself: ‘This woman on whom all eyes are fixed, whose voice penetrates to the depths of the soul—this woman, beautiful, applauded, courted, belongs to me—wholly to me,’ and your masculine vanity is pleasantly flattered. But later, Henri! When the rouge is effaced from my lips, when the powder is removed

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from my cheeks—perhaps revealing some premature line caused by study and late hours—if, after that, you return to your own circle, and there encounter some fresh young girl, graceful and blooming, the object, in her turn, of the fickle admiration of the multitude, forgetful already of her who just now charmed them—tell me, Henri! do you not, as do the others, covet that beautiful exotic flower, and must not the poor comedienne weep for her lost prestige?”

“It is Mademoiselle de Vermont, then, who inspires you with this apprehension,” said the General, smiling.

“Well, yes, it is she!”

“What childishness! Lenaieff will tell you that I have never even looked at her.”

“Last night, perhaps—but to-day?”

“We exchanged no more than a dozen words.”

“But the more I think of her visit to the greenroom, the more inexplicable it appears to me.”

“You need not be surprised at that: she does nothing that any one else does.”

“These things are not done to displease you.”

“I may agree as to that; but what conclusion do you draw?”

“That she is trying to turn your head.”

“My head! You jest! I might be her father.”

“That is not always a reason—”

Nevertheless, Henri’s exclamation had been so frank that Eugenie felt somewhat reassured.

“Are you going so soon?” she said, seeing him take his hat.

“I promised my sister to join her at the opera. Besides, this is your reception night, and I leave you to your duties as hostess. To-morrow, at the usual hour—and we will talk of something else, shall we not?”

“Ah, dearest, that is all I ask!” said Eugenie.

He attempted to kiss her hand, but she held up her lips. He pressed his own upon them in a long kiss, and left her.

CHAPTER XV

DEFIANCE OF MRS. GRUNDY

For more than fifty years the first proscenium box on the ground floor, to the left, at the Opera, had belonged exclusively to ten members of the jockey Club, in the name of the oldest member of which the box is taken. When a place becomes vacant through any cause, the nine remaining subscribers vote on the admission of a new candidate for the vacant chair; it is a sort of academy within the national Academy of Music.

When this plan was originated, that particular corner was called "the infernal box," but the name has fallen into desuetude since the dedication of the fine monument of M. Gamier. Nevertheless, as it is counted a high privilege to be numbered among these select subscribers, changes are rare among them; besides, the members are not, as a rule, men in their first youth. They have seen, within those walls, the blooming and the renewal of several generations of pretty women; and the number of singers and dancers to whom they have paid court in the coulisses is still greater.

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From their post of observation nothing that occurs either before or behind the curtain escapes their analysis—an analysis undoubtedly benevolent on the part of men who have seen much of life, and who accord willingly, to their younger fellow-members, a little of that indulgence of which they stand in need themselves.

An event so unexpected as the enthronement of Zibeline in one of the two large boxes between the columns, in company with the Duchesse de Montgeron, Madame de Lisieux, and Madame de Nointel, did not escape their observation and comment.

“The Duchess is never thoughtless in her choice of associates,” said one of the ten. “There must be some very powerful motive to induce her to shield with her patronage a foreigner who sets so completely at defiance anything that people may say about her.”

“Nonsense! What is it, after all, that they say about this young woman?” demanded the senior member of the party. “That she rides alone on horseback. If she were to ride with a groom, some one would be sure to say that he was her lover. They say that she drives out without any female chaperon beside her in the carriage. Well, if she had one, they would probably find some other malicious thing to say. Paris has become like a little country town in its gossip.”

“And all this,” added a third member, “because she is as lovely as a dream, and because she drives the handsomest turnout in the Bois. If she were ugly, and contented herself with a hired carriage, she would be absolved without confession!”

“Where the deuce does Christian charity come in, in all this gossip?” said Henri de Prerolles to himself, who had just entered the box and overheard the last remarks. “Will you grant me your hospitality until the beginning of the next act, gentlemen?” he said aloud. “My sister’s box is full of guests and transient visitors; she can not admit even me!”

The General was a great favorite with the members of the club. One of them rose to offer him his place.

“I shall stay only a moment, to escape a cloud of questioners in the foyer. Every one that stops me asks—”

“About the new recruit in the Duchess’s box, eh?” said a member. “We, too, wish to inquire about her; we are all leagued together.”

“Thank you, no,” said the General.

“But if it is a secret—”

“There is no secret about it,” the General replied; and in a few words he explained the enigma.

“Why, then,” exclaimed the senior member, “she is indeed the fowl that lays the golden eggs! What a lucky bird will be the one that mates with her!”

The rising curtain sent the spectators back to their places. The augurs of the Duchess’s box reinstalled themselves before it where they could examine at their ease through their lorgnettes the fair stranger of whom so much had been said; and, mounting to the next floor, the General was at last able to find room among his sister’s guests.

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"You can see for yourself that our young friend is altogether charming," whispered Madame de Nointel, behind the shelter of her fan, and indicating Zibeline.

"If you pronounce her so, Madame, she can receive no higher praise," said Henri.

"Say at once that you think me exasperating," laughed the lady.

"Was it not you that first called her Zibeline?" Henri inquired.

"Yes, but she calls herself Valentine—which rhymes, after all. Not richly enough for her, I know, but her means allow her to do without the supporting consonant. See how beautiful she is to-night!"

In fact, twenty-four hours had sufficed to change the lonely stranger of the day before into the heroine of this evening, and the satisfaction that shone in her face tempered the somewhat haughty and disdainful expression that had hitherto characterized her.

"You have not yet said 'good-evening' to Mademoiselle de Vermont, Henri," said the Duchess to her brother, and he changed his place in order to act upon her hint.

"Ah, is it you, General?" said Zibeline, affecting not to have seen him until that moment. "It seems that music interests you less than comedy."

"What has made you form that opinion, Mademoiselle?"

"The fact that you arrive much later at the opera than at the Comedie Francaise."

"Have you, then, kept watch upon my movements?"

"Only a passing observation of signs—quite allowable in warfare!"

"But I thought we had made a compact of peace."

"True enough, we did make it, but suppose it were only an armistice?"

"You are ready, then, to resume hostilities?" said Henri.

"Now that I have Madame la Duchesse, your sister, for an ally, I fear no enemies."

"Not even if I should call for aid upon the camp of Desvanneaux?"

"Alceste leagued with Tartufe? That idea never occurred to Moliere," said Zibeline, mischievously.

“Take care!” said the Duchess, interrupting this skirmishing, “you will fall over into the orchestra! It is growing late, and if Mademoiselle de Vermont does not wish to remain to see the final conflagration, we might go now, before the crowd begins to leave.”

“I await your orders, Madame la Duchesse,” said Zibeline, rising.

The other ladies followed her example, receiving their cloaks from the hands of their cavaliers, and the occupants of the box made their exit in the following order: Zibeline, on the arm of the Duke; the Comtesse de Lisieux, leaning upon M. de Nointel; Madame de Nointel with the General; the Duchess bringing up the procession with M. de Lisieux.

As soon as they reached the outer lobby their footmen ran to find their carriages, and that of the Duc de Montgeron advanced first.

“I beg, Madame, that you will not trouble yourself to wait here until my carriage comes,” said Mademoiselle de Vermont to the Duchess, who hesitated to leave her guest alone.

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"Since you wish it, I will leave you, then," said the Duchess, "and we thank you for giving us your society this evening. My brother will accompany you to your carriage."

When Zibeline's vehicle drove up to the entrance in its turn, the General conducted his charge to the door of a marvellously equipped brougham, to which was harnessed a carriage-horse of powerful frame, well suited to the kind of vehicle he drew.

A thaw had begun, not yet transforming the gutters into yellow torrents rushing toward the openings of the sewer, but covering the streets with thick, black mud, over which the wheels rolled noiselessly.

"Your carriage is late, is it not?" said Zibeline, after the General had handed her into the brougham.

"My carriage?" said the General. "Behold it!"

He pointed to a passing fiacre, at the same time hailing the driver.

"Don't call him. I will take you home myself," said Zibeline, as if such a suggestion were the most natural thing in the world.

"You know that in France it is not the custom," said the General.

"What! Do you bother yourself with such things at your age?"

"If my age seems to you a sufficient guaranty, that is different. I accept your invitation."

"To the Hotel de Montgeron," said Zibeline to her footman.

"I never shall forget your sister's kindness to me," she continued, as the carriage rolled away. "She fulfils my idea of the great lady better than any other woman I have seen."

"You may be proud of her friendship," said Henri. "When once she likes a person, it is forever. I am like her in that respect. Only I am rather slow in forming friendships."

"And so am I."

"That is obvious, else you would have been married ere this."

"No doubt—to some one like young Desvanneaux, perhaps. You are very flattering! If you think that I would sacrifice my independence for a man like that—"

"But surely you do not intend to remain unmarried."

"Perhaps I shall—if I do not meet my ideal."

“All women say that, but they usually change their minds in the end.”

“Mine is one and indivisible. If I do not give all I give nothing.”

“And shall you wait patiently until your ideal presents himself?”

“On the contrary, I am always looking for him.”

“Did you come to Europe for that purpose?”

“For that and for nothing else.”

“And suppose, should you find your ideal, that he himself raises obstacles?”

“I shall try to smooth them away.”

“Do you believe, then, that the power of money is irresistible?”

“Far from it! A great fortune is only a trust which Providence has placed in our hands, in order that we may repair, in its name, the injustices of fate. But I have another string to my bow.”

“What is it?”

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"The force of my will."

"You have plenty of that! But suppose, by some impossible chance, your ideal resists you even then?"

"Then I know what will remain for me to do."

"You will resort to the pistol?"

"Not for him, but for myself," she replied, in a tone so resolute as to exclude any suggestion of bravado.

Zibeline's horse, which was a rapid trotter, now stopped before the Hotel de Montgeron, arriving just in advance of the Duchess's carriage, for which the Swiss was watching at the threshold of the open Porte cochere. He drew himself up; the brougham entered the gate at a swift pace, described a circle, and halted under the marquee at the main entrance. The General sprang lightly to the ground.

"I thank you, Mademoiselle," bowing, hat in hand, to his charming conductor.

"Call me Valentine, please," she responded, with her usual ease of manner.

"Even in the character of a stage father, that would be rather too familiar," said the Marquis.

"Not so much so as to call me Zibeline," said Mademoiselle de Vermont, laughing.

"Ha! ha! You know your sobriquet, then?"

"I have known it a long time! Good-night, General! We shall meet again."

Then, addressing her footman, she said in English: "Home!"

CHAPTER XVI

FRATERNAL ADVICE

Like all residences where the owners receive much company, the Hotel de Montgeron had a double porte-cochere. Just as the Swiss opened the outer gate to allow the departure of Mademoiselle de Vermont, the two carriages crossed each other on the threshold. In fact, Henri had had hardly time to cross the courtyard to mount to his own apartments before his brother-in-law and his sister stopped him at the foot of the steps. He rejoined them to say good-night.



"Won't you come and take a cup of tea with us in the little salon?" they asked.

"Willingly," was his response. He followed them, and all three seated themselves beside a table which was already laid, and upon which the boiling water sang in the kettle.

"Leave us," said the Duchess to the butler. "I will serve tea myself. Did Mademoiselle de Vermont bring you home?" she asked, when the servant had retired.

"Well," said Henri, "in proposing to do so she mentioned my discreet age, which appeared to her to make the thing all right! If I had declined her invitation, I should have seemed to pose as a compromising person! That is the reason why I accepted."

"You did quite right. What do you really think of her?"

"She is very different from what I had fancied her: I find her frank, intellectual, full of originality. I have only one fault to mention: she is too rich."

"Well, surely, you do not expect her to ruin herself to please you."

"I should think not! Besides, what would be the object?"

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"To permit you to fall in love with her."

"Oh, that is what you are thinking of, is it?"

"Certainly, for, if need be, perhaps you would make a sacrifice to your feelings."

"In what way?"

"In the toleration of a few remaining millions which she might retain, so that when you marry her neither of you will be reduced to absolute beggary!"

"Marry her!—I?" cried the General, astonished.

"What is there to prevent your doing so?"

"The past, my dear sister. To speculate upon my title and my rank in order to make a wealthy marriage? To quit my nomad's tent for a fixed residence other than that where the Prerolles have succeeded one another from generation to generation? Never! Of all our ancient prejudices, that is the only one I cherish. Besides, I am free at present to serve my country under any form of government which it may please her to adopt. But, with his hereditary estates lost, through his own fault, shall he who has nothing left to him but his name form a mere branch of another family? He has no right to do so."

This declaration was categorical. Madame de Montgeron bent her head; her jesting vein was quenched in a moment.

After a moment of silence the Duke spoke.

"There are scruples that one does not discuss," he said. "But, on the other hand, if I do not deceive myself, there are others which can be adjusted to suit circumstances."

"What circumstances?" said the General.

"The subject is rather delicate—especially to mention before you, my dear Jeanne."

"I was just about to propose that I should retire," said the Duchess. "Good-night, Henri!" And she bent to kiss him.

"You are not vexed?" said her brother, embracing her tenderly.

"What an idea! Good-night!"

"Am I always to be considered as occupying the stool of repentance?" Henri inquired, as soon as his sister had left the room.

“Yes, but you will not be offended if I interrogate you a little, after the manner of a judge?” said the Duke.

“Quite the contrary. Go on; I will listen.”

“Had you not just now expressed yourself very distinctly in disfavor of any project of marriage because of perfectly unimpeachable principles, I should not permit myself to make any allusion to your private life. Every man is his own master in his choice of liaisons, and on that head is answerable only to his own conscience. In these days, moreover, art is on a level with birth, and talent with military glory. You see that I am quite modern in my ideas! However—”

“Ah, there is a reserve?”

“Without liability. Mademoiselle Gontier is surrounded by great luxury. She maintains an expensive house and keeps an open table. Her annual salary and her income can not possibly cover these expenses. Whence does she obtain further resources?”

“From the investments made for her by the Baron de Samoreau.”

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"Without her having to pay a commission of any kind? A most remarkable case of disinterestedness!"

"I never have sought to examine the matter particularly," said Henri.

"And is that the way you keep yourself informed? A future general-in-chief!"

"I was not aware that I am in an enemy's country."

"No, but you are in a conquered country, which is still more dangerous. Oh, no one will attack you face to face at the point of the sword. But behind your back, in the shadow, you have already massed against you various rejected swains, the Desvanneaux of the coulisses, jealous of a preference which wounds their own vanity, and the more ready to throw discredit—were they able—upon a man of your valor, because they are better armed against him with the logic of facts."

"What logic, in heaven's name?"

"That which emanates from the following dilemma: Either Danae is obliged to hide from Jupiter—or, rather, from Maecenas—her intimacy with you—and you are only a lover who simply loves her—or else Maecenas is an epicurean who has no objection to share his fortune philosophically; so that ostensibly you sit at the feast without paying the cost—which is worse yet."

"Does any one dare to say that of me?" cried the General, springing from his chair.

"They are beginning to say it," the Duke replied, his eyes fixed on his brother-in-law, who paced to and fro, gnawing his moustache. "I ask your pardon for throwing such a bucket of ice-water on you, but with men of your constitution—"

"Pleurisy is not mortal," Henri interrupted briefly. "I know. Don't worry about me."

"I knew you would understand," said the Duke, going toward the door of his own apartments. "That is the reason why I have not spared you a thorough ducking!"

"I thank you," said the General, as he was about to leave the room. "I will talk to you about this tomorrow. The night brings counsel."

Wrapped in thought, he made his way to the little suite of apartments between the ground floor and the first story which he occupied, and which had a separate door opening on the Rue de Bellechase.

At the foot of the stairs, in a coach-house which had been transformed into a chamber, slept the orderlies beneath the apartment of their chief. This apartment, composed of

four rooms, was of the utmost simplicity, harmonizing with the poverty of its occupant, who made it a point of honor not to attempt to disguise his situation.

The ante-chamber formed a military bureau for the General and his chief orderly.

The salon, hung with draperies to simulate a tent, had no other decoration than some trophies of Arabian arms, souvenirs of raids upon rebellious tribes.

More primitive still was the bedroom, furnished with a simple canteen bed, as if it were put up in a temporary camp, soon to be abandoned.

The only room which suggested nothing of the anchorite was the dressing-room, furnished with all the comforts and conveniences necessary to an elegant and fastidious man of the world.

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But his real luxury, which, by habit and by reason of his rank, the General had always maintained, was found among his horses, as he devoted to them all the available funds that could be spared from his salary. Hence the four box-stalls placed at his disposal in the stables of his brother-in-law were occupied by four animals of remarkably pure blood, whose pedigrees were inscribed in the French stud-book. Neither years, nor the hard service which their master had seen, had deteriorated any of his ability as a dashing horseman. His sober and active life having even enabled him to preserve a comparatively slender figure, he would have joined victoriously in the races, except that his height made his weight too heavy for that amusement.

Entering his own domain, still overwhelmed, with the shock of the revelations and the gossip of which he never had dreamed, he felt himself wounded to the quick in all those sentiments upon which his 'amour propre' had been most sensitive.

The more he pondered proudly over his pecuniary misfortunes, the more grave the situation appeared to him, and the more imperious the necessity of a rupture.

When it had been a question of dismissing Fanny Dorville, an actress of humble standing, his parting gift, a diamond worth twenty-five thousand francs, had seemed to him a sufficient indemnity to cancel all accounts.

But now, in the presence of an artiste of merit, who had given herself without calculation and who loved him for himself alone, how, without wounding her heart and her dignity, could he break violently a chain so light yesterday, so heavy to-day?

To indulge in tergiversation, to invent some subterfuge to cover his retreat—he did not feel himself capable of such a course; moreover, his manoeuvre would be quickly suspected by a clever woman whom nothing escaped.

To ask to be sent back to Africa, just at the time when his intelligent and practical instruction in the latest grand manoeuvres had drawn all eyes upon him, would compromise, by an untimely retirement, the advantages of this new office, the object of his ambition.

For the first time this nobleman, always prompt and radical in his decisions, found himself hesitating; and, such is the power of human egotism even in generous natures, he felt almost incensed against Eugenie, the involuntary cause of his hesitation.

After weighing everything carefully in his mind, he finally said to himself that an open confession, sincere and unrestricted, would be the best solution of the difficulty; and just as the first light of day came to dissipate the shadow that overcast his mind, when his orderly entered to open the blinds in his chamber, he formed a fixed resolution as to his course.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LADY BOUNTIFUL

Valentine de Vermont was not yet twenty-two years old.

Her birth had cost the life of her mother, and, brought up by an active and enterprising man, her education had been directed by plain common-sense, rather masculine, perhaps, but without injury to her personal attractions, nor to those of her delicate and lofty spirit.

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Her father, who was endowed with a veritable genius for commercial action, had monopolized more than the fur-trade of Alaska and of Hudson's Bay. From year to year he had extended the field of his operations: in Central America, dealing in grains and salt meats; in Europe in wines and brandy; commodities always bought at the right time, in enormous quantities, and, without pausing in transshipment from one country to another, carried in vessels belonging to him and sailing under the English flag.

Without giving her any unnecessary instruction as to the management of his affairs, he wished his daughter to possess sufficient knowledge of them to handle herself the wealth that she would receive as a dowry and at his death; and he decided that she should not contract a marriage except under the law of the separation of goods, according to the custom generally adopted in the United States.

An attack of paralysis having condemned him to his armchair, he consecrated the remainder of his days to settling all his enterprises, and when he died, about two years before the arrival of Valentine in Paris, that young lady found herself in the possession of more than one hundred and twenty million francs, nearly all invested in English, American, and French State bonds.

At the expiration of her period of mourning, the wealthy heiress could then live in London, New York, or Paris, at her pleasure; but the French blood that ran in her veins prevented her from hesitating a moment, and she chose the last named of the three cities for her abode.

Being passionately fond of saddle and driving-horses, she did not stop in England without taking the necessary time to acquire everything of the best for the fitting-up of a stable, and after a time she established herself temporarily in a sumptuous apartment in the Place de l'Etoile, furnished with a taste worthy of the most thorough Parisian.

On the evening after her appearance at the Opera, just as she left her breakfast-table, M. Durand presented himself at her dwelling with the architect's plan for the building of the orphan asylum, and declared himself ready to take her orders regarding the plan, as well as on the subject of the gift of money to the Society.

"I have resolved," said Zibeline, "to transform into an asylum, following a certain plan, the model farm belonging to the estate that I have recently purchased through you. If I required carte blanche in choosing the site, it was because I desire that Monsieur Desvanneaux shall have nothing to do with the matter until the day when I shall put the committee in possession of the building and its premises, which I have engaged to furnish, free of all expense to the Society. I shall employ my own architect to execute the work, and I shall ask you to indemnify, for me, the architect who has drawn up this first plan, which will remain as the minimum expense incurred on my part. But I wish to be

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the only person to superintend the arrangements, and to be free to introduce, without control, such improvements as I may judge suitable. Should the committee demand a guaranty, I have on deposit with Monsieur de Samoreau a million francs which I intend to use in carrying out these operations. Half of that sum may be consigned to the hands of some one they may wish to choose; the other half will serve to pay the laborers in proportion to their work. In order to insure even greater regularity, have the kindness to draw up, to cover the interval that will elapse before I make my final definite donation, a provisionary document, setting forth the engagement that I have undertaken to carry out."

"Here it is," said the notary; "I have already prepared it."

Having examined the document carefully, to assure herself that all statements contained therein were according to her intentions, Zibeline took her pen and wrote at the foot of the page: "Read and approved," and signed the paper.

"Mademoiselle appears to be well accustomed to business habits," observed M. Durand, with a smile.

"That is because I have been trained to them since childhood," she replied. "My plan is to place this document myself in the hands of Madame la Duchesse de Montgeron."

"You can do so this very afternoon, if you wish. Thursday is her reception day," said the notary, rising with a bow, preparatory to taking his leave.

"I shall take good care not to fail to call," earnestly replied the fair Lady Bountiful.

She telephoned immediately to her head-groom, ordering him to bring around her brougham at three o'clock.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MODERN TARTUFE

At the same hour that the elegant carriage of Zibeline was conducting her to the Hotel de Montgeron, M. Desvanneaux descended from a modest fiacre at the gate of the hotel occupied by Eugenie Gontier.

The first impulse of the actress—who was engaged in studying a new role in her library—was not to receive her importunate visitor; but a sudden idea changed her determination, and she gave the order to admit him.

"This is the first time that I have had the high favor of being admitted to this sanctuary," said the churchwarden, kissing with ardor the hand that the actress extended to him.

"Don't let us have so great a display of pious manifestations," she said, withdrawing her hand from this act of humility, which was rather too prolonged. "Sit down and be sensible," she added.

"Can one be sensible when he finds himself at your feet, dear Mademoiselle? At the feet of the idol who is so appropriately enthroned among so many artistic objects!" replied the honey-tongued Prudhomme, adjusting his eyeglasses. "The bust of General de Prerolles, no doubt?" he added, inquiringly, scrutinizing a marble statuette placed on the high mantelpiece.

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"You are wrong, Monsieur Desvanneaux; it is that of Moliere!"

"I beg your pardon!—I am standing so far below it! I, too, have on my bureau a bust of our great Poquelin, but Madame Desvanneaux thinks that this author's style is somewhat too pornographic, and has ordered me to replace his profane image by the more edifying one of our charitable patron, Saint Vincent de Paul."

"Is it to tell me of your family jars that you honor me with this visit?" said Eugenie.

"No, indeed! It was rather to escape from them, dear Mademoiselle! But alas! my visit has also another object: to release you from the promise you were so kind as to make me regarding the matter of our kermess; a project now unfortunately rendered futile by that Zibeline!"

"Otherwise called 'Mademoiselle de Vermont.'"

"I prefer to call her Zibeline—that name is better suited to a courtesan."

"You are very severe toward her!"

"I can not endure hypocrites!" naively replied the worthy man.

"She appeared to me to be very beautiful, however," continued Eugenie Gontier, in order to keep up the conversation on the woman who she felt instinctively was her rival.

"Beautiful! Not so beautiful as you," rejoined M. Desvanneaux, gallantly. "She is a very ambitious person, who throws her money at our heads, the better to humiliate us."

"But, since it is all in the interest of the Orphan Asylum—"

"Say, rather, in her own interest, to put herself on a pedestal because of her generosity! Oh, she has succeeded at the first stroke! Already, at the Hotel de Montgeron they swear by her; and if this sort of thing goes on, I shall very soon be regarded only as a pariah!"

"Poor Monsieur Desvanneaux!"

"You pity me, dear Mademoiselle? I thank you! The role of consoler is truly worthy of your large heart, and if you do not forbid me to hope—" said this modern Tartufe, approaching Eugenie little by little.

"Take care!" said she; "suppose the General should be hidden under that table, like Orgon!"

"The General!" exclaimed Desvanneaux; "he is too much occupied elsewhere!"



“Occupied with whom?”

“With Zibeline, probably. He never left her side all the evening, last night at the Opera.”

“Pardon me! He was here until after ten o’clock.”

“Yes, but afterward—when the opera was over?”

“Well, what happened when the opera was over?” Eugenie inquired, forcing herself to hide her emotion.

“They went away together! I saw them—I was watching them from behind a column. What a scandal!”

“And your conclusion on all this, Monsieur Desvanneaux?”

“It is that the General is deceiving you, dear Mademoiselle.”

“With that young girl?”

“A bold hussy, I tell you! A Messalina! Ah, I pity you sincerely in my turn! And should a devoted consoler, a discreet avenger, be able to make you forget this outrage to your charms, behold me at your feet, devoting to you my prayers, awaiting only a word from you to become the most fortunate among the elect—”

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A loud knock at the outer door spared Mademoiselle Gontier the trouble of repelling her ridiculous adorer, who promptly scrambled to his feet at the sound.

"A visitor!" he murmured, turning pale. "Decidedly, I have no luck—"

"Monsieur le Marquis de Prerolles is in the drawing-room," a domestic announced.

"Beg him to wait," said Eugenie, reassured by this visit, which was earlier than the usual hour. "You see that you are badly informed, Monsieur Desvanneaux," she added.

"For heaven's sake, spare me this embarrassing meeting!" said the informer, whose complexion had become livid.

"I understand. You fear a challenge?"

"Oh, no, not that! My religious principles would forbid me to fight a duel. But the General would not fail to rally me before my wife regarding my presence here, and Madame Desvanneaux would be pitiless."

"Own, however, that you richly deserve a lesson, Lovelace that you are! But I will take pity on you," said Eugenie, opening a door at the end of the room. "The servants' stairway is at the end of that corridor. You know the way!" she added, laughing.

"I am beginning to know it, dear Mademoiselle!" said the pitiful beguiler, slipping through the doorway on tiptoe.

CHAPTER XIX

BROKEN TIES

After picking up a chair which, in his alarm, the fugitive had overturned in his flight, Mademoiselle Gontier herself opened the door leading to the drawing-room.

"Come in, Henri!" said she, lifting the portiere.

"Do I disturb you?" the General inquired, entering the library.

"Never! You know that well! But how gravely you asked the question!"

"For the reason that I wish to speak to you about serious matters, my dear Eugenie."

The image of Zibeline passed before the eyes of the actress. That which Desvanneaux had revealed, in accusing the girl of debauchery, now appeared plausible to her, if considered in another way.

“You are about to marry!” she exclaimed.

They were the same words pronounced by Fanny Dorville in similar circumstances.

“Never! You know that well enough!” he replied, in his turn.

“Speak, then!” said she, sinking upon a chair and motioning him to a seat before her.

He obeyed, and sitting so far forward upon his chair that his knees touched her skirt, he took both her hands in his own, and said gently:

“You know how much I love you, and how much I esteem you. You know, too, the story of my life: my past follies, and also the honorable career I have run in order to atone for them morally, for in a material sense they are irreparable—according to my ideas, at least. This career has been fortunate. I have reached the highest rank that a soldier can attain to-day. But my rapid promotion, however justifiable it may be, has none the less awakened jealousy. The nature of my services being above all possibility of suspicion, calumny has sought another quarter at which to strike, and at this moment it is my delicacy which is impugned.”

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"Your delicacy, Henri! What do you mean?" asked Eugenie, in an altered voice.

"Our friendship is well known. You are rich, and I have only my pay: the antithesis is flagrant! The gossips comment upon it, and exploit the fact against me."

"Against you!" cried Eugenie, indignantly.

"Against me—yes. I have proof of it. A man in private life would be justified in ignoring such gossip, but for a man in my profession ambiguity has no place, nor has compromise. Himself a severe judge of the conduct of others, he must not afford them a single instance whereby they can accuse him of not following his own precepts."

And, as his companion remained silent and startled before an explanation so unexpected, he added:

"You say nothing, my love. You must divine the depth of my chagrin at the prospect of a necessary separation, and you are sufficiently charitable not to remind me that I ought to have made these tardy reflections before I yielded to a fascination which made me close my eyes to facts."

"I reproach you with nothing, Henri," said Eugenie in a trembling voice. "I myself yielded to the same enchantment, and in abandoning myself to it, I did not foresee that some day it might be prejudicial to your honor. A singular moral law is that of the world!" she pursued, growing more excited. "Let General de Prerolles be the lover of Madame de Lisieux or of Madame de Nointel; let him sit every day at their tables—if there be only a husband whose hand he may clasp in greeting, no one will call this hospitable liaison a crime! But let him feel anything more than a passing fancy for Eugenie Gontier, who violates no conjugal vow in loving him, but whose love he is not rich enough to buy—even were that love for sale—oh, then, everyone must point at him the finger of scorn! As for myself, it seems that it was useless for me to resist so many would-be lovers in order to open my door more freely to the man of my choice—an action which no one holds against me, however, because I am only an actress, and the public classes us in a separate category, so that they may more readily offer up to us the incense with which they smother us! Be it so! There are also in my profession disinterested hearts which may serve as examples—and I pretend to the very highest rank as an actress in every role I assume, even in this city. Take back your liberty, Henri!"

"I have most unwillingly offended you," said he, sadly.

"You? Ah, no! I know that you are loyal and sincere, and I could not harbor resentment against you after your avowal. You would have lacked self-confidence had you acted otherwise. But," she continued, "have you indeed told me all?"

"All!" he replied, without hesitation.



"Will you give me your word of honor that no other woman stands between you and me?"

"I swear it to you!"

"I thank you! You are incapable of lying. Whatever happens, you never will have a better friend than I, for your just pride is still more dear to me than my own. If you cease to come to the theatre, and appear no more at my receptions, that will be sufficient to insure the silence of gossip concerning us. Go without remorse, Henri! But come back to see me sometimes—quietly, without the knowledge of the envious—will you not?"

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"Do you doubt it?" he responded, folding her tenderly in his arms.

"Yes and no! But if this is our supreme farewell, do not tell me so!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Ambiguity has no place, nor has compromise
But if this is our supreme farewell, do not tell me so!
Chain so light yesterday, so heavy to-day
Every man is his own master in his choice of liaisons
If I do not give all I give nothing
Indulgence of which they stand in need themselves
Ostensibly you sit at the feast without paying the cost
Paris has become like a little country town in its gossip
The night brings counsel
You are in a conquered country, which is still more dangerous

ZIBELINE

By Philippe de Massa

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XX

ZIBELINE RECEIVES

The Duchesse de Montgeron had no children, and her most tender affections were concentrated upon her husband and her brother. The scruples which caused the latter to forswear matrimony grieved her deeply, for, knowing the inflexibility of his character, she was sure that no one in the world could make him alter his decision.

Thus, on one side the title of the Duc de Montgeron was destined to pass to a collateral branch of the family; and on the other, the title of Marquis de Prerolles would become extinct with the General.

But, although she now considered it impossible to realize the project which she had momentarily cherished, she continued to show the same kindness to Mademoiselle de Vermont. She would have regarded any other course as unworthy of her, since she had made the first advances; moreover, the young girl's nature was so engaging that no one who approached her could resist her charm.

Very reserved or absolutely frank, according to the degree of confidence with which she was treated, Valentine had sufficient intuition to avoid a lack of tact.

She was, in feminine guise, like 'L'Ingenu' of Voltaire, struck, as was Huron, with all that was illogical in our social code; but she did not make, after his fashion, a too literal application of its rules, and knew where to draw the line, if she found herself on the point of making some hazardous remark, declaring frankly: "I was about to say something foolish!" which lent originality to her playful conversation.

After receiving from Valentine's hands the contract signed in presence of the notary, for the benefit of the Orphan Asylum, the president of the society did not fail to give a dinner in honor of the new patroness.

As she was a foreigner she was placed in the seat of honor at the table, to the great displeasure of Madame Desvanneaux, who was invited to take the second place, in spite of her title of vice-president.

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"It is because of her millions that she was placed before me," she said in an undertone to her husband, as soon as the guests had returned to the drawing-room. And, giving orders that her carriage should be summoned immediately, she left the house without speaking to any one, and with the air of a peeress of England outraged in her rights of precedence!

This was, for the hostile pair, a new cause of grievance against Zibeline. When she, in her turn, gave at her home a similar dinner, a fortnight later, she received from them, in reply to her invitation, which was couched in the most courteous terms, a simple visiting card, with the following refusal: "The Comte and the Comtesse Desvanneaux, not being in the habit of accepting invitations during Lent, feel constrained to decline that of Mademoiselle de Vermont."

The dinner was only the more gay and cordial.

Valentine's household was conducted on a footing more elegant than sumptuous.

The livery was simple, but the appearance of her people was irreproachable. The butler and the house servants wore the ordinary dress-coat and trousers; the powdered footmen wore short brown coats, ornamented, after the English fashion, with metal buttons and a false waistcoat; the breeches were of black velveteen, held above the knee by a band of gold braid, with embroidered ends, which fell over black silk stockings. At the end of the ante-chamber where this numerous personnel was grouped, opened a long gallery, ornamented with old tapestries representing mythological subjects in lively and well-preserved coloring. This room, which was intended to serve as a ballroom at need, was next to two large drawing-rooms. The walls of one were covered with a rich material, on which hung costly paintings; the furniture and the ceiling of the other were of oak, finely carved, relieved with touches of gold in light and artistic design.

Everywhere was revealed an evident desire to avoid an effect of heaviness and ostentation, and this was especially noticeable in the dining-room, where the pure tone of the panels and the moulding doubled the intensity of the light thrown upon them. Upon the table the illumination of the apartment was aided by two large candelabra of beautifully chiselled silver, filled with candles, the light of which filtered through a forest of diaphanous little white shades.

The square table was a veritable parterre of flowers, and was laid for twelve guests, three on each side.

The young mistress of the house was seated on one side, between the Duc de Montgeron and the Marquis de Prerolles. Facing her sat the Duchesse de Montgeron, between General Lenaieff and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy.—Laterally, on one hand

appeared Madame de Lisieux, between M. de Nointel and the painter Edmond Delorme; on the other, Madame de Nointel, between M. de Lisieux and the Baron de Samoreau.

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Never, during the six weeks that Valentine had had friendly relations with the Duchess, had she appeared so self-possessed, or among surroundings so well fitted to display her attractions of mind and of person. She was a little on the defensive on finding herself in this new and unexpected society, but she felt, this evening, that she was in the midst of a sympathetic and admiring circle, and did the honors of her own house with perfect ease, finding agreeable words and showing a delicate forethought for each guest, and above all displaying toward her protectress a charming deference, by which the Duchess felt herself particularly touched.

"What a pity!" she said to herself, glancing alternately at Zibeline and at her brother, between whom a tone of frank comradeship had been established, free from any coquetry on her side or from gallantry on his.

The more clearly Henri divined the thoughts of his sister, the more he affected to remain insensible to the natural seductions of his neighbor, to whom Lenaieff, on the contrary, addressed continually, in his soft and caressing voice, compliments upon compliments and madrigals upon madrigals!

"Take care, my dear Constantin!" said Henri to him, bluntly. "You will make Mademoiselle de Vermont quite impossible. If you go on thus, she will take herself seriously as a divinity!"

"Fortunately," rejoined Zibeline, "you are there, General, to remind me that I am only a mortal, as Philippe's freedman reminded his master every morning."

"You can not complain! I serve you as a confederate, to allow you to display your erudition," retorted the General, continuing his persiflage.

But he, too, was only a man, wavering and changeable, to use Montaigne's expression, for his eyes, contradicting the brusqueness of his speech, rested long, and not without envy, on this beautiful and tempting fruit which his fate forbade him to gather. The more he admired her freshness, and the more he inhaled her sweetness, the more the image of Eugenie Gontier was gradually effaced from his memory, like one of those tableaux on the stage, which gauze curtains, descending from the flies, seem to absorb without removing, gradually obliterating the pictures as they fall, one after another.

CHAPTER XXI

A DASHING AMAZON

On leaving the table, the fair "Amphitryonne" proposed that the gentlemen should use her private office as a smoking-room, and the ladies followed them thither, pretending that the odor of tobacco would not annoy them in the least, but in reality to inspect this new room.

Edmond Delorme had finished his work that very morning, and the enormous canvas, with its life-size subject, had already been hung, lighted from above and below by electric bulbs, the battery for which was cleverly hidden behind a piece of furniture.

The portrait, bearing a striking resemblance to the original, was indeed that of “the most dashing of all the Amazons on the Bois,” to quote the words of the artist, who was a better painter of portraits than of animals, but who, in this case, could not separate the rider from her steed.

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Seaman, a Hungarian bay, by Xenophon and Lena Rivers, was drawn in profile, very erect on his slender, nervous legs. He appeared, on the side nearest the observer, to be pawing the ground impatiently with his hoof, a movement which seemed to be facilitated by his rider, who, drawn in a three-quarters view and extending her hand, allowed the reins to fall over the shoulders of her pure-blooded mount.

"What do you think of it?" Zibeline inquired of General de Prerolles.

"I think you have the air of the commander of a division of cavalry, awaiting the moment to sound the charge."

"I shall guard her well," said Zibeline, "for she would be sure to be put to rout by your bayonets."

"Not by mine!" gallantly exclaimed Lenaieff. "I should immediately lower my arms before her!"

"You!—perhaps! But between General de Prerolles and myself the declaration of war is without quarter. Is it not, General?" said Valentine, laughing.

"It is the only declaration that fate permits me to make to you, Mademoiselle," Henri replied, rather dryly, laying emphasis on the double sense of his words.

This rejoinder, which nothing in the playful attack had justified, irritated the Duchess, but Valentine appeared to pay no attention to it, and at ten o'clock, when a gypsy band began to play in the long gallery, she arose.

"Although we are a very small party," she said, "would you not like to indulge in a waltz, Mesdames? The gentlemen can not complain of being crowded here," she added, with a smile.

M. de Lisieux and M. de Nointel, as well as Edmond Delorme, hastened to throw away their cigarettes, and all made their way to the long gallery. The Baron de Samoreau and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy remained alone together.

The Duchess took the occasion to speak quietly to her brother.

"I assure you that you are too hard with her," she said. "There is no need to excuse yourself for not marrying. No one dreams of such a thing—she no more than any one else. But she seems to have a sentiment of friendship toward you, and I am sure that your harshness wounds her."

A more experienced woman than Madame de Montgeron, who had known only a peaceful and legitimate love, would have quickly divined that beneath her brother's

brusque manner lurked a budding but hopeless passion, whence sprang his intermittent revolt against the object that had inspired it.

This revolt was not only against Zibeline's fortune; it included her all-pervading charm, which penetrated his soul. He was vexed at his sister for having brought them together; he was angry with himself that he had allowed his mind to be turned so quickly from his former prejudices; and, however indifferent he forced himself to appear, he was irritated against Lenaieff because of the attentions which that gentleman showered upon Zibeline, upon whom he revenged himself by assuming the aggressive attitude for which the Duchess had reproached him.

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In a still worse humor after the sisterly remonstrance to which he had just been compelled to listen, he seated himself near the entrance of the gallery, where the gypsy band was playing one of their alluring waltzes, of a cadence so different from the regular and monotonous measure of French dance music.

The three couples who were to compose this impromptu ball, yielded quickly to the spell of this irresistible accompaniment.

“Suppose Monsieur Desvanneaux should hear that we danced on the eve of Palm Sunday?” laughingly pro-tested Madame de Lisieux.

“He would report it at Rome,” said Madame de Nointel.

And, without further regard to the compromising of their souls, each of the two young women took for a partner the husband of the other.

Mademoiselle de Vermont had granted the eager request of Lenaieff that she would waltz with him, an occupation in which the Russian officer acquitted himself with the same respectful correctness that had formerly obtained for him the high favor of some grand duchess at the balls in the palace of Gatchina.

He was older and stouter than his brother-in-arms, Henri de Prerolles, and a wound he had received at Plevna slightly impeded his movements, so that he was unable to display the same activity in the dance as the other waltzers, and contented himself with moving a ‘trois temps’, in an evolution less in harmony with the brilliancy of the music.

Henri, on the contrary, who had been a familiar friend of the Austrian ambassador at the time when the Princess de Metternich maintained a sort of open ballroom for her intimates, had learned, in a good school, all the boldness and elegance of the Viennese style of dancing.

But he sat immovable, as did also Edmond Delorme, because of the lack of partners; and, not wishing to take the second place after Lenaieff, his rival, he would not for the world abandon his role of spectator, unless some one forced him to it.

“Suppose we have a cotillon figure, in order to change partners?” said Valentine suddenly, during a pause, after she had thanked her partner.

And, to set the example, she took, from a basket of flowers, a rosebud, which she offered to Henri.

“Will you take a turn with me?” she said, with the air of the mistress of the house, who shows equal courtesy to all her guests.

“A deux temps?” he asked, fastening the rosebud in his buttonhole.

“Yes, I prefer that,” she replied.

He passed his arm around her waist, and they swept out upon the polished floor, he erect and gallant, she light and supple as a gazelle, her chin almost resting upon her left hand, which lay upon her partner’s shoulder, her other hand clasped in his.

At times her long train swirled in a misty spiral around her, when they whirled about in some corner; then it spread out behind her like a great fan when they swept in a wide curve from one end of the gallery to the other.

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During the feverish flight which drew these two together, their breasts touched, the bosom of the enchantress leaned against the broad chest of the vigorous soldier, her soft hair caressed his cheek, he inhaled a subtle Perfume, and a sudden intoxication overflowed his heart, which he had tried to make as stern and immobile as his face.

"How well you waltz!" murmured Zibeline, in his ear.

"I am taking my revenge for my defeat on the ice," he replied, clasping her a little closer, in order to facilitate their movements.

"The prisoners you take must find it very difficult to escape from your hands," she said, with a touch of malice.

"Does that mean that already you wish to reclaim your liberty?"

"Not yet—unless you are fatigued."

"Fatigued! I should like to go thus to the end of the world!"

"And I, too," said Zibeline, simply.

By common consent the other waltzers had stopped, as much for the purpose of observing these two as for giving them more space, while the wearied musicians scraped away as if it were a contest who should move the faster, themselves or the audacious couple.

"What a pity!" again said the Duchess to her husband, whose sole response was a shrug of his shoulders as he glanced at his brother-in-law.

At the end of his strength, and with a streaming brow, the gypsy leader lowered his bow, and the music ceased.

Henri de Prerolles, resuming his sang-froid, drew the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont through his arm, and escorted her to her place among the other ladies.

"Bravo, General!" said Madame de Lisieux. "You have won your decoration, I see," she added, indicating the rosebud which adorned his buttonhole.

"What shall we call this new order, ladies?" asked Madame de Nointel of the circle.

"The order of the Zibeline," Valentine replied, with a frank burst of laughter.

"What?—do you know—" stammered the author of the nickname, blushing up to her ears.

“Do not disturb yourself, Madame! The zibeline is a little animal which is becoming more and more rare. They never have been found at all in my country, which I regret,” said Mademoiselle de Vermont graciously.

The hour was late, and the Duchess arose to depart. The Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, exercising his function as a sort of chamberlain, went to summon the domestics. Meanwhile Valentine spoke confidentially to Henri.

“General,” said she, “I wish to ask a favor of you.”

“I am at your orders, Mademoiselle.”

“I am delighted with the success of this little dinner,” Valentine continued, “and I wish to give another after Easter. My great desire is to have Mademoiselle Gontier—with whom I should like to become better acquainted—recite poetry to us after dinner. Would you have the kindness to tell her of my desire?”

“I!” exclaimed the General, amazed at such a request.

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"Yes, certainly. If you ask her, she will come all the more willingly."

"You forget that I am not in the diplomatic service, Mademoiselle."

"My request annoys you? Well, we will say no more about it," said Zibeline. "I will charge Monsieur de Samoreau with the negotiations."

They rejoined the Duchess, Zibeline accompanying her to the vestibule, always evincing toward her the same pretty air of deference.

The drive home was silent. The Duke and the Duchess had agreed not to pronounce the name of Mademoiselle de Vermont before Henri, who racked his brain without being able to guess what strange motive prompted the young girl to wish to enter into closer relations with the actress.

A letter from Eugenie was awaiting him. He read:

"Two weeks have elapsed since you have been to see me. I do not ask whether you love me still, but I do ask you, in case you love another, to tell me so frankly.

"Ariadne."

"So I am summoned to the confessional, and am expected to accuse myself of that which I dare not avow even to my own heart! Never!" said Henri, crushing the note in his hand. "Besides, unless I deceive myself, Ariadne has not been slow in seeking a consoling divinity! Samoreau is at hand, it appears. He played the part of Plutus before; now he will assume that of Bacchus," thought the recreant lover, in order to smother his feeling of remorse.

CHAPTER XXII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

The life of General de Prerolles was uniformly regulated. He arose at dawn, and worked until the arrival of his courier; then he mounted his horse, attired in morning military costume.

After his ride, he visited the quartermaster-general of his division, received the report of his chief of staff, and gave necessary orders. It was at this place, and never at the General's own dwelling, that the captains or subaltern officers presented themselves when they had occasion to speak to him.

At midday he returned to breakfast at the Hotel de Montgeron where, morning and evening, his plate was laid; and soon after this meal he retired to his own quarters to work with his orderly, whose duty it was to report to him regarding the numerous guns and pieces of heavy ordnance which make the object of much going and coming in military life.

After signing the usual number of documents, the General would mount another of his horses, and at this hour would appear in civilian attire for an afternoon canter. After this second ride he would pass an hour at his club, but without ever touching a card, no matter what game was in progress.

He dined at different places, but oftenest with his sister, where by this time a studied silence was preserved on the subject of Zibeline. This, however, did not prevent him from thinking of her more and more.

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Mademoiselle de Vermont had not been seen again in the Bois de Boulogne since the night of her dinner, although Henri had sought in vain to meet her in the mornings in the bridle-path, and afternoons in the Avenue des Acacias.

He decided that probably she did not wish to ride during Holy Week; but when several days had passed after Easter, and still she was not seen amusing herself in her usual fashion, he said to himself that perhaps it would be the proper thing to make what is called "a dinner-call."

There are some women whose fascination is so overwhelming as to cause the sanest of lovers to commit themselves, whence comes the slightly vulgar expression, "He has lost his bearings." Henri began to feel that he was in this state when he presented himself at Zibeline's home. A domestic informed him that Mademoiselle had been absent a week, but was expected home that evening. He left his card, regretting that he had not waited twenty-four hours more.

It was now the middle of April, the time when the military governor of Paris is accustomed to pass in review the troops stationed on the territory under his command, and this review was to take place the next morning.

The order for the mobilizing of his own division having been received and transmitted, Henri's evening was his own, and he resolved to pass it with Lenaieff, feeling certain that his colleague at least would speak to him of Zibeline.

The aide-de-camp general lived at the Hotel Continental, much frequented by Russians of distinction. Henri found his friend just dressing for dinner, and well disposed to accept his proposition.

As they descended the stairs, they passed an imposing elderly man, with white moustache and imperial, still very erect in his long redingote with military buttons—a perfect type of the German officer who gets himself up to look like the late Emperor William I. This officer and the French general stopped on the stairs, each eyeing the other without deciding whether he ought to salute or not, as often happens with people who think they recognize some one, but without being able to recall where or in what circumstances they have met before.

It was Henri whose memory was first revived.

"Captain, you are my prisoner!" he said, gayly, seizing the stranger by the collar.

"What! The Commandant de Prerolles!" cried the elderly man, in a reproachful tone, from which fifteen years had not removed the bitterness.

"I know who he is!" said Lenaieff. "Monsieur is your former jailer of the frontier fortress!"

The officer of the landwehr attempted to withdraw from the hand that held him.

“Oh, I don’t intend to let you escape! You are coming to dine with us, and we will sign a treaty of peace over the dessert,” said Henri, clasping the officer’s hand affectionately.

His tone was so cordial that the stranger allowed himself to be persuaded. A quarter of an hour later all three were seated at a table in the Cafe Anglais.

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"I present to you General Lenaieff," said Henri to his guest. "You should be more incensed against him than against me, for, if he had done his duty, you would probably have had me imprisoned again."

"Not imprisoned—shot!" the Captain replied, with conviction.

"In that case I regret my complicity still less," said Lenaieff, "for otherwise I should have lost an excellent friend, and, had Prerolles been shot, he never could have made me acquainted with the delicious Mademoiselle de Vermont!"

"Ah! So that is what you are thinking of?" Henri said to himself.

"I do not know the young lady of whom you speak," the German interrupted; "but I know that, for having allowed the Commandant to escape, I was condemned to take his place in the prison, and was shut up there for six months, in solitary confinement, without even seeing my wife!"

"Poor Captain! How is the lady?" Henry inquired.

"Very well, I thank you."

"Will you permit us to drink her health?"

"Certainly, Monsieur."

"Hock! hoch!" said Henri, lifting his glass.

"Hock! hoch!" responded the ex-jailer, drinking with his former prisoner.

This delicate toast began to appease the bitterness of the good man; while the memories of his escape, offering a diversion to Henri's mind, put him in sympathetic humor with the stranger.

"Ah! There are mountains that we never climb but once," he said. "We three, meeting in Paris, can prove the truth of that proverb."

"Not only in Paris," said Lenaieff. "If you were in Saint Petersburg, Henri, you might, any evening, see your old flame, Fanny Dorville."

"Does she keep a table d'hôte?"

"No, indeed, my boy. She plays duenna at the Theatre Michel, as that fat Heloise used to do at the Palais-Royal. She must have died long ago, that funny old girl!"

"Not at all. She is still living, and is a pensioner of the Association of Dramatic Artists! But, pardon me, our conversation can hardly be amusing to our guest."

"No one can keep a Frenchman and a Russian from talking about women! The habit is stronger than themselves!" said the old officer, with a hearty laugh.

"Well, and you, Captain," said Lenaieff: "Have you not also trodden the primrose path in your time?"

"Gentlemen, I never have loved any other woman than my own wife," replied the honest German, laying his large hand upon his heart, as if he were taking an oath. "That astonishes you Parisians, eh?" he added benevolently.

"Quite the contrary! It assures us peace of mind!" said Lenaieff. "To your health, Captain!"

"And yours, Messieurs!"

And their glasses clinked a second time.

"Apropos," said Lenaieff to Henri, "the military governor has asked me to accompany him to-morrow to the review at Vincennes. I shall then have the pleasure of seeing you at the head of your division."



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"Teufel!" exclaimed the German officer; "it appears that the Commandant de Prerolles has lost no time since we took leave of each other."

"Thanks to you, Monsieur! Had you not allowed me to withdraw from your society, I should certainly not have reached my present rank! To your health, Captain!"

"To yours, General!"

Succeeding bumpers finally dissipated entirely the resentment of the former jailer, and when they parted probably never to meet again—he and his prisoner had become the best friends in the world.

"Meine besten complimente der Frau Hauptmannin!" said Henri to him, in leaving him on the boulevard.

"Lieber Gott! I shall take good care not to own to her that I dined with you."

"And why, pray?"

"Because there is one thing for which she never will forgive you."

"What is that?"

"The fact that you were the cause of her living alone for six months!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MILITARY REVIEW

The different troops, assembled for review, were massed on the parade-ground at Vincennes, facing the tribunes.

In the centre, the artillery brigade, surrounded by two divisions of infantry, was drawn up in two straight columns, connected by regiments; each division of infantry, in double columns, was connected by brigades.

These six columns were separated by spaces varying from twenty to twenty-five metres.

In the background, the cavalry division was lined up in columns; behind that was its artillery, in the same order of formation.

At a given signal, the troops advanced five hundred metres, and, as soon as they halted, drums, clarinets and trumpets beat and sounded from all parts of the field, saluting the arrival of the military governor of Paris.

This functionary, followed by his staff, in the midst of which group glittered the brilliant Russian uniform of the aide-de-camp General Leniaeff, rode slowly past the front and the flanks of the massed body, the troops facing to the left or the right as he passed.

This inspection finished, he took up his stand before the pillars at the entrance, and the march past began by battalions en masse, in the midst of the acclamations of numerous spectators who had come to witness this imposing display, well calculated to stir patriotic pride.

The enthusiasm increased; the Prerolles division marched past after its artillery, and, as always, the martial and distinguished profile of its general produced its usual effect on the public.

He rode Aida, his favorite mare, an Irish sorrel of powerful frame, with solid limbs, whose horizontal crupper and long tail indicated her race; she was one of those animals that are calm and lively at the same time, capable of going anywhere and of passing through all sorts of trials.

After its parade, the infantry, whose part in the affair was finished, retraced their steps and took up a position on the other side of the field of manoeuvres, facing the north, and in front of rising ground, in preparation for the discharge of musketry.

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During this time the artillery brigade, re-formed in battle array on the parade-ground, detached six batteries, which advanced at a trot to within one hundred and fifty metres of the tribunes, where they discharged a volley. The long pieces were run rapidly to right and left, unmasking the cavalry, which, after a similar volley from its own batteries, appeared behind them in battle order, and executed a galloping march, its third line held in reserve.

A few moments later all the troops rejoined the infantry on the ground set apart for rest and for the purpose of partaking of a cold repast, consisting of potted meats, with which each man was furnished.

Nothing more picturesque could be imagined than this temporary camp, with its stacked arms, knapsacks lying on the ground, holes dug in the ground in which to kindle fires, and the clattering of cans. On the other side of the field the artillerymen and cavalymen ate, holding their reins under their arms, while their officers stood around some temporary table, served by canteen men of the united divisions. Tiny columns of blue smoke rose where coffee was making, and everywhere were the swift movement and sprightly good-fellowship in which the soldier feels himself in his natural element.

The curious spectators crowded themselves in front of the banner, while in the centre of the square the military governor of Paris, and the other officers, talked with some privileged persons who had been able to present themselves among them.

Descending from his mount a little apart from the group, and plunged in thought, the former sub-lieutenant of 'chasseurs a pied' gazed at the old fortress, the sight of which recalled so many sad memories.

Vincennes had been his first garrison, and its proximity to Paris had been disastrous for him. There he had entered one morning, stripped of his fortune!

And what a series of disasters had followed! But for his heavy losses upon that fatal night, he would not have been compelled to sell Prerolles, the income of which, during his long absence, would have sufficed to lessen the tax on the land, transmissible, had events turned out otherwise, to some heir to his name. If only fate had not made Paul Landry cross his path!

"Good morning, General!" came the sound of a fresh, gay voice behind, which sent a thrill through him.

He turned and saw Zibeline, who had just stopped a few steps distant from him, sitting in her carriage, to which was harnessed a pretty pair of cobs, prancing and champing their bits.

“Ah, it is you, Mademoiselle!” he said, carrying his hand to the visor of his kepi, fastened under his chin.

“I found your card last night,” said Zibeline, “and I have come here this morning to return your call!”

Then, leaning back in her driving-seat in order to reveal Edmond Delorme installed beside her, she added:

“I have brought also my painter-in-ordinary. We have watched the review together, and he is as enthusiastic as I over the picturesque effect of this improvised bivouac. See! He is so much occupied with his sketch that I can not get a word out of him.”



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It was Aida, whose bridle was held by a dragoon, that served as a model for the artist's pencil.

"Will you permit me?" he said to Henri.

"It appears decidedly, that my mare has caught your eye," replied the General, approaching the carriage and resting his spurred foot on its step.

"She has superb lines," said the painter, without interrupting his drawing.

"Well, I am curious to know whether she could beat Seaman," said Zibeline. "Are you willing to run a race with me, General?"

"As you please—some morning when you return to the Bois."

"You noticed my absence, then?"

"I assure you that I did," Henri replied, earnestly.

Then, fearing that he had said too much, he added:

"I, and many others!"

"Good! You were almost making a pretty speech to me, but, as usual, the disavowal was not slow in coming. Fortunately, here comes your friend Lenaieff, who is hastening to make amends to me."

"What good fortune to meet you here, Mademoiselle!" cried Constantin, who, having perceived Valentine from a distance, had taken an abrupt leave of his general-in-chief.

"I know that you have called to see me several times," said she, "but I was in the country."

"So early in the month of April?"

"Oh! not to live there. Monsieur de Perolles knows that I have promised to build our Orphan Asylum at a certain distance from Paris, and hardly three weeks remain to me before I must hand over the property. If I am not ready on the day appointed, Monsieur Desvanneaux will be sure to seize my furniture, and I could not invite you any more to dinner, Messieurs! A propos, General, Monsieur de Samoreau has failed in his negotiations. Mademoiselle Gontier refuses to come to recite at my next soiree!"

"What necessity is there for you to make her acquaintance?" demanded Henri.

"Ah, that is my secret!"

During this conversation a hired fiacre, well appointed, had stopped beside the road, and Eugenie Gontier descended from it, inquiring of an officer belonging to the grounds where she could find General de Prerolles. When the officer had pointed out the General to her, she started to walk toward him; but, on seeing her former lover leaning familiarly against the door of Zibeline's carriage, she immediately retraced her steps and quickly reentered her own.

"There is no longer any doubt about it!" said Mademoiselle de Vermont, who had been observing Eugenie's movements. "Mademoiselle Gontier has made a fixed resolution to avoid meeting me."

"That is because she is jealous of you!" said Lenaieff naively.

"Jealous? And why?" said Zibeline, blushing.

Visibly embarrassed, Henri drew out his watch in order to avert his countenance.

"Midday!" he cried. "This is the hour for the return of the troops to their barracks. You would do well not to delay in starting for home, Mademoiselle. The roads will be very crowded, and your horses will not be able to trot. I beg your pardon for taking away your model, my dear Delorme, but I really must be off."

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"It is all the same to me; I have finished my sketch," said the painter, closing his portfolio.

At this moment, as the military governor passed near them, on his way to the crossway of the Pyramid, Henri made a movement as if to rejoin him.

"Do not disturb yourself, General de Prerolles," said the military governor. "The compliments which I have made you on the fine appearance of your troops are probably not so agreeable to you as those to which you are listening at present!"

And saluting Mademoiselle de Vermont courteously, he went his way.

"Now you are free, Henri. Suppose we accompany Mademoiselle back to Paris?" suggested Lenaieff, seeming to read his friend's mind.

"What an honor for me!" Valentine exclaimed.

The General made a sign to his orderly, who approached to receive his instructions.

"Tell the brigadier-generals that I am about to depart. I need no more escort than two cavalymen for General Lenaieff and myself. Now I am ready, Mademoiselle," Henri continued, turning toward Valentine. "If you will be guided by me, we should do well to reach the fortifications by way of the Lake of Saint-Mande."

She made a little sound with her tongue, and the two cobs set off in the direction indicated, the crowds they passed stopping to admire their high action, and asking one another who was that pretty woman who was escorted by two generals, the one French, the other a foreigner.

"I must look like a treaty of peace in a Franco-Russian alliance!" said Zibeline, gayly.

The sun shone brightly, the new leaves were quivering on the trees, the breeze bore to the ear the echo of the military bands.

Animated by the sound, the two cobs went ahead at a great pace, but they were kept well in hand by their mistress, who was dressed this morning in a simple navy-blue costume, with a small, oval, felt hat, ornamented with two white wings, set on in a manner that made the wearer resemble a valkyrie. Her whip, an unnecessary accessory, lay across the seat at her right, on which side of the carriage Henri rode.

The General's eyes missed none of the graceful movements of the young girl. And his reflections regarding her, recently interrupted, returned in full force, augmenting still more his regret at the inexorable fate that separated him from her. "What a pity!" he thought in his turn, repeating unconsciously the phrase so often uttered by his sister.

Arrived at the Place du Trene, Valentine stopped her horses a moment, and addressed her two cavaliers:

“I thank you for your escort, gentlemen. But however high may be your rank, I really can not go through Paris looking like a prisoner between two gendarmes! So good-by! I shall see you this evening perhaps, but good-by for the present.”

They gave her a military salute, and the carriage disappeared in the Faubourg St. Antoine, while the two horsemen followed the line of the quays along the Boulevard Diderot.



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CHAPTER XXIV

THE CHALLENGE

That person who, in springtime, between ten o'clock and midday, never has walked beside the bridle-path in the Bois de Boulogne, under the deep shade of the trees, can form no idea of the large number of equestrians that for many years have been devoted to riding along that delightful and picturesque road.

To see and to be seen constitutes the principal *raison d'être* of this exercise, where the riders traverse the same path going and coming, a man thus being able to meet more than once the fair one whom he seeks, or a lady to encounter several times a cavalier who interests her.

On this more and more frequented road, the masculine element displayed different costumes, according to the age and tastes of each rider. The young men appeared in careless array: leggings, short coats, and small caps. The older men, faithful to early traditions, wore long trousers, buttoned-up redingotes, and tall hats, like those worn by their fathers, as shown in the pictures by Alfred de Dreux.

For the feminine element the dress is uniform. It consists of a riding-habit of black or dark blue, with bodice and skirt smoothly molded to the form by one of the two celebrated habit-makers, Youss or Creed. The personal presence alone varied, according to the degree of perfection of the model.

A cylindrical hat, a little straight or turned-over collar, a cravat tied in a sailor's knot, a gardenia in the buttonhole, long trousers and varnished boots completed the dress of these modern Amazons, who, having nothing in common with the female warriors of ancient times, are not deprived, as were those unfortunates, of any of their feminine charms.

The military element is represented by officers of all grades from generals to sub-lieutenants, in morning coats, with breeches and high boots, forbidden under the Second Empire, but the rule at present.

At the top of the Pre-Catelan, the path is crossed by the Bagatelle road to the lakes, a point of intersection situated near a glade where the ladies were fond of stopping their carriages to chat with those passing on horseback. A spectator might have fancied himself at the meet of a hunting-party, lacking the whippers-in and the dogs.

A few days after the review at Vincennes, on a bright morning in May, a file of victorias and pony-chaises were strung out along this sylvan glade, and many persons had alighted from them. Announcing their arrival by trumpet-blasts, two or three vehicles of

the Coaching Club, headed by that of the Duc de Mont had discharged a number of pretty passengers, whose presence soon caused the halt of many gay cavaliers.

Several groups were formed, commenting on the news of the day, the scandal of the day before, the fete announced for the next day.

More serious than the others, the group surrounding Madame de Montgeron strolled along under the trees in the side paths which, in their windings, often came alongside of the bridle-path.

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"What has become of Mademoiselle de Vermont, Duchess?" inquired Madame de Lisieux, who had been surprised not to find Zibeline riding with their party.

"She is in the country, surrounded by masons, occupied in the building of our Orphan Asylum. The time she required before making over the property to us expires in two weeks."

"It is certainly very singular that we do not know where we are to go for the ceremonies of inauguration," said Madame Desvanneaux, in her usual vinegary tones.

"I feel at liberty to tell you that the place is not far away, and the journey thence will not fatigue you," said the president, with the air of one who has long known what she has not wished to reveal heretofore.

"The question of fatigue should not discourage us when it is a matter of doing good," said M. Desvanneaux. "Only, in the opinion of the founders of the Orphan Asylum, it should be situated in the city of Paris itself."

"The donor thought that open fields and fresh air would be better for the children."

"Land outside of Paris costs very much less, of course; that is probably the real reason," said M. Desvanneaux.

"Poor Zibeline! you are well hated!" Madame de Nointel could not help saying.

"We neither like nor dislike her, Madame. We regard her as indifferently as we do that," the churchwarden replied, striking down a branch with the end of his stick, with the superb air of a Tarquin.

Still gesticulating, he continued:

"The dust that she throws in the eyes of others does not blind us, that is all!"

The metaphor was not exactly happy, for at that instant the unlucky man received full in his face a broadside of gravel thrown by the hoofs of a horse which had been frightened by the flourishing stick, and which had responded to the menace by a violent kick.

This steed was none other than Seaman, ridden by Mademoiselle de Vermont. She had recognized the Duchess and turned her horse back in order to offer her excuses for his misconduct, the effects of which Madame Desvanneaux tried to efface by brushing off the gravel with the corner of her handkerchief.

"What has happened?" asked General de Prerolles, who at that moment cantered up, mounted on Aida.



“Oh, nothing except that Mademoiselle has just missed killing my husband with that wicked animal of hers!” cried the Maegera, in a fury.

“Mademoiselle might turn the accusation against him,” Madame de Nointel said, with some malice. “It was he who frightened her horse.”

The fiery animal, with distended veins and quivering nostrils, snorted violently, cavorted sidewise, and tried to run. Zibeline needed all her firmness of grasp to force him, without allowing herself to be thrown, to stand still on the spot whence had come the movement that had alarmed him.

“Your horse needs exercise,” said Henri to the equestrienne. “You ought to give him an opportunity to do something besides the formal trot around this path.”

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"I should be able to do so, if ever we could have our match," said Zibeline. "Will you try it now?"

"Come on!"

She nodded, gave him her hand an instant, and they set off, side by side, followed by Zibeline's groom, no less well mounted than she, and wearing turned-over boots, bordered with a band of fawn-colored leather, according to the fashion.

CHAPTER XXV

THE AMAZON HAS A FALL

They were a well-matched pair: he, the perfect type of the elegant and always youthful soldier; she, the most dashing of all the Amazons in the Bois, to quote the words of Edmond Delorme.

Everyone was familiar with the personal appearance of both riders, and recognized them, but until now Mademoiselle de Vermont had always ridden alone, and now to see her accompanied by the gallant General, whose embroidered kepi glittered in the sunlight, was a new spectacle for the gallery.

The people looked at them all the more because Seaman was still prancing, but without unseating his mistress, who held him at any gait or any degree of swiftness that pleased her.

"What a good seat you have!" said Henri.

"That is the first real compliment you ever have paid me. I shall appropriate it immediately, before you have time to retract it," Zibeline replied.

At the circle of Melezes, Henri proposed to turn to the right, in order to reach Longchamp.

"A flat race! You are joking!" Zibeline cried, turning to the left, toward the road of La Vierge,

"You don't intend that we shall run a steeplechase, I hope."

"On the contrary, that is exactly my intention! You are not afraid to try it, are you?"

"Not on my own account, but on yours."

"You know very well that I never am daunted by any obstacle."

"Figuratively, yes; but in riding a horse it is another matter."

"All the more reason why I should not be daunted now," Zibeline insisted.

When they arrived at the public square of the Cascades, in front of the Auteuil hippodrome, she paused a moment between the two lakes, uncertain which course to take.

It was Thursday, the day of the races. The vast ground, enclosed on all sides by a fence, had been cleared, since early morning, of the boards covering the paths reserved for pedestrians on days when there was no racing; but it was only eleven o'clock, and the place was not yet open to the paying public. Several workmen, in white blouses, went along the track, placing litters beside the obstacles where falls occurred most frequently.

"Do you think the gatekeeper will allow us to enter at this hour?" Zibeline asked.

"I hope not!" Henri replied.

"Well, then, I shall enter without his permission! You are free to declare me the winner. I shall be left to make a walkover, I see!" And setting off at a gallop along the bridle-path, which was obstructed a little farther on by the fence itself, she struck her horse resolutely, and with one audacious bound sprang over the entrance gate. She was now on the steeplechase track.



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"You are mad!" cried the General, who, as much concerned for her safety as for his own pride, urged on his mare, and, clearing the fence, landed beside Zibeline on the other side.

"All right!" she cried, in English, dropping her whip, as the starter drops the flag at the beginning of a race.

The die was cast. Henri bent over Aida's neck, leaning his hands upon her withers in an attitude with which experience had made him familiar, and followed the Amazon, determined to win at all hazards.

Zibeline's groom, an Englishman, formerly a professional jockey, had already jumped the fence, in spite of the cries of the guard, who ran to prevent him, and coolly galloped after his mistress, keeping at his usual distance.

The first two hedges, which were insignificant obstacles for such horses, were crossed without effort.

"Not the brook, I beg of you!" cried Henri, seeing that, instead of running past the grandstand, Zibeline apparently intended to attempt this dangerous feat.

"Come on! Seaman would never forgive me if I balk at it!" she cried, riding fearlessly down the slope,

The good horse gathered up his four feet on the brink, took one vigorous leap, appearing for a second to hover over the water; then he fell lightly on the other side of the stream, with a seesaw movement, to which the intrepid Amazon accommodated herself by leaning far back. The rebound threw her forward a little, but she straightened herself quickly and went on.

The General, who had slackened his pace that he might not interfere with her leap, gave vent to a sigh of relief. He pressed Aida's flanks firmly, and the big Irish mare jumped after her competitor, with the majestic dignity of her race.

Reassured by the 'savoir-faire' of his companion, the former winner of the military steeplechase felt revive within himself all his ardor for the conflict, and he hastened to make up the distance he had lost.

The two horses, now on the west side of the racetrack, were almost neck-and-neck, and it would have been difficult to prognosticate which had the better chance of victory. Zibeline's light weight gave Seaman the advantage, but Aida gained a little ground every time she leaped an obstacle; so that, after passing the hurdles and the third hedge, the champions arrived simultaneously at the summit of the hill, from which point the track extends in a straight line, parallel with the Allee des Fortifications.



Feeling himself urged on still harder, the English horse began to lay back his ears and pull so violently on the rein that his rider had all she could do to hold him, and lacked sufficient strength to direct his course. Seeing Zibeline's danger, Henri hastened to slacken his horse's pace, but it was too late: the almost perpendicular declivity of the other side of the hill added fresh impetus to the ungovernable rush of Seaman, who suddenly became wild and reckless.

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The situation was all the more critical for the reason that the next obstacle was a brook, only two metres wide, but of which the passage was obstructed on the farther side of the track by heavy beams, laid one on top of another, solidly riveted and measuring one metre and ten millimetres from the base to the summit. The excited horse charged obliquely toward this obstruction with all his might. Paying no more attention to the pressure upon his bit, he rose in the air, but as he had not given himself sufficient time to take plenty of room for the leap, his hoofs struck violently against the top beam, the force of resistance of which threw him over on one side; his hindquarters turned in the air, and he fell in a heap on the other side of the obstacle, sending up a great splash of water as he went into the brook.

Had Zibeline been crushed by the weight of the horse in this terrible fall, or, not having been able to free herself from him, had she been drowned under him? Henri uttered a hoarse cry, struck his spurs into the sides of his mare, crossed the brook breathlessly, stopping on the other side as soon as he could control his horse's pace; then, rushing back, he leaped to the ground to save the poor girl, if there was still time to do so.

Zibeline lay inanimate on the grass, her face lying against the earth. By a lucky chance, the horse had fallen on his right side, so that his rider's limbs and skirt had not been caught. Unhorsed by the violence of the shock, Zibeline had gone over the animal's head and fallen on the other side of the brook. Her Amazon hat, so glossy when she had set out, was now crushed, and her gloves were torn and soiled with mud; which indicated that she had fallen on her head and her hands.

Henri knelt beside her, passed his arm around her inert and charming body, and drew her tenderly toward him. Her eyes were half-open and dull, her lips pale; her nose, the nostrils of which were usually well dilated, had a pinched look; and a deadly pallor covered that face which only a moment before had been so rosy and smiling.

These signs were the forerunners of death, which the officer had recognized so many times on the battlefield. But those stricken ones had at least been men, devoting themselves to the risks of warfare; while in the presence of this young girl lying before him, looking upon this victim of a reckless audacity to which he felt he had lent himself too readily, the whole responsibility for the accident seemed to him to rest upon his own shoulders, and a poignant remorse tore his heart.

He removed her cravat, unhooked her bodice, laid his ear against her breast, from which an oppressed breathing still arose.

Two laborers hurried to open the gate and soon arrived at the spot with a litter, guided by the groom, whose horse had refused to jump the brook, and who since then had followed the race on foot outside the track. While the General placed Zibeline on the litter, the groom took Aida by the bridle, and the sad procession made its way slowly toward the enclosure surrounding the weighing-stand.

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As for Seaman, half submerged in the stream, and with an incurable fracture of the leg, nothing was left to do for the poor animal but to kill him.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN UNCONSCIOUS AVOWAL

Walking slowly, step by step, beside her whose power had so quickly and so wholly subjugated him, watching over her removal with more than paternal solicitude, Henri de Prerolles, sustained by a ray of hope, drew a memorandum-book from his pocket, wrote upon a slip of paper a name and an address, and, giving it to the groom, ordered him to go ahead of the litter and telephone to the most celebrated surgeon in Paris, requesting him to go as quickly as possible to the domicile of Mademoiselle de Vermont, and, meantime, to send with the greatest despatch one of the eight-spring carriages from the stables.

It was noon by the dial on the grand-stand when the litter was finally deposited in a safe place. The surgeon could hardly arrive in less than two hours; therefore, the General realized that he must rely upon his own experience in rendering the first necessary aid.

He lifted Valentine's hand, unbuttoned the glove, laid his finger on her pulse, and counted the pulsations, which were weak, slow, and irregular.

While the wife of the gate-keeper kept a bottle of salts at the nostrils of the injured girl, Henri soaked a handkerchief in tincture of arnica and sponged her temples with it; then, pouring some drops of the liquid into a glass of water, he tried in vain to make her swallow a mouthful. Her teeth, clenched by the contraction of muscles, refused to allow it to pass into her throat. At the end of half an hour, the inhalation of the salts began to produce a little effect; the breath came more regularly, but that was the only symptom which announced that the swoon might soon terminate. The landau with the high springs arrived. The General ordered the top laid back, and helped to lift and place upon the cushions on the back seat the thin mattress on which Zibeline lay; then he took his place on the front seat, made the men draw the carriage-top back into its proper position, and the equipage rolled smoothly, and without a jar, to its destination. On the way they met the first carriages that had arrived at the Auteuil hippodrome, the occupants of which little suspected what an exciting dramatic incident had occurred just before the races. Zibeline's servants, by whom she was adored, awaited their mistress at the threshold, and for her maids it was an affair of some minutes to undress her and lay her in her own bed. During this delay, the surgeon, who had hastened to answer the call, found Henri nervously walking about from one drawing-room to the other; and, having received information as to the details of the fall, he soon entered the bedchamber. While awaiting the sentence of life or of death which must soon be pronounced, he who considered himself

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the chief cause of this tragic event continued to pace to and fro in the gallery—that gallery where, under the intoxication of a waltz, the demon of temptation had so quickly demolished all his resolutions of resistance. A half-hour—an age!—elapsed before the skilled practitioner reappeared. “There is no fracture,” he said, “but the cerebral shock has been such that I can not as yet answer for the consequences. If the powerful reactive medicine which I have just given should bring her back to her senses soon, her mental faculties will suffer no harm. If not, there is everything to fear. I will return in three hours,” he added. Without giving a thought to the conventionalities, Henri entered the bedchamber, to the great astonishment of the maids, and, installing himself at the head of the bed, he decided not to leave that spot until Valentine had regained her senses, should she ever regain them. An hour passed thus, while Henri kept the same attitude, erect, attentive, motionless, with stray scraps of his childhood’s prayers running through his brain. Suddenly the heavy eyelids of the wounded girl were lifted; the dulness of the eyes disappeared; her body made an involuntary attempt to change its position; the nostrils dilated; the lips quivered in an effort to speak. Youth and life had triumphed over death. With painful slowness, she tried to raise her hand to her head, the seat of her pain, where, though half paralyzed, thought was beginning to return. Her eyes wandered to and fro in the shadowy room, seeking to recognize the surroundings. A ray of light, filtering through the window-curtains, showed her the anxious face bending tenderly over her. “Henri!” she murmured, in a soft, plaintive voice. That name, pronounced thus, the first word uttered after her long swoon, revealed her secret. Never had a more complete yet modest avowal been more simply expressed; was it not natural that he should be present at her reentrance into life, since she loved him? With women, the sentiment of love responds to the most diverse objects. The ordinary young girl of Zibeline’s age, either before or after her sojourn in a convent, considers that a man of thirty has arrived at middle age, and that a man of forty is absolutely old. Should she accept a man of either of these ages, she does it because a fortune, a title, or high social rank silences her other tastes, and her ambition does the rest. But, with an exceptional woman, like Mademoiselle de Vermont, brought up in view of wide horizons, in the midst of plains cleared by bold pioneers, among whom the most valorous governed the others, a man like General de Prerolles realized her ideal all the more, because both their natures presented the same striking characteristics: carelessness of danger, and frankness carried to its extremest limit. Therefore, this declaration—to use the common expression—entirely free from artifice or affectation, charmed Henri for one reason, yet, on the other hand, redoubled his perplexity.

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How could he conciliate his scruples of conscience with the aspirations of his heart? The problem seemed then as insoluble as when it had been presented the first time. But Valentine was saved. For the moment that was the essential point, the only one in question. The involuntary revelation of her secret had brought the color to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, a smile to her lips, in spite of the leaden band that seemed still pressing upon her head. "How you have frightened me!" said Henri, in a low voice, seating himself on the side of the bed and taking her hand. "Is that true?" she asked, softly pressing his fingers. "Hush!" he said, making a movement to enjoin silence. She obeyed, and they remained a few moments thus. Nevertheless, he reflected that the account of the accident would soon be spread everywhere, that Valentine's new friends would hear about it as soon as they arrived at the race-track that day, and that he could no longer prolong his stay beside her.

"Are you leaving me so soon?" Valentine murmured, when he said that he must go.

"I am going to tell my sister and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy of your mishap."

"Very well," she replied, as if already she had no other desire than to follow his wishes.

He gave the necessary orders, and again took his place beside the bed, awaiting the second visit of the doctor, whose arrival was simultaneous with that of the Duchess.

This time the verdict was altogether favorable, with no mention of the possibility of any aggravating circumstances. An inevitable feverishness, and a great lassitude, which must be met with absolute repose for several days, would be the only consequences of this dangerous prank.

The proprieties resumed their normal sway, and it was no longer possible for Henri to remain beside the charming invalid.

CHAPTER XXVII

DISTRACTION

The Duchesse de Montgeron, who had passed the rest of the day with Mademoiselle de Vermont, did not return to her own dwelling until eight o'clock that evening, bearing the most reassuring news.

Longing for fresh air and exercise, Henri went out after dinner, walked through the Champs-Elysees, and traversed the crossing at l'Etoile, in order to approach the spot where Zibeline lay ill.



If one can imagine the feelings of a man of forty-five, who is loved for himself, under the most flattering and unexpected conditions, one can comprehend the object of this nocturnal walk and the long pause that Henri made beneath the windows of Zibeline's apartment. A small garden, protected by a light fence, was the only obstacle that separated them. But how much more insuperable was the barrier which his own principles had raised between this adorable girl and himself.

Had he not told his sister, confided to Eugenie Gontier, and reiterated to any one that would listen to him, the scruples which forbade him ever to think of marriage? To change this decision, in asking for the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont, would-in appearance, at least—sacrifice to the allurements of wealth the proud poverty which he had long borne so nobly.

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But the demon of temptation was then, as always, lurking in the shadow, the sole witness of this duel to the death between prejudice and love.

When he returned to his rooms he found another note from his former mistress:

"You have just had a terrible experience, my dear friend. Nothing that affects you can be indifferent to me. I beg you to believe, notwithstanding the grief which our separation causes me, in all the prayers that I offer for your happiness.

"Ariadne."

"My happiness? My torture, rather!" he said, the classic name of Ariadne suggesting the idea that the pseudonym of Tantalus might well be applied to himself.

But he had long kept a rule to write as little as possible, and was guarded in making reply to any letter, especially to such a communication as this.

When he left the house the next morning, on his way to attend to military duties, he learned that his sister had gone away early on an excursion to one of the suburbs, and that she would not return until evening. As the Duchess was the only person who had been initiated into the mystery surrounding Zibeline on the subject of the building of the Orphan Asylum, it was evident that she had gone to take her place in the directing of the work.

In the afternoon Henri called to inquire for the invalid, and was received by the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy. She had had a quiet night; a little fever had appeared toward morning, and, above all, an extreme weakness, requiring absolute quiet and freedom from any excitement. On an open register in the reception-room were inscribed the names of all those persons who had called to express their interest in Mademoiselle de Vermont: Constantin Lenaieff, the Lisieux, the Nointels, Edmond Delorme, the Baron de Samoreau, and others. Only the Desvanneaux had shown no sign of life. Their Christian charity did not extend so far as that.

Henri added his name to the list, and for several days he returned each morning to inscribe it anew, feeling certain that, as soon as Valentine was able to be placed half-reclining on a couch, she would give orders that he should be admitted to her presence. But nothing of the kind occurred.

On the evening of the fifth day after the accident, the Duchess informed her brother that their young friend had been taken to the country, where it was thought a complete cure would sooner be effected.

This hasty departure, made without any preliminary message, caused Henri to feel the liveliest disappointment.

Had he deceived himself, then? Was it, after all, only by chance that she had so tenderly pronounced his name, and had that familiar appellative only been drawn from her involuntarily because of her surprise at beholding his unexpected presence at her bedside?

Regarding the matter from this point of view, the whole romance that he had constructed on a fragile foundation had really never existed save in his own imagination!

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At this thought his self-esteem suffered cruelly. He felt a natural impulse to spring into a carriage and drive to the dwelling of Eugenie Gontier, and there to seek forgetfulness. But he felt that his bitterness would make itself known even there, and that such a course would be another affront to the dignity of a woman of heart, whose loyalty to himself he never had questioned.

Try to disguise it as he would, his sombre mood made itself apparent, especially to his brother-in-law, who had no difficulty in guessing the cause, without allowing Henri to suspect that he divined it.

The date for the formal transfer of the Orphan Asylum to the committee had been fixed for the fifteenth day of May.

On the evening of the fourteenth, at the hour when the General was signing the usual military documents in his bureau, a domestic presented to him a letter which, he said, had just been brought in great haste by a messenger on horseback:

The superscription, "To Monsieur the General the Marquis de Prerolles," was inscribed in a long, English hand, elegant and regular. The orderly gave the letter to his chief, who dismissed him with a gesture before breaking the seal. The seal represented, without escutcheon or crown, a small, wild animal, with a pointed muzzle, projecting teeth, and shaggy body, under which was a word Henri expected to find: Zibeline!

The letter ran thus:

"My dear general:

"An officer, like yourself, whose business it is to see that his orders are obeyed, will understand that I have not dared, even in your favor, to infringe on those imposed upon me by the doctor. But those orders have been withdrawn! If you have nothing better to do, come to-morrow, with your sister, to inspect our asylum, before Monsieur Desvanneaux takes possession of it!

"Your military eye will be able to judge immediately whether anything is lacking in the quarters. Yours affectionately,

"Valentine de Vermont.

"P.S.—Poor Seaman is dead! I beg you to carry this sad news to his friend Aida. V."

If a woman's real self is revealed in her epistolary style, finesse, good-humor, and sprightliness were characterised in this note. Zibeline's finesse had divined Henri's self-deception; her good-humor sought to dissipate it; and her sprightliness was evidenced by her allusions to M. Desvanneaux and the loss of her horse.

When they found themselves reunited at the dinner-hour, the Duchess said simply to her brother:

“You must have received an invitation to-day from Mademoiselle de Vermont. Will you accompany us tomorrow?”

“Yes, certainly. But where? How? At what hour?”

“We must leave here at one o’clock. Don’t disturb yourself about any other detail—we shall look after everything.”

“Good! I accept.”

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As he was not so curious as the Desvanneaux, it mattered little to him to what place they took him, so long as he should find Zibeline at the end of the journey.

At the appointed hour the brother and sister drove to the Gare du Nord. The Duke, a director of the road, who had been obliged to attend a convocation of the Council until noon, had preceded them. He was waiting for them beside the turnstile at the station, having already procured their tickets and reserved a carriage in one of the omnibus trains from Paris to Treport which make stops at various suburban stations.

"Will it be a very long journey?" Henri asked, on taking his place in the carriage.

"Barely three-quarters of an hour," said the Duke, as the train started on its way.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE VOW REDEEMED

The third road, constructed between the two lines which met at Creil, passing, the one by way of Chantilly, the other, by Pontoise, was not in existence in 1871, when, after the war, Jeanne and Henri de Prerolles went to visit the spot, already unrecognizable, where they had passed their childhood. L'Ile-d'Adam was at that time the nearest station; to day it is Presles, on the intermediate line, which they now took.

"This is our station," said Madame de Montgeron, when the train stopped at Montsout. They descended from the carriage, and found on the platform two footmen, who conducted them to a large char-a-banc, to which were harnessed four dark bay Percherons, whose bridles were held by postilions in Zibeline's livery, as correct in their appearance as those belonging to the imperial stables, when the sojourn of the court was at Compiègne or at Fontainebleau.

"Where are we going now, Jeanne?" asked Henri, whose heart seemed to him to contract at the sight of Maffliers, which he knew so well.

"A short distance from here," his sister replied.

The horses set off, and, amid the sound of bells and the cracking of whips, the carriage reached the national road from Paris to Beauvais, which, from Montsout, passes around the railway by a rapid descent, from the summit of which is visible, on the right, the Chateau of Franconville; on the left, the village of Nerville perched on its crest.

One of the footmen on the rear seat held the reins, and a quarter of an hour later the carriage stopped just before arriving at the foot of Valpendant.



Valpendant had formerly been a feudal manor within the confines of Ile-de-France, built midway upon a hill, as its name indicated. On the side toward the plain was a moat, and the castle itself commanded the view of a valley, through which ran the little stream called Le Roi, which flows into the river Oise near the hamlet of Mours. Acquired in the fifteenth century by the lords of Prerolles, it had become an agricultural territory worked for their profit, first by forced labor, and later by farmers.

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Even recently, the courtyard, filled with squawking fowls and domestic animals of all kinds, and the sheds crowded with agricultural implements piled up in disorder, presented a scene of confusion frequent among cultivators, and significant of the alienation of old domains from their former owners.

"We have arrived!" said the Duchess, alighting first.

"What, is it here?" Henri exclaimed, his heart beating more quickly.

"Your old farm was for sale just at the time that Mademoiselle de Vermont was seeking an appropriate site for the Orphan Asylum. This spot appeared to her to combine all the desirable conditions, and she has wrought the transformation you are about to behold. It might as well be this place as another," the Duchess added. "In my opinion, it is a sort of consolation offered to us by fate."

"Be it so!" said Henri, in a tone of less conviction.

He followed his sister along the footpath of a bluff, which as children they had often climbed; while the carriage made a long detour in order to reach the main entrance to the grounds.

The footpath, winding along near the railway embankment, ended at a bridge, where Zibeline awaited the three visitors. A significant pressure of her hand showed Henri how little cause he had had for his apprehensions.

They entered. Seen from the main entrance, the metamorphosis of the place was complete.

The old tower that had served as a barn alone remained the same; it was somewhat isolated from the other building, and had been repaired in the style of its period, making a comfortable dwelling for the future director of the Asylum. Mademoiselle de Vermont occupied it temporarily.

On each side of the grounds, standing parallel, rose two fine buildings: on the ground floor of each were all the customary rooms and accessories found on model farms; on the upper floors were dormitories arranged to receive a large number of children of both sexes. There were schoolrooms, sewing-rooms, a chapel-in short, nothing was lacking to assist in the children's intellectual and manual education.

"You have done things royally," said the Duke to the happy donor, when, having finished the inspection of the premises, they returned to the directors' room, indicated by a plate upon its door.

As for Henri, silent and absorbed, he hesitated between the dread of facing a new emotion and the desire to go once more to gaze upon the tower of Prerolles, hardly more than two kilometres distant.

“What is the matter with you, General?” Zibeline asked, observing that he did not appear to take pleasure in the surprise she had prepared.

“I lived here many years a long time ago,” he replied. “I am thinking of all that it recalls to me; and, if you would not consider it discourteous on my part, I should like to leave you for a little time to make a pilgrimage on foot around the neighborhood.”

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"Would you like to have me take you myself? I have a little English cart which can run about anywhere," said Zibeline.

The proposition was tempting. The sweetness of a tete-a-tete might diminish the bitterness of recollections. He accepted.

She ordered the cart brought around, and they climbed into the small vehicle, which was drawn by a strong pony, driven by Zibeline herself.

"Which way?" she asked, when they had passed through the gates.

"To the right," he said, pointing to a rough, half-paved slope, an abandoned part of what had been in former days the highway, which now joins the new road at the Beaumont tunnel.

Passing this point, and leaving on their left the state road of l'Ile-d'Adam, they drove through a narrow cross-cut, between embankments, by which one mounts directly to the high, plateau that overlooks the town of Presles.

The hill was steep, and the pony was out of breath. They were compelled to stop to allow him to rest.

"It is not necessary to go any farther," said Henri to his companion. "I need only to take a few steps in order to see what interests me."

"I will wait for you here," she replied, alighting after him. "Don't be afraid to leave me alone. The horse will not move; he is used to stopping."

He left her gathering daisies, and walked resolutely to the panoramic point of view, where a strange and unexpected sight met his eyes!

All that had once been so dear to him had regained its former aspect. The kitchen-gardens had given place to the rich pastures, where yearling colts frisked gayly. The factory had disappeared, and the chateau had been restored to its original appearance. The walls enclosing the park had been rebuilt, and even several cleared places indicated the sites of cottages that had been pulled down.

Henri de Prerolles could hardly believe his eyes! Was he the sport of a dream or of one of those mirages which rise before men who travel across the sandy African deserts? The latitude and the position of the sun forbade this interpretation. But whence came it, then? What fairy had turned a magic ring in order to work this miracle?

A crackling of dry twigs under a light tread made him turn, and he beheld Zibeline, who had come up behind him.

The fairy was there, pale and trembling, like a criminal awaiting arrest.

"Is it you who have done this?" Henri exclaimed, with a sob which no human strength could have controlled.

"It is I!" she murmured, lowering her eyes. "I did it in the hope that some day you would take back that which rightfully belongs to you."

"Rightfully, you say? By what act?"

"An act of restitution."

"You never have done me any injury, and nothing authorizes me to accept such a gift from Mademoiselle de Vermont."

"Vermont was the family name of my mother. When my father married her, he obtained leave to add it to his own. I am the daughter of Paul Landry."

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"You!"

"Yes. The daughter of Paul Landry, whose fortune had no other origin than the large sum of which he despoiled you."

Henri made a gesture of denial.

"Pardon me!" Zibeline continued. "He was doubly your debtor, since this sum had been increased tenfold when you rescued him from the Mexicans who were about to shoot him. 'This is my revenge!' you said to him, without waiting to hear a word from him. Your ruin was the remorse of his whole life. I knew it only when he lay upon his deathbed. Otherwise—"

She paused, then raised her head higher to finish her words.

"Never mind!" she went on. "That which he dared not do while living, I set myself to do after his death. When I came to Paris to inquire what had become of the Marquis de Prerolles, your glorious career answered for you; but even before I knew you I had become the possessor of these divided estates, which, reunited by me, must be restored to your hands. You are proud, Henri," she added, with animation, "but I am none less proud than you. Judge, then, what I have suffered in realizing our situation: I, overwhelmed with riches, you, reduced to your officer's pay. Is that a satisfaction to your pride? Very well! But to my own, it is the original stain, which only a restitution, nobly accepted by you, ever can efface!"

She paused, looking at him supplicatingly, her hands clasped. As he remained silent, she understood that he still hesitated, and continued:

"To plead my cause, to vanquish your resistance, as I am trying now to triumph over it, could be attempted with any chance of success only by a dear and tender friend; that is the reason why I sought to establish relations with—"

"With Eugenie Gontier?"

"But she would not consent to it—all the worse for her! For, since then, you and I have come to know each other well. Your prejudices have been overcome one by one. I have observed it well. I am a woman, and even your harshness has not changed my feelings, nor prevented me from believing that, in spite of yourself, you were beginning to love me. Have I been deceiving myself?—tell me!"

"You know that you have not, since, as I look at you and listen to you, I know not which I admire more—your beauty or the treasures of your heart!"

"Then come!"

“Whither?”

“To Prerolles, where all is ready to receive you.”

“Well, since this is a tale from the Arabian Nights, let us follow it to the end! I will go!” said Henri.

Browsing beside the road, the pony, left to himself, had advanced toward them, step by step, whinnying to his mistress. Valentine and Henri remounted the cart; which soon drew up before the gates of the chateau, where, awaiting them, reinstated in his former office, stood the old steward, bent and white with years.

The borders of the broad driveway were of a rich, deep green. Rose-bushes in full bloom adorned the smooth lawns. The birds trilled a welcome in jumping from branch to branch, and across the facade of the chateau the open windows announced to the surrounding peasantry the return of the prodigal master.

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At the top of the flight of steps Valentine stepped back to allow Henri to pass before her; then, changing her mind, she advanced again.

"No, you are at home," she said. "It is I that must enter first!"

He followed her docilely, caring no longer to yield to any other will than hers.

Within the chateau, thanks to the complicity of the Duchess, the furnishings resembled as closely as possible those of former days. The good fairy had completed successfully two great works: the restoration of the chateau and the building of the asylum. The inhabitants of the one would be so much the better able to foresee the needs of the other.

Having explored one of the wings, they returned to the central hall. Mademoiselle de Vermont made a sign to the steward to remain there, and beckoned to Henri to accompany her to the historic gallery. After they had entered it, she closed the door. The family portraits had been rehung in their former places, in chronological order, and, in its proper place, figured that of the General of Division the Marquis de Prerolles, in full uniform, mounted on Aida, the portrait being the work of Edmond Delorme.

At this sight, touched to the depths of his heart, Henri knelt before Valentine, and carried her hand to his lips.

"I adore you!" he said, without attempting to hide the tears of gratitude that fell upon those generous hands.

"Do you, indeed?" Zibeline murmured.

"You shall see!" he replied, rising. "Come, in your turn."

He led her before the portrait of the ancestral marshal of France, and said:

"Twenty-three years ago I vowed before that portrait either to vanquish the enemy or to regain with honor all that I had lost at play. I have kept my word. Will you be my wife?"

"Ah, you know my heart is yours!" Zibeline whispered, hiding her face upon his shoulder.

The door at the end of the gallery opened; the Duc and the Duchesse de Montgeron appeared. Henri took Zibeline's hand and approached them.

"The Marquise de Prerolles!" he said, presenting her to his sister and her husband.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MARQUISE DE PREROLLES

The next day a special train landed the fair patronesses at the station of Presles, whence Zibeline's carriages conducted them to Valpendant.

The deed of gift was signed before M. Durand and his colleague, a notary of Pontoise.

This formality fulfilled, M. Desvanneaux, whose own role, for a moment overshadowed, appeared to him to renew its importance, took the floor and said:

"It remains to us, Mesdames, to assure the support of the Orphan Asylum by means of an annual income."

"The Marquis and the Marquise de Prerolles assume this responsibility," said the ministerial officer, treasurer of the Asylum. "This mutual engagement will form the object of a special clause in the drawing up of their contract."

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In this way was the news of the approaching marriage between Valentine and Henri announced to the Society.

“The little intriguer!” murmured the churchwarden, nudging the elbow of his Maegera.

The General, who noted the effect which this announcement had produced upon the peevish pair, divined the malicious words upon the hypocritical lips. He drew the husband aside, and put one hand upon his shoulder.

“Desvanneaux,” he said, “you have known me twenty-five years, and you know that I am a man of my word. If ever a malevolent word from you regarding my wife should come to my ears, I shall elongate yours to such a degree that those of King Midas will be entirely eclipsed! Remember that!”

The ceremony took place six weeks later, in the church of St. Honore-d'Eylau, which was not large enough to hold the numerous public and the brilliant corps of officers that assisted.

The witnesses for the bridegroom were the military governor of Paris and the Duc de Montgeron. Those of the bride were the aide-de-camp General Lenaieff, in full uniform, wearing an astrachan cap and a white cloak with the Russian eagle fastened in the fur; and the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy.

On the evening before, a last letter from his former mistress had come to the General:

“I have heard all the details of your romance, my dear Henri. Its conclusion is according to all dramatic rules, and I congratulate you without reserve.

“If, on the eve of contracting this happy union, an examination of your conscience should suggest to you some remorse for having abandoned me so abruptly, let me say that no shadow, not even the lightest, must cloud the serenity of this joyous day: I am about to leave the stage forever, to become the wife of the Baron de Samoreau!

“Always affectionately yours,
“*Eugenie Gontier.*”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

All that was illogical in our social code
Only a man, wavering and changeable
Their Christian charity did not extend so far as that
There are mountains that we never climb but once

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire ZEBELINE:



All that was illogical in our social code
Ambiguity has no place, nor has compromise
But if this is our supreme farewell, do not tell me so!
Chain so light yesterday, so heavy to-day
Every man is his own master in his choice of liaisons
If I do not give all I give nothing
Indulgence of which they stand in need themselves
Life goes on, and that is less gay than the stories
Men admired her; the women sought some point to criticise
Only a man, wavering and changeable
Ostensibly you sit at the feast without paying the cost

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Paris has become like a little country town in its gossip
The night brings counsel
Their Christian charity did not extend so far as that
There are mountains that we never climb but once
You are in a conquered country, which is still more dangerous

A WOODLAND QUEEN

(‘Reine des Bois’)

By *Andre Theuriet*

With a Preface by *Melchior de vogue*, of the French academy

ANDRE THEURIET

Claude-ADHEMAR-Andre Theuriet was born at Marly-le-Roi (Seine et Oise), October 8, 1833. His ancestors came from Lorraine. He was educated at Bar-le-Duc and went to Paris in 1854 to study jurisprudence. After finishing his courses he entered the Department of the Treasury, and after an honorable career there, resigned as chef-de-bureau. He is a poet, a dramatist, but, above all, a writer of great fiction.

As early as 1857 the poems of Theuriet were printed in the ‘Revue de Paris’ and the ‘Revue des Deux Mondes’. His greatest novel, ‘Reine des Bois’ (Woodland Queen), was crowned by the Academie Francaise in 1890. To the public in general he became first known in 1870 by his ‘Nouvelles Intimes’. Since that time he has published a great many volumes of poems, drama, and fiction. A great writer, he perhaps meets the wishes of that large class of readers who seek in literature agreeable rest and distraction, rather than excitement or aesthetic gratification. He is one of the greatest spirits that survived the bankruptcy of Romanticism. He excels in the description of country nooks and corners; of that polite rusticity which knows nothing of the delving laborers of ‘La Terre’, but only of graceful and learned leisure, of solitude nursed in revery, and of passion that seems the springtide of germinating nature. He possesses great originality and the passionate spirit of a ‘paysagiste’: pictures of provincial life and family-interiors seem to appeal to his most pronounced sympathies. His taste is delicate, his style healthy and frank, and at the same time limpid and animated.

After receiving, in 1890, the Prix Vitet for the ensemble of his literary productions, he was elected to the Academy in 1896. To the stage Theuriet has given ‘Jean-Marie’,

drama in verses (Odeon, February 11, 1871). It is yet kept on the repertoire together with his 'Maison de deux Barbeaux (1865), Raymonde (1887), and Les Maugars (1901).'

His novels, tales, and poems comprise a long list. 'Le Bleu et le Noir' (1873) was also crowned by the Academy. Then followed, at short intervals: 'Mademoiselle Guignon (1874.); Le Mariage de Gerard (1875); La Fortune d'Angele (1876); Raymonde (1877),' a romance of modern life, vastly esteemed by the reading public; 'Le Don Juan de Vireloup (1877); Sous Bois, Impressions d'un Forestier

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(1878); Le Filleul d'un Marquis (1878); Les Nids (1879); Le fils Maugars (1879); La Maison de deux Barbeaux (1879); Toute seule (1880); Sauvageonne (1880), his most realistic work; Les Enchantements de la Foret (1881); Le Livre de la Payse (poetry, 1882); Madame Heurteloup (1882); Peche de Jeunesse (1883); Le Journal de Tristan, mostly autobiographical; Bigarreau (1885); Eusebe Lombard (1885); Les OEillets de Kerlatz (1885); Helene (1886); Nos Oiseaux (beautiful verses, 1886); La Vie Rustique (1887); Amour d'Automne (1888); Josette (1888); Deux Soeurs (1889); Contes pour les Soirs d'Hiver (1890); Charme Dangereux (1891); La Ronde des Saisons et des Mois (1889); La Charmeresse (1891); Fleur de Nice (1896); Bois Fleury (1897); Refuge (1898); Villa Tranquille (1899); Claudette (1900); La Petite Derniere (1901); Le Manuscrit du Chanoine (1902), etc.

Besides this abundant production Andre Theuriet has also contributed to various journals and magazines: 'Le Moniteur, Le Musee Universal, L'Illustration, Le Figaro, Le Gaulois, La Republique Francaise, etc.; he has lectured in Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland, and has even found leisure to fill the post as Mayor of Bourg-la-Reine (Seine et Oise), perhaps no onerous office (1882-1900). He has also been an 'Officier de la Legion d'Honneur' since 1895.

Melchiorde vogue
de l'Academie Francaise.

A WOODLAND QUEEN

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE UNFINISHED WILL

Toward the middle of October, about the time of the beechnut harvest, M. Eustache Destourbet, justice of the Peace of Auberive, accompanied by his clerk, Etienne Seurrot, left his home at Abbatiale, in order to repair to the Chateau of Vivey, where he was to take part in removing the seals on some property whose owner had deceased.

At that period, 1857, the canton of Auberive, which stretches its massive forests like a thick wall between the level plain of Langres and the ancient Chatillonnais, had but one main road of communication: that from Langres to Bar-sur-Aube. The almost parallel adjacent route, from Auberive to Vivey, was not then in existence; and in order to reach this last commune, or hamlet, the traveller had to follow a narrow grass-bordered path,

leading through the forest up the hill of Charboniere, from the summit of which was seen that intermingling of narrow gorges and wooded heights which is so characteristic of this mountainous region. On all sides were indented horizons of trees, among which a few, of more dominant height, projected their sharp outlines against the sky; in the distance were rocky steeps, with here and there a clump of brambles, down which trickled slender rivulets; still farther, like little islands, half submerged in a sea of foliage, were pastures of tender green dotted with juniper bushes, almost black in their density, and fields of rye struggling painfully through the stony soil—the entire scene presenting a picture of mingled wildness and cultivation, aridity and luxuriant freshness.

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Justice Destourbet, having strong, wiry limbs, ascended cheerily the steep mountain-path. His tall, spare figure, always in advance of his companion, was visible through the tender green of the young oaks, clothed in a brown coat, a black cravat, and a very high hat, which the justice, who loved correctness in details, thought it his duty to don whenever called upon to perform his judicial functions. The clerk, Seurrot, more obese, and of maturer age, protuberant in front, and somewhat curved in the back, dragged heavily behind, perspiring and out of breath, trying to keep up with his patron, who, now and then seized with compassion, would come to a halt and wait for his subordinate.

"I trust," said Destourbet, after one of these intervals which enabled the clerk to walk by his side, "I trust we shall find Maitre Arbillot down there; we shall have need of his services in looking over and filing the papers of the deceased."

"Yes, Monsieur," answered Seurrot, "the notary will meet us at the chateau; he went to Praslay to find out from his associates whether Monsieur de Buxieres had not left a will in his keeping. In my humble opinion, that is hardly likely; for the deceased had great confidence in Maitre Arbillot, and it seems strange that he should choose to confide his testamentary intentions to a rival notary."

"Well," observed the justice, "perhaps when the seals are raised, we may discover an autograph will in some corner of a drawer."

"It is to be hoped so, Monsieur," replied Seurrot; "I wish it with all my heart, for the sake of Claudet Sejournant, for he is a good fellow, although on the sinister bar of the escutcheon, and a right jolly companion."

"Yes; and a marvellous good shot," interrupted the justice. "I recognize all that; but even if he had a hundred other good qualities, the grand chasserot, as they call him here, will be on the wrong side of the hedge if Monsieur de Buxieres has unfortunately died intestate. In the eye of the law, as you are doubtless aware, a natural child, who has not been acknowledged, is looked upon as a stranger."

"Monsieur de Buxieres always treated Claudet as his own son, and every one knew that he so considered him."

"Possibly, but if the law were to keep count of all such cases, there would be no end to their labors; especially in all questions of the 'cujus'. Odouart de Buxieres was a terribly wild fellow, and they say that these old beech-trees of Vivey forest could tell many a tale of his exploits."

"He, he!" assented the clerk, laughing slyly, and showing his toothless gums, "there is some truth in that. The deceased had the devil in his boots. He could see neither a deer nor a pretty girl without flying in pursuit. Ah, yes! Many a trick has he played them—talk of your miracles, forsooth!—well, Claudet was his favorite, and Monsieur de

Buxieres has told me, over and over again, that he would make him his heir, and I shall be very much astonished if we do not find a will."

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“Seurrot, my friend,” replied the justice, calmly, “you are too experienced not to know that our country folks dread nothing so much as testifying to their last wishes—to make a will, to them, is to put one foot into the grave. They will not call in the priest or the notary until the very last moment, and very often they delay until it is too late. Now, as the deceased was at heart a rustic, I fear greatly that he did not carry his intentions into execution.”

“That would be a pity—for the chateau, the lands, and the entire fortune would go to an heir of whom Monsieur Odouart never had taken account—to one of the younger branch of Buxieres, whom he had never seen, having quarrelled with the family.”

“A cousin, I believe,” said the justice.

“Yes, a Monsieur Julien de Buxieres, who is employed by the Government at Nancy.”

“In fact, then, and until we receive more ample information, he is, for us, the sole legitimate heir. Has he been notified?”

“Yes, Monsieur. He has even sent his power of attorney to Monsieur Arbillot’s clerk.”

“So much the better,” said M. Destourbet, “in that case, we can proceed regularly without delay.”

While thus conversing, they had traversed the forest, and emerged on the hill overlooking Vivey. From the border line where they stood, they could discover, between the half-denuded branches of the line of aspens, the sinuous, deepset gorge, in which the Aubette wound its tortuous way, at the extremity of which the village lay embanked against an almost upright wall of thicket and pointed rocks. On the west this narrow defile was closed by a mill, standing like a sentinel on guard, in its uniform of solid gray; on each side of the river a verdant line of meadow led the eye gradually toward the clump of ancient and lofty ash-trees, behind which rose the Buxieres domicile. This magnificent grove of trees, and a monumental fence of cast-iron, were the only excuse for giving the title of chateau to a very commonplace structure, of which the main body presented bare, whitewashed walls, flanked by two small towers on turrets shaped like extinguishers, and otherwise resembling very ordinary pigeon-houses.

This chateau, or rather country squire’s residence, had belonged to the Odouart de Buxieres for more than two centuries. Before the Revolution, Christophe de Buxieres, grandfather of the last proprietor, had owned a large portion of Vivey, besides several forges in operation on the Aube and Aubette rivers. He had had three children: one daughter, who had embraced religion as a vocation; Claude Antoine, the elder son, to whom he left his entire fortune, and Julien Abdon, the younger, officer in the regiment of Rohan Soubise, with whom he was not on good terms. After emigrating and serving in Conde’s army, the younger Buxieres had returned to France during the Restoration, had

married, and been appointed special receiver in a small town in southern France. But since his return, he had not resumed relations with his elder brother, whom he accused of having defrauded him of his rights. The older one had married also, one of the Rochetaillee family; he had had but one son, Claude Odouart de Buxieres, whose recent decease had brought about the visit of the Justice of Auberive and his clerk.

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Claude de Buxieres had lived all his life at Vivey. Inheriting from his father and grandfather flourishing health and a robust constitution, he had also from them strong love for his native territory, a passion for the chase, and a horror of the constraint and decorum exacted by worldly obligations. He was a spoiled child, brought up by a weak-minded mother and a preceptor without authority, who had succeeded in imparting to him only the most elementary amount of instruction, and he had, from a very early age, taken his own pleasure as his sole rule of life. He lived side by side with peasants and poachers, and had himself become a regular country yeoman, wearing a blouse, dining at the wine-shop, and taking more pleasure in speaking the mountain patois than his own native French. The untimely death of his father, killed by an awkward huntsman while following the hounds, had emancipated him at the age of twenty years. From this period he lived his life freely, as he understood it; always in the open air, without hindrance of any sort, and entirely unrestrained.

Nothing was exaggerated in the stories told concerning him. He was a handsome fellow, jovial and dashing in his ways, and lavish with his money, so he met with few rebuffs. Married women, maids, widows, any peasant girl of attractive form or feature, all had had to resist his advances, and with more than one the resistance had been very slight. It was no false report which affirmed that he had peopled the district with his illegitimate progeny. He was not hard to please, either; strawberry-pickers, shepherd-girls, wood-pilers, day-workers, all were equally charming in his sight; he sought only youth, health, and a kindly disposition.

Marriage would have been the only safeguard for him; but aside from the fact that his reputation of reckless huntsman and general scapegrace naturally kept aloof the daughters of the nobles, and even the Langarian middle classes, he dreaded more than anything else in the world the monotonous regularity of conjugal life. He did not care to be restricted always to the same dishes—preferring, as he said, his meat sometimes roast, sometimes boiled, or even fried, according to his humor and his appetite.

Nevertheless, about the time that Claude de Buxieres attained his thirty-sixth year, it was noticed that he had a more settled air, and that his habits were becoming more sedentary. The chase was still his favorite pastime, but he frequented less places of questionable repute, seldom slept away from home, and seemed to take greater pleasure in remaining under his own roof. The cause of this change was ascribed by some to the advance of years creeping over him; others, more perspicacious, verified a curious coincidence between the entrance of a new servant in the chateau and the sudden good behavior of Claude.

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This girl, a native of Aprey, named Manette Sejournant, was not, strictly speaking, a beauty, but she had magnificent blonde hair, gray, caressing eyes, and a silvery, musical voice. Well built, supple as an adder, modest and prudish in mien, she knew how to wait upon and cosset her master, accustoming him by imperceptible degrees to prefer the cuisine of the chateau to that of the wine-shops. After a while, by dint of making her merits appreciated, and her presence continually desired, she became the mistress of Odouart de Buxieres, whom she managed to retain by proving herself immeasurably superior, both in culinary skill and in sentiment, to the class of females from whom he had hitherto been seeking his creature comforts.

Matters went on in this fashion for a year or so, until Manette went on a three months' vacation. When she reappeared at the chateau, she brought with her an infant, six weeks old, which she declared was the child of a sister, lately deceased, but which bore a strange likeness to Claude. However, nobody made remarks, especially as M. de Buxieres, after he had been drinking a little, took no pains to hide his paternity. He himself held the little fellow at the baptismal font, and later, consigned him to the care of the Abbe Pernot, the curate of Vivey, who prepared the little Claudet for his first communion, at the same time that he instructed him in reading, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic. As soon as the lad reached his fifteenth year, Claude put a gun into his hands, and took him hunting with him. Under the teaching of M. de Buxieres, Claudet did honor to his master, and soon became such an expert that he could give points to all the huntsmen of the canton. None could equal him in tracing a dog; he knew all the passes, by-paths, and enclosures of the forest; swooped down upon the game with the keen scent and the velocity of a bird of prey, and never was known to miss his mark. Thus it was that the country people surnamed him the 'grand chasserot', the term which we here apply to the sparrow-hawk. Besides all these advantages, he was handsome, alert, straight, and well made, dark-haired and olive-skinned, like all the Buxieres; he had his mother's caressing glance, but also the overhanging eyelids and somewhat stern expression of his father, from whom he inherited also a passionate temperament, and a spirit averse to all kinds of restraint. They were fond of him throughout the country, and M. de Buxieres, who felt his youth renewed in him, was very proud of his adroitness and his good looks. He would invite him to his pleasure parties, and make him sit at his own table, and confided unhesitatingly all his secrets to him. In short, Claudet, finding himself quite at home at the chateau, naturally considered himself as one of the family. There was but one formality wanting to that end: recognizance according to law. At certain favorable times, Manette Sejournant would gently urge M. de Buxieres to have the situation legally authorized, to which he would invariably reply, from a natural dislike to taking legal advisers into his confidence:

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“Don’t worry about anything; I have no direct heir, and Claudet will have all my fortune; my will and testament will be worth more to him than a legal acknowledgment.”

He would refer so often and so decidedly to his settled intention of making Claudet his sole heir, that Manette, who knew very little about what was required in such cases, considered the matter already secure. She continued in unsuspecting serenity until Claude de Buxieres, in his sixty-second year, died suddenly from a stroke of apoplexy.

The will, which was to insure Claudet’s future prospects, and to which the deceased had so often alluded, did it really exist? Neither Manette nor the grand chasserot had been able to obtain any certain knowledge in the matter, the hasty search for it after the decease having been suddenly interrupted by the arrival of the mayor of Vivey; and by the proceedings of the justice of the peace. The seals being once imposed, there was no means, in the absence of a verified will, of ascertaining on whom the inheritance devolved, until the opening of the inventory; and thus the Sejournants awaited with feverish anxiety the return of the justice of the peace and his bailiff.

M. Destoubet and Stephen Seurrot pushed open a small door to the right of the main gateway, passed rapidly under the arched canopy of beeches, the leaves of which, just touched by the first frost, were already falling from the branches, and, stamping their muddy feet on the outer steps, advanced into the vestibule. The wide corridor, flagged with black-and-white pavement, presented a cheerless aspect of bare walls discolored by damp, and adorned alternately by stags’ heads and family portraits in a crumbling state of decay. The floor was thus divided: on the right, the dining-room and the kitchen; on the left, drawing-room and a billiard-hall. A stone staircase, built in one of the turrets, led to the upper floors. Only one of these rooms, the kitchen, which the justice and his bailiff entered, was occupied by the household. A cold light, equally diffused in all directions, and falling from a large window, facing north across the gardens, allowed every detail of the apartment to be seen clearly; opposite the door of entrance, the tall chimney-place, with its deep embrasure, gave ample shelter to the notary, who installed himself upon a stool and lighted his pipe at one of the embers, while his principal clerk sat at the long table, itemizing the objects contained in the inventory.

In the opposite angle of the chimney-place, a lad of twenty-four years, no other than Claudet, called by the friendly nickname of the grand chasserot, kept company with the notary, while he toyed, in an absent fashion, with the silky ears of a spaniel, whose fluffy little head lay in his lap. Behind him, Manette Sejourrant stood putting away her shawl and prayerbook in a closet. A mass had been said in the morning at the church, for the repose of the soul of the late Claude de Buxieres, and mother and son had donned their Sunday garments to assist at the ceremony.

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Claudet appeared ill at ease in his black, tightly buttoned suit, and kept his eyes with their heavy lids steadily bent upon the head of the animal. To all the notary's questions, he replied only by monosyllables, passing his fingers every now and then through his bushy brown locks, and twining them in his forked beard, a sure indication with him of preoccupation and bad humor.

Manette had acquired with years an amount of embonpoint which detracted materially from the supple and undulating beauty which had so captivated Claude de Buxieres. The imprisonment of a tight corset caused undue development of the bust at the expense of her neck and throat, which seemed disproportionately short and thick. Her cheeks had lost their gracious curves and her double chin was more pronounced. All that remained of her former attractions were the caressing glance of her eye, tresses still golden and abundant, especially as seen under the close cap of black net, white teeth, and a voice that had lost nothing of its insinuating sweetness.

As the justice and his bailiff entered, Maitre Arbillot, and a petulant little man with squirrel-like eyes and a small moustache, arose quickly.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he cried. "I was anxiously expecting you—if you are willing, we will begin our work at once, for at this season night comes on quickly."

"At your orders, Maitre Arbillot," replied the justice, laying his hat down carefully on the window-sill; "we shall draw out the formula for raising the seals. By the way, has no will yet been found?"

"None to my knowledge. It is quite clear to me that the deceased made no testament, none at least before a notary."

"But," objected M. Destourbet, "he may have executed a holograph testament."

"It is certain, gentlemen," interrupted Manette, with her soft, plaintive voice, "that our dear gentleman did not go without putting his affairs in order. 'Manette,' said he, not more than two weeks ago; 'I do not intend you shall be worried, neither you nor Claudet, when I am no longer here. All shall be arranged to your satisfaction.' Oh! he certainly must have put down his last wishes on paper. Look well around, gentlemen; you will find a will in some drawer or other."

While she applied her handkerchief ostentatiously to her nose and wiped her eyes, the justice exchanged glances with the notary.

"Maitre Arbillot, you think doubtless with me, that we ought to begin operations by examining the furniture of the bedroom?"

The notary inclined his head, and notified his chief clerk to remove his papers to the first floor.

“Show us the way, Madame,” said the justice to the housekeeper; and the quartet of men of the law followed Manette, carrying with them a huge bunch of keys.

Claudet had risen from his seat when the justice arrived. As the party moved onward, he followed hesitatingly, and then halted, uncertain how to decide between the desire to assist in the search and the fear of intruding. The notary, noticing his hesitation; called to him:

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"Come, you also, Claudet, are not you one of the guardians of the seals?"

And they wended their silent way, up the winding staircase of the turret. The high, dark silhouette of Manette headed the procession; then followed the justice, carefully choosing his foothold on the well-worn stairs, the asthmatic old bailiff, breathing short and hard, the notary, beating his foot impatiently every time that Seurrot stopped to take breath, and finally the principal clerk and Claudet.

Manette, opening noiselessly the door of the deceased's room, entered, as if it were a church, the somewhat stifling apartment. Then she threw open the shutters, and the afternoon sun revealed an interior decorated and furnished in the style of the close of the eighteenth century. An inlaid secretary, with white marble top and copper fittings, stood near the bed, of which the coverings had been removed, showing the mattresses piled up under a down bed covered with blue-and-white check.

As soon as the door was closed, the clerk settled himself at the table with his packet of stamped paper, and began to run over, in a low, rapid voice, the preliminaries of the inventory. In this confused murmuring some fragments of phrases would occasionally strike the ear: "Chateau of Vivey—deceased the eighth of October last—at the requisition of Marie-Julien de Buxieres, comptroller of direct contributions at Nancy—styling himself heir to Claude Odouart de Buxieres, his cousin-german by blood—"

This last phrase elicited from Claudet a sudden movement of surprise.

"The inventory," explained Maitre Arbillot, "is drawn up at the requisition of the only heir named, to whom we must make application, if necessary, for the property left by the deceased."

There was a moment of silence, interrupted by a plaintive sigh from Manette Sejourrant and afterward by the tearing sound of the sealed bands across the bureau, the drawers and pigeonholes of which were promptly ransacked by the justice and his assistant.

Odouart de Buxieres had not been much of a scribe. A double Liege almanac, a memorandum-book, in which he had entered the money received from the sale of his wood and the dates of the payments made by his farmers; a daybook, in which he had made careful note of the number of head of game killed each day—that was all the bureau contained.

"Let us examine another piece of furniture," murmured the justice.

Manette and Claudet remained unmoved. They apparently knew the reason why none but insignificant papers had been found in the drawers, for their features expressed neither surprise nor disappointment.

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Another search through a high chest of drawers with large copper handles was equally unprofitable. Then they attacked the secretary, and after the key had been turned twice in the noisy lock, the lid went slowly down. The countenances of both mother and son, hitherto so unconcerned, underwent a slight but anxious change. The bailiff continued his scrupulous search of each drawer under the watchful eye of the justice, finding nothing but documents of mediocre importance; old titles to property, bundles of letters, tradesmen's bills, *etc.* Suddenly, at the opening of the last drawer, a significant "Ah!" from Stephen Seurrot drew round him the heads of the justice and the notary, and made Manette and Claudet, standing at the foot of the bed, start with expectation. On the dark ground of a rosewood box lay a sheet of white paper, on which was written:

"This is my testament."

With the compression of lip and significant shake of the head of a physician about to take in hand a hopeless case of illness, the justice made known to his two neighbors the text of the sheet of paper, on which Claude Odouart de Buxieres had written, in his coarse, ill-regulated hand, the following lines:

"Not knowing my collateral heirs, and caring nothing about them, I give and bequeath all my goods and chattels—"

The testator had stopped there, either because he thought it better, before going any further, to consult some legal authority more experienced than himself, or because he had been interrupted in his labor and had deferred completing this testifying of his last will until some future opportunity.

M. Destoubet, after once more reading aloud this unfinished sentence, exclaimed:

"Monsieur de Buxieres did not finish—it is much to be regretted!"

"My God! is it possible?" interrupted the housekeeper; "you think, then, Monsieur justice, that Claudet does not inherit anything?"

"According to my idea," replied he, "we have here only a scrap of unimportant paper; the name of the legatee is not indicated, and even were it indicated, the testament would still be without force, being neither dated nor signed."

"But perhaps Monsieur de Buxieres made another?"

"I think not; I am more inclined to suppose that he did not have time to complete the arrangements that he wished to make, and the proof lies in the very existence of this incomplete document in the only piece of furniture in which he kept his papers." Then, turning toward the notary and the bailiff: "You are doubtless, gentlemen, of the same opinion as myself; it will be wise, therefore, to defer raising the remainder of the seals

until the arrival of the legal heir. Maitre Arbillot, Monsieur Julien de Buxieres must be notified, and asked to be here in Vivey as soon as possible."

"I will write this evening," said the notary; "in the meanwhile, the keeping of the seals will be continued by Claudet Sejournant."

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The justice inclined his head to Manette, who was standing, pale and motionless, at the foot of the bed; stunned by the unexpected announcement; the bailiff and the chief clerk, after gathering up their papers, shook hands sympathizingly with Claudet.

"I am grieved to the heart, my dear fellow," said the notary, in his turn, "at what has happened! It is hard to swallow, but you will always keep a courageous heart, and be able to rise to the top; besides, even if, legally, you own nothing here, this unfinished testament of Monsieur de Buxieres will constitute a moral title in your favor, and I trust that the heir will have enough justice and right feeling to treat you properly."

"I want nothing from him!" muttered Claudet, between his teeth; then, leaving his mother to attend to the rest of the legal fraternity, he went hastily to his room, next that of the deceased, tore off his dress-coat, slipped on a hunting-coat, put on his gaiters, donned his old felt hat, and descended to the kitchen, where Manette was sitting, huddled up in front of the embers, weeping and bewailing her fate.

Since she had become housekeeper and mistress of the Buxieres household, she had adopted a more polished speech and a more purely French mode of expression, but in this moment of discouragement and despair the rude dialect of her native country rose to her lips, and in her own patois she inveighed against the deceased:

"Ah! the bad man, the mean man! Didn't I tell him, time and again, that he would leave us in trouble! Where can we seek our bread this late in the day? We shall have to beg in the streets!"

"Hush! hush! mother," interrupted Claudet, sternly, placing his hand on her shoulder, "it does not mend matters to give way like that. Calm thyself—so long as I have hands on the ends of my arms, we never shall be beggars. But I must go out—I need air."

And crossing the gardens rapidly, he soon reached the outskirts of the brambly thicket.

This landscape, both rugged and smiling in its wildness, hardly conveyed the idea of silence, but rather of profound meditation, absolute calm; the calmness of solitude, the religious meditation induced by spacious forest depths. The woods seemed asleep, and the low murmurings, which from time to time escaped from their recesses, seemed like the unconscious sighs exhaled by a dreamer. The very odor peculiar to trees in autumn, the penetrating and spicy odor of the dying leaves, had a delicate and subtle aroma harmonizing with this quietude of fairyland.

Now and then, through the vaporous golden atmosphere of the late autumn sunset, through the pensive stillness of the hushed woods, the distant sound of feminine voices, calling to one another, echoed from the hills, and beyond the hedges was heard the crackling of branches, snapped by invisible hands, and the rattle of nuts dropping on the earth. It was the noise made by the gatherers of beechnuts, for in the years when the

beech produces abundantly, this harvest, under the sanction of the guardians of the forest, draws together the whole population of women and children, who collect these triangular nuts, from which an excellent species of oil is procured.

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Wending his way along the copse, Claudet suddenly perceived, through an opening in the trees, several large white sheets spread under the beeches, and covered with brown heaps of the fallen fruit. One or two familiar voices hailed him as he passed, but he was not disposed to gossip, for the moment, and turned abruptly into the bushwood, so as to avoid any encounter. The unexpected event which had just taken place, and which was to change his present mode of life, as well as his plans for the future, was of too recent occurrence for him to view it with any degree of calmness.

He was like a man who has received a violent blow on the head, and is for the moment stunned by it. He suffered vaguely, without seeking to know from what cause; he had not been able as yet to realize the extent of his misfortune; and every now and then a vague hope came over him that all would come right.

So on he went, straight ahead, his eyes on the ground, and his hands in his pockets, until he emerged upon one of the old forest roads where the grass had begun to burst through the stony interstices; and there, in the distance, under the light tracery of weaving branches, a delicate female silhouette was outlined on the dark background. A young woman, dressed in a petticoat of gray woolen material, and a jacket of the same, close-fitting at the waist, her arms bare to the elbows and supporting on her head a bag of nuts enveloped in a white sheet, advanced toward him with a quick and rhythmical step. The manner in which she carried her burden showed the elegance of her form, the perfect grace of her chest and throat. She was not very tall, but finely proportioned. As she approached, the slanting rays of the setting sun shone on her heavy brown hair, twisted into a thick coil at the back of her head, and revealed the amber paleness of her clear skin, the long oval of her eyes, the firm outline of her chin and somewhat full lips; and Claudet, roused from his lethargic reverie by the sound of her rapid footsteps, raised his eyes, and recognized the daughter of Pere Vincart, the proprietor of La Thuilliere.

At the same moment, the young girl, doubtless fatigued with the weight of her bundle, had laid it down by the roadside while she recovered her breath. In a few seconds Claudet was by her side.

“Good-evening, Reine,” said he, in a voice singularly softened in tone, “shall I give you a lift with that?”

“Good-evening, Claudet,” replied she; “truly, now, that is not an offer to be refused. The weight is greater than I thought.”

“Have you come far thus laden?”

“No; our people are nutting in the Bois des Ronces; I came on before, because I don’t like to leave father alone for long at a time and, as I was coming, I wished to bring my share with me.”



“No one can reproach you with shirking work, Reine, nor of being afraid to take hold of things. To see you all day trotting about the farm, no one would think you had been to school in the city, like a young lady.”

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And Claudet's countenance became irradiated with a glow of innocent and tender admiration. It was evident that his eyes looked with delight into the dark limpid orbs of Reine, on her pure and rosy lips, and on her partly uncovered neck, the whiteness of which two little brown moles only served to enhance.

"How can it be helped?" replied she, smiling, "it must be done; when there is no man in the house to give orders, the women must take a hand themselves. My father was not very strong when my mother died, and since he had that attack he has become quite helpless, and I have had to take his place."

While she spoke, Claudet took hold of the bundle, and, lifting it as if it had been a feather, threw it over his shoulder. They walked on, side by side, in the direction of La Thuliere; the sun had set, and a penetrating moisture, arising from the damp soil of the adjacent pasture lands, encircled them in a bluish fog.

"So he is worse, your father, is he?" said Claudet, after a moment's silence.

"He can not move from his armchair, his mental faculties are weakening, and I am obliged to amuse him like a child. But how is it with yourself, Claudet?" she asked, turning her frank, cordial gaze upon him. "You have had your share of trouble since we last met, and great events have happened. Poor Monsieur de Buxieres was taken away very suddenly!"

The close relationship that united Claudet with the deceased was a secret to no one; Reine, as well as all the country people, knew and admitted the fact, however irregular, as one sanctioned by time and continuity. Therefore, in speaking to the young man, her voice had that tone of affectionate interest usual in conversing with a bereaved friend on a death that concerns him.

The countenance of the 'grand chasserot', which had cleared for a time under her influence, became again clouded.

"Yes;" sighed he, "he was taken too soon!"

"And now, Claudet, you are sole master at the chateau?"

"Neither—master—nor even valet!" he returned, with such bitterness that the young girl stood still with surprise.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, "was it not agreed with Monsieur de Buxieres that you should inherit all his property?"

"Such was his intention, but he did not have time to put it in execution; he died without leaving any will, and, as I am nothing in the eye of the law, the patrimony will go to a distant relative, a de Buxieres whom Monsieur Odouart did not even know."

Reine's dark eyes filled with tears.

"What a misfortune!" she exclaimed, "and who could have expected such a thing? Oh! my poor Claudet!"

She was so moved, and spoke with such sincere compassion, that Claudet was perhaps misled, and thought he read in her glistening eyes a tenderer sentiment than pity; he trembled, took her hand, and held it long in his.

"Thank you, Reine! Yes," he added, after a pause, "it is a rude shock to wake up one morning without hearth or home, when one has been in the habit of living on one's income."

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"What do you intend to do?" inquired Reine, gravely.

Claudet shrugged his shoulders.

"To work for my bread—or, if I can find no suitable trade, enlist in a regiment. I think I should not make a bad soldier. Everything is going round and round in my head like a millwheel. The first thing to do is to see about my mother, who is lamenting down there at the house—I must find her a comfortable place to live."

The young girl had become very thoughtful.

"Claudet," replied she, "I know you are very proud, very sensitive, and could not wish to hurt your feelings. Therefore, I pray you not to take in ill part that which I am going to say—in short, if you should get into any trouble, you will, I hope, remember that you have friends at La Thuiliere, and that you will come to seek us."

The 'grand chasserot' reddened.

"I shall never take amiss what you may say to me, Reine!" faltered he; "for I can not doubt your good heart—I have known it since the time when we played together in the cure's garden, while waiting for the time to repeat the catechism. But there is no hurry as yet; the heir will not arrive for several weeks, and by that time, I trust, we shall have had a chance to turn round."

They had reached the boundary of the forest where the fields of La Thuiliere begin.

By the last fading light of day they could distinguish the black outline of the ancient forge, now become a grange, and a light was twinkling in one of the low windows of the farm.

"Here you are at home," continued Claudet, laying the bundle of nuts on the flat stone wall which surrounded the farm buildings; "I wish you good-night."

"Will you not come in and get warm?"

"No; I must go back," replied he.

"Good-night, then, Claudet; au revoir and good courage!"

He gazed at her for a moment in the deepening twilight, then, abruptly pressing her hands:

"Thank you, Reine," murmured he in a choking voice, "you are a good girl, and I love you very much!"

He left the young mistress of the farm precipitately, and plunged again into the woods.

CHAPTER II

THE HEIR TO VIVEY

While these events were happening at Vivey, the person whose name excited the curiosity and the conversational powers of the villagers—Marie-Julien de Buxieres—ensconced in his unpretentious apartment in the Rue Stanislaus, Nancy, still pondered over the astonishing news contained in the Auberive notary's first letter. The announcement of his inheritance, dropping from the skies, as it were, had found him quite unprepared, and, at first, somewhat sceptical. He remembered, it is true, hearing his father once speak of a cousin who had remained a bachelor and who owned a fine piece of property in some corner of the Haute Marne; but, as all intercourse had long been broken off between the two families, M. de Buxieres the elder had mentioned the subject only in relation to barely possible hopes which had very little chance of being realized. Julien had never placed any reliance on this chimerical inheritance, and he received almost with indifference the official announcement of the death of Claude Odouart de Buxieres.

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By direct line from his late father, he became in fact the only legitimate heir of the chateau and lands of Vivey; still, there was a strong probability that Claude de Buxieres had made a will in favor of some one more within his own circle. The second missive from Arbillot the notary, announcing that the deceased had died intestate, and requesting the legal heir to come to Vivey as soon as possible, put a sudden end to the young man's doubts, which merged into a complex feeling, less of joy than of stupefaction.

Up to the present time, Julien de Buxieres had not been spoiled by Fortune's gifts. His parents, who had died prematurely, had left him nothing. He lived in a very mediocre style on his slender salary as comptroller of direct contributions, and, although twenty-seven years old, was housed like a supernumerary in a small furnished room on the second floor above the ground. At this time his physique was that of a young man of medium height, slight, pale, and nervous, sensitive in disposition, reserved and introspective in habit. His delicate features, his intelligent forehead surmounted by soft chestnut hair, his pathetic blue eyes, his curved, dissatisfied mouth, shaded by a slight, dark moustache, indicated a melancholy, unquiet temperament and precocious moral fatigue.

There are some men who never have had any childhood, or rather, whose childhood never has had its happy time of laughter. Julien was one of these. That which imparts to childhood its charm and enjoyment is the warm and tender atmosphere of the home; the constant and continued caressing of a mother; the gentle and intimate creations of one's native country where, by degrees, the senses awaken to the marvellous sights of the outer world; where the alternating seasons in their course first arouse the student's ambition and cause the heart of the adolescent youth to thrill with emotion; where every street corner, every tree, every turn of the soil, has some history to relate. Julien had had no experiences of this peaceful family life, during which are stored up such treasures of childhood's recollections. He was the son of a government official, who had been trotted over all France at the caprice of the administration, and he had never known, so to speak, any associations of the land in which he was born, or the hearth on which he was raised. Chance had located his birth in a small town among the Pyrenees, and when he was two years old he had been transplanted to one of the industrial cities of Artois. At the end of two years more came another removal to one of the midland towns, and thus his tender childhood had been buffeted about, from east to west, from north to south, taking root nowhere. All he could remember of these early years was an unpleasant impression of hasty packing and removal, of long journeys by diligence, and of uncomfortable resettling. His mother had died just as he was entering upon his eighth year; his father, absorbed in official work, and not caring

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to leave the child to the management of servants, had placed him at that early age in a college directed by priests. Julien thus passed his second term of childhood, and his boyhood was spent behind these stern, gloomy walls, bending resignedly under a discipline which, though gentle, was narrow and suspicious, and allowed little scope for personal development. He obtained only occasional glimpses of nature during the monotonous daily walks across a flat, meaningless country. At very rare intervals, one of his father's colleagues would take him visiting; but these stiff and ceremonious calls only left a wearisome sensation of restraint and dull fatigue. During the long vacation he used to rejoin his father, whom he almost always found in a new residence. The poor man had alighted there for a time, like a bird on a tree; and among these continually shifting scenes, the lad had felt himself more than ever a stranger among strangers; so that he experienced always a secret though joyless satisfaction in returning to the cloisters of the St. Hilaire college and submitting himself to the yoke of the paternal but inflexible discipline of the Church.

He was naturally inclined, by the tenderness of his nature, toward a devotional life, and accepted with blind confidence the religious and moral teaching of the reverend fathers. A doctrine which preached separation from profane things; the attractions of a meditative and pious life, and mistrust of the world and its perilous pleasures, harmonized with the shy and melancholy timidity of his nature. Human beings, especially women, inspired him with secret aversion, which was increased by consciousness of his awkwardness and remissness whenever he found himself in the society of women or young girls.

The beauties of nature did not affect him; the flowers in the springtime, the glories of the summer sun, the rich coloring of autumn skies, having no connection in his mind with any joyous recollection, left him cold and unmoved; he even professed an almost hostile indifference to such purely material sights as disturbing and dangerous to the inner life. He lived within himself and could not see beyond.

His mind, imbued with a mystic idealism, delighted itself in solitary reading or in meditations in the house of prayer. The only emotion he ever betrayed was caused by the organ music accompanying the hymnal plain-song, and by the pomp of religious ceremony.

At the age of eighteen, he left the St. Hilaire college in order to prepare his baccalaureate, and his father, becoming alarmed at his increasing moodiness and mysticism, endeavored to infuse into him the tastes and habits of a man of the world by introducing him into the society of his equals in the town where he lived; but the twig was already bent, and the young man yielded with bad grace to the change of regime; the amusements they offered were either wearisome or repugnant to him. He would wander aimlessly through the salons

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where they were playing whist, where the ladies played show pieces at the piano, and where they spoke a language he did not understand. He was quite aware of his worldly inaptitude, and that he was considered awkward, dull, and ill-tempered, and the knowledge of this fact paralyzed and frightened him still more. He could not disguise his feeling of ennui sufficiently to prevent the provincial circles from being greatly offended; they declared unanimously that young de Buxieres was a bear, and decided to leave him alone. The death of his father, which happened just as the youth was beginning his official cares, put a sudden end to all this constraint. He took advantage of his season of mourning to resume his old ways; and returned with a sigh of relief to his solitude, his books, and his meditations. According to the promise of the Imitation, he found unspeakable joys in his retirement; he rose at break of day, assisted at early mass, fulfilled, conscientiously, his administrative duties, took his hurried meals in a boardinghouse, where he exchanged a few polite remarks with his fellow inmates, then shut himself up in his room to read Pascal or Bossuet until eleven o'clock.

He thus attained his twenty-seventh year, and it was into the calm of this serious, cloister-like life, that the news fell of the death of Claude de Buxieres and of the unexpected inheritance that had accrued to him.

After entering into correspondence with the notary, M. Arbillot, and becoming assured of the reality of his rights and of the necessity of his presence at Vivey, he had obtained leave of absence from his official duties, and set out for Haute Marne. On the way, he could not help marvelling at the providential interposition which would enable him to leave a career for which he felt he had no vocation, and to pursue his independent life, according to his own tastes, and secured from any fear of outside cares. According to the account given by the notary, Claude de Buxieres's fortune might be valued at two hundred thousand francs, in furniture and other movables, without reckoning the chateau and the adjacent woods. This was a much larger sum than had ever been dreamed of by Julien de Buxieres, whose belongings did not amount in all to three thousand francs. He made up his mind, therefore, that, as soon as he was installed at Vivey, he would change his leave of absence to an unlimited furlough of freedom. He contemplated with serene satisfaction this perspective view of calm and solitary retirement in a chateau lost to view in the depths of the forest, where he could in perfect security give himself up to the studious contemplative life which he loved so much, far from all worldly frivolities and restraint. He already imagined himself at Vivey, shut up in his carefully selected library; he delighted in the thought of having in future to deal only with the country people, whose uncivilized ways would be like his own, and among whom his timidity would not be remarked.

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He arrived at Langres in the afternoon of a foggy October day, and inquired immediately at the hotel how he could procure a carriage to take him that evening to Vivey. They found him a driver, but, to his surprise, the man refused to take the journey until the following morning, on account of the dangerous state of the crossroads, where vehicles might stick fast in the mire if they ventured there after nightfall. Julien vainly endeavored to effect an arrangement with him, and the discussion was prolonged in the courtyard of the hotel. Just as the man was turning away, another, who had overheard the end of the colloquy, came up to young de Buxieres, and offered to undertake the journey for twenty francs.

"I have a good horse," said he to Julien; "I know the roads, and will guarantee that we reach Vivey before nightfall."

The bargain was quickly made; and in half an hour, Julien de Buxieres was rolling over the plain above Langres, in a shaky old cabriolet, the muddy hood of which bobbed over at every turn of the wheel, while the horse kept up a lively trot over the stones.

The clouds were low, and the road lay across bare and stony prairies, the gray expanse of which became lost in the distant mist. This depressing landscape would have made a disagreeable impression on a less unobserving traveller, but, as we have said, Julien looked only inward, and the phenomena of the exterior world influenced him only unconsciously. Half closing his eyes, and mechanically affected by the rhythmical tintinnabulation of the little bells, hanging around the horse's neck, he had resumed his meditations, and considered how he should arrange his life in this, to him, unknown country, which would probably be his own for some time to come. Nevertheless, when, at the end of the level plain, the road turned off into the wooded region, the unusual aspect of the forest aroused his curiosity. The tufted woods and lofty trees, in endless succession under the fading light, impressed him by their profound solitude and their religious silence. His loneliness was in sympathy with the forest, which seemed contemporary with the Sleeping Beauty of the wood, the verdant walls of which were to separate him forever from the world of cities. Henceforth, he could be himself, could move freely, dress as he wished, or give way to his dreaming, without fearing to encounter the ironical looks of idle and wondering neighbors. For the first time since his departure from his former home, he experienced a feeling of joy and serenity; the influence of the surroundings, so much in harmony with his wishes, unlocked his tongue, and made him communicative.

He made up his mind to speak to the guide, who was smoking at his side and whipping his horse.

"Are we far from Vivey now?"

"That depends, Monsieur—as the crow flies, the distance is not very great, and if we could go by the roads, we should be there in one short hour. Unfortunately, on turning

by the Allofroy farm, we shall have to leave the highroad and take the cross path; and then—my gracious! we shall plunge into the ditch down there, and into perdition.”

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"You told me that you were well acquainted with the roads!"

"I know them, and I do not know them. When it comes to these crossroads, one is sure of nothing. They change every year, and each new superintendent cuts a way out through the woods according to his fancy. The devil himself could not find his way."

"Yet you have been to Vivey before?"

"Oh, yes; five or six years ago; I used often to take parties of hunters to the chateau. Ah! Monsieur, what a beautiful country it is for hunting; you can not take twenty steps along a trench without seeing a stag or a deer."

"You have doubtless had the opportunity of meeting Monsieur Odouart de Buxieres?"

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur, more than once-ah! he is a jolly fellow and a fine man—"

"He was," interrupted Julien, gravely, "for he is dead."

"Ah! excuse me—I did not know it. What! is he really dead? So fine a man! What we must all come to. Careful, now!" added he, pulling in the reins, "we are leaving the highroad, and must keep our eyes open."

The twilight was already deepening, the driver lighted his lantern, and the vehicle turned into a narrow lane, half mud, half stone, and hedged in on both sides with wet brushwood, which flapped noisily against the leathern hood. After fifteen minutes' riding, the paths opened upon a pasture, dotted here and there with juniper bushes, and thence divided into three lines, along which ran the deep track of wagons, cutting the pasturage into small hillocks. After long hesitation, the man cracked his whip and took the right-hand path.

Julien began to fear that the fellow had boasted too much when he declared that he knew the best way. The ruts became deeper and deeper; the road was descending into a hole; suddenly, the wheels became embedded up to the hub in thick, sticky mire, and the horse refused to move. The driver jumped to the ground, swearing furiously; then he called Julien to help him to lift out the wheel. But the young man, slender and frail as he was, and not accustomed to using his muscles, was not able to render much assistance.

"Thunder and lightning!" cried the driver, "it is impossible to get out of this—let go the wheel, Monsieur, you have no more strength than a chicken, and, besides, you don't know how to go about it. What a devil of a road! But we can't spend the night here!"

"If we were to call out," suggested Julien, somewhat mortified at the inefficiency of his assistance, "some one would perhaps come to our aid."



They accordingly shouted with desperation; and after five or six minutes, a voice hailed back. A woodcutter, from one of the neighboring clearings, had heard the call, and was running toward them.

"This way!" cried the guide, "we are stuck fast in the mud. Give us a lift."

The man came up and walked round the vehicle, shaking his head.

"You've got on to a blind road," said he, "and you'll have trouble in getting out of it, seeing as how there's not light to go by. You had better unharness the horse, and wait for daylight, if you want to get your carriage out."

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“And where shall we go for a bed?” growled the driver; “there isn’t even a house near in this accursed wild country of yours!”

“Excuse me—you are not far from La Thuiliere; the farm people will not refuse you a bed, and to-morrow morning they will help you to get your carriage out of the mud. Unharness, comrade; I will lead you as far as the Plancheau-Vacher; and from there you will see the windows of the farmhouse.”

The driver, still grumbling, decided to take his advice. They unharnessed the horse; took one of the lanterns of the carriage as a beacon, and followed slowly the line of pasture-land, under the woodchopper’s guidance. At the end of about ten minutes, the forester pointed out a light, twinkling at the extremity of a rustic path, bordered with moss.

“You have only to go straight ahead,” said he, “besides, the barking of the dogs will guide you. Ask for Mamselle Vincart. Good-night, gentlemen.”

He turned on his heel, while Julien, bewildered, began to reproach himself for not having thanked him enough. The conductor went along with his lantern; young de Buxieres followed him with eyes downcast. Thus they continued silently until they reached the termination of the mossy path, where a furious barking saluted their ears.

“Here we are,” growled the driver, “fortunately the dogs are not yet let loose, or we should pass a bad quarter of an hour!”

They pushed open a side-wicket and, standing in the courtyard, could see the house. With the exception of the luminous spot that reddened one of the windows of the ground floor, the long, low facade was dark, and, as it were, asleep. On the right, standing alone, outlined against the sky, was the main building of the ancient forge, now used for granaries and stables; inside, the frantic barking of the watch-dogs mingled with the bleating of the frightened sheep, the neighing of horses, and the clanking of wooden shoes worn by the farm hands. At the same moment, the door of the house opened, and a servant, attracted by the uproar, appeared on the threshold, a lantern in her hand.

“Hallo! you people,” she exclaimed sharply to the newcomers, who were advancing toward her, “what do you want?”

The driver related, in a few words, the affair of the cabriolet, and asked whether they would house him at the farm until the next day—himself and the gentleman he was conducting to Vivey.

The girl raised the lantern above her head in order to scrutinize the two strangers; doubtless their appearance and air of respectability reassured her, for she replied, in a milder voice:



“Well, that does not depend on me—I am not the mistress here, but come in, all the same—Mamselle Reine can not be long now, and she will answer for herself.”

As soon as the driver had fastened his horse to one of the outside posts of the wicket-gate, the servant brought them into a large, square hall, in which a lamp, covered with a shade, gave a moderate light. She placed two chairs before the fire, which she drew together with the poker.

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"Warm yourselves while you are waiting," continued she, "it will not be long, and you must excuse me—I must go and milk the cows—that is work which will not wait."

She reached the courtyard, and shut the gate after her, while Julien turned to examine the room into which they had been shown, and felt a certain serenity creep over him at the clean and cheerful aspect of this homely but comfortable interior. The room served as both kitchen and dining-room. On the right of the flaring chimney, one of the cast-iron arrangements called a cooking-stove was gently humming; the saucepans, resting on the bars, exhaled various appetizing odors. In the centre, the long, massive table of solid beech was already spread with its coarse linen cloth, and the service was laid. White muslin curtains fell in front of the large windows, on the sills of which potted chrysanthemums spread their white, brown, and red blossoms.

Round the walls a shining battery of boilers, kettles, basins, and copper plates were hung in symmetrical order. On the dresser, near the clock, was a complete service of old Aprey china, in bright and varied colors, and not far from the chimney, which was ornamented with a crucifix of yellow copper, was a set of shelves, attached to the wall, containing three rows of books, in gray linen binding. Julien, approaching, read, not without surprise, some of the titles: Paul and Virginia, La Fontaine's Fables, Gessner's Idylls, Don Quixote, and noticed several odd volumes of the Picturesque Magazine.

Hanging from the whitened ceiling were clusters of nuts, twisted hemp, strings of yellow maize, and chaplets of golden pippins tied with straw, all harmonizing in the dim light, and adding increased fulness to the picture of thrift and abundance.

"It's jolly here!" said the driver, smacking his lips, "and the smell which comes from that oven makes one hungry. I wish Mamselle Reine would arrive!"

Just as he said this, a mysterious falsetto voice, which seemed to come from behind the copper basins, repeated, in an acrid voice: "Reine! Reine!"

"What in the world is that?" exclaimed the driver, puzzled.

Both looked toward the beams; at the same moment there was a rustling of wings, a light hop, and a black-and-white object flitted by, resting, finally, on one of the shelves hanging from the joists.

"Ha, ha!" said the driver, laughing, "it is only a magpie!"

He had hardly said it, when, like a plaintive echo, another voice, a human voice this time, childish and wavering, proceeding from a dark corner, faltered: "Rei-eine—Rei-eine!"

"Hark!" murmured Julien, "some one answered."

His companion seized the lamp, and advanced toward the portion of the room left in shadow. Suddenly he stopped short, and stammered some vague excuse.

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Julien, who followed him, then perceived, with alarm, in a sort of niche formed by two screens, entirely covered with illustrations from Epinal, a strange-looking being stretched in an easy-chair, which was covered with pillows and almost hidden under various woolen draperies. He was dressed in a long coat of coarse, pale-blue cloth. He was bareheaded, and his long, white hair formed a weird frame for a face of bloodless hue and meagre proportions, from which two vacant eyes stared fixedly. He sat immovable and his arms hung limply over his knees.

“Monsieur,” said Julien, bowing ceremoniously, “we are quite ashamed at having disturbed you. Your servant forgot to inform us of your presence, and we were waiting for Mademoiselle Reine, without thinking that—”

The old man continued immovable, not seeming to understand; he kept repeating, in the same voice, like a frightened child:

“Rei-eine! Rei-eine!”

The two bewildered travellers gazed at this sepulchral-looking personage, then at each other interrogatively, and began to feel very uncomfortable. The magpie, perched upon the hanging shelf, suddenly flapped his wings, and repeated, in his turn, in falsetto:

“Reine, queen of the woods!”

“Here I am, papa, don’t get uneasy!” said a clear, musical voice behind them.

The door had been suddenly opened, and Reine Vincart had entered. She wore on her head a white cape or hood, and held in front of her an enormous bouquet of glistening leaves, which seemed to have been gathered as specimens of all the wild fruit-trees of the forest: the brown beam-berries, the laburnums, and wild cherry, with their red, transparent fruit, the bluish mulberry, the orange-clustered mountain-ash. All this forest vegetation, mingling its black or purple tints with the dark, moist leaves, brought out the whiteness of the young girl’s complexion, her limpid eyes, and her brown curls escaping from her hood.

Julien de Buxieres and his companion had turned at the sound of Reine’s voice. As soon as she perceived them, she went briskly toward them, exclaiming:

“What are you doing here? Don’t you see that you are frightening him?”

Julien, humbled and mortified, murmured an excuse, and got confused in trying to relate the incident of the carriage. She interrupted him hurriedly:

“The carriage, oh, yes—La Guitote spoke to me about it. Well, your carriage will be attended to! Go and sit down by the fire, gentlemen; we will talk about it presently.”

She had taken the light from the driver, and placed it on an adjacent table with her plants. In the twinkling of an eye, she removed her hood, unfastened her shawl, and then knelt down in front of the sick man, after kissing him tenderly on the forehead. From the corner where Julien had seated himself, he could hear her soothing voice. Its caressing tones contrasted pleasantly with the harsh accent of a few minutes before.

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"You were longing for me, papa," said she, "but you see, I could not leave before all the sacks of potatoes had been laid in the wagon. Now everything has been brought in, and we can sleep in peace. I thought of you on the way, and I have brought you a fine bouquet of wild fruits. We shall enjoy looking them over tomorrow, by daylight. Now, this is the time that you are to drink your bouillon like a good papa, and then as soon as we have had our supper Guite and I will put you to bed nice and warm, and I will sing you a song to send you to sleep."

She rose, took from the sideboard a bowl which she filled from a saucepan simmering on the stove, and then, without taking any notice of her visitors, she returned to the invalid. Slowly and with delicate care she made him swallow the soup by spoonfuls. Julien, notwithstanding the feeling of ill-humor caused by the untoward happenings of the evening, could not help admiring the almost maternal tenderness with which the young girl proceeded in this slow and difficult operation. When the bowl was empty she returned to the stove, and at last bethought herself of her guests.

"Excuse me, Monsieur, but I had to attend to my father first. If I understood quite aright, you were going to Vivey."

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I had hoped to sleep there tonight."

"You have probably come," continued she, "on business connected with the chateau. Is not the heir of Monsieur Odouart expected very shortly?"

"I am that heir," replied Julien, coloring.

"You are Monsieur de Buxieres?" exclaimed Reine, in astonishment. Then, embarrassed at having shown her surprise too openly, she checked herself, colored in her turn, and finally gave a rapid glance at her interlocutor. She never should have imagined this slender young man, so melancholy in aspect, to be the new proprietor—he was so unlike the late Odouart de Buxieres!

"Pardon me, Monsieur," continued she, "you must have thought my first welcome somewhat unceremonious, but my first thought was for my father. He is a great invalid, as you may have noticed, and for the first moment I feared that he had been startled by strange faces."

"It is I, Mademoiselle," replied Julien, with embarrassment, "it is I who ought to ask pardon for having caused all this disturbance. But I do not intend to trouble you any longer. If you will kindly furnish us with a guide who will direct us to the road to Vivey, we will depart to-night and sleep at the chateau."

“No, indeed,” protested Reine, very cordially. “You are my guests, and I shall not allow you to leave us in that manner. Besides, you would probably find the gates closed down there, for I do not think they expected you so soon.”

During this interview, the servant who had received the travellers had returned with her milk-pail; behind her, the other farm-hands, men and women, arranged themselves silently round the table.

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"Guitiote," said Reine, "lay two more places at the table. The horse belonging to these gentlemen has been taken care of, has he not?"

"Yes, Mamselle, he is in the stable," replied one of the grooms.

"Good! Bernard, to-morrow you will take Fleuriot with you, and go in search of their carriage which has been swamped in the Planche-au-Vacher. That is settled. Now, Monsieur de Buxieres, will you proceed to table—and your coachman also? Upon my word, I do not know whether our supper will be to your liking. I can only offer you a plate of soup, a chine of pork, and cheese made in the country; but you must be hungry, and when one has a good appetite, one is not hard to please."

Every one had been seated at the table; the servants at the lower end, and Reine Vincart, near the fireplace, between M. de Buxieres and the driver. La Guite helped the cabbage-soup all around; soon nothing was heard but the clinking of spoons and smacking of lips. Julien, scarcely recovered from his bewilderment, watched furtively the pretty, robust young girl presiding at the supper, and keeping, at the same time, a watchful eye over all the details of service. He thought her strange; she upset all his ideas. His own imagination and his theories pictured a woman, and more especially a young girl, as a submissive, modest, shadowy creature, with downcast look, only raising her eyes to consult her husband or her mother as to what is allowable and what is forbidden. Now, Reine did not fulfil any of the requirements of this ideal. She seemed to be hardly twenty-two years old, and she acted with the initiative genius, the frankness and the decision of a man, retaining all the while the tenderness and easy grace of a woman. Although it was evident that she was accustomed to govern and command, there was nothing in her look, gesture, or voice which betrayed any assumption of masculinity. She remained a young girl while in the very act of playing the virile part of head of the house. But what astonished Julien quite as much was that she seemed to have received a degree of education superior to that of people of her condition, and he wondered at the amount of will-power by which a nature highly cultivated, relatively speaking, could conform to the unrefined, rough surroundings in which she was placed.

While Julien was immersed in these reflections, and continued eating with an abstracted air, Reine Vincart was rapidly examining the reserved, almost ungainly, young man, who did not dare address any conversation to her, and who was equally stiff and constrained with those sitting near him. She made a mental comparison of him with Claudet, the bold huntsman, alert, resolute, full of dash and spirit, and a feeling of charitable compassion arose in her heart at the thought of the reception which the Sejournant family would give to this new master, so timid and so little acquainted with the ways and dispositions of country folk. Julien did not impress her as being able to defend himself against the ill-will of persons who would consider him an intruder, and would certainly endeavor to make him pay dearly for the inheritance of which he had deprived them.

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"You do not take your wine, Monsieur de Buxieres!" said she, noticing that her guest's glass was still full.

"I am not much of a wine-drinker," replied he, "and besides, I never take wine by itself—I should be obliged if you would have some water brought."

Reine smiled, and passed him the water-bottle.

"Indeed?" she said, "in that case, you have not fallen among congenial spirits, for in these mountains they like good dinners, and have a special weakness for Burgundy. You follow the chase, at any rate?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I do not know how to handle a gun!"

"I suppose it is not your intention to settle in Vivey?"

"Why not?" replied he; "on the contrary, I intend to inhabit the chateau, and establish myself there definitely."

"What!" exclaimed Reine, laughing, "you neither drink nor hunt, and you intend to live in our woods! Why, my poor Monsieur, you will die of ennui."

"I shall have my books for companions; besides, solitude never has had any terrors for me."

The young girl shook her head incredulously.

"I shouldn't wonder," she continued, "if you do not even play at cards."

"Never; games of chance are repugnant to me."

"Take notice that I do not blame you," she replied, gayly, "but I must give you one piece of advice: don't speak in these neighborhoods of your dislike of hunting, cards, or good wine; our country folk would feel pity for you, and that would destroy your prestige."

Julien gazed at her with astonishment. She turned away to give directions to La Guite about the beds for her guests—then the supper went on silently. As soon as they had swallowed their last mouthful, the menservants repaired to their dormitory, situated in the buildings of the ancient forge. Reine Vincart rose also.

"This is the time when I put my father to bed—I am obliged to take leave of you, Monsieur de Buxieres. Guitote will conduct you to your room. For you, driver, I have had a bed made in a small room next to the furnace; you will be nice and warm. Good-night, gentlemen, sleep well!"

She turned away, and went to rejoin the paralytic sufferer, who, as she approached, manifested his joy by a succession of inarticulate sounds.

The room to which Guitiote conducted Julien was on the first floor, and had a cheerful, hospitable appearance. The walls were whitewashed; the chairs, table, and bed were of polished oak; a good fire of logs crackled in the fireplace, and between the opening of the white window-curtains could be seen a slender silver crescent of moon gliding among the flitting clouds. The young man went at once to his bed; but notwithstanding the fatigues of the day, sleep did not come to him. Through the partition he could hear the clear, sonorous voice of Reine singing her father to sleep with one of the popular ballads of the country, and while turning and twisting in the homespun linen sheets, scented with orrisroot, he could not help thinking of this young girl, so original in her ways, whose grace, energy, and frankness fascinated and shocked him at the same time. At last he dozed off; and when the morning stir awoke him, the sun was up and struggling through the foggy atmosphere.

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The sky had cleared during the night; there had been a frost, and the meadows were powdered white. The leaves, just nipped with the frost, were dropping softly to the ground, and formed little green heaps at the base of the trees. Julien dressed himself hurriedly, and descended to the courtyard, where the first thing he saw was the cabriolet, which had been brought in the early morning and which one of the farm-boys was in the act of sousing with water in the hope of freeing the hood and wheels from the thick mud which covered them. When he entered the diningroom, brightened by the rosy rays of the morning sun, he found Reine Vincart there before him. She was dressed in a yellow striped woolen skirt, and a jacket of white flannel carelessly belted at the waist. Her dark chestnut hair, parted down the middle and twisted into a loose knot behind, lay in ripples round her smooth, open forehead.

"Good-morning, Monsieur de Buxieres," said she, in her cordial tone, "did you sleep well? Yes? I am glad. You find me busy attending to household matters. My father is still in bed, and I am taking advantage of the fact to arrange his little corner. The doctor said he must not be put near the fire, so I have made a place for him here; he enjoys it immensely, and I arranged this nook to protect him from draughts."

And she showed him how she had put the big easy chair, padded with cushions, in the bright sunlight which streamed through the window, and shielded by the screens, one on each side. She noticed that Julien was examining, with some curiosity, the uncouth pictures from Epinal, with which the screens were covered.

"This," she explained, "is my own invention. My father is a little weak in the head, but he understands a good many things, although he can not talk about them. He used to get weary of sitting still all day in his chair, so I lined the screens with these pictures in order that he might have something to amuse him. He is as pleased as a child with the bright colors, and I explain the subjects to him. I don't tell him much at a time, for fear of fatiguing him. We have got now to Pyramus and Thisbe, so that we shall have plenty to occupy us before we reach the end."

She caught a pitying look from her guest which seemed to say: "The poor man may not last long enough to reach the end." Doubtless she had the same fear, for her dark eyes suddenly glistened, she sighed, and remained for some moments without speaking.

In the mean time the magpie, which Julien had seen the day before, was hopping around its mistress, like a familiar spirit; it even had the audacity to peck at her hair and then fly away, repeating, in its cracked voice:

"Reine, queen of the woods!"

"Why 'queen of the woods?'" asked Julien, coloring.



“Ah!” replied the young girl, “it is a nickname which the people around here give me, because I am so fond of the trees. I spend all the time I can in our woods, as much as I can spare from the work of the farm.

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"Margot has often heard my father call me by that name; she remembers it, and is always repeating it."

"Do you like living in this wild country?"

"Very much. I was born here, and I like it."

"But you have not always lived here?"

"No; my mother, who had lived in the city, placed me at school in her own country, in Dijon. I received there the education of a young lady, though there is not much to show for it now. I stayed there six years; then my mother died, my father fell ill, and I came home."

"And did you not suffer from so sudden a change?"

"Not at all. You see I am really by nature a country girl. I wish you might not have more trouble than I had, in getting accustomed to your new way of living, in the chateau at Vivey. But," she added, going toward the fire, "I think they are harnessing the horse, and you must be hungry. Your driver has already primed himself with some toast and white wine. I will not offer you the same kind of breakfast. I will get you some coffee and cream."

He bent his head in acquiescence, and she brought him the coffee herself, helping him to milk and toasted bread. He drank rapidly the contents of the cup, nibbled at a slice of toast, and then, turning to his hostess, said, with a certain degree of embarrassment:

"There is nothing left for me to do, Mademoiselle, but to express my most heartfelt thanks for your kind hospitality. It is a good omen for me to meet with such cordiality on my arrival in an unknown part of the country. May I ask you one more question?" he continued, looking anxiously at her; "why do you think it will be so difficult for me to get accustomed to the life they lead here?"

"Why?" replied she, shaking her head, "because, to speak frankly, Monsieur, you do not give me the idea of having much feeling for the country. You are not familiar with our ways; you will not be able to speak to the people in their language, and they will not understand yours—you will be, in their eyes, 'the city Monsieur,' whom they will mistrust and will try to circumvent. I should like to find that I am mistaken, but, at present, I have the idea that you will encounter difficulties down there of which you do not seem to have any anticipation—"

She was intercepted by the entrance of the driver, who was becoming impatient. The horse was in harness, and they were only waiting for M. de Buxieres. Julien rose, and after awkwardly placing a piece of silver in the hand of La Guite, took leave of Reine Vincart, who accompanied him to the threshold.

“Thanks, once more, Mademoiselle,” murmured he, “and au revoir, since we shall be neighbors.”

He held out his hand timidly and she took it with frank cordiality. Julien got into the cabriolet beside the driver, who began at once to belabor vigorously his mulish animal.

“Good journey and good luck, Monsieur,” cried Reine after him, and the vehicle sped joltingly away.

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CHAPTER III

CONSCIENCE HIGHER THAN THE LAW

On leaving La Thuiliere, the driver took the straight line toward the pasturelands of the Planche-au-Vacher.

According to the directions they had received from the people of the farm, they then followed a rocky road, which entailed considerable jolting for the travellers, but which led them without other difficulty to the bottom of a woody dell, where they were able to ford the stream. As soon as they had, with difficulty, ascended the opposite hill, the silvery fog that had surrounded them began to dissipate, and they distinguished a road close by, which led a winding course through the forest.

“Ah! now I see my way!” said the driver, “we have only to go straight on, and in twenty minutes we shall be at Vivey. This devil of a fog cuts into one’s skin like a bunch of needles. With your permission, Monsieur de Buxieres, and if it will not annoy you, I will light my pipe to warm myself.”

Now that he knew he was conducting the proprietor of the chateau, he repented having treated him so cavalierly the day before; he became obsequious, and endeavored to gain the good-will of his fare by showing himself as loquacious as he had before been cross and sulky. But Julien de Buxieres, too much occupied in observing the details of the country, or in ruminating over the impressions he had received during the morning, made but little response to his advances, and soon allowed the conversation to drop.

The sun’s rays had by this time penetrated the misty atmosphere, and the white frost had changed to diamond drops, which hung tremblingly on the leafless branches. A gleam of sunshine showed the red tints of the beech-trees, and the bright golden hue of the poplars, and the forest burst upon Julien in all the splendor of its autumnal trappings. The pleasant remembrance of Reine Vincart’s hospitality doubtless predisposed him to enjoy the charm of this sunshiny morning, for he became, perhaps for the first time in his life, suddenly alive to the beauty of this woodland scenery. By degrees, toward the left, the brushwood became less dense, and several gray buildings appeared scattered over the glistening prairie. Soon after appeared a park, surrounded by low, crumbling walls, then a group of smoky roofs, and finally, surmounting a massive clump of ash-trees, two round towers with tops shaped like extinguishers. The coachman pointed them out to the young man with the end of his whip.

“There is Vivey,” said he, “and here is your property, Monsieur de Buxieres.”

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Julien started, and, notwithstanding his alienation from worldly things, he could not repress a feeling of satisfaction when he reflected that, by legal right, he was about to become master of the woods, the fields, and the old homestead of which the many-pointed slate roofs gleamed in the distance. This satisfaction was mingled with intense curiosity, but it was also somewhat shadowed by a dim perspective of the technical details incumbent on his taking possession. No doubt he should be obliged, in the beginning, to make himself personally recognized, to show the workmen and servants of the chateau that the new owner was equal to the situation. Now, Julien was not, by nature, a man of action, and the delicately expressed fears of Reine Vincart made him uneasy in his mind. When the carriage, suddenly turning a corner, stopped in front of the gate of entrance, and he beheld, through the cast-iron railing, the long avenue of ash-trees, the grass-grown courtyard, the silent facade, his heart began to beat more rapidly, and his natural timidity again took possession of him.

"The gate is closed, and they don't seem to be expecting you," remarked the driver.

They dismounted. Noticing that the side door was half open, the coachman gave a vigorous pull on the chain attached to the bell. At the sound of the rusty clamor, a furious barking was heard from an adjoining outhouse, but no one inside the house seemed to take notice of the ringing.

"Come, let us get in all the same," said the coachman, giving another pull, and stealing a furtive look at his companion's disconcerted countenance.

He fastened his horse to the iron fence, and both passed through the side gate to the avenue, the dogs all the while continuing their uproar. Just as they reached the courtyard, the door opened and Manette Sejournant appeared on the doorstep.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said she, in a slow, drawling voice, "is it you who are making all this noise?"

The sight of this tall, burly woman, whose glance betokened both audacity and cunning, increased still more Julien's embarrassment. He advanced awkwardly, raised his hat and replied, almost as if to excuse himself:

"I beg pardon, Madame—I am the cousin and heir of the late Claude de Buxieres. I have come to install myself in the chateau, and I had sent word of my intention to Monsieur Arbillot, the notary—I am surprised he did not notify you."

"Ah! it is you, Monsieur Julien de Buxieres!" exclaimed Madame Sejournant, scrutinizing the newcomer with a mingling of curiosity and scornful surprise which completed the young man's discomfiture. "Monsieur Arbillot was here yesterday—he waited for you all day, and as you did not come, he went away at nightfall."

“I presume you were in my cousin's service?” said Julien, amiably, being desirous from the beginning to evince charitable consideration with regard to his relative's domestic affairs.

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"Yes, Monsieur," replied Manette, with dignified sadness; "I attended poor Monsieur de Buxieres twenty-six years, and can truly say I served him with devotion! But now I am only staying here in charge of the seals—I and my son Claudet. We have decided to leave as soon as the notary does not want us any more."

"I regret to hear it, Madame," replied Julien, who was beginning to feel uncomfortable. "There must be other servants around—I should be obliged if you would have our carriage brought into the yard. And then, if you will kindly show us the way, we will go into the house, for I am desirous to feel myself at home—and my driver would not object to some refreshment."

"I will send the cowboy to open the gate," replied the housekeeper. "If you will walk this way, gentlemen, I will take you into the only room that can be used just now, on account of the seals on the property."

Passing in front of them, she directed her steps toward the kitchen, and made way for them to pass into the smoky room, where a small servant was making coffee over a clear charcoal fire. As the travellers entered, the manly form of Claudet Sejourant was outlined against the bright light of the window at his back.

"My son," said Manette, with a meaning side look, especially for his benefit, "here is Monsieur de Buxieres, come to take possession of his inheritance."

The grand chasserot attempted a silent salutation, and then the young men took a rapid survey of each other.

Julien de Buxieres was startled by the unexpected presence of so handsome a young fellow, robust, intelligent, and full of energy, whose large brown eyes gazed at him with a kind of surprised and pitying compassion which was very hard for Julien to bear. He turned uneasily away, making a lame excuse of ordering some wine for his coachman; and while Manette, with an air of martyrdom, brought a glass and a half-empty bottle, Claudet continued his surprised and inquiring examination of the legal heir of Claude de Buxieres.

The pale, slight youth, buttoned up in a close-fitting, long frock-coat, which gave him the look of a priest, looked so unlike any of the Buxieres of the elder branch that it seemed quite excusable to hesitate about the relationship. Claudet maliciously took advantage of the fact, and began to interrogate his would-be deposer by pretending to doubt his identity.

"Are you certainly Monsieur Julien de Buxieres?" asked he, surveying him suspiciously from head to foot.

"Do you take me for an impostor?" exclaimed the young man.

“I do not say that,” returned Claudet, crossly, “but after all, you do not carry your name written on your face, and, by Jove! as guardian of the seals, I have some responsibility—I want information, that is all!”

Angry at having to submit to these inquiries in the presence of the coachman who had brought him from Langres, Julien completely lost control of his temper.

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"Do you require me to show my papers?" he inquired, in a haughty, ironical tone of voice.

Manette, foreseeing a disturbance, hastened to interpose, in her hypocritical, honeyed voice:

"Leave off, Claudet, let Monsieur alone. He would not be here, would he, if he hadn't a right? As to asking him to prove his right, that is not our business—it belongs to the justice and the notary. You had better, my son, go over to Auberive, and ask the gentlemen to come to-morrow to raise the seals."

At this moment, the cowboy, who had been sent to open the gate, entered the kitchen.

"The carriage is in the courtyard," said he, "and Monsieur's boxes are in the hall. Where shall I put them, Madame Sejourmant?"

Julien's eyes wandered from Manette to the young boy, with an expression of intense annoyance and fatigue.

"Why, truly," said Manette, "as a matter of fact, there is only the room of our deceased master, where the seals have been released. Would Monsieur object to taking up his quarters there?"

"I am willing," muttered Julien; "have my luggage carried up there, and give orders for it to be made ready immediately."

The housekeeper gave a sign, and the boy and the servant disappeared.

"Madame," resumed Julien, turning toward Manette, "if I understand you right, I can no longer reckon upon your services to take care of my household. Could you send me some one to supply your place?"

"Oh! as to that matter," replied the housekeeper, still in her wheedling voice, "a day or two more or less! I am not so very particular, and I don't mind attending to the house as long as I remain. At what hour would you wish to dine, Monsieur?"

"At the hour most convenient for you," responded Julien, quickly, anxious to conciliate her; "you will serve my meals in my room."

As the driver had now finished his bottle, they left the room together.

As soon as the door was closed, Manette and her son exchanged sarcastic looks.

"He a Buxieres!" growled Claudet. "He looks like a student priest in vacation."

“He is an ‘ecrigneule’,” returned Manette, shrugging her shoulders.

‘Ecrigneule’ is a word of the Langrois dialect, signifying a puny, sickly, effeminate being. In the mouth of Madame Sejournant, this picturesque expression acquired a significant amount of scornful energy.

“And to think,” sighed Claudet, twisting his hands angrily in his bushy hair, “that such a slip of a fellow is going to be master here!”

“Master?” repeated Manette, shaking her head, “we’ll see about that! He does not know anything at all, and has not what is necessary for ordering about. In spite of his fighting-cock airs, he hasn’t two farthings’ worth of spunk—it would be easy enough to lead him by the nose. Do you see, Claudet, if we were to manage properly, instead of throwing the handle after the blade, we should be able before two weeks are, over to have rain or sunshine here, just as we pleased. We must only have a little more policy.”

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"What do you mean by policy, mother?"

"I mean—letting things drag quietly on—not breaking all the windows at the first stroke. The lad is as dazed as a young bird that has fallen from its nest. What we have to do is to help him to get control of himself, and accustom him not to do without us. As soon as we have made ourselves necessary to him, he will be at our feet."

"Would you wish me to become the servant of the man who has cheated me out of my inheritance?" protested Claudet, indignantly.

"His servant—no, indeed! but his companion—why not? And it would be so easy if you would only make up your mind to it, Claude. I tell you again, he is not ill-natured—he looks like a man who is up to his neck in devotion. When he once feels we are necessary to his comfort, and that some reliable person, like the curate, for example, were to whisper to him that you are the son of Claudet de Buxieres, he would have scruples, and at last, half on his own account, and half for the sake of religion, he would begin to treat you like a relative."

"No;" said Claudet, firmly, "these tricky ways do not suit me. Monsieur Arbillot proposed yesterday that I should do what you advise. He even offered to inform this gentleman of my relationship to Claude de Buxieres. I refused, and forbade the notary to open his mouth on the subject. What! should I play the part of a craven hound before this younger son whom my father detested, and beg for a portion of the inheritance? Thank you! I prefer to take myself out of the way at once!"

"You prefer to have your mother beg her bread at strangers' doors!" replied Manette, bitterly, shedding tears of rage.

"I have already told you, mother, that when one has a good pair of arms, and the inclination to use them, one has no need to beg one's bread. Enough said! I am going to Auberive to notify the justice and the notary."

While Claudet was striding across the woods, the boy carried the luggage of the newly arrived traveller into the chamber on the first floor, and Zelig, the small servant, put the sheets on the bed, dusted the room, and lighted the fire. In a few minutes, Julien was alone in his new domicile, and began to open his boxes and valises. The chimney, which had not been used since the preceding winter, smoked unpleasantly, and the damp logs only blackened instead of burning. The boxes lay wide open, and the room of the deceased Claude de Buxieres had the uncomfortable aspect of a place long uninhabited. Julien had seated himself in one of the large armchairs, covered in Utrecht velvet, and endeavored to rekindle the dying fire. He felt at loose ends and discouraged, and had no longer the courage to arrange his clothes in the open wardrobes, which stood open, emitting a strong odor of decaying mold.

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The slight breath of joyous and renewed life which had animated him on leaving the Vincart farm, had suddenly evaporated. His anticipations collapsed in the face of these bristling realities, among which he felt his isolation more deeply than ever before. He recalled the cordiality of Reine's reception, and how she had spoken of the difficulties he should have to encounter. How little he had thought that her forebodings would come true the very same day! The recollection of the cheerful and hospitable interior of La Thuiliere contrasted painfully with his cold, bare Vivey mansion, tenanted solely by hostile domestics. Who were these people—this Manette Sejournant with her treacherous smile, and this fellow Claudet, who had, at the very first, subjected him to such offensive questioning? Why did they seem so ill-disposed toward him? He felt as if he were completely enveloped in an atmosphere of contradiction and ill-will. He foresaw what an amount of quiet but steady opposition he should have to encounter from these subordinates, and he became alarmed at the prospect of having to display so much energy in order to establish his authority in the chateau. He, who had pictured to himself a calm and delightful solitude, wherein he could give himself up entirely to his studious and contemplative tastes. What a contrast to the reality!

Rousing himself at last, he proceeded mechanically to arrange his belongings in the room, formerly inhabited by his cousin de Buxieres. He had hardly finished when Zelig made her appearance with some plates and a tablecloth, and began to lay the covers. Seeing the fire had gone out, the little servant uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh!" cried she, "so the wood didn't flare!"

He gazed at her as if she were talking Hebrew, and it was at least a minute before he understood that by "flare" she meant kindle.

"Well, well!" she continued, "I'll go and fetch some splinters."

She returned in a few moments, with a basket filled with the large splinters thrown off by the woodchoppers in straightening the logs: she piled these up on the andirons, and then, applying her mouth vigorously to a long hollow tin tube, open at both ends, which she carried with her, soon succeeded in starting a steady flame.

"Look there!" said she, in a tone implying a certain degree of contempt for the "city Monsieur" who did not even know how to keep up a fire, "isn't that clever? Now I must lay the cloth."

While she went about her task, arranging the plates, the water-bottle, and glasses symmetrically around the table, Julien tried to engage her in conversation. But the little maiden, either because she had been cautioned beforehand, or because she did not very well comprehend M. de Buxieres's somewhat literary style of French, would answer only in monosyllables, or else speak only in patois, so that Julien had to give up

the idea of getting any information out of her. Certainly, Mademoiselle Vincart was right in saying that he did not know the language of these people.

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He ate without appetite the breakfast on which Manette had employed all her culinary art, barely tasted the roast partridge, and to Zélie's great astonishment, mingled the old Burgundy wine with a large quantity of water.

"You will inform Madame Sejournant," said he to the girl, as he folded his napkin, "that I am not a great eater, and that one dish will suffice me in future."

He left her to clear away, and went out to look at the domain which he was to call his own. It did not take him very long. The twenty or thirty white houses, which constituted the village and lay sleeping in the wooded hollow like eggs in a nest, formed a curious circular line around the chateau. In a few minutes he had gone the whole length of it, and the few people he met gave him only a passing glance, in which curiosity seemed to have more share than any hospitable feeling. He entered the narrow church under the patronage of Our Lady; the gray light which entered through the moldy shutters showed a few scattered benches of oak, and the painted wooden altar. He knelt down and endeavored to collect his thoughts, but the rude surroundings of this rustic sanctuary did not tend to comfort his troubled spirit, and he became conscious of a sudden withering of all religious fervor. He turned and left the place, taking a path that led through the forest. It did not interest him more than the village; the woods spoke no language which his heart could understand; he could not distinguish an ash from an oak, and all the different plants were included by him under one general term of "weeds"; but he needed bodily fatigue and violent physical agitation to dissipate the overpowering feeling of discouragement that weighed down his spirits. He walked for several hours without seeing anything, nearly got lost, and did not reach home till after dark. Once more the little servant appeared with his meal, which he ate in an abstracted manner, without even asking whether he were eating veal or mutton; then he went immediately to bed, and fell into an uneasy sleep. And thus ended his first day.

The next morning, about nine o'clock, he was informed that the justice of the peace, the notary, and the clerk, were waiting for him below. He hastened down and found the three functionaries busy conferring in a low voice with Manette and Claudet. The conversation ceased suddenly upon his arrival, and during the embarrassing silence that followed, all eyes were directed toward Julien, who saluted the company and delivered to the justice the documents proving his identity, begging him to proceed without delay to the legal breaking of the seals. They accordingly began operations, and went through all the house without interruption, accompanied by Claudet, who stood stiff and sullen behind the justice, taking advantage of every little opportunity to testify his dislike and ill-feeling toward the legal heir of Claude de Buxieres. Toward eleven o'clock, the

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proceedings came to an end, the papers were signed, and Julien was regularly invested with his rights. But the tiresome formalities were not yet over: he had to invite the three officials to breakfast. This event, however, had been foreseen by Manette. Since early morning she had been busy preparing a bountiful repast, and had even called Julien de Buxieres aside in order to instruct him in the hospitable duties which his position and the customs of society imposed upon him.

As they entered the dining-room, young de Buxieres noticed that covers were laid for five people; he began to wonder who the fifth guest could be, when an accidental remark of the clerk showed him that the unknown was no other than Claudet. The fact was that Manette could not bear the idea that her son, who had always sat at table with the late Claude de Buxieres, should be consigned to the kitchen in presence of these distinguished visitors from Auberive, and had deliberately laid a place for him at the master's table, hoping that the latter would not dare put any public affront upon Claudet. She was not mistaken in her idea. Julien, anxious to show a conciliatory spirit, and making an effort to quell his own repugnance, approached the 'grand chasserot', who was standing at one side by himself, and invited him to take his seat at the table.

"Thank you," replied Claudet, coldly, "I have breakfasted." So saying, he turned his back on M. de Buxieres, who returned to the hall, vexed and disconcerted.

The repast was abundant, and seemed of interminable length to Julien. The three guests, whose appetites had been sharpened by their morning exercise, did honor to Madame Sejournant's cooking; they took their wine without water, and began gradually to thaw under the influence of their host's good Burgundy; evincing their increased liveliness by the exchange of heavy country witticisms, or relating noisy and interminable stories of their hunting adventures. Their conversation was very trying to Julien's nerves. Nevertheless, he endeavored to fulfil his duties as master of the house, throwing in a word now and then, so as to appear interested in their gossip, but he ate hardly a mouthful. His features had a pinched expression, and every now and then he caught himself trying to smother a yawn. His companions at the table could not understand a young man of twenty-eight years who drank nothing but water, scorned all enjoyment in eating, and only laughed forcedly under compulsion. At last, disturbed by the continued taciturnity of their host, they rose from the table sooner than their wont, and prepared to take leave. Before their departure, Arbillet the notary, passed his arm familiarly through that of Julien and led him into an adjoining room, which served as billiard-hall and library.

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"Monsieur de Buxieres," said he, pointing to a pile of law papers heaped upon the green cloth of the table; "see what I have prepared for you; you will find there all the titles and papers relating to the real estate, pictures, current notes, and various matters of your inheritance. You had better keep them under lock and key, and study them at your leisure. You will find them very interesting. I need hardly say," he added, "that I am at your service for any necessary advice or explanation. But, in respect to any minor details, you can apply to Claudet Sejournant, who is very intelligent in such matters, and a good man of business. And, by the way, Monsieur de Buxieres, will you allow me to commend the young man especially to your kindly consideration."

But Julien interrupted him with an imperious gesture, and replied, frowning angrily:

"If you please, Maitre Arbillot, we will not enter upon that subject. I have already tried my best to show a kindly feeling toward Monsieur Claudet, but I have been only here twenty-four hours, and he has already found opportunities for affronting me twice. I beg you not to speak of him again."

The notary, who was just lighting his pipe, stopped suddenly. Moved by a feeling of good-fellowship for the 'grand chasserot', who had, however, enjoined him to silence, he had it on the tip of his tongue to inform Julien of the facts concerning the parentage of Claudet de Buxieres; but, however much he wished to render Claudet a service, he was still more desirous of respecting the feelings of his client; so, between the hostility of one party and the backwardness of the other, he chose the wise part of inaction.

"That is sufficient, Monsieur de Buxieres," replied he, "I will not press the matter."

Thereupon he saluted his client, and went to rejoin the justice and the clerk, and the three comrades wended their way to Auberive through the woods, discussing the incidents of the breakfast, and the peculiarities of the new proprietor.

"This de Buxieres," said M. Destourbet, "does not at all resemble his deceased cousin Claude!"

"I can quite understand why the two families kept apart from each other," observed the notary, jocosely.

"Poor 'chasserot'!" whined Seurrot the clerk, whom the wine had rendered tender-hearted; "he will not have a penny. I pity him with all my heart!"

As soon as the notary had departed, Julien came to the determination of transforming into a study the hall where he had been conferring with Maitre Arbillot, which was dignified with the title of "library," although it contained at the most but a few hundred odd volumes. The hall was spacious, and lighted by two large windows opening on the garden; the floor was of oak, and there was a great fireplace where the largest logs

used in a country in which the wood costs nothing could find ample room to blaze and crackle. It took the young man several days to make the necessary

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changes, and during that time he enjoyed a respite from the petty annoyances worked by the steady hostility of Manette Sejournant and her son. To the great indignation of the inhabitants of the chateau, he packed off the massive billiard-table, on which Claude de Buxieres had so often played in company with his chosen friends, to the garret; after which the village carpenter was instructed to make the bookshelves ready for the reception of Julien's own books, which were soon to arrive by express. When he had got through with these labors, he turned his attention to the documents placed in his hands by the notary, endeavoring to find out by himself the nature of his revenues. He thought this would be a very easy matter, but he soon found that it was encumbered with inextricable difficulties.

A large part of the products of the domain consisted of lumber ready for sale. Claude de Buxieres had been in the habit of superintending, either personally or through his intermediate agents, one half of the annual amount of lumber felled for market, the sale of which was arranged with the neighboring forge owners by mutual agreement; the other half was disposed of by notarial act. This latter arrangement was clear and comprehensible; the price of sale and the amounts falling due were both clearly indicated in the deed. But it was quite different with the bargains made by the owner himself, which were often credited by notes payable at sight, mostly worded in confused terms, unintelligible to any but the original writer. Julien became completely bewildered among these various documents, the explanations in which were harder to understand than conundrums. Although greatly averse to following the notary's advice as to seeking Claudet's assistance, he found himself compelled to do so, but was met by such laconic and surly answers that he concluded it would be more dignified on his part to dispense with the services of one who was so badly disposed toward him. He therefore resolved to have recourse to the debtors themselves, whose names he found, after much difficulty, in the books. These consisted mostly of peasants of the neighborhood, who came to the chateau at his summons; but as soon as they came into Julien's presence, they discovered, with that cautious perception which is an instinct with rustic minds, that before them stood a man completely ignorant of the customs of the country, and very poorly informed on Claude de Buxieres's affairs. They made no scruple of mystifying this "city gentleman," by means of ambiguous statements and cunning reticence. The young man could get no enlightenment from them; all he clearly understood was, that they were making fun of him, and that he was not able to cope with these country bumpkins, whose shrewdness would have done honor to the most experienced lawyer.

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After a few days he became discouraged and disgusted. He could see nothing but trouble ahead; he seemed surrounded by either open enemies or people inclined to take advantage of him. It was plain that all the population of the village looked upon him as an intruder, a troublesome master, a stranger whom they would like to intimidate and send about his business. Manette Sejournant, who was always talking about going, still remained in the chateau, and was evidently exerting her influence to keep her son also with her. The fawning duplicity of this woman was unbearable to Julien; he had not the energy necessary either to subdue her, or to send her away, and she appeared every morning before him with a string of hypocritical grievances, and opposing his orders with steady, irritating inertia. It seemed as if she were endeavoring to render his life at Vivey hateful to him, so that he would be compelled finally to beat a retreat.

One morning in November he had reached such a state of moral fatigue and depression that, as he sat listlessly before the library fire, the question arose in his mind whether it would not be better to rent the chateau, place the property in the hands of a manager, and take himself and his belongings back to Nancy, to his little room in the Rue Stanislaus, where, at any rate, he could read, meditate, or make plans for the future without being every moment tormented by miserable, petty annoyances. His temper was becoming soured, his nerves were unstrung, and his mind was so disturbed that he fancied he had none but enemies around him. A cloudy melancholy seemed to invade his brain; he was seized with a sudden fear that he was about to have an attack of persecution-phobia, and began to feel his pulse and interrogate his sensations to see whether he could detect any of the premonitory symptoms.

While he was immersing himself in this unwholesome atmosphere of hypochondria, the sound of a door opening and shutting made him start; he turned quickly around, saw a young woman approaching and smiling at him, and at last recognized Reine Vincart.

She wore the crimped linen cap and the monk's hood in use among the peasants of the richer class. Her wavy, brown hair, simply parted in front, fell in rebellious curls from under the border of her cap, of which the only decoration was a bow of black ribbon; the end floating gracefully over her shoulders. The sharp November air had imparted a delicate rose tint to her pale complexion, and additional vivacity to her luminous, dark eyes.

"Good-morning, Monsieur de Buxieres," said she, in her clear, pleasantly modulated voice; "I think you may remember me? It is not so long since we saw each other at the farm."

"Mademoiselle Vincart!" exclaimed Julien. "Why, certainly I remember you!"

He drew a chair toward the fire, and offered it to her. This charming apparition of his cordial hostess at La Thuiliere evoked the one pleasant remembrance in his mind since his arrival in Vivey. It shot, like a ray of sunlight, across the heavy fog of despair which

had enveloped the new master of the chateau. It was, therefore, with real sincerity that he repeated:

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"I both know you and am delighted to see you. I ought to have called upon you before now, to thank you for your kind hospitality, but I have had so much to do, and," his face clouding over, "so many annoyances!"

"Really?" said she, softly, gazing pityingly at him; "you must not take offence, but, it is easy to see you have been worried! Your features are drawn and you have an anxious look. Is it that the air of Vivey does not agree with you?"

"It is not the air," replied Julien, in an irritated tone, "it is the people who do not agree with me. And, indeed," sighed he, "I do not think I agree any better with them. But I need not annoy other persons merely because I am annoyed myself! Mademoiselle Vincart, what can I do to be of service to you? Have you anything to ask me?"

"Not at all!" exclaimed Reine, with a frank smile; "I not only have nothing to ask from you, but I have brought something for you—six hundred francs for wood we had bought from the late Monsieur de Buxieres, during the sale of the Ronces forest." She drew from under her cloak a little bag of gray linen, containing gold, five-franc pieces and bank-notes. "Will you be good enough to verify the amount?" continued she, emptying the bag upon the table; "I think it is correct. You must have somewhere a memorandum of the transaction in writing."

Julien began to look through the papers, but he got bewildered with the number of rough notes jotted down on various slips of paper, until at last, in an impatient fit of vexation, he flung the whole bundle away, scattering the loose sheets all over the floor.

"Who can find anything in such a chaos?" he exclaimed. "I can't see my way through it, and when I try to get information from the people here, they seem to have an understanding among themselves to leave me under a wrong impression, or even to make my uncertainties still greater! Ah! Mademoiselle Reine, you were right! I do not understand the ways of your country folk. Every now and then I am tempted to leave everything just as it stands, and get away from this village, where the people mistrust me and treat me like an enemy!"

Reine gazed at him with a look of compassionate surprise. Stooping quietly down, she picked up the scattered papers, and while putting them in order on the table, she happened to see the one relating to her own business.

"Here, Monsieur de Buxieres," said she, "here is the very note you were looking for. You seem to be somewhat impatient. Our country folk are not so bad as you think; only they do not yield easily to new influences. The beginning is always difficult for them. I know something about it myself. When I returned from Dijon to take charge of the affairs at La Thuiliere, I had no more experience than you, Monsieur, and I had great difficulty in accomplishing anything. Where should we be now, if I had suffered myself to be discouraged, like you, at the very outset?"

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Julien raised his eyes toward the speaker, coloring with embarrassment to hear himself lectured by this young peasant girl, whose ideas, however, had much more virility than his own.

"You reason like a man, Mademoiselle Vincart," remarked he, admiringly, "pray, how old are you?"

"Twenty-two years; and you, Monsieur de Buxieres?"

"I shall soon be twenty-eight."

"There is not much difference between us; still, you are the older, and what I have done, you can do also."

"Oh!" sighed he, "you have a love of action. I have a love of repose—I do not like to act."

"So much the worse!" replied Reine, very decidedly. "A man ought to show more energy. Come now, Monsieur de Buxieres, will you allow me to speak frankly to you? If you wish people to come to you, you must first get out of yourself and go to seek them; if you expect your neighbor to show confidence and good-will toward you, you must be open and good-natured toward him."

"That plan has not yet succeeded with two persons around here," replied Julien, shaking his head.

"Which persons?"

"The Sejournants, mother and son. I tried to be pleasant with Claudet, and received from both only rebuffs and insolence."

"Oh! as to Claudet," resumed she, impulsively, "he is excusable. You can not expect he will be very gracious in his reception of the person who has supplanted him—"

"Supplanted?—I do not understand."

"What!" exclaimed Reine, "have they not told you anything, then? That is wrong. Well, at the risk of meddling in what does not concern me, I think it is better to put you in possession of the facts: Your deceased cousin never was married, but he had a child all the same—Claudet is his son, and he intended that he should be his heir also. Every one around the country knows that, for Monsieur de Buxieres made no secret of it."

"Claudet, the son of Claude de Buxieres?" ejaculated Julien, with amazement.



"Yes; and if the deceased had had the time to make his will, you would not be here now. But," added the young girl, coloring, "don't tell Claudet I have spoken to you about it. I have been talking here too long. Monsieur de Buxieres, will you have the goodness to reckon up your money and give me a receipt?"

She had risen, and Julien gazed wonderingly at the pretty country girl who had shown herself so sensible, so resolute, and so sincere. He bent his head, collected the money on the table, scribbled hastily a receipt and handed it to Reine.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," said he, "you are the first person who has been frank with me, and I am grateful to you for it."

"Au revoir, Monsieur de Buxieres."

She had already gained the door while he made an awkward attempt to follow her. She turned toward him with a smile on her lips and in her eyes.

"Come, take courage!" she added, and then vanished.

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Julien went back dreamily, and sat down again before the hearth. The revelation made by Reine Vincart had completely astounded him. Such was his happy inexperience of life, that he had not for a moment suspected the real position of Manette and her son at the chateau. And it was this young girl who had opened his eyes to the fact! He experienced a certain degree of humiliation in having had so little perception. Now that Reine's explanation enabled him to view the matter from a different standpoint, he found Claudet's attitude toward him both intelligible and excusable. In fact, the lad was acting in accordance with a very legitimate feeling of mingled pride and anger. After all, he really was Claude de Buxieres's son—a natural son, certainly, but one who had been implicitly acknowledged both in private and in public by his father. If the latter had had time to draw up the incomplete will which had been found, he would, to all appearances, have made Claudet his heir. Therefore, the fortune of which Julien had become possessed, he owed to some unexpected occurrence, a mere chance. Public opinion throughout the entire village tacitly recognized and accepted the 'grand chasserot' as son of the deceased, and if this recognition had been made legally, he would have been rightful owner of half the property.

"Now that I have been made acquainted with this position of affairs, what is my duty?" asked Julien of himself. Devout in feeling and in practice, he was also very scrupulous in all matters of conscience, and the reply was not long in coming: that both religion and uprightness commanded him to indemnify Claudet for the wrong caused to him by the carelessness of Claude de Buxieres. Reine had simply told him the facts without attempting to give him any advice, but it was evident that, according to her loyal and energetic way of thinking, there was injustice to be repaired. Julien was conscious that by acting to that effect he would certainly gain the esteem and approbation of his amiable hostess of La Thuiliere, and he felt a secret satisfaction in the idea. He rose suddenly, and, leaving the library, went to the kitchen, where Manette Sejournant was busy preparing the breakfast.

"Where is your son?" said he. "I wish to speak with him."

Manette looked inquiringly at him.

"My son," she replied, "is in the garden, fixing up a box to take away his little belongings in—he doesn't want to stay any longer at other peoples' expense. And, by the way, Monsieur de Buxieres, have the goodness to provide yourself with a servant to take my place; we shall not finish the week here."

Without making any reply, Julien went out by the door, leading to the garden, and discovered Claudet really occupied in putting together the sides of a packing-case. Although the latter saw the heir of the de Buxieres family approaching, he continued driving in the nails without appearing to notice his presence.

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“Monsieur Claudet,” said Julien, “can you spare me a few minutes? I should like to talk to you.”

Claudet raised his head, hesitated for a moment, then, throwing away his hammer and putting on his loose jacket, muttered:

“I am at your service.”

They left the outhouse together, and entered an avenue of leafy lime-trees, which skirted the banks of the stream.

“Monsieur,” said Julien, stopping in the middle of the walk, “excuse me if I venture on a delicate subject—but I must do so—now that I know all.”

“Beg pardon—what do you know?” demanded Claudet, reddening.

“I know that you are the son of my cousin de Buxieres,” replied the young man with considerable emotion.

The ‘grand chasserot’ knitted his brows.

“Ah!” said he, bitterly, “my mother’s tongue has been too long, or else that blind magpie of a notary has been gossiping, notwithstanding my instructions.”

“No; neither your mother nor Maitre Arbillot has been speaking to me. What I know I have learned from a stranger, and I know also that you would be master here if Claude de Buxieres had taken the precaution to write out his will. His negligence on that point has been a wrong to you, which it is my duty to repair.”

“What’s that!” exclaimed Claudet. Then he muttered between his teeth: “You owe me nothing. The law is on your side.”

“I am not in the habit of consulting the law when it is a question of duty. Besides, Monsieur de Buxieres treated you openly as his son; if he had done what he ought, made a legal acknowledgment, you would have the right, even in default of a will, to one half of his patrimony. This half I come to offer to you, and beg of you to accept it.”

Claudet was astonished, and opened his great, fierce brown eyes with amazement. The proposal seemed so incredible that he thought he must be dreaming, and mistrusted what he heard.

“What! You offer me half the inheritance?” faltered he.

“Yes; and I am ready to give you a certified deed of relinquishment as soon as you wish
—”

Claudet interrupted him with a violent shrug of the shoulders.

"I make but one condition," pursued Julien.

"What is it?" asked Claudet, still on the defensive.

"That you will continue to live here, with me, as in your father's time."

Claudet was nearly overcome by this last suggestion, but a lingering feeling of doubt and a kind of innate pride prevented him from giving way, and arrested the expression of gratitude upon his lips.

"What you propose is very generous, Monsieur," said he, "but you have not thought much about it, and later you might regret it. If I were to stay here, I should be a restraint upon you—"

"On the contrary, you would be rendering me a service, for I feel myself incapable of managing the property," replied Julien, earnestly. Then, becoming more confidential as his conscience was relieved of its burden, he continued, pleasantly: "You see I am not vain about admitting the fact. Come, cousin, don't be more proud than I am. Accept freely what I offer with hearty goodwill!"

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As he concluded these words, he felt his hand seized, and affectionately pressed in a strong, robust grip.

“You are a true de Buxieres!” exclaimed Claudet, choking with emotion. “I accept—thanks—but, what have I to give you in exchange?—nothing but my friendship; but that will be as firm as my grip, and will last all my life.”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Amusements they offered were either wearisome or repugnant
Dreaded the monotonous regularity of conjugal life
Fawning duplicity
Had not been spoiled by Fortune's gifts
Hypocritical grievances
I am not in the habit of consulting the law
It does not mend matters to give way like that
Opposing his orders with steady, irritating inertia
There are some men who never have had any childhood
To make a will is to put one foot into the grave
Toast and white wine (for breakfast)
Vague hope came over him that all would come right

A WOODLAND QUEEN

(‘Reine des Bois’)

By Andre Theuriet

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER IV

THE DAWN OF LOVE

Winter had come, and with it all the inclement accompaniments usual in this bleak and bitter mountainous country: icy rains, which, mingled with sleet, washed away whirlpools of withered leaves that the swollen streams tossed noisily into the ravines; sharp, cutting winds from the north, bleak frosts hardening the earth and vitrifying the cascades; abundant falls of snow, lasting sometimes an entire week. The roads had become impassable. A thick, white crust covered alike the pasture-lands, the stony levels, and the wooded slopes, where the branches creaked under the weight of their snowy burdens. A profound silence encircled the village, which seemed buried under

the successive layers of snowdrifts. Only here and there, occasionally, did a thin line of blue smoke, rising from one of the white roofs, give evidence of any latent life among the inhabitants. The Chateau de Buxieres stood in the midst of a vast carpet of snow on which the sabots of the villagers had outlined a narrow path, leading from the outer steps to the iron gate. Inside, fires blazed on all the hearths, which, however, did not modify the frigid atmosphere of the rudely-built upper rooms.

Julien de Buxieres was freezing, both physically and morally, in his abode. His generous conduct toward Claudet had, in truth, gained him the affection of the 'grand chasserot', made Manette as gentle as a lamb, and caused a revulsion of feeling in his favor throughout the village; but, although his material surroundings had become more congenial, he still felt around him the chill of intellectual solitude. The days also seemed longer since Claudet had taken upon himself the management of all details. Julien found that re-reading his favorite books was not sufficient occupation for the weary hours that dragged slowly along between the rising and the setting of the sun. The gossipings of Manette, the hunting stories of Claudet had no interest for young de Buxieres, and the acquaintances he endeavored to make outside left only a depressing feeling of ennui and disenchantment.

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His first visit had been made to the cure of Vivey, where he hoped to meet with some intellectual resources, and a tone of conversation more in harmony with his tastes. In this expectation, also, he had been disappointed. The Abbe Pernot was an amiable quinquagenarian, and a 'bon vivant', whose mind inclined more naturally toward the duties of daily life than toward meditation or contemplative studies. The ideal did not worry him in the least; and when he had said his mass, read his breviary, confessed the devout sinners and visited the sick, he gave the rest of his time to profane but respectable amusements. He was of robust temperament, with a tendency to corpulency, which he fought against by taking considerable exercise; his face was round and good-natured, his calm gray eyes reflected the tranquillity and uprightness of his soul, and his genial nature was shown in his full smiling mouth, his thick, wavy, gray hair, and his quick and cordial gestures.

When Julien was ushered into the presbytery, he found the cure installed in a small room, which he used for working in, and which was littered up with articles bearing a very distant connection to his pious calling: nets for catching larks, hoops and other nets for fishing, stuffed birds, and a collection of coleopterx. At the other end of the room stood a dusty bookcase, containing about a hundred volumes, which seemed to have been seldom consulted. The Abbe, sitting on a low chair in the chimney-corner, his cassock raised to his knees, was busy melting glue in an old earthen pot.

"Aha, good-day! Monsieur de Buxieres," said he in his rich, jovial voice, "you have caught me in an occupation not very canonical; but what of it? As Saint James says: 'The bow can not be always bent.' I am preparing some lime-twigs, which I shall place in the Bois des Ronces as soon as the snow is melted. I am not only a fisher of souls, but I endeavor also to catch birds in my net, not so much for the purpose of varying my diet, as of enriching my collection!"

"You have a great deal of spare time on your hands, then?" inquired Julien, with some surprise.

"Well, yes—yes—quite a good deal. The parish is not very extensive, as you have doubtless noticed; my parishioners are in the best possible health, thank God! and they live to be very old. I have barely two or three marriages in a year, and as many burials, so that, you see, one must fill up one's time somehow to escape the sin of idleness. Every man must have a hobby. Mine is ornithology; and yours, Monsieur de Buxieres?"

Julien was tempted to reply: "Mine, for the moment, is ennui." He was just in the mood to unburden himself to the cure as to the mental thirst that was drying up his faculties, but a certain instinct warned him that the Abbe was not a man to comprehend the subtle complexities of his psychological condition, so he contented himself with replying, briefly:

"I read a great deal. I have, over there in the chateau, a pretty fair collection of historical and religious works, and they are at your service, Monsieur le Cure!"

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"A thousand thanks," replied the Abbe Pernot, making a slight grimace; "I am not much of a reader, and my little stock is sufficient for my needs. You remember what is said in the Imitation: 'Si scires totam Bibliam exterius et omnium philosophorum dicta, quid totum prodesset sine caritate Dei et gratia?' Besides, it gives me a headache to read too steadily. I require exercise in the open air. Do you hunt or fish, Monsieur de Buxieres?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"So much the worse for you. You will find the time hang very heavily on your hands in this country, where there are so few sources of amusement. But never fear! You can not be always reading, and when the fine weather comes you will yield to the temptation; all the more likely because you have Claudet Sejournant with you. A jolly fellow he is; there is not one like him for killing a snipe or sticking a trout! Our trout here on the Aubette, Monsieur de Buxieres, are excellent—of the salmon kind, and very meaty."

Then came an interval of silence. The Abbe began to suspect that this conversation was not one of profound interest to his visitor, and he resumed:

"Speaking of Claudet, Monsieur, allow me to offer you my congratulations. You have acted in a most Christian-like and equitable manner, in making amends for the inconceivable negligence of the deceased Claude de Buxieres. Then, on the other hand, Claudet deserves what you have done for him. He is a good fellow, a little too quick-tempered and violent perhaps, but he has a heart of gold. Ah! it would have been no use for the deceased to deny it—the blood of de Buxieres runs in his veins!"

"If public rumor is to be believed," said Julien timidly, rising to go, "my deceased cousin Claude was very much addicted to profane pleasures."

"Yes, yes, indeed!" sighed the Abbe, "he was a devil incarnate—but what a magnificent man! What a wonderful huntsman! Notwithstanding his backslidings, there was a great deal of good in him, and I am fain to believe that God has taken him under His protecting mercy."

Julien took his leave, and returned to the chateau, very much discouraged. "This priest," thought he to himself, "is a man of expediency. He allows himself certain indulgences which are to be regretted, and his mind is becoming clogged by continual association with carnal-minded men. His thoughts are too much given to earthly things, and I have no more faith in him than in the rest of them."

So he shut himself up again in his solitude, with one more illusion destroyed. He asked himself, and his heart became heavy at the thought, whether, in course of time, he also would undergo this stultification, this moral depression, which ends by lowering us to the level of the low-minded people among whom we live.

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Among all the persons he had met since his arrival at Vivey, only one had impressed him as being sympathetic and attractive: Reine Vincart—and even her energy was directed toward matters that Julien looked upon as secondary. And besides, Reine was a woman, and he was afraid of women. He believed with Ecclesiastes the preacher, that “they are more bitter than death . . . and whoso pleaseth God shall escape from them.” He had therefore no other refuge but in his books or his own sullen reflections, and, consequently, his old enemy, hypochondria, again made him its prey.

Toward the beginning of January, the snow in the valley had somewhat melted, and a light frost made access to the woods possible. As the hunting season seldom extended beyond the first days of February, the huntsmen were all eager to take advantage of the few remaining weeks to enjoy their favorite pastime. Every day the forest resounded with the shouts of beaters-up and the barking of the hounds. From Auberive, Praslay and Grancey, rendezvous were made in the woods of Charbonniere or Maigrefontaine; nothing was thought of but the exploits of certain marksmen, the number of pieces bagged, and the joyous outdoor breakfasts which preceded each occasion. One evening, as Julien, more moody than usual, stood yawning wearily and leaning on the corner of the stove, Claudet noticed him, and was touched with pity for this young fellow, who had so little idea how to employ his time, his youth, or his money. He felt impelled, as a conscientious duty, to draw him out of his unwholesome state of mind, and initiate him into the pleasures of country life.

“You do not enjoy yourself with us, Monsieur Julien,” said he, kindly; “I can’t bear to see you so downhearted. You are ruining yourself with poring all day long over your books, and the worst of it is, they do not take the frowns out of your face. Take my word for it, you must change your way of living, or you will be ill. Come, now, if you will trust in me, I will undertake to cure your ennui before a week is over.”

“And what is your remedy, Claudet?” demanded Julien, with a forced smile.

“A very simple one: just let your books go, since they do not succeed in interesting you, and live the life that every one else leads. The de Buxieres, your ancestors, followed the same plan, and had no fault to find with it. You are in a wolf country—well, you must howl with the wolves!”

“My dear fellow,” replied Julien, shaking his head, “one can not remake one’s self. The wolves themselves would discover that I howled out of tune, and would send me back to my books.”

“Nonsense! try, at any rate. You can not imagine what pleasure there is in coursing through the woods, and suddenly, at a sharp turn, catching sight of a deer in the distance, then galloping to the spot where he must pass, and holding him with the end of your gun! You have no idea what an appetite one gets with such exercise, nor how jolly it is to breakfast afterward, all together, seated round some favorite old beech-tree.

Enjoy your youth while you have it. Time enough to stay in your chimney-corner and spit in the ashes when rheumatism has got hold of you. Perhaps you will say you never have followed the hounds, and do not know how to handle a gun?"

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"That is the exact truth."

"Possibly, but appetite comes with eating, and when once you have tasted of the pleasures of the chase, you will want to imitate your companions. Now, see here: we have organized a party at Charbonniere to-morrow, for the gentlemen of Auberive; there will be some people you know—Destourbet, justice of the Peace, the clerk Seurrot, Maitre Arbillot and the tax-collector, Boucheseiche. Hutinet went over the ground yesterday, and has appointed the meeting for ten o'clock at the Belle-Etoile. Come with us; there will be good eating and merriment, and also some fine shooting, I pledge you my word!"

Julien refused at first, but Claudet insisted, and showed him the necessity of getting more intimately acquainted with the notables of Auberive—people with whom he would be continually coming in contact as representing the administration of justice and various affairs in the canton. He urged so well that young de Buxieres ended by giving his consent. Manette received immediate instructions to prepare eatables for Hutinet, the keeper, to take at early dawn to the Belle-Etoile, and it was decided that the company should start at precisely eight o'clock.

The next morning, at the hour indicated, the 'grand chasserot' was already in the courtyard with his two hounds, Charbonneau and Montagnard, who were leaping and barking sonorously around him. Julien, reminded of his promise by the unusual early uproar, dressed himself with a bad grace, and went down to join Claudet, who was bristling with impatience. They started. There had been a sharp frost during the night; some hail had fallen, and the roads were thinly coated with a white dust, called by the country people, in their picturesque language, "a sugarfrost" of snow. A thick fog hung over the forest, so that they had to guess their way; but Claudet knew every turn and every sidepath, and thus he and his companion arrived by the most direct line at the rendezvous. They soon began to hear the barking of the dogs, to which Montagnard and Charbonneau replied with emulative alacrity, and finally, through the mist, they distinguished the group of huntsmen from Auberive.

The Belle-Etoile was a circular spot, surrounded by ancient ash-trees, and formed the central point for six diverging alleys which stretched out indefinitely into the forest. The monks of Auberive, at the epoch when they were the lords and owners of the land, had made this place a rendezvous for huntsmen, and had provided a table and some stone benches, which, thirty years ago, were still in existence. The enclosure, which had been chosen for the breakfast on the present occasion, was irradiated by a huge log-fire; a very respectable display of bottles, bread, and various eatables covered the stone table, and the dogs, attached by couples to posts, pulled at their leashes and barked in chorus, while their masters, grouped around the fire, warmed their benumbed fingers over the flames, and tapped their heels while waiting for the last-comers.

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At sight of Julien and Claudet, there was a joyous hurrah of welcome. Justice Destourbet exchanged a ceremonious hand-shake with the new proprietor of the chateau. The scant costume and tight gaiters of the huntsman's attire, displayed more than ever the height and slinness of the country magistrate. By his side, the registrar Seurrot, his legs encased in blue linen spatterdashes, his back bent, his hands crossed comfortably over his "corporation," sat roasting himself at the flame, while grumbling when the wind blew the smoke in his eyes. Arbillot, the notary, as agile and restless as a lizard, kept going from one to the other with an air of mysterious importance. He came up to Claudet, drew him aside, and showed him a little figure in a case.

"Look here!" whispered he, "we shall have some fun; as I passed by the Abbe Pernot's this morning, I stole one of his stuffed squirrels."

He stooped down, and with an air of great mystery poured into his ear the rest of the communication, at the close of which his small black eyes twinkled maliciously, and he passed the end of his tongue over his frozen moustache.

"Come with me," continued he; "it will be a good joke on the collector."

He drew Claudet and Hutinet toward one of the trenches, where the fog hid them from sight.

During this colloquy, Boucheseiche the collector, against whom they were thus plotting, had seized upon Julien de Buxieres, and was putting him through a course of hunting lore. Justin Boucheseiche was a man of remarkable ugliness; big, bony, freckled, with red hair, hairy hands, and a loud, rough voice.

He wore a perfectly new hunting costume, cap and gaiters of leather, a havana-colored waistcoat, and had a complete assortment of pockets of all sizes for the cartridges. He pretended to be a great authority on all matters relating to the chase, although he was, in fact, the worst shot in the whole canton; and when he had the good luck to meet with a newcomer, he launched forth on the recital of his imaginary prowess, without any pity for the hearer. So that, having once got hold of Julien, he kept by his side when they sat down to breakfast.

All these country huntsmen were blessed with healthy appetites. They ate heartily, and drank in the same fashion, especially the collector Boucheseiche, who justified his name by pouring out numerous bumpers of white wine. During the first quarter of an hour nothing could be heard but the noise of jaws masticating, glasses and forks clinking; but when the savory pastries, the cold game and the hams had disappeared, and had been replaced by goblets of hot Burgundy and boiling coffee, then tongues became loosened. Julien, to his infinite disgust, was forced again to be present at a conversation similar to the one at the time of the raising of the seals, the coarseness of

which had so astonished and shocked him. After the anecdotes of the chase were exhausted, the guests

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began to relate their experiences among the fair sex, losing nothing of the point from the effect of the numerous empty bottles around. All the scandalous cases in the courts of justice, all the coarse jokes and adventures of the district, were related over again. Each tried to surpass his neighbor. To hear these men of position boast of their gallantries with all classes, one would have thought that the entire canton underwent periodical changes and became one vast Saturnalia, where rustic satyrs courted their favorite nymphs. But nothing came of it, after all; once the feast was digested, and they had returned to the conjugal abode, all these terrible gay Lotharios became once more chaste and worthy fathers of families. Nevertheless, Julien, who was unaccustomed to such bibulous festivals and such unbridled license of language, took it all literally, and reproached himself more than ever with having yielded to Claudet's entreaties.

At last the table was deserted, and the marking of the limits of the hunt began.

As they were following the course of the trenches, the notary stopped suddenly at the foot of an ash-tree, and took the arm of the collector, who was gently humming out of tune.

"Hush! Collector," he whispered, "do you see that fellow up there, on the fork of the tree? He seems to be jeering at us."

At the same time he pointed out a squirrel, sitting perched upon a branch, about halfway up the tree. The animal's tail stood up behind like a plume, his ears were upright, and he had his front paws in his mouth, as if cracking a nut.

"A squirrel!" cried the impetuous Boucheseiche, immediately falling into the snare; "let no one touch him, gentlemen—I will settle his account for him."

The rest of the hunters had drawn back in a circle, and were exchanging sly glances. The collector loaded his gun, shouldered it, covered the squirrel, and then let go.

"Hit!" exclaimed he, triumphantly, as soon as the smoke had dispersed.

In fact, the animal had slid down the branch, head first, but, somehow, he did not fall to the ground.

"He has caught hold of something," said the notary, facetiously.

"Ah! you will hold on, you rascal, will you?" shouted Boucheseiche, beside himself with excitement, and the next moment he sent a second shot, which sent the hair flying in all directions.

The creature remained in the same position. Then there was a general roar.

“He is quite obstinate!” remarked the clerk, slyly.

Boucheseiche, astonished, looked attentively at the tree, then at the laughing crowd, and could not understand the situation.

“If I were in your place, Collector,” said Claudet, in an insinuating manner, “I should climb up there, to see—”

But Justin Boucheseiche was not a climber. He called a youngster, who followed the hunt as beater-up.

“I will give you ten sous,” said he; “to mount that tree and bring me my squirrel!”

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The young imp did not need to be told twice. In the twinkling of an eye he threw his arms around the tree, and reached the fork. When there, he uttered an exclamation.

"Well?" cried the collector; impatiently, "throw him down!"

"I can't, Monsieur," replied the boy, "the squirrel is fastened by a wire." Then the laughter burst forth more boisterously than before.

"A wire, you young rascal! Are you making fun of me?" shouted Boucheseiche, "come down this moment!"

"Here he is, Monsieur," replied the lad, throwing himself down with the squirrel which he tossed at the collector's feet.

When Boucheseiche verified the fact that the squirrel was a stuffed specimen, he gave a resounding oath.

"In the name of——! who is the miscreant that has perpetrated this joke?"

No one could reply for laughing. Then ironical cheers burst forth from all sides.

"Brave Boucheseiche! That's a kind of game one doesn't often get hold of!"

"We never shall see any more of that kind!"

"Let us carry Boucheseiche in triumph!"

And so they went on, marching around the tree. Arbillot seized a slip of ivy and crowned Boucheseiche, while all the others clapped their hands and capered in front of the collector, who, at last, being a good fellow at heart, joined in the laugh at his own expense.

Julien de Buxieres alone could not share the general hilarity. The uproar caused by this simple joke did not even chase the frown from his brow. He was provoked at not being able to bring himself within the diapason of this somewhat vulgar gayety: he was aware that his melancholy countenance, his black clothes, his want of sympathy jarred unpleasantly on the other jovial guests. He did not intend any longer to play the part of a killjoy. Without saying anything to Claudet, therefore, he waited until the huntsmen had scattered in the brushwood, and then, diving into a trench, in an opposite direction, he gave them all the slip, and turned in the direction of Planche-au-Vacher.

As he walked slowly, treading under foot the dry frosty leaves, he reflected how the monotonous crackling of this foliage, once so full of life, now withered and rendered brittle by the frost, seemed to represent his own deterioration of feeling. It was a sad and suitable accompaniment of his own gloomy thoughts.



He was deeply mortified at the sorry figure he had presented at the breakfast-table. He acknowledged sorrowfully to himself that, at twenty-eight years of age, he was less young and less really alive than all these country squires, although all, except Claudet, had passed their fortieth year. Having missed his season of childhood, was he also doomed to have no youth? Others found delight in the most ordinary amusements, why, to him, did life seem so insipid and colorless?

Why was he so unfortunately constituted that all human joys lost their sweetness as soon as he opened his heart to them? Nothing made any powerful impression on him; everything that happened seemed to be a perpetual reiteration, a song sung for the hundredth time, a story a hundred times related.

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He was like a new vase, cracked before it had served its use, and he felt thoroughly ashamed of the weakness and infirmity of his inner self. Thus pondering, he traversed much ground, hardly knowing where he was going. The fog, which now filled the air and which almost hid the trenches with its thin bluish veil, made it impossible to discover his bearings. At last he reached the border of some pastureland, which he crossed, and then he perceived, not many steps away, some buildings with tiled roofs, which had something familiar to him in their aspect. After he had gone a few feet farther he recognized the court and facade of La Thuilliere; and, as he looked over the outer wall, a sight altogether novel and unexpected presented itself.

Standing in the centre of the courtyard, her outline showing in dark relief against the light "sugar-frosting," stood Reine Vincart, her back turned to Julien. She held up a corner of her apron with one hand, and with the other took out handfuls of grain, which she scattered among the birds fluttering around her. At each moment the little band was augmented by a new arrival. All these little creatures were of species which do not emigrate, but pass the winter in the shelter of the wooded dells. There were blackbirds with yellow bills, who advanced boldly over the snow up to the very feet of the distributing fairy; robin redbreasts, nearly as tame, hopping gayly over the stones, bobbing their heads and puffing out their red breasts; and tomtits, prudently watching awhile from the tops of neighboring trees, then suddenly taking flight, and with quick, sharp cries, seizing the grain on the wing. It was charming to see all these little hungry creatures career around Reine's head, with a joyous fluttering of wings. When the supply was exhausted, the young girl shook her apron, turned around, and recognized Julien.

"Were you there, Monsieur de Buxieres?" she exclaimed; "come inside the courtyard! Don't be afraid; they have finished their meal. Those are my boarders," she added, pointing to the birds, which, one by one, were taking their flight across the fields. "Ever since the first fall of snow, I have been distributing grain to them once a day. I think they must tell one another under the trees there, for every day their number increases. But I don't complain of that. Just think, these are not birds of passage; they do not leave us at the first cold blast, to find a warmer climate; the least we can do is to recompense them by feeding them when the weather is too severe! Several know me already, and are very tame. There is a blackbird in particular, and a blue tomtit, that are both extremely saucy!"

These remarks were of a nature to please Julien. They went straight to the heart of the young mystic; they recalled to his mind St. Francis of Assisi, preaching to the fish and conversing with the birds, and he felt an increase of sympathy for this singular young girl. He would have liked to find a pretext for remaining longer with her, but his natural timidity in the presence of women paralyzed his tongue, and, already, fearing he should be thought intruding, he had raised his hat to take leave, when Reine addressed him:

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"I do not ask you to come into the house, because I am obliged to go to the sale of the Ronces woods, in order to speak to the men who are cultivating the little lot that we have bought. I wager, Monsieur de Buxieres, that you are not yet acquainted with our woods?"

"That is true," he replied, smiling.

"Very well, if you will accompany me, I will show you the canton they are about to develop. It will not be time lost, for it will be a good thing for the people who are working for you to know that you are interested in their labors."

Julien replied that he should be happy to be under her guidance.

"In that case," said Reine, "wait for me here. I shall be back in a moment."

She reappeared a few minutes later, wearing a white hood with a cape, and a knitted woolen shawl over her shoulders.

"This way!" said she, showing a path that led across the pasture-lands.

They walked along silently at first. The sky was clear, the wind had freshened. Suddenly, as if by enchantment, the fog, which had hung over the forest, became converted into needles of ice. Each tree was powdered over with frozen snow, and on the hillsides overshadowing the valley the massive tufts of forest were veiled in a bluish-white vapor.

Never had Julien de Buxieres been so long in *tete-a-tete* with a young woman. The extreme solitude, the surrounding silence, rendered this dual promenade more intimate and also more embarrassing to a young man who was alarmed at the very thought of a female countenance. His ecclesiastical education had imbued Julien with very rigorous ideas as to the careful and reserved behavior which should be maintained between the sexes, and his intercourse with the world had been too infrequent for the idea to have been modified in any appreciable degree. It was natural, therefore, that this walk across the fields in the company of Reine should assume an exaggerated importance in his eyes. He felt himself troubled and yet happy in the chance afforded him to become more closely acquainted with this young girl, toward whom a secret sympathy drew him more and more. But he did not know how to begin conversation, and the more he cudgelled his brains to find a way of opening the attack, the more he found himself at sea. Once more Reine came to his assistance.

"Well, Monsieur de Buxieres," said she, "do matters go more to your liking now? You have acted most generously toward Claudet, and he ought to be pleased."

"Has he spoken to you, then?"

“No; not himself, but good news, like bad, flies fast, and all the villagers are singing your praises.”

“I only did a very simple and just thing,” replied Julien.

“Precisely, but those are the very things that are the hardest to do. And according as they are done well or ill, so is the person that does them judged by others.”

“You have thought favorably of me then, Mademoiselle Vincart,” he ventured, with a timid smile.

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"Yes; but my opinion is of little importance. You must be pleased with yourself—that is more essential. I am sure that it must be pleasanter now for you to live at Vivey?"

"Hm!—more bearable, certainly."

The conversation languished again. As they approached the confines of the farm they heard distant barking, and then the voices of human beings. Finally two gunshots broke on the air.

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Reine, listening, "the Auberive Society is following the hounds, and Claudet must be one of the party. How is it you were not with them?"

"Claudet took me there, and I was at the breakfast—but, Mademoiselle, I confess that that kind of amusement is not very tempting to me. At the first opportunity I made my escape, and left the party to themselves."

"Well, now, to be frank with you, you were wrong. Those gentlemen will feel aggrieved, for they are very sensitive. You see, when one has to live with people, one must yield to their customs, and not pooh-pooh their amusements."

"You are saying exactly what Claudet said last night."

"Claudet was right."

"What am I to do? The chase has no meaning for me. I can not feel any interest in the butchery of miserable animals that are afterward sent back to their quarters."

"I can understand that you do not care for the chase for its own sake; but the ride in the open air, in the open forest? Our forests are so beautiful—look there, now! does not that sight appeal to you?"

From the height they had now gained, they could see all over the valley, illuminated at intervals by the pale rays of the winter sun. Wherever its light touched the brushwood, the frosty leaves quivered like diamonds, while a milky cloud enveloped the parts left in shadow. Now and then, a slight breeze stirred the branches, causing a shower of sparkling atoms to rise in the air, like miniature rainbows. The entire forest seemed clothed in the pure, fairy-like robes of a virgin bride.

"Yes, that is beautiful," admitted Julien, hesitatingly; "I do not think I ever saw anything similar: at any rate, it is you who have caused me to notice it for the first time. But," continued he, "as the sun rises higher, all this phantasmagoria will melt and vanish. The beauty of created things lasts only a moment, and serves as a warning for us not to set our hearts on things that perish."

Reine gazed at him with astonishment.



“Do you really think so?” exclaimed she: “that is very sad, and I do not know enough to give an opinion. All I know is, that if God has created such beautiful things it is in order that we may enjoy them. And that is the reason why I worship these woods with all my heart. Ah! if you could only see them in the month of June, when the foliage is at its fulness. Flowers everywhere—yellow, blue, crimson! Music also everywhere—the song of birds, the murmuring of waters, and the balmy

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scents in the air. Then there are the lime-trees, the wild cherry, and the hedges red with strawberries—it is intoxicating. And, whatever you may say, Monsieur de Buxieres, I assure you that the beauty of the forest is not a thing to be despised. Every season it is renewed: in autumn, when the wild fruits and tinted leaves contribute their wealth of color; in winter, with its vast carpets of snow, from which the tall ash springs to such a stately height-look, now! up there!”

They were in the depths of the forest. Before them were colonnades of slim, graceful trees, rising in one unbroken line toward the skies, their slender branches forming a dark network overhead, and their lofty proportions lessening in the distance, until lost in the solemn gloom beyond. A religious silence prevailed, broken only by the occasional chirp of the wren, or the soft pattering of some smaller fourfooted race.

“How beautiful!” exclaimed Reine, with animation; “one might imagine one’s self in a cathedral! Oh! how I love the forest; a feeling of awe and devotion comes over me, and makes me want to kneel down and pray!”

Julien looked at her with an uneasy kind of admiration. She was walking slowly now, grave and thoughtful, as if in church. Her white hood had fallen on her shoulders, and her hair, slightly stirred by the wind, floated like a dark aureole around her pale face. Her luminous eyes gleamed between the double fringes of her eyelids, and her mobile nostrils quivered with suppressed emotion. As she passed along, the brambles from the wayside, intermixed with ivy, and other hardy plants, caught on the hem of her dress and formed a verdant train, giving her the appearance of the high-priestess of some mysterious temple of Nature. At this moment, she identified herself so perfectly with her nickname, “queen of the woods,” that Julien, already powerfully affected by her peculiar and striking style of beauty, began to experience a superstitious dread of her influence. His Catholic scruples, or the remembrance of certain pious lectures administered in his childhood, rendered him distrustful, and he reproached himself for the interest he took in the conversation of this seductive creature. He recalled the legends of temptations to which the Evil One used to subject the anchorites of old, by causing to appear before them the attractive but illusive forms of the heathen deities. He wondered whether he were not becoming the sport of the same baleful influence; if, like the Lamias and Dryads of antiquity, this queen of the woods were not some spirit of the elements, incarnated in human form and sent to him for the purpose of dragging his soul down to perdition.

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In this frame of mind he followed in her footsteps, cautiously, and at a distance, when she suddenly turned, as if waiting for him to rejoin her. He then perceived that they had reached the end of the copse, and before them lay an open space, on which the cut lumber lay in cords, forming dark heaps on the frosty ground. Here and there were allotments of chosen trees and poles, among which a thin spiral of smoke indicated the encampment of the cutters. Reine made straight for them, and immediately presented the new owner of the chateau to the workmen. They made their awkward obeisances, scrutinizing him in the mistrustful manner customary with the peasants of mountainous regions when they meet strangers. The master workman then turned to Reine, replying to her remarks in a respectful but familiar tone:

“Make yourself easy, mamselle, we shall do our best and rush things in order to get through with the work. Besides, if you will come this way with me, you will see that there is no idling; we are just now going to fell an oak, and before a quarter of an hour is over it will be lying on the ground, cut off as neatly as if with a razor.”

They drew near the spot where the first strokes of the axe were already resounding. The giant tree did not seem affected by them, but remained haughty and immovable. Then the blows redoubled until the trunk began to tremble from the base to the summit, like a living thing. The steel had made the bark, the sapwood, and even the core of the tree, fly in shivers; but the oak had resumed its impassive attitude, and bore stoically the assaults of the workmen. Looking upward, as it reared its proud and stately head, one would have affirmed that it never could fall. Suddenly the woodsmen fell back; there was a moment of solemn and terrible suspense; then the enormous trunk heaved and plunged down among the brushwood with an alarming crash of breaking branches. A sound as of lamentation rumbled through the icy forest, and then all was still.

The men, with unconscious emotion, stood contemplating the monarch oak lying prostrate on the ground. Reine had turned pale; her dark eyes glistened with tears.

“Let us go,” murmured she to Julien; “this death of a tree affects me as if it were that of a Christian.”

They took leave of the woodsmen, and reentered the forest. Reine kept silence and her companion was at a loss to resume the conversation; so they journeyed along together quietly until they reached a border line, whence they could perceive the smoke from the roofs of Vivey.

“You have only to go straight down the hill to reach your home,” said she, briefly; “au revoir, Monsieur de Buxieres.”

Thus they quitted each other, and, looking back, he saw that she slackened her speed and went dreamily on in the direction of Planche-au-Vacher.

CHAPTER V

LOVE'S INDISCRETION

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In the mountainous region of Langres, spring can hardly be said to appear before the end of May. Until that time the cold weather holds its own; the white frosts, and the sharp, sleety April showers, as well as the sudden windstorms due to the malign influence of the ice-gods, arrest vegetation, and only a few of the more hardy plants venture to put forth their trembling shoots until later. But, as June approaches and the earth becomes warmed through by the sun, a sudden metamorphosis is effected. Sometimes a single night is sufficient for the floral spring to burst forth in all its plenitude. The hedges are alive with lilies and woodruffs; the blue columbines shake their foolscap-like blossoms along the green side-paths; the milky spikes of the Virgin plant rise slender and tall among the bizarre and many-colored orchids. Mile after mile, the forest unwinds its fairy show of changing scenes. Sometimes one comes upon a spot of perfect verdure; at other times one wanders in almost complete darkness under the thick interlacing boughs of the ash-trees, through which occasional gleams of light fall on the dark soil or on the spreading ferns. Now the wanderer emerges upon an open space so full of sunshine that the strawberries are already ripening; near them are stacked the tender young trees, ready for spacing, and the billets of wood piled up and half covered with thistle and burdock leaves; and a little farther away, half hidden by tall weeds, teeming with insects, rises the peaked top of the woodsman's hut. Here one walks beside deep, grassy trenches, which appear to continue without end, along the forest level; farther, the wild mint and the centaurea perfume the shady nooks, the oaks and lime-trees arch their spreading branches, and the honeysuckle twines itself round the knotty shoots of the hornbeam, whence the thrush gives forth her joyous, sonorous notes.

Not only in the forest, but also in the park belonging to the chateau, and in the village orchards, spring had donned a holiday costume. Through the open windows, between the massive bunches of lilacs, hawthorn, and laburnum blossoms, Julien de Buxieres caught glimpses of rolling meadows and softly tinted vistas. The gentle twittering of the birds and the mysterious call of the cuckoo, mingled with the perfume of flowers, stole into his study, and produced a sense of enjoyment as novel to him as it was delightful. Having until the present time lived a sedentary life in cities, he had had no opportunity of experiencing this impression of nature in her awakening and luxuriant aspect; never had he felt so completely under the seductive influence of the goddess Maia than at this season when the abundant sap exudes in a white foam from the trunk of the willow; when between the plant world and ourselves a magnetic current seems to exist, which seeks to wed their fraternizing emanations with our own personality. He was oppressed by the vividness of the verdure, intoxicated with

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the odor of vegetation, agitated by the confused music of the birds, and in this May fever of excitement, his thoughts wandered with secret delight to Reine Vincart, to this queen of the woods, who was the personification of all the witchery of the forest. Since their January promenade in the glades of Charbonniere, he had seen her at a distance, sometimes on Sundays in the little church at Vivey, sometimes like a fugitive apparition at the turn of a road. They had also exchanged formal salutations, but had not spoken to each other. More than once, after the night had fallen, Julien had stopped in front of the courtyard of La Thuiliere, and watched the lamps being lighted inside. But he had not ventured to knock at the door of the house; a foolish timidity had prevented him; so he had returned to the chateau, dissatisfied and reproaching himself for allowing his awkward shyness to interpose, as it were, a wall of ice between himself and the only person whose acquaintance seemed to him desirable.

At other times he would become alarmed at the large place a woman occupied in his thoughts, and he congratulated himself on having resisted the dangerous temptation of seeing Mademoiselle Vincart again. He acknowledged that this singular girl had for him an attraction against which he ought to be on his guard. Reine might be said to live alone at La Thuiliere, for her father could hardly be regarded seriously as a protector. Julien's visits might have compromised her, and the young man's severe principles of rectitude forbade him to cause scandal which he could not repair. He was not thinking of marriage, and even had his thoughts inclined that way, the proprieties and usages of society which he had always in some degree respected, would not allow him to wed a peasant girl. It was evident, therefore, that both prudence and uprightness would enjoin him to carry on any future relations with Mademoiselle Vincart with the greatest possible reserve.

Nevertheless, and in spite of these sage reflections, the enchanting image of Reine haunted him more than was at all reasonable. Often, during his hours of watchfulness, he would see her threading the avenues of the forest, her dark hair half floating in the breeze, and wearing her white hood and her skirt bordered with ivy. Since the spring had returned, she had become associated in his mind with all the magical effects of nature's renewal. He discovered the liquid light of her dark eyes in the rippling darkness of the streams; the lilies recalled the faintly tinted paleness of her cheeks; the silene roses, scattered throughout the hedges, called forth the remembrance of the young maiden's rosy lips, and the vernal odor of the leaves appeared to him like an emanation of her graceful and wholesome nature.

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This state of feeling began to act like an obsession, a sort of witchcraft, which alarmed him. What was she really, this strange creature? A peasant indeed, apparently; but there was also something more refined and cultivated about her, due, doubtless, to her having received her education in a city school. She both felt and expressed herself differently from ordinary country girls, although retaining the frankness and untutored charm of rustic natures. She exercised an uneasy fascination over Julien, and at times he returned to the superstitious impression made upon him by Reine's behavior and discourse in the forest. He again questioned with himself whether this female form, in its untamed beauty, did not enfold some spirit of temptation, some insidious fairy, similar to the Melusine, who appeared to Count Raymond in the forest of Poitiers.

Most of the time he would himself laugh at this extravagant supposition, but, while endeavoring to make light of his own cowardice, the idea still haunted and tormented him. Sometimes, in the effort to rid himself of the persistence of his own imagination, he would try to exorcise the demon who had got hold of him, and this exorcism consisted in despoiling the image of his temptress of the veil of virginal purity with which his admiration had first invested her. Who could assure him, after all, that this girl, with her independent ways, living alone at her farm, running through the woods at all hours, was as irreproachable as he had imagined? In the village, certainly, she was respected by all; but people were very tolerant—very easy, in fact—on the question of morals in this district, where the gallantries of Claude de Buxieres were thought quite natural, where the illegitimacy of Claudet offended no one's sense of the proprieties, and where the after-dinner conversations, among the class considered respectable, were such as Julien had listened to with repugnance. Nevertheless, even in his most suspicious moods, Julien had never dared broach the subject to Claudet.

Every time that the name of Reine Vincart had come to his lips, a feeling of bashfulness, in addition to his ordinary timidity, had prevented him from interrogating Claudet concerning the character of this mysterious queen of the woods. Like all novices in love-affairs Julien dreaded that his feelings should be divined, at the mere mention of the young girl's name. He preferred to remain isolated, concentrating in himself his desires, his trouble and his doubts.

Yet, whatever efforts he made, and however firmly he adhered to his resolution of silence, the hypochondria from which he suffered could not escape the notice of the 'grand chasserot'. He was not clear-sighted enough to discern the causes, but he could observe the effects. It provoked him to find that all his efforts to enliven his cousin had proved futile. He had cudgelled his brains to comprehend whence came these fits of terrible melancholy, and, judging Julien by himself, came to the conclusion that his ennui proceeded from an excess of strictness and good behavior.

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“Monsieur de Buxieres,” said he, one evening when they were walking silently, side by side, in the avenues of the park, which resounded with the song of the nightingales, “there is one thing that troubles me, and that is that you do not confide in me.”

“What makes you think so, Claudet?” demanded Julien, with surprise.

“Paybleu! the way you act. You are, if I may say so, too secretive. When you wanted to make amends for Claude de Buxieres’s negligence, and proposed that I should live here with you, I accepted without any ceremony. I hoped that in giving me a place at your fire and your table, you would also give me one in your affections, and that you would allow me to share your sorrows, like a true brother comrade—”

“I assure you, my dear fellow, that you are mistaken. If I had any serious trouble on my mind, you should be the first to know it.”

“Oh! that’s all very well to say; but you are unhappy all the same—one can see it in your mien, and shall I tell you the reason? It is that you are too sedate, Monsieur de Buxieres; you have need of a sweetheart to brighten up your days.”

“Ho, ho!” replied Julien, coloring, “do you wish to have me married, Claudet?”

“Ah! that’s another affair. No; but still I should like to see you take some interest in a woman—some gay young person who would rouse you up and make you have a good time. There is no lack of such in the district, and you would only have the trouble of choosing.”

M. de Buxieres’s color deepened, and he was visibly annoyed.

“That is a singular proposition,” exclaimed he, after awhile; “do you take me for a libertine?”

“Don’t get on your high horse, Monsieur de Buxieres! There would be no one hurt. The girls I allude to are not so difficult to approach.”

“That has nothing to do with it, Claudet; I do not enjoy that kind of amusement.”

“It is the kind that young men of our age indulge in, all the same. Perhaps you think there would be difficulties in the way. They would not be insurmountable, I can assure you; those matters go smoothly enough here. You slip your arm round her waist, give her a good, sounding salute, and the acquaintance is begun. You have only to improve it!”

“Enough of this,” interrupted Julien, harshly, “we never can agree on such topics!”



“As you please, Monsieur de Buxieres; since you do not like the subject, we will not bring it up again. If I mentioned it at all, it was that I saw you were not interested in either hunting or fishing, and thought you might prefer some other kind of game. I do wish I knew what to propose that would give you a little pleasure,” continued Claudet, who was profoundly mortified at the ill-success of his overtures. “Now! I have it. Will you come with me to-morrow, to the Ronces woods? The charcoal-dealers who are constructing their furnaces for the sale, will complete their dwellings this evening

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and expect to celebrate in the morning. They call it watering the bouquet, and it is the occasion of a little festival, to which we, as well as the presiding officials of the cutting, are invited. Naturally, the guests pay their share in bottles of wine. You can hardly be excused from showing yourself among these good people. It is one of the customs of the country. I have promised to be there, and it is certain that Reine Vincart, who has bought the Ronces property, will not fail to be present at the ceremony."

Julien had already the words on his lips for declining Claudet's offer, when the name of Reine Vincart produced an immediate change in his resolution. It just crossed his mind that perhaps Claudet had thrown out her name as a bait and an argument in favor of his theories on the facility of love-affairs in the country. However that might be, the allusion to the probable presence of Mademoiselle Vincart at the coming fete, rendered young Buxieres more tractable, and he made no further difficulties about accompanying his cousin.

The next morning, after partaking hastily of breakfast, they started on their way toward the cutting. The charcoal-dealers had located themselves on the border of the forest, not far from the spot where, in the month of January, Reine and Julien had visited the wood cutters. Under the sheltering branches of a great ash tree, the newly erected but raised its peaked roof covered with clods of turf, and two furnaces, just completed, occupied the ground lately prepared. One of them, ready for use, was covered with the black earth called 'frazil', which is extracted from the site of old charcoal works; the other, in course of construction, showed the successive layers of logs ranged in circles inside, ready for the fire. The workmen moved around, going and coming; first, the head-man or patron, a man of middle age, of hairy chest, embrowned visage, and small beady eyes under bushy eyebrows; his wife, a little, shrivelled, elderly woman; their daughter, a thin awkward girl of seventeen, with fluffy hair and a cunning, hard expression; and finally, their three boys, robust young fellows, serving their apprenticeship at the trade. This party was reenforced by one or two more single men, and some of the daughters of the woodchoppers, attracted by the prospect of a day of dancing and joyous feasting.

These persons were sauntering in and out under the trees, waiting for the dinner, which was to be furnished mainly by the guests, the contribution of the charcoal-men being limited to a huge pot of potatoes which the patroness was cooking over the fire, kindled in front of the hut.

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The arrival of Julien and Claudet, attended by the small cowboy, puffing and blowing under a load of provisions, was hailed with exclamations of gladness and welcome. While one of the assistants was carefully unrolling the big loaves of white bread, the enormous meat pastry, and the bottles encased in straw, Reine Vincart appeared suddenly on the scene, accompanied by one of the farm-hands, who was also tottering under the weight of a huge basket, from the corners of which peeped the ends of bottles, and the brown knuckle of a smoked ham. At sight of the young proprietress of La Thuiliere, the hurrahs burst forth again, with redoubled and more sustained energy. As she stood there smiling, under the greenish shadow cast by the ashtrees, Reine appeared to Julien even more seductive than among the frosty surroundings of the previous occasion. Her simple and rustic spring costume was marvellously becoming: a short blue-and-yellow striped skirt, a tight jacket of light-colored material, fitted closely to the waist, a flat linen collar tied with a narrow blue ribbon, and a bouquet of woodruff at her bosom. She wore stout leather boots, and a large straw hat, which she threw carelessly down on entering the hut. Among so many faces of a different type, all somewhat disfigured by hardships of exposure, this lovely face with its olive complexion, lustrous black eyes, and smiling red lips, framed in dark, soft, wavy hair resting on her plump shoulders, seemed to spread a sunshiny glow over the scene. It was a veritable portrayal of the "queen of the woods," appearing triumphant among her rustic subjects. As an emblem of her royal prerogative, she held in her hand an enormous bouquet of flowers she had gathered on her way: honeysuckles, columbine, all sorts of grasses with shivering spikelets, black alder blossoms with their white centres, and a profusion of scarlet poppies. Each of these exhaled its own salubrious springlike perfume, and a light cloud of pollen, which covered the eyelashes and hair of the young girl with a delicate white powder.

"Here, Pere Theotime," said she, handing her collection over to the master charcoal-dealer, "I gathered these for you to ornament the roof of your dwelling."

She then drew near to Claudet; gave him her hand in comrade fashion, and saluted Julien:

"Good-morning, Monsieur de Buxieres, I am very glad to see you here. Was it Claudet who brought you, or did you come of your own accord?"

While Julien, dazed and bewildered, was seeking a reply, she passed quickly to the next group, going from one to another, and watching with interest the placing of the bouquet on the summit of the hut. One of the men brought a ladder and fastened the flowers to a spike. When they were securely attached and began to nod in the air, he waved his hat and shouted: "Hou, houp!" This was the signal for going to table.

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The food had been spread on the tablecloth under the shade of the ash-trees, and all the guests sat around on sacks of charcoal; for Reine and Julien alone they had reserved two stools, made by the master, and thus they found themselves seated side by side. Soon a profound, almost religious, silence indicated that the attack was about to begin; after which, and when the first fury of their appetites had been appeased, the tongues began to be loosened: jokes and anecdotes, seasoned with loud bursts of laughter, were bandied to and fro under the spreading branches, and presently the wine lent its aid to raise the spirits of the company to an exuberant pitch. But there was a certain degree of restraint observed by these country folk. Was it owing to Reine's presence? Julien noticed that the remarks of the working-people were in a very much better tone than those of the Auberive gentry, with whom he had breakfasted; the gayety of these children of the woods, although of a common kind, was always kept within decent limits, and he never once had occasion to feel ashamed. He felt more at ease among them than among the notables of the borough, and he did not regret having accepted Claudet's invitation.

"I am glad I came," murmured he in Reine's ear, "and I never have eaten with so much enjoyment!"

"Ah! I am glad of it," replied the young girl, gayly, "perhaps now you will begin to like our woods."

When nothing was left on the table but bones and empty bottles, Pere Theotime took a bottle of sealed wine, drew the cork, and filled the glasses.

"Now," said he, "before christening our bouquet, we will drink to Monsieur de Buxieres, who has brought us his good wine, and to our sweet lady, Mademoiselle Vincart."

The glasses clinked, and the toasts were drunk with fervor.

"Mamselle Reine," resumed Pere Theotime, with a certain amount of solemnity, "you can see, the hut is built; it will be occupied to-night, and I trust good work will be done. You can perceive from here our first furnace, all decorated and ready to be set alight. But, in order that good luck shall attend us, you yourself must set light to the fire. I ask you, therefore, to ascend to the top of the chimney and throw in the first embers; may I ask this of your good-nature?"

"Why, certainly!" replied Reine, "come, Monsieur de Buxieres, you must see how we light a charcoal furnace."

All the guests jumped from their seats; one of the men took the ladder and leaned it against the sloping side of the furnace. Meanwhile, Pere Theotime was bringing an earthen vase full of burning embers. Reine skipped lightly up the steps, and when she reached the top, stood erect near the orifice of the furnace.



Her graceful outline came out in strong relief against the clear sky; one by one, she took the embers handed her by the charcoal-dealer, and threw them into the opening in the middle of the furnace. Soon there was a crackling inside, followed by a dull rumbling; the chips and rubbish collected at the bottom had caught fire, and the air-holes left at the base of the structure facilitated the passage of the current, and hastened the kindling of the wood.

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"Bravo; we've got it!" exclaimed Pere Theotime.

"Bravo!" repeated the young people, as much exhilarated with the open air as with the two or three glasses of white wine they had drunk. Lads and lasses joined hands and leaped impetuously around the furnace.

"A song, Reine! Sing us a song!" cried the young girls.

She stood at the foot of the ladder, and, without further solicitation, intoned, in her clear and sympathetic voice, a popular song, with a rhythmical refrain:

My father bid me
Go sell my wheat.
To the market we drove
"Good-morrow, my sweet!
How much, can you say,
Will its value prove?"

The embroidered rose
Lies on my glove.

"A hundred francs
Will its value prove."
"When you sell your wheat,
Do you sell your love?"

The embroidered rose
Lies on my glove!

"My heart, Monsieur,
Will never rove,
I have promised it
To my own true love."

The embroidered rose
Lies on my glove.

"For me he braves
The wind and the rain;
For me he weaves
A silver chain."

On my 'broidered glove.
Lies the rose again.



Repeating the refrain in chorus, boys and girls danced and leaped in the sunlight. Julien leaned against the trunk of a tree, listening to the sonorous voice of Reine, and could not take his eyes off the singer. When she had ended her song, Reine turned in another direction; but the dancers had got into the spirit of it and could not stand still; one of the men came forward, and started another popular air, which all the rest repeated in unison:

Up in the woods
Sleeps the fairy to-day:
The king, her lover,
Has strolled that way!
Will those who are young
Be married or nay?
Yea, yea!

Carried away by the rhythm, and the pleasure of treading the soft grass under their feet, the dancers quickened their pace. The chain of young folks disconnected for a moment, was reformed, and twisted in and out among the trees; sometimes in light, sometimes in shadow, until they disappeared, singing, into the very heart of the forest. With the exception of Pere Theotime and his wife, who had gone to superintend the furnace, all the guests, including Claudet, had joined the gay throng. Reine and Julien, the only ones remaining behind, stood in the shade near the borderline of the forest. It was high noon, and the sun's rays, shooting perpendicularly down, made the shade desirable. Reine proposed to her companion to enter the hut and rest, while waiting for the return of the dancers. Julien accepted readily; but not

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without being surprised that the young girl should be the first to suggest a *tete-a-tete* in the obscurity of a remote hut. Although more than ever fascinated by the unusual beauty of Mademoiselle Vincart, he was astonished, and occasionally shocked, by the audacity and openness of her action toward him. Once more the spirit of doubt took possession of him, and he questioned whether this freedom of manners was to be attributed to innocence or effrontery. After the pleasant friendliness of the midday repast, and the enlivening effect of the dance round the furnace, he was both glad and troubled to find himself alone with Reine. He longed to let her know what tender admiration she excited in his mind; but he did not know how to set about it, nor in what style to address a girl of so strange and unusual a disposition. So he contented himself with fixing an enamored gaze upon her, while she stood leaning against one of the inner posts, and twisted mechanically between her fingers a branch of wild honeysuckle. Annoyed at his taciturnity, she at last broke the silence:

"You are not saying anything, Monsieur de Buxieres; do you regret having come to this fete?"

"Regret it, Mademoiselle?" returned he; "it is a long time since I have had so pleasant a day, and I thank you, for it is to you I owe it."

"To me? You are joking. It is the good-humor of the people, the spring sunshine, and the pure air of the forest that you must thank. I have no part in it."

"You are everything in it, on the contrary," said he, tenderly. "Before I knew you, I had met with country people, seen the sun and trees, and so on, and nothing made any impression on me. But, just now, when you were singing over there, I felt gladdened and inspired; I felt the beauty of the woods, I sympathized with these good people, and these grand trees, all these things among which you live so happily. It is you who have worked this miracle. Ah! you are well named. You are truly the fairy of the feast, the queen of the woods!"

Astonished at the enthusiasm of her companion, Reine looked at him sidewise, half closing her eyes, and perceived that he was altogether transformed. He appeared to have suddenly thawed. He was no longer the awkward, sickly youth, whose every movement was paralyzed by timidity, and whose words froze on his tongue; his slender frame had become supple, his blue eyes enlarged and illuminated; his delicate features expressed refinement, tenderness, and passion. The young girl was moved and won by so much emotion, the first that Julien had ever manifested toward her. Far from being offended at this species of declaration, she replied, gayly:

"As to the queen of the woods working miracles, I know none so powerful as these flowers."



She unfastened the bouquet of white starry woodruff from her corsage, and handed them over to him in their envelope of green leaves.

“Do you know them?” said she; “see how sweet they smell! And the odor increases as they wither.”

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Julien had carried the bouquet to his lips, and was inhaling slowly the delicate perfume.

“Our woodsmen,” she continued, “make with this plant a broth which cures from ill effects of either cold or heat as if by enchantment; they also infuse it into white wine, and convert it into a beverage which they call May wine, and which is very intoxicating.”

Julien was no longer listening to these details. He kept his eyes steadily fixed on Mademoiselle Vincart, and continued to inhale rapturously the bouquet, and to experience a kind of intoxication.

“Let me keep these flowers,” he implored, in a choking voice.

“Certainly,” replied she, gayly; “keep them, if it will give you pleasure.”

“Thank you,” he murmured, hiding them in his bosom.

Reine was surprised at his attaching such exaggerated importance to so slight a favor, and a sudden flush overspread her cheeks. She almost repented having given him the flowers when she saw what a tender reception he had given them, so she replied, suggestively:

“Do not thank me; the gift is not significant. Thousands of similar flowers grow in the forest, and one has only to stoop and gather them.”

He dared not reply that this bouquet, having been worn by her, was worth much more to him than any other, but he thought it, and the thought aroused in his mind a series of new ideas. As Reine had so readily granted this first favor, was she not tacitly encouraging him to ask for others? Was he dealing with a simple, innocent girl, or a village coquette, accustomed to be courted? And on this last supposition should he not pass for a simpleton in the eyes of this experienced girl, if he kept himself at too great a distance. He remembered the advice of Claudet concerning the method of conducting love-affairs smoothly with certain women of the country. Whether she was a coquette or not, Reine had bewitched him. The charm had worked more powerfully still since he had been alone with her in this obscure hut, where the cooing of the wild pigeons faintly reached their ears, and the penetrating odors of the forest pervaded their nostrils. Julien’s gaze rested lovingly on Reine’s wavy locks, falling heavily over her neck, on her half-covered eyes with their luminous pupils full of golden specks of light, on her red lips, on the two little brown moles spotting her somewhat decollete neck. He thought her adorable, and was dying to tell her so; but when he endeavored to formulate his declaration, the words stuck fast in his throat, his veins swelled, his throat became dry, his head swam. In this disorder of his faculties he brought to mind the recommendation of Claudet: “One arm round the waist, two sounding kisses, and the thing is done.” He rose abruptly, and went up to the young girl:

“Since you have given me these flowers,” he began, in a husky voice, “will you also, in sign of friendship, give me your hand, as you gave it to Claudet?”

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After a moment's hesitation, she held out her hand; but, hardly had he touched it when he completely lost control of himself, and slipping the arm which remained free around Reine's waist, he drew her toward him and lightly touched with his lips her neck, the beauty of which had so magnetized him.

The young girl was stronger than he; in the twinkling of an eye she tore herself from his audacious clasp, threw him violently backward, and with one bound reached the door of the hut. She stood there a moment, pale, indignant, her eyes blazing, and then exclaimed, in a hollow voice:

"If you come a step nearer, I will call the charcoalmen!"

But Julien had no desire to renew the attack; already sobered, cowed, and repentant, he had retreated to the most obscure corner of the dwelling.

"Are you mad?" she continued, with vehemence, "or has the wine got into your head? It is rather early for you to be adopting the ways of your deceased cousin! I give you notice that they will not succeed with me!" And, at the same moment, tears of humiliation filled her eyes. "I did not expect this of you, Monsieur de Buxieres!"

"Forgive me!" faltered Julien, whose heart smote him at the sight of her tears; "I have behaved like a miserable sinner and a brute! It was a moment of madness—forget it and forgive me!"

"Nobody ever treated me with disrespect before," returned the young girl, in a suffocated voice; "I was wrong to allow you any familiarity, that is all. It shall not happen to me again!"

Julien remained mute, overpowered with shame and remorse. Suddenly, in the stillness around, rose the voices of the dancers returning and singing the refrain of the rondelay:

I had a rose—
On my heart it lay
Will those who are young
Be married, or nay?
Yea, yea!

"There are our people," said Reine, softly, "I am going to them; adieu—do not follow me!" She left the but and hastened toward the furnace, while Julien, stunned with the rapidity with which this unfortunate scene had been enacted, sat down on one of the benches, a prey to confused feelings of shame and angry mortification. No, certainly, he did not intend to follow her! He had no desire to show himself in public with this young girl whom he had so stupidly insulted, and in whose face he never should be able to look again. Decidedly, he did not understand women, since he could not even tell a



virtuous girl from a frivolous coquette! Why had he not been able to see that the good-natured, simple familiarity of Reine Vincart had nothing in common with the enticing allurements of those who, to use Claudet's words, had "thrown their caps over the wall." How was it that he had not read, in those eyes, pure as the fountain's source, the candor and uprightness of a maiden heart which had nothing to conceal. This cruel evidence of his inability to conduct himself properly in the

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affairs of life exasperated and humiliated him, and at the same time that he felt his self-love most deeply wounded, he was conscious of being more hopelessly enamored of Reine Vincart. Never had she appeared so beautiful as during the indignant movement which had separated her from him. Her look of mingled anger and sadness, the expression of her firm, set lips, the quivering nostrils, the heaving of her bosom, he recalled it all, and the image of her proud beauty redoubled his grief and despair.

He remained a long time concealed in the shadow of the hut. Finally, when he heard the voices dying away in different directions, and was satisfied that the charcoal-men were attending to their furnace work, he made up his mind to come out. But, as he did not wish to meet any one, instead of crossing through the cutting he plunged into the wood, taking no heed in what direction he went, and being desirous of walking alone as long as possible, without meeting a single human visage.

As he wandered aimlessly through the deepening shadows of the forest, crossed here and there by golden bars of light from the slanting rays of the setting sun, he pondered over the probable results of his unfortunate behavior. Reine would certainly keep silence on the affront she had received, but would she be indulgent enough to forget or forgive the insult? The most evident result of the affair would be that henceforth all friendly relations between them must cease. She certainly would maintain a severe attitude toward the person who had so grossly insulted her, but would she be altogether pitiless in her anger? All through his dismal feelings of self-reproach, a faint hope of reconciliation kept him from utter despair. As he reviewed the details of the shameful occurrence, he remembered that the expression of her countenance had been one more of sorrow than of anger. The tone of melancholy reproach in which she had uttered the words: "I did not expect this from you, Monsieur de Buxieres!" seemed to convey the hope that he might, one day, be forgiven. At the same time, the poignancy of his regret showed him how much hold the young girl had taken upon his affections, and how cheerless and insipid his life would be if he were obliged to continue on unfriendly terms with the woodland queen.

He had come to this conclusion in his melancholy reflections, when he reached the outskirts of the forest.

He stood above the calm, narrow valley of Vivey; on the right, over the tall ash-trees, peeped the pointed turrets of the chateau; on the left, and a little farther behind, was visible a whitish line, contrasting with the surrounding verdure, the winding path to La Thuiliere, through the meadow-land of Planche-au-Vacher. Suddenly, the sound of voices reached his ears, and, looking more closely, he perceived Reine and Claudet walking side by side down the narrow path. The evening air softened the resonance of the voices, so that the words themselves were not audible, but

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the intonation of the alternate speakers, and their confidential and friendly gestures, evinced a very animated, if not tender, exchange of sentiments. At times the conversation was enlivened by Claudet's bursts of laughter, or an amicable gesture from Reine. At one moment, Julien saw the young girl lay her hand familiarly on the shoulder of the 'grand chssserot', and immediately a pang of intense jealousy shot through his heart. At last the young pair arrived at the banks of a stream, which traversed the path and had become swollen by the recent heavy rains. Claudet took Reine by the waist and lifted her in his vigorous arms, while he picked his way across the stream; then they resumed their way toward the bottom of the pass, and the tall brushwood hid their retreating forms from Julien's eager gaze, although it was long before the vibrations of their sonorous voices ceased echoing in his ears.

"Ah!" thought he, quite overcome by this new development, "she stands less on ceremony with him than with me! How close they kept to each other in that lonely path! With what animation they conversed! with what abandon she allowed herself to be carried in his arms! All that indicates an intimacy of long standing, and explains a good many things!"

He recalled Reine's visit to the chateau, and how cleverly she had managed to inform him of the parentage existing between Claudet and the deceased Claude de Buxieres; how she had by her conversation raised a feeling of pity in his mind for Claudet; and a desire to repair the negligence of the deceased.

"How could I be so blind!" thought Julien, with secret scorn of himself; "I did not see anything, I comprehended none of their artifices! They love each other, that is sure, and I have been playing throughout the part of a dupe. I do not blame him. He was in love, and allowed himself to be persuaded. But she! whom I thought so open, so true, so loyal! Ah! she is no better than others of her class, and she was coquetting with me in order to insure her lover a position! Well! one more illusion is destroyed. Ecclesiastes was right. 'Inveni amarivrem morte mulierem', 'woman is more bitter than death'!"

Twilight had come, and it was already dark in the forest. Slowly and reluctantly, Julien descended the slope leading to the chateau, and the gloom of the woods entered his heart.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE BY PROXY

Jealousy is a maleficent deity of the harpy tribe; she embitters everything she touches.

Ever since the evening that Julien had witnessed the crossing of the brook by Reine and Claudet, a secret poison had run through his veins, and embittered every moment of his life. Neither the glowing sun of June, nor the glorious development of the woods had any charm for him. In vain did the fields display their golden treasures of ripening corn; in vain did the pale barley and the silvery oats wave their luxuriant

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growth against the dark background of the woods; all these fairylike effects of summer suggested only prosaic and misanthropic reflections in Julien's mind. He thought of the tricks, the envy and hatred that the possession of these little squares of ground brought forth among their rapacious owners. The prolific exuberance of forest vegetation was an exemplification of the fierce and destructive activity of the blind forces of Nature. All the earth was a hateful theatre for the continual enactment of bloody and monotonous dramas; the worm consuming the plant; the bird mangling the insect, the deer fighting among themselves, and man, in his turn, pursuing all kinds of game. He identified nature with woman, both possessing in his eyes an equally deceiving appearance, the same beguiling beauty, and the same spirit of ambush and perfidy. The people around him inspired him only with mistrust and suspicion. In every peasant he met he recognized an enemy, prepared to cheat him with wheedling words and hypocritical lamentations. Although during the few months he had experienced the delightful influence of Reine Vincart, he had been drawn out of his former prejudices, and had imagined he was rising above the littleness of every-day worries; he now fell back into hard reality; his feet were again embedded in the muddy ground of village politics, and consequently village life was a burden to him.

He never went out, fearing to meet Reine Vincart. He fancied that the sight of her might aggravate the malady from which he suffered and for which he eagerly sought a remedy.

But, notwithstanding the cloistered retirement to which he had condemned himself, his wound remained open. Instead of solitude having a healing effect, it seemed to make his sufferings greater. When, in the evening, as he sat moodily at his window, he would hear Claudet whistle to his dog, and hurry off in the direction of La Thuiliere, he would say to himself: "He is going to keep an appointment with Reine." Then a feeling of blind rage would overpower him; he felt tempted to leave his room and follow his rival secretly—a moment afterward he would be ashamed of his meanness. Was it not enough that he had once, although involuntarily, played the degrading part of a spy! What satisfaction could he derive from such a course? Would he be much benefited when he returned home with rage in his heart and senses, after watching a love-scene between the young pair? This consideration kept him in his seat, but his imagination ran riot instead; it went galloping at the heels of Claudet, and accompanied him down the winding paths, moistened by the evening dew. As the moon rose above the trees, illuminating the foliage with her mild bluish rays, he pictured to himself the meeting of the two lovers on the flowery turf bathed in the silvery light. His brain seemed on fire. He saw Reine in white advancing like a moonbeam, and Claudet passing his arm around the yielding waist of the maiden. He tried to substitute himself in idea, and to imagine the delight of the first words of welcome, and the ecstasy of the prolonged embrace. A shiver ran through his whole body; a sharp pain transfixed his heart; his throat closed convulsively; half fainting, he leaned against the window-frame, his eyes

closed, his ears stopped, to shut out all sights or sounds, longing only for oblivion and complete torpor of body and mind.

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He did not realize his longing. The enchanting image of the woodland queen, as he had beheld her in the dusky light of the charcoal-man's hut, was ever before him. He put his hands over his eyes. She was there still, with her deep, dark eyes and her enticing cherry lips. Even the odor of the honeysuckle arising from the garden assisted the reality of the vision, by recalling the sprig of the same flower which Reine was twisting round her fingers at their last interview. This sweet breath of flowers in the night seemed like an emanation from the young girl herself, and was as fleeting and intangible as the remembrance of vanished happiness. Again and again did his morbid nature return to past events, and make his present position more unbearable.

"Why," thought he, "did I ever entertain so wild a hope? This wood-nymph, with her robust yet graceful figure, her clear-headedness, her energy and will-power, could she ever have loved a being so weak and unstable as myself? No, indeed; she needs a lover full of life and vigor; a huntsman, with a strong arm, able to protect her. What figure should I cut by the side of so hearty and well-balanced a fellow?"

In these fits of jealousy, he was not so angry with Claudet for being loved by Reine as for having so carefully concealed his feelings. And yet, while inwardly blaming him for this want of frankness, he did not realize that he himself was open to a similar accusation, by hiding from Claudet what was troubling him so grievously.

Since the evening of the inauguration festival, he had become sullen and taciturn. Like all timid persons, he took refuge in a moody silence, which could not but irritate his cousin. They met every day at the same table; to all appearance their intimacy was as great as ever, but, in reality, there was no mutual exchange of feeling. Julien's continued ill-humor was a source of anxiety to Claudet, who turned his brain almost inside out in endeavoring to discover its cause. He knew he had done nothing to provoke any coolness; on the contrary, he had set his wits to work to show his gratitude by all sorts of kindly offices.

By dint of thinking the matter over, Claudet came to the conclusion that perhaps Julien was beginning to repent of his generosity, and that possibly this coolness was a roundabout way of manifesting his change of feeling. This seemed to be the only plausible solution of his cousin's behavior. "He is probably tired," thought he, "of keeping us here at the chateau, my mother and myself."

Claudet's pride and self-respect revolted at this idea. He did not intend to be an incumbrance on any one, and became offended in his turn at the mute reproach which he imagined he could read in his cousin's troubled countenance. This misconception, confirmed by the obstinate silence of both parties, and aggravated by its own continuance, at last produced a crisis.

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It happened one night, after they had taken supper together, and Julien's ill-humor had been more evident than usual. Provoked at his persistent taciturnity, and more than ever convinced that it was his presence that young de Buxieres objected to, Claudet resolved to force an explanation. Instead, therefore, of quitting the dining-room after dessert, and whistling to his dog to accompany him in his habitual promenade, the 'grand chasserot' remained seated, poured out a small glass of brandy, and slowly filled his pipe. Surprised to see that he was remaining at home, Julien rose and began to pace the floor, wondering what could be the reason of this unexpected change. As suspicious people are usually prone to attribute complicated motives for the most simple actions, he imagined that Claudet, becoming aware of the jealous feeling he had excited, had given up his promenade solely to mislead and avert suspicion. This idea irritated him still more, and halting suddenly in his walk, he went up to Claudet and said, brusquely:

"You are not going out, then?"

"No;" replied Claudet, "if you will permit me, I will stay and keep you company. Shall I annoy you?"

"Not in the least; only, as you are accustomed to walk every evening, I should not wish you to inconvenience yourself on my account. I am not afraid of being alone, and I am not selfish enough to deprive you of society more agreeable than mine."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Claudet, pricking up his ears.

"Nothing," muttered Julien, between his set teeth, "except that your fancied obligation of keeping me company ought not to prevent you missing a pleasant engagement, or keeping a rendezvous."

"A rendezvous," replied his interlocutor, with a forced laugh, "so you think, when I go out after supper, I go to seek amusement. A rendezvous! And with whom, if you please?"

"With your mistress, of course," replied Julien, sarcastically, "from what you said to me, there is no scarcity here of girls inclined to be good-natured, and you have only the trouble of choosing among them. I supposed you were courting some woodman's young daughter, or some pretty farmer girl, like—like Reine Vincart."

"Refine Vincart!" repeated Claudet, sternly, "what business have you to mix up her name with those creatures to whom you refer? Mademoiselle Vincart," added he, "has nothing in common with that class, and you have no right, Monsieur de Buxieres, to use her name so lightly!"

The allusion to Reine Vincart had agitated Claudet to such a degree that he did not notice that Julien, as he pronounced her name, was as much moved as himself.



The vehemence with which Claudet resented the insinuation increased young de Buxieres's irritation.

"Ha, ha!" said he, laughing scornfully, "Reine Vincart is an exceedingly pretty girl!"

"She is not only pretty, she is good and virtuous, and deserves to be respected."

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"How you uphold her! One can see that you are interested in her."

"I uphold her because you are unjust toward her. But I wish you to understand that she has no need of any one standing up for her—her good name is sufficient to protect her. Ask any one in the village—there is but one voice on that question."

"Come," said Julien, huskily, "confess that you are in love with her."

"Well! suppose I am," said Claudet, angrily, "yes, I love her! There, are you satisfied now?"

Although de Buxieres knew what he had to expect, he was not the less affected by so open an avowal thrust at him, as it were. He stood for a moment, silent; then, with a fresh burst of rage:

"You love her, do you? Why did you not tell me before? Why were you not more frank with me?"

As he spoke, gesticulating furiously, in front of the open window, the deep red glow of the setting sun, piercing through the boughs of the ash-trees, threw its bright reflections on his blazing eyeballs and convulsed features. His interlocutor, leaning against the opposite corner of the window-frame, noticed, with some anxiety, the extreme agitation of his behavior, and wondered what could be the cause of such emotion.

"I? Not frank with you! Ah, that is a good joke, Monsieur de Buxieres! Naturally, I should not go proclaiming on the housetops that I have a tender feeling for Mademoiselle Vincart, but, all the same, I should have told you had you asked me sooner. I am not reserved; but, you must excuse my saying it, you are walled in like a subterranean passage. One can not get at the color of your thoughts. I never for a moment imagined that you were interested in Reine, and you never have made me sufficiently at home to entertain the idea of confiding in you on that subject."

Julien remained silent. He had reseated himself at the table, where, leaning his head in his hands, he pondered over what Claudet had said. He placed his hand so as to screen his eyes, and bit his lips as if a painful struggle was going on within him. The splendors of the setting sun had merged into the dusky twilight, and the last piping notes of the birds sounded faintly among the sombre trees. A fresh breeze had sprung up, and filled the darkening room with the odor of honeysuckle.

Under the soothing influence of the falling night, Julien slowly raised his head, and addressing Claudet in a low and measured voice like a father confessor interrogating a penitent, said:

"Does Reine know that you love her?"



"I think she must suspect it," replied Claudet, "although I never have ventured to declare myself squarely. But girls are very quick, Reine especially. They soon begin to suspect there is some love at bottom, when a young man begins to hang around them too frequently."

"You see her often, then?"

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"Not as often as I should like. But, you know, when one lives in the same district, one has opportunities of meeting—at the beech harvest, in the woods, at the church door. And when you meet, you talk but little, making the most of your time. Still, you must not suppose, as I think you did, that we have rendezvous in the evening. Reine respects herself too much to go about at night with a young man as escort, and besides, she has other fish to fry. She has a great deal to do at the farm, since her father has become an invalid."

"Well, do you think she loves you?" said Julien, with a movement of nervous irritation.

"I can not tell," replied Claudet shrugging his shoulders, "she has confidence in me, and shows me some marks of friendship, but I never have ventured to ask her whether she feels anything more than friendship for me. Look here, now. I have good reasons for keeping back; she is rich and I am poor. You can understand that I would not, for any consideration, allow her to think that I am courting her for her money—"

"Still, you desire to marry her, and you hope that she will not say no—you acknowledge that!" cried Julien, vociferously.

Claudet, struck with the violence and bitterness of tone of his companion, came up to him.

"How angrily you say that, Monsieur de Buxieres!" exclaimed he in his turn; "upon my word, one might suppose the affair is very displeasing to you. Will you let me tell you frankly an idea that has already entered my head several times these last two or three days, and which has come again now, while I have been listening to you? It is that perhaps you, yourself, are also in love with Reine?"

"I!" protested Julien. He felt humiliated at Claudet's perspicacity; but he had too much pride and self-respect to let his preferred rival know of his unfortunate passion. He waited a moment to swallow something in his throat that seemed to be choking him, and then, trying in vain to steady his voice, he added:

"You know that I have an aversion for women; and for that matter, I think they return it with interest. But, at all events, I am not foolish enough to expose myself to their rebuffs. Rest assured, I shall not follow at your heels!"

Claudet shook his head incredulously.

"You doubt it," continued de Buxieres; "well, I will prove it to you. You can not declare your wishes because Reine is rich and you are poor? I will take charge of the whole matter."

"I—I do not understand you," faltered Claudet, bewildered at the strange turn the conversation was taking.

“You will understand-soon,” asserted Julien, with a gesture of both decision and resignation.

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The truth was, he had made one of those resolutions which seem illogical and foolish at first sight, but are natural to minds at once timid and exalted. The suffering caused by Claudet's revelations had become so acute that he was alarmed. He recognized with dismay the disastrous effects of this hopeless love, and determined to employ a heroic remedy to arrest its further ravages. This was nothing less than killing his love, by immediately getting Claudet married to Reine Vincart. Sacrifices like this are easier to souls that have been subjected since their infancy to Christian discipline, and accustomed to consider the renunciation of mundane joys as a means of securing eternal salvation. As soon as this idea had developed in Julien's brain, he seized upon it with the precipitation of a drowning man, who distractedly lays hold of the first object that seems to offer him a means of safety, whether it be a dead branch or a reed.

"Listen," he resumed; "at the very first explanation that we had together, I told you I did not intend to deprive you of your right to a portion of your natural father's inheritance. Until now, you have taken my word for it, and we have lived at the chateau like two brothers. But now that a miserable question of money alone prevents you from marrying the woman you love, it is important that you should be legally provided for. We will go to-morrow to Monsieur Arbillot, and ask him to draw up the deed, making over to you from me one half of the fortune of Claude de Buxieres. You will then be, by law, and in the eyes of all, one of the desirable matches of the canton, and you can demand the hand of Mademoiselle Vincart, without any fear of being thought presumptuous or mercenary."

Claudet, to whom this conclusion was wholly unexpected, was thunderstruck. His emotion was so great that it prevented him from speaking. In the obscurity of the room his deep-set eyes seemed larger, and shone with the tears he could not repress.

"Monsieur Julien," said he, falteringly, "I can not find words to thank you. I am like an idiot. And to think that only a little while ago I suspected you of being tired of me, and regretting your benefits toward me! What an animal I am! I measure others by myself. Well! can you forgive me? If I do not express myself well, I feel deeply, and all I can say is that you have made me very happy!" He sighed heavily. "The question is now," continued he, "whether Reine will have me! You may not believe me, Monsieur de Buxieres, but though I may seem very bold and resolute, I feel like a wet hen when I get near her. I have a dreadful panic that she will send me away as I came. I don't know whether I can ever find courage to ask her."

"Why should she refuse you?" said Julien, sadly, "she knows that you love her. Do you suppose she loves any one else?"

"That I don't know. Although Reine is very frank, she does not let every one know what is passing in her mind, and with these young girls, I tell you, one is never sure of anything. That is just what I fear may be possible."

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"If you fear the ordeal," said de Buxieres, with a visible effort, "would you like me to present the matter for you?"

"I should be very glad. It would be doing me a great service. It would be adding one more kindness to those I have already received, and some day I hope to make it all up to you."

The next morning, according to agreement, Julien accompanied Claudet to Auberive, where Maitre Arbillot drew up the deed of gift, and had it at once signed and recorded. Afterward the young men adjourned to breakfast at the inn. The meal was brief and silent. Neither seemed to have any appetite. As soon as they had drunk their coffee, they turned back on the Vivey road; but, when they had got as far as the great limetree, standing at the entrance to the forest, Julien touched Claudet lightly on the shoulder.

"Here," said he, "we must part company. You will return to Vivey, and I shall go across the fields to La Thuiliere. I shall return as soon as I have had an interview with Mademoiselle Vincart. Wait for me at the chateau."

"The time will seem dreadfully long to me," sighed Claudet; "I shall not know how to dispose of my body until you return."

"Your affair will be all settled within two or three hours from now. Stay near the window of my room, and you will catch first sight of me coming along in the distance. If I wave my hat, it will be a sign that I bring a favorable answer."

Claudet pressed his hand; they separated, and Julien descended the newly mown meadow, along which he walked under the shade of trees scattered along the border line of the forest.

The heat of the midday sun was tempered by a breeze from the east, which threw across the fields and woods the shadows of the white fleecy clouds. The young man, pale and agitated, strode with feverish haste over the short-cropped grass, while the little brooklet at his side seemed to murmur a flute-like, soothing accompaniment to the tumultuous beatings of his heart. He was both elated and depressed at the prospect of submitting his already torn and lacerated feelings to so severe a trial. The thought of beholding Reine again, and of sounding her feelings, gave him a certain amount of cruel enjoyment. He would speak to her of love—love for another, certainly—but he would throw into the declaration he was making, in behalf of another, some of his own tenderness; he would have the supreme and torturing satisfaction of watching her countenance, of anticipating her blushes, of gathering the faltering avowal from her lips. He would once more drink of the intoxication of her beauty, and then he would go and shut himself up at Vivey, after burying at La Thuiliere all his dreams and profane desires. But, even while the courage of this immolation of his youthful love was strong within him, he could not prevent a dim feeling of hope from crossing his mind. Claudet

was not certain that he was beloved; and possibly Reine's answer would be a refusal. Then he should have a free field.

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By a very human, but very illogical impulse, Julien de Buxieres had hardly concluded the arrangement with Claudet which was to strike the fatal blow to his own happiness when he began to forestall the possibilities which the future might have in store for him. The odor of the wild mint and meadow-sweet, dotting the banks of the stream, again awoke vague, happy anticipations. Longing to reach Reine Vincart's presence, he hastened his steps, then stopped suddenly, seized with an overpowering panic. He had not seen her since the painful episode in the hut, and it must have left with her a very sorry impression. What could he do, if she refused to receive him or listen to him?

While revolting these conflicting thoughts in his mind, he came to the fields leading directly to La Thuiliere, and just beyond, across a waving mass of oats and rye, the shining tops of the farm-buildings came in sight. A few minutes later, he pushed aside a gate and entered the yard.

The shutters were closed, the outer gate was closed inside, and the house seemed deserted. Julien began to think that the young girl he was seeking had gone into the fields with the farm-hands, and stood uncertain and disappointed in the middle of the courtyard. At this sudden intrusion into their domain, a brood of chickens, who had been clucking sedately around, and picking up nourishment at the same time, scattered screaming in every direction, heads down, feet sprawling, until by unanimous consent they made a beeline for a half-open door, leading to the orchard. Through this manoeuvre, the young man's attention was brought to the fact that through this opening he could reach the rear facade of the building. He therefore entered a grassy lane, winding round a group of stones draped with ivy; and leaving the orchard on his left, he pushed on toward the garden itself—a real country garden with square beds bordered by mossy clumps alternating with currant-bushes, rows of raspberry-trees, lettuce and cabbage beds, beans and runners climbing up their slender supports, and, here and there, bunches of red carnations and peasant roses.

Suddenly, at the end of a long avenue, he discovered Reine Vincart, seated on the steps before an arched door, communicating with the kitchen. A plum-tree, loaded with its violet fruit, spread its light shadow over the young girl's head, as she sat shelling fresh-gathered peas and piling the faint green heaps of color around her. The sound of approaching steps on the grassy soil caused her to raise her head, but she did not stir. In his intense emotion, Julien thought the alley never would come to an end. He would fain have cleared it with a single bound, so as to be at once in the presence of Mademoiselle Vincart, whose immovable attitude rendered his approach still more difficult. Nevertheless, he had to get over the ground somehow at a reasonable pace, under penalty of making himself ridiculous, and he therefore found plenty of time to examine Reine, who continued her work with imperturbable gravity, throwing the peas as she shelled them into an ash-wood pail at her feet.

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She was bareheaded, and wore a striped skirt and a white jacket fitted to her waist. The checkered shadows cast by the tree made spots of light and darkness over her face and her uncovered neck, the top button of her camisole being unfastened on account of the heat. De Buxieres had been perfectly well recognized by her, but an emotion, at least equal to that experienced by the young man, had transfixed her to the spot, and a subtle feminine instinct had urged her to continue her employment, in order to hide the sudden trembling of her fingers. During the last month, ever since the adventure in the hut, she had thought often of Julien; and the remembrance of the audacious kiss which the young de Buxieres had so impetuously stolen from her neck, invariably brought the flush of shame to her brow. But, although she was very indignant at the fiery nature of his caress, as implying a want of respect little in harmony with Julien's habitual reserve, she was astonished at herself for not being still more angry. At first, the affront put upon her had roused a feeling of indignation, but now, when she thought of it, she felt only a gentle embarrassment, and a soft beating of the heart. She began to reflect that to have thus broken loose from all restraint before her, this timid youth must have been carried away by an irresistible burst of passion, and any woman, however high-minded she may be, will forgive such violent homage rendered to the sovereign power of her beauty. Besides his feeding of her vanity, another independent and more powerful motive predisposed her to indulgence: she felt a tender and secret attraction toward Monsieur de Buxieres. This healthy and energetic girl had been fascinated by the delicate charm of a nature so unlike her own in its sensitiveness and disposition to self-blame. Julien's melancholy blue eyes had, unknown to himself, exerted a magnetic influence on Reine's dark, liquid orbs, and, without endeavoring to analyze the sympathy that drew her toward a nature refined and tender even to weakness, without asking herself where this unreflecting instinct might lead her, she was conscious of a growing sentiment toward him, which was not very much unlike love itself.

Julien de Buxieres's mood was not sufficiently calm to observe anything, or he would immediately have perceived the impression that his sudden appearance had produced upon Reine Vincart. As soon as he found himself within a few steps of the young girl, he saluted her awkwardly, and she returned his bow with marked coldness. Extremely disconcerted at this reception, he endeavored to excuse himself for having invaded her dwelling in so unceremonious a manner.

"I am all the more troubled," added he, humbly, "that after what has happened, my visit must appear to you indiscreet, if not improper."

Reine, who had more quickly recovered her self-possession, pretended not to understand the unwise allusion that had escaped the lips of her visitor. She rose, pushed away with her foot the stalks and pods, which encumbered the passage, and replied, very shortly:

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"You are excused, Monsieur. There is no need of an introduction to enter La Thuiliere. Besides, I suppose that the motive which has brought you here can only be a proper one."

While thus speaking, she shook her skirt down, and without any affectation buttoned up her camisole.

"Certainly, Mademoiselle," faltered Julien, "it is a most serious and respectable motive that causes me to wish for an interview, and—if—I do not disturb you—"

"Not in the least, Monsieur; but, if you wish to speak with me, it is unnecessary for you to remain standing. Allow me to fetch you a chair."

She went into the house, leaving the young man overwhelmed with the coolness of his reception; a few minutes later she reappeared, bringing a chair, which she placed under the tree. "Sit here, you will be in the shade."

She seated herself on the same step as before, leaning her back against the wall, and her head on her hand.

"I am ready to listen to you," she said.

Julien, much less under his own control than she, discovered that his mission was more difficult than he had imagined it would be; he experienced a singular amount of embarrassment in unfolding his subject; and was obliged to have recourse to prolonged inquiries concerning the health of Monsieur Vincart.

"He is still in the same condition," said Reine, "neither better nor worse, and, with the illness which afflicts him, the best I can hope for is that he may remain in that condition. But," continued she, with a slight inflection of irony; "doubtless it is not for the purpose of inquiring after my father's health that you have come all the way from Vivey?"

"That is true, Mademoiselle," replied he, coloring. "What I have to speak to you about is a very delicate matter. You will excuse me, therefore, if I am somewhat embarrassed. I beg of you, Mademoiselle, to listen to me with indulgence."

"What can he be coming to?" thought Reine, wondering why he made so many preambles before beginning. And, at the same time, her heart began to beat violently.

Julien took the course taken by all timid people after meditating for a long while on the best way to prepare the young girl for the communication he had taken upon himself to make—he lost his head and inquired abruptly:

"Mademoiselle Reine, do you not intend to marry?"

Reine started, and gazed at him with a frightened air.

"I!" exclaimed she, "Oh, I have time enough and I am not in a hurry." Then, dropping her eyes: "Why do you ask that?"

"Because I know of some one who loves you and who would be glad to marry you."

She became very pale, took up one of the empty pods, twisted it nervously around her finger without speaking.

"Some one belonging to our neighborhood?" she faltered, after a few moments' silence.

"Yes; some one whom you know, and who is not a recent arrival here. Some one who possesses, I believe, sterling qualities sufficient to make a good husband, and means enough to do credit to the woman who will wed him. Doubtless you have already guessed to whom I refer?"

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She sat motionless, her lips tightly closed, her features rigid, but the nervous twitching of her fingers as she bent the green stem back and forth, betrayed her inward agitation.

“No; I can not tell,” she replied at last, in an almost inaudible voice.

“Truly?” he exclaimed, with an expression of astonishment, in which was a certain amount of secret satisfaction; “you can not tell whom I mean? You have never thought of the person of whom I am speaking in that light?”

“No; who is that person?”

She had raised her eyes toward his, and they shone with a deep, mysterious light.

“It is Claudet Sejournant,” replied Julien, very gently; and in an altered tone.

The glow that had illumined the dark orbs of the young girl faded away, her eyelids dropped, and her countenance became as rigid as before; but Julien did not notice anything. The words he had just uttered had cost him too much agony, and he dared not look at his companion, lest he should behold her joyful surprise, and thereby aggravate his suffering.

“Ah!” said Reine, coldly, “in that case, why did not Claudet come himself and state his own case?”

“His courage failed him at the last moment—and so—”

“And so,” continued she, with sarcastic bitterness of tone, “you took upon yourself to speak for him?”

“Yes; I promised him I would plead his cause. I was sure, moreover, that I should not have much difficulty in gaining the suit. Claudet has loved you for a long time. He is good-hearted, and a fine fellow to look at. And as to worldly advantages, his position is now equal to your own. I have made over to him, by legal contract, the half of his father’s estate. What answer am I to take back?”

He spoke with difficulty in broken sentences, without turning his eyes toward Mademoiselle Vincart. The silence that followed his last question seemed to him unbearable, and the contrasting chirping of the noisy grasshoppers, and the buzzing of the flies in the quiet sunny garden, resounded unpleasantly in his ears.

Reine remained speechless. She was disconcerted and well-nigh overpowered by the unexpected announcement, and her brain seemed unable to bear the crowd of tumultuous and conflicting emotions which presented themselves. Certainly, she had already suspected that Claudet had a secret liking for her, but she never had thought of encouraging the feeling. The avowal of his hopes neither surprised nor hurt her; that



which pained her was the intervention of Julien, who had taken in hand the cause of his relative. Was it possible that this same M. de Buxieres, who had made so audacious a display of his tender feeling in the hut, could now come forward as Claudet's advocate, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him to do? In that case, his astonishing behavior at the fete, which had caused her so much pain, and which she had endeavored to excuse in her own mind as the

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untutored outbreak of his pentup love, that fiery caress, was only the insulting manifestation of a brutal caprice? The transgressor thought so little of her, she was of such small importance in his eyes, that he had no hesitation in proposing that she marry Claudet? She beheld herself scorned, humiliated, insulted by the only man in whom she ever had felt interested. In the excess of her indignation she felt herself becoming hardhearted and violent; a profound discouragement, a stony indifference to all things, impelled her to extreme measures, and, not being able at the moment to find any one on whom she could put them in operation, she was almost tempted to lay violent hands on herself.

“What shall I say to Claudet?” repeated Julien, endeavoring to conceal the suffering which was devouring his heart by an assumption of outward frigidity.

She turned slowly round, fixed her searching eyes, which had become as dark as waters reflecting a stormy sky, upon his face, and demanded, in icy tones:

“What do you advise me to say?”

Now, if Julien had been less of a novice, he would have understood that a girl who loves never addresses such a question; but the feminine heart was a book in which he was a very poor speller. He imagined that Reine was only asking him as a matter of form, and that it was from a feeling of maidenly reserve that she adopted this passive method of escaping from openly declaring her wishes. She no doubt desired his friendly aid in the matter, and he felt as if he ought to grant her that satisfaction.

“I have the conviction,” stammered he, “that Claudet will make a good husband, and you will do well to accept him.”

Reine bit her lip, and her paleness increased so as to set off still more the fervid lustre of her eyes. The two little brown moles stood out more visibly on her white neck, and added to her attractions.

“So be it!” exclaimed she, “tell Claudet that I consent, and that he will be welcome at La Thuilliere.”

“I will tell him immediately.” He bent gravely and sadly before Reine, who remained standing and motionless against the door. “Adieu, Mademoiselle!”

He turned away abruptly; plunged into the first avenue he came to, lost his way twice and finally reached the courtyard, and thence escaped at breakneck speed across the fields.



Reine maintained her statue-like pose as long as the young man's footsteps resounded on the stony paths; but when they died gradually away in the distance, when nothing could be heard save the monotonous trill of the grasshoppers basking in the sun, she threw herself down on the green heap of rubbish; she covered her face with her hands and gave way to a passionate outburst of tears and sobs.

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In the meanwhile, Julien de Buxieres, angry with himself, irritated by the speedy success of his mission, was losing his way among the pasturages, and getting entangled in the thickets. All the details of the interview presented themselves before his mind with remorseless clearness. He seemed more lonely, more unfortunate, more disgusted with himself and with all else than he ever had been before. Ashamed of the wretched part he had just been enacting, he felt almost childish repugnance to returning to Vivey, and tried to pick out the paths that would take him there by the longest way. But he was not sufficiently accustomed to laying out a route for himself, and when he thought he had a league farther to go, and had just leaped over an intervening hedge, the pointed roofs of the chateau appeared before him at a distance of not more than a hundred feet, and at one of the windows on the first floor he could distinguish Claudet, leaning for ward, as if to interrogate him.

He remembered then the promise he had made the young huntsman; and faithful to his word, although with rage and bitterness in his heart, he raised his hat, and with effort, waved it three times above his head. At this signal, the forerunner of good news, Claudet replied by a triumphant shout, and disappeared from the window. A moment later, Julien heard the noise of furious galloping down the enclosures of the park. It was the lover, hastening to learn the particulars of the interview.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

I measure others by myself
Like all timid persons, he took refuge in a moody silence
Others found delight in the most ordinary amusements
Sensitiveness and disposition to self-blame
Women: they are more bitter than death
Yield to their customs, and not pooh-pooh their amusements
You must be pleased with yourself—that is more essential

A WOODLAND QUEEN

('Reine des Bois')

By Andre Theuriet

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER VII

THE STRANGE, DARK SECRET



Julien had once entertained the hope that Claudet's marriage with Reine would act as a kind of heroic remedy for the cure of his unfortunate passion, he very soon perceived that he had been woefully mistaken. As soon as he had informed the grand chasserot of the success of his undertaking, he became aware that his own burden was considerably heavier. Certainly it had been easier for him to bear uncertainty than the boisterous rapture evinced by his fortunate rival. His jealousy rose against it, and that was all. Now that he had torn from Reine the avowal of her love for Claudet, he was more than ever oppressed by his hopeless passion, and plunged into a condition of complete moral and physical disintegration.

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It mingled with his blood, his nerves, his thoughts, and possessed him altogether, dwelling within him like an adored and tyrannical mistress. Reine appeared constantly before him as he had contemplated her on the outside steps of the farmhouse, in her never-to-be-forgotten negligee of the short skirt and the half-open bodice. He again beheld the silken treasure of her tresses, gliding playfully around her shoulders, the clear, honest look of her limpid eyes, the expressive smile of her enchanting lips, and with a sudden revulsion of feeling he reflected that perhaps before a month was over, all these charms would belong to Claudet. Then, almost at the same moment, like a swallow, which, with one rapid turn of its wing, changes its course, his thoughts went in the opposite direction, and he began to imagine what would have happened if, instead of replying in the affirmative, Reine had objected to marrying Claudet. He could picture himself kneeling before her as before the Madonna, and in a low voice confessing his love. He would have taken her hands so respectfully, and pleaded so eloquently, that she would have allowed herself to be convinced. The little hands would have remained prisoners in his own; he would have lifted her tenderly, devotedly, in his arms, and under the influence of this feverish dream, he fancied he could feel the beating heart of the young girl against his own bosom. Suddenly he would wake up out of his illusions, and bite his lips with rage on finding himself in the dull reality of his own dwelling.

One day he heard footsteps on the gravel; a sonorous and jovial voice met his ear. It was Claudet, starting for La Thuilliere. Julien bent forward to see him, and ground his teeth as he watched his joyous departure. The sharp sting of jealousy entered his soul, and he rebelled against the evident injustice of Fate. How had he deserved that life should present so dismal and forbidding an aspect to him? He had had none of the joys of infancy; his youth had been spent wearily under the peevish discipline of a cloister; he had entered on his young manhood with all the awkwardness and timidity of a night-bird that is made to fly in the day. Up to the age of twenty-seven years, he had known neither love nor friendship; his time had been given entirely to earning his daily bread, and to the cultivation of religious exercises, which consoled him in some measure for his apparently useless way of living. Latterly, it is true, Fortune had seemed to smile upon him, by giving him a little more money and liberty, but this smile was a mere mockery, and a snare more hurtful than the pettinesses and privations of his past life. The fickle goddess, continuing her part of mystifier, had opened to his enraptured sight a magic window through which she had shown him a charming vision of possible happiness; but while he was still gazing, she had closed it abruptly in his face, laughing scornfully at his discomfiture. What sense was

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there in this perversion of justice, this perpetual mockery of Fate? At times the influence of his early education would resume its sway, and he would ask himself whether all this apparent contradiction were not a secret admonition from on high, warning him that he had not been created to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this world, and ought, therefore, to turn his attention toward things eternal, and renounce the perishable delights of the flesh?

"If so," thought he, irreverently, "the warning comes rather late, and it would have answered the purpose better had I been allowed to continue in the narrow way of obscure poverty!" Now that the enervating influence of a more prosperous atmosphere had weakened his courage, and cooled the ardor of his piety, his faith began to totter like an old wall. His religious beliefs seemed to have been wrecked by the same storm which had destroyed his passionate hopes of love, and left him stranded and forlorn without either haven or pilot, blown hither and thither solely by the violence of his passion.

By degrees he took an aversion to his home, and would spend entire days in the woods. Their secluded haunts, already colored by the breath of autumn, became more attractive to him as other refuge failed him. They were his consolation; his doubts, weakness, and amorous regrets, found sympathy and indulgence under their silent shelter. He felt less lonely, less humiliated, less prosaic among these great forest depths, these lofty ash-trees, raising their verdant branches to heaven. He found he could more easily evoke the seductive image of Reine Vincart in these calm solitudes, where the recollections of the previous springtime mingled with the phantoms of his heated imagination and clothed themselves with almost living forms. He seemed to see the young girl rising from the mists of the distant valleys. The least fluttering of the leaves heralded her fancied approach. At times the hallucination was so complete that he could see, in the interlacing of the branches, the undulations of her supple form, and the graceful outlines of her profile. Then he would be seized by an insane desire to reach the fugitive and speak to her once more, and would go tearing along the brushwood for that purpose. Now and then, in the half light formed by the hanging boughs, he would see rays of golden light, coming straight down to the ground, and resting there lightly like diaphanous apparitions. Sometimes the rustling of birds taking flight, would sound in his ears like the timid frou-frou of a skirt, and Julien, fascinated by the mysterious charm of these indefinite objects, and following the impulse of their mystical suggestions, would fling himself impetuously into the jungle, repeating to himself the words of the "Cantic of Canticles": "I hear the voice of my beloved; behold! she cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." He would continue to press forward in pursuit of the intangible apparition, until he sank with exhaustion near some stream or fountain. Under the influence of the fever, which was consuming his brain, he would imagine the trickling water to be the song of a feminine voice. He would wind his arms around the young saplings, he would tear the berries from the bushes,

pressing them against his thirsty lips, and imagining their odoriferous sweetness to be a fond caress from the loved one.

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He would return from these expeditions exhausted but not appeased. Sometimes he would come across Claudet, also returning home from paying his court to Reine Vincart; and the unhappy Julien would scrutinize his rival's countenance, seeking eagerly for some trace of the impressions he had received during the loving interview. His curiosity was nearly always baffled; for Claudet seemed to have left all his gayety and conversational powers at La Thuiliere. During their tete-a-tete meals, he hardly spoke at all, maintaining a reserved attitude and a taciturn countenance. Julien, provoked at this unexpected sobriety, privately accused his cousin of dissimulation, and of trying to conceal his happiness. His jealousy so blinded him that he considered the silence of Claudet as pure hypocrisy not recognizing that it was assumed for the purpose of concealing some unpleasantness rather than satisfaction.

The fact was that Claudet, although rejoicing at the turn matters had taken, was verifying the poet's saying: "Never is perfect happiness our lot." When Julien brought him the good news, and he had flown so joyfully to La Thuiliere, he had certainly been cordially received by Reine, but, nevertheless, he had noticed with surprise an absent and dreamy look in her eyes, which did not agree with his idea of a first interview of lovers. When he wished to express his affection in the vivacious and significant manner ordinarily employed among the peasantry, that is to say, by vigorous embracing and resounding kisses, he met with unexpected resistance.

"Keep quiet!" was the order, "and let us talk rationally!"

He obeyed, although not agreeing in her view of the reserve to be maintained between lovers; but, he made up his mind to return to the charge and triumph over her bashful scruples. In fact, he began again the very next day, and his impetuous ardor encountered the same refusal in the same firm, though affectionate manner. He ventured to complain, telling Reine that she did not love him as she ought.

"If I did not feel friendly toward you," replied the young girl, laconically, "should I have allowed you to talk to me of marriage?"

Then, seeing that he looked vexed and worried, and realizing that she was perhaps treating him too roughly, she continued, more gently:

"Remember, Claudet, that I am living all alone at the farm. That obliges me to have more reserve than a girl whose mother is with her. So you must not be offended if I do not behave exactly as others might, and rest assured that it will not prevent me from being a good wife to you, when we are married."

"Well, now," thought Claudet, as he was returning despondently to Vivey: "I can't help thinking that a little caress now and then wouldn't hurt any one!"

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Under these conditions it is not to be supposed he was in a mood to relate any of the details of such meagre lovemaking. His self-love was wounded by Reine's coldness. Having always been "cock-of-the-walk," he could not understand why he had such poor success with the only one about whom he was in earnest. He kept quiet, therefore, hiding his anxiety under the mask of careless indifference. Moreover, a certain primitive instinct of prudence made him circumspect. In his innermost soul, he still entertained doubts of Julien's sincerity. Sometimes he doubted whether his cousin's conduct had not been dictated by the bitterness of rejected love, rather than a generous impulse of affection, and he did not care to reveal Reine's repulse to one whom he vaguely suspected of being a former lover. His simple, ardent nature could not put up with opposition, and he thought only of hastening the day when Reine would belong to him altogether. But, when he broached this subject, he had the mortification to find that she was less impatient than himself.

"There is no hurry," she replied, "our affairs are not in order, our harvests are not housed, and it would be better to wait till the dull season."

In his first moments of joy and effervescence, Claudet had evinced the desire to announce immediately the betrothal throughout the village. This Reine had opposed; she thought they should avoid awakening public curiosity so long beforehand, and she extracted from Claudet a promise to say nothing until the date of the marriage should be settled. He had unwillingly consented, and thus, during the last month, the matter had been dragging on indefinitely:

With Julien de Buxieres, this interminable delay, these incessant comings and goings from the chateau to the farm, as well as the mysterious conduct of the bridegroom-elect, became a subject of serious irritation, amounting almost to obsession. He would have wished the affair hurried up, and the sacrifice consummated without hindrance. He believed that when once the newly-married pair had taken up their quarters at La Thuiliere, the very certainty that Reine belonged in future to another would suffice to effect a radical cure in him, and chase away the deceptive phantoms by which he was pursued.

One evening, as Claudet was returning home, more out of humor and silent than usual, Julien asked him, abruptly:

"Well! how are you getting along? When is the wedding?"

"Nothing is decided yet," replied Claudet, "we have time enough!"

"You think so?" exclaimed de Buxieres, sarcastically; "you have considerable patience for a lover!"

The remark and the tone provoked Claudet.



"The delay is not of my making," returned he.

"Ah!" replied the other, quickly, "then it comes from Mademoiselle Vincart?" And a sudden gleam came into his eyes, as if Claudet's assertion had kindled a spark of hope in his breast. The latter noticed the momentary brightness in his cousin's usually stormy countenance, and hastened to reply:

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"Nay, nay; we both think it better to postpone the wedding until the harvest is in."

"You are wrong. A wedding should not be postponed. Besides, this prolonged love-making, these daily visits to the farm—all that is not very proper. It is compromising for Mademoiselle Vincart!"

Julien shot out these remarks with a degree of fierceness and violence that astonished Claudet.

"You think, then," said he, "that we ought to rush matters, and have the wedding before winter?"

"Undoubtedly!"

The next day, at La Thuiliere, the grand chasserot, as he stood in the orchard, watching Reine spread linen on the grass, entered bravely on the subject.

"Reine," said he, coaxingly, "I think we shall have to decide upon a day for our wedding."

She set down the watering-pot with which she was wetting the linen, and looked anxiously at her betrothed.

"I thought we had agreed to wait until the later season. Why do you wish to change that arrangement?"

"That is true; I promised not to hurry you, Reine, but it is beyond me to wait—you must not be vexed with me if I find the time long. Besides, they know nothing, around the village, of our intentions, and my coming here every day might cause gossip and make it unpleasant for you. At any rate, that is the opinion of Monsieur de Buxieres, with whom I was conferring only yesterday evening."

At the name of Julien, Reine frowned and bit her lip.

"Aha!" said she, "it is he who has been advising you?"

"Yes; he says the sooner we are married, the better it will be."

"Why does he interfere in what does not concern him?" said she, angrily, turning her head away. She stood a moment in thought, absently pushing forward the roll of linen with her foot. Then, shrugging her shoulders and raising her head, she said slowly, while still avoiding Claudet's eyes:

"Perhaps you are right—both of you. Well, let it be so! I authorize you to go to Monsieur le Cure and arrange the day with him."

“Oh, thanks, Reine!” exclaimed Claudet, rapturously; “you make me very happy!”

He pressed her hands in his, but though absorbed in his own joyful feelings, he could not help remarking that the young girl was trembling in his grasp. He even fancied that there was a suspicious, tearful glitter in her brilliant eyes.

He left her, however, and repaired at once to the cure’s house, which stood near the chateau, a little behind the church.

The servant showed him into a small garden separated by a low wall from the cemetery. He found the Abbe Pernot seated on a stone bench, sheltered by a trellised vine. He was occupied in cutting up pieces of hazel-nuts to make traps for small birds.

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"Good-evening, Claudet!" said the cure, without moving from his work; "you find me busy preparing my nets; if you will permit me, I will continue, for I should like to have my two hundred traps finished by this evening. The season is advancing, you know! The birds will begin their migrations, and I should be greatly provoked if I were not equipped in time for the opportune moment. And how is Monsieur de Buxieres? I trust he will not be less good-natured than his deceased cousin, and that he will allow me to spread my snares on the border hedge of his woods. But," added he, as he noticed the flurried, impatient countenance of his visitor, "I forgot to ask you, my dear young fellow, to what happy chance I owe your visit? Excuse my neglect!"

"Don't mention it, Monsieur le Cure. You have guessed rightly. It is a very happy circumstance which brings me. I am about to marry."

"Aha!" laughed the Abbe, "I congratulate you, my dear young friend. This is really delightful news. It is not good for man to be alone, and I am glad to know you must give up the perilous life of a bachelor. Well, tell me quickly the name of your betrothed. Do I know her?"

"Of course you do, Monsieur le Cure; there are few you know so well. It is Mademoiselle Vincart."

"Reine?"

The Abbe flung away the pruning-knife and branch that he was cutting, and gazed at Claudet with a stupefied air. At the same time, his jovial face became shadowed, and his mouth assumed an expression of consternation.

"Yes, indeed, Reine Vincart," repeated Claudet, somewhat vexed at the startled manner of his reverence; "are you surprised at my choice?"

"Excuse me-and-is it all settled?" stammered the Abbe, with bewilderment, "and—and do you really love each other?"

"Certainly; we agree on that point; and I have come here to arrange with you about having the banns published."

"What! already?" murmured the cure, buttoning and unbuttoning the top of his coat in his agitation, "you seem to be in a great hurry to go to work. The union of the man and the woman—ahem—is a serious matter, which ought not to be undertaken without due consideration. That is the reason why the Church has instituted the sacrament of marriage. Hast thou well considered, my son?"

"Why, certainly, I have reflected," exclaimed Claudet with some irritation, "and my mind is quite made up. Once more, I ask you, Monsieur le Cure, are you displeased with my choice, or have you anything to say against Mademoiselle Vincart?"

"I? no, absolutely nothing. Reine is an exceedingly good girl."

"Well, then?"

"Well, my friend, I will go over to-morrow and see your fiancée, and we will talk matters over. I shall act for the best, in the interests of both of you, be assured of that. In the meantime, you will both be united this evening in my prayers; but, for to-day, we shall have to stop where we are. Good-evening, Claudet! I will see you again."

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With these enigmatic words, he dismissed the young lover, who returned to the chateau, vexed and disturbed by his strange reception.

The moment the door of the presbytery had closed behind Claudet, the Abbe Pernot, flinging to one side all his preparations, began to pace nervously up and down the principal garden-walk. He appeared completely unhinged. His features were drawn, through an unusual tension of ideas forced upon him. He had hurriedly caught his skullcap from his head, as if he feared the heat of his meditation might cause a rush of blood to the head. He quickened his steps, then stopped suddenly, folded his arms with great energy, then opened them again abruptly to thrust his hands into the pockets of his gown, searching through them with feverish anxiety, as if he expected to find something which might solve obscure and embarrassing questions.

“Good Lord! Good Lord! What a dreadful piece of business; and right in the bird season, too! But I can say nothing to Claudet. It is a secret that does not belong to me. How can I get out of it? Tutt! tutt! tutt!”

These monosyllabic ejaculations broke forth like the vexed clucking of a frightened blackbird; after which relief, the Abbe resumed his fitful striding up and down the box-bordered alley. This lasted until the hour of twilight, when Augustine, the servant, as soon as the Angelus had sounded, went to inform her master that they were waiting prayers for him in the church. He obeyed the summons, although in a somewhat absent mood, and hurried over the services in a manner which did not contribute to the edification of the assistants. As soon as he got home, he ate his Supper without appetite, mumbled his prayers, and shut himself up in the room he used as a study and workshop. He remained there until the night was far advanced, searching through his scanty library to find two dusty volumes treating of “cases of conscience,” which he looked eagerly over by the feeble light of his study lamp. During this laborious search he emitted frequent sighs, and only left off reading occasionally in order to dose himself plentifully with snuff. At last, as he felt that his eyes were becoming inflamed, his ideas conflicting in his brain, and as his lamp was getting low, he decided to go to bed. But he slept badly, turned over at least twenty times, and was up with the first streak of day to say his mass in the chapel. He officiated with more dignity and piety than was his wont; and after reading the second gospel he remained for a long while kneeling on one of the steps of the altar. After he had returned to the sacristy, he divested himself quickly of his sacerdotal robes, reached his room by a passage of communication, breakfasted hurriedly, and putting on his three-cornered hat, and seizing his knotty, cherry-wood cane, he shot out of doors as if he had been summoned to a fire.

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Augustine, amazed at his precipitate departure, went up to the attic, and, from behind the shelter of the skylight, perceived her master striding rapidly along the road to Planche-au-Vacher. There she lost sight of him—the underwood was too thick. But, after a few minutes, the gaze of the inquisitive woman was rewarded by the appearance of a dark object emerging from the copse, and defining itself on the bright pasture land beyond. “Monsieur le Cure is going to La Thuiliere,” thought she, and with this half-satisfaction she descended to her daily occupations.

It was true, the Abbe Pernot was walking, as fast as he could, to the Vincart farm, as unmindful of the dew that tarnished his shoe-buckles as of the thorns which attacked his calves. He had that within him which spurred him on, and rendered him unconscious of the accidents on his path. Never, during his twenty-five years of priestly office, had a more difficult question embarrassed his conscience. The case was a grave one, and moreover, so urgent that the Abbe was quite at a loss how to proceed. How was it that he never had foreseen that such a combination of circumstances might occur? A priest of a more fervent spirit, who had the salvation of his flock more at heart, could not have been taken so unprepared. Yes; that was surely the cause! The profane occupations in which he had allowed himself to take so much enjoyment, had distracted his watchfulness and obscured his perspicacity. Providence was now punishing him for his lukewarmness, by interposing across his path this stumbling-block, which was probably sent to him as a salutary warning, but which he saw no way of getting over.

While he was thus meditating and reproaching himself, the thrushes were calling to one another from the branches of their favorite trees; whole flights of yellowhammers burst forth from the hedges red with haws; but he took no heed of them and did not even give a single thought to his neglected nests and snares.

He went straight on, stumbling over the juniper bushes, and wondering what he should say when he reached the farm, and how he should begin. Sometimes he addressed himself, thus: “Have I the right to speak? What a revelation! And to a young girl! Oh, Lord, lead me in the straight way of thy truth, and instruct me in the right path!”

As he continued piously repeating this verse of the Psalmist, in order to gain spiritual strength, the gray roofs of La Thuiliere rose before him; he could hear the crowing of the cocks and the lowing of the cows in the stable. Five minutes after, he had pushed open the door of the kitchen where La Guite was arranging the bowls for breakfast.

“Good-morning, Guitiote,” said he, in a choking voice; “is Mademoiselle Vincart up?”

“Holy Virgin! Monsieur le Cure! Why, certainly Mademoiselle is up. She was on foot before any of us, and now she is trotting around the orchard. I will go fetch her.”

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"No, do not stir. I know the way, and I will go and find her myself."

She was in the orchard, was she? The Abbe preferred it should be so; he thought the interview would be less painful, and that the surrounding trees would give him ideas. He walked across the kitchen, descended the steps leading from the ground floor to the garden, and ascended the slope in search of Reine, whom he soon perceived in the midst of a bower formed by clustering filbert-trees.

At sight of the cure, Reine turned pale; he had doubtless come to tell her the result of his interview with Claudet, and what day had been definitely chosen for the nuptial celebration. She had been troubled all night by the reflection that her fate would soon be irrevocably sealed; she had wept, and her eyes betrayed it. Only the day before, she had looked upon this project of marriage, which she had entertained in a moment of anger and injured feeling, as a vague thing, a vaporous eventuality of which the realization was doubtful; now, all was arranged, settled, cruelly certain; there was no way of escaping from a promise which Claudet, alas! was bound to consider a serious one. These thoughts traversed her mind, while the cure was slowly approaching the filbert-trees; she felt her heart throb, and her eyes again filled with tears. Yet her pride would not allow that the Abbe should witness her irresolution and weeping; she made an effort, overcame the momentary weakness, and addressed the priest in an almost cheerful voice:

"Monsieur le Cure, I am sorry that they have made you come up this hill to find me. Let us go back to the farm, and I will offer you a cup of coffee."

"No, my child," replied the Abbe, motioning with his hand that she should stay where she was, "no, thank you! I will not take anything. Remain where you are."

"I wish to talk to you, and we shall be less liable to be disturbed here."

There were two rustic seats under the nut-trees; the cure took one and asked Reine to take the other, opposite to him. There they were, under the thick, verdant branches, hidden from indiscreet passers-by, surrounded by silence, installed as in a confessional.

The morning quiet, the solitude, the half light, all invited meditation and confidence; nevertheless the young girl and the priest sat motionless; both agitated and embarrassed and watching each other without uttering a sound. It was Reine who first broke the silence.

"You have seen Claudet, Monsieur le Cure?"

"Yes, yes!" replied the Abbe, sighing deeply.

"He—spoke to you of our-plans," continued the young girl, in a quavering voice, "and you fixed the day?"

“No, my child, we settled nothing. I wanted to see you first, and converse with you about something very important.”

The Abbe hesitated, rubbed a spot of mud off his soutane, raised his shoulders like a man lifting a heavy burden, then gave a deep cough.

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"My dear child," continued he at length, prudently dropping his voice a tone lower, "I will begin by repeating to you what I said yesterday to Claudet Sejournant: the marriage, that is to say, the indissoluble union, of man and woman before God, is one of the most solemn and serious acts of life. The Church has constituted it a sacrament, which she administers only on certain formal conditions. Before entering into this bond, one ought, as we are taught by Holy Writ, to sound the heart, subject the very inmost of the soul to searching examinations. I beg of you, therefore, answer my questions freely, without false shame, just as if you were at the tribunal of repentance. Do you love Claudet?"

Reine trembled. This appeal to her sincerity renewed all her perplexities and scruples. She raised her full, glistening eyes to the cure, and replied, after a slight hesitation:

"I have a sincere affection for Claudet-and-much esteem."

"I understand that," replied the priest, compressing his lips, "but—excuse me if I press the matter—has the engagement you have made with him been determined simply by considerations of affection and suitableness, or by more interior and deeper feelings?"

"Pardon, Monsieur le Cure," returned Reine, coloring, "it seems to me that a sentiment of friendship, joined to a firm determination to prove a faithful and devoted wife, should be, in your eyes as they are in mine, a sufficient assurance that—"

"Certainly, certainly, my dear child; and many husbands would be contented with less. However, it is not only a question of Claudet's happiness, but of yours also. Come now! let me ask you: is your affection for young Sejournant so powerful that in the event of any unforeseen circumstance happening, to break off the marriage, you would be forever unhappy?"

"Ah!" replied Reine, more embarrassed than ever, "you ask too grave a question, Monsieur le Cure! If it were broken off without my having to reproach myself for it, it is probable that I should find consolation in time."

"Very good! Consequently, you do not love Claudet, if I may take the word love in the sense understood by people of the world. You only like, you do not love him? Tell me. Answer frankly."

"Frankly, Monsieur le Cure, no!"

"Thanks be to God! We are saved!" exclaimed the Abbe, drawing a long breath, while Reine, amazed, gazed at him with wondering eyes.

"I do not understand you," faltered she; "what is it?"

"It is this: the marriage can not take place."

“Can not? why?”

“It is impossible, both in the eyes of the Church and in those of the world.”

The young girl looked at him with increasing amazement.

“You alarm me!” cried she. “What has happened? What reasons hinder me from marrying Claudet?”

“Very powerful reasons, my dear child. I do not feel at liberty to reveal them to you, but you must know that I am not speaking without authority, and that you may rely on the statement I have made.”

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Reine remained thoughtful, her brows knit, her countenance troubled.

"I have every confidence in you, Monsieur le Cure, but—"

"But you hesitate about believing me," interrupted the Abbe, piqued at not finding in one of his flock the blind obedience on which he had reckoned. "You must know, nevertheless, that your pastor has no interest in deceiving you, and that when he seeks to influence you, he has in view only your well-being in this world and in the next."

"I do not doubt your good intentions," replied Reine, with firmness, "but a promise can not be annulled without sufficient cause. I have given my word to Claudet, and I am too loyal at heart to break faith with him without letting him know the reason."

"You will find some pretext."

"And supposing that Claudet would be content with such a pretext, my own conscience would not be," objected the young girl, raising her clear, honest glance toward the priest; "your words have entered my soul, they are troubling me now, and it will be worse when I begin to think this matter over again. I can not bear uncertainty. I must see my way clearly before me. I entreat you then, Monsieur le Cure, not to do things by halves. You have thought it your duty to tell me I can not wed with Claudet; now tell me why not?"

"Why not? why not?" repeated the Abbe, angrily. "I distress myself in telling you that I am not authorized to satisfy your unwise curiosity! You must humble your intelligence and believe without arguing."

"In matters of faith, that may be possible," urged Reine, obstinately, "but my marriage has nothing to do with discussing the truths of our holy religion. I therefore respectfully ask to be enlightened, Monsieur le Cure; otherwise—"

"Otherwise?" repeated the Abby Pernot, inquiringly, rolling his eyes uneasily.

"Otherwise, I shall keep my word respectably, and I shall marry Claudet."

"You will not do that?" said he, imploringly, joining his hands as if in supplication; "after being openly warned by me, you dare not burden your soul with such a terrible responsibility. Come, my child, does not the possibility of committing a mortal sin alarm your conscience as a Christian?"

"I can not sin if I am in ignorance, and as to my conscience, Monsieur le Cure, do you think it is acting like a Christian to alarm without enlightening?"

"Is that your last word?" inquired the Abbe, completely aghast.



"It is my last word," she replied, vehemently, moved both by a feeling of self-respect, and a desire to force the hand of her interlocutor.

"You are a proud, obstinate girl!" exclaimed the Abbe, rising abruptly, "you wish to compel me to reveal this secret! Well, have your way! I will tell you. May the harm which may result from it fall lightly upon you, and do not hereafter reproach me for the pain I am about to inflict upon you."

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He checked himself for a moment, again joined his hands, and raising his eyes toward heaven ejaculated fervently, as if repeating his devotions in the oratory: "O Lord, thou knowest I would have spared her this bitter cup, but, between two evils, I have avoided the greater. If I forfeit my solemn promise, consider, O Lord, I pray thee, that I do it to avoid disgrace and exposure for her, and deign to forgive thy servant!"

He seated himself again, placed one of his hands before his eyes, and began, in a hollow voice, Reine, all the while gazing nervously at him:

"My child, you are forcing me to violate a secret which has been solemnly confided to me. It concerns a matter not usually talked about before young girls, but you are, I believe, already a woman in heart and understanding, and you will hear resignedly what I have to tell you, however much the recital may trouble you. I have already informed you that your marriage with Claudet is impossible. I now declare that it would be criminal, for the reason that incest is an abomination."

"Incest!" repeated Reine, pale and trembling, "what do you mean?"

"I mean," sighed the cure, "that you are Claudet's sister, not having the same mother, but the same father: Claude-Odouart de Buxieres."

"Oh! you are mistaken! that cannot be!"

"I am stating facts. It grieves me to the heart, my dear child, that in speaking of your deceased mother, I should have to reveal an error over which she lamented, like David, with tears of blood. She confessed her sin, not to the priest, but to a friend, a few days before her death. In justice to her memory, I ought to add that, like most of the unfortunates seduced by this untamable de Buxieres, she succumbed to his wily misrepresentations. She was a victim rather than an accomplice. The man himself acknowledged as much in a note entrusted to my care, which I have here."

And the Abbe' drew from his pocket an old, worn letter, the writing yellow with age, and placed it before Reine. In this letter, written in Claude de Buxieres's coarse, sprawling hand, doubtless in reply to a reproachful appeal from his mistress, he endeavored to offer some kind of honorable amends for the violence he had used, and to calm Madame Vincart's remorse by promising, as was his custom, to watch over the future of the child which should be born to her.

"That child was yourself, my poor girl," continued the Abbe, picking up the letter which Reine had thrown down, after reading it, with a gesture of sickened disgust.

She appeared not to hear him. She had buried her face in her hands, to hide the flushing of her cheeks, and sat motionless, altogether crushed beneath the shameful revelation; convulsive sobs and tremblings occasionally agitating her frame.

“You can now understand,” continued the priest, “how the announcement of this projected marriage stunned and terrified me. I could not confide to Claudet the reason for my stupefaction, and I should have been thankful if you could have understood so that I could have spared you this cruel mortification, but you would not take any intimation from me. And now, forgive me for inflicting this cross upon you, and bear it with courage, with Christian fortitude.”



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"You have acted as was your duty," murmured Reine, sadly, "and I thank you, Monsieur le Cure!"

"And will you promise me to dismiss Claudet at once—today?"

"I promise you."

The Abbe Pernot advanced to take her hand, and administer some words of consolation; but she evaded, with a stern gesture, the good man's pious sympathy, and escaped toward the dwelling.

The spacious kitchen was empty when she entered. The shutters had been closed against the sun, and it had become cool and pleasant. Here and there, among the copper utensils, and wherever a chance ray made a gleam of light, the magpie was hopping about, uttering short, piercing cries. In the recess of the niche containing the colored prints, sat the old man Vincart, dozing, in his usual supine attitude, his hands spread out, his eyelids drooping, his mouth half open. At the sound of the door, his eyes opened wide. He rather guessed at, than saw, the entrance of the young girl, and his pallid lips began their accustomed refrain: "Reine! Rei-eine!"

Reine flew impetuously toward the paralytic old man, threw herself on her knees before him, sobbing bitterly, and covered his hands with kisses. Her caresses were given in a more respectful, humble, contrite manner than ever before.

"Oh! father—father!" faltered she; "I loved you always, I shall love you now with all my heart and soul!"

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE'S SAD ENDING

The kitchen was bright with sunshine, and the industrious bees were buzzing around the flowers on the window-sills, while Reine was listlessly attending to culinary duties, and preparing her father's meal. The humiliating disclosures made by the Abbe Pernot weighed heavily upon her mind. She foresaw that Claudet would shortly be at La Thuilliere in order to hear the result of the cure's visit; but she did not feel sufficiently mistress of herself to have a decisive interview with him at such short notice, and resolved to gain at least one day by absenting herself from the farm. It seemed to her necessary that she should have that length of time to arrange her ideas, and evolve some way of separating Claudet and herself without his suspecting the real motive of rupture. So, telling La Guite to say that unexpected business had called her away, she set out for the woods of Maignefontaine.



Whenever she had felt the need of taking counsel with herself before deciding on any important matter, the forest had been her refuge and her inspiration. The refreshing solitude of the valleys, watered by living streams, acted as a strengthening balm to her irresolute will; her soul inhaled the profound peace of these leafy retreats. By the time she had reached the inmost shade of the forest her mind had become calmer, and better able to unravel the confusion of thoughts that surged like troubled waters through her brain. The dominant idea was, that her self-respect

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had been wounded; the shock to her maidenly modesty, and the shame attendant upon the fact, affected her physically, as if she had been belittled and degraded by a personal stain; and this downfall caused her deep humiliation. By slow degrees, however, and notwithstanding this state of abject despair, she felt, cropping up somewhere in her heart, a faint germ of gladness, and, by close examination, discovered its origin: she was now loosed from her obligations toward Claudet, and the prospect of being once more free afforded her immediate consolation.

She had so much regretted, during the last few weeks, the feeling of outraged pride which had incited her to consent to this marriage; her loyal, sincere nature had revolted at the constraint she had imposed upon herself; her nerves had been so severely taxed by having to receive her fiance with sufficient warmth to satisfy his expectations, and yet not afford any encouragement to his demonstrative tendencies, that the certainty of her newly acquired freedom created a sensation of relief and well-being. But, hardly had she analyzed and acknowledged this sensation when she reproached herself for harboring it when she was about to cause Claudet such affliction.

Poor Claudet! what a cruel blow was in store for him! He was so guilelessly in love, and had such unbounded confidence in the success of his projects! Reine was overcome by tender reminiscences. She had always experienced, as if divining by instinct the natural bonds which united them, a sisterly affection for Claudet. Since their earliest infancy, at the age when they learned their catechism under the church porch, they had been united in a bond of friendly fellowship. With Reine, this tender feeling had always remained one of friendship, but, with Claudet, it had ripened into love; and now, after allowing the poor young fellow to believe that his love was reciprocated, she was forced to disabuse him. It was useless for her to try to find some way of softening the blow; there was none. Claudet was too much in love to remain satisfied with empty words; he would require solid reasons; and the only conclusive one which would convince him, without wounding his self-love, was exactly the one which the young girl could not give him. She was, therefore, doomed to send Claudet away with the impression that he had been jilted by a heartless and unprincipled coquette. And yet something must be done. The grand chasserot had been too long already in the toils; there was something barbarously cruel in not freeing him from his illusions.

In this troubled state of mind, Reine gazed appealingly at the silent witnesses of her distress. She heard a voice within her saying to the tall, vaulted ash, "Inspire me!" to the little rose-colored centaurea of the wayside, "Teach me a charm to cure the harm I have done!" But the woods, which in former days had been her advisers and instructors, remained deaf to her invocation. For the first time, she felt herself isolated and abandoned to her own resources, even in the midst of her beloved forest.

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It is when we experience these violent mental crises, that we become suddenly conscious of Nature's cold indifference to our sufferings. She really is nothing more than the reflex of our own sensations, and can only give us back what we lend her. Beautiful but selfish, she allows herself to be courted by novices, but presents a freezing, emotionless aspect to those who have outlived their illusions.

Reine did not reach home until the day had begun to wane. La Guite informed her that Claudet had waited for her during part of the afternoon, and that he would come again the next day at nine o'clock. Notwithstanding her bodily fatigue, she slept uneasily, and her sleep was troubled by feverish dreams. Every time she closed her eyes, she fancied herself conversing with Claudet, and woke with a start at the sound of his angry voice.

She arose at dawn, descended at once to the lower floor, to get through her morning tasks, and as soon as the big kitchen clock struck nine, she left the house and took the path by which Claudet would come. A feeling of delicate consideration toward her lover had impelled her to choose for her explanation any other place than the one where she had first received his declaration of love, and consented to the marriage. Very soon he came in sight, his stalwart figure outlined against the gray landscape. He was walking rapidly; her heart smote her, her hands became like ice, but she summoned all her fortitude, and went bravely forward to meet him.

When he came within forty or fifty feet, he recognized Reine, and took a short cut across the stubble studded with cobwebs glistening with dew.

"Aha! my Reine, my queen, good-morning!" cried he, joyously, "it is sweet of you to come to meet me!"

"Good-morning, Claudet. I came to meet you because I wish to speak with you on matters of importance, and I preferred not to have the conversation take place in our house. Shall we walk as far as the Planche-au-Vacher?"

He stopped short, astonished at the proposal and also at the sad and resolute attitude of his betrothed. He examined her more closely, noticed her deep-set eyes, her cheeks, whiter than usual.

"Why, what is the matter, Reine?" he inquired; "you are not yourself; do you not feel well?"

"Yes, and no. I have passed a bad night, thinking over matters that are troubling me, and I think that has produced some fever."

"What matters? Any that concern us?"

"Yes," replied she, laconically.

Claudet opened his eyes. The young girl's continued gravity began to alarm him; but, seeing that she walked quickly forward, with an absent air, her face lowered, her brows bent, her mouth compressed, he lost courage and refrained from asking her any questions. They walked on thus in silence, until they came to the open level covered with juniper-bushes, from which solitary place, surrounded by hawthorn hedges, they could trace the narrow defile leading to Vivey, and the faint mist beyond.

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"Let us stop here," said Reine, seating herself on a flat, mossy stone, "we can talk here without fear of being disturbed."

"No fear of that," remarked Claudet, with a forced smile, "with the exception of the shepherd of Vivey, who comes here sometimes with his cattle, we shall not see many passers-by. It must be a secret that you have to tell me, Reine?" he added.

"No;" she returned, "but I foresee that my words will give you pain, my poor Claudet, and I prefer you should hear them without being annoyed by the farm-people passing to and fro."

"Explain yourself!" he exclaimed, impetuously. "For heaven's sake, don't keep me in suspense!"

"Listen, Claudet. When you asked my hand in marriage, I answered yes, without taking time to reflect. But, since I have been thinking over our plans, I have had scruples. My father is becoming every day more of an invalid, and in his present state I really have no right to live for any one but him. One would think he was aware of our intentions, for since you have been visiting at the farm, he is more agitated and suffers more. I think that any change in his way of living would bring on a stroke, and I never should forgive myself if I thought I had shortened his life. That is the reason why, as long as I have him with me, I do not see that it will be possible for me to dispose of myself. On the other hand, I do not wish to abuse your patience. I therefore ask you to take back your liberty and give me back my promise."

"That is to say, you won't have me!" he exclaimed.

"No; my poor friend, it means only that I shall not marry so long as my father is living, and that I can not ask you to wait until I am perfectly free. Forgive me for having entered into the engagement too carelessly, and do not on that account take your friendship from me."

"Reine," interrupted Claudet, angrily, "don't turn your brain inside out to make me believe that night is broad day. I am not a child, and I see very well that your father's health is only a pretext. You don't want me, that's all, and, with all due respect, you have changed your mind very quickly! Only the day before yesterday you authorized me to arrange about the day for the ceremony with the Abbe Pernot. Now that you have had a visit from the cure, you want to put the affair off until the week when two Sundays come together! I am a little curious to know what that confounded old abbe has been babbling about me, to turn you inside out like a glove in such a short time."

Claudet's conscience reminded him of several rare frolics, chance love-affairs, meetings in the woods, and so on, and he feared the priest might have told Reine some unfavorable stories about him. "Ah!" he continued, clenching his fists, "if this old

poacher in a cassock has done me an ill turn with you, he will not have much of a chance for paradise!"

"Undeceive yourself," said Reine, quickly, "Monsieur le Cure is your friend, like myself; he esteems you highly, and never has said anything but good of you."

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"Oh, indeed!" sneered the young man, "as you are both so fond of me, how does it happen that you have given me my dismissal the very day after your interview with the cure?"

Reine, knowing Claudet's violent disposition, and wishing to avoid trouble for the cure, thought it advisable to have recourse to evasion.

"Monsieur le Cure," said she, "has had no part in my decision. He has not spoken against you, and deserves no reproaches from you."

"In that case, why do you send me away?"

"I repeat again, the comfort and peace of my father are paramount with me, and I do not intend to marry so long as he may have need of me."

"Well," said Claudet, persistently, "I love you, and I will wait."

"It can not be."

"Why?"

"Because," replied she, sharply, "because it would be kind neither to you, nor to my father, nor to me. Because marriages that drag along in that way are never good for anything!"

"Those are bad reasons!" he muttered, gloomily.

"Good or bad," replied the young girl, "they appear valid to me, and I hold to them."

"Reine," said he, drawing near to her and looking straight into her eyes, "can you swear, by the head of your father, that you have given me the true reason for your rejecting me?"

She became embarrassed, and remained silent.

"See!" he exclaimed, "you dare not take the oath!"

"My word should suffice," she faltered.

"No; it does not suffice. But your silence says a great deal, I tell you! You are too frank, Reine, and you don't know how to lie. I read it in your eyes, I do. The true reason is that you do not love me."

She shrugged her shoulders and turned away her head.

"No, you do not love me. If you had any love for me, instead of discouraging me, you would hold out some hope to me, and advise me to have patience. You never have loved me, confess now!"

By dint of this persistence, Reine by degrees lost her self-confidence. She could realize how much Claudet was suffering, and she reproached herself for the torture she was inflicting upon him. Driven into a corner, and recognizing that the avowal he was asking for was the only one that would drive him away, she hesitated no longer.

"Alas!" she murmured, lowering her eyes, "since you force me to tell you some truths that I would rather have kept from you, I confess you have guessed. I have a sincere friendship for you, but that is all. I have concluded that to marry a person one ought to love him differently, more than everything else in the world, and I feel that my heart is not turned altogether toward you."

"No," said Claudet, bitterly, "it is turned elsewhere."

"What do you mean? I do not understand you."

"I mean that you love some one else."

"That is not true," she protested.

"You are blushing—a proof that I have hit the nail!"

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"Enough of this!" cried she, imperiously.

"You are right. Now that you have said you don't want me any longer, I have no right to ask anything further. Adieu!"

He turned quickly on his heel. Reine was conscious of having been too hard with him, and not wishing him to go away with such a grief in his heart, she sought to retain him by placing her hand upon his arm.

"Come, Claudet," said she, entreatingly, "do not let us part in anger. It pains me to see you suffer, and I am sorry if I have said anything unkind to you. Give me your hand in good fellowship, will you?"

But Claudet drew back with a fierce gesture, and glancing angrily at Reine, he replied, rudely:

"Thanks for your regrets and your pity; I have no use for them." She understood that he was deeply hurt; gave up entreating, and turned away with eyes full of tears.

He remained motionless, his arms crossed, in the middle of the road. After some minutes, he turned his head. Reine was already nothing more than a dark speck against the gray of the increasing fog. Then he went off, haphazard, across the pasture-lands. The fog was rising slowly, and the sun, shorn of its beams, showed its pale face faintly through it. To the right and the left, the woods were half hidden by moving white billows, and Claudet walked between fluid walls of vapor. This hidden sky, these veiled surroundings, harmonized with his mental condition. It was easier for him to hide his chagrin. "Some one else! Yes; that's it. She loves some other fellow! how was it I did not find that out the very first day?" Then he recalled how Reine shrank from him when he solicited a caress; how she insisted on their betrothal being kept secret, and how many times she had postponed the date of the wedding. It was evident that she had received him only in self-defence, and on the pleading of Julien de Buxieres. Julien! the name threw a gleam of light across his brain, hitherto as foggy as the country around him. Might not Julien be the fortunate rival on whom Reine's affections were so obstinately set? Still, if she had always loved Monsieur de Buxieres, in what spirit of perversity or thoughtlessness had she suffered the advances of another suitor?

Reine was no coquette, and such a course of action would be repugnant to her frank, open nature. It was a profound enigma, which Claudet, who had plenty of good common sense, but not much insight, was unable to solve. But grief has, among its other advantages, the power of rendering our perceptions more acute; and by dint of revolving the question in his mind, Claudet at last became enlightened. Had not Reine simply followed the impulse of her wounded feelings? She was very proud, and when the man whom she secretly loved had come coolly forward to plead the cause of one who was indifferent to her, would not her self-respect be lowered, and would she not, in



a spirit of bravado, accept the proposition, in order that he might never guess the sufferings of her spurned affections? There was no doubt, that, later, recognizing that the task was beyond her strength, she had felt ashamed of deceiving Claudet any longer, and, acting on the advice of the Abbe Pernot, had made up her mind to break off a union that was repugnant to her.

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"Yes;" he repeated, mournfully to himself, "that must have been the way it happened." And with this kind of explanation of Reine's actions, his irritation seemed to lessen. Not that his grief was less poignant, but the first burst of rage had spent itself like a great wind-storm, which becomes lulled after a heavy fall of rain; the bitterness was toned down, and he was enabled to reason more clearly.

Julien—well, what was the part of Julien in all this disturbance? "If what I imagine is true," thought he, "Monsieur de Buxieres knows that Reine loves him, but has he any reciprocal feeling for her? With a man as mysterious as my cousin, it is not easy to find out what is going on in his heart. Anyhow, I have no right to complain of him; as soon as he discovered my love for Reine, did he not, besides ignoring his own claim, offer spontaneously to take my message? Still, there is something queer at the bottom of it all, and whatever it costs me, I am going to find it out."

At this moment, through the misty air, he heard faintly the village clock strike eleven. "Already so late! how the time flies, even when one is suffering!" He bent his course toward the chateau, and, breathless and excited, without replying to Manette's inquiries, he burst into the hall where his cousin was pacing up and down, waiting for breakfast. At this sudden intrusion Julien started, and noted Claudet's quick breathing and disordered state.

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed he, in his usual, sarcastic tone, "what a hurry you are in! I suppose you have come to say the wedding-day is fixed at last?"

"No!" replied Claudet, briefly, "there will be no wedding."

Julien tottered, and turned to face his cousin.

"What's that? Are you joking?"

"I am in no mood for joking. Reine will not have me; she has taken back her promise."

While pronouncing these words, he scrutinized attentively his cousin's countenance, full in the light from the opposite window. He saw his features relax, and his eyes glow with the same expression which he had noticed a few days previous, when he had referred to the fact that Reine had again postponed the marriage.

"Whence comes this singular change?" stammered de Buxieres, visibly agitated; "what reasons does Mademoiselle Vincart give in explanation?"

"Idle words: her father's health, disinclination to leave him. You may suppose I take such excuses for what they are worth. The real cause of her refusal is more serious and more mortifying."

"You know it, then?" exclaimed Julien, eagerly.

"I know it, because I forced Reine to confess it."

"And the reason is?"

"That she does not love me."

"Reine—does not love you!"

Again a gleam of light irradiated the young man's large, blue eyes. Claudet was leaning against the table, in front of his cousin; he continued slowly, looking him steadily in the face:

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"That is not all. Not only does Reine not love me, but she loves some one else."

Julien changed color; the blood coursed over his cheeks, his forehead, his ears; he drooped his head.

"Did she tell you so?" he murmured, at last, feebly.

"She did not, but I guessed it. Her heart is won, and I think I know by whom."

Claudet had uttered these last words slowly and with a painful effort, at the same time studying Julien's countenance with renewed inquiry. The latter became more and more troubled, and his physiognomy expressed both anxiety and embarrassment.

"Whom do you suspect?" he stammered.

"Oh!" replied Claudet, employing a simple artifice to sound the obscure depth of his cousin's heart, "it is useless to name the person; you do not know him."

"A stranger?"

Julien's countenance had again changed. His hands were twitching nervously, his lips compressed, and his dilated pupils were blazing with anger, instead of triumph, as before.

"Yes; a stranger, a clerk in the iron-works at Grancey, I think."

"You think!—you think!" cried Julien, fiercely, "why don't you have more definite information before you accuse Mademoiselle Vincart of such treachery?"

He resumed pacing the hall, while his interlocutor, motionless, remained silent, and kept his eyes steadily upon him.

"It is not possible," resumed Julien, "Reine can not have played us such a trick! When I spoke to her for you, it was so easy to say she was already betrothed!"

"Perhaps," objected Claudet, shaking his head, "she had reasons for not letting you know all that was in her mind."

"What reasons?"

"She doubtless believed at that time that the man she preferred did not care for her. There are some people who, when they are vexed, act in direct contradiction to their own wishes. I have the idea that Reine accepted me only for want of some one better, and afterward, being too openhearted to dissimulate for any length of time, she thought better of it, and sent me about my business."

“And you,” interrupted Julien, sarcastically, “you, who had been accepted as her betrothed, did not know better how to defend your rights than to suffer yourself to be ejected by a rival, whose intentions, even, you have not clearly ascertained!”

“By Jove! how could I help it? A fellow that takes an unwilling bride is playing for too high stakes. The moment I found there was another she preferred, I had but one course before me—to take myself off.”

“And you call that loving!” shouted de Buxieres, “you call that losing your heart! God in heaven! if I had been in your place, how differently I should have acted! Instead of leaving, with piteous protestations, I should have stayed near Reine, I should have surrounded her with tenderness. I should have expressed my passion with so much force that its flame should pass from my burning soul to hers, and she would have been forced to love me! Ah! If I had only thought! if I had dared! how different it would have been!”

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He jerked out his sentences with unrestrained frenzy. He seemed hardly to know what he was saying, or that he had a listener. Claudet stood contemplating him in sullen silence: "Aha!" thought he, with bitter resignation; "I have sounded you at last. I know what is in the bottom of your heart."

Manette, bringing in the breakfast, interrupted their colloquy, and both assumed an air of indifference, according to a tacit understanding that a prudent amount of caution should be observed in her presence. They ate hurriedly, and as soon as the cloth was removed, and they were again alone, Julien, glancing with an indefinable expression at Claudet, muttered savagely:

"Well! what do you decide?"

"I will tell you later," responded the other, briefly.

He quitted the room abruptly, told Manette that he would not be home until late, and strode out across the fields, his dog following. He had taken his gun as a blind, but it was useless for Montagnard to raise his bark; Claudet allowed the hares to scamper away with out sending a single shot after them. He was busy inwardly recalling the details of the conversation he had had with his cousin. The situation now was simplified Julien was in love with Reine, and was vainly combating his overpowering passion. What reason had he for concealing his love? What motive or reasoning had induced him, when he was already secretly enamored of the girl, to push Claudet in front and interfere to procure her acceptance of him as a fiance? This point alone remained obscure. Was Julien carrying out certain theories of the respect due his position in society, and did he fear to contract a misalliance by marrying a mere farmer's daughter? Or did he, with his usual timidity and distrust of himself, dread being refused by Reine, and, half through pride, half through backward ness, keep away for fear of a humiliating rejection? With de Buxieres's proud and suspicious nature, each of these suppositions was equally likely. The conclusion most undeniable was, that notwithstanding his set ideas and his moral cowardice, Julien had an ardent and overpowering love for Mademoiselle Vincart. As to Reine herself, Claudet was more than ever convinced that she had a secret inclination toward somebody, although she had denied the charge. But for whom was her preference? Claudet knew the neighborhood too well to believe the existence of any rival worth talking about, other than his cousin de Buxieres. None of the boys of the village or the surrounding towns had ever come courting old Father Vincart's daughter, and de Buxieres himself possessed sufficient qualities to attract Reine. Certainly, if he were a girl, he never should fix upon Julien for a lover; but women often have tastes that men can not comprehend, and Julien's refinement of nature, his bashfulness, and even his reserve, might easily have fascinated a girl of such strong will and somewhat peculiar notions. It was probable, therefore, that she liked him, and

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perhaps had done so for a long time; but, being clear-sighted and impartial, she could see that he never would marry her, because her condition in life was not equal to his own. Afterward, when the man she loved had flaunted his indifference so far as to plead the cause of another, her pride had revolted, and in the blind agony of her wounded feelings, she had thrown herself into the arms of the first comer, as if to punish herself for entertaining loving thoughts of a man who could so disdain her affection.

So, by means of that lucid intuition which the heart alone can furnish, Claudet at last succeeded in evolving the naked truth. But the fatiguing labor of so much thinking, to which his brain was little accustomed, and the sadness which continued to oppress him, overcame him to such an extent that he was obliged to sit down and rest on a clump of brushwood. He gazed over the woods and the clearings, which he had so often traversed light of heart and of foot, and felt mortally unhappy. These sheltering lanes and growing thickets, where he had so frequently encountered Reine, the beautiful hunting-grounds in which he had taken such delight, only awakened painful sensations, and he felt as if he should grow to hate them all if he were obliged to pass the rest of his days in their midst. As the day waned, the sinuosities of the forest became more blended; the depth of the valleys was lost in thick vapors. The wind had risen. The first falling leaves of the season rose and fell like wounded birds; heavy clouds gathered in the sky, and the night was coming on apace. Claudet was grateful for the sudden darkness, which would blot out a view now so distasteful to him. Shortly, on the Auberive side, along the winding Aubette, feeble lights became visible, as if inviting the young man to profit by their guidance. He arose, took the path indicated, and went to supper, or rather, to a pretence of supper, in the same inn where he had breakfasted with Julien, whence the latter had gone on his mission to Reine. This remembrance alone would have sufficed to destroy his appetite.

He did not remain long at table; he could not, in fact, stay many minutes in one place, and so, notwithstanding the urgent insistence of the hostess, he started on the way back to Vivey, feeling his way through the profound darkness. When he reached the chateau, every one was in bed. Noiselessly, his dog creeping after him, he slipped into his room, and, overcome with fatigue, fell into a heavy slumber.

The next morning his first visit was to Julien. He found him in a nervous and feverish condition, having passed a sleepless night. Claudet's revelations had entirely upset his intentions, and planted fresh thorns of jealousy in his heart. On first hearing that the marriage was broken off, his heart had leaped for joy, and hope had revived within him; but the subsequent information that Mademoiselle Vincart was probably interested in some lover, as

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yet unknown, had grievously sobered him. He was indignant at Reine's duplicity, and Claudet's cowardly resignation. The agony caused by Claudet's betrothal was a matter of course, but this love-for-a-stranger episode was an unexpected and mortal wound. He was seized with violent fits of rage; he was sometimes tempted to go and reproach the young girl with what he called her breach of faith, and then go and throw himself at her feet and avow his own passion.

But the mistrust he had of himself, and his incurable bashfulness, invariably prevented these heroic resolutions from being carried out. He had so long cultivated a habit of minute, fatiguing criticism upon every inward emotion that he had almost incapacitated himself for vigorous action.

He was in this condition when Claudet came in upon him. At the noise of the opening door, Julien raised his head, and looked dolefully at his cousin.

"Well?" said he, languidly.

"Well!" retorted Claudet, bravely, "on thinking over what has been happening during the last month, I have made sure of one thing of which I was doubtful."

"Of what were you doubtful?" returned de Buxieres, quite ready to take offence at the answer.

"I am about to tell you. Do you remember the first conversation we had together concerning Reine? You spoke of her with so much earnestness that I then suspected you of being in love with her."

"I—I—hardly remember," faltered Julien, coloring.

"In that case, my memory is better than yours, Monsieur de Buxieres. To-day, my suspicions have become certainties. You are in love with Reine Vincart!"

"I?" faintly protested his cousin.

"Don't deny it, but rather, give me your confidence; you will not be sorry for it. You love Reine, and have loved her for a long while. You have succeeded in hiding it from me because it is hard for you to unbosom yourself; but, yesterday, I saw it quite plainly. You dare not affirm the contrary!"

Julien, greatly agitated, had hidden his face in his hands. After a moment's silence, he replied, defiantly: "Well, and supposing it is so? What is the use of talking about it, since Reine's affections are placed elsewhere?"

“Oh! that’s another matter. Reine has declined to have me, and I really think she has some other affair in her head. Yet, to confess the truth, the clerk at the iron-works was a lover of my own imagining; she never thought of him.”

“Then why did you tell such a lie?” cried Julien, impetuously.

“Because I thought I would plead the lie to get at the truth. Forgive me for having made use of this old trick to put you on the right track. It wasn’t such a bad idea, for I succeeded in finding out what you took so much pains to hide from me.”

“To hide from you? Yes, I did wish to hide it from you. Wasn’t that right, since I was convinced that Reine loved you?” exclaimed Julien, in an almost stifled voice, as if the avowal were choking him. “I have always thought it idle to parade one’s feelings before those who do not care about them.”

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"You were wrong," returned poor Claudet, sighing deeply, "if you had spoken for yourself, I have an idea you would have been better received, and you would have spared me a terrible heart-breaking."

He said it with such profound sadness that Julien, notwithstanding the absorbing nature of his own thoughts, was quite overcome, and almost on the point of confessing, openly, the intensity of his feeling toward Reine Vincart. But, accustomed as he was, by long habit, to concentrate every emotion within himself, he found it impossible to become, all at once, communicative; he felt an invincible and almost maidenly bashfulness at the idea of revealing the secret sentiments of his soul, and contented himself with saying, in a low voice:

"Do you not love her any more, then?"

"I? oh, yes, indeed! But to be refused by the only girl I ever wished to marry takes all the spirit out of me. I am so discouraged, I feel like leaving the country. If I were to go, it would perhaps be doing you a service, and that would comfort me a little. You have treated me as a friend, and that is a thing one doesn't forget. I have not the means to pay you back for your kindness, but I think I should be less sorry to go if my departure would leave the way more free for you to return to La Thuilliere."

"You surely would not leave on my account?" exclaimed Julien, in alarm.

"Not solely on your account, rest assured. If Reine had loved me, it never would have entered my head to make such a sacrifice for you, but she will not have me. I am good for nothing here. I am only in your way."

"But that is a wild idea! Where would you go?"

"Oh! there would be no difficulty about that. One plan would be to go as a soldier. Why not? I am hardy, a good walker, a good shot, can stand fatigue; I have everything needed for military life. It is an occupation that I should like, and I could earn my epaulets as well as my neighbor. So that perhaps, Monsieur de Buxieres, matters might in that way be arranged to suit everybody."

"Claudet!" stammered Julien, his voice thick with sobs, "you are a better man than I! Yes; you are a better man than I!"

And, for the first time, yielding to an imperious longing for expansion, he sprang toward the grand chasserot, clasped him in his arms, and embraced him fraternally.

"I will not let you expatriate yourself on my account," he continued; "do not act rashly, I entreat!"

“Don’t worry,” replied Claudet, laconically, “if I so decide, it will not be without deliberation.”

In fact, during the whole of the ensuing week, he debated in his mind this question of going away. Each day his position at Vivey seemed more unbearable. Without informing any one, he had been to Langres and consulted an officer of his acquaintance on the subject of the formalities required previous to enrolment.

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At last, one morning he resolved to go over to the military division and sign his engagement. But he was not willing to consummate this sacrifice without seeing Reine Vincart for the last time. He was nursing, down in the bottom of his heart, a vague hope, which, frail and slender as the filament of a plant, was yet strong enough to keep him on his native soil. Instead of taking the path to Vivey, he made a turn in the direction of La Thuiliere, and soon reached the open elevation whence the roofs of the farm-buildings and the turrets of the chateau could both alike be seen. There he faltered, with a piteous sinking of the heart. Only a few steps between himself and the house, yet he hesitated about entering; not that he feared a want of welcome, but because he dreaded lest the reawakening of his tenderness should cause him to lose a portion of the courage he should need to enable him to leave. He leaned against the trunk of an old pear-tree and surveyed the forest site on which the farm was built.

The landscape retained its usual placidity. In the distance, over the waste lands, the shepherd Tringuesse was following his flock of sheep, which occasionally scattered over the fields, and then, under the dog's harassing watchfulness, reformed in a compact group, previous to descending the narrow hill-slope. One thing struck Claudet: the pastures and the woods bore exactly the same aspect, presented the same play of light and shade as on that afternoon of the preceding year, when he had met Reine in the Ronces woods, a few days before the arrival of Julien. The same bright yet tender tint reddened the crab-apple and the wild-cherry; the tomtits and the robins chirped as before, among the bushes, and, as in the previous year, one heard the sound of the beechnuts and acorns dropping on the rocky paths. Autumn went through her tranquil rites and familiar operations, always with the same punctual regularity; and all this would go on just the same when Claudet was no longer there. There would only be one lad the less in the village streets, one hunter failing to answer the call when they were surrounding the woods of Charbonniere. This dim perception of how small a space man occupies on the earth, and of the ease with which he is forgotten, aided Claudet unconsciously in his effort to be resigned, and he determined to enter the house. As he opened the gate of the courtyard, he found himself face to face with Reine, who was coming out.

The young girl immediately supposed he had come to make a last assault, in the hope of inducing her to yield to his wishes. She feared a renewal of the painful scene which had closed their last interview, and her first impulse was to put herself on her guard. Her countenance darkened, and she fixed a cold, questioning gaze upon Claudet, as if to keep him at a distance. But, when she noted the sadness of her young relative's expression, she was seized with pity. Making an effort, however, to disguise her emotion, she pretended to accost him with the calm and cordial friendship of former times.

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"Why, good-morning, Claudet," said she, "you come just in time. A quarter of an hour later you would not have found me. Will you come in and rest a moment?"

"Thanks, Reine," said he, "I will not hinder you in your work. But I wanted to say, I am sorry I got angry the other day; you were right, we must not leave each other with ill-feeling, and, as I am going away for a long time, I desire first to take your hand in friendship."

"You are going away?"

"Yes; I am going now to Langres to enroll myself as a soldier. And true it is, one knows when one goes away, but it is hard to know when one will come back. That is why I wanted to say good-by to you, and make peace, so as not to go away with too great a load on my heart."

All Reine's coldness melted away. This young fellow, who was leaving his country on her account, was the companion of her infancy, more than that, her nearest relative. Her throat swelled, her eyes filled with tears. She turned away her head, that he might not perceive her emotion, and opened the kitchen-door.

"Come in, Claudet," said she, "we shall be more comfortable in the dining-room. We can talk there, and you will have some refreshment before you go, will you not?"

He obeyed, and followed her into the house. She went herself into the cellar, to seek a bottle of old wine, brought two glasses, and filled them with a trembling hand.

"Shall you remain long in the service?" asked she.

"I shall engage for seven years."

"It is a hard life that you are choosing."

"What am I to do?" replied he, "I could not stay here doing nothing."

Reine went in and out of the room in a bewildered fashion. Claudet, too much excited to perceive that the young girl's impassiveness was only on the surface, said to himself: "It is all over; she accepts my departure as an event perfectly natural; she treats me as she would Theotime, the coal-dealer, or the tax-collector Boucheseiche. A glass of wine, two or three unimportant questions, and then, good-by-a pleasant journey, and take care of yourself!"

Then he made a show of taking an airy, insouciant tone.

"Oh, well!" he exclaimed, "I've always been drawn toward that kind of life. A musket will be a little heavier than a gun, that's all; then I shall see different countries, and that will



change my ideas.” He tried to appear facetious, poking around the kitchen, and teasing the magpie, which was following his footsteps with inquisitive anxiety. Finally, he went up to the old man Vincart, who was lying stretched out in his picture-lined niche. He took the flabby hand of the paralytic old man, pressed it gently and endeavored to get up a little conversation with him, but he had it all to himself, the invalid staring at him all the time with uneasy, wide-open eyes. Returning to Reine, he lifted his glass.

“To your health, Reine!” said he, with forced gayety, “next time we clink glasses together, I shall be an experienced soldier—you’ll see!”



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But, when he put the glass to his lips, several big tears fell in, and he had to swallow them with his wine.

"Well!" he sighed, turning away while he passed the back of his hand across his eyes, "it must be time to go."

She accompanied him to the threshold.

"Adieu, Reine!"

"Adieu!" she murmured, faintly.

She stretched out both hands, overcome with pity and remorse. He perceived her emotion, and thinking that she perhaps still loved him a little, and repented having rejected him, threw his arms impetuously around her. He pressed her against his bosom, and imprinted kisses, wet with tears, upon her cheek. He could not leave her, and redoubled his caresses with passionate ardor, with the ecstasy of a lover who suddenly meets with a burst of tenderness on the part of the woman he has tenderly loved, and whom he expects never to fold again in his arms. He completely lost his self-control. His embrace became so ardent that Reine, alarmed at the sudden outburst, was overcome with shame and terror, notwithstanding the thought that the man, who was clasping her in his arms with such passion, was her own brother.

She tore herself away from him and pushed him violently back.

"Adieu!" she cried, retreating to the kitchen, of which she hastily shut the door.

Claudet stood one moment, dumfounded, before the door so pitilessly shut in his face, then, falling suddenly from his happy state of illusion to the dead level of reality, departed precipitately down the road.

When he turned to give a parting glance, the farm buildings were no longer visible, and the waste lands of the forest border, gray, stony, and barren, stretched their mute expanse before him.

"No!" exclaimed he, between his set teeth, "she never loved me. She thinks only of the other man! I have nothing more to do but go away and never return!"

CHAPTER IX

LOVE HEALS THE BROKEN HEART

In arriving at Langres, Claudet enrolled in the seventeenth battalion of light infantry. Five days later, paying no attention to the lamentations of Manette, he left Vivey, going,

by way of Lyon, to the camp at Lathonay, where his battalion was stationed. Julien was thus left alone at the chateau to recover as best he might from the dazed feeling caused by the startling events of the last few weeks. After Claudet's departure, he felt an uneasy sensation of discomfort, and as if he himself had lessened in value. He had never before realized how little space he occupied in his own dwelling, and how much living heat Claudet had infused into the house which was now so cold and empty. He felt poor and diminished in spirit, and was ashamed of being so useless to himself and to others. He had before him a prospect of new duties, which frightened him. The management of the district, which Claudet had undertaken for

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him, would now fall entirely on his shoulders, and just at the time of the timber sales and the renewal of the fences. Besides all this, he had Manette on his conscience, thinking he ought to try to soften her grief at her son's unexpected departure. The ancient housekeeper was like Rachel, she refused to be comforted, and her temper was not improved by her recent trials. She filled the air with lamentations, and seemed to consider Julien responsible for her troubles. The latter treated her with wonderful patience and indulgence, and exhausted his ingenuity to make her time pass more pleasantly. This was the first real effort he had made to subdue his dislikes and his passive tendencies, and it had the good effect of preparing him, by degrees, to face more serious trials, and to take the initiative in matters of greater importance. He discovered that the energy he expended in conquering a first difficulty gave him more ability to conquer the second, and from that result he decided that the will is like a muscle, which shrivels in inaction and is developed by exercise; and he made up his mind to attack courageously the work before him, although it had formerly appeared beyond his capabilities.

He now rose always at daybreak. Gaitered like a huntsman, and escorted by Montagnard, who had taken a great liking to him, he would proceed to the forest, visit the cuttings, hire fresh workmen, familiarize himself with the woodsmen, interest himself in their labors, their joys and their sorrows; then, when evening came, he was quite astonished to find himself less weary, less isolated, and eating with considerable appetite the supper prepared for him by Manette. Since he had been traversing the forest, not as a stranger or a person of leisure, but with the predetermination to accomplish some useful work, he had learned to appreciate its beauties. The charms of nature and the living creatures around no longer inspired him with the defiant scorn which he had imbibed from his early solitary life and his priestly education; he now viewed them with pleasure and interest. In proportion, as his sympathies expanded and his mind became more virile, the exterior world presented a more attractive appearance to him.

While this work of transformation was going on within him, he was aided and sustained by the ever dear and ever present image of Reine Vincart. The trenches, filled with dead leaves, the rows of beech-trees, stripped of their foliage by the rude breath of winter, the odor peculiar to underwood during the dead season, all recalled to his mind the impressions he had received while in company with the woodland queen. Now that, he could better understand the young girl's adoration of the marvellous forest world, he sought out, with loving interest, the sites where she had gone into ecstasy, the details of the landscape which she had pointed out to him the year before, and had made him admire. The beauty of the scene was associated in his thoughts with Reine's love,

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and he could not think of either separately. But, notwithstanding the steadfastness and force of his love, he had not yet made any effort to see Mademoiselle Vincart. At first, the increase of occupation caused by Claudet's departure, the new duties devolving upon him, together with his inexperience, had prevented Julien from entertaining the possibility of renewing relations that had been so violently sundered. Little by little, however; as he reviewed the situation of affairs, which his cousin's generous sacrifice had engendered, he began to consider how he could benefit thereby. Claudet's departure had left the field free, but Julien felt no more confidence in himself than before. The fact that Reine had so unaccountably refused to marry the grand chasserot did not seem to him sufficient encouragement. Her motive was a secret, and therefore, of doubtful interpretation. Besides, even if she were entirely heart-whole, was that a reason why she should give Julien a favorable reception? Could she forget the cruel insult to which he had subjected her? And immediately after that outrageous behavior of his, he had had the stupidity to make a proposal for Claudet. That was the kind of affront, thought he, that a woman does not easily forgive, and the very idea of presenting himself before her made his heart sink. He had seen her only at a distance, at the Sunday mass, and every time he had endeavored to catch her eye she had turned away her head. She also avoided, in every way, any intercourse with the chateau. Whenever a question arose, such as the apportionment of lands, or the allotment of cuttings, which would necessitate her having recourse to M. de Buxieres, she would abstain from writing herself, and correspond only through the notary, Arbillot. Claudet's heroic departure, therefore, had really accomplished nothing; everything was exactly at the same point as the day after Julien's unlucky visit to La Thuiliere, and the same futile doubts and fears agitated him now as then. It also occurred to him, that while he was thus debating and keeping silence, days, weeks, and months were slipping away; that Reine would soon reach her twenty-third year, and that she would be thinking of marriage. It was well known that she had some fortune, and suitors were not lacking. Even allowing that she had no afterthought in renouncing Claudet, she could not always live alone at the farm, and some day she would be compelled to accept a marriage of convenience, if not of love.

"And to think," he would say to himself, "that she is there, only a few steps away, that I am consumed with longing, that I have only to traverse those pastures, to throw myself at her feet, and that I positively dare not! Miserable wretch that I am, it was last spring, while we were in that but together, that I should have spoken of my love, instead of terrifying her with my brutal caresses! Now it is too late! I have wounded and humiliated her; I have driven away Claudet, who would at any rate have made her a stalwart lover, and I have made two beings unhappy, without counting myself. So much for my miserable shufflings and evasion! Ah! if one could only begin life over again!"

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While thus lamenting his fate, the march of time went steadily on, with its pitiless dropping out of seconds, minutes, and hours. The worst part of winter was over; the March gales had dried up the forests; April was tingeing the woods with its tender green; the song of the cuckoo was already heard in the tufted bowers, and the festival of St. George had passed.

Taking advantage of an unusually clear day, Julien went to visit a farm, belonging to him, in the plain of Anjeures, on the border of the forest of Maigrefontaine. After breakfasting with the farmer, he took the way home through the woods, so that he might enjoy the first varied effects of the season.

The forest of Maigrefontaine, situated on the slope of a hill, was full of rocky, broken ground, interspersed with deep ravines, along which narrow but rapid streams ran to swell the fishpond of La Thuiliere. Julien had wandered away from the road, into the thick of the forest where the budding vegetation was at its height, where the lilies multiply and the early spring flowers disclose their umbellshaped clusters, full of tiny, white stars. The sight of these blossoms, which had such a tender meaning for him, since he had identified the name with that of Reine, brought vividly before him the beloved image of the young girl. He walked slowly and languidly on, heated by his feverish recollections and desires, tormented by useless self-reproach, and physically intoxicated by the balmy atmosphere and the odor of the flowering shrubs at his feet. Arriving at the edge of a somewhat deep pit, he tried to leap across with a single bound, but, whether he made a false start, or that he was weakened and dizzy with the conflicting emotions with which he had been battling, he missed his footing and fell, twisting his ankle, on the side of the embankment. He rose with an effort and put his foot to the ground, but a sharp pain obliged him to lean against the trunk of a neighboring ash-tree. His foot felt as heavy as lead, and every time he tried to straighten it his sufferings were intolerable. All he could do was to drag himself along from one tree to another until he reached the path.

Exhausted by this effort; he sat down on the grass, unbuttoned his gaiter, and carefully unlaced his boot. His foot had swollen considerably. He began to fear he had sprained it badly, and wondered how he could get back to Vivey. Should he have to wait on this lonely road until some woodcutter passed, who would take him home? Montagnard, his faithful companion, had seated himself in front of him, and contemplated him with moist, troubled eyes, at the same time emitting short, sharp whines, which seemed to say:

“What is the matter?” and, “How are we going to get out of this?”

Suddenly he heard footsteps approaching. He perceived a flutter of white skirts behind the copse, and just at the moment he was blessing the lucky chance that had sent some one in that direction, his eyes were gladdened with a sight of the fair visage of Reine.

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She was accompanied by a little girl of the village, carrying a basket full of primroses and freshly gathered ground ivy. Reine was quite familiar with all the medicinal herbs of the country, and gathered them in their season, in order to administer them as required to the people of the farm. When she was within a few feet of Julien, she recognized him, and her brow clouded over; but almost immediately she noticed his altered features and that one of his feet was shoeless, and divined that something unusual had happened. Going straight up to him, she said:

"You seem to be suffering, Monsieur de Buxieres. What is the matter?"

"A—a foolish accident," replied he, putting on a careless manner. "I fell and sprained my ankle."

The young girl knit her brows with an anxious expression; then, after a moment's hesitation, she said:

"Will you let me see your foot? My mother understood about bone-setting, and I have been told that I inherit her gift of curing sprains."

She drew from the basket an empty bottle and a handkerchief.

"Zelie," said she to the little damsel, who was standing astonished at the colloquy, "go quickly down to the stream, and fill this bottle."

While she was speaking, Julien, greatly embarrassed, obeyed her suggestions, and uncovered his foot. Reine, without any prudery or nonsense, raised the wounded limb, and felt around cautiously.

"I think," said she at last, "that the muscles are somewhat injured."

Without another word, she tore the handkerchief into narrow strips, and poured the contents of the bottle, which Zelie had filled, slowly over the injure member, holding her hand high for that purpose. Then, with a soft yet firm touch, she pressed the injured muscles into their places, while Julien bit his lips and did his very utmost to prevent her seeing how much he was suffering. After this massage treatment, the young girl bandaged the ankle tightly with the linen bands, and fastened them securely with pins.

"There," said she, "now try to put on your shoe and stocking; they will give support to the muscles. Now you, Zelie, run, fit to break your neck, to the farm, make them harness the wagon, and tell them to bring it here, as close to the path as possible."

The girl picked up her basket and started on a trot.

"Monsieur de Buxieres," said Reine, "do you think you can walk as far as the carriage road, by leaning on my arm?"

"Yes;" he replied, with a grateful glance which greatly embarrassed Mademoiselle Vincart, "you have relieved me as if by a miracle. I feel much better and as if I could go anywhere you might lead, while leaning on your arm!"

She helped him to rise, and he took a few steps with her aid.

"Why, it feels really better," sighed he.

He was so happy in feeling himself thus tenderly supported by Reine, that he altogether forgot his pain.

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"Let us walk slowly," continued she, "and do not be afraid to lean on me. All you have to think of is reaching the carriage."

"How good you are," stammered he, "and how ashamed I am!"

"Ashamed of what?" returned Reine, hastily. "I have done nothing extraordinary; anyone else would have acted in the same manner."

"I entreat you," replied he, earnestly, "not to spoil my happiness. I know very well that the first person who happened to pass would have rendered me some charitable assistance; but the thought that it is you—you alone—who have helped me, fills me with delight, at the same time that it increases my remorse. I so little deserve that you should interest yourself in my behalf!"

He waited, hoping perhaps that she would ask for an explanation, but, seeing that she did not appear to understand, he added:

"I have offended you. I have misunderstood you, and I have been cruelly punished for my mistake. But what avails my tardy regret in healing the injuries I have inflicted! Ah! if one could only go backward, and efface, with a single stroke, the hours in which one has been blind and headstrong!"

"Let us not speak of that!" replied she, shortly, but in a singularly softened tone.

In spite of herself, she was touched by this expression of repentance, so naively acknowledged in broken, disconnected sentences, vibrating with the ring of true sincerity. In proportion as he abased himself, her anger diminished, and she recognized that she loved him just the same, notwithstanding his defects, his weakness, and his want of tact and polish. She was also profoundly touched by his revealing to her, for the first time, a portion of his hidden feelings.

They had become silent again, but they felt nearer to each other than ever before; their secret thoughts seemed to be transmitted to each other; a mute understanding was established between them. She lent him the support of her arm with more freedom, and the young man seemed to experience fresh delight in her firm and sympathetic assistance.

Progressing slowly, although more quickly than they would have chosen themselves, they reached the foot of the path, and perceived the wagon waiting on the beaten road. Julien mounted therein with the aid of Reine and the driver. When he was stretched on the straw, which had been spread for him on the bottom of the wagon, he leaned forward on the side, and his eyes met those of Reine. For a few moments their gaze seemed riveted upon each other, and their mutual understanding was complete. These



few, brief moments contained a whole confession of love; avowals mingled with repentance, promises of pardon, tender reconciliation!

"Thanks!" he sighed at last, "will you give me your hand?"

She gave it, and while he held it in his own, Reine turned toward the driver on the seat.

"Felix," said she, warningly, "drive slowly and avoid the ruts. Good-night, Monsieur de Buxieres, send for the doctor as soon as you get in, and all will be well. I will send to inquire how you are getting along."

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She turned and went pensively down the road to La Thuiliere, while the carriage followed slowly the direction to Vivey.

The doctor, being sent for immediately on Julien's arrival, pronounced it a simple sprain, and declared that the preliminary treatment had been very skilfully applied, that the patient had now only to keep perfectly still. Two days later came La Guite from Reine, to inquire after M. de Buxieres's health. She brought a large bunch of lilies which Mademoiselle Vincart had sent to the patient, to console him for not being able to go in the woods, which Julien kept for several days close by his side.

This accident, happening at Maigrefontaine, and providentially attended to by Reine Vincart, the return to the chateau in the vehicle belonging to La Thuiliere, the sending of the lilies, were all a source of great mystification to Manette. She suspected some amorous mystery in all these events, commented somewhat uncharitably on every minor detail, and took care to carry her comments all over the village. Very soon the entire parish, from the most insignificant woodchopper to the Abbe Pernot himself, were made aware that there was something going on between M. de Buxieres and the daughter of old M. Vincart.

In the mean time, Julien, quite unconscious that his love for Reine was providing conversation for all the gossips of the country, was cursing the untoward event that kept him stretched in his invalid-chair. At last, one day, he discovered he could put his foot down and walk a little with the assistance of his cane; a few days after, the doctor gave him permission to go out of doors. His first visit was to La Thuiliere.

He went there in the afternoon and found Reine in the kitchen, seated by the side of her paralytic father, who was asleep. She was reading a newspaper, which she retained in her hand, while rising to receive her visitor. After she had congratulated him on his recovery, and he had expressed his cordial thanks for her timely aid, she showed him the paper.

"You find me in a state of disturbance," said she, with a slight degree of embarrassment, "it seems that we are going to have war and that our troops have entered Italy. Have you any news of Claudet?"

Julien started. This was the last remark he could have expected. Claudet's name had not been once mentioned in their interview at Maigrefontaine, and he had nursed the hope that Reine thought no longer about him.

All his mistrust returned in a moment on hearing this name come from the young girl's lips the moment he entered the house, and seeing the emotion which the news in the paper had caused her.

"He wrote me a few days ago," replied he.



“Where is he?”

“In Italy, with his battalion, which is a part of the first army corps. His last letter is dated from Alexandria.”

Reine’s eyes suddenly filled with tears, and she gazed absently at the distant wooded horizon.

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"Poor Claudet!" murmured she, sighing, "what is he doing just now, I wonder?"

"Ah!" thought Julien, his visage darkening, "perhaps she loves him still!"

Poor Claudet! At the very time they are thus talking about him at the farm, he is camping with his battalion near Voghera, on the banks of one of the obscure tributaries of the river Po, in a country rich in waving corn, interspersed with bounteous orchards and hardy vines climbing up to the very tops of the mulberry-trees. His battalion forms the extreme end of the advance guard, and at the approach of night, Claudet is on duty on the banks of the stream. It is a lovely May night, irradiated by millions of stars, which, under the limpid Italian sky, appear larger and nearer to the watcher than they appeared in the vaporous atmosphere of the Haute-Marne.

Nightingales are calling to one another among the trees of the orchard, and the entire landscape seems imbued with their amorous music. What ecstasy to listen to them! What serenity their liquid harmonies spread over the smiling landscape, faintly revealing its beauties in the mild starlight.

Who would think that preparations for deadly combat were going on through the serenity of such a night? Occasionally a sharp exchange of musketry with the advanced post of the enemy bursts upon the ear, and all the nightingales keep silence. Then, when quiet is restored in the upper air, the chorus of spring songsters begins again. Claudet leans on his gun, and remembers that at this same hour the nightingales in the park at Vivey, and in the garden of La Thuilliere, are pouring forth the same melodies. He recalls the bright vision of Reine: he sees her leaning at her window, listening to the same amorous song issuing from the coppice woods of Maigrefontaine. His heart swells within him, and an over-powering homesickness takes possession of him. But the next moment he is ashamed of his weakness, he remembers his responsibility, primes his ear, and begins investigating the dark hollows and rising hillocks where an enemy might hide.

The next morning, May 20th, he is awakened by a general hubbub and noise of fighting. The battalion to which he belongs has made an attack upon Montebello, and is sending its sharpshooters among the cornfields and vineyards. Some of the regiments invade the rice-fields, climb the walls of the vineyards, and charge the enemy's column-ranks. The sullen roar of the cannon alternates with the sharp report of guns, and whole showers of grape-shot beat the air with their piercing whistle. All through the uproar of guns and thunder of the artillery, you can distinguish the guttural hurrahs of the Austrians, and the broken oaths of the French troopers. The trenches are piled with dead bodies, the trumpets sound the attack, the survivors, obeying an irresistible impulse, spring to the front. The ridges are crested with human masses swaying to and fro, and the first red uniform is seen in the streets of Montebello,

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in relief against the chalky facades bristling with Austrian guns, pouring forth their ammunition on the enemy below. The soldiers burst into the houses, the courtyards, the enclosures; every instant you hear the breaking open of doors, the crashing of windows, and the scuffling of the terrified inmates. The white uniforms retire in disorder. The village belongs to the French! Not just yet, though. From the last houses on the street, to the entrance of the cemetery, is rising ground, and just behind stands a small hillock. The enemy has retrenched itself there, and, from its cannons ranged in battery, is raining a terrible shower on the village just evacuated.

The assailants hesitate, and draw back before this hailstorm of iron; suddenly a general appears from under the walls of a building already crumbling under the continuous fire, spurs his horse forward, and shouts: "Come, boys, let us carry the fort!"

Among the first to rally to this call, one rifleman in particular, a fine, broad-shouldered active fellow, with a brown moustache and olive complexion, darts forward to the point indicated. It is Claudet. Others are behind him, and soon more than a hundred men, with their bayonets, are hurling themselves along the cemetery road; the grand chasserot leaps across the fields, as he used formerly in pursuit of the game in the Charbonniere forest. The soldiers are falling right and left of him, but he hardly sees them; he continues pressing forward, breathless, excited, scarcely stopping to think. As he is crossing one of the meadows, however, he notices the profusion of scarlet gladiolus and also observes that the rye and barley grow somewhat sturdier here than in his country; these are the only definite ideas that detach themselves clearly from his seething brain. The wall of the cemetery is scaled; they are fighting now in the ditches, killing one another on the side of the hill; at last, the fort is taken and they begin routing the enemy. But, at this moment, Claudet stoops to pick up a cartridge, a ball strikes him in the forehead, and, without a sound, he drops to the ground, among the noisome fennels which flourish in graveyards—he drops, thinking of the clock of his native village.

.....

"I have sad news for you," said Julien to Reine, as he entered the garden of La Thuilliere, one June afternoon.

He had received official notice the evening before, through the mayor, of the decease of "Germain-Claudet Sejournant, volunteer in the seventeenth battalion of light infantry, killed in an engagement with the enemy, May 20, 1859."



Reine was standing between two hedges of large peasant-roses. At the first words that fell from M. de Buxieres's lips, she felt a presentiment of misfortune.

"Claudet?" murmured she.

"He is dead," replied Julien, almost inaudibly, "he fought bravely and was killed at Montebello."

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The young girl remained motionless, and for a moment de Buxieres thought she would be able to bear, with some degree of composure, this announcement of the death in a foreign country of a man whom she had refused as a husband. Suddenly she turned aside, took two or three steps, then leaning her head and folded arms on the trunk of an adjacent tree, she burst into a passion of tears. The convulsive movement of her shoulders and stifled sobs denoted the violence of her emotion. M. de Buxieres, alarmed at this outbreak, which he thought exaggerated, felt a return of his old misgivings. He was jealous now of the dead man whom she was so openly lamenting. Her continued weeping annoyed him; he tried to arrest her tears by addressing some consolatory remarks to her; but, at the very first word, she turned away, mounted precipitately the kitchen-stairs, and disappeared, closing the door behind her. Some minutes after, La Guite brought a message to de Buxieres that Reine wished to be alone, and begged him to excuse her.

He took his departure, disconcerted, downhearted, and ready to weep himself, over the crumbling of his hopes. As he was nearing the first outlying houses of the village, he came across the Abbe Pernot, who was striding along at a great rate, toward the chateau.

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest, "how are you, Monsieur de Buxieres, I was just going over to see you. Is it true that you have received bad news?"

Julien nodded his head affirmatively, and informed the cure of the sad notice he had received. The Abbe's countenance lengthened, his mouth took on a saddened expression, and during the next few minutes he maintained an attitude of condolence.

"Poor fellow!" he sighed, with a slight nasal intonation, "he did not have a fair chance! To have to leave us at twenty-six years of age, and in full health, it is very hard. And such a jolly companion; such a clever shot!"

Finally, not being naturally of a melancholy turn of mind, nor able to remain long in a mournful mood, he consoled himself with one of the pious commonplaces which he was in the habit of using for the benefit of others: "The Lord is just in all His dealings, and holy in all His works; He reckons the hairs of our heads, and our destinies are in His hands. We shall celebrate a fine high mass for the repose of Claudet's soul."

He coughed, and raised his eyes toward Julien.

"I wished," continued he, "to see you for two reasons, Monsieur de Buxieres: first of all, to hear about Claudet, and secondly, to speak to you on a matter—a very delicate matter—which concerns you, but which also affects the safety of another person and the dignity of the parish."



Julien was gazing at him with a bewildered air. The cure pushed open the little park gate, and passing through, added:

“Let us go into your place; we shall be better able to talk over the matter.”

When they were underneath the trees, the Abbe resumed:

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“Monsieur de Buxieres, do you know that you are at this present time giving occasion for the tongues of my parishioners to wag more than is at all reasonable? Oh!” continued he, replying to a remonstrating gesture of his companion, “it is unpremeditated on your part, I am sure, but, all the same, they talk about you—and about Reine.”

“About Mademoiselle Vincart?” exclaimed Julien, indignantly, “what can they say about her?”

“A great many things which are displeasing to me. They speak of your having sprained your ankle while in the company of Reine Vincart; of your return home in her wagon; of your frequent visits to La Thuiliere, and I don’t know what besides. And as mankind, especially the female portion, is more disposed to discover evil than good, they say you are compromising this young person. Now, Reine is living, as one may say, alone and unprotected. It behooves me, therefore, as her pastor, to defend her against her own weakness. That is the reason why I have taken upon myself to beg you to be more circumspect, and not trifle with her reputation.”

“Her reputation?” repeated Julien, with irritation. “I do not understand you, Monsieur le Cure!”

“You don’t, hey! Why, I explain my meaning pretty clearly. Human beings are weak; it is easy to injure a girl’s reputation, when you try to make yourself agreeable, knowing you can not marry her.”

“And why could I not marry her?” inquired Julien, coloring deeply.

“Because she is not in your own class, and you would not love her enough to overlook the disparity, if marriage became necessary.”

“What do you know about it?” returned Julien, with violence. “I have no such foolish prejudices, and the obstacles would not come from my side. But, rest easy, Monsieur,” continued he, bitterly, “the danger exists only in the imagination of your parishioners. Reine has never cared for me! It was Claudet she loved!”

“Hm, hm!” interjected the cure, dubiously.

“You would not doubt it,” insisted de Buxieres, provoked at the Abbe’s incredulous movements of his head, “if you had seen her, as I saw her, melt into tears when I told her of Sejournant’s death. She did not even wait until I had turned my back before she broke out in her lamentations. My presence was of very small account. Ah! she has but too cruelly made me feel how little she cares for me!”

“You love her very much, then?” demanded the Abbe, slyly, an almost imperceptible smile curving his lips.

“Oh, yes! I love her,” exclaimed he, impetuously; then coloring and drooping his head. “But it is very foolish of me to betray myself, since Reine cares nothing at all for me!”

There was a moment of silence, during which the curb took a pinch of snuff from a tiny box of cherry wood.

“Monsieur de Buxieres;” said he, With a particularly oracular air, “Claudet is dead, and the dead, like the absent, are always in the wrong. But who is to say whether you are not mistaken concerning the nature of Reine’s unhappiness? I will have that cleared up this very day. Good-night; keep quiet and behave properly.”

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Thereupon he took his departure, but, instead of returning to the parsonage, he directed his steps hurriedly toward La Thuiliere. Notwithstanding a vigorous opposition from La Guite, he made use of his pastoral authority to penetrate into Reine's apartment, where he shut himself up with her. What he said to her never was divulged outside the small chamber where the interview took place. He must, however, have found words sufficiently eloquent to soften her grief, for when he had gone away the young girl descended to the garden with a soothed although still melancholy mien. She remained a long time in meditation in the thicket of roses, but her meditations had evidently no bitterness in them, and a miraculous serenity seemed to have spread itself over her heart like a beneficent balm.

A few days afterward, during the unpleasant coolness of one of those mornings, white with dew, which are the peculiar privilege of the mountain-gorges in Langres, the bells of Vivey tolled for the dead, announcing the celebration of a mass in memory of Claudet. The grand chasserot having been a universal favorite with every one in the neighborhood, the church was crowded. The steep descent from the high plain overlooked the village. They came thronging in through the wooded glens of Praslay; by the Auberive road and the forests of Charbonniere; companions in hunting and social amusements, foresters and wearers of sabots, campers in the woods, inmates of the farms embedded in the forests—none failed to answer the call. The rustic, white-walled nave was too narrow to contain them all, and the surplus flowed into the street. Arbeltier, the village carpenter, had erected a rudimentary catafalque, which was draped in black and bordered with wax tapers, and placed in front of the altar steps. On the pall, embroidered with silver tears, were arranged large bunches of wild flowers, sent from La Thuiliere, and spreading an aromatic odor of fresh verdure around. The Abbe Pernot, wearing his insignia of mourning, officiated. Through the side windows were seen portions of the blue sky; the barking of the dogs and singing of birds were heard in the distance; and even while listening to the 'Dies irae', the curb could not help thinking of the robust and bright young fellow who, only the year previous, had been so joyously traversing the woods, escorted by Charbonneau and Montagnard, and who was now lying in a foreign land, in the common pit of the little cemetery of Montebello.

As each verse of the funeral service was intoned, Manette Sejourrant, prostrate on her prie-dieu, interrupted the monotonous chant with tumultuous sobs. Her grief was noisy and unrestrained, but those present sympathized more with the quiet though profound sorrow of Reine Vincart. The black dress of the young girl contrasted painfully with the dead pallor of her complexion. She emitted no sighs, but, now and then, a contraction of the lips, a trembling of the hands testified to the inward struggle, and a single tear rolled slowly down her cheek.

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From the corner where he had chosen to stand alone, Julien de Buxieres observed, with pain, the mute eloquence of her profound grief, and became once more a prey to the fiercest jealousy. He could not help envying the fate of this deceased, who was mourned in so tender a fashion. Again the mystery of an attachment so evident and so tenacious, followed by so strange a rupture, tormented his uneasy soul. "She must have loved Claudet, since she is in mourning for him," he kept repeating to himself, "and if she loved him, why this rupture, which she herself provoked, and which drove the unhappy man to despair?"

At the close of the absolution, all the assistants defiled close beside Julien, who was now standing in front of the catafalque. When it came to Reine Vincart's turn, she reached out her hand to M. de Buxieres; at the same time, she gazed at him with such friendly sadness, and infused into the clasp of her hand something so cordial and intimate that the young man's ideas were again completely upset. He seemed to feel as if it were an encouragement to speak. When the men and women had dispersed, and a surging of the crowd brought him nearer to Reine, he resolved to follow her, without regard to the question of what people would say, or the curious eyes that might be watching him.

A happy chance came in his way. Reine Vincart had gone home by the path along the outskirts of the wood and the park enclosure. Julien went hastily back to the chateau, crossed the gardens, and followed an interior avenue, parallel to the exterior one, from which he was separated only by a curtain of linden and nut trees. He could just distinguish, between the leafy branches, Reine's black gown, as she walked rapidly along under the ashtrees. At the end of the enclosure, he pushed open a little gate, and came abruptly out on the forest path.

On beholding him standing in advance of her, the young girl appeared more surprised than displeased. After a momentary hesitation, she walked quietly toward him.

"Mademoiselle Reine," said he then, gently, "will you allow me to accompany you as far as La Thuiliere?"

"Certainly," she replied, briefly.

She felt a presentiment that something decisive was about to take place between her and Julien, and her voice trembled as she replied. Profiting by the tacit permission, de Buxieres walked beside Reine; the path was so narrow that their garments rustled against each other, yet he did not seem in haste to speak, and the silence was interrupted only by the occasional flight of a bird, or the crackling of some falling branches.

"Reine," said Julien, suddenly, "you have so often and so kindly extended to me the hand of friendship, that I have decided to speak frankly, and open my heart to you. I



love you, Reine, and have loved you for a long time. But I have been so accustomed to hide what I think, I know so little how to conduct myself in the varying circumstances of life, and I have so much mistrust of myself, that I never have dared to tell you before now. This will explain to you my stupid behavior. I am suffering the penalty to-day, for while I was hesitating, another took my place; although he is dead, his shadow stands between us, and I know that you love him still."

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She listened to him with bent head and half-closed eyes, and her heart began to beat violently.

"I never have loved him in the way you suppose," she replied, simply.

A gleam of light shot through Julien's melancholy blue eyes. Both remained silent. The green pasture-lands, bathed in the full noonday sun, were lying before them. The grasshoppers were chirping in the bushes, and the skylarks were soaring aloft with their joyous songs. Julien was endeavoring to extract the exact meaning from the reply he had just heard. He was partly reassured, but some points had still to be cleared up.

"But still," said he, "you are lamenting his loss."

A melancholy smile flitted for an instant over Reine's pure, rosy lips.

"Are you jealous of my tears?" said she, softly.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed, with sudden exultation, "I love you so entirely that I can not help envying Claudet his share in your affections! If his death causes you such poignant regret, he must have been nearer and dearer to you than those that survive."

"You might reasonably suppose otherwise," replied she, almost in a whisper, "since I refused to marry him."

He shook his head, seemingly unable to accept that positive statement.

Then Reine began to reflect that a man of his distrustful and despondent temperament would, unless the whole truth were revealed to him, be forevermore tormented by morbid and injurious misgivings. She knew he loved her, and she wished him to love her in entire faith and security. She recalled the last injunctions she had received from the Abbe Pernot, and, leaning toward Julien, with tearful eyes and cheeks burning with shame, she whispered in his ear the secret of her close relationship to Claudet.

This painful and agitating confidence was made in so low a voice as to be scarcely distinguished from the soft humming of the insects, or the gentle twittering of the birds.

The sun was shining everywhere; the woods were as full of verdure and blossoms as on the day when the young man had manifested his passion with such savage violence. Hardly had the last words of her avowal expired on Reine's lips, when Julien de Buxieres threw his arms around her and fondly kissed away the tears from her eyes.

This time he was not repelled.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:



Accustomed to hide what I think
Consoled himself with one of the pious commonplaces
How small a space man occupies on the earth
More disposed to discover evil than good
Nature's cold indifference to our sufferings
Never is perfect happiness our lot
Plead the lie to get at the truth
The ease with which he is forgotten
Those who have outlived their illusions
Timidity of a night-bird that is made to fly in the day
Vexed, act in direct contradiction to their own wishes
You have considerable patience for a lover

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ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire woodland queen:

Accustomed to hide what I think
Amusements they offered were either wearisome or repugnant
Consoled himself with one of the pious commonplaces
Dreaded the monotonous regularity of conjugal life
Fawning duplicity
Had not been spoiled by Fortune's gifts
How small a space man occupies on the earth
Hypocritical grievances
I am not in the habit of consulting the law
I measure others by myself
It does not mend matters to give way like that
Like all timid persons, he took refuge in a moody silence
More disposed to discover evil than good
Nature's cold indifference to our sufferings
Never is perfect happiness our lot
Opposing his orders with steady, irritating inertia
Others found delight in the most ordinary amusements
Plead the lie to get at the truth
Sensitiveness and disposition to self-blame
The ease with which he is forgotten
There are some men who never have had any childhood
Those who have outlived their illusions
Timidity of a night-bird that is made to fly in the day
To make a will is to put one foot into the grave
Toast and white wine (for breakfast)
Vague hope came over him that all would come right
Vexed, act in direct contradiction to their own wishes
Women: they are more bitter than death
Yield to their customs, and not pooh-pooh their amusements
You have considerable patience for a lover
You must be pleased with yourself—that is more essential

CONFESSION OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

(Confession d'un Enfant du Siecle)

By Alfred de musset

With a Preface by *Henri de BORNIER*, of the French Academy

ALFRED DE MUSSET

A poet has no right to play fast and loose with his genius. It does not belong to him, it belongs to the Almighty; it belongs to the world and to a coming generation. At thirty De Musset was already an old man, seeking in artificial stimuli the youth that would not spring again. Coming from a literary family the zeal of his house had eaten him up; his passion had burned itself out and his heart with it. He had done his work; it mattered little to him or to literature whether the curtain fell on his life's drama in 1841 or in 1857.

Alfred de Musset, by virtue of his genial, ironical temperament, eminently clear brain, and undying achievements, belongs to the great poets of the ages. We to-day do not approve the timbre of his epoch: that impertinent, somewhat irritant mask, that redundant rhetoric, that occasional disdain for the metre. Yet he remains the greatest poete de l'amour, the most spontaneous, the most sincere, the most emotional singer of the tender passion that modern times has produced.

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Born of noble parentage on December 11, 1810—his full name being Louis Charles Alfred de Musset—the son of De Musset-Pathai, he received his education at the College Henri IV, where, among others, the Duke of Orleans was his schoolmate. When only eighteen he was introduced into the Romantic 'cenacle' at Nodier's. His first work, 'Les Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie' (1829), shows reckless daring in the choice of subjects quite in the spirit of Le Sage, with a dash of the dandified impertinence that mocked the foibles of the old Romanticists. However, he presently abandoned this style for the more subjective strain of 'Les Voeux Steyiles, Octave, Les Seceetes Pensees de Rafael, Namouna, and Rolla', the last two being very eloquent at times, though immature. Rolla (1833) is one of the strongest and most depressing of his works; the sceptic regrets the faith he has lost the power to regain, and realizes in lurid flashes the desolate emptiness of his own heart. At this period the crisis of his life was reached. He accompanied George Sand to Italy, a rupture between them occurred, and De Musset returned to Paris alone in 1834.

More subdued sadness is found in 'Les Nuits' (1832-1837), and in 'Espoir en Dieu' (1838), *etc.*, and his 'Lettre a Lamartine' belongs to the most beautiful pages of French literature. But henceforth his production grows more sparing and in form less romantic, although 'Le Rhin Allemand', for example, shows that at times he can still gather up all his powers. The poet becomes lazy and morose, his will is sapped by a wild and reckless life, and one is more than once tempted to wish that his lyre had ceased to sing.

De Musset's prose is more abundant than his lyrics or his dramas. It is of immense value, and owes its chief significance to the clearness with which it exhibits the progress of his ethical disintegration. In 'Emmeline' (1837) we have a rather dangerous juggling with the psychology of love. Then follows a study of simultaneous love, 'Les Deux Mattresses' (1838), quite in the spirit of Jean Paul. He then wrote three sympathetic depictions of Parisian Bohemia: 'Frederic et Bernadette, Mimi Pinson, and Le Secret de Javotte', all in 1838. 'Le Fils de Titien' (1838) and 'Croiselles' (1839) are carefully elaborated historical novelettes; the latter is considered one of his best works, overflowing with romantic spirit, and contrasting in this respect strangely with 'La Mouche' (1853), one of the last flickerings of his imagination. 'Maggot' (1838) bears marks of the influence of George Sand; 'Le Merle Blanc' (1842) is a sort of allegory dealing with their quarrel. 'Pierre et Camille' is a pretty but slight tale of a deaf-mute's love. His greatest work, 'Confession d'un Enfant du Siecle', crowned with acclaim by the French Academy, and classic for all time, was written in 1836, when the poet, somewhat recovered from the shock, relates his unhappy Italian experience. It is an ambitious and deeply interesting work, and shows whither his dread of all moral compulsion and self-control was leading him.

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De Musset also wrote some critical essays, witty and satirical in tone, in which his genius appears in another light. It is not generally known that he was the translator into French of De Quincey's 'Confessions of an Opium Eater' (1828). He was also a prominent contributor to the 'Revue des Deux Mondes.' In 1852 he was elected to the French Academy, but hardly ever appeared at the sessions. A confrere once made the remark: "De Musset frequently absents himself," whereupon it is said another Immortal answered, "And frequently absinthe's himself!"

While Brunetiere, Lemattre, and others consider De Musset a great dramatist, Sainte-Beuve, singularly enough, does not appreciate him as a playwright. Theophile Gautier says about 'Un Caprice' (1847): "Since the days of Marivaux nothing has been produced in 'La Comedie Francaise' so fine, so delicate, so dainty, than this tender piece, this chef-d'oeuvre, long buried within the pages of a review; and we are greatly indebted to the Russians of St. Petersburg, that snow-covered Athens, for having dug up and revived it." Nevertheless, his blquette, 'La Nuit Venetienne', was outrageously treated at the Odeon. The opposition was exasperated by the recent success of Hugo's 'Hernani.' Musset was then in complete accord with the fundamental romantic conception that tragedy must mingle with comedy on the stage as well as in life, but he had too delicate a taste to yield to the extravagance of Dumas and the lesser romanticists. All his plays, by the way, were written for the 'Revue des Deux Mondes' between 1833 and 1850, and they did not win a definite place on the stage till the later years of the Second Empire. In some comedies the dialogue is unequalled by any writer since the days of Beaumarchais. Taine says that De Musset has more real originality in some respects than Hugo, and possesses truer dramatic genius. Two or three of his comedies will probably hold the stage longer than any dramatic work of the romantic school. They contain the quintessence of romantic imaginative art; they show in full flow that unchecked freedom of fancy which, joined to the spirit of realistic comedy, produces the modern French drama. Yet De Musset's prose has in greater measure the qualities that endure.

The Duke of Orleans created De Musset Librarian in the Department of the Interior. It was sometimes stated that there was no library at all. It is certain that it was a sinecure, though the pay, 3,000 francs, was small. In 1848 the Duke had the bad taste to ask for his resignation, but the Empire repaired the injury. Alfred de Musset died in Paris, May 2, 1857.

Henride BORNIER
de l'Academie Francaise.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

BOOK 1.

PART I

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CHAPTER I

TO THE READER

Before the history of any life can be written, that life must be lived; so that it is not my life that I am now writing. Attacked in early youth by an abominable moral malady, I here narrate what happened to me during the space of three years. Were I the only victim of that disease, I would say nothing, but as many others suffer from the same evil, I write for them, although I am not sure that they will give heed to me. Should my warning be unheeded, I shall still have reaped the fruit of my agonizing in having cured myself, and, like the fox caught in a trap, shall have gnawed off my captive foot.

CHAPTER II

REFLECTIONS

During the wars of the Empire, while husbands and brothers were in Germany, anxious mothers gave birth to an ardent, pale, and neurotic generation. Conceived between battles, reared amid the noises of war, thousands of children looked about them with dull eyes while testing their limp muscles. From time to time their blood-stained fathers would appear, raise them to their gold-laced bosoms, then place them on the ground and remount their horses.

The life of Europe centred in one man; men tried to fill their lungs with the air which he had breathed. Yearly France presented that man with three hundred thousand of her youth; it was the tax to Caesar; without that troop behind him, he could not follow his fortune. It was the escort he needed that he might scour the world, and then fall in a little valley on a deserted island, under weeping willows.

Never had there been so many sleepless nights as in the time of that man; never had there been seen, hanging over the ramparts of the cities, such a nation of desolate mothers; never was there such a silence about those who spoke of death. And yet there was never such joy, such life, such fanfares of war, in all hearts. Never was there such pure sunlight as that which dried all this blood. God made the sun for this man, men said; and they called it the Sun of Austerlitz. But he made this sunlight himself with his ever-booming guns that left no clouds but those which succeed the day of battle.

It was this air of the spotless sky, where shone so much glory, where glistened so many swords, that the youth of the time breathed. They well knew that they were destined to the slaughter; but they believed that Murat was invulnerable, and the Emperor had been seen to cross a bridge where so many bullets whistled that they wondered if he were mortal. And even if one must die, what did it matter? Death itself was so beautiful, so noble, so illustrious, in its battle-scarred purple! It borrowed the color of hope, it reaped

so many immature harvests that it became young, and there was no more old age. All the cradles of France, as indeed all its tombs, were armed with bucklers; there were no more graybeards, there were only corpses or demi-gods.

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Nevertheless the immortal Emperor stood one day on a hill watching seven nations engaged in mutual slaughter, not knowing whether he would be master of all the world or only half. Azrael passed, touched the warrior with the tip of his wing, and hurled him into the ocean. At the noise of his fall, the dying Powers sat up in their beds of pain; and stealthily advancing with furtive tread, the royal spiders made partition of Europe, and the purple of Caesar became the motley of Harlequin.

Just as the traveller, certain of his way, hastes night and day through rain and sunlight, careless of vigils or of dangers, but, safe at home and seated before the fire, is seized by extreme lassitude and can hardly drag himself to bed, so France, the widow of Caesar, suddenly felt her wound. She fell through sheer exhaustion, and lapsed into a coma so profound that her old kings, believing her dead, wrapped about her a burial shroud. The veterans, their hair whitened in service, returned exhausted, and the hearths of deserted castles sadly flickered into life.

Then the men of the Empire, who had been through so much, who had lived in such carnage, kissed their emaciated wives and spoke of their first love. They looked into the fountains of their native fields and found themselves so old, so mutilated, that they bethought themselves of their sons, in order that these might close the paternal eyes in peace. They asked where they were; the children came from the schools, and, seeing neither sabres, nor cuirasses, neither infantry nor cavalry, asked in turn where were their fathers. They were told that the war was ended, that Caesar was dead, and that the portraits of Wellington and of Blucher were suspended in the ante-chambers of the consulates and the embassies, with this legend beneath: 'Salvatoribus mundi'.

Then came upon a world in ruins an anxious youth. The children were drops of burning blood which had inundated the earth; they were born in the bosom of war, for war. For fifteen years they had dreamed of the snows of Moscow and of the sun of the Pyramids.

They had not gone beyond their native towns; but had been told that through each gateway of these towns lay the road to a capital of Europe. They had in their heads a world; they saw the earth, the sky, the streets and the highways; but these were empty, and the bells of parish churches resounded faintly in the distance.

Pale phantoms, shrouded in black robes, slowly traversed the countryside; some knocked at the doors of houses, and, when admitted, drew from their pockets large, well-worn documents with which they evicted the tenants. From every direction came men still trembling with the fear that had seized them when they had fled twenty years before. All began to urge their claims, disputing loudly and crying for help; strange that a single death should attract so many buzzards.

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The King of France was on his throne, looking here and there to see if he could perchance find a bee [symbol of Napoleon D.W.] in the royal tapestry. Some men held out their hats, and he gave them money; others extended a crucifix and he kissed it; others contented themselves with pronouncing in his ear great names of powerful families, and he replied to these by inviting them into his grand salle, where the echoes were more sonorous; still others showed him their old cloaks, when they had carefully effaced the bees, and to these he gave new robes.

The children saw all this, thinking that the spirit of Caesar would soon land at Cannes and breathe upon this larva; but the silence was unbroken, and they saw floating in the sky only the paleness of the lily. When these children spoke of glory, they met the answer:

“Become priests;” when they spoke of hope, of love, of power, of life: “Become priests.”

And yet upon the rostrum came a man who held in his hand a contract between king and people. He began by saying that glory was a beautiful thing, and ambition and war as well; but there was something still more beautiful, and it was called liberty.

The children raised their heads and remembered that thus their grandfathers had spoken. They remembered having seen in certain obscure corners of the paternal home mysterious busts with long marble hair and a Latin inscription; they remembered how their grandsires shook their heads and spoke of streams of blood more terrible than those of the Empire. Something in that word liberty made their hearts beat with the memory of a terrible past and the hope of a glorious future.

They trembled at the word; but returning to their homes they encountered in the street three coffins which were being borne to Clamart; within were three young men who had pronounced that word liberty too distinctly.

A strange smile hovered on their lips at that sad sight; but other speakers, mounted on the rostrum, began publicly to estimate what ambition had cost and how very dear was glory; they pointed out the horror of war and called the battle-losses butcheries. They spoke so often and so long that all human illusions, like the trees in autumn, fell leaf by leaf about them, and those who listened passed their hands over their foreheads as if awakening from a feverish dream.

Some said: “The Emperor has fallen because the people wished no more of him;” others added: “The people wished the king; no, liberty; no, reason; no, religion; no, the English constitution; no, absolutism;” and the last one said: “No, none of these things, but simply peace.”

Three elements entered into the life which offered itself to these children: behind them a past forever destroyed, still quivering on its ruins with all the fossils of centuries of

absolutism; before them the aurora of an immense horizon, the first gleams of the future; and between these two worlds—like the ocean which separates the Old World from the New—something vague and floating, a troubled sea filled with wreckage, traversed from time to time by some distant sail or some ship trailing thick clouds of smoke; the present, in a word, which separates the past from the future, which is neither the one nor the other, which resembles both, and where one can not know whether, at each step, one treads on living matter or on dead refuse.

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It was in such chaos that choice had to be made; this was the aspect presented to children full of spirit and of audacity, sons of the Empire and grandsons of the Revolution.

As for the past, they would none of it, they had no faith in it; the future, they loved it, but how? As Pygmalion before Galatea, it was for them a lover in marble, and they waited for the breath of life to animate that breast, for blood to color those veins.

There remained then the present, the spirit of the time, angel of the dawn which is neither night nor day; they found him seated on a lime-sack filled with bones, clad in the mantle of egoism, and shivering in terrible cold. The anguish of death entered into the soul at the sight of that spectre, half mummy and half foetus; they approached it as does the traveller who is shown at Strasburg the daughter of an old count of Sarvenden, embalmed in her bride's dress: that childish skeleton makes one shudder, for her slender and livid hand wears the wedding-ring and her head decays enwreathed in orange-blossoms.

As on the approach of a tempest there passes through the forests a terrible gust of wind which makes the trees shudder, to which profound silence succeeds, so had Napoleon, in passing, shaken the world; kings felt their crowns oscillate in the storm, and, raising hands to steady them, found only their hair, bristling with terror. The Pope had travelled three hundred leagues to bless him in the name of God and to crown him with the diadem; but Napoleon had taken it from his hands. Thus everything trembled in that dismal forest of old Europe; then silence succeeded.

It is said that when you meet a mad dog, if you keep quietly on your way without turning, the dog will merely follow you a short distance growling and showing his teeth; but if you allow yourself to be frightened into a movement of terror, if you but make a sudden step, he will leap at your throat and devour you; that when the first bite has been taken there is no escaping him.

In European history it has often happened that a sovereign has made such a movement of terror and his people have devoured him; but if one had done it, all had not done it at the same time—that is to say, one king had disappeared, but not all royal majesty. Before the sword of Napoleon majesty made this movement, this gesture which ruins everything, not only majesty but religion, nobility, all power both human and divine.

Napoleon dead, human and divine power were reestablished, but belief in them no longer existed. A terrible danger lurks in the knowledge of what is possible, for the mind always goes farther. It is one thing to say: "That may be" and another thing to say: "That has been;" it is the first bite of the dog.

The fall of Napoleon was the last flicker of the lamp of despotism; it destroyed and it parodied kings as Voltaire the Holy Scripture. And after him was heard a great noise: it

was the stone of St. Helena which had just fallen on the ancient world. Immediately there appeared in the heavens the cold star of reason, and its rays, like those of the goddess of the night, shedding light without heat, enveloped the world in a livid shroud.

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There had been those who hated the nobles, who cried out against priests, who conspired against kings; abuses and prejudices had been attacked; but all that was not so great a novelty as to see a smiling people. If a noble or a priest or a sovereign passed, the peasants who had made war possible began to shake their heads and say: "Ah! when we saw this man in such a time and place he wore a different face." And when the throne and altar were mentioned, they replied: "They are made of four planks of wood; we have nailed them together and torn them apart." And when some one said: "People, you have recovered from the errors which led you astray; you have recalled your kings and your priests," they replied: "We have nothing to do with those prattlers." And when some one said "People, forget the past, work and obey," they arose from their seats and a dull jangling could be heard. It was the rusty and notched sabre in the corner of the cottage chimney. Then they hastened to add: "Then keep quiet, at least; if no one harms you, do not seek to harm." Alas! they were content with that.

But youth was not content. It is certain that there are in man two occult powers engaged in a death-struggle: the one, clear-sighted and cold, is concerned with reality, calculation, weight, and judges the past; the other is athirst for the future and eager for the unknown. When passion sways man, reason follows him weeping and warning, him of his danger; but when man listens to the voice of reason, when he stops at her request and says: "What a fool I am; where am I going?" passion calls to him: "Ah, must I die?"

A feeling of extreme uneasiness began to ferment in all young hearts. Condemned to inaction by the powers which governed the world, delivered to vulgar pedants of every kind, to idleness and to ennui, the youth saw the foaming billows which they had prepared to meet, subside. All these gladiators glistening with oil felt in the bottom of their souls an insupportable wretchedness. The richest became libertines; those of moderate fortune followed some profession and resigned themselves to the sword or to the church. The poorest gave themselves up with cold enthusiasm to great thoughts, plunged into the frightful sea of aimless effort. As human weakness seeks association and as men are gregarious by nature, politics became mingled with it. There were struggles with the 'garde du corps' on the steps of the legislative assembly; at the theatre Talma wore a wig which made him resemble Caesar; every one flocked to the burial of a Liberal deputy.

But of the members of the two parties there was not one who, upon returning home, did not bitterly realize the emptiness of his life and the feebleness of his hands.

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While life outside was so colorless and so mean, the inner life of society assumed a sombre aspect of silence; hypocrisy ruled in all departments of conduct; English ideas, combining gayety with devotion, had disappeared. Perhaps Providence was already preparing new ways, perhaps the herald angel of future society was already sowing in the hearts of women the seeds of human independence. But it is certain that a strange thing suddenly happened: in all the salons of Paris the men passed on one side and the women on the other; and thus, the one clad in white like brides, and the other in black like orphans, began to take measure of one another with the eye.

Let us not be deceived: that vestment of black which the men of our time wear is a terrible symbol; before coming to this, the armor must have fallen piece by piece and the embroidery flower by flower. Human reason has overthrown all illusions; but it bears in itself sorrow, in order that it may be consoled.

The customs of students and artists, those customs so free, so beautiful, so full of youth, began to experience the universal change. Men in taking leave of women whispered the word which wounds to the death: contempt. They plunged into the dissipation of wine and courtesans. Students and artists did the same; love was treated as were glory and religion: it was an old illusion. The grisette, that woman so dreamy, so romantic, so tender, and so sweet in love, abandoned herself to the counting-house and to the shop. She was poor and no one loved her; she needed gowns and hats and she sold herself. Oh! misery! the young man who ought to love her, whom she loved, who used to take her to the woods of Verrieres and Romainville, to the dances on the lawn, to the suppers under the trees; he who used to talk with her as she sat near the lamp in the rear of the shop on the long winter evenings; he who shared her crust of bread moistened with the sweat of her brow, and her love at once sublime and poor; he, that same man, after abandoning her, finds her after a night of orgy, pale and leaden, forever lost, with hunger on her lips and prostitution in her heart.

About this time two poets, whose genius was second only to that of Napoleon, consecrated their lives to the work of collecting the elements of anguish and of grief scattered over the universe. Goethe, the patriarch of a new literature, after painting in his *Weyther* the passion which leads to suicide, traced in his *Faust* the most sombre human character which has ever represented evil and unhappiness. His writings began to pass from Germany into France. From his studio, surrounded by pictures and statues, rich, happy, and at ease, he watched with a paternal smile his gloomy creations marching in dismal procession across the frontiers of France. Byron replied to him in a cry of grief which made Greece tremble, and hung *Manfred* over the abyss, as if oblivion were the solution of the hideous enigma with which he enveloped him.

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Pardon, great poets! who are now but ashes and who sleep in peace! Pardon, ye demigods, for I am only a child who suffers. But while I write all this I can not but curse you. Why did you not sing of the perfume of flowers, of the voices of nature, of hope and of love, of the vine and the sun, of the azure heavens and of beauty? You must have understood life, you must have suffered; the world was crumbling to pieces about you; you wept on its ruins and you despaired; your mistresses were false; your friends calumniated, your compatriots misunderstood; your heart was empty; death was in your eyes, and you were the Colossi of grief. But tell me, noble Goethe, was there no more consoling voice in the religious murmur of your old German forests? You, for whom beautiful poesy was the sister of science, could not they find in immortal nature a healing plant for the heart of their favorite? You, who were a pantheist, and antique poet of Greece, a lover of sacred forms, could you not put a little honey in the beautiful vases you made; you who had only to smile and allow the bees to come to your lips? And thou, Byron, hadst thou not near Ravenna, under the orange-trees of Italy, under thy beautiful Venetian sky, near thy Adriatic, hadst thou not thy well-beloved? Oh, God! I who speak to you, who am only a feeble child, have perhaps known sorrows that you have never suffered, and yet I believe and hope, and still bless God.

When English and German ideas had passed thus over our heads there ensued disgust and mournful silence, followed by a terrible convulsion. For to formulate general ideas is to change saltpetre into powder, and the Homeric brain of the great Goethe had sucked up, as an alembic, all the juice of the forbidden fruit. Those who did not read him, did not believe it, knew nothing of it. Poor creatures! The explosion carried them away like grains of dust into the abyss of universal doubt.

It was a denial of all heavenly and earthly facts that might be termed disenchantment, or if you will, despair; as if humanity in lethargy had been pronounced dead by those who felt its pulse. Like a soldier who is asked: "In what do you believe?" and who replies: "In myself," so the youth of France, hearing that question, replied: "In nothing."

Then formed two camps: on one side the exalted spirits, sufferers, all the expansive souls who yearned toward the infinite, bowed their heads and wept; they wrapped themselves in unhealthful dreams and nothing could be seen but broken reeds in an ocean of bitterness. On the other side the materialists remained erect, inflexible, in the midst of positive joys, and cared for nothing except to count the money they had acquired. It was but a sob and a burst of laughter, the one coming from the soul, the other from the body.

This is what the soul said:

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"Alas! Alas! religion has departed; the clouds of heaven fall in rain; we have no longer either hope or expectation, not even two little pieces of black wood in the shape of a cross before which to clasp our hands. The star of the future is loath to appear; it can not rise above the horizon; it is enveloped in clouds, and like the sun in winter its disc is the color of blood, as in '93. There is no more love, no more glory. What heavy darkness over all the earth! And death will come ere the day breaks."

This is what the body said:

"Man is here below to satisfy his senses; he has more or less of white or yellow metal, by which he merits more or less esteem. To eat, to drink, and to sleep, that is life. As for the bonds which exist between men, friendship consists in loaning money; but one rarely has a friend whom he loves enough for that. Kinship determines inheritance; love is an exercise of the body; the only intellectual joy is vanity."

Like the Asiatic plague exhaled from the vapors of the Ganges, frightful despair stalked over the earth. Already Chateaubriand, prince of poesy, wrapping the horrible idol in his pilgrim's mantle, had placed it on a marble altar in the midst of perfumes and holy incense. Already the children were clenching idle hands and drinking in a bitter cup the poisoned brewage of doubt. Already things were drifting toward the abyss, when the jackals suddenly emerged from the earth. A deathly and infected literature, which had no form but that of ugliness, began to sprinkle with fetid blood all the monsters of nature.

Who will dare to recount what was passing in the colleges? Men doubted everything: the young men denied everything. The poets sang of despair; the youth came from the schools with serene brow, their faces glowing with health, and blasphemy in their mouths. Moreover, the French character, being by nature gay and open, readily assimilated English and German ideas; but hearts too light to struggle and to suffer withered like crushed flowers. Thus the seed of death descended slowly and without shock from the head to the bowels. Instead of having the enthusiasm of evil we had only the negation of the good; instead of despair, insensibility. Children of fifteen, seated listlessly under flowering shrubs, conversed for pastime on subjects which would have made shudder with terror the still thickets of Versailles. The Communion of Christ, the Host, those wafers that stand as the eternal symbol of divine love, were used to seal letters; the children spit upon the Bread of God.

Happy they who escaped those times! Happy they who passed over the abyss while looking up to Heaven. There are such, doubtless, and they will pity us.

It is unfortunately true that there is in blasphemy a certain outlet which solaces the burdened heart. When an atheist, drawing his watch, gave God a quarter of an hour in which to strike him dead, it is certain that it was a quarter of an hour of wrath and of atrocious joy. It was the paroxysm of despair, a nameless appeal to all celestial powers;

it was a poor, wretched creature squirming under the foot that was crushing him; it was a loud cry of pain. Who knows? In the eyes of Him who sees all things, it was perhaps a prayer.

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Thus these youth found employment for their idle powers in a fondness for despair. To scoff at glory, at religion, at love, at all the world, is a great consolation for those who do not know what to do; they mock at themselves, and in doing so prove the correctness of their view. And then it is pleasant to believe one's self unhappy when one is only idle and tired. Debauchery, moreover, the first result of the principles of death, is a terrible millstone for grinding the energies.

The rich said: "There is nothing real but riches, all else is a dream; let us enjoy and then let us die." Those of moderate fortune said: "There is nothing real but oblivion, all else is a dream; let us forget and let us die." And the poor said: "There is nothing real but unhappiness, all else is a dream; let us blaspheme and die."

Is this too black? Is it exaggerated? What do you think of it? Am I a misanthrope? Allow me to make a reflection.

In reading the history of the fall of the Roman Empire, it is impossible to overlook the evil that the Christians, so admirable when in the desert, did to the State when they were in power. "When I think," said Montesquieu, "of the profound ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity, I am obliged to compare them to the Scythians of whom Herodotus speaks, who put out the eyes of their slaves in order that nothing might distract their attention from their work No affair of State, no peace, no truce, no negotiations, no marriage could be transacted by any one but the clergy. The evils of this system were beyond belief."

Montesquieu might have added: Christianity destroyed the emperors but it saved the people. It opened to the barbarians the palaces of Constantinople, but it opened the doors of cottages to the ministering angels of Christ. It had much to do with the great ones of earth. And what is more interesting than the death-rattle of an empire corrupt to the very marrow of its bones, than the sombre galvanism under the influence of which the skeleton of tyranny danced upon the tombs of Heliogabalus and Caracalla? How beautiful that mummy of Rome, embalmed in the perfumes of Nero and swathed in the shroud of Tiberius! It had to do, my friends the politicians, with finding the poor and giving them life and peace; it had to do with allowing the worms and tumors to destroy the monuments of shame, while drawing from the ribs of this mummy a virgin as beautiful as the mother of the Redeemer, Hope, the friend of the oppressed.

That is what Christianity did; and now, after many years, what have they done who destroyed it? They saw that the poor allowed themselves to be oppressed by the rich, the feeble by the strong, because of that saying: "The rich and the strong will oppress me on earth; but when they wish to enter paradise, I shall be at the door and I will accuse them before the tribunal of God." And so, alas! they were patient.

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The antagonists of Christ therefore said to the poor: "You wait patiently for the day of justice: there is no justice; you wait for the life eternal to achieve your vengeance: there is no life eternal; you gather up your tears and those of your family, the cries of children and the sobs of women, to place them at the feet of God at the hour of death: there is no God."

Then it is certain that the poor man dried his tears, that he told his wife to check her sobs, his children to come with him, and that he stood erect upon the soil with the power of a bull. He said to the rich: "Thou who oppressest me, thou art only man," and to the priest: "Thou who hast consoled me, thou hast lied." That was just what the antagonists of Christ desired. Perhaps they thought this was the way to achieve man's happiness, sending him out to the conquest of liberty.

But, if the poor man, once satisfied that the priests deceive him, that the rich rob him, that all men have rights, that all good is of this world, and that misery is impiety; if the poor man, believing in himself and in his two arms, says to himself some fine day: "War on the rich! For me, happiness here in this life, since there is no other! for me, the earth, since heaven is empty! for me and for all, since all are equal." Oh! reasoners sublime, who have led him to this, what will you say to him if he is conquered?

Doubtless you are philanthropists, doubtless you are right about the future, and the day will come when you will be blessed; but thus far, we have not blessed you. When the oppressor said: "This world for me!" the oppressed replied: "Heaven for me!" Now what can he say?

All the evils of the present come from two causes: the people who have passed through 1793 and 1814 nurse wounds in their hearts. That which was is no more; what will be, is not yet. Do not seek elsewhere the cause of our malady.

Here is a man whose house falls in ruins; he has torn it down in order to build another. The rubbish encumbers the spot, and he waits for new materials for his new home. At the moment he has prepared to cut the stone and mix the cement, while standing pick in hand with sleeves rolled up, he is informed that there is no more stone, and is advised to whiten the old material and make the best possible use of that. What can you expect this man to do who is unwilling to build his nest out of ruins? The quarry is deep, the tools too weak to hew out the stones. "Wait!" they say to him, "we will draw out the stones one by one; hope, work, advance, withdraw." What do they not tell him? And in the mean time he has lost his old house, and has not yet built the new; he does not know where to protect himself from the rain, or how to prepare his evening meal, nor where to work, nor where to sleep, nor where to die; and his children are newly born.

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I am much deceived if we do not resemble that man. Oh! people of the future! when on a warm summer day you bend over your plows in the green fields of your native land; when you see in the pure sunlight, under a spotless sky, the earth, your fruitful mother, smiling in her matutinal robe on the workman, her well-beloved child; when drying on your brow the holy baptism of sweat, you cast your eye over the vast horizon, where there will not be one blade higher than another in the human harvest, but only violets and marguerites in the midst of ripening ears; oh! free men! when you thank God that you were born for that harvest, think of those who are no more, tell yourself that we have dearly purchased the repose which you enjoy; pity us more than all your fathers, for we have suffered the evil which entitled them to pity and we have lost that which consoled them.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFESSIONS

I have to explain how I was first taken with the malady of the age.

I was at table, at a great supper, after a masquerade. About me were my friends, richly costumed, on all sides young men and women, all sparkling with beauty and joy; on the right and on the left exquisite dishes, flagons, splendor, flowers; above my head was an obstreperous orchestra, and before me my loved one, whom I idolized.

I was then nineteen; I had passed through no great misfortune, I had suffered from no disease; my character was at once haughty and frank, my heart full of the hopes of youth. The fumes of wine fermented in my head; it was one of those moments of intoxication when all that one sees and hears speaks to one of the well-beloved. All nature appeared a beautiful stone with a thousand facets, on which was engraven the mysterious name. One would willingly embrace all who smile, and feel that he is brother of all who live. My mistress had granted me a rendezvous, and I was gently raising my glass to my lips while my eyes were fixed on her.

As I turned to take a napkin, my fork fell. I stooped to pick it up, and not finding it at first I raised the table cloth to see where it had rolled. I then saw under the table my mistress's foot; it touched that of a young man seated beside her; from time to time they exchanged a gentle pressure.

Perfectly calm, I asked for another fork and continued my supper. My mistress and her neighbor, on their side, were very quiet, talking but little and never looking at each other. The young man had his elbows on the table and was chatting with another woman, who was showing him her necklace and bracelets. My mistress sat motionless, her eyes fixed and swimming with languor. I watched both of them during the entire supper, and I saw nothing either in their gestures or in their faces that could betray

them. Finally, at dessert, I dropped my napkin, and stooping down saw that they were still in the same position.

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I had promised to escort my mistress to her home that night. She was a widow and therefore free, living alone with an old relative who served as chaperon. As I was crossing the hall she called to me:

“Come, Octave!” she said, “let us go; here I am.”

I laughed, and passed out without replying. After walking a short distance I sat down on a stone projecting from a wall. I do not know what my thoughts were; I sat as if stupefied by the unfaithfulness of one of whom I had never been jealous, whom I had never had cause to suspect. What I had seen left no room for doubt; I was felled as if by a stroke from a club. The only thing I remember doing as I sat there, was looking mechanically up at the sky, and, seeing a star shoot across the heavens, I saluted that fugitive gleam, in which poets see a worn-out world, and gravely took off my hat to it.

I returned to my home very quietly, experiencing nothing, as if deprived of all sensation and reflection. I undressed and retired; hardly had my head touched the pillow when the spirit of vengeance seized me with such force that I suddenly sat bolt upright against the wall as if all my muscles were made of wood. I then jumped from my bed with a cry of pain; I could walk only on my heels, the nerves in my toes were so irritated. I passed an hour in this way, completely beside myself, and stiff as a skeleton. It was the first burst of passion I had ever experienced.

The man I had surprised with my mistress was one of my most intimate friends. I went to his house the next day, in company with a young lawyer named Desgenais; we took pistols, another witness, and repaired to the woods of Vincennes. On the way I avoided speaking to my adversary or even approaching him; thus I resisted the temptation to insult or strike him, a useless form of violence at a time when the law recognized the code. But I could not remove my eyes from him. He was the companion of my childhood, and we had lived in the closest intimacy for many years. He understood perfectly my love for my mistress, and had several times intimated that bonds of this kind were sacred to a friend, and that he would be incapable of an attempt to supplant me, even if he loved the same woman. In short, I had perfect confidence in him and I had perhaps never pressed the hand of any human creature more cordially than his.

Eagerly and curiously I scrutinized this man whom I had heard speak of love like an antique hero and whom yet I had caught caressing my mistress. It was the first time in my life I had seen a monster; I measured him with a haggard eye to see what manner of man was this. He whom I had known since he was ten years old, with whom I had lived in the most perfect friendship, it seemed to me I had never seen him. Allow me a comparison.

There is a Spanish play, familiar to all the world, in which a stone statue comes to sup with a profligate, sent thither by divine justice. The profligate puts a good face on the matter and forces himself to affect indifference; but the statue asks for his hand, and

when he has extended it he feels himself seized by a mortal chill and falls in convulsions.



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Whenever I have loved and confided in any one, either friend or mistress, and suddenly discover that I have been deceived, I can only describe the effect produced on me by comparing it to the clasp of that marble hand. It is the actual impression of marble, it is as if a man of stone had embraced me. Alas! this horrible apparition has knocked more than once at my door; more than once we have supped together.

When the arrangements were all made we placed ourselves in line, facing each other and slowly advancing. My adversary fired the first shot, wounding me in the right arm. I immediately seized my pistol in the other hand; but my strength failed, I could not raise it; I fell on one knee.

Then I saw my enemy running up to me with an expression of great anxiety on his face, and very pale. Seeing that I was wounded, my seconds hastened to my side, but he pushed them aside and seized my wounded arm. His teeth were set, and I could see that he was suffering intense anguish. His agony was as frightful as man can experience.

“Go!” he cried; “go, stanch your wound at the house of-----”

He choked, and so did I.

I was placed in a cab, where I found a physician. My wound was not dangerous, the bone being untouched, but I was in such a state of excitation that it was impossible properly to dress my wound. As they were about to drive from the field I saw a trembling hand at the door of my cab; it was that of my adversary. I shook my head in reply; I was in such a rage that I could not pardon him, although I felt that his repentance was sincere.

By the time I reached home I had lost much blood and felt relieved, for feebleness saved me from the anger which was doing me more harm than my wound. I willingly retired to my bed and called for a glass of water, which I gulped down with relish.

But I was soon attacked by fever. It was then I began to shed tears. I could understand that my mistress had ceased to love me, but not that she could deceive me. I could not comprehend why a woman, who was forced to it by neither duty nor interest, could lie to one man when she loved another. Twenty times a day I asked my friend Desgenais how that could be possible.

“If I were her husband,” I said, “or if I supported her, I could easily understand how she might be tempted to deceive me; but if she no longer loves me, why deceive me?”

I did not understand how any one could lie for love; I was but a child, then, but I confess that I do not understand it yet. Every time I have loved a woman I have told her of it,



and when I ceased to love her I have confessed it with the same sincerity, having always thought that in matters of this kind the will was not concerned and that there was no crime but falsehood.

To all this Desgenais replied:

“She is unworthy; promise me that you will never see her again.”

I solemnly promised. He advised me, moreover, not to write to her, not even to reproach her, and if she wrote to me not to reply. I promised all, with some surprise that he should consider it necessary to exact such a pledge.

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Nevertheless, the first thing I did when I was able to leave my room was to visit my mistress. I found her alone, seated in the corner of her room, with an expression of sorrow on her face and an appearance of general disorder in her surroundings. I overwhelmed her with violent reproaches; I was intoxicated with despair. In a paroxysm of grief I fell on the bed and gave free course to my tears.

“Ah! faithless one! wretch!” I cried between my sobs, “you knew that it would kill me. Did the prospect please you? What have I done to you?”

She threw her arms around my neck, saying that she had been tempted, that my rival had intoxicated her at that fatal supper, but that she had never been his; that she had abandoned herself in a moment of forgetfulness; that she had committed a fault but not a crime; but that if I would not pardon her, she, too, would die. All that sincere repentance has of tears, all that sorrow has of eloquence, she exhausted in order to console me; pale and distraught, her dress deranged, her hair falling over her shoulders, she kneeled in the middle of her chamber; never have I seen anything so beautiful, and I shuddered with horror as my senses revolted at the sight.

I went away crushed, scarcely able to direct my tottering steps. I wished never to see her again; but in a quarter of an hour I returned. I do not know what desperate resolve I had formed; I experienced a full desire to know her mine once more, to drain the cup of tears and bitterness to the dregs, and then to die with her. In short I abhorred her, yet I idolized her; I felt that her love was ruin, but that to live without her was impossible. I mounted the stairs like a flash; I spoke to none of the servants, but, familiar with the house, opened the door of her chamber.

I found her seated calmly before her toilette-table, covered with jewels; she held in her hand a piece of red crepe which she passed gently over her cheeks. I thought I was dreaming; it did not seem possible that this was the woman I had left, just fifteen minutes before, overwhelmed with grief, abased to the floor; I was as motionless as a statue. She, hearing the door open, turned her head and smiled:

“Is it you?” she said.

She was going to a ball and was expecting my rival. As she recognized me, she compressed her lips and frowned.

I started to leave the room. I looked at her bare neck, lithe and perfumed, on which rested her knotted hair confined by a jewelled comb; that neck, the seat of vital force, was blacker than hell; two shining tresses had fallen there and some light silvern hairs balanced above it. Her shoulders and neck, whiter than milk, displayed a heavy growth of down. There was in that knotted mass of hair something maddeningly lovely, which seemed to mock me when I thought of the sorrowful abandon in which I had seen her a moment before. I suddenly stepped up to her and struck that neck with the back of my

hand. My mistress gave vent to a cry of terror, and fell on her hands, while I hastened from the room.



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When I reached my room I was again attacked by fever and was obliged to take to my bed. My wound had reopened and I suffered great pain. Desgenais came to see me and I told him what had happened. He listened in silence, then paced up and down the room as if undecided as to his next course. Finally he stopped before my bed and burst out laughing.

"Is she your first love?" he asked.

"No!" I replied, "she is my last."

Toward midnight, while sleeping restlessly, I seemed to hear in my dreams a profound sigh. I opened my eyes and saw my mistress standing near my bed with arms crossed, looking like a spectre. I could not restrain a cry of fright, believing it to be an apparition conjured up by my diseased brain. I leaped from my bed and fled to the farther end of the room; but she followed me.

"It is I!" said she; putting her arms around me, she drew me to her.

"What do you want of me?" I cried. "Leave, me! I fear I shall kill you!"

"Very well, kill me!" she said. "I have deceived you, I have lied to you, I am an infamous wretch and I am miserable; but I love you, and I can not live without you."

I looked at her; how beautiful she was! Her body was quivering; her eyes were languid with love and moist with voluptuousness; her bosom was bare, her lips were burning. I raised her in my arms.

"Very well," I said, "but before God who sees us, by the soul of my father, I swear that I will kill you and that I will die with you."

I took a knife from the table and placed it under the pillow.

"Come, Octave," she said, smiling and kissing me, "do not be foolish. Come, my dear, all these horrors have unsettled your mind; you are feverish. Give me that knife."

I saw that she wished to take it.

"Listen to me," I then said; "I do not know what comedy you are playing, but as for me I am in earnest. I have loved you as only man can love, and to my sorrow I love you still. You have just told me that you love me, and I hope it is true; but, by all that is sacred, if I am your lover to-night, no one shall take my place tomorrow. Before God, before God," I repeated, "I would not take you back as my mistress, for I hate you as much as I love you. Before God, if you wish to stay here to-night I will kill you in the morning."

When I had spoken these words I fell into a delirium. She threw her cloak over her shoulders and fled from the room.

When I told Desgenais about it he said:

“Why did you do that? You must be very much disgusted, for she is a beautiful woman.”

“Are you joking?” I asked. “Do you think such a woman could be my mistress? Do you think I would ever consent to share her with another? Do you know that she confesses that another attracts her, and do you expect me, loving her as I do, to share my love? If that is the way you love, I pity you.”

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Desgenais replied that he was not so particular.

“My dear Octave,” he added, “you are very young. You want many things, beautiful things, which do not exist. You believe in a singular sort of love; perhaps you are capable of it; I believe you are, but I do not envy you. You will have other mistresses, my friend, and you will live to regret what happened last night. If that woman came to you it is certain that she loved you; perhaps she does not love you at this moment—indeed, she may be in the arms of another; but she loved you last night in that room; and what should you care for the rest? You will regret it, believe me, for she will not come again. A woman pardons everything except such a slight. Her love for you must have been something terrible when she came to you knowing and confessing herself guilty, risking rebuff and contempt at your hands. Believe me, you will regret it, for I am satisfied that you will soon be cured.”

There was such an air of simple conviction about my friend’s words, such a despairing certainty based on experience, that I shuddered as I listened. While he was speaking I felt a strong desire to go to my mistress, or to write to her to come to me. I was so weak that I could not leave my bed, and that saved me from the shame of finding her waiting for my rival or perhaps in his company. But I could write to her; in spite of myself I doubted whether she would come if I should write.

When Desgenais left me I became so desperate that I resolved to put an end to my trouble. After a terrible struggle, horror got the better of love. I wrote my mistress that I would never see her again, and begged her not to try to see me unless she wished to be exposed to the shame of being refused admittance. I called a servant and ordered him to deliver the letter at once. He had hardly closed the door when I called him back. He did not hear me; I did not dare call again; covering my face with my hands, I yielded to an overwhelming sense of despair.

CHAPTER IV

THE PATH OF DESPAIR

The next morning the first question that occurred to my mind was: “What shall I do?”

I had no occupation. I had studied medicine and law without being able to decide on either of the two careers; I had worked for a banker for six months, and my services were so unsatisfactory that I was obliged to resign to avoid being discharged. My studies had been varied but superficial; my memory was active but not retentive.

My only treasure, after love, was reserve. In my childhood I had devoted myself to a solitary way of life, and had, so to speak, consecrated my heart to it. One day my father, solicitous about my future, spoke to me of several careers among which he

allowed me to choose. I was leaning on the window-sill, looking at a solitary poplar-tree that was swaying in the breeze down in the garden.

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I thought over all the various occupations and wondered which one I should choose. I turned them all over, one after another, in my mind, and then, not feeling inclined to any of them, I allowed my thoughts to wander. Suddenly it seemed to me that I felt the earth move, and that a secret, invisible force was slowly dragging me into space and becoming tangible to my senses. I saw it mount into the sky; I seemed to be on a ship; the poplar near my window resembled a mast; I arose, stretched out my arms, and cried:

“It is little enough to be a passenger for one day on this ship floating through space; it is little enough to be a man, a black point on that ship; I will be a man, but not any particular kind of man.”

Such was the first vow that, at the age of fourteen, I pronounced in the face of nature, and since then I have done nothing, except in obedience to my father, never being able to overcome my repugnance.

I was therefore free, not through indolence but by choice; loving, moreover, all that God had made and very little that man had made. Of life I knew nothing but love, of the world only my mistress, and I did not care to know anything more. So, falling in love upon leaving college, I sincerely believed that it was for life, and every other thought disappeared.

My life was indolent. I was accustomed to pass the day with my mistress; my greatest pleasure was to take her through the fields on beautiful summer days, the sight of nature in her splendor having ever been for me the most powerful incentive to love. In winter, as she enjoyed society, we attended numerous balls and masquerades, and because I thought of no one but her I fondly imagined her equally true to me.

To give you an idea of my state of mind I can not do better than compare it to one of those rooms we see nowadays in which are collected and mingled the furniture of all times and countries. Our age has no impress of its own. We have impressed the seal of our time neither on our houses nor our gardens, nor on anything that is ours. On the street may be seen men who have their beards trimmed as in the time of Henry III, others who are clean-shaven, others who have their hair arranged as in the time of Raphael, others as in the time of Christ. So the homes of the rich are cabinets of curiosities: the antique, the gothic, the style of the Renaissance, that of Louis XIII, all pell-mell. In short, we have every century except our own—a thing which has never been seen at any other epoch: eclecticism is our taste; we take everything we find, this for beauty, that for utility, another for antiquity, still another for its ugliness even, so that we live surrounded by debris, as if the end of the world were at hand.



Such was the state of my mind; I had read much; moreover I had learned to paint. I knew by heart a great many things, but nothing in order, so that my head was like a sponge, swollen but empty. I fell in love with all the poets one after another; but being of an impressionable nature the last acquaintance disgusted me with the rest. I had made of myself a great warehouse of odds and ends, so that having no more thirst after drinking of the novel and the unknown, I became an oddity myself.

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Nevertheless, about me there was still something of youth: it was the hope of my heart, which was still childlike.

That hope, which nothing had withered or corrupted and which love had exalted to excess, had now received a mortal wound. The perfidy of my mistress had struck deep, and when I thought of it, I felt in my soul a swooning away, the convulsive flutter of a wounded bird in agony.

Society, which works so much evil, is like that serpent of the Indies whose habitat is under a shrub, the leaves of which afford the antidote to its venom; in nearly every case it brings the remedy with the wound it causes. For example, the man whose life is one of routine, who has his business cares to claim his attention upon rising, visits at one hour, loves at another, can lose his mistress and suffer no evil effects. His occupations and his thoughts are like impassive soldiers ranged in line of battle; a single shot strikes one down, his neighbors close the gap and the line is intact.

I had not that resource, since I was alone: nature, the kind mother, seemed, on the contrary, vaster and more empty than before. Had I been able to forget my mistress, I should have been saved. How many there are who can be cured with even less than that. Such men are incapable of loving a faithless woman, and their conduct, under the circumstances, is admirable in its firmness. But is it thus one loves at nineteen when, knowing nothing of the world, desiring everything, one feels, within, the germ of all the passions? Everywhere some voice appeals to him. All is desire, all is revery. There is no reality which holds him when the heart is young; there is no oak so gnarled that it may not give birth to a dryad; and if one had a hundred arms one need not fear to open them; one has but to clasp his mistress and all is well.

As for me, I did not understand what else there was to do but love, and when any one spoke to me of other occupations I did not reply. My passion for my mistress had something fierce about it, for all my life had been severely monachal. Let me cite a single instance. She gave me her miniature in a medallion. I wore it over my heart, a practice much affected by men; but one day, while idly rummaging about a shop filled with curiosities, I found an iron "discipline whip" such as was used by the mediaeval flagellants. At the end of this whip was a metal plate bristling with sharp iron points; I had the medallion riveted to this plate and then returned it to its place over my heart. The sharp points pierced my bosom with every movement and caused such strange, voluptuous anguish that I sometimes pressed it down with my hand in order to intensify the sensation. I knew very well that I was committing a folly; love is responsible for many such idiocies.

But since this woman deceived me I loathed the cruel medallion. I can not tell with what sadness I removed that iron circlet, and what a sigh escaped me when it was gone.

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“Ah! poor wounds!” I said, “you will soon heal, but what balm is there for that other deeper wound?”

I had reason to hate this woman; she was, so to speak, mingled with the blood of my veins; I cursed her, but I dreamed of her. What could I do with a dream? By what effort of the will could I drown a memory of flesh and blood? Lady Macbeth, having killed Duncan, saw that the ocean would not wash her hands clean again; it would not have washed away my wounds. I said to Desgenais: “When I sleep, her head is on my pillow.”

My life had been wrapped up in this woman; to doubt her was to doubt all; to deny her, to curse all; to lose her, to renounce all. I no longer went out; the world seemed peopled with monsters, with horned deer and crocodiles. To all that was said to distract my mind, I replied:

“Yes, that is all very well, but you may rest assured I shall do nothing of the kind.”

I sat in my window and said:

“She will come, I am sure of it; she is coming, she is turning the corner at this moment, I can feel her approach. She can no more live without me than I without her. What shall I say? How shall I receive her?”

Then the thought of her perfidy occurred to me.

“Ah! let her come! I will kill her!”

Since my last letter I had heard nothing of her.

“What is she doing?” I asked myself. “She loves another? Then I will love another also. Whom shall I love?”

While thinking, I heard a far distant voice crying:

“Thou, love another? Two beings who love, who embrace, and who are not thou and I! Is such a thing possible? Are you a fool?”

“Coward!” said Desgenais, “when will you forget that woman? Is she such a great loss? Take the first comer and console yourself.”

“No,” I replied, “it is not such a great loss. Have I not done what I ought? Have I not driven her away from here? What have you to say to that? The rest concerns me; the bull wounded in the arena can lie down in a corner with the sword of the matador 'twixt his shoulders, and die in peace. What can I do, tell me? What do you mean by first comer? You will show me a cloudless sky, trees and houses, men who talk, drink, sing,

women who dance and horses that gallop. All that is not life, it is the noise of life. Go, go, leave me in peace.”

CHAPTER V

A PHILOSOPHER’S ADVICE

Desgenais saw that my despair was incurable, that I would neither listen to any advice nor leave my room, he took the thing seriously. I saw him enter one evening with an expression of gravity on his face; he spoke of my mistress and continued in his tone of persiflage, saying all manner of evil of women. While he was speaking I was leaning on my elbow, and, rising in my bed, I listened attentively.

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It was one of those sombre evenings when the sighing of the wind recalls the moaning of a dying man. A fitful storm was brewing, and between the splashes of rain on the windows there was the silence of death. All nature suffers in such moments, the trees writhe in pain and hide their heads; the birds of the fields cower under the bushes; the streets of cities are deserted. I was suffering from my wound. But a short time before I had a mistress and a friend. The mistress had deceived me and the friend had stretched me on a bed of pain. I could not clearly distinguish what was passing in my head; it seemed to me that I was under the influence of a horrible dream and that I had but to awake to find myself cured; at times it seemed that my entire life had been a dream, ridiculous and puerile, the falseness of which had just been disclosed.

Desgenais was seated near the lamp at my side; he was firm and serious, although a smile hovered about his lips. He was a man of heart, but as dry as a pumice-stone. An early experience had made him bald before his time; he knew life and had suffered; but his grief was a cuirass; he was a materialist and he waited for death.

“Octave,” he said, “after what has happened to you, I see that you believe in love such as the poets and romancers have represented; in a word, you believe in what is said here below and not in what is done. That is because you do not reason soundly, and it may lead you into great misfortune.

“Poets represent love as sculptors design beauty, as musicians create melody; that is to say, endowed with an exquisite nervous organization, they gather up with discerning ardor the purest elements of life, the most beautiful lines of matter, and the most harmonious voices of nature. There lived, it is said, at Athens a great number of beautiful girls; Praxiteles drew them all one after another; then from these diverse types of beauty, each one of which had its defects, he formed a single faultless beauty and created Venus. The man who first created a musical instrument, and who gave to harmony its rules and its laws, had for a long time listened to the murmuring of reeds and the singing of birds. Thus the poets, who understand life, after knowing much of love, more or less transitory, after feeling that sublime exaltation which real passion can for the moment inspire, eliminating from human nature all that degrades it, created the mysterious names which through the ages fly from lip to lip: Daphnis and Chloe, Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe.

“To try to find in real life such love as this, eternal and absolute, is but to seek on public squares a woman such as Venus, or to expect nightingales to sing the symphonies of Beethoven.

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“Perfection does not exist; to comprehend it is the triumph of human intelligence; to desire to possess it, the most dangerous of follies. Open your window, Octave; do you not see the infinite? You try to form some idea of a thing that has no limits, you who were born yesterday and who will die to-morrow! This spectacle of immensity in every country in the world produces the wildest illusions. Religions are born of it; it was to possess the infinite that Cato cut his throat, that the Christians delivered themselves to lions, the Huguenots to the Catholics; all the people of the earth have stretched out their hands to that immensity and have longed to plunge into it. The fool wishes to possess heaven; the sage admires it, kneels before it, but does not desire it.

“Perfection, my friend, is no more made for us than immensity. We must seek for nothing in it, demand nothing of it, neither love nor beauty, happiness nor virtue; but we must love it if we would be virtuous, if we would attain the greatest happiness of which man is capable.

“Let us suppose you have in your study a picture by Raphael that you consider perfect. Let us say that upon a close examination you discover in one of the figures a gross defect of design, a limb distorted, or a muscle that belies nature, such as has been discovered, they say, in one of the arms of an antique gladiator. You would experience a feeling of displeasure, but you would not throw that picture in the fire; you would merely say that it is not perfect, but that it has qualities that are worthy of admiration.

“There are women whose natural singleness of heart and sincerity are such that they could not have two lovers at the same time. You believed your mistress such an one; that is best, I admit. You have discovered that she has deceived you; does that oblige you to depose and to abuse her, to believe her deserving of your hatred?

“Even if your mistress had never deceived you, even if at this moment she loved none other than you, think, Octave, how far her love would still be from perfection, how human it would be, how small, how restrained by the hypocrisies and conventions of the world; remember that another man possessed her before you, that many others will possess her after you.

“Reflect: what drives you at this moment to despair is the idea of perfection in your mistress, the idea that has been shattered. But when you understand that the primal idea itself was human, small and restricted, you will see that it is little more than a rung in the rotten ladder of human imperfection.

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"I think you will readily admit that your mistress has had other admirers, and that she will have still others in the future; you will doubtless reply that it matters little, so long as she loved you. But I ask you, since she has had others, what difference does it make whether it was yesterday or two years since? Since she loves but one at a time, what does it matter whether it is during an interval of two years or in the course of a single night? Are you a man, Octave? Do you see the leaves falling from the trees, the sun rising and setting? Do you hear the ticking of the horologe of time with each pulsation of your heart? Is there, then, such a difference between the love of a year and the love of an hour? I challenge you to answer that, you fool, as you sit there looking out at the infinite through a window not larger than your hand.

"You consider that woman faithful who loves you two years; you must have an almanac that will indicate just how long it takes for an honest man's kisses to dry on a woman's lips. You make a distinction between the woman who sells herself for money and the one who gives herself for pleasure; between the one who gives herself through pride and the one who gives herself through devotion. Among women who are for sale, some cost more than others; among those who are sought for pleasure some inspire more confidence than others; and among those who are worthy of devotion there are some who receive a third of a man's heart, others a quarter, others a half, depending upon her education, her manner, her name, her birth, her beauty, her temperament, according to the occasion, according to what is said, according to the time, according to what you have drunk at dinner.

"You love women, Octave, because you are young, ardent, because your features are regular, and your hair dark and glossy, but you do not, for all that, understand woman.

"Nature, having all, desires the reproduction of beings; everywhere, from the summit of the mountain to the bottom of the sea, life is opposed to death. God, to conserve the work of His hands, has established this law-that the greatest pleasure of all sentient beings shall be to procreate.

"Oh! my friend, when you feel bursting on your lips the vow of eternal love, do not be afraid to yield, but do not confound wine with intoxication; do not think of the cup divine because the draught is of celestial flavor; do not be astonished to find it broken and empty in the evening. It is but woman, but a fragile vase, made of earth by a potter.

"Thank God for giving you a glimpse of heaven, but do not imagine yourself a bird because you can flap your wings. The birds themselves can not escape the clouds; there is a region where air fails them and the lark, rising with its song into the morning fog, sometimes falls back dead in the field.

"Take love as a sober man takes wine; do not become a drunkard. If your mistress is sincere and faithful, love her for that; but if she is not, if she is merely young and beautiful, love her for that; if she is agreeable and spirituelle, love her for that; if she is

none of these things but merely loves you, love her for that. Love does not come to us every day.

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“Do not tear your hair and stab yourself because you have a rival. You say that your mistress deceives you for another; it is your pride that suffers; but change the words, say that it is for you that she deceives him, and behold, you are happy!

“Do not make a rule of conduct, and do not say that you wish to be loved exclusively, for in saying that, as you are a man and inconstant yourself, you are forced to add tacitly: ‘As far as possible.’

“Take time as it comes, the wind as it blows, woman as she is. The Spaniards, first among women, love faithfully; their hearts are sincere and violent, but they wear a dagger just above them. Italian women are lascivious. The English are exalted and melancholy, cold and unnatural. The German women are tender and sweet, but colorless and monotonous. The French are spirituelle, elegant, and voluptuous, but are false at heart.

“Above all, do not accuse women of being what they are; we have made them thus, undoing the work of nature.

“Nature, who thinks of everything, made the virgin for love; but with the first child her bosom loses form, her beauty its freshness. Woman is made for motherhood. Man would perhaps abandon her, disgusted by the loss of beauty; but his child clings to him and weeps. Behold the family, the human law; everything that departs from this law is monstrous.

“Civilization thwarts the ends of nature. In our cities, according to our customs, the virgin destined by nature for the open air, made to run in the sunlight; to admire the nude wrestlers, as in Lacedaemonia, to choose and to love, is shut up in close confinement and bolted in. Meanwhile she hides romance under her cross; pale and idle, she fades away and loses, in the silence of the nights, that beauty which oppresses her and needs the open air. Then she is suddenly snatched from this solitude, knowing nothing, loving nothing, desiring everything; an old woman instructs her, a mysterious word is whispered in her ear, and she is thrown into the arms of a stranger. There you have marriage, that is to say, the civilized family.

“A child is born. This poor creature has lost her beauty and she has never loved. The child is brought to her with the words: ‘You are a mother.’ She replies: ‘I am not a mother; take that child to some woman who can nurse it. I can not.’ Her husband tells her that she is right, that her child would be disgusted with her. She receives careful attention and is soon cured of the disease of maternity. A month later she may be seen at the Tuileries, at the ball, at the opera; her child is at Chaillot, at Auxerre; her husband with another woman. Then young men speak to her of love, of devotion, of sympathy, of all that is in the heart. She takes one, draws him to her bosom; he dishonors her and returns to the Bourse. She cries all night, but discovers that tears make her eyes red. She takes a consoler, for the loss of whom another consoles her; thus up to the age of



thirty or more. Then, blase and corrupted, with no human sentiment, not even disgust, she meets a fine youth with raven locks, ardent eye and hopeful heart; she recalls her own youth, she remembers what she has suffered, and telling him the story of her life, she teaches him to eschew love.

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"That is woman as we have made her; such are your mistresses. But you say they are women and that there is something good in them!

"But if your character is formed, if you are truly a man, sure of yourself and confident of your strength, you may taste of life without fear and without reserve; you may be sad or joyous, deceived or respected; but be sure you are loved, for what matters the rest?

"If you are mediocre and ordinary, I advise you to consider your course very carefully before deciding, but do not expect too much of your mistress.

"If you are weak, dependent upon others, inclined to allow yourself to be dominated by opinion, to take root wherever you see a little soil, make for yourself a shield that will resist everything, for if you yield to your weaker nature you will not grow, you will dry up like a dead plant, and you will bear neither fruit nor flowers. The sap of your life will dissipate into the formation of useless bark; all your actions will be as colorless as the leaves of the willow; you will have no tears to water you, but those from your own eyes; to nourish you, no heart but your own.

"But if you are of an exalted nature, believing in dreams and wishing to realize them, I say to you plainly: Love does not exist.

"For to love is to give body and soul, or better, it is to make a single being of two; it is to walk in the sunlight, in the open air through the boundless prairies with a body having four arms, two heads, and two hearts. Love is faith, it is the religion of terrestrial happiness, it is a luminous triangle suspended in the temple of the world. To love is to walk freely through that temple, at your side a being capable of understanding why a thought, a word, a flower makes you pause and raise your eyes to that celestial triangle. To exercise the noble faculties of man is a great good—that is why genius is glorious; but to double those faculties, to place a heart and an intelligence upon a heart and an intelligence—that is supreme happiness. God has nothing better for man; that is why love is better than genius.

"But tell me, is that the love of our women? No, no, it must be admitted. Love, for them, is another thing; it is to go out veiled, to write in secret, to make trembling advances, to heave chaste sighs under starched and unnatural robes, then to draw bolts and throw them aside, to humiliate a rival, to deceive a husband, to render a lover desolate. To love, for our women, is to play at lying, as children play at hide and seek, a hideous orgy of the heart, worse than the lubricity of the Romans, or the Saturnalia of Priapus; a bastard parody of vice itself, as well as of virtue; a loathsome comedy where all is whispering and sidelong glances, where all is small, elegant, and deformed, like those porcelain monsters brought from China; a lamentable satire on all that is beautiful and ugly, divine and infernal; a shadow without a body, a skeleton of all that God has made."

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Thus spoke Desgenais; and the shadows of night began to fall.

CHAPTER VI

MADAME LEVASSEUR

The following morning I rode through the Bois de Boulogne; the weather was dark and threatening. At the Porte Maillot I dropped the reins on my horse's back and abandoned myself to revery, revolving in my mind the words spoken by Desgenais the evening before.

Suddenly I heard my name called. Turning my head I spied one of my inamorata's most intimate friends in an open carriage. She bade me stop, and, holding out her hand with a friendly air, invited me to dine with her if I had no other engagement.

This woman, Madame Levasseur by name, was small, stout, and decidedly blonde; I had never liked her, and my attitude toward her had always been one of studied politeness. But I could not resist a desire to accept her invitation; I pressed her hand and thanked her; I was sure that we should talk of my mistress.

She sent a servant to lead my horse and I entered her carriage; she was alone, and we at once took the road to Paris. Rain began to fall, and the carriage curtains were drawn; thus shut up together we rode on in silence. I looked at her with inexpressible sadness; she was not only the friend of my faithless one but her confidante. She had often formed one of our party when I called on my mistress in the evening. With what impatience had I endured her presence! How often I counted the minutes that must elapse before she would leave! That was probably the cause of my aversion to her. I knew that she approved of our love; she even went so far as to defend me in our quarrels. In spite of the services she had rendered me, I considered her ugly and tiresome. Alas! now I found her beautiful! I looked at her hands, her clothes; every gesture went straight to my heart; all the past was associated with her. She noticed the change in manner and understood that I was oppressed by sad memories of the past. Thus we sped on our way, I looking at her, she smiling at me. When we reached Paris she took my hand:

"Well?" she said.

"Well?" I replied, sobbing, "tell her if you wish." Tears rushed from my eyes.

After dinner we sat before the fire.

"But tell me," she said, "is it irrevocable? Can nothing be done?"



“Alas! Madame,” I replied, “there is nothing irrevocable except the grief that is killing me. My condition can be expressed in a few words: I can not love her, I can not love another, and I can not cease loving.”

At these words she moved uneasily in her chair, and I could see an expression of compassion on her face.

For some time she appeared to be reflecting, as if pondering over my fate and seeking some remedy for my sorrow. Her eyes were closed and she appeared lost in revery. She extended her hand and I took it in mine.

“And I, too,” she murmured, “that is just my experience.” She stopped, overcome by emotion.

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Of all the sisters of love, the most beautiful is pity. I held Madame Levasseur's hand as she began to speak of my mistress, saying all she could think of in her favor. My sadness increased. What could I reply? Finally she came to speak of herself.

Not long since, she said, a man who loved her abandoned her. She had made great sacrifices for him; her fortune was compromised, as well as her honor and her name. Her husband, whom she knew to be vindictive, had made threats. Her tears flowed as she continued, and I began to forget my own sorrow in my sympathy for her. She had been married against her will; she struggled a long time; but she regretted nothing except that she had not been able to inspire a more sincere affection. I believe she even accused herself because she had not been able to hold her lover's heart, and because she had been guilty of apparent indifference.

When she had unburdened her heart she became silent.

"Madame," I said, "it was not chance that brought about our meeting in the Bois de Boulogne. I believe that human sorrows are but wandering sisters and that some good angel unites the trembling hands that are stretched out for aid. Do not repent having told me your sorrow. The secret you have confided to me is only a tear which has fallen from your eye, but has rested on my heart. Permit me to come again and let us suffer together."

Such lively sympathy took possession of me that without reflection I kissed her; it did not occur to my mind that it could offend her, and she did not appear even to notice it.

Our conversation continued in this tone of expansive friendship. She told me her sorrows, I told her mine, and between these two experiences which touched each other, I felt arise a sweetness, a celestial accord born of two voices in anguish. All this time I had seen nothing but her face. Suddenly I noticed that her dress was in disorder. It appeared singular to me that, seeing my embarrassment, she did not rearrange it, and I turned my head to give her an opportunity. She did nothing. Finally, meeting her eyes and seeing that she was perfectly aware of the state she was in, I felt as if I had been struck by a thunderbolt, for I now clearly understood that I was the plaything of her monstrous effrontery, that grief itself was for her but a means of seducing the senses. I took my hat without a word, bowed profoundly, and left the room.

CHAPTER VII

THE WISDOM OF SIRACH

Upon returning to my apartments I found a large box in the centre of the room. One of my aunts had died, and I was one of the heirs to her fortune, which was not large.



The box contained, among other things, a number of musty old books. Not knowing what to do, and being afflicted with ennui, I began to read one of them. They were for the most part romances of the time of Louis XV; my pious aunt had probably inherited them herself and never read them, for they were, so to speak, catechisms of vice.

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I was singularly disposed to reflect on everything that came to my notice, to give everything a mental and moral significance; I treated events as pearls in a necklace which I tried to string together.

It struck me that there was something significant about the arrival of these books at this time. I devoured them with a bitterness and a sadness born of despair. "Yes, you are right," I said to myself, "you alone possess the secret of life, you alone dare to say that nothing is true and real but debauchery, hypocrisy, and corruption. Be my friends, throw on the wound in my soul your corrosive poisons, teach me to believe in you."

While buried in these shadows, I allowed my favorite poets and text-books to accumulate dust. I even ground them under my feet in excess of wrath. "You wretched dreamers!" I said to them; "you who teach me only suffering, miserable shufflers of words, charlatans, if you know the truth, fools, if you speak in good faith, liars in either case, who make fairy-tales of the woes of the human heart. I will burn the last one of you!"

Then tears came to my aid and I perceived that there was nothing real but my grief. "Very well," I cried, in my delirium, "tell me, good and bad genii, counselors for good or evil, tell me what to do! Choose an arbiter and let him speak."

I seized an old Bible which lay on my table, and read the first passage that caught my eye.

"Reply to me, thou book of God!" I said, "what word hast thou for me?" My eye fell on this passage in Ecclesiastes, Chapter IX:

For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

When I read these words I was astounded; I did not know that there was such a sentiment in the Bible. "And thou, too, as all others, thou book of hope!"

What do the astronomers think when they predict, at a given hour and place, the passage of a comet, that most eccentric of celestial travellers? What do the naturalists think when they reveal the myriad forms of life concealed in a drop of water? Do they think they have invented what they see and that their lenses and microscopes make the

law of nature? What did the first law-giver think when, seeking for the corner-stone in the social edifice, angered doubtless

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by some idle importunity, he struck the tables of brass and felt in his bowels the yearning for a law of retaliation? Did he, then, invent justice? And the first who plucked the fruit planted by his neighbor and who fled cowering under his mantle, did he invent shame? And he who, having overtaken that same thief who had robbed him of the product of his toil, forgave him his sin, and, instead of raising his hand to smite him, said, "Sit thou down and eat thy fill;" when, after thus returning good for evil, he raised his eyes toward Heaven and felt his heart quivering, tears welling from his eyes, and his knees bending to the earth, did he invent virtue? Oh, Heaven! here is a woman who speaks of love and who deceives me; here is a man who speaks of friendship and counsels me to seek consolation in debauchery; here is another woman who weeps and would console me with the flesh; here is a Bible that speaks of God and says: "Perhaps; but nothing is of any real importance."

I ran to the open window: "Is it true that you are empty?" I cried, looking up at the pale expanse of sky which spread above me. "Reply, reply! Before I die, grant that I may clasp in these arms of mine something more than a dream!"

Profound silence reigned. As I stood with arms outstretched, eyes lost in space, a swallow uttered a plaintive cry; in spite of myself I followed it with my eyes; while the swallow disappeared from sight like a flash, a little girl passed singing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEARCH FOR HEALING

Yet I was unwilling to yield.

Before taking life on its pleasant side—a side which to me seemed rather sinister—I resolved to test everything. I remained thus for some time, a prey to countless sorrows, tormented by terrible dreams.

The great obstacle to my cure was my youth. Wherever I happened to be, whatever my occupation, I could think of nothing but women; the sight of a woman made me tremble.

It had been my fate—a fate as rare as happy—to give to love my unsullied youth. But the result of this was that all my senses united in idealizing love; there was the cause of my unhappiness. For not being able to think of anything but women, I could not help turning over in my head, day and night, all the ideas of debauchery, of false love and of feminine treason, with which my mind was filled. For me to possess a woman was to love her; I thought of nothing but women, but I believed no more in the possibility of true love.

All this suffering inspired me with a sort of rage. At times I was tempted to imitate the monks and starve my body in order to conquer my senses; at times I felt like rushing out into the street to throw myself at the feet of the first woman I met and vow to her eternal love.

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God is my witness that I did all in my power to cure myself. Preoccupied from the first with the idea that the society of men was the haunt of vice and hypocrisy, where all were like my mistress, I resolved to separate myself from them and live in complete isolation. I resumed my neglected studies, and plunged into history, poetry, and anatomy. There happened to be on the fourth floor of the same house an old and learned German. I determined to learn his language; the German was poor and friendless, and willingly accepted the task of instructing me. My perpetual state of distraction worried him. How many times he waited in patient astonishment while I, seated near him with a smoking lamp between us, sat with my arms crossed on my book, lost in revery, oblivious of his presence and of his pity.

"My dear sir," said I to him one day, "all this is useless, but you are the best of men. What a task you have undertaken! You must leave me to my fate; we can do nothing, neither you nor I."

I do not know that he understood my meaning, but he grasped my hand and there was no more talk of German.

I soon realized that solitude, instead of curing me, was doing me harm, and so I completely changed my system. I went into the country, and galloped through the woods with the huntsmen; I would ride until I was out of breath, trying to cure myself with fatigue, and when, after a day of sweat in the fields, I reached my bed in the evening smelling of powder and the stable, I would bury my head in the pillow, roll about under the covers and cry: "Phantom, phantom! are you not satiated? Will you not leave me for one single night?"

But why these vain efforts? Solitude sent me to nature, and nature to love. Standing in the street of Mental Observation, I saw myself pale and wan, surrounded by corpses, and, drying my hands on my bloody apron, stifled by the odor of putrefaction, I turned my head in spite of myself, and saw floating before my eyes green harvests, balmy fields, and the pensive harmony of the evening. "No," said I, "science can not console me; rather will I plunge into this sea of irresponsive nature and die there myself by drowning. I will not war against my youth; I will live where there is life, or at least die in the sunlight." I began to mingle with the throngs at Sevres and Chaville, and stretch myself on flowery swards in secluded groves. Alas! all the forests and fields cried to me:

"What do you seek here? We are young, poor child! We wear the colors of hope."

Then I returned to the city; I lost myself in its obscure streets; I looked up at the lights in its windows, into those mysterious family nests; I watched the passing carriages; I saw man jostling against man. Oh, what solitude! How sad the smoke on those roofs! What sorrow in those tortuous streets where all are hurrying hither and thither, working and sweating, where thousands of strangers rub against your elbows; a sewer where

society is of bodies only, while souls are solitary and alone, where all who hold out a hand to you are prostitutes! "Become corrupt, corrupt, and you will cease to suffer!" This has been the cry of all cities unto man; it is written with charcoal on the walls, on the streets with mud, on men's faces with extravasated blood.

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At times, when seated in the corner of some salon I watched the women as they danced, some rosy, some blue, and others white, their arms bare and their hair gathered gracefully about their shapely heads, looking like cherubim drunk with light, floating in spheres of harmony and beauty, I would think: "Ah, what a garden, what flowers to gather, to breathe! Ah! Marguerites, Marguerites! What will your last petal say to him who plucks it? A little, a little, but not all. That is the moral of the world, that is the end of your smiles. It is over this terrible abyss that you are walking in your spangled gauze; it is on this hideous reality you run like gazelles on the tips of your little toes!"

"But why take things so seriously?" said Desgenais. "That is something that is never seen. You complain because bottles become empty? There are many casks in the vaults, and many vaults in the hills. Give me a dainty fish-hook gilded with sweet words, a drop of honey for bait, and quick! catch in the stream of oblivion a pretty consoler, as fresh and slippery as an eel; you will still have the hook when the fish shall have glided from your hands. Youth must pass away, and if I were you I would carry off the queen of Portugal rather than study anatomy."

Such was the advice of Desgenais. I made my way home with swollen heart, my face concealed under my cloak. I kneeled at the side of my bed and my poor heart dissolved in tears. What vows! what prayers! Galileo struck the earth, crying: "Nevertheless it moves!" Thus I struck my heart.

CHAPTER IX

BACCHUS, THE CONSOLER

Suddenly, in the midst of black despair, youth and chance led me to commit an act that decided my fate.

I had written my mistress that I wished never to see her again; I kept my word, but I passed the nights under her window, seated on a bench before her door. I could see the lights in her room, I could hear the sound of her piano, at times I saw something that looked like a shadow through the partially drawn curtains.

One night as I was seated on the bench, plunged in frightful melancholy, I saw a belated workman staggering along the street. He muttered a few words in a dazed manner and then began to sing. So much was he under the influence of liquor that he walked at times on one side of the gutter and then on the other. Finally he fell upon a bench facing another house opposite me. There he lay still, supported on his elbows, and slept profoundly.



The street was deserted, a dry wind stirred the dust here and there; the moon shone through a rift in the clouds and lighted the spot where the man slept. So I found myself tete-a-tete with this boor, who, not suspecting my presence, was sleeping on that stone bench as peacefully as if in his own bed.

The man served to divert my grief; I arose to leave him in full possession, but returned and resumed my seat. I could not leave that fateful door, at which I would not have knocked for an empire. Finally, after walking up and down a few times, I stopped before the sleeper.

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"What sleep!" I said. "Surely this man does not dream. His clothes are in tatters, his cheeks are wrinkled, his hands hardened with toil; he is some unfortunate who does not have a meal every day. A thousand gnawing cares, a thousand mortal sorrows await his return to consciousness; nevertheless, this evening he had money in his pocket, and entered a tavern where he purchased oblivion. He has earned enough in a week to enjoy a night of slumber, and perhaps has purchased it at the expense of his children's supper. Now his mistress can betray him, his friend can glide like a thief into his hut; I could shake him by the shoulder and tell him that he is being murdered, that his house is on fire; he would turn over and continue to sleep."

"And I—I do not sleep," I continued, pacing up and down the street, "I do not sleep, I who have enough in my pocket at this moment to purchase sleep for a year. I am so proud and so foolish that I dare not enter a tavern, and it seems I do not understand that if unfortunates enter there, it is to come out happy. O God! grapes crushed beneath the foot suffice to dissipate the deepest sorrow and to break the invisible threads that the fates weave about our pathway. We weep like women, we suffer like martyrs; in our despair it seems that the world is crumbling under our feet, and we sit down in tears as did Adam at Eden's gate. And to cure our griefs we have but to make a movement of the hand and moisten our throats. How contemptible our sorrow since it can be thus assuaged! We are surprised that Providence does not send angels to grant our prayers; it need not take the trouble, for it has seen our woes, it knows our desires, our pride and bitterness, the ocean of evil that surrounds us, and is content to hang a small black fruit along our paths. Since that man sleeps so soundly on his bench, why do not I sleep on mine? My rival is doubtless passing the night with my mistress; he will leave her at daybreak; she will accompany him to the door and they will see me asleep on my bench. Their kisses will not awaken me, and they will shake me by the shoulder; I will turn over on the other side and sleep on."

Thus, inspired by fierce joy, I set out in quest of a tavern. As it was past midnight some were closed; this put me in a fury. "What!" I cried, "even that consolation is refused me!" I ran hither and thither knocking at the doors of taverns, crying: "Wine! Wine!"

At last I found one open; I called for a bottle, and without caring whether it was good or bad, I gulped it down; a second followed, and then a third. I dosed myself as with medicine, and forced the wine down as if it had been prescribed by some physician to save my life.

The heavy fumes of the liquor, doubtless adulterated, mounted to my head. As I had gulped it down at a breath, drunkenness seized me promptly; I felt that I was becoming muddled, then I experienced a lucid moment, then confusion followed. Then consciousness left me, I leaned my elbows on the table and said adieu to myself.

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But I had a confused idea that I was not alone in the tavern. At the other end of the room stood a hideous group with haggard faces and harsh voices. Their dress indicated that they belonged to the poorer class, but were not bourgeois; in short, they belonged to that ambiguous class, the vilest of all, which has neither fortune nor occupation, which never works except at some criminal plot, a class which, neither poor nor rich, combines the vices of one with the misery of the other.

They were quarrelling over a dirty pack of cards. Among them was a girl who appeared to be very young and very pretty, was decently clad, and resembled her companions in no way, except in the harshness of her voice, which was as rough and broken as if it had performed the office of public crier. She looked at me closely, as if astonished to see me in such a bad place, for I was elegantly attired. Little by little she approached my table and seeing that all the bottles were empty, smiled. I saw that she had fine teeth of brilliant whiteness; I took her hand and begged her to be seated; she consented with good grace and asked what we should have for supper.

I looked at her without saying a word, while my eyes began to fill with tears; she observed my emotion and inquired the cause. I could not reply. She understood that I had some secret sorrow and forebore any attempt to learn the cause; with her handkerchief she dried my tears from time to time as we dined.

There was something about this girl at once repulsive and sweet, a singular boldness mingled with pity, that I could not understand. If she had taken my hand in the street she would have inspired a feeling of horror in me; but it seemed so strange that a creature I had never seen should come to me, and, without a word, proceed to order supper and dry my tears with her handkerchief, that I was rendered speechless; it revolted, yet charmed me. What I had done had been done so quickly that I seemed to have obeyed some impulse of despair. Perhaps I was a fool, or the victim of some supernatural caprice.

"Who are you?" I suddenly cried out; "what do you want of me? How do you know who I am? Who told you to dry my tears? Is this your vocation and do you think I desire you? I would not touch you with the tip of my finger. What are you doing here? Reply at once. Is it money you want? What price do you put on your pity?"

I arose and tried to go out, but my feet refused to support me. At the same time my eyes failed me, a mortal weakness took possession of me and I fell over a stool.

"You are not well," she said, taking me by the arm, "you have drunk, like the child that you are, without knowing what you were doing. Sit down in this chair and wait until a cab passes. You will tell me where you live and I will order the driver to take you home to your mother, since," she added, "you really find me ugly."



As she spoke I raised my eyes. Perhaps my drunkenness deceived me, or perhaps I had not seen her face clearly before, but suddenly I detected in that unfortunate girl a fatal resemblance to my mistress. I shuddered at the sight. There is a certain shudder that affects the hair; some say it is death passing over the head, but it was not death that passed over mine.

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It was the malady of the age, or rather was it that girl herself; and it was she who, with her pale, halfmocking features and rasping voice, came and sat with me at the end of the tavern room.

The moment I perceived her resemblance to my mistress a frightful idea occurred to me; it took irresistible possession of my muddled mind, and I put it into execution at once.

I escorted that girl to my home; and I arranged my room just as I had been wont to do when my mistress was with me, for I was dominated by a certain recollection of past joys.

Having arranged my room to my satisfaction, I gave myself up to the intoxication of despair. I probed my heart to the bottom in order to sound its depths. A Tyrolean song that my loved one used to sing began to run through my head:

Altra volta gieri biele,
Blanch' a rossa com' un flore,
Ma ora no. Non son piu biele
Consumatis dal' amore.

[Once I was beautiful, white and rosy as a flower; but now I am not.
I am no longer beautiful, consumed by the fire of love.]

I listened to the echo of that song as it reverberated through the desert of my heart. I said: "Behold the happiness of man; behold my little Paradise; behold my queen Mab, a girl from the streets. My mistress is no better. Behold what is found at the bottom of the glass when the nectar of the gods has been drained; behold the corpse of love."

The unfortunate creature heard me singing and began to sing herself. I turned pale; for that harsh and rasping voice, coming from the lips of one who resembled my mistress, seemed a symbol of my experience. It sounded like a gurgle in the throat of debauchery. It seemed to me that my mistress, having been unfaithful, must have such a voice. I was reminded of Faust who, dancing at the Brocken with a young sorceress, saw a red mouse emerge from her throat.

"Stop!" I cried. I arose and approached her.

Let me ask you, O men of the time, bent upon pleasure, who attend the balls and the opera and who, upon retiring this night, will seek slumber with the aid of some threadbare blasphemy of old Voltaire, some sensible satire by Paul Louis Courier, or some essay on economics, you who dally with the cold substance of that monstrous water-lily that Reason has planted in the hearts of our cities-let me ask, if by some chance this obscure book falls into your hands, not to smile with noble disdain or shrug

your shoulders. Be not too sure that I complain of an imaginary evil; be not too sure that human reason is the most beautiful of faculties, that there is nothing real here below but quotations on the Bourse, gambling in the salon, wine on the table, the glow of health, indifference toward others, and the pleasures of the night.



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For some day, across your stagnant life, a gust of wind will blow. Those beautiful trees, that you water with the stream of oblivion, Providence will destroy; despair will overtake you, heedless ones, and tears will dim your eyes. I will not say that your mistresses will deceive you—that would not grieve you so much as the loss of a horse—but you can lose on the Bourse. For the first plunge is not the last, and even if you do not gamble, bethink you that your moneyed tranquillity, your golden happiness, are in the care of a banker who may fail. In short, I tell you, frozen as you are, you are capable of loving something; some fibre of your being can be torn and you can give vent to cries that will resemble a moan of pain. Some day, wandering about the muddy streets, when daily material joys shall have failed, you will find yourself seated disconsolately on a deserted bench at midnight.

O men of marble! sublime egoists, inimitable reasoners, who have never given way to despair or made a mistake in arithmetic, if this ever happens to you, at the hour of your ruin you will remember Abelard when he lost Heloise. For he loved her more than you love your horses, your money, or your mistresses; and in losing her he lost more than your monarch Satan would lose in falling again from the battlements of Heaven. He loved her with a love of which the gazettes do not speak, the shadow of which your wives and your daughters do not perceive in our theatres and in our books. He passed half of his life kissing her white forehead, teaching her to sing the psalms of David and the canticles of Saul; he had but her on earth alone; and God consoled him.

Believe me, when in your distress you think of Abelard you will not look with the same eye upon the rich blasphemy of Voltaire and the badinage of Courier; you will feel that human reason can cure illusions but can not heal sorrows; that God has use for Reason but that He has not made her a sister of Charity. You will find that when the heart of man said: "I believe in nothing, for I see nothing," it did not speak the last word on the subject. You will look about you for something like hope, you will shake the doors of churches to see if they still swing, but you will find them walled up; you will think of becoming Trappists, and destiny will mock at you, and for reply will give you a bottle of wine and a courtesan.

And if you drink the wine, and take the courtesan, you will learn how such things come to pass.

PART II

CHAPTER I

AT THE CROSSWAYS

Upon awaking the following morning I experienced a feeling of such deep disgust with myself, and felt so degraded in my own eyes that a horrible temptation assailed me.

Then I sat down and looked gloomily about the room, my eyes resting mechanically on a brace of pistols that decorated the walls.

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When the suffering mind stretches its hands, so to speak, toward annihilation, when the soul forms some violent resolution, there seems to be an independent physical horror in the act of touching the cold steel of some deadly weapon; the fingers stiffen in anguish, the arm grows cold and hard. Nature recoils as the condemned walks to death. I can not express what I experienced, unless it was as if my pistol had said to me: "Think what you are about to do."

Since then I have often wondered what would have happened to me if the girl had departed immediately. Doubtless the first flush of shame would have subsided; sadness is not despair, and God has joined them in order that the one should not leave us alone with the other. Once relieved of the presence of that woman, my heart would have become calm. There would remain only repentance, for the angel of pardon has forbidden man to kill. But I was doubtless cured for life; debauchery was once for all driven from my door, and I would never again know the feeling of disgust with which its first visit had inspired me.

But it happened otherwise. The struggle which was going on within, the poignant reflections which overwhelmed me, the disgust, the fear, the wrath, even (for I experienced all these emotions at the same time), all these fatal powers nailed me to my chair; and, while I was thus a prey to dangerous delirium, the creature, standing before my mirror, thought of nothing but how best to arrange her dress and fix her hair, smiling the while. This lasted more than a quarter of an hour, during which I had almost forgotten her. Finally some slight noise attracted my attention to her, and turning about with impatience I ordered her to leave the room in such a tone that she at once opened the door and threw me a kiss before going out.

At the same moment some one rang the bell of the outer door. I arose precipitately, and had only time to open the closet door and motion the creature into it, when Desgenais entered the room with two friends.

The great currents that are found in the middle of the ocean resemble certain events in life. Fatality, Chance, Providence, what matters the name? Those who quarrel over the word admit the fact. Such are not those who, speaking of Napoleon or Caesar, say:

"He was a man of Providence." They apparently believe that heroes merit the attention which Heaven shows them, and that the color of purple attracts gods as well as bulls.

As to what rules the course of these little events, or what objects and circumstances, in appearance the least important, lead to changes in fortune, there is not, to my mind, a deeper cause and opportunity for thought. For something in our ordinary actions resembles the little blunted arrows we shoot at targets; little by little we make of our successive deeds an abstract and regular entity that we call our prudence or our will. Then comes a gust of wind, and lo! the smallest of these arrows, the very lightest and

most ineffective, is wafted beyond our vision, beyond the very horizon to the dwelling-place of God himself.

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What a strange feeling of unrest seizes us then! What becomes of those phantoms of tranquil pride, the will and prudence? Force itself, that mistress of the world, that sword of man in the combat of life, in vain do we brandish it over our heads in wrath, in vain do we seek to ward off with it a blow which threatens us; an invisible power turns aside the point, and all the impetus of effort, deflected into space, serves only to precipitate our fall.

Thus, at the moment I was hoping to cleanse myself from the sin I had committed, perhaps to inflict the penalty, at the very instant when a great horror had taken possession of me, I learned that I had to sustain a dangerous test.

Desgenais was in good humor; stretching himself out on my sofa he began to chaff me about my appearance, which indicated, he said, that I had not slept well. As I was little disposed to indulge in pleasantry I begged him to spare me.

He appeared to pay no attention to me, but, warned by my tone, soon broached the subject that had brought him to me. He informed me that my mistress had not only two lovers at a time, but three; that is to say, she had treated my rival as badly as she had treated me; the poor boy, having discovered her inconstancy, made a great ado and all Paris knew it. At first I did not catch the meaning of Desgenais's words, as I was not listening attentively; but when he had repeated his story three times in detail I was so stupefied that I could not reply. My first impulse was to laugh, for I saw that I had loved the most unworthy of women; but it was no less true that I loved her still. "Is it possible?" was all I could say.

Desgenais's friends confirmed all he had said. My mistress had been surprised in her own house between two lovers, and a scene ensued that all Paris knew by heart. She was disgraced, obliged to leave Paris or remain exposed to the most bitter taunts.

It was easy for me to see that in all this ridicule a great part was directed at me, not only on account of my duel in connection with this woman, but from my whole conduct in regard to her. To say that she deserved severest censure, that she had perhaps committed far worse sins than those she was charged with, was but to make me feel that I had been one of her dupes.

All this did not please me; but Desgenais had undertaken the task of curing me of my love, and was prepared to treat my disease heroically. A long friendship, founded on mutual services, gave him certain rights, and as his motive appeared praiseworthy I allowed him to have his way.

Not only did he not spare me, but when he saw my trouble and my shame increase, he pressed me the harder. My impatience was so obvious that he could not continue, so he stopped and remained silent—a course that irritated me still more.



In my turn I began to ask questions; I paced to and fro in my room. Although the recital of the story was well-nigh insupportable, I wished to hear it again. I tried to assume a smiling face and tranquil air, but in vain. Desgenais suddenly became silent after having shown himself to be a most virulent gossip. While I was pacing up and down my room he looked at me calmly, as if I were a caged fox.

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I can not express my state of mind. That a woman who had so long been the idol of my heart, and who, since I had lost her, had caused me such deep affliction, the only one I had ever loved, for whom indeed I might sorrow till death, should become suddenly a shameless wretch, the subject of coarse jests, of universal censure and scandal! It seemed to me that I felt on my shoulder the brand of a glowing iron and that I was marked with a burning stigma.

The more I reflected, the more the darkness thickened about me. From time to time I turned my head and saw a cold smile or a curious glance. Desgenais did not leave me; he knew very well what he was doing, and saw that I might go to any lengths in my present desperate condition.

When he found that he had brought me to the desired point, he did not hesitate to deal the finishing stroke.

“Does that story displease you?” he asked. “The best is yet to come. My dear Octave, the scene I have described took place on a certain night when the moon was shining brightly. While the two lovers were quarrelling over their fair one, and talking of cutting her throat as she sat before the fire, down in the street a certain shadow was seen to pass up and down before the house, a shadow that resembled you so closely that it was decided it must be you.”

“Who says so?” I asked, “who saw me in the street?”

“Your mistress herself; she told it to every one who cared to listen, just as cheerfully as we tell you her story. She claims that you love her still, that you keep guard at her door, in short—everything you can think of; but you ought to know that she talks about you publicly.”

I have never been able to lie, for whenever I have tried to disguise the truth my face has betrayed me. ‘Amour propre’, the shame of confessing my weakness before witnesses induced me, however, to make the effort. “It is very true that I was in the street,” I thought, “but had I known that my mistress was as bad as she is, I should not have been there.”

Finally I persuaded myself that I had not been seen distinctly; I attempted to deny it. A deep flush suffused my face and I felt the futility of my feint. Desgenais smiled.

“Take care,” said he, “take care, do not go too far.”

“But,” I protested, “how did I know it, how could I know—”

Desgenais compressed his lips as if to say:

“You knew enough.”

I stopped short, mumbling the remnant of my sentence. My blood became so hot that I could not continue.

“I in the street bathed in tears, in despair, and during that time that encounter within! What! that very night! Mocked by her! Surely, Desgenais, you are dreaming. Is it true? Can it be possible? What can you know about it?”

Thus talking at haphazard, I lost my head and an irresistible feeling of wrath began to rise within me. Finally I sat down exhausted.

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"My friend," said Desgenais, "do not take the thing so seriously. The solitary life you have been leading for the last two months has made you ill; I see you have need of distraction. Come to supper with me this evening, and tomorrow morning we will go to the country."

The tone in which he said this hurt me more than anything else; in vain I tried to control myself. "Yes," I thought, "deceived by that woman, poisoned by horrible suggestions, having no refuge either in work or in fatigue, having for my only safeguard against despair and ruin a sacred but frightful grief. O God! it is that grief, that sacred relic of my sorrow, that has just crumbled in my hands! It is no longer, my love, it is my despair that is insulted. Mockery! She mocks at me as I weep!" That appeared incredible to me. All the memories of the past crowded about my heart when I thought of it. I seemed to see the spectres of our nights of love; they hung over a bottomless, eternal abyss, black as chaos, and from the bottom of that abyss arose a shriek of laughter, sweet but mocking, that said: "Behold your reward!"

Had I been told that the world mocked at me I would have replied: "So much the worse for it," and I should not have been angry; but at the same time I was told that my mistress was a shameless wretch. Thus, on one side, the ridicule was public, vouched for, stated by two witnesses who, before telling what they knew, must have felt that the world was against me; and, on the other hand, what reply could I make? How could I escape? What could I do when the centre of my life, my heart itself, was ruined, killed, annihilated. What could I say when the woman for whom I had braved all, ridicule as well as blame, for whom I had borne a load of misery, whom I loved, and who loved another, of whom I demanded no love, of whom I desired nothing but permission to weep at her door, no favor but that of vowing my youth to her memory and of writing her name, her name alone, on the tomb of my hopes!—Ah! when I thought of it, I felt the hand of death heavy upon me. That woman mocked me, it was she who first pointed her finger at me, singling me out to the idle crowd which surrounded her; it was she, it was those lips erstwhile so many times pressed to mine, it was that body, that soul of my life, my flesh and my blood, it was from that source the injury came; yea, the last pang of all, the most cowardly and the most bitter, the pitiless laugh that sneers in the face of grief.

The more I thought of it the more enraged I became. Did I say enraged? I do not know what passion possessed me. What I do know is that an inordinate desire for vengeance entered into my soul. How could I revenge myself on a woman? I would have paid any price for a weapon that could be used against her. But I had none, not even the one she had employed; I could not pay her in her own coin.

Suddenly I noticed a shadow moving behind the curtain before the closet. I had forgotten my prisoner.

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"Listen to me!" I cried, rising, "I have loved, I have loved like a fool. I deserve all the ridicule you have subjected me to. But, by Heaven! I will show you something that will prove to you that I am not such a fool as you think."

With these words I pulled aside the curtain and exposed the interior of the closet. The girl was trying to conceal herself in a corner.

"Go in, if you choose," I said to Desgenais; "you who call me a fool for loving a woman, see how your teaching has affected me. Do you think I passed last night under the windows of—? But that is not all," I added, "that is not all I have to say. You give a supper to-night and to-morrow go to the country; I am with you, and shall not leave you from now on. We will not separate, but will pass the entire day together. Are you with me? Agreed! I have tried to make of my heart the mausoleum of my love, but I will bury my love in another tomb."

With these words I sat down, marvelling how indignation can solace grief and restore happiness. Whoever is astonished to learn that, from that day, I completely changed my course of life does not know the heart of man, and does not understand that a young man of twenty may hesitate before taking a step, but does not retreat when he has once taken it.

CHAPTER II

THE CHOSEN WAY

The first steps in debauchery resemble vertigo, for one feels a sort of terror mingled with sensuous delight, as if peering downward from some giddy—height. While shameful, secret dissipation ruins the noblest of men, in the frank and open defiance of conventionality there is something that compels respect even in the most depraved. He who goes at nightfall, muffled in his cloak, to sully his life in secret, and clandestinely to shake off the hypocrisy of the day, resembles an Italian who strikes his enemy from behind, not daring to provoke him to open quarrel. There are assassinations in the dark corners of the city under shelter of the night. He who goes his way without concealment says: "Every one does it and conceals it; I do it and do not conceal it." Thus speaks pride, and once that cuirass has been buckled on, it glitters with the refulgent light of day.

It is said that Damocles saw a sword suspended over his head. Thus libertines seem to have something over their heads which says: "Go on, but remember, I hang not by a thread." Those masked carriages that are seen during Carnival are the faithful images of their life. A dilapidated open wagon, flaming torches lighting up painted faces; some laugh, some sing. Among them you see what appear to be women; they are in fact what once were women, with human semblance. They are caressed and insulted; no

one knows who they are or what their names. They float and stagger under the flaming torches in an intoxication that thinks of nothing, and over which, it is said, a pitying God watches.

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But if the first impression be astonishment, the second is horror, and the third pity. There is evident so much force, or rather such an abuse of force, that often the noblest characters and the strongest constitutions are ruined. The life appears hardy and dangerous to these; they would make prodigies of themselves; bound to debauchery as Mazeppa to his horse, they gallop, making Centaurs of themselves and seeing neither the bloody trail that the shreds of their flesh leave, nor the eyes of the wolves that gleam in hungry pursuit, nor the desert, nor the vultures.

Launched into that life by the circumstances that I have recounted, I must now describe what I saw there.

Before I had a close view of one of those famous gatherings called theatrical masked balls, I had heard the debauchery of the Regency spoken of, and a reference to the time when a queen of France appeared disguised as a violet-seller. I found there flower-merchants disguised as vivandieres. I expected to find libertinism there, but in fact I found none at all. One sees only the scum of libertinism, some blows, and drunken women lying in deathlike stupor on broken bottles.

Ere I saw debauchery at table I had heard of the suppers of Heliogabulus and of the philosophy of Greece, which made the pleasures of the senses a kind of natural religion. I expected to find oblivion or something like joy; I found there the worst thing in the world: ennui trying to live, and some Englishmen who said: "I do this or that, and so I amuse myself. I have spent so many sovereigns, and have procured so much pleasure." And thus they wear out their life on that grindstone.

I had known nothing of courtesans when I heard of Aspasia, who sat on the knees of Alcibiades while discussing philosophy with Socrates. I expected to find something bold and insolent, but gay, free, and vivacious, something with the sparkle of champagne; I found a yawning mouth, a fixed eye, and light fingers.

Before I saw titled courtesans I had read Boccaccio and Bandello; above all, I had read Shakespeare. I had dreamed of those beautiful triflers; of those cherubim of hell. A thousand times I had drawn those heads so poetically foolish, so enterprising in audacity, heads of harebrained mistresses who wreck a romance with a glance, and who pass through life by waves and by pulsations, like the sirens of the tides. I thought of the fairies of the modern tales, who are always drunk with love if not with wine. I found, instead, writers of letters, exact arrangers of assassinations, who practised lying as an art and cloaked their baseness under hypocrisy, whose only thought was to give themselves for profit and to forget.

Ere first I looked on the gaming-table I had heard of floods of gold, of fortunes made in a quarter of an hour, and of a lord of the court of Henry IV, who won on one card a hundred thousand louis. I found a narrow room where workmen who had but one shirt

rented a suit for the evening for twenty sous, police stationed at the door, and starving wretches staking a crust of bread against a pistol-shot.

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Unknown to me were those dance-halls, public or other, open to any of those thirty thousand women who are permitted to sell themselves in Paris; I had heard of the saturnalia of all ages, of every imaginable orgy, from Babylon to Rome, from the temple of Priapus to the Parc-aux-Cerfs, and I have always seen written on the sill of that door the word, "Pleasure." I found nothing suggestive of pleasure, but in its place another word; and it has always seemed ineffaceable, not graven in that glorious metal that takes the sun's light, but in the palest of all, the cold colors of which seem tinted by the moonlight silver.

The first time I saw a mob, it was a depressing morning—Ash Wednesday, near Courtille. A cold, fine rain had been falling since the evening before; the streets were covered with pools of water. Carriages with blinds down were strung out hither and thither, crowding between hedges of hideous men and women standing on the sidewalks. That sinister wall of spectators had tigerish eyes, red with wine, gleaming with hatred. The carriage-wheels splashed mud over them, but they did not move. I was standing on the front seat of an open carriage; from time to time a man in rags would step out from the wall, hurl a torrent of abuse at us, then cover us with a cloud of flour. Mud would soon follow; yet we kept on our way toward the Isle of Love and the pretty wood of Romainville, consecrated by so many sweet kisses. One of my friends fell from his seat into the mud, narrowly escaping death on the paving. The people threw themselves on him to overpower him, and we were obliged to hasten to his assistance. One of the trumpeters who preceded us on horseback was struck on the shoulder by a paving-stone; the flour had given out. I had never heard of anything like that.

I began to understand the time and comprehend the spirit of the age.

CHAPTER III

AFRICAN HOSPITALITY

Desgenais had planned a reunion of young people at his country house. The best wines, a splendid table, gaming, dancing, hunting, nothing was lacking. Desgenais was rich and generous. He combined an antique hospitality with modern ways. Moreover one could always find in his house the best books; his conversation was that of a man of learning and culture. He was a problem.

I took with me a taciturn humor that nothing could overcome; he respected it scrupulously. I did not reply to his questions and he dropped the subject; he was satisfied that I had forgotten my mistress. I went to the chase and appeared at the table, and was as convivial as the best; he asked no more.

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One of the most unfortunate tendencies of inexperienced youth is to judge of the world from first impressions; but it must be confessed that there is a race of men who are also very unhappy; a race which says to youth: "You are right in believing in evil, for we know what it is." I have heard, for example, a curious thing spoken of, a medium between good and evil, a certain arrangement between heartless women and men worthy of them—apparently love, but in reality a passing sentiment. They speak of love as of an engine constructed by a wagon-builder or a building-contractor. They said to me: "This and that are agreed upon, such and such phrases are spoken, and certain others are repeated in reply; letters are written in a prescribed manner, you kneel in a certain attitude." All is regulated as in a parade.

This made me laugh. Unfortunately for me, I can not tell a woman whom I despise that I love her, even when I know that it is only a convention and that she will not be deceived by it. I have never bent my knee to the ground when my heart did not go with it. So that class of women known as facile is unknown to me, or if I allow myself to be taken with them, it is without knowing it, and through innate simplicity.

I can understand that one's soul can be put aside, but not that it should be handled. That there is some pride in this, I confess, but I do not intend either to boast or abase myself. Above all things I hate those women who laugh at love, and I permit them to reciprocate the sentiment; there will never be any dispute between us.

Such women are beneath courtesans, for courtesans may lie as well as they; but courtesans are capable of love, and these women are not. I remember a woman who loved me, and who said to a man many times richer than I, with whom she was living: "I am weary of you, I am going to my lover." That woman is worth more than many others who are not despised by society.

I passed the entire season with Desgenais, and learned that my mistress had left France; that news left in my heart a feeling of languor which I could not overcome.

At the sight of that world which surrounded and was so new to me, I experienced at first a kind of bizarre curiosity, at once sad and profound, which made me look timorously at things as does a restless horse. Then an incident occurred which made a deep impression on me.

Desgenais had with him a very beautiful woman who loved him much. One evening as I was walking with him I told him that I considered her admirable, as much on account of her attachment for him as because of her beauty. In short, I praised her highly and with warmth, giving him to understand that he ought to be happy.

He made no reply. It was his manner, for he was the dryest of men. That night when all had retired, and I had been in bed some fifteen minutes I heard a knock at my door. I supposed it was some one of my friends who could not sleep, and invited him to enter.

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There appeared before my astonished eyes a woman, very pale, carrying a bouquet in her hands, to which was attached a piece of paper bearing these words "To Octave, from his friend Desgenais."

I had no sooner read these words than a flash of light came to me. I understood the meaning of this action of Desgenais in making me this African gift. It made me think. The poor woman was weeping and did not dare dry her tears for fear I would see them. I said to her: "You may return and fear nothing."

She replied that if she should return Desgenais would send her back to Paris. "Yes," I replied, "you are beautiful and I am susceptible to temptation, but you weep, and your tears not being shed for me, I care nothing for the rest. Go, therefore, and I will see to it that you are not sent back to Paris."

One of my peculiarities is that meditation, which with many is a firm and constant quality of the mind, is in my case an instinct independent of the will, and seizes me like a fit of passion. It comes to me at intervals in its own good time, regardless of my will and in almost any place. But when it comes I can do nothing against it. It takes me whither it pleases by whatever route seems good to it.

When the woman had left, I sat up.

"My friend," I said to myself, "behold what has been sent you. If Desgenais had not seen fit to send you his mistress he would not have been mistaken, perhaps, in supposing that you might fall in love with her.

"Have you well considered it? A sublime and divine mystery is accomplished. Such a being costs nature the most vigilant maternal care; yet man, who would cure you, can think of nothing better than to offer you lips which belong to him in order to teach you how to cease to love.

"How was it accomplished? Others than you have doubtless admired her, but they ran no risk. She might employ all the seduction she pleased; you alone were in danger.

"It must be that Desgenais has a heart, since he lives. In what respect does he differ from you. He is a man who believes in nothing, fears nothing, who knows no care or ennui, perhaps, and yet it is clear that a scratch on the finger would fill him with terror, for if his body abandons him, what becomes of him? He lives only in the body. What sort of creature is he who treats his soul as the flagellants treat their bodies? Can one live without a head?

"Think of it. Here is a man who possesses one of the most beautiful women in the world; he is young and ardent; he finds her beautiful and tells her so; she replies that she loves him. Some one touches him on the shoulder and says to him: 'She is



unfaithful.' Nothing more, he is sure of himself. If some one had said: 'She is a poisoner,' he would, perhaps have continued to love her, he would not have given her a kiss less; but she is unfaithful, and it is no more a question of love with him than of the star of Saturn.

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“What is there in that word? A word that is merited, positive, withering, at will. But why? It is still but a word. Can you kill a body with a word?”

“And if you love that body? Some one pours a glass of wine and says to you: ‘Do not love that, for you can get four for six francs.’ And it may intoxicate you!”

“But Desgenais loves his mistress, since he keeps her; he must, therefore, have a peculiar fashion of loving? No, he has not; his fashion of loving is not love, and he cares no more for the woman who merits affection than for her who is unworthy. He loves no one, simply and truly.

“What has led him to this? Was he born thus? To love is as natural as to eat and to drink. He is not a man. Is he a dwarf or a giant? Is he always so impassive? Upon what does he feed, what beverage does he drink? Behold him at thirty like old Mithridates; poisons are his familiar friends.

“There is the great secret, my child, the key you must grasp. By whatever process of reasoning debauchery may be defended, it will be proven that it is natural at a given day, hour, or night, but not to-morrow nor every day. There is not a nation on earth which has not considered woman either the companion and consolation of man or the sacred instrument of life, and has not under either of these two forms honored her. And yet here is an armed warrior who leaps into the abyss that God has dug with His own hands between man and brute; as well might he deny that fact. What mute Titan is this who dares repress under the kisses of the body the love of the soul, and place on human lips the stigma of the brute, the seal of eternal silence?”

“There is a word that should be studied. In it you hear the faint moan of those dismal labyrinths we know as secret societies, mysteries that the angels of destruction whisper in the ear of night as it descends upon the earth. That man is better or worse than God has made him. He is like a sterile woman, in whom nature has not completed her work, or there is distilled in the shadow of his life some venomous poison.

“Ah! yes, neither occupation nor study has been able to cure you, my friend. To forget and to learn, that is your device. You turn the leaves of dead books; you are too young for antiquities. Look about you, the pale throng of men surrounds you. The eyes of life’s sphynx glitter in the midst of divine hieroglyphics; decipher the book of life! Courage, scholar, launch out on the Styx, the deathless flood, and let the waves of sorrow waft you to oblivion or to God.”

CHAPTER IV

MARCO

“All the good there was in it, supposing there was some good in it, was that false pleasures were the seeds of sorrow and of bitterness which fatigued me to the point of exhaustion.” Such are the simple words spoken with reference to his youth by a man who was the most manly of any who have lived—St. Augustine. Of those who have done as I, few would say those words; all have them in their hearts; I have found no others in mine.

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Returning to Paris in the month of December, I passed the winter attending pleasure parties, masquerades, suppers, rarely leaving Desgenais, who was delighted with me: not so was I with him. The more I went about, the more unhappy I became. It seemed to me after a short time that the world which had at first appeared so strange would hamper me, so to speak, at every step; yet where I had expected to see a spectre, I discovered, upon closer inspection, a shadow.

Desgenais asked what ailed me.

“And you?” I asked. “What is the matter with you? Have you lost some relative? Or do you suffer from some wound?”

At times he seemed to understand and did not question me. Occasionally we sat down at a cafe table and drank until our heads swam; or in the middle of the night took horses and rode ten or twelve leagues into the country; returning to the bath, then to table, then to gambling, then to bed; and on reaching mine, I fell on my knees and wept. That was my evening prayer.

Strange to say, I took pride in passing for what I was not, I boasted of being worse than I really was, and experienced a sort of melancholy pleasure in doing so. When I had actually done what I claimed, I felt nothing but ennui, but when I invented an account of some folly, some story of debauchery, or a recital of an orgy with which I had nothing to do, it seemed to me that my heart was better satisfied, although I know not why.

Whenever I joined a party of pleasure-seekers and visited some spot made sacred by tender associations I became stupid, went off by myself, looked gloomily at the trees and bushes as if I would like to trample them under my feet. Upon my return I would remain silent for hours.

The baleful idea that truth is nudity beset me on every occasion.

“The world,” I said to myself, “is accustomed to call its disguise virtue, its chaplet religion, its flowing mantle convenience. Honor and Morality are man’s chambermaids; he drinks in his wine the tears of the poor in spirit who believe in him; while the sun is high in the heavens he walks about with downcast eye; he goes to church, to the ball, to the assembly, and when evening has come he removes his mantle and there appears a naked bacchante with the hoofs of a goat.”

But such thoughts aroused a feeling of horror, for I felt that if the body was under the clothing, the skeleton was under the body. “Is it possible that that is all?” I asked in spite of myself. Then I returned to the city, I saw a little girl take her mother’s arm, and I became like a child.



Although I had followed my friends into all manner of dissipation, I had no desire to resume my place in the world of society. The sight of women caused me intolerable pain; I could not touch a woman's hand without trembling. I had decided never to love again.

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Nevertheless I returned from the ball one evening so sick at heart that I feared that it was love. I happened to have had beside me at supper the most charming and the most distinguished woman whom it had ever been my good fortune to meet. When I closed my eyes to sleep I saw her image before me. I thought I was lost, and I at once resolved that I would avoid meeting her again. A sort of fever seized me, and I lay on my bed for fifteen days, repeating over and over the lightest words I had exchanged with her.

As there is no spot on earth where one can be so well-known by his neighbors as in Paris, it was not long before the people of my acquaintance who had seen me with Desgenais began to accuse me of being a great libertine. In that I admired the discernment of the world: in proportion as I had passed for inexperienced and sensitive at the time of my rupture with my mistress, I was now considered corrupt and hardened. Some one had just told me that it was clear I had never loved that woman, that I had doubtless merely played at love, thereby paying me a compliment which I really did not deserve; but the truth of it was that I was so swollen with vanity I was charmed with it.

My desire was to pass as blase, even while I was filled with desires and my exalted imagination was carrying me beyond all limits. I began to say that I could not make any headway with the women; my head was filled with chimeras which I preferred to realities. In short, my unique pleasure consisted in altering the nature of facts. If a thought were but extraordinary, if it shocked common sense, I became its ardent champion at the risk of advocating the most dangerous sentiments.

My greatest fault was imitation of everything that struck me, not by its beauty but by its strangeness, and not wishing to confess myself an imitator I resorted to exaggeration in order to appear original. According to my idea, nothing was good or even tolerable; nothing was worth the trouble of turning the head, and yet when I had become warmed up in a discussion it seemed as if there was no expression in the French language strong enough to sustain my cause; but my warmth would subside as soon as my opponents ranged themselves on my side.

It was a natural consequence of my conduct. Although disgusted with the life I was leading I was unwilling to change it:

Simigliante a quelli 'nferma
Che non puo trovar posa in su le piume,
Ma con dar volta suo dolore scherma.—*Dante*.

Thus I tortured my mind to give it change, and I fell into all these vagaries in order to get away from myself.

But while my vanity was thus occupied, my heart was suffering, so that ever within me were a man who laughed and a man who wept. It was a perpetual struggle between my head and my heart. My own mockeries frequently caused me great pain and my deepest sorrows aroused a desire to burst into laughter.



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One day a man boasted of being proof against superstitious fears, in fact, fear of every kind. His friends put a human skeleton in his bed and then concealed themselves in an adjoining room to wait for his return. They did not hear any noise, but in the morning they found him dressed and sitting on the bed playing with the bones; he had lost his reason.

I might be that man but for the fact that my favorite bones are those of a well-beloved skeleton; they are the debris of my first love, all that remains of the past.

But it must not be supposed that there were no joyous moments in all this maddened whirl. Among Desgenais's companions were several young men of distinction and a number of artists. We sometimes passed together delightful evenings imagining ourselves libertines. One of them was infatuated with a beautiful singer, who charmed us with her fresh and expressive voice. How many times we sat listening to her while supper was waiting! How many times, when the flagons had been emptied, one of us held a volume of Lamartine and read aloud in a voice choked by emotion! Every other thought disappeared. The hours passed by unheeded. What strange "libertines" we were! We did not speak a word and there were tears in our eyes.

Desgenais especially, habitually the coldest and driest of men, was inexplicable on such occasions; he delivered himself of such extraordinary sentiments that he might have been a poet in delirium. But after these effusions he would be seized with furious joy. When warmed by wine he would break everything within reach; the genius of destruction stalked forth in him armed to the teeth. I have seen him pick up a chair and hurl it through a closed window.

I could not help making a study of this singular man. He appeared to me the exact type of a class which ought to exist somewhere but which was unknown to me. One could never tell whether his outbursts were the despair of a man sick of life, or the whim of a spoiled child.

During the fete, in particular, he was in such a state of nervous excitement that he acted like a schoolboy. Once he persuaded me to go out on foot with him, muffled in grotesque costumes, with masks and instruments of music. We promenaded all night, in the midst of the most frightful din of horrible sounds. We found a driver asleep on his box and unhitched his horses; then, pretending we had just come from the ball, set up a great cry. The coachman started up, cracked his whip, and his horses started off on a trot, leaving him seated on the box. That same evening we had passed through the Champs Elysees; Desgenais, seeing another carriage passing, stopped it after the manner of a highwayman; he intimidated the coachman by threats and forced him to climb down and lie flat on his stomach. He opened the carriage door and found within a young man and a lady motionless with fright. He whispered to me to imitate him, and we began to enter one door and go out by the other, so that in the obscurity the poor young people thought they saw a procession of bandits going through their carriage.

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As I understand it, the men who say that the world gives experience ought to be astonished if they are believed. The world is merely a number of whirlpools, each one independent of the others; they circle in groups like flocks of birds. There is no resemblance between the different quarters of the same city, and the denizen of the Chaussee d'Antin has as much to learn at Marais as at Lisbon. It is true that these various whirlpools are traversed, and have been since the beginning of the world, by seven personages who are always the same: the first is called hope; the second, conscience; the third, opinion; the fourth, desire; the fifth, sorrow; the sixth, pride; and the seventh, man.

"But," the reader objects, "where are the women in all this?"

Oh! creatures who bear the name of women and who have passed like dreams through a life that was itself a dream, what shall I say of you? Where there is no shadow of hope can there be memory? Where shall I seek for it? What is there more dumb in human memory? What is there more completely forgotten than you?

If I must speak of women I will mention two; here is one of them:

I ask what would be expected of a poor sewing-girl, young and pretty, about eighteen, with a romantic affair on her hands that is purely a question of love; with little knowledge of life and no idea of morals; eternally sewing near a window before which processions were not allowed to pass by order of the police, but near which a dozen young women prowled who were licensed and recognized by these same police; what could you expect of her, when after wearying her hands and eyes all day long on a dress or a hat, she leans out of that window as night falls? That dress she has sewed, that hat she has trimmed with her poor and honest hands in order to earn a supper for the household, she sees passing along the street on the head or on the body of a notorious woman. Thirty times a day a hired carriage stops before the door, and there steps out a dissolute character, numbered as is the hack in which she rides, who stands before a glass and primps, taking off and putting on the results of many days' work on the part of the poor girl who watches her. She sees that woman draw from her pocket gold in plenty, she who has but one louis a week; she looks at her feet and her head, she examines her dress and eyes her as she steps into her carriage; and then, what can you expect? When night has fallen, after a day when work has been scarce, when her mother is sick, she opens her door, stretches out her hand and stops a passerby.

Such is the story of a girl I once knew. She could play the piano, knew something of accounts, a little designing, even a little history and grammar, and thus a little of everything. How many times have I regarded with poignant compassion that sad work of nature, mutilated by society! How many times have I followed in the darkness the pale and vacillating gleams of a spark flickering in abortive life! How many times have I tried to revive the fire that smouldered under those ashes! Alas! her long hair was the color of ashes, and we called her Cendrillon.

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I was not rich enough to help her; Desgenais, at my request, interested himself in the poor creature; he made her learn over again all of which she had a slight knowledge. But she could make no appreciable progress. When her teacher left her she would fold her arms and for hours look silently across the public square. What days! What misery! One day I threatened that if she did not work she should have no money; she silently resumed her task, and I learned that she stole out of the house a few minutes later. Where did she go? God knows. Before she left I asked her to embroider a purse for me. I still have that sad relic, it hangs in my room, a monument of the ruin that is wrought here below.

But here is another case:

It was about ten in the evening when, after a riotous day, we repaired to Desgenais's, who had left us some hours before to make his preparations. The orchestra was ready and the room filled when we arrived.

Most of the dancers were girls from the theatres.

As soon as we entered I plunged into the giddy whirl of the waltz. That delightful exercise has always been dear to me; I know of nothing more beautiful, more worthy of a beautiful woman and a young man; all dances compared with the waltz are but insipid conventions or pretexts for insignificant converse. It is truly to possess a woman, in a certain sense, to hold her for a half hour in your arms, and to draw her on in the dance, palpitating in spite of herself, in such a way that it can not be positively asserted whether she is being protected or seduced. Some deliver themselves up to the pleasure with such modest voluptuousness, with such sweet and pure abandon, that one does not know whether he experiences desire or fear, and whether, if pressed to the heart, they would faint or break in pieces like the rose. Germany, where that dance was invented, is surely the land of love.

I held in my arms a superb danseuse from an Italian theatre who had come to Paris for the carnival; she wore the costume of a Bacchante with a robe of panther's skin. Never have I seen anything so languishing as that creature. She was tall and slender, and while dancing with extreme rapidity, had the appearance of allowing herself to be led; to see her one would think that she would tire her partner, but such was not the case, for she moved as if by enchantment.

On her bosom rested an enormous bouquet, the perfume of which intoxicated me. She yielded to my encircling arms as would an Indian vine, with a gentleness so sweet and so sympathetic that I seemed enveloped with a perfumed veil of silk. At each turn there could be heard a light tinkling from her metal girdle; she moved so gracefully that I thought I beheld a beautiful star, and her smile was that of a fairy about to vanish from human sight. The tender and voluptuous music of the dance seemed to come from her

lips, while her head, covered with a wilderness of black tresses, bent backward as if her neck was too slender to support its weight.

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When the waltz was over I threw myself on a chair; my heart beat wildly: "Oh, heaven!" I murmured, "how can it be possible? Oh, superb monster! Oh! beautiful reptile! How you writhe, how you coil in and out, sweet adder, with supple and spotted skin! Thy cousin the serpent has taught thee to coil about the tree of life holding between thy lips the apple of temptation. Oh! Melusina! Melusina! The hearts of men are thine. You know it well, enchantress, with your soft languor that seems to suspect nothing! You know very well that you ruin, that you destroy; you know that he who touches you will suffer; you know that he dies who basks in your smile, who breathes the perfume of your flowers and comes under the magic influence of your charms; that is why you abandon yourself so freely, that is why your smile is so sweet, your flowers so fresh; that is why you place your arms so gently on our shoulders. Oh, heaven! what is your will with us?"

Professor Halle has said a terrible thing: "Woman is the nervous part of humanity, man the muscular." Humboldt himself, that serious thinker, has said that an invisible atmosphere surrounds the human nerves.

I do not quote the dreamers who watch the wheeling flight of Spallanzani's bat, and who think they have found a sixth sense in nature. Such as nature is, her mysteries are terrible enough, her powers mighty enough—that nature which creates us, mocks at us, and kills us—without our seeking to deepen the shadows that surround us. But where is the man who thinks he has lived that will deny woman's power over us? Has he ever taken leave of a beautiful dancer with trembling hands? Has he ever felt that indefinable enervating magnetism which, in the midst of the dance, under the influence of music, and the warmth, making all else seem cold, that comes from a young woman, electrifying her and leaping from her to him as the perfume of aloes from the swinging censer?

I was struck with stupor. I was familiar with that sensation similar to drunkenness which characterizes love; I knew that it was the aureole which crowned my well-beloved. But that she should excite such heart-throbs, that she should evoke such phantoms with nothing but her beauty, her flowers, her motley costume, and a certain trick of dancing she had learned from some merry-andrew; and that without a word, without a thought, without even appearing to know it! What was chaos, if it required seven days to make such a being?

It was not love, however, that I felt, and I do not know how to describe it unless I call it thirst. For the first time I felt vibrating in my body a cord that was not attuned to my heart. The sight of that beautiful animal had aroused a responsive roar from another animal in my nature. I felt sure I could never tell that woman that I loved her, or that she pleased me, or even that she was beautiful; there was nothing on my lips but a desire to kiss her, and say to her: "Make a girdle of those listless arms and lean that head on my breast; place that sweet smile on my lips." My body loved hers; I was under the influence of beauty as of wine.

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Desgenais passed and asked what I was doing there.

"Who is that woman?" I asked.

"What woman? Of whom do you speak?"

I took his arm and led him into the hall. The Italian saw us coming and smiled. I stopped and stepped back.

"Ah!" said Desgenais, "you have danced with Marco?"

"Who is Marco?" I asked.

"Why, that idle creature who is laughing over there. Does she please you?"

"No," I replied, "I have waltzed with her and wanted to know her name; I have no further interest in her."

Shame led me to speak thus, but when Desgenais turned away I followed him.

"You are very prompt," he said, "Marco is no ordinary woman. She was almost the wife of M. de-----, ambassador to Milan. One of his friends brought her here. Yet," he added, "you may rest assured I shall speak to her. We shall not allow you to die so long as there is any hope for you or any resource left untried. It is possible that she will remain to supper."

He left me, and I was alarmed to see him approach her. But they were soon lost in the crowd.

"Is it possible," I murmured; "have I come to this? Oh! heavens! is this what I am going to love? But after all," I thought, "my senses have spoken, but not my heart."

Thus I tried to calm myself. A few minutes later Desgenais tapped me on the shoulder.

"We shall go to supper at once," said he. "You will give your arm to Marco."

"Listen," I said; "I hardly know what I am experiencing. It seems to me I see limping Vulcan covering Venus with kisses while his beard smokes with the fumes of the forge. He fixes his staring eyes on the dazzling skin of his prey. His happiness in the possession of his prize makes him laugh for joy, and at the same time shudder with happiness, and then he remembers his father, Jupiter, seated on high among the gods."

Desgenais looked at me but made no reply; taking me by the arm he led me away.

"I am tired," he said, "and I am sad; this noise wearies me. Let us go to supper, that will refresh us."

The supper was splendid, but I could not touch it.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Marco.

I sat like a statue, making no reply and looking at her from head to foot with amazement.

She began to laugh, and Desgenais, who could see us from his table, joined her. Before her was a large crystal glass cut in the shape of a chalice, which reflected the glittering lights on its thousand sparkling facets, shining like the prism and revealing the seven colors of the rainbow. She listlessly extended her arm and filled it to the brim with Cyprian and a sweetened Oriental wine which I afterward found so bitter on the deserted Lido.

"Here," she said, presenting it to me, "per voi, bambino mio."

"For you and for me," I said, presenting her my glass in turn.

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She moistened her lips while I emptied my glass, unable to conceal the sadness she seemed to read in my eyes.

“Is it not good?” she asked.

“No,” I replied.

“Perhaps your head aches?”

“No.”

“Or you are tired?”

“No.”

“Ah! then it is the ennui of love?”

With these words she became serious, for in spite of herself, in speaking of love, her Italian heart beat the faster.

A scene of folly ensued. Heads were becoming heated, cheeks were assuming that purple hue with which wine suffuses the face as if to prevent shame appearing there. A confused murmur, like to that of a rising sea, could be heard all over the room; here and there eyes would become inflamed, then fixed and empty; I know not what wind stirred above this drunkenness. A woman rises, as in a tranquil sea the first wave that feels the tempest’s breath foams up to announce it; she makes a sign with her hand to command silence, empties her glass at a gulp and with the same movement undoes her hair, which falls in shining tresses over her shoulders; she opens her mouth as if to start a drinking-song; her eyes are half closed. She breathes with an effort; twice a harsh sound comes from her throat; a mortal pallor overspreads her features and she drops into her chair.

Then came an uproar which lasted an hour. It was impossible to distinguish anything, either laughter, songs, or cries.

“What do you think of it?” asked Desgenais.

“Nothing,” I replied. “I have stopped my ears and am looking at it.”

In the midst of this Bacchanalian orgy the beautiful Marco remained mute, drinking nothing and leaning quietly on her bare arm. She seemed neither astonished nor affected by it.

“Do you not wish to do as they?” I asked. “You have just offered me Cyprian wine; why do you not drink some yourself?”

With these words I poured out a large glass full to the brim. She raised it to her lips and then placed it on the table, and resumed her listless attitude.

The more I studied that Marco, the more singular she appeared; she took pleasure in nothing and did not seem to be annoyed by anything. It appeared as difficult to anger her as to please her; she did what was asked of her, but no more. I thought of the genius of eternal repose, and I imagined that if that pale statue should become somnambulant it would resemble Marco.

“Are you good or bad?” I asked. “Are you sad or gay? Are you loved? Do you wish to beloved? Are you fond of money, of pleasure, of what? Horses, the country, balls? What pleases you? Of what are you dreaming?”

To all these questions the same smile on her part, a smile that expressed neither joy nor sorrow, but which seemed to say, “What does it matter?” and nothing more.

I held my lips to hers; she gave me a listless kiss and then passed her handkerchief over her mouth.

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"Marco," I said, "woe to him who loves you."

She turned her dark eyes on me, then turned them upward, and raising her finger with that Italian gesture which can not be imitated, she pronounced that characteristic feminine word of her country:

"Forse!"

And then dessert was served. Some of the party had departed, some were smoking, others gambling, and a few still at table; some of the women danced, others slept. The orchestra returned; the candles paled and others were lighted. I recalled a supper of Petronius, where the lights went out around the drunken masters, and the slaves entered and stole the silver. All the while songs were being sung in various parts of the room, and three Englishmen, three of those gloomy figures for whom the Continent is a hospital, kept up a most sinister ballad that must have been born of the fogs of their marshes.

"Come," said I to Marco, "let us go."

She arose and took my arm.

"To-morrow!" cried Desgenais to me, as we left the hall.

When approaching Marco's house, my heart beat violently and I could not speak. I could not understand such a woman; she seemed to experience neither desire nor disgust, and I could think of nothing but the fact that my hand was trembling and hers motionless.

Her room was, like her, sombre and voluptuous; it was dimly lighted by an alabaster lamp. The chairs and sofa were as soft as beds, and there was everywhere suggestion of down and silk. Upon entering I was struck with the strong odor of Turkish pastilles, not such as are sold here on the streets, but those of Constantinople, which are more powerful and more dangerous. She rang, and a maid appeared. She entered an alcove without a word, and a few minutes later I saw her leaning on her elbow in her habitual attitude of nonchalance.

I stood looking at her. Strange to say, the more I admired her, the more beautiful I found her, the more rapidly I felt my desires subside. I do not know whether it was some magnetic influence or her silence and listlessness. I lay down on a sofa opposite the alcove, and the coldness of death settled on my soul.

The pulsation of the blood in the arteries is a sort of clock, the ticking of which can be heard only at night. Man, free from exterior attractions, falls back upon himself; he hears himself live. In spite of my fatigue I could not close my eyes; those of Marco were fixed on me; we looked at each other in silence, gently, so to speak.

“What are you doing there?” she asked.

She heaved a gentle sigh that was almost a plaint.

I turned my head and saw that the first gleams of morning light were shining through the window.

I arose and opened the window; a bright light penetrated every corner of the room. The sky was clear.

I motioned to her to wait. Considerations of prudence had led her to choose an apartment some distance from the centre of the city; perhaps she had other quarters, for she sometimes received a number of visitors. Her lover’s friends sometimes visited her, and this room was doubtless only a petite maison; it overlooked the Luxembourg, the gardens of which extended as far as my eye could reach.

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As a cork held under water seems restless under the hand which holds it, and slips through the fingers to rise to the surface, thus there stirred in me a sentiment that I could neither overcome nor escape. The gardens of the Luxembourg made my heart leap and banished every other thought. How many times had I stretched myself out on one of those little mounds, a sort of sylvan school, while I read in the cool shade some book filled with foolish poetry! For such, alas, were the extravagances of my childhood. I saw many souvenirs of the past among those leafless trees and faded lawns. There, when ten years of age, I had walked with my brother and my tutor, throwing bits of bread to some of the poor half-starved birds; there, seated under a tree, I had watched a group of little girls as they danced, and felt my heart beat in unison with the refrain of their childish song. There, returning from school, I had followed a thousand times the same path, lost in meditation upon some verse of Virgil and kicking the pebbles at my feet.

“Oh, my childhood! You are there!” I cried. “Oh, heaven! now I am here.”

I turned around. Marco was asleep, the lamp had gone out, the light of day had changed the aspect of the room; the hangings which had at first appeared blue were now a faded yellow, and Marco, the beautiful statue, was livid as death.

I shuddered in spite of myself; I looked at the alcove, then at the garden; my head became drowsy and fell on my breast. I sat down before an open secretary near one of the windows. A piece of paper caught my eye; it was an open letter and I looked at it mechanically. I read it several times before I thought what I was doing. Suddenly a gleam of intelligence came to me, although I could not understand everything. I picked up the paper and read what follows, written in an unskilled hand and filled with errors in spelling:

“She died yesterday. She began to fail at twelve the night before. She called me and said: ‘Louison, I am going to join my companion; go to the closet and take down the cloth that hangs on a nail; it is the mate of the other.’ I fell on my knees and wept, but she took my hand and said: ‘Do not weep, do not weep!’ And she heaved such a sigh —”

The rest was torn, I can not describe the impression that sad letter made on me; I turned it over and saw on the other side Marco’s address and the date that of the evening previous.

“Is she dead? Who is dead?” I cried going to the alcove. “Dead! Who?”

Marco opened her eyes. She saw me with the letter in my hand.

“It is my mother,” she said, “who is dead. You are not coming?”

As she spoke she extended her hand.

“Silence!” I said, “sleep, and leave me to myself.”

She turned over and went to sleep. I looked at her for some time to assure myself that she would not hear me, and then quietly left the house.

CHAPTER V

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SATIETY

One evening I was seated before the fire with Desgenais. The window was open; it was one of the early days in March, a harbinger of spring.

It had been raining, and a light odor came from the garden.

"What shall we do this spring?" I asked. "I do not care to travel."

"I shall do what I did last year," replied Desgenais. "I shall go to the country when the time comes."

"What!" I replied. "Do you do the same thing every year? Are you going to begin life over again this year?"

"What would you expect me to do?"

"What would I expect you to do?" I cried, jumping to my feet. "That is just like you. Ah! Desgenais, how all this wearies me! Do you never tire of this sort of life?"

"No," he replied.

I was standing before an engraving of the Magdalen in the desert. Involuntarily I joined my hands.

"What are you doing?" asked Desgenais.

"If I were an artist," I replied, "and wished to represent melancholy, I would not paint a dreamy girl with a book in her hands."

"What is the matter with you this evening?" he asked, smiling.

"No, in truth," I continued, "that Magdalen in tears has a spark of hope in her bosom; that pale and sickly hand on which she supports her head, is still sweet with the perfume with which she anointed the feet of her Lord. You do not understand that in that desert there are thinking people who pray. This is not melancholy."

"It is a woman who reads," he replied dryly.

"And a happy woman," I continued, "with a happy book."

Desgenais understood me; he saw that a profound sadness had taken possession of me. He asked if I had some secret cause of sorrow. I hesitated, but did not reply.

"My dear Octave," he said, "if you have any trouble, do not hesitate to confide in me. Speak freely and you will find that I am your friend!"

"I know it," I replied, "I know I have a friend; that is not my trouble."

He urged me to explain.

"But what will it avail," I asked, "since neither of us can help matters? Do you want the fulness of my heart or merely a word and an excuse?"

"Be frank!" he said.

"Very well," I replied, "you have seen fit to give me advice in the past and now I ask you to listen to me as I have listened to you. You ask what is in my heart, and I am about to tell you.

"Take the first comer and say to, him: 'Here are people who pass their lives drinking, riding, laughing, gambling, enjoying all kinds of pleasures; no barrier restrains them, their law is their pleasure, women are their playthings; they are rich. They have no cares, not one. All their days are days of feasting.' What do you think of it? Unless that man happened to be a severe bigot, he would probably reply that it was the greatest happiness that could be imagined.

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“Then take that man into the centre of the whirl, place him at a table with a woman on either side, a glass in his hand, a handful of gold every morning and say to him: ‘This is your life. While you sleep near your mistress, your horses neigh in the stables; while you drive your horses along the boulevards, your wines are ripening in your vaults; while you pass away the night drinking, the bankers are increasing your wealth. You have but to express a wish and your desires are gratified. You are the happiest of men. But take care lest some night of carousal you drink too much and destroy the capacity of your body for enjoyment. That would be a serious misfortune, for all the ills that afflict human flesh can be cured, except that. You ride some night through the woods with joyous companions; your horse falls and you are thrown into a ditch filled with mud, and it may be that your companions, in the midst of their happy shoutings will not hear your cry of anguish; it may be that the sound of their trumpets will die away in the distance while you drag your broken limbs through the deserted forest.

“Some night you will lose at the gaming-table; fortune has its bad days. When you return home and are seated before the fire, do not strike your forehead with your hands, and allow sorrow to moisten your cheeks with tears; do not anxiously cast your eyes about here and there as if searching for a friend; do not, under any circumstances, think of those who, under some thatched roof, enjoy a tranquil life and who sleep holding each other by the hand; for before you on your luxurious bed reclines a pale creature who loves—your money. From her you will seek consolation for your grief, and she will remark that you are very sad and ask if your loss was considerable; the tears from your eyes will concern her deeply, for they may be the cause of allowing her dress to grow old or the rings to drop from her fingers. Do not name him who won your money that night, for she may meet him on the morrow, and may make sweet eyes at him that would destroy your remaining happiness.

“That is what is to be expected of human frailty; have you the strength to endure it? Are you a man? Beware of disgust, it is an incurable evil; death is more to be desired than a living distaste for life. Have you a heart? Beware of love, for it is worse than disease for a debauchee, and it is ridiculous. Debauchees pay their mistresses, and the woman who sells herself has no right but that of contempt for the purchaser. Are you passionate? Take care of your face. It is shameful for a soldier to throw down his arms and for a debauchee to appear to hold to anything; his glory consists in touching nothing except with hands of marble that have been bathed in oil in order that nothing may stick to them.

“Are you hot-headed? If you desire to live, learn how to kill, for wine is a wrangler. Have you a conscience? Take care of your slumber, for a debauchee who repents too late is like a ship that leaks: it can neither return to land nor continue on its course; the winds can with difficulty move it, the ocean yawns for it, it careens and disappears. If you have a body, look out for suffering; if you have a soul, despair awaits you.

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“O unhappy one! beware of men; while they walk along the same path with you, you will see a vast plain strewn with garlands where a happy throng of dancers trip the gladsome farandole standing in a circle, each a link in an endless chain. It is but a mirage; those who look down know that they are dancing on a silken thread stretched over an abyss that swallows up all who fall and shows not even a ripple on its surface. What foot is sure? Nature herself seems to deny you her divine consolation; trees and flowers are yours no more; you have broken your mother’s laws, you are no longer one of her foster children; the birds of the field become silent when you appear.

“You are alone! Beware of God! You are face to face with Him, standing like a cold statue upon the pedestal of will. The rain from heaven no longer refreshes you, it undermines and weakens you. The passing wind no longer gives you the kiss of life, its benediction on all that lives and breathes; it buffets you and makes you stagger. Every woman who kisses you takes from you a spark of life and gives you none in return; you exhaust yourself on phantoms; wherever falls a drop of your sweat there springs up one of those sinister weeds that grow in graveyards. Die! You are the enemy of all who love; blot yourself from the face of the earth, do not wait for old age; do not leave a child behind you, do not perpetuate a drop of your corrupted blood; vanish as does the smoke, do not deprive a single blade of living grass of a ray of sunlight.”

When I had spoken these words I fell back in my chair, and a flood of tears streamed from my eyes.

“Ah! Desgenais,” I cried, sobbing, “this is not what you told me. Did you not know it? And if you did, why did you not tell me of it?”

But Desgenais sat still with folded hands; he was as pale as a shroud, and a tear trickled slowly down his cheek.

A moment of silence ensued. The clock struck; I suddenly remembered that it was on this hour and this day one year ago that my mistress deceived me.

“Do you hear that clock?” I cried, “do you hear it? I do not know what it means at this moment, but it is a terrible hour, and one that will count in my life.”

I was beside myself, and scarcely knew what I was saying. But at that instant a servant rushed into the room; he took my hand and led me aside, whispering in my ear:

“Sir, I have come to inform you that your father is dying; he has just been seized with an attack of apoplexy and the physicians despair of his life.”

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

A terrible danger lurks in the knowledge of what is possible
Accustomed to call its disguise virtue

All that is not life, it is the noise of life
Become corrupt, and you will cease to suffer
Began to forget my own sorrow in my sympathy for her
Beware of disgust, it is an incurable evil

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Death is more to be desired than a living distaste for life
Despair of a man sick of life, or the whim of a spoiled child
Do they think they have invented what they see
Force itself, that mistress of the world
Galileo struck the earth, crying: "Nevertheless it moves!"
Grief itself was for her but a means of seducing
He lives only in the body
Human weakness seeks association
I boasted of being worse than I really was
I can not love her, I can not love another
I do not intend either to boast or abase myself
Ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity
In what do you believe?
Indignation can solace grief and restore happiness
Is he a dwarf or a giant
Men doubted everything: the young men denied everything
Of all the sisters of love, the most beautiful is pity
Perfection does not exist
Resorted to exaggeration in order to appear original
Sceptic regrets the faith he has lost the power to regain
Seven who are always the same: the first is called hope
St. Augustine
Ticking of which (our arteries) can be heard only at night
When passion sways man, reason follows him weeping and warning
Wine suffuses the face as if to prevent shame appearing there
You believe in what is said here below and not in what is done
You turn the leaves of dead books
Youth is to judge of the world from first impressions

CONFESSION OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

(Confession d'un Enfant du Siecle)

By Alfred de musset

BOOK 2.

PART III

CHAPTER I

DEATH, THE INEVITABLE

My father lived in the country some distance from Paris. When I arrived I found a physician in the house, who said to me:

“You are too late; your father expressed a desire to see you before he died.”

I entered, and saw my father dead. “Sir,” I said to the physician, “please have everyone retire that I may be alone here; my father had something to say to me, and he will say it.”

In obedience to my order the servants left the room. I approached the bed and raised the shroud which covered the face. But when my eyes fell on that countenance, I stooped to kiss it and lost consciousness.

When I recovered, I heard some one say:

“If he requests it, you must refuse him on some pretext or other.”

I understood that they wanted to get me away from the bed of death, and so I feigned that I had heard nothing. When they saw that I was resting quietly, they left me. I waited until the house was quiet, and then took a candle and made my way to my father’s room. I found there a young priest seated near the bed.

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"Sir," I said, "to dispute with an orphan the last vigil at a father's side is a bold enterprise. I do not know what your orders may be. You may remain in the adjoining room; if anything happens, I alone am responsible."

He retired. A single candle on the table shone on the bed. I sat down in the chair the priest had just left, and again uncovered those features I was to see for the last time.

"What do you wish to say to me, father?" I asked. "What was your last thought concerning your child?"

My father had a book in which he was accustomed to write from day to day the record of his life. That book lay on the table, and I saw that it was open; I kneeled before it; on the page were these words and no more:

"Adieu, my son, I love you and I die."

I did not shed a tear, not a sob came from my lips; my throat was swollen and my mouth sealed; I looked at my father without moving.

He knew my life, and my irregularities had caused him much sorrow and anxiety. He did not refer to my future, to my youth and my follies. His advice had often saved me from some evil course, and had influenced my entire life, for his life had been one of singular virtue and kindness. I supposed that before dying he wished to see me to try once more to turn me from the path of error; but death had come too swiftly; he felt that he could express all he had to say in one word, and he wrote in his book that he loved me.

CHAPTER II

THE BALM OF SOLITUDE

A little wooden railing surrounded my father's grave. According to his expressed wish, he was buried in the village cemetery. Every day I visited his tomb and passed part of the day on a little bench in the interior of the vault. The rest of the time I lived alone in the house in which he died, and kept with me only one servant.

Whatever sorrows the passions may cause, the woes of life are not to be compared with those of death. My first thought as I sat beside my father's bedside was that I was a helpless child, knowing nothing, understanding nothing; I can not say that my heart felt physical pain, but I sometimes bent over and wrung my hands, as one who awakens from a long sleep.

During the first months of my life in the country I had no thought either of the past or of the future. It did not seem to be I who had lived up to that time; what I felt was not



despair, and in no way resembled the terrible griefs I had experienced in the past; there was a sort of languor in every action, a sense of disgust with life, a poignant bitterness that was eating out my heart. I held a book in my hand all day long, but I did not read; I did not even know what I dreamed about. I had no thoughts; within, all was silence; I had received such a violent blow, and yet one that was so prolonged in its effects, that I remained a purely passive being and there seemed to be no reaction.

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My servant, Larive by name, had been much attached to my father; he was, after my father himself, probably the best man I had ever known. He was of the same height, and wore the clothes my father had left him, having no livery.

He was of about the same age—that is, his hair was turning gray, and during the twenty years he had lived with my father, he had learned some of his ways. While I was pacing up and down the room after dinner, I heard him doing the same in the hall; although the door was open he did not enter, and not a word was spoken; but from time to time we would look at each other and weep. The entire evening would pass thus, and it would be late in the night before I would ask for a light, or get one myself.

Everything about the house was left unchanged, not a piece of paper was moved. The great leather armchair in which my father used to sit stood near the fire; his table and his books were just as he left them; I respected even the dust on these articles, which in life he never liked to see disturbed. The walls of that solitary house, accustomed to silence and a most tranquil life, seemed to look down on me in pity as I sat in my father's chair, enveloped in his dressing-gown. A feeble voice seemed to whisper: "Where is the father? It is plain to see that this is an orphan."

I received several letters from Paris, and replied to each that I desired to pass the summer alone in the country, as my father was accustomed to do. I began to realize that in all evil there is some good, and that sorrow, whatever else may be said of it, is a means of repose. Whatever the message brought by those who are sent by God, they always accomplish the happy result of awakening us from the sleep of the world, and when they speak, all are silent. Passing sorrows blaspheme and accuse heaven; great sorrows neither accuse nor blaspheme—they listen.

In the morning I passed entire hours in the contemplation of nature. My windows overlooked a valley, in the midst of which arose a village steeple; all was plain and calm. Spring, with its budding leaves and flowers, did not produce on me the sinister effect of which the poets speak, who find in the contrasts of life the mockery of death. I looked upon the frivolous idea, if it was serious and not a simple antithesis made in pleasantry, as the conceit of a heart that has known no real experience. The gambler who leaves the table at break of day, his eyes burning and hands empty, may feel that he is at war with nature, like the torch at some hideous vigil; but what can the budding leaves say to a child who mourns a lost father? The tears of his eyes are sisters of the rose; the leaves of the willow are themselves tears. It is when I look at the sky, the woods and the prairies, that I understand men who seek consolation.

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Larive had no more desire to console me than to console himself. At the time of my father's death he feared I would sell the property and take him to Paris. I did not know what he had learned of my past life, but I had noticed his anxiety, and, when he saw me settle down in the old home, he gave me a glance that went to my heart. One day I had a large portrait of my father sent from Paris, and placed it in the dining-room. When Larive entered the room to serve me, he saw it; he hesitated, looked at the portrait and then at me; in his eyes there shone a melancholy joy that I could not fail to understand. It seemed to say: "What happiness! We are to suffer here in peace!"

I gave him my hand, which he covered with tears and kisses.

He looked upon my grief as the mistress of his own. When I visited my father's tomb in the morning I found him there watering the flowers; when he saw me he went away and returned home. He followed me in my rambles; when I was on my horse I did not expect him to follow me, but when I saw him trudging down the valley, wiping the sweat from his brow, I bought a small horse from a peasant and gave it to him; thus we rode through the woods together.

In the village were some people of our acquaintance who frequently visited us. My door was closed to them, although I regretted it; but I could not see any one with patience. Some time, when sure to be free from interruption, I hoped to examine my father's papers. Finally Larive brought them to me, and untying the package with trembling hand, spread them before me.

Upon reading the first pages I felt in my heart that vivifying freshness that characterizes the air near a lake of cool water; the sweet serenity of my father's soul exhaled as a perfume from the dusty leaves I was unfolding. The journal of his life lay open before me; I could count the diurnal throbbings of that noble heart. I began to yield to the influence of a dream that was both sweet and profound, and in spite of the serious firmness of his character, I discovered an ineffable grace, the flower of kindness. While I read, the recollection of his death mingled with the narrative of his life, I can not tell with what sadness I followed that limpid stream until its waters mingled with those of the ocean.

"Oh! just man," I cried, "fearless and stainless! what candor in thy experience! Thy devotion to thy friends, thy admiration for nature, thy sublime love of God, this is thy life, there is no place in thy heart for anything else. The spotless snow on the mountain's summit is not more pure than thy saintly old age; thy white hair resembles it. Oh! father, father! Give thy snowy locks to me, they are younger than my blond head. Let me live and die as thou hast lived and died. I wish to plant in the soil over your grave the green branch of my young life; I will water it with my tears, and the God of orphans will protect that sacred twig nourished by the grief of youth and the memory of age."



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After examining these precious papers, I classified them and arranged them in order. I formed a resolution to write a journal myself. I had one made just like that of my father's, and, carefully searching out the minor details of his life, I tried to conform my life to his. Thus, whenever I heard the clock strike the hour, tears came to my eyes: "This," said I, "is what my father did at this hour," and whether it was reading, walking, or eating, I never failed to follow his example. Thus I accustomed myself to a calm and regular life; there was an indefinable charm about this orderly conduct that did me good. I went to bed with a sense of comfort and happiness such as I had not known for a long time. My father spent much of his time about the garden; the rest of the day was devoted to walking and study, a nice adjustment of bodily and mental exercise.

At the same time I followed his example in doing little acts of benevolence among the unfortunate. I began to search for those who were in need of my assistance, and there were many of them in the valley. I soon became known among the poor; my message to them was: "When the heart is good, sorrow is sacred!" For the first time in my life I was happy; God blessed my tears and sorrow taught me virtue.

CHAPTER III

BRIGITTE

One evening, as I was walking under a row of lindens at the entrance to the village, I saw a young woman come from a house some distance from the road. She was dressed simply and veiled so that I could not see her face; but her form and her carriage seemed so charming that I followed her with my eyes for some time. As she was crossing a field, a white goat, straying at liberty through the grass, ran to her side; she caressed it softly, and looked about as if searching for some favorite plants to feed to it. I saw near me some wild mulberry; I plucked a branch and stepped up to her holding it in my hand. The goat watched my approach with apprehension; he was afraid to take the branch from my hand. His mistress made him a sign as if to encourage him, but he looked at her with an air of anxiety; she then took the branch from my hand, and the goat promptly accepted it from hers. I bowed, and she passed on her way.

On my return home I asked Larive if he knew who lived in the house I described to him; it was a small house, modest in appearance, with a garden. He recognized it; there were but two people in the house, an old woman who was very religious, and a young woman whose name was Madame Pierson. It was she I had seen. I asked him who she was, and if she ever came to see my father. He replied that she was a widow, that she led a retired life, and that she had visited my father, but rarely. When I had learned all he knew, I returned to the lindens and sat down on a bench.

I do not know what feeling of sadness came over me as I saw the goat approaching me. I arose from my seat, and, for distraction, I followed the path I had seen Madame Pierson take, a path that led to the mountains.

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It was nearly eleven in the evening before I thought of returning; as I had walked some distance, I directed my steps toward a farmhouse, intending to ask for some milk and bread. Drops of rain began to splash at my feet, announcing a thunder-shower which I was anxious to escape. Although there was a light in the place, and I could hear the sound of feet going and coming through the house, no one responded to my knock, and I walked around to one of the windows to ascertain if there was any one within.

I saw a bright fire burning in the lower hall; the farmer, whom I knew, was sitting near his bed; I knocked on the window-pane and called to him. Just then the door opened, and I was surprised to see Madame Pierson, who inquired who was there.

I waited a moment in order to conceal my astonishment. I then entered the house, and asked permission to remain until the storm should pass. I could not imagine what she was doing at such an hour in this deserted spot; suddenly I heard a plaintive voice from the bed, and turning my head I saw the farmer's wife lying there with the seal of death on her face.

Madame Pierson, who had followed me, sat down before the old man who was bowed with sorrow; she made me a sign to make no noise as the sick woman was sleeping. I took a chair and sat in a corner until the storm passed.

While I sat there I saw her rise from time to time and whisper something to the farmer. One of the children, whom I took upon my knee, said that she had been coming every night since the mother's illness. She performed the duties of a sister of charity; there was no one else in the country who could do it; there was but one physician, and he was densely ignorant.

"That is Brigitte la Rose," said the child; "don't you know her?"

"No," I replied in a low voice. "Why do you call her by such a name?"

He replied that he did not know, unless it was because she had been rosy and the name had clung to her.

As Madame Pierson had laid aside her veil I could see her face; when the child left me I raised my head. She was standing near the bed, holding in her hand a cup, which she was offering the sick woman who had awakened. She appeared to be pale and thin; her hair was ashen blond. Her beauty was not of the regular type. How shall I express it? Her large dark eyes were fixed on those of her patient, and those eyes that shone with approaching death returned her gaze. There was in that simple exchange of kindness and gratitude a beauty that can not be described.

The rain was falling in torrents; a heavy darkness settled over the lonely mountain-side, pierced by occasional flashes of lightning. The noise of the storm, the roaring of the

wind, the wrath of the unchained elements made a deep contrast with the religious calm which prevailed in the little cottage. I looked at the wretched bed, at the broken windows, the puffs of smoke forced from the fire by the tempest;

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I observed the helpless despair of the farmer, the superstitious terror of the children, the fury of the elements besieging the bed of death; and in the midst of all, seeing that gentle, pale-faced woman going and coming, bravely meeting the duties of the moment, regardless of the tempest and of our presence, it seemed to me there was in that calm performance something more serene than the most cloudless sky, something, indeed, superhuman about this woman who, surrounded by such horrors, did not for an instant lose her faith in God.

What kind of woman is this, I wondered; whence comes she, and how long has she been here? A long time, since they remember when her cheeks were rosy. How is it I have never heard of her? She comes to this spot alone and at this hour? Yes. She has traversed these mountains and valleys through storm and fair weather, she goes hither and thither bearing life and hope wherever they fail, holding in her hand that fragile cup, caressing her goat as she passes. And this is what has been going on in this valley while I have been dining and gambling; she was probably born here, and will be buried in a corner of the cemetery, by the side of her father. Thus will that obscure woman die, a woman of whom no one speaks and of whom the children say: "Don't you know her?"

I can not express what I experienced; I sat quietly in my corner scarcely breathing, and it seemed to me that if I had tried to assist her, if I had reached out my hand to spare her a single step, I should have been guilty of sacrilege, I should have touched sacred vessels.

The storm lasted two hours. When it subsided the sick woman sat up in her bed and said that she felt better, that the medicine she had taken had done her good. The children ran to the bedside, looking up into their mother's face with great eyes that expressed both surprise and joy.

"I am very sure you are better," said the husband, who had not stirred from his seat, "for we have had a mass celebrated, and it cost us a large sum."

At that coarse and stupid expression I glanced at Madame Pierson; her swollen eyes, her pallor, her attitude, all clearly expressed fatigue and the exhaustion of long vigils.

"Ah! my poor man!" said the farmer's wife, "may God reward you!"

I could hardly contain myself, I was so angered by the stupidity of these brutes who were capable of crediting the work of charity to the avarice of a cure.

I was about to reproach them for their ingratitude and treat them as they deserved, when Madame Pierson took one of the children in her arms and said, with a smile:

"You may kiss your mother, for she is saved."



I stopped when I heard these words.

Never was the simple contentment of a happy and benevolent heart painted in such beauty on so sweet a face. Fatigue and pallor seemed to vanish, she became radiant with joy.

A few minutes later Madame Pierson told the children to call the farmer's boy to conduct her home. I advanced to offer my services; I told her that it was useless to awaken the boy as I was going in the same direction, and that she would do me an honor by accepting my offer. She asked me if I was not Octave de T-----.

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I replied that I was, and that she doubtless remembered my father. It struck me as strange that she should smile at that question; she cheerfully accepted my arm and we set out on our return.

We walked along in silence; the wind was going down; the trees quivered gently, shaking the rain from the boughs. Some distant flashes of lightning could still be seen; the perfume of humid verdure filled the warm air. The sky soon cleared and the moon illumined the mountain.

I could not help thinking of the whimsicalness of chance, which had seen fit to make me the solitary companion of a woman of whose existence I knew nothing a few hours before. She had accepted me as her escort on account of the name I bore, and leaned on my arm with quiet confidence. In spite of her distraught air it seemed to me that this confidence was either very bold or very simple; and she must needs be either the one or the other, for at each step I felt my heart becoming at once proud and innocent.

We spoke of the sick woman she had just quitted, of the scenes along the route; it did not occur to us to ask the questions incident to a new acquaintance. She spoke to me of my father, and always in the same tone I had noted when I first revealed my name—that is, cheerfully, almost gayly. By degrees I thought I understood why she did this, observing that she spoke thus of all, both living and dead, of life and of suffering and death. It was because human sorrows had taught her nothing that could accuse God, and I felt the piety of her smile.

I told her of the solitary life I was leading. Her aunt, she said, had seen more of my father than she, as they had sometimes played cards together after dinner. She urged me to visit them, assuring me a welcome.

When about half way home she complained of fatigue and sat down to rest on a bench that the heavy foliage had protected from the rain. I stood before her and watched the pale light of the moon playing on her face. After a moment's silence she arose and, in a constrained manner, observed:

“Of what are you thinking? It is time for us to think of returning.”

“I was wondering,” I replied, “why God created you, and I was saying to myself that it was for the sake of those who suffer.”

“That is an expression that, coming from you, I can not look upon except as a compliment.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you appear to be very young.”



"It sometimes happens," I said, "that one is older than the face would seem to indicate."

"Yes," she replied, smiling, "and it sometimes happens that one is younger than his words would seem to indicate."

"Have you no faith in experience?"

"I know that it is the name most young men give to their follies and their disappointments; what can one know at your age?"

"Madame, a man of twenty may know more than a woman of thirty. The liberty which men enjoy enables them to see more of life and its experiences than women; they go wherever they please, and no barrier restrains them; they test life in all its phases. When inspired by hope, they press forward to achievement; what they will they accomplish. When they have reached the end, they return; hope has been lost on the route, and happiness has broken its word."

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As I was speaking we reached the summit of a little hill which sloped down to the valley; Madame Pierson, yielding to the downward tendency, began to trip lightly down the incline. Without knowing why, I did the same, and we ran down the hill, arm in arm, the long grass under our feet retarded our progress. Finally, like two birds, spent with flight, we reached the foot of the mountain.

“Behold!” cried Madame Pierson, “just a short time ago I was tired, but now I am rested. And, believe me,” she added, with a charming smile, “you should treat your experience as I have treated my fatigue. We have made good time, and shall enjoy supper the more on that account.”

CHAPTER IV

RIPENING ACQUAINTANCE

I went to see her in the morning. I found her at the piano, her old aunt at the window sewing, the little room filled with flowers, the sunlight streaming through the blinds, a large bird-cage at her side.

I expected to find her something of a religieuse, at least one of those women of the provinces who know nothing of what happens two leagues away, and who live in a certain narrow circle from which they never escape. I confess that such isolated life, which is found here and there in small towns, under a thousand unknown roofs, had always had on me the effect of stagnant pools of water; the air does not seem respirable: in everything on earth that is forgotten, there is something of death.

On Madame Pierson’s table were some papers and new books; they appeared as if they had not been more than touched. In spite of the simplicity of everything around her, of furniture and dress, it was easy to recognize mode, that is to say, life; she did not live for this alone, but that goes without saying. What struck me in her taste was that there was nothing bizarre, everything breathed of youth and pleasantness.

Her conversation indicated a finished education; there was no subject on which she could not speak well and with ease. While admitting that she was naive, it was evident that she was at the same time profound in thought and fertile in resource; an intelligence at once broad and free soared gently over a simple heart and over the habits of a retired life. The sea-swallow, whirling through the azure heavens, soars thus over the blade of grass that marks its nest.

We talked of literature, music, and even politics. She had visited Paris during the winter; from time to time she dipped into the world; what she saw there served as a basis for what she divined.

But her distinguishing trait was gayety, a cheerfulness that, while not exactly joy itself, was constant and unalterable; it might be said that she was born a flower, and that her perfume was gayety.

Her pallor, her large dark eyes, her manner at certain moments, all led me to believe that she had suffered. I know not what it was that seemed to say that the sweet serenity of her brow was not of this world but had come from God, and that she would return it to Him spotless in spite of man; and there were times when she reminded one of the careful housewife, who, when the wind blows, holds her hand before the candle.



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After I had been in the house half an hour I could not help saying what was in my heart. I thought of my past life, of my disappointment and my ennui; I walked to and fro, breathing the fragrance of the flowers and looking at the sun. I asked her to sing, and she did so with good grace. In the mean time I leaned on the window-sill and watched the birds flitting about the garden. A saying of Montaigne's came into my head: "I neither love nor esteem sadness, although the world has invested it, at a given price, with the honor of its particular favor. They dress up in it wisdom, virtue, conscience. Stupid and absurd adornment."

"What happiness!" I cried, in spite of myself. "What repose! What joy! What forgetfulness of self!"

The good aunt raised her head and looked at me with an air of astonishment; Madame Pierson stopped short. I became red as fire when conscious of my folly, and sat down without a word.

We went out into the garden. The white goat I had seen the evening before was lying in the grass; it came up to her and followed us about the garden.

When we reached the end of the garden walk, a large young man with a pale face, clad in a kind of black cassock, suddenly appeared at the railing. He entered without knocking and bowed to Madame Pierson; it seemed to me that his face, which I considered a bad omen, darkened a little when he saw me. He was a priest I had often seen in the village, and his name was Mercanson; he came from St. Sulpice and was related to the cure of the parish.

He was large and at the same time pale, a thing which always displeases me and which is, in fact, unpleasant; it impresses me as a sort of diseased healthfulness. Moreover, he had the slow yet jerky way of speaking that characterizes the pedant. Even his manner of walking, which was not that of youth and health, repelled me; as for his glance, it might be said that he had none. I do not know what to think of a man whose eyes have nothing to say. These are the signs which led me to an unfavorable opinion of Mercanson, an opinion which was unfortunately correct.

He sat down on a bench and began to talk about Paris, which he called the modern Babylon. He had been there, he knew every one; he knew Madame de B-----, who was an angel; he had preached sermons in her salon and was listened to on bended knee. (The worst of this was that it was true.) One of his friends, who had introduced him there, had been expelled from school for having seduced a girl; a terrible thing to do, very sad. He paid Madame Pierson a thousand compliments for her charitable deeds throughout the country; he had heard of her benefactions, her care for the sick, her vigils at the bed of suffering and of death. It was very beautiful and noble; he would not fail to speak of it at St. Sulpice. Did he not seem to say that he would not fail to speak of it to God?

Wearied by this harangue, in order to conceal my rising disgust, I sat down on the grass and began to play with the goat. Mercanson turned on me his dull and lifeless eye:

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"The celebrated Vergniaud," said he, "was afflicted with the habit of sitting on the ground and playing with animals."

"It is a habit that is innocent enough," I replied. "If there were none worse the world would get along very well, without so much meddling on the part of others."

My reply did not please him; he frowned and changed the subject. He was charged with a commission; his uncle the cure had spoken to him of a poor devil who was unable to earn his daily bread. He lived in such and such a place; he had been there himself and was interested in him; he hoped that Madame Pierson—

I was looking at her while he was speaking, wondering what reply she would make and hoping she would say something in order to efface the memory of the priest's voice with her gentle tones. She merely bowed and he retired.

When he had gone our gayety returned. We entered a greenhouse in the rear of the garden.

Madame Pierson treated her flowers as she did her birds and her peasants: everything about her must be well cared for, each flower must have its drop of water and ray of sunlight in order that it might be gay and happy as an angel; so nothing could be in better condition than her little greenhouse. When we had made the round of the building, she said:

"This is my little world; you have seen all I possess, and my domain ends here."

"Madame," I said, "as my father's name has secured for me the favor of admittance here, permit me to return, and I will believe that happiness has not entirely forgotten me."

She extended her hand and I touched it with respect, not daring to raise it to my lips.

I returned home, closed my door and retired. There danced before my eyes a little white house; I saw myself walking through the village and knocking at the garden gate. "Oh, my poor heart!" I cried. "God be praised, you are still young, you are still capable of life and of love!"

One evening I was with Madame Pierson. More than three months had passed, during which I had seen her almost every day; and what can I say of that time except that I saw her? "To be with those we love," said Bruyere, "suffices; to dream, to talk to them, not to talk to them, to think of them, to think of the most indifferent things, but to be near them, that is all."

I loved. During the three months we had taken many long walks; I was initiated into the mysteries of her modest charities; we passed through dark streets, she on her pony, I



on foot, a small stick in my hand; thus half conversing, half dreaming, we went from cottage to cottage. There was a little bench near the edge of the wood where I was accustomed to rest after dinner; we met here regularly, as though by chance. In the morning, music, reading; in the evening, cards with the aunt as in the days of my father; and she always there, smiling, her presence filling my heart. By what road, O Providence! have you led me? What irrevocable destiny am I to accomplish? What! a life so free, an intimacy so charming, so much repose, such buoyant hope! O God! Of what do men complain? What is there sweeter than love?

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To live, yes, to feel intensely, profoundly, that one exists, that one is a sentient man, created by God, that is the first, the greatest gift of love. We can not deny, however, that love is a mystery, inexplicable, profound. With all the chains, with all the pains, and I may even say, with all the disgust with which the world has surrounded it, buried as it is under a mountain of prejudices which distort and deprave it, in spite of all the ordure through which it has been dragged, love, eternal and fatal love, is none the less a celestial law as powerful and as incomprehensible as that which suspends the sun in the heavens.

What is this mysterious bond, stronger and more durable than iron, that can neither be seen nor touched? What is there in meeting a woman, in looking at her, in speaking one word to her, and then never forgetting her? Why this one rather than that one? Invoke the aid of reason, of habit, of the senses, the head, the heart, and explain it if you can. You will find nothing but two bodies, one here, the other there, and between them, what? Air, space, immensity. O blind fools! who fondly imagine yourselves men, and who reason of love! Have you talked with it? No, you have felt it. You have exchanged a glance with a passing stranger, and suddenly there flies out from you something that can not be defined, that has no name known to man. You have taken root in the ground like the seed concealed in the turf which feels the life within it, and which is on its way to maturity.

We were alone, the window was open, the murmur of a little fountain came to us from the garden. O God! would that I could count, drop by drop, all the water that fell while we were sitting there, while she was talking and I was answering. It was there that I became intoxicated with her to the point of madness.

It is said that there is nothing so rapid as a feeling of antipathy, but I believe that the road to love is more swiftly traversed. How priceless the slightest words! What signifies the conversation, when you listen for the heart to answer? What sweetness in the glance of a woman who begins to attract you! At first it seems as though everything that passes between you is timid and tentative, but soon there is born a strange joy, an echo answers you; you know a dual life. What a touch! What a strange attraction! And when love is sure of itself and knows response in the object beloved, what serenity in the soul! Words die on the lips, for each one knows what the other is about to say before utterance has shaped the thought. Souls expand, lips are silent. Oh! what silence! What forgetfulness of all!

Although my love began the first day and had since grown to ardor, the respect I felt for Madame Pierson sealed my lips. If she had been less frank in permitting me to become her friend, perhaps I should have been more bold, for she had made such a strong impression on me, that I never quitted her without transports of love. But there was something in the frankness and the confidence she placed in me that checked me; moreover, it was in my father's name that I had been treated as a friend. That

consideration rendered me still more respectful, and I resolved to prove worthy of that name.

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To talk of love, they say, is to make love. We rarely spoke of it. Every time I happened to touch the subject Madame Pierson led the conversation to some other topic. I did not discern her motive, but it was not prudery; it seemed to me that at such times her face took on a stern aspect, and a wave of feeling, even of suffering, passed over it. As I had never questioned her about her past life and was unwilling to do so, I respected her obvious wishes.

Sunday there was dancing in the village; she was almost always there. On those occasions her toilet, although quite simple, was more elegant than usual; there was a flower in her hair, a bright ribbon, or some such bagatelle; but there was something youthful and fresh about her. The dance, which she loved for itself as an amusing exercise, seemed to inspire her with a frolicsome gayety. Once launched on the floor it seemed to me she allowed herself more liberty than usual, that there was an unusual familiarity. I did not dance, being still in mourning, but I managed to keep near her, and seeing her in such good humor, I was often tempted to confess my love.

But for some strange reason, whenever I thought of it, I was seized with an irresistible feeling of fear; the idea of an avowal was enough to render me serious in the midst of gayety. I conceived the idea of writing to her, but burned the letters before they were half finished.

That evening I dined with her, and looked about me at the many evidences of a tranquil life; I thought of the quiet life that I was leading, of my happiness since I had known her, and said to myself: "Why ask for more? Does not this suffice? Who knows, perhaps God has nothing more for you? If I should tell her that I love her, what would happen? Perhaps she would forbid me the pleasure of seeing her. Would I, in speaking the words, make her happier than she is to-day? Would I be happier myself?"

I was leaning on the piano, and as I indulged in these reflections sadness took possession of me. Night was coming on and she lighted a candle; while returning to her seat she noticed a tear in my eye.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

I turned aside my head.

I sought an excuse, but could find none; I was afraid to meet her glance. I arose and stepped to the window. The air was balmy, the moon was rising beyond those lindens where I had first met her. I fell into a profound reverie; I even forgot that she was present and, extending my arms toward heaven, a sob welled up from my heart.

She arose and stood behind me.

"What is it?" she again asked.



I replied that the sight of that valley stretching out beneath us had recalled my father's death; I took leave of her and went out.

Why I decided to silence my love I can not say. Nevertheless, instead of returning home, I began to wander about the woods like a fool. Whenever I found a bench I sat down only to rise precipitately. Toward midnight I approached Madame Pierson's house; she was at the window. Seeing her there I began to tremble and tried to retrace my steps, but I was fascinated; I advanced gently and sadly and sat down beneath her window.

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I do not know whether she recognized me; I had been there some time when I heard her sweet, fresh voice singing the refrain of a romance, and at the same instant a flower fell on my shoulder. It was a rose she had worn that evening on her bosom; I picked it up and pressed it to my lips.

“Who is there at this hour? Is it you?”

She called me by name. The gate leading into the garden was open; I arose without replying and entered it, I stopped before a plot of grass in the centre of the garden; I was walking like a somnambulist, without knowing what I was doing.

Suddenly I saw her at the door opening into the garden; she seemed to be undecided and looked attentively at the rays of the moon. She made a few steps toward me and I advanced to meet her. I could not speak, I fell on my knees before her and seized her hand.

“Listen to me,” she said; “I know all; but if it has come to that, Octave, you must go away. You come here every day and you are always welcome, are you not? Is not that enough? What more can I do for you? My friendship you have won; I wish you had been able to keep yours a little longer.”

When Madame Pierson had spoken these words she waited in silence as though expecting a reply. As I remained overwhelmed with sadness, she gently withdrew her hand, stepped back, waited a moment longer and then reentered the house.

I remained kneeling on the grass. I had been expecting what she said; my resolution was soon taken, and I decided to go away. I arose, my heart bleeding but firm. I looked at the house, at her window; I opened the garden-gate and placed my lips on the lock as I passed out.

When I reached home I told Larive to make what preparations were necessary, as I would set out in the morning. The poor fellow was astonished, but I made him a sign to obey and ask no questions. He brought a large trunk and busied himself with preparations for departure.

It was five o'clock in the morning and day was beginning to break when I asked myself where I was going. At that thought, which had not occurred to me before, I experienced a profound feeling of discouragement. I cast my eyes over the country, scanning the horizon. A sense of weakness took possession of me; I was exhausted with fatigue. I sat down in a chair and my ideas became confused; I bore my hand to my forehead and found it bathed in sweat. A violent fever made my limbs tremble; I could hardly reach my bed with Larive's assistance. My thoughts were so confused that I had no recollection of what had happened. The day passed; toward evening I heard the sound of instruments. It was the Sunday dance, and I asked Larive to go and see if Madame



Pierson was there. He did not find her; I sent him to her house. The blinds were closed, and a servant informed him that Madame Pierson and her aunt had gone to spend some days with a relative who lived at N-----, a small town some distance north. He handed me a letter that had been given him. It was couched in the following terms:



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"I have known you three months, and for one month have noticed that you feel for me what at your age is called love. I thought I detected on your part a resolution to conceal this from me and conquer yourself. I already esteemed you, this enhanced my respect. I do not reproach you for the past, nor for the weakness of your will." "What you take for love is nothing more than desire. I am well aware that many women seek to arouse it; it would be better if they did not feel the necessity of pleasing those who approach them. Such a feeling is a dangerous thing, and I have done wrong in entertaining it with you." "I am some years older than you, and ask you not to try to see me again. It would be vain for you to try to forget the weakness of a moment; what has passed between us can neither be repeated nor forgotten." "I do not take leave of you without sorrow; I expect to be absent some time; if, when I return, I find that you have gone away, I shall appreciate your action as the final evidence of your friendship and esteem.

"Brigitte Pierson."

CHAPTER V

AN INTERVIEW

The fever kept me in bed a week. When I was able to write I assured Madame Pierson that she should be obeyed, and that I would go away. I wrote in good faith, without any intention to deceive, but I was very far from keeping my promise. Before I had gone ten leagues I ordered the driver to stop, and stepped out of the carriage. I began to walk along the road. I could not resist the temptation to look back at the village which was still visible in the distance. Finally, after a period of frightful irresolution, I felt that it was impossible for me to continue on my route, and rather than get into the carriage again, I would have died on the spot. I told the driver to turn around, and, instead of going to Paris as I had intended, I made straight for N-----, whither Madame Pierson had gone.

I arrived at ten in the night. As soon as I reached the inn I had a boy direct me to the house of her relatives, and, without reflecting what I was doing, at once made my way to the spot. A servant opened the door. I asked if Madame Pierson was there, and directed him to tell her that some one wished to speak to her on the part of M. Desprez. That was the name of our village cure.

While the servant was executing my order I remained alone in a sombre little court; as it was raining, I entered the hall and stood at the foot of the stairway, which was not lighted. Madame Pierson soon arrived, preceding the servant; she descended rapidly, and did not see me in the darkness; I stepped up to her and touched her arm. She recoiled with terror and cried out:

"What do you wish of me?"

Her voice trembled so painfully and, when the servant appeared with a light, her face was so pale, that I did not know what to think. Was it possible that my unexpected appearance could disturb her in such a manner? That reflection occurred to me, but I decided that it was merely a feeling of fright natural to a woman who is suddenly touched.

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Nevertheless, she repeated her question in a firmer tone.

"You must permit me to see you once more," I replied. "I will go away, I will leave the country. You shall be obeyed, I swear it, and that beyond your real desire, for I will sell my father's house and go abroad; but that is only on condition that I am permitted to see you once more; otherwise I remain; you need fear nothing from me, but I am resolved on that."

She frowned and cast her eyes about her in a strange manner; then she replied, almost graciously:

"Come to-morrow during the day and I will see you." Then she left me.

The next day at noon I presented myself. I was introduced into a room with old hangings and antique furniture. I found her alone, seated on a sofa. I sat down before her.

"Madame," I began, "I come neither to speak of what I suffer, nor to deny that I love you. You have written me that what has passed between us can not be forgotten, and that is true; but you say that on that account we can not meet on the same footing as heretofore, and you are mistaken. I love you, but I have not offended you; nothing is changed in our relations since you do not love me. If I am permitted to see you, responsibility rests with me, and as far as your responsibility is concerned, my love for you should be sufficient guarantee."

She tried to interrupt me.

"Kindly allow me to finish what I have to say. No one knows better than I that in spite of the respect I feel for you, and in spite of all the protestations by which I might bind myself, love is the stronger. I repeat I do not intend to deny what is in my heart; but you do not learn of that love to-day for the first time, and I ask you what has prevented me from declaring it up to the present time? The fear of losing you; I was afraid I would not be permitted to see you, and that is what has happened. Make a condition that the first word I shall speak, the first thought or gesture that shall seem to be inconsistent with the most profound respect, shall be the signal for the closing of your door; as I have been silent in the past, I will be silent in the future, You think that I have loved you for a month, when in fact I have loved you from the first day I met you. When you discovered it, you did not refuse to see me on that account. If you had at that time enough esteem for me to believe me incapable of offending you, why have you lost that esteem?"

"That is what I have come to ask you. What have I done? I have bent my knee, but I have not said a word. What have I told you? What you already knew. I have been weak because I have suffered. It is true, Madame, that I am twenty years of age and what I have seen of life has only disgusted me (I could use a stronger word); it is true

that there is not at this hour on earth, either in the society of men or in solitude, a place, however small and insignificant, that I care to occupy.

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"The space enclosed within the four walls of your garden is the only spot in the world where I live; you are the only human being who has made me love God. I had renounced everything before I knew you; why deprive me of the only ray of light that Providence has spared me? If it is on account of fear, what have I done to inspire it? If it is on account of dislike, in what respect am I culpable? If it is on account of pity and because I suffer, you are mistaken in supposing that I can cure myself; it might have been done, perhaps, two months ago; but I preferred to see you and to suffer, and I do not repent, whatever may come of it. The only misfortune that can reach me is to lose you. Put me to the proof. If I ever feel that there is too much suffering for me in our bargain I will go away; and you may be sure of it, since you send me away to-day, and I am ready to go. What risk do you run in giving me a month or two of the only happiness I shall ever know?"

I waited her reply. She suddenly rose from her seat, and then sat down again. Then a moment of silence ensued.

"Rest assured," she said, "it is not so."

I thought she was searching for words that would not appear too severe, and that she was anxious to avoid hurting me.

"One word," I said, rising, "one word, nothing more. I know who you are and if there is any compassion for me in your heart, I thank you; speak but one word, this moment decides my life."

She shook her head; I saw that she was hesitating.

"You think I can be cured?" I cried. "May God grant you that solace if you send me away—"

I looked out of the window at the horizon, and felt in my soul such a frightful sensation of loneliness at the idea of going away that my blood froze in my veins. She saw me standing before her, my eyes fixed on her, awaiting her reply; all my life was hanging in suspense upon her lips.

"Very well," she said, "listen to me. This move of yours in coming to see me was an act of great imprudence; however, it is not necessary to assume that you have come here to see me; accept a commission that I will give you for a friend of my family. If you find that it is a little far, let it be the occasion of an absence which shall last as long as you choose, but which must not be too short. Although you said a moment ago," she added with a smile, "that a short trip would calm you. You will stop in the Vosges and you will go as far as Strasburg. Then in a month, or, better, in two months, you will return and report to me; I will see you again and give you further instructions."

CHAPTER VI

THE RUGGED PATH OF LOVE

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That evening I received from Madame Pierson a letter addressed to M. R. D., at Strasburg. Three weeks later my mission had been accomplished and I returned. During my absence I had thought of nothing but her, and I despaired of ever forgetting her. Nevertheless I determined to restrain my feelings in her presence; I had suffered too cruelly at the prospect of losing her to run any further risks. My esteem for her rendered it impossible for me to suspect her sincerity, and I did not see, in her plan of getting me to leave the country, anything that resembled hypocrisy. In a word, I was firmly convinced that at the first word of love her door would be closed to me. Upon my return I found her thin and changed. Her habitual smile seemed to languish on her discolored lips. She told me that she had been suffering. We did not speak of the past. She did not appear to wish to recall it, and I had no desire to refer to it. We resumed our old relations of neighbors; yet there was something of constraint between us, a sort of conventional familiarity. It was as if we had agreed: "It was thus before, let it still be thus." She granted me her confidence, a concession that was not without its charms for me; but our conversation was colder, for the reason that our eyes expressed as much as our tongues. In all that we said there was more to be surmised than was actually spoken. We no longer endeavored to fathom each other's minds; there was not the same interest attaching to each word, to each sentiment; that curious analysis that characterized our past intercourse; she treated me with kindness, but I distrusted even that kindness; I walked with her in the garden, but no longer accompanied her outside of the premises; we no longer wandered through the woods and valleys; she opened the piano when we were alone; the sound of her voice no longer awakened in my heart those transports of joy which are like sobs that are inspired by hope. When I took leave of her, she gave me her hand, but I was conscious of the fact that it was lifeless; there was much effort in our familiar ease, many reflections in our lightest remarks, much sadness at the bottom of it all. We felt that there was a third party between us: it was my love for her. My actions never betrayed it, but it appeared in my face. I lost my cheerfulness, my energy, and the color of health that once shone in my cheeks. At the end of one month I no longer resembled my old self. And yet in all our conversations I insisted on my disgust with the world, on my aversion to returning to it. I tried to make Madame Pierson feel that she had no reason to reproach herself for allowing me to see her; I depicted my past life in the most sombre colors, and gave her to understand that if she should refuse to allow me to see her, she would condemn me to a loneliness worse than death. I told her that I held society in abhorrence and the story of my life, as I recited it, proved my sincerity. So I affected a cheerfulness that I was far from feeling,

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in order to show her that in permitting me to see her, she had saved me from the most frightful misfortune; I thanked her almost every time I went to see her, that I might return in the evening or the following morning. "All my dreams of happiness," said I, "all my hopes, all my ambitions, are enclosed in the little corner of the earth where you dwell; outside of the air that you breathe there is no life for me."

She saw that I was suffering and could not help pitying me. My courage was pathetic, and her every word and gesture shed a sort of tender light over my devotion. She saw the struggle that was going on in me; my obedience flattered her pride, while my pallor awakened her charitable instinct. At times she appeared to be irritated, almost coquettish; she would say in a tone that was almost rebellious: "I shall not be here to-morrow, do not come on such and such a day." Then, as I was going away sad, but resigned, she sweetened the cup of bitterness by adding: "I am not sure of it, come whenever you please;" or her adieu was more friendly than usual, her glance more tender.

"Rest assured that Providence has led me to you," I said. "If I had not met you, I might have relapsed into the irregular life I was leading before I knew you."

"God has sent you as an angel of light to draw me from the abyss. He has confided a sacred mission to you; who knows, if I should lose you, whither the sorrow that consumes me might lead me, because of the sad experience I have been through, the terrible combat between my youth and my ennui?"

That thought, sincere enough on my part, had great weight with a woman of lofty devotion whose soul was as pious as it was ardent. It was probably the only consideration that induced Madame Pierson to permit me to see her.

I was preparing to visit her one day when some one knocked at my door, and I saw Mercanson enter, that priest I had met in the garden on the occasion of my first visit. He began to make excuses that were as tiresome as himself for presuming to call on me without having made my acquaintance; I told him that I knew him very well as the nephew of our cure, and asked what I could do for him.

He turned uneasily from one side to the other with an air of constraint, searching for phrases and fingering everything on the table before him as if at a loss what to say. Finally he informed me that Madame Pierson was ill and that she had sent word to me by him that she would not be able to see me that day.

"Is she ill? Why, I left her late yesterday afternoon, and she was very well at that time!"

He bowed.

“But,” I continued, “if she is ill why send word to me by a third person? She does not live so far away that a useless call would harm me.”

The same response from Mercanson. I could not understand what this peculiar manner signified, much less why she had entrusted her mission to him.

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"Very well," I said, "I shall see her to-morrow and she will explain what this means."

His hesitation continued.

"Madame Pierson has also told me—that I should inform you—in fact, I am requested to —"

"Well, what is it?" I cried, impatiently.

"Sir, you are becoming violent! I think Madame Pierson is seriously ill; she will not be able to see you this week."

Another bow, and he retired.

It was clear that his visit concealed some mystery: either Madame Pierson did not wish to see me, and I could not explain why; or Mercanson had interfered on his own responsibility.

I waited until the following day and then presented myself at her door; the servant who met me said that her mistress was indeed very ill and could not see me; she refused to accept the money I offered her, and would not answer my questions.

As I was passing through the village on my return, I saw Mercanson; he was surrounded by a number of schoolchildren, his uncle's pupils. I stopped him in the midst of his harangue and asked if I could have a word with him.

He followed me aside; but now it was my turn to hesitate, for I was at a loss how to proceed to draw his secret from him.

"Sir," I finally said, "will you kindly inform me if what you told me yesterday was the truth, or was there some motive behind it? Moreover, as there is not a physician in the neighborhood who can be called in, in case of necessity, it is important that I should know whether her condition is serious."

He protested that Madame Pierson was ill, but that he knew nothing more, except that she had sent for him and asked him to notify me as he had done. While talking we had walked down the road some distance and had now reached a deserted spot. Seeing that neither strategy nor entreaty would serve my purpose, I suddenly turned and seized him by the arms.

"What does this mean, Monsieur? You intend to resort to violence?" he cried.

"No, but I intend to make you tell me what you know."

"Monsieur, I am afraid of no one, and I have told you what you ought to know."

“You have told me what you think I ought to know, but not what you know. Madame Pierson is not sick; I am sure of it.”

“How do you know?”

“The servant told me so. Why has she closed her door against me, and why did she send you to tell me of it?”

Mercanson saw a peasant passing.

“Pierre!” he cried, calling him by name, “wait a moment, I wish to speak with you.”

The peasant approached; that was all he wanted, thinking I would not dare use violence in the presence of a third person. I released him, but so roughly that he staggered back and fell against a tree. He clenched his fist and turned away without a word.

For three weeks I suffered terribly. Three times a day I called at Madame Pierson’s and each time was refused admittance. I received one letter from her; she said that my assiduity was causing talk in the village, and begged me to call less frequently. Not a word about Mercanson or her illness.

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This precaution on her part was so unnatural, and contrasted so strongly with her former proud indifference in matters of this kind, that at first I could hardly believe it. Not knowing what else to say, I replied that there was no desire in my heart but obedience to her wishes. But in spite of me, the words I used did not conceal the bitterness I felt.

I purposely delayed going to see her even when permitted to do so, and no longer sent to inquire about her condition, as I wished to have her know that I did not believe in her illness. I did not know why she kept me at a distance; but I was so miserably unhappy that, at times, I thought seriously of putting an end to a life that had become insupportable. I was accustomed to spend entire days in the woods, and one day I happened to encounter her there.

I hardly had the courage to ask for an explanation; she did not reply frankly, and I did not recur to the subject; I could only count the days I was obliged to pass without seeing her, and live in the hope of a visit. All the time I was sorely tempted to throw myself at her feet, and tell her of my despair. I knew that she would not be insensible to it, and that she would at least express her pity; but her severity and the abrupt manner of her departure recalled me to my senses; I trembled lest I should lose her, and I would rather die than expose myself to that danger.

Thus denied the solace of confessing my sorrow, my health began to give way. My feet lagged on the way to her house; I felt that I was exhausting the source of tears, and each visit cost me added sorrow; I was torn with the thought that I ought not to see her.

On her part there was neither the same tone nor the same ease as of old; she spoke of going away on a tour; she pretended to confess to me her longing to get away, leaving me more dead than alive after her cruel words. If surprised by a natural impulse of sympathy, she immediately checked herself and relapsed into her accustomed coldness. Upon one occasion I could not restrain my tears. I saw her turn pale. As I was going, she said to me at the door:

“To-morrow I am going to Sainte-Luce (a neighboring village), and it is too far to go on foot. Be here with your horse early in the morning, if you have nothing to do, and go with me.”

I was on hand promptly, as may readily be imagined. I had slept over that word with transports of joy; but, upon leaving my house, I experienced a feeling of deep dejection. In restoring me to the privilege I had formerly enjoyed of accompanying her on her missions about the country, she had clearly been guilty of a cruel caprice if she did not love me. She knew how I was suffering; why abuse my courage unless she had changed her mind?

This reflection had a strange influence on me. When she mounted her horse my heart beat violently as I took her foot; I do not know whether it was from desire or anger. “If

she is touched," I said to myself, "why this reserve? If she is a coquette, why so much liberty?"

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Such are men. At my first word she saw that a change had taken place in me. I did not speak to her, but kept to the other side of the road. When we reached the valley she appeared at ease, and only turned her head from time to time to see if I was following her; but when we came to the forest and our horses' hoofs resounded against the rocks that lined the road, I saw that she was trembling. She stopped as though to wait for me, as I was some distance in the rear; when I had overtaken her she set out at a gallop. We soon reached the foot of the mountain and were compelled to slacken our pace. I then made my way to her side; our heads were bowed; the time had come, I took her hand.

"Brigitte," I said, "are you weary of my complaints? Since I have been reinstated in your favor, since I have been allowed to see you every day and every evening, I have asked myself if I have been importunate. During the last two months, while strength and hope have been failing me, have I said a word of that fatal love which is consuming me? Raise your head and answer me. Do you not see that I suffer and that my nights are given to weeping? Have you not met in the forest an unfortunate wretch sitting in solitary dejection with his hands pressed to his forehead? Have you not seen tears on these bushes? Look at me, look at these mountains; do you realize that I love you? They know it, they are my witnesses; these rocks and these trees know my secret. Why lead me before them? Am I not wretched enough? Do I fail in courage? Have I obeyed you? To what tests, what tortures am I subjected, and for what crime? If you do not love me, what are you doing here?"

"Let us return," she said, "let us retrace our steps."

I seized her horse's bridle.

"No," I replied, "for I have spoken. If we return, I lose you, I realize it; I know in advance what you will say. You have been pleased to try my patience, you have set my sorrow at defiance, perhaps that you might have the right to drive me from your presence; you have become tired of that sorrowful lover who suffered without complaint and who drank with resignation the bitter chalice of your disdain! You knew that, alone with you in the presence of these trees, in the midst of this solitude where my love had its birth, I could not be silent! You wish to be offended. Very well, Madame, I lose you! I have wept and I have suffered, I have too long nourished in my heart a pitiless love that devours me. You have been cruel!"

As she was about to leap from her saddle, I seized her in my arms and pressed my lips to hers. She turned pale, her eyes closed, her bridle slipped from her hand and she fell to the ground.

"God be praised!" I cried, "she loves me!" She had returned my kiss.



I leaped to the ground and hastened to her side. She was extended on the ground. I raised her, she opened her eyes, and shuddered with terror; she pushed my arm aside, and burst into tears.

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I stood near the roadside; I looked at her as she leaned against a tree, as beautiful as the day, her long hair falling over her shoulders, her hands twitching and trembling, her cheeks suffused with crimson, whereon shone pearly tears.

“Do not come near me!” she cried, “not a step!”

“Oh, my love!” I said, “fear nothing; if I have offended you, you know how to punish me. I was angry and I gave way to my grief; treat me as you choose; you may go away now, you may send me away! I know that you love me, Brigitte, and you are safer here than a king in his palace.”

As I spoke these words, Madame Pierson fixed her humid eyes on mine; I saw the happiness of my life come to me in the flash of those orbs. I crossed the road and knelt before her. How little he loves who can recall the words he uses when he confesses that love!

CHAPTER VII

THE VENUSBERG AGAIN

If I were a jeweler and had in stock a pearl necklace that I wished to give a friend, it seems to me I should take great pleasure in placing it about her neck with my own hands; but were I that friend, I would rather die than snatch the necklace from the jeweler’s hand. I have seen many men hasten to give themselves to the woman they love, but I have always done the contrary, not through calculation, but through natural instinct. The woman who loves a little and resists does not love enough, and she who loves enough and resists knows that she is not sincerely loved.

Madame Pierson gave evidence of more confidence in me, confessing that she loved me when she had never shown it in her actions. The respect I felt for her inspired me with such joy that her face looked to me like a budding rose. At times she would abandon herself to an impulse of sudden gayety, then she would suddenly check herself; treating me like a child, and then look at me with eyes filled with tears; indulging in a thousand pleasantries as a pretext for a more familiar word or caress, she would suddenly leave me, go aside and abandon herself to reverie. Was ever a more beautiful sight? When she returned she would find me waiting for her in the same spot where I had remained watching her.

“Oh! my friend!” I said, “Heaven itself rejoices to see how you are loved.”

Yet I could conceal neither the violence of my desires nor the pain I endured struggling against them. One evening I told her that I had just learned of the loss of an important case, which would involve a considerable change in my affairs.

“How is it,” she asked, “that you make this announcement and smile at the same time?”

“There is a certain maxim of a Persian poet,” I replied: “He who is loved by a beautiful woman is sheltered from every blow.”

Madame Pierson made no reply; all that evening she was even more cheerful than usual. When we played cards with her aunt and I lost she was merciless in her scorn, saying that I knew nothing of the game, and she bet against me with so much success that she won all I had in my purse. When the old lady retired, she stepped out on the balcony and I followed her in silence.

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The night was beautiful; the moon was setting and the stars shone brightly in a field of deep azure. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees; the air was warm and freighted with the perfume of spring.

She was leaning on her elbow, her eyes in the heavens; I leaned over her and watched her as she dreamed. Then I raised my own eyes; a voluptuous melancholy seized us both. We breathed together the warm perfume wafted to us from the garden; we followed, in its lingering course, the pale light of the moon which glinted through the chestnut-trees. I thought of a certain day when I had looked up at the broad expanse of heaven with despair; I trembled at the recollection of that hour; life was so rich now! I felt a hymn of praise welling up in my heart. Around the form of my dear mistress I slipped my arm; she gently turned her head; her eyes were bathed in tears. Her body yielded as does the rose, her open lips fell on mine, and the universe was forgotten.

Eternal angel of happy nights, who shall interpret thy silence? Mysterious vintage that flows from lips that meet as from a stainless chalice! Intoxication of the senses! O, supremest joy! Yes, like God, thou art immortal! Sublime exaltation of the creature, universal communion of beings, thrice sacred pleasure, what have they sung who have celebrated thy praise? They have called thee transitory, O thou who dost create! And they have said that thy passing beams have illumined their fugitive life. Words that are as feeble as the dying breath! Words of a sensual brute who is astonished that he should live for an hour, and who mistakes the rays of the eternal lamp for the spark which is struck from the flint!

O love! thou principle of life! Precious flame over which all nature, like a careful vestal, incessantly watches in the temple of God! Centre of all, by whom all exists, the spirit of destruction would itself die, blowing at thy flame! I am not astonished that thy name should be blasphemed, for they do not know who thou art, they who think they have seen thy face because they have opened their eyes; and when thou findest thy true prophets, united on earth with a kiss, thou closest their eyes lest they look upon the face of perfect joy.

But you, O rapturous delights, languishing smiles, and first caressing, stammering utterance of love, you who can be seen, who are you? Are you less in God's sight than all the rest, beautiful cherubim who soar in the alcove and who bring to this world man awakened from the dream divine! Ah! dear children of pleasure, how your mother loves you! It is you, curious prattlers, who behold the first mysteries, touches, trembling yet chaste, glances that are already insatiable, who begin to trace on the heart, as a tentative sketch, the ineffaceable image of cherished beauty! O royalty! O conquest! It is you who make lovers. And thou, true diadem, serenity of happiness! The first true concept of man's life, and first return of happiness in the many little things of life which are seen only through the medium of joy, first steps made by nature in the direction of the well-beloved! Who will paint you? What human word will ever express thy slightest caress?

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He who, in the freshness of youth, has taken leave of an adored mistress; he who has walked through the streets without hearing the voices of those who speak to him; he who has sat in a lonely spot, laughing and weeping without knowing why; he who has placed his hands to his face in order to breathe the perfume that still clings to them; he who has suddenly forgotten what he had been doing on earth; he who has spoken to the trees along the route and to the birds in their flight; finally, he who, in the midst of men, has acted the madman, and then has fallen on his knees and thanked God for it; let him die without complaint: he has known the joy of love.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

THE THORNS OF LOVE

I have now to recount what happened to my love, and the change that took place in me. What reason can I give for it? None, except as I repeat the story and as I say: "It is the truth." For two days, neither more nor less, I was Madame Pierson's lover. One fine night I set out and traversed the road that led to her house. I was feeling so well in body and soul that I leaped for joy and extended my arms to heaven. I found her at the top of the stairway leaning on the railing, a lighted candle beside her. She was waiting for me, and when she saw me ran to meet me.

She showed me how she had changed her coiffure which had displeased me, and told me how she had passed the day arranging her hair to suit my taste; how she had taken down a villainous black picture-frame that had offended my eye; how she had renewed the flowers; she recounted all she had done since she had known me, how she had seen me suffer and how she had suffered herself; how she had thought of leaving the country, of fleeing from her love; how she had employed every precaution against me; how she had sought advice from her aunt, from Mercanson and from the cure; how she had vowed to herself that she would die rather than yield, and how all that had been dissipated by a single word of mine, a glance, an incident; and with every confession a kiss.

She said that whatever I saw in her room that pleased my taste, whatever bagatelle on her table attracted my attention, she would give me; that whatever she did in the future, in the morning, in the evening, at any hour, I should regulate as I pleased; that the judgments of the world did not concern her; that if she had appeared to care for them, it was only to send me away; but that she wished to be happy and close her ears, that she was thirty years of age and had not long to be loved by me. "And you will love me a long time? Are those fine words, with which you have beguiled me, true?" And then loving reproaches because I had been late in coming to her; that she had put on her

slippers in order that I might see her foot, but that she was no longer beautiful; that she could wish she were; that she had been at fifteen. She went here and there, silly with love, rosy with joy; and she did not know what to imagine, what to say or do, in order to give herself and all that she had.

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I was lying on the sofa; I felt, at every word she spoke, a bad hour of my past life slipping away from me. I watched the star of love rising in my sky, and it seemed to me I was like a tree filled with sap that shakes off its dry leaves in order to attire itself in new foliage. She sat down at the piano and told me she was going to play an air by Stradella. More than all else I love sacred music, and that morceau which she had sung for me a number of times gave me great pleasure.

"Yes," she said when she had finished, "but you are very much mistaken, the air is mine, and I have made you believe it was Stradella's."

"It is yours?"

"Yes, and I told you it was by Stradella in order to see what you would say of it. I never play my own music when I happen to compose any; but I wanted to try it with you, and you see it has succeeded since you were deceived."

What a monstrous machine is man! What could be more innocent? A bright child might have adopted that ruse to surprise his teacher. She laughed heartily the while, but I felt a strange coldness as if a dark cloud had settled on me; my countenance changed:

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

"It is nothing; play that air again."

While she was playing I walked up and down the room; I passed my hand over my forehead as if to brush away the fog; I stamped my foot, shrugged my shoulders at my own madness; finally I sat down on a cushion which had fallen to the floor; she came to me. The more I struggled with the spirit of darkness which had seized me, the thicker the night that gathered around my head.

"Verily," I said, "you lie so well? What! that air is yours? Is it possible you can lie so fluently?"

She looked at me with an air of astonishment.

"What is it?" she asked.

Unspeakable anxiety was depicted on her face. Surely she could not believe me fool enough to reproach her for such a harmless bit of pleasantry; she did not see anything serious in that sadness which I felt; but the more trifling the cause, the greater the surprise. At first she thought I, too, must be joking; but when she saw me growing paler every moment as if about to faint, she stood with open lips and bent body, looking like a statue.

"God of Heaven!" she cried, "is it possible?"

You smile, perhaps, reader, at this page; I who write it still shudder as I think of it. Misfortunes have their symptoms as well as diseases, and there is nothing so terrible at sea as a little black point on the horizon.

However, my dear Brigitte drew a little round table into the centre of the room and brought out some supper. She had prepared it herself, and I did not drink a drop that was not first borne to her lips. The blue light of day, piercing through the curtains, illumined her charming face and tender eyes; she was tired and allowed her head to fall on my shoulder with a thousand terms of endearment.

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I could not struggle against such charming abandon, and my heart expanded with joy; I believed I had rid myself of the bad dream that had just tormented me, and I begged her pardon for giving way to a sudden impulse which I myself did not understand.

"My friend," I said, from the bottom of my heart, "I am very sorry that I unjustly reproached you for a piece of innocent badinage; but if you love me, never lie to me, even in the smallest matter, for a lie is an abomination to me and I can not endure it."

I told her I would remain until she was asleep. I saw her close her beautiful eyes and heard her murmur something in her sleep as I bent over and kissed her adieu. Then I went away with a tranquil heart, promising myself that I would henceforth enjoy my happiness and allow nothing to disturb it.

But the next day Brigitte said to me, as if quite by chance:

"I have a large book in which I have written my thoughts, everything that has occurred to my mind, and I want you to see what I said of you the first day I met you."

We read together what concerned me, to which we added a hundred foolish comments, after which I began to turn the leaves in a mechanical way. A phrase written in capital letters caught my eye on one of the pages I was turning; I distinctly saw some words that were insignificant enough, and I was about to read the rest when Brigitte stopped me and said:

"Do not read that."

I threw the book on the table.

"Why, certainly not," I said, "I did not think what I was doing."

"Do you still take things seriously?" she asked, smiling, doubtless seeing my malady coming on again; "take the book, I want you to read it."

The book lay on the table within easy reach and I did not take my eyes from it. I seemed to hear a voice whispering in my ear, and I thought I saw, grimacing before me, with his glacial smile and dry face, Desgenais. "What are you doing here, Desgenais?" I asked as if I really saw him. He looked as he did that evening, when he leaned over my table and unfolded to me his catechism of vice.

I kept my eyes on the book and I felt vaguely stirring in my memory some forgotten words of the past. The spirit of doubt hanging over my head had injected into my veins a drop of poison; the vapor mounted to my head and I staggered like a drunken man. What secret was Brigitte concealing from me? I knew very well that I had only to bend over and open the book; but at what place? How could I recognize the leaf on which my eye had chanced to fall?

My pride, moreover, would not permit me to take the book; was it indeed pride? “O God!” I said to myself with a frightful sense of sadness, “is the past a spectre? and can it come out of its tomb? Ah! wretch that I am, can I never love?”

All my ideas of contempt for women, all the phrases of mocking fatuity which I had repeated as a schoolboy his lesson, suddenly came to my mind; and strange to say, while formerly I did not believe in making a parade of them, now it seemed that they were real, or at least that they had been.

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I had known Madame Pierson four months, but I knew nothing of her past life and had never questioned her about it. I had yielded to my love for her with confidence and without reservation. I found a sort of pleasure in taking her just as she was, for just what she seemed, while suspicion and jealousy are so foreign to my nature that I was more surprised at feeling them toward Brigitte than she was in discovering them in me. Never in my first love nor in the affairs of daily life have I been distrustful, but on the contrary bold and frank, suspecting nothing. I had to see my mistress betray me before my eyes before I would believe that she could deceive me. Desgenais himself, while preaching to me after his manner, joked me about the ease with which I could be duped. The story of my life was an incontestable proof that I was credulous rather than suspicious; and when the words in that book suddenly struck me, it seemed to me I felt a new being within me, a sort of unknown self; my reason revolted against the feeling, and I did not dare ask whither all this was leading me.

But the suffering I had endured, the memory of the perfidy that I had witnessed, the frightful cure I had imposed on myself, the opinions of my friends, the corrupt life I had led, the sad truths I had learned, as well as those that I had unconsciously surmised during my sad experience, ending in debauchery, contempt of love, abuse of everything, that is what I had in my heart although I did not suspect it; and at the moment when life and hope were again being born within me, all these furies that were being atrophied by time seized me by the throat and cried that they were yet alive.

I bent over and opened the book, then immediately closed it and threw it on the table. Brigitte was looking at me; in her beautiful eyes was neither wounded pride nor anger; nothing but tender solicitude, as if I were ill.

“Do you think I have secrets?” she asked, embracing me.

“No,” I replied, “I know nothing except that you are beautiful and that I would die loving you.”

When I returned home to dinner I said to Larive:

“Who is Madame Pierson?”

He looked at me in astonishment.

“You have lived here many years,” I continued; “you ought to know better than I. What do they say of her here? What do they think of her in the village? What kind of life did she lead before I knew her? Whom did she receive as her friends?”

“In faith, sir, I have never seen her do otherwise than she does every day, that is to say, walk in the valley, play picquet with her aunt, and visit the poor. The peasants call her Brigitte la Rose; I have never heard a word against her except that she goes through

the woods alone at all hours of the day and night; but that is when engaged in charitable work. She is the ministering angel in the valley. As for those she receives, there are only the cure and Monsieur de Dalens during vacation."



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"Who is this Monsieur de Dalens?"

"He owns the chateau at the foot of the mountain on the other side; he only comes here for the chase."

"Is he young?"

"Yes."

"Is he related to Madame Pierson?"

"No, he was a friend of her husband."

"Has her husband been dead long?"

"Five years on All-Saints' day. He was a worthy man."

"And has this Monsieur de Dalens paid court?"

"To the widow? In faith—to tell the truth—" he stopped, embarrassed.

"Well, will you answer me?"

"Some say so and some do not—I know nothing and have seen nothing."

"And you just told me that they do not talk about her in the country?"

"That is all they have said, and I supposed you knew that."

"In a word, yes or no?"

"Yes, sir, I think so, at least."

I arose from the table and walked down the road; Mercanson was there. I expected he would try to avoid me; on the contrary he approached me.

"Sir," he said, "you exhibited signs of anger which it does not become a man of my character to resent. I wish to express my regret that I was charged to communicate a message which appeared so unwelcome."

I returned his compliment, supposing he would leave me at once; but he walked along at my side.

"Dalens! Dalens!" I repeated between my teeth, "who will tell me about Dalens?" For Larive had told me nothing except what a valet might learn. From whom had he learned it? From some servant or peasant. I must have some witness who had seen Dalens



with Madame Pierson and who knew all about their relations. I could not get that Dalens out of my head, and not being able to talk to any one else, I asked Mercanson about him.

If Mercanson was not a bad man, he was either a fool or very shrewd, I have never known which. It is certain that he had reason to hate me and that he treated me as meanly as possible. Madame Pierson, who had the greatest friendship for the cure, had almost come to think equally well of the nephew. He was proud of it, and consequently jealous. It is not love alone that inspires jealousy; a favor, a kind word, a smile from a beautiful mouth, may arouse some people to jealous rage.

Mercanson appeared to be astonished. I was somewhat astonished myself; but who knows his own mind?

At his first words I saw that the priest understood what I wanted to know and had decided not to satisfy me.

“How does it happen that you have known Madame Pierson so long and so intimately (I think so, at least) and have not met Monsieur de Dalens? But, doubtless, you have some reason unknown to me for inquiring about him to-day. All I can say is that as far as I know, he is an honest man, kind and charitable; he was, like you, very intimate with Madame Pierson; he is fond of hunting and entertains handsomely. He and Madame Pierson were accustomed to devote much

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of their time to music. He punctually attended to his works of charity and, when—in the country, accompanied that lady on her rounds, just as you do. His family enjoys an excellent reputation at Paris; I used to find him with Madame Pierson whenever I called; his manners were excellent. As for the rest, I speak truly and frankly, as becomes me when it concerns persons of his merit. I believe that he only comes here for the chase; he was a friend of her husband; he is said to be rich and very generous; but I know nothing about it except that—”

With what tortured phrases was this dull tormentor teasing me. I was ashamed to listen to him, yet not daring to ask a single question or interrupt his vile insinuations. I was alone on the promenade; the poisoned arrow of suspicion had entered my heart. I did not know whether I felt more of anger or of sorrow. The confidence with which I had abandoned myself to my love for Brigitte had been so sweet and so natural that I could not bring myself to believe that so much happiness had been built upon an illusion. That sentiment of credulity which had attracted me to her seemed a proof that she was worthy. Was it possible that these four months of happiness were but a dream?

But after all, I thought, that woman has yielded too easily. Was there not deception in that pretended anxiety to have me leave the country? Is she not just like all the rest? Yes, that is the way they all do; they attempt to escape in order to experience the happiness of being pursued: it is the feminine instinct. Was it not she who confessed her love by her own act, at the very moment I had decided that she would never be mine? Did she not accept my arm the first day I met her? If Dalens has been her lover, he probably is still; there is a certain sort of liaison that has neither beginning nor end; when chance ordains a meeting, it is resumed; when parted, it is forgotten.

If that man comes here this summer, she will probably see him without breaking with me. Who is this aunt, what mysterious life is this that has charity for its cloak, this liberty that cares nothing for opinion? May they not be adventurers, these two women with their little house, their prudence, and their caution, which enable them to impose on people so easily? Assuredly, for all I know, I have fallen into an affair of gallantry when I thought I was engaged in a romance. But what can I do? There is no one here who can help me except the priest, who does not care to tell me what he knows, and his uncle, who will say still less. Who will save me? How can I learn the truth?

Thus spoke jealousy; thus, forgetting so many tears and all that I had suffered, I had come at the end of two days to a point where I was tormenting myself with the idea that Brigitte had yielded too easily. Thus, like all who doubt, I brushed aside sentiment and reason to dispute with facts, to attach myself to the letter and dissect my love.

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While absorbed in these reflections I was slowly approaching Madame Pierson's.

I found the gate open, and as I entered the garden I saw a light in the kitchen. I thought of questioning the servant, I stepped to the window.

A feeling of horror rooted me to the spot. The servant was an old woman, thin and wrinkled and bent, a common deformity in people who have worked in the fields. I found her shaking a cooking utensil over a filthy sink. A dirty candle fluttered in her trembling hand; about her were pots, kettles, and dishes, the remains of dinner that a dog sniffed at, from time to time, as though ashamed; a warm, nauseating odor emanated from the reeking walls. When the old woman caught sight of me, she smiled in a confidential way; she had seen me take leave of her mistress.

I shuddered as I thought what I had come to seek in a spot so well suited to my ignoble purpose. I fled from that old woman as from jealousy personified, and as if the stench of her cooking had come from my heart.

Brigitte was at the window watering her well-beloved flowers; a child of one of her neighbors was lying in a cradle at her side, and she was gently rocking the cradle with her disengaged hand; the child's mouth was full of bonbons, and in gurgling eloquence it was addressing an incomprehensible apostrophe to its nurse. I sat down near her and kissed the child on its fat cheeks, as if to imbibe some of its innocence. Brigitte accorded me a timid greeting; she could see her troubled image in my eyes. For my part I avoided her glance; the more I admired her beauty and her air of candor, the more I was convinced that such a woman was either an angel or a monster of perfidy; I forced myself to recall each one of Mercanson's words, and I confronted, so to speak, the man's insinuations with her presence and her face. "She is very beautiful," I said to myself, "and very dangerous if she knows how, to deceive; but I will fathom her and I will sound her heart; and she shall know who I am."

"My dear," I said after a long silence, "I have just given a piece of advice to a friend who consulted me. He is an honest young man, and he writes me that a woman he loves has another lover. He asks me what he ought to do."

"What reply did you make?"

"Two questions: Is she pretty? Do you love her? If you love her, forget her; if she is pretty and you do not love her, keep her for your pleasure; there will always be time to quit her, if it is merely a matter of beauty, and one is worth as much as another."

Hearing me speak thus, Brigitte put down the child she was holding and sat down at the other end of the room. There was no light in the room; the moon, which was shining on the spot where she had been standing, threw a shadow over the sofa on which she was now seated. The words I had uttered were so heartless, so cruel, that I was dazed

myself, and my heart was filled with bitterness. The child in its cradle began to cry. Then all three of us were silent while a cloud passed over the moon.

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A servant entered the room with a light and carried the child away. I arose, Brigitte also; but she suddenly placed her hand on her heart and fell to the floor.

I hastened to her side; she had not lost consciousness and begged me not to call any one. She explained that she was subject to violent palpitation of the heart and had been troubled by fainting spells from her youth; that there was no danger and no remedy. I kneeled beside her; she sweetly opened her arms; I raised her head and placed it on my shoulder.

"Ah! my friend," she said, "I pity you."

"Listen to me," I whispered in her ear, "I am a wretched fool, but I can keep nothing on my heart. Who is this Monsieur de Dalens who lives on the mountain and comes to see you?"

She appeared astonished to hear me mention that name.

"Dalens?" she replied. "He was my husband's friend."

She looked at me as if to inquire: "Why do you ask?" It seemed to me that her face wore a grieved expression. I bit my lips. "If she wants to deceive me," I thought, "I was foolish to question her."

Brigitte rose with difficulty; she took her fan and began to walk up and down the room.

She was breathing hard; I had wounded her. She was absorbed in thought and we exchanged two or three glances that were almost cold. She stepped to her desk, opened it, drew out a package of letters tied together with a ribbon, and threw it at my feet without a word.

But I was looking neither at her nor her letters; I had just thrown a stone into the abyss and was listening to the echoes. For the first time offended pride was depicted on Brigitte's face. There was no longer either anxiety or pity in her eyes, and, just as I had come to feel myself other than I had ever been, so I saw in her a woman I did not know.

"Read that," she said, finally. I stepped up to her and took her hand.

"Read that, read that!" she repeated in freezing tones.

I took the letters. At that moment I felt so persuaded of her innocence that I was seized with remorse.

"You remind me," she said, "that I owe you the story of my life; sit down and you shall learn it. You will open these drawers, and you will read all that I have written and all that has been written to me."

She sat down and motioned me to a chair. I saw that she found it difficult to speak. She was pale as death, her voice constrained, her throat swollen.

“Brigitte! Brigitte!” I cried, “in the name of heaven, do not speak! God is my witness I was not born such as you see me; during my life I have been neither suspicious nor distrustful. I have been undone, my heart has been seared by the treachery of others. A frightful experience has led me to the very brink of the precipice, and for a year I have seen nothing but evil here below. God is my witness that, up to this day, I did not believe myself capable of playing the ignoble role I have assumed, the meanest role of all, that of a jealous lover. God is my witness that I love you and that you are the only one in the world who can cure me of the past.

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"I have had to do, up to this time, with women who deceived me, or who were unworthy of love. I have led the life of a libertine; I bear on my heart certain marks that will never be effaced. Is it my fault if calumny, and base suggestion, to-day planted in a heart whose fibres were still trembling with pain and ready to assimilate all that resembles sorrow, have driven me to despair? I have just heard the name of a man I have never met, of whose existence I was ignorant; I have been given to understand that there has been between you and him a certain intimacy, which proves nothing. I do not intend to question you; I have suffered from it, I have confessed to you, and I have done you an irreparable wrong. But rather than consent to what you propose, I will throw it all in the fire. Ah! my friend, do not degrade me; do not attempt to justify yourself, do not punish me for suffering. How could I, in the bottom of my heart, suspect you of deceiving me? No, you are beautiful and you are true; a single glance of yours, Brigitte, tells me more than words could utter and I am content. If you knew what horrors, what monstrous deceit, the man who stands before you has seen! If you knew how he has been treated, how they have mocked at all that is good, how they have taken pains to teach him all that leads to doubt, to jealousy, to despair!

"Alas! alas! my dear mistress, if you knew whom you love! Do not reproach me, but rather pity me; I must forget that other beings than you exist. Who can know through what frightful trials, through what pitiless suffering I have passed! I did not expect this, I did not anticipate this moment. Since you have become mine, I realize what I have done; I have felt, in kissing you, that my lips were not, like yours, unsullied. In the name of heaven, help me live! God made me a better man than the one you see before you."

Brigitte held out her hands and caressed me tenderly. She begged me to tell her all that had led to this sad scene. I spoke of what I had learned from Larive, but did not dare confess that I had interviewed Mercanson. She insisted that I listen to her explanation. M. de Dalens had loved her; but he was a man of frivolous disposition, dissipated and inconstant; she had given him to understand that, not wishing to remarry, she could only request that he drop the role of suitor, and he had yielded to her wishes with good grace; but his visits had become more rare since that time, until now they had ceased altogether. She drew from the bundle a certain letter which she showed me, the date of which was recent; I could not help blushing as I found in it the confirmation of all she had said; she assured me that she pardoned me, and exacted a promise that in the future I would promptly tell her of any cause I might have to suspect her. Our treaty was sealed with a kiss, and when I left her we had both forgotten that M. de Dalens ever existed.

CHAPTER II

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UNCERTAINTY

A kind of stagnant inertia, tempered with bitter joy, is characteristic of debauchery. It is the sequence of a life of caprice, where nothing is regulated according to the needs of the body, but everything according to the fantasy of the mind, and one must be always ready to obey the behests of the other. Youth and will can resist excess; but nature silently avenges herself, and the day when she decides to repair her forces, she will struggle to retard her work and abuses her anew.

Finding about him then all the objects that were able to tempt him the evening before, the man who is incapable of enjoying them looks down at them with a smile of disgust. At the same time the objects which excite his desire are never attained with sang-froid; all that the debauches loves, he seizes; his life is a fever; his organs, in order to search the depths of joy, are forced to avail themselves of the stimulant of fermented liquors and sleepless nights; in the days of ennui and of idleness he feels more keenly than other men the disparity between his impotence and his temptations, and, in order to resist the latter, pride must come to his aid and make him believe that he disdains them. It is thus he spits on all the feasts and pleasures of his life, and so, between an ardent thirst and a profound satiety, a feeling of tranquil vanity leads him to his death.

Although I was no longer a debauches, it came to pass that my body suddenly remembered that it had been. It is easy to understand why I had not felt the effects of it sooner. While mourning my father's death every other thought was crowded from my mind. Then a passionate love succeeded; while I was alone, ennui had nothing to struggle for. Sad or gay, fair or foul, what matters it to him who is alone?

As zinc, rarely found unmixed, drawn from the vein where it lies sleeping, attracts to itself a ray of light when placed near green leather, thus Brigitte's kisses gradually awakened in my heart what had been buried there. At her side I perceived what I really was.

There were days when I felt such a strange sensation in the mornings that it is impossible for me to define it. I awakened without a motive, feeling like a man who has spent the night in eating and drinking to the point of exhaustion. All external sensations caused me insupportable fatigue, all well-known objects of daily life repelled and annoyed me; if I spoke it was in ridicule of what others thought or of what I thought myself. Then, extended on the bed, as if incapable of any motion, I dismissed any thought of undertaking whatever had been agreed upon the evening before; I recalled all the tender and loving things I had said to my mistress during my better moments, and was not satisfied until I had spoiled and poisoned those memories of happy days. "Can you not forget all that?" Brigitte would sadly inquire, "if there are two different men in you, can you not, when the bad rouses himself, forget the good?"

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The patience with which Brigitte opposed these vagaries only served to excite my sinister gayety. Strange that the man who suffers wishes to make her whom he loves suffer! To lose control of one's self, is that not the worst of evils? Is there anything more cruel for a woman than to hear a man turn to derision all that is sacred and mysterious? Yet she did not flee from me; she remained at my side, while in my savage humor I insulted love and allowed insane ravings to escape from lips that were still moist with her kisses.

On such days, contrary to my usual inclination, I liked to talk of Paris and speak of my life of debauchery as the most commendable thing in the world. "You are nothing but a saint," I would laughingly observe; "you do not understand what I say. There is nothing like those careless ones who make love without believing in it." Was that not the same as saying that I did not believe in it?

"Very well," Brigitte replied, "teach me how to please you always. I am perhaps as pretty as those mistresses whom you mourn; if I have not their skill to divert you, I beg that you will instruct me. Act as if you did not love me, and let me love you without saying anything about it. If I am devoted to religion, I am also devoted to love. What can I do to make you believe it?"

Then she would stand before the mirror arraying herself as if for a soiree, affecting a coquetry that she was far from feeling, trying to adopt my tone, laughing and skipping about the room. "Am I to your taste?" she would ask. "Which one of your mistresses do I resemble? Am I beautiful, enough to make you forget that any one can believe in love? Have I a sufficiently careless air to suit you?" Then, in the midst of that factitious joy, she would turn her back and I could see her shudder until the flowers she had placed in her hair trembled. I threw myself at her feet.

"Stop!" I cried, "you resemble only too closely that which you try to imitate, that which my mouth has been so vile as to conjure up before you. Lay aside those flowers and that dress. Let us wash away such mimicry with a sincere tear; do not remind me that I am but a prodigal son; I remember the past too well."

But even this repentance was cruel, as it proved to her that the phantoms in my heart were full of reality. In yielding to an impulse of horror I merely gave her to understand that her resignation and her desire to please me only served to call up an impure image.

And it was true; I reached her side transported with joy, swearing that I would regret my past life; on my knees I protested my respect for her; then a gesture, a word, a trick of turning as she approached me, recalled to my mind the fact that such and such a woman had made that gesture, had used that word, had that same trick of turning.

Poor devoted soul! What didst thou suffer in seeing me turn pale before thee, in seeing my arms fall as though lifeless at my side! When the kiss died on my lips, and the full



glance of love, that pure ray of God's light, fled from my eyes like an arrow turned by the wind! Ah! Brigitte! what diamonds trickled from thine eyes! What treasures of charity didst thou exhaust with patient hand! How pitiful thy love!

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For a long time good and bad days succeeded each other almost regularly; I showed myself alternately cruel and scornful, tender and devoted, insensible and haughty, repentant and submissive. The face of Desgenais, which had at first appeared to me as though to warn me whither I was drifting, was now constantly before me. On my days of doubt and coldness, I conversed, so to speak, with him; often when I had offended Brigitte by some cruel mockery I said to myself "If he were in my place he would do as I do!"

And then at other times, when putting on my hat to visit Brigitte, I would look in my glass and say: "What is there so terrible about it, anyway? I have, after all, a pretty mistress; she has given herself to a libertine, let her take me for what I am." I reached her side with a smile on my lips, I sank into a chair with an air of deliberate insolence; then I saw Brigitte approach, her large eyes filled with tenderness and anxiety; I seized her little hands in mine and lost myself in an infinite dream.

How name a thing that is nameless? Was I good or bad? Was I distrustful or a fool? It is useless to reflect on it; it happened thus.

One of our neighbors was a young woman whose name was Madame Daniel. She possessed some beauty, and still more coquetry; she was poor, but tried to pass for rich; she would come to see us after dinner and always played a heavy game against us, although her losses embarrassed her; she sang, but had no voice. In the solitude of that unknown village, where an unkind fate had buried her, she was consumed with an uncontrollable passion for pleasure. She talked of nothing but Paris, which she visited two or three times a year. She pretended to keep up with the fashions, and my dear Brigitte assisted her as best she could, while smiling with pity. Her husband was employed by the government; once a year he would take her to the house of the chief of his department, where, attired in her best, the little woman danced to her heart's content. She would return with shining eyes and tired body; she would come to us to tell of her prowess, and her success in assaulting the masculine heart. The rest of the time she read novels, never taking the trouble to look after her household affairs, which were not always in the best condition.

Whenever I saw her, I laughed at her, finding nothing so ridiculous as the high life she thought she was leading. I would interrupt her description of a ball to inquire about her husband and her father-in-law, both of whom she detested, the one because he was her husband, and the other because he was only a peasant; in short, we were always disputing on some subject.

In my evil moments I thought of paying court to her just for the sake of annoying Brigitte.

"You see," I said, "how perfectly Madame Daniel understands life! In her present sprightly humor could one desire a more charming mistress?"

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I then paid her the most extravagant compliments; her senseless chatting I described as unrestraint tempered by finesse, her pretentious exaggerations as a natural desire to please; was it her fault that she was poor? At least she thought of nothing but pleasure and confessed it freely; she did not preach sermons herself, nor did she listen to them from others; I went so far as to tell Brigitte that she ought to adopt her as a model, and that she was just the kind of woman to please me.

Poor Madame Daniel discovered signs of melancholy in Brigitte's eyes. She was a strange creature, as good and sincere—when you could get finery out of her head—as she was stupid when absorbed in such frivolous affairs. On occasion she could be both good and stupid. One fine day, when they were walking together, she threw herself into Brigitte's arms, and told her that she had noticed I was beginning to pay court to her, and that I had made certain proposals to her, the meaning of which was not doubtful; but she knew that I was another's lover, and as for her, whatever might happen, she would die rather than destroy the happiness of a friend. Brigitte thanked her, and Madame Daniel, having set her conscience at ease, considered it no sin to render me desolate by languishing glances.

In the evening, when she had gone, Brigitte, in a severe tone, told me what had happened; she begged me to spare her such affronts in the future.

"Not that I attach any importance to such pleasantries," she said, "but if you have any love for me, it seems to me it is useless to inform a third party that there are times when you have not."

"Is it possible," I replied with a smile, "that it is important? You see very well that I was only joking, and that I did it only to pass away the time."

"Ah! my friend, my friend," said Brigitte, "it is a pity that you must seek pastimes."

A few days later I proposed that we go to the prefecture to see Madame Daniel dance; she unwillingly consented. While she was arranging her toilette, I sat near the window and reproached her for losing her former cheerfulness.

"What is the matter with you?" I asked. (I knew as well as she.) "Why that morose air that never leaves you? In truth, you make our life quite sad. I have known you when you were more joyous, more free and more open; I am not flattered by the thought that I am responsible for the change. But you have a cloistral disposition; you were born to live in a convent."

It was Sunday; as we were driving down the road Brigitte ordered the carriage to stop in order to say good-evening to some friends, fresh and vigorous country girls, who were going to dance at Tilleuls. When they had gone on, Brigitte followed them with, longing

eyes; her little rustic dance was very dear to her; she dried her eyes with her handkerchief.

We found Madame Daniel at the prefecture in high feather. I danced with her so often that it excited comment; I paid her a thousand compliments and she replied as best she could.

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Brigitte was near us, and her eyes never left us. I can hardly describe what I felt; it was both pleasure and pain. I clearly saw that she was jealous; but instead of being moved by it I did all I could to increase her suffering.

On the return I expected to hear her reproaches; she made none, but remained silent for three days. When I came to see her she would greet me kindly; then we would sit down facing each other, both of us preoccupied, hardly exchanging a word. The third day she spoke, overwhelmed me with bitter reproaches, told me that my conduct was unreasonable, that she could not account for it except on the supposition that I had ceased to love her; but she could not endure this life and would resort to anything rather than submit to my caprices and coldness. Her eyes were full of tears, and I was about to ask her pardon when some words escaped her that were so bitter that my pride revolted. I replied in the same tone, and our quarrel became violent.

I told her that it was absurd to suppose that I could not inspire enough confidence in my mistress to escape the necessity of explaining my every action; that Madame Daniel was only a pretext; that she very well knew I did not think of that woman seriously; that her pretended jealousy was nothing but the expression of her desire for despotic power, and that, moreover, if she had tired of this life, it was easy enough to put an end to it.

"Very well," she replied; "it is true that I do not recognize you as the same man I first knew; you doubtless performed a little comedy to persuade me that you loved me; you are tired of your role and can think of nothing but abuse. You suspect me of deceiving you upon the first word, and I am under no obligation to submit to your insults. You are no longer the man I loved."

"I know what your sufferings are," I replied. "I can not make a step without exciting your alarm. Soon I shall not be permitted to address a word to any one but you. You pretend that you have been abused in order that you may be justified in offering insult; you accuse me of tyranny in order that I may become your slave. Since I trouble your repose, I leave you in peace; you will never see me again."

We parted in anger, and I passed an entire day without seeing her. The next night, toward midnight, I was seized by a feeling of melancholy that I could not resist. I shed a torrent of tears; I overwhelmed myself with reproaches that I richly deserved. I told myself that I was nothing but a fool, and a cowardly fool at that, to make the noblest, the best of creatures, suffer in this way. I ran to her to throw myself at her feet.

Entering the garden, I saw that her room was lighted and a flash of suspicion crossed my mind. "She does not expect me at this hour," I said to myself; "who knows what she may be doing. I left her in tears yesterday; I may find her ready to sing to-day and caring no more for me than if I never existed. I must enter gently, in order to surprise her."

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I advanced on tiptoe, and the door being open, I could see Brigitte without being seen.

She was seated at her table and was writing in that same book that had aroused my suspicions. She held in her left hand a little box of white wood which she looked at from time to time and trembled. There was something sinister in the quiet that reigned in the room. Her secretary was open and several bundles of papers were carefully ranged in order.

I made some noise at the door. She rose, went to the secretary, closed it, then came to me with a smile:

"Octave," she said, "we are two children. If you had not come here, I should have gone to you. Pardon me, I was wrong. Madame Daniel comes to dinner to-morrow; make me repent, if you choose, of what you call my despotism. If you but love me I am happy; let us forget what is past and let us not spoil our happiness."

CHAPTER III

EXPLANATIONS

But quarrel had been, so to speak, less sad than our reconciliation; it was attended, on Brigitte's part, by a mystery which frightened me at first and then planted in my soul the seeds of constant dread.

There developed in me, in spite of my struggles, the two elements of misfortune which the past had bequeathed me: at times furious jealousy attended by reproaches and insults; at other times a cruel gayety, an affected cheerfulness, that mockingly outraged whatever I held most dear. Thus the inexorable spectres of the past pursued me without respite; thus Brigitte, seeing herself treated alternately as a faithless mistress and a shameless woman, fell into a condition of melancholy that clouded our entire life; and worst of all, that sadness even, the cause of which I knew, was not the most burdensome of our sorrows. I was young and I loved pleasure; that daily association with a woman older than I, who suffered and languished, that face, more and more serious, which was always before me, all this repelled my youth and aroused within me bitter regrets for the liberty I had lost.

One night we were passing through the forest in the beautiful light of the moon, and both experienced a profound melancholy. Brigitte looked at me in pity. We sat down on a rock near a wild gorge and passed two entire hours there; her half-veiled eyes plunged into my soul, crossing a glance from mine; then wandered to nature, to the heavens and the valley.

"Ah! my dear child," she said, "how I pity you! You do not love me."

To reach that rock we had to travel two leagues; two more in returning makes four. Brigitte was afraid of neither fatigue nor darkness. We set out at eleven at night, expecting to reach home some time in the morning. When we went on long tramps she always dressed in a blue blouse and the apparel of a man, saying that skirts were not made for bushes. She walked before me in the sand with a firm step

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and such a charming mingling of feminine delicacy and childlike innocence, that I stopped every few moments to look at her. It seemed that, once started, she had to accomplish a difficult but sacred task; she walked in front like a soldier, her arms swinging, her voice ringing through the woods in song; suddenly she would turn, come to me and kiss me. This was on the outward journey; on the return she leaned on my arm; then more songs, confidences, tender avowals in low tones, although we were alone, two leagues from anywhere. I do not recall a single word spoken on the return that was not of love or friendship.

Another night we struck out through the woods, leaving the road which led to the rock. Brigitte was tramping along so stoutly and her little velvet cap on her light hair made her look so much like a resolute youth, that I forgot she was a woman when there were no obstacles in our path. More than once she was obliged to call me to her aid when I, without thinking of her, had pushed on ahead. I can not describe the effect produced on me in the clear night air, in the midst of the forest, by that voice of hers, half-joyous and half-plaintive, coming, as it were, from that little schoolboy body wedged in between roots and trunks of trees, unable to advance. I took her in my arms.

“Come, Madame,” I cried, laughing, “you are a pretty little mountaineer, but you are blistering your white hands, and in spite of your hobnailed shoes, your stick and your martial air, I see that you must be carried.”

We arrived at the rock breathless; about my body was strapped a leather belt to which was attached a wicker bottle. When we were seated on the rock, my dear Brigitte asked for the bottle; I had lost it, as well as a tinder-box which served another purpose: that was to read the inscriptions on the guide-posts when we went astray, which occurred frequently. At such times I would climb the posts, and read the half-effaced inscription by the light of the tinder-box; all this in play, like the children that we were. At a crossroad we would have to examine not one guide-post but five or six until the right one was found. But this time we had lost our baggage on the way.

“Very well,” said Brigitte, “we will pass the night here, as I am rather tired. This rock will make a hard bed, but we can cover it with dry leaves. Let us sit down and make the best of it.”

The night was superb; the moon was rising behind us; I looked at it over my left shoulder. Brigitte was watching the lines of the wooded hills as they began to outline themselves against the background of sky. As the light flooded the copse and threw its halo over sleeping nature, Brigitte’s song became more gentle and more melancholy. Then she bent over, and, throwing her arms around my neck, said:

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“Do not think that I do not understand your heart or that I would reproach you for what you make me suffer. It is not your fault, my friend, if you have not the power to forget your past life; you have loved me in good faith and I shall never regret, although I should die for it, the day I gave myself to you. You thought you were entering upon a new life, and that with me you would forget the women who had deceived you. Alas! Octave, I used to smile at that precocious experience which you said you had been through, and of which I heard you boast like a child who knows nothing of life. I thought I had but to will it, and all that there was that was good in your heart would come to your lips with my first kiss. You, too, believed it, but we were both mistaken.

“Oh, my child! You have in your heart a plague that can not be cured; that woman who deceived you, how you must have loved her! Yes, more than you love me, alas! much more, since with all my poor love I can not efface her image; she must have deceived you most cruelly, since it is in vain that I am faithful!

“And the others, those wretches who then poisoned your youth! The pleasures they sold must have been terrible since you ask me to imitate them! You remember them with me! Alas! my dear child, that is too cruel. I like you better when you are unjust and furious, when you reproach me for imaginary crimes and avenge on me the wrong done you by others, than when you are under the influence of that frightful gayety, when you assume that air of hideous mockery, when that mask of scorn affronts my eyes.

“Tell me, Octave, why that? Why those moments when you speak of love with contempt and rail at the most sacred mysteries of love? What frightful power over your irritable nerves has that life you have led, that such insults should mount to your lips in spite of you? Yes, in spite of you; for your heart is noble, you blush at your own blasphemy; you love me too much, not to suffer when you see me suffer. Ah! I know you now. The first time I saw you thus, I was seized with a feeling of terror of which I can give you no idea. I thought you were only a r  le, that you had deliberately deceived me by feigning a love you did not feel, and that I saw you such as you really were. O my friend! I thought it was time to die; what a night I passed! You do not know my life; you do not know that I who speak to you have had an experience as terrible as yours. Alas! life is sweet only to those who do not know life.

“You are not, my dear Octave, the only man I have loved. There is hidden in my heart a fatal story that I wish you to know. My father destined me, when I was quite young, for the only son of an old friend. They were neighbors and each owned a little domain of almost equal value. The two families saw each other every day, and lived, so to speak, together. My father died; my mother had been dead some time. I lived with the aunt whom you know. A journey she was compelled to take forced her to confide me to the care of my future father-in-law. He called me his daughter, and it was so well known about the country that I was to marry his son that we were allowed the greatest liberty together.

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“That young man, whose name you need not know, appeared to love me. What had been friendship from infancy became love in time. He began to tell me of the happiness that awaited us; he spoke of his impatience, I was only one year younger than he; but he had made the acquaintance of a man of dissipated habits who lived in the vicinity, a sort of adventurer, and had listened to his evil suggestions. While I was yielding to his caresses with the confidence of a child, he resolved to deceive his father, and to abandon me after he had ruined me.

“His father called us into his room one evening and, in the presence of the family, set the day of our wedding. The very evening before that day he had met me in the garden and had spoken to me of love with more force than usual; he said that since the time was set, we were just the same as married, and for that matter had been in the eyes of God, ever since our birth. I have no other excuse to offer than my youth, my ignorance, and my confidence in him. I gave myself to him before becoming his wife, and eight days afterward he left his father’s house. He fled with a woman his new friend had introduced to him; he wrote that he had gone to Germany and that we should never see him again.

“That is, in a word, the story of my life; my husband knew it as you now know it. I am proud, my child, and I have sworn that no man shall ever make me again suffer what I suffered then. I saw you and forgot my oath, but not my sorrow. You must treat me gently; if you are sick, I am also; we must care for each other. You see, Octave, I, too, know what it is to call up memories of the past. It inspires me at times with cruel terror; I should have more courage than you, for perhaps I have suffered more. It is my place to begin; my heart is not sure of itself, I am still very feeble; my life in this village was so tranquil before you came! I had promised myself that it should never change! All this makes me exacting.

“Ah! well, it does not matter, I am yours. You have told me, in your better moments, that Providence appointed me to watch over you as a mother. Yes, when you make me suffer I do not look upon you as a lover, but as a sick child, fretful and rebellious, that I must care for and cure in order that I may always keep him and love him. May God give me that power!” she added looking up to heaven. “May God who sees me, who hears us, may the God of mothers and of lovers permit me to accomplish that task! When I feel as if I should sink under it, when my pride rebels, when my heart is breaking, when all my life—”

She could not finish; her tears choked her. Oh, God! I saw her there on her knees, her hands clasped on the rock; she swayed in the breeze as did the bushes about us. Frail and sublime creature! she prayed for her love. I raised her in my arms.

“Oh! my only friend,” I cried, “oh! my mistress, my mother, and my sister! Pray also for me that I may be able to love you as you deserve. Pray that I may have the courage to

live; that my heart may be cleansed in your tears; that it may become a holy offering before God and that we may share it together.”



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All was silent about us; above our heads spread the heavens resplendent with stars.

"Do you remember," I said, "do you remember the first day?"

From that night we never returned to that spot. That rock was an altar which has retained its purity; it is one of the visions of my life, and it still passes before my eyes wreathed in spotless white.

CHAPTER IV

BRIGITTE'S LOSS

As I was crossing the public square one evening I saw two men standing together; one of them said:

"It appears to me that he has ill-treated her."

"It is her fault," replied the other; "why choose such a man? He has known only public women; she is paying the price of her folly."

I advanced in the darkness to see who was speaking thus, and to hear more if possible; but they passed on as soon as they spied me.

I found Brigitte much disturbed; her aunt was seriously ill; she had time for only a few words with me. I did not see her for an entire week; I knew that she had summoned a physician from Paris; finally she sent for me.

"My aunt is dead," she said; "I lose the only one left me on earth, I am now alone in the world, and I am going to leave the country."

"Am I, then, nothing to you?"

"Yes, my friend; you know that I love you, and I often believe that you love me. But how can I count on you? I am your mistress, alas! but you are not my lover. It is for you that Shakespeare has written these sad words: 'Make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal.' And I, Octave," she added, pointing to her mourning costume, "I am reduced to a single color, and I shall not change it for a long time."

"Leave the country if you choose; I will either kill myself or I will follow you. Ah! Brigitte," I continued, throwing myself on my knees before her, "you thought you were alone when your aunt died! That is the most cruel punishment you could inflict on me; never have I so keenly felt the misery of my love for you. You must retract those terrible words; I deserve them, but they will kill me. Oh, God! can it be true that I count for

nothing in your life, or that I am an influence in your life only because of the evil I have done you!"

"I do not know," she said, "who is busying himself in our affairs; certain insinuations, mixed with idle gossip, have been set afloat in the village and in the neighboring country. Some say that I have been ruined; others accuse me of imprudence and folly; others represent you as a cruel and dangerous man. Some one has spied into our most secret thoughts; things that I thought no one else knew, events in your life and sad scenes to which they have led, are known to others; my poor aunt spoke to me about it not long ago, and she knew it some time before speaking to me. Who knows but that that has hastened her death?"

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“When I meet my old friends in the street, they either treat me coldly, or turn aside. Even my dear peasant girls, those good girls who love me so much, shrug their shoulders when they see my place empty at the Sunday afternoon balls. How has that come about? I do not know, nor do you, I suppose; but I must go away, I can not endure it. And my aunt’s death, so sudden, so unexpected, above all, this solitude! this empty room! Courage fails me; my friend, my friend, do not abandon me!”

She wept; in an adjoining room I saw her household goods in disorder, a trunk on the floor, everything indicating preparations for departure. It was evident that, at the time of her aunt’s death, Brigitte had tried to go away without seeing me, but could not. She was so overwhelmed with emotion that she could hardly speak; her condition was pitiful, and it was I who had brought her to it. Not only was she unhappy, but she was insulted in public, and the man who ought to be her support and her consolation in such an hour was the cause of all her troubles.

I felt the wrong I had done her so keenly that I was overcome with shame. After so many promises, so much useless exaltation, so many plans and hopes, what had I, in fact, accomplished in three months? I thought I had a treasure in my heart, and out of it came nothing but malice, the shadow of a dream, and the misfortune of a woman I adored. For the first time I found myself really face to face with myself. Brigitte reproached me for nothing; she had tried to go away and could not; she was ready to suffer still. I suddenly asked myself whether I ought not to leave her, whether it was not my duty to flee from her and rid her of the scourge of my presence.

I arose, and, passing into the next room, sat down on Brigitte’s trunk. There I leaned my head on my hand and sat motionless. I looked about me at the confused piles of goods. Alas! I knew them all; my heart was not so hardened that it could not be moved by the memories which they awakened. I began to calculate all the harm I had done; I saw my dear Brigitte walking under the lindens with her goat beside her.

“O man!” I mused, “and by what right?—how dared you come to this house, and lay hands on this woman? Who has ordained that she should suffer for you? You array yourself in fine linen, and set out, sleek and happy, for the home where your mistress languishes; you throw yourself upon the cushions where she has just knelt in prayer, for you and for her, and you gently stroke those delicate hands that still tremble. You think it no evil to inflame a poor heart, and you perorate as warmly in your deliriums of love as the wretched lawyer who comes with red eyes from a suit he has lost. You play the infant prodigy in making sport of suffering; you find it amusing to occupy your leisure moments in committing murder by means of little pin pricks.

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"What will you say to the living God, when your work is finished? What will become of the woman who loves you? Where will you fall while she leans on you for support? With what face will you one day bury your pale and wretched creature, just as she buried the last man who protected her? Yes, yes, you will doubtless have to bury her, for your love kills and consumes; you have devoted her to the Furies and it is she who appeases them. If you follow that woman you will be the cause of her death. Take care! her guardian angel hesitates; he has just knocked at the door of this house, in order to frighten away a fatal and shameful passion! He inspired Brigitte with the idea of flight; at this moment he may be whispering in her ear his final warning. O assassin! O murderer! Beware! it is a matter of life and death."

Thus I communed with myself; then on the sofa I caught sight of a little gingham dress, folded and ready to be packed in the trunk. It had been a witness of our happy days. I took it up and examined it.

"Must I leave you?" I said to it; "Must I lose you? O little dress, would you go away without me?"

No, I can not abandon Brigitte; in these circumstances it would be cowardly. She has just lost her aunt, and is all alone; she is exposed to the power of I know not what enemy. Can it be Mercanson? He may have spoken of my conversation with him, and, seeing that I was jealous of Dalens, may have guessed the rest. Assuredly he is the snake who has been hissing about my well-beloved flower. I must punish him, and I must repair the wrong I have done Brigitte. Fool that I am! I think of leaving her, when I ought to consecrate my life to her, to the expiation of my sins, to rendering her happy after the tears I have drawn from her eyes-when I am her only support in the world, her only friend, her only protector! when I ought to follow her to the end of the world, to shelter her with my body, to console her for having loved me, for having given herself to me!

"Brigitte!" I cried, returning to her room, "wait an hour for me, and I will return."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Wait for me," I replied, "do not set out without me. Remember the words of Ruth: 'Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.'"

I left her precipitately, and rushed out to find Mercanson. I was told that he had gone out, and I entered his house to wait for him.

I sat in the corner of the room on a priest's chair before a dirty black table. I was becoming impatient when I recalled my duel on account of my first mistress.



“I received a wound from a bullet and am still a fool,” I said to myself. “What have I come to do here? This priest will not fight; if I seek a quarrel with him, he will say that his priestly robes forbid, and he will continue his vile gossip when I have gone. Moreover, for what can I hold him responsible? What is it that has disturbed Brigitte? They say that her reputation has been sullied, that I ill-treat her, and that she ought not to submit to it. What stupidity! That concerns no one; there is nothing to do but allow them to talk; in such a case, to notice an insult is to give it importance.

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"Is it possible to prevent provincials from talking about their neighbors? Can any one prevent a gossip from maligning a woman who loves? What measures can be taken to stop a public rumor? If they say that I ill-treat her, it is for me—to prove the contrary by my conduct with her, and not by violence. It would be as ridiculous to seek a quarrel with Mercanson as to leave the country on account of gossip. No, we must not leave the country; that would be a bad move; that would be to say to all the world that there is truth in its idle rumors, and to give excuse to the gossips. We must neither go away nor take any notice of such things."

I returned to Brigitte. A half hour had passed, and I had changed my mind three times. I dissuaded her from her plans; I told her what I had just done and why I had not carried out my first impulse. She listened resignedly, yet she wished to go away; the house where her aunt had died had become odious to her. Much effort and persuasion on my part were required to get her to consent to remain; finally I accomplished it. We repeated that we would despise the world, that we would yield nothing, that we would not change our manner of life. I swore that my love should console her for all her sorrows, and she pretended to hope for the best. I told her that this circumstance had so enlightened me in the matter of the wrongs I had done her, that my conduct would prove my repentance, that I would drive from me as a phantom all the evil that remained in my heart; that hence forth she should not be offended either by my pride or by my caprices; and thus, sad and patient, her arms around my neck, she yielded obedience to the pure caprice that I myself mistook for a flash of reason.

One day I saw a little chamber she called her oratory; there was no furniture except a prie-dieu and a little altar with a cross and some vases of flowers. As for the rest, the walls and curtains were as white as snow. She shut herself up in that room at times, but rarely since I had known her.

I stepped to the door and saw Brigitte seated on the floor in the middle of the room, surrounded by the flowers she was throwing here and there. She held in her hand a little wreath that appeared to be made of dried grass, and she was breaking it in pieces.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She trembled and stood up.

"It is nothing but a child's plaything," she said; "it is a rose wreath that has faded here in the oratory; I have come here to change my flowers, as I have not attended to them for some time."

Her voice trembled, and she appeared to be about to faint. I recalled that name of Brigitte la Rose that I had heard given her. I asked her whether it was not her crown of roses that she had just broken thus.

“No,” she replied, turning pale.

“Yes,” I cried, “yes, on my life! Give me the pieces.”

I gathered them up and placed them on the altar, then I was silent, my eyes fixed on the offering.



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"Was I not right," she asked, "if it was my crown, to take it from the wall where it has hung so long?"

"Of what use are these remains? Brigitte la Rose is no more, nor the flowers that baptized her." She went out. I heard her sobs, and the door closed on me; I fell on my knees and wept bitterly. When I returned to her room, I found her waiting for me; dinner was ready. I took my place in silence, and not a word was said of what was in our hearts.

CHAPTER V

A TORTURED SOUL

It was Mercanson who had repeated in the village and in the chateau my conversation with him about Dalens and the suspicions that, in spite of myself, I had allowed him clearly to see. Every one knows how bad news travels in the provinces, flying from mouth to mouth and growing as it flies; that is what had happened in this case.

Brigitte and I found ourselves face to face with each other in a new position. However feebly she may have tried to flee, she had nevertheless made the attempt. It was on account of my prayers that she remained; there was an obligation implied. I was under oath not to grieve her either by my jealousy or my levity; every thoughtless or mocking word that escaped me was a sin, every sorrowful glance from her was a reproach acknowledged and merited.

Her simple good-nature gave a charm even to solitude; she could see me now at all hours without resorting to any precaution. Perhaps she consented to this arrangement in order to prove to me that she valued her love more highly than her reputation; she seemed to regret having shown that she cared for the representations of malice. At any rate, instead of making any attempt to disarm criticism or thwart curiosity, we lived the freest kind of life, more regardless of public opinion than ever.

For some time I kept my word, and not a cloud troubled our life. These were happy days, but it is not of these that I would speak.

It was said everywhere about the country that Brigitte was living publicly with a libertine from Paris; that her lover ill-treated her, that they spent their time quarrelling, and that she would come to a bad end. As they had praised Brigitte for her conduct in the past, so they blamed her now. There was nothing in her past life, even, that was not picked to pieces and misrepresented. Her lonely tramps over the mountains, when engaged in works of charity, suddenly became the subject of quibbles and of raillery. They spoke of her as of a woman who had lost all human respect and who deserved the frightful misfortunes she was drawing down on her head.

I had told Brigitte that it was best to let them talk and pay no attention to them; but the truth is, it became insupportable to me. I sometimes tried to catch a word that could be construed as an insult and to demand an explanation. I listened to whispered conversations in a salon where I was visiting, but could hear nothing; in order to do us better justice they waited until I had gone. I returned to Brigitte and told her that all these stories were mere nonsense; that it was foolish to notice them; that they could talk about us as much as they pleased and we would care nothing about it.

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Was I not terribly mistaken? If Brigitte was imprudent, was it not my place to be cautious and ward off danger? On the contrary, I took, so to speak, the part of the world against her.

I began by indifference; I was soon to grow malignant.

“It is true,” I said, “that they speak evil of your nocturnal excursions. Are you sure that they are wrong? Has nothing happened in those romantic grottoes and by-paths in the forest? Have you never accepted the arm of an unknown as you accepted mine? Was it merely charity that served as your divinity in that beautiful temple of verdure that you visited so bravely?”

Brigitte’s glance when I adopted this tone I shall never forget; I shuddered at it myself. “But, bah!” I thought, “she would do the same thing that my other mistress did—she would point me out as a ridiculous fool, and I should pay for it all in the eyes of the public.”

Between the man who doubts and the man who denies there is only a step. All philosophy is akin to atheism. Having told Brigitte that I suspected her past conduct, I began to regard it with real suspicion.

I came to imagine that Brigitte was deceiving me, she who never left me at any hour of the day; I sometimes planned long absences in order to test her, as I supposed; but in truth it was only to give myself some excuse for suspicion and mockery. And then I took pleasure in observing that I had outgrown my foolish jealousy, which was the same as saying that I no longer esteemed her highly enough to be jealous of her.

At first I kept such thoughts to myself, but soon found pleasure in revealing them to Brigitte. We had gone out for a walk:

“That dress is pretty,” I said, “such and such a girl, belonging to one of my friends, has one like it.”

We were now seated at table.

“Come, my dear, my former mistress used to sing for me at dessert; you promised, you know, to imitate her.”

She sat down at the piano.

“Ah! pardon me, but will you play that waltz that was so popular last winter? That will remind me of happy times.”

Reader, this lasted six months: for six long months Brigitte, scandalized, exposed to the insults of the world, had to endure from me all the wrongs that a wrathful and cruel libertine can inflict on woman.

After these distressing scenes, in which my own spirit exhausted itself in suffering and in painful contemplation of the past; after recovering from that frenzy, a strange access of love, an extreme exaltation, led me to treat my mistress like an idol, or a divinity. A quarter of an hour after insulting her I was on my knees before her; when I was not accusing her of some crime, I was begging her pardon; when I was not mocking, I was weeping. Then, seized by a delirium of joy, I almost lost my reason in the violence of my transports; I did not know what to do, what to say, what to think, in order to repair the evil I had done.

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I took Brigitte in my arms, and made her repeat a hundred times that she loved me and that she pardoned me. I threatened to expiate my evil deeds by blowing out my brains if I ever ill-treated her again. These periods of exaltation sometimes lasted several hours, during which time I exhausted myself in foolish expressions of love and esteem. Then morning came; day appeared; I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and I awakened with a smile on my lips, mocking at everything, believing in nothing.

During these terrible hours, Brigitte appeared to forget that there was a man in me other than the one she saw. When I asked her pardon she shrugged her shoulders as if to answer: "Do you not know that I pardon you?" She would not complain as long as a spark of love remained in my heart; she assured me that all was good and sweet coming from me, insults as well as tears.

And yet as time passed my evil grew worse, my moments of malignity and irony became more sombre and intractable. A real physical fever attended my outbursts of passion; I awakened trembling in every limb and covered with cold sweat. Brigitte, too, although she did not complain of it, began to fail in health. When I started to abuse her she would leave me without a word and lock herself in her room. Thank God, I never raised my hand against her; in my most violent moments I would rather have died than touched her.

One evening the rain was driving against the windows; we were alone, the curtains were closed.

"I am in happy humor this evening," I said to Brigitte, "and yet the horrible weather saddens me. Let us seek some diversion in spite of the storm."

I arose and lighted all the candles I could find. The room was small and the illumination brilliant. At the same time a bright fire threw out a stifling heat:

"Come," I said, "what shall we do while waiting for supper?"

I happened to remember that it was carnival time in Paris I seemed to see the carriages filled with masks crossing the boulevards. I heard the shouts of the crowds before the theatres; I saw the lascivious dances, the gay costumes, the wine and the folly; all my youth bounded in my heart.

"Let us disguise ourselves," I said to Brigitte. "It will be for our own amusement, but what does that matter? If you have no costumes we can make them, and pass away the time agreeably."

We searched in the closet for dresses, cloaks, and artificial flowers; Brigitte, as usual, was patient and cheerful. We both arranged a sort of travesty; she wished to dress my



hair herself; we painted and powdered ourselves freely; all that we lacked was found in an old chest that had belonged, I believe, to the aunt. In an hour we could not recognize each other. The evening passed in singing, in a thousand follies; toward one o'clock in the morning it was time for supper.

We had ransacked all the closets; there was one near me that remained open. While sitting down at the table, I perceived on a shelf the book of which I have already spoken, the one in which Brigitte was accustomed to write.

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"Is it not a collection of your thoughts?" I asked, stretching out my hand and taking the book down. "If I may, allow me to look at it."

I opened the book, although Brigitte made a gesture as if to prevent me; on the first page I read these words:

"This is my last will and testament."

Everything was written in a firm hand; I found first a faithful recital of all that Brigitte had suffered on my account since she had been my mistress. She announced her firm determination to endure everything, so long as I loved her, and to die when I left her. Her daily life was recorded there; what she had lost, what she had hoped, the isolation she experienced even in my presence, the barrier that was growing up between us; the cruelties I subjected her to in return for her love and her resignation. All this was written down without a complaint; on the contrary she undertook to justify me. Then followed personal details, the disposition of her effects. She would end her life by poison, she wrote. She would die by her own hand and expressly forbade that her death should be charged to me. "Pray for him!" were her last words.

I found in the closet on the same shelf a little box that I remembered I had seen before, filled with a fine bluish powder resembling salt.

"What is this?" I asked of Brigitte, raising the box to my lips. She gave vent to a scream of terror and threw herself upon me.

"Brigitte," I said, "bid me farewell. I shall carry this box away with me; you will forget me, and you will live if you wish to save me from becoming a murderer. I shall set out this very night; you will agree with me that God demands it. Give me a last kiss."

I bent over her and kissed her forehead.

"Not yet!" she cried, in anguish. But I repulsed her and left the room.

Three hours later I was ready to set out, and the horses were at the door. It was still raining when I entered the carriage. At the moment the carriage was starting, I felt two arms about my body and a sob which spent itself on my lips.

It was Brigitte. I did all I could to persuade her to remain; I ordered the driver to stop; I even told her that I would return to her when time should have effaced the memory of the wrongs I had done her. I forced myself to prove to her that yesterday was the same as to-day, to-day as yesterday; I repeated that I could only render her unhappy, that to attach herself to me was but to make an assassin of me. I resorted to prayers, to vows, to threats even; her only reply was: "You are going away; take me, let us take leave of the country, let us take leave of the past. We can not live here; let us go elsewhere,

wherever you please; let us go and die together in some remote corner of the world. We must be happy, I by you, you by me."

I kissed her with such passion that I feared my heart would burst.

"Drive on!" I cried to the coachman. We threw ourselves into each other's arms, and the horses set out at a gallop.

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ETEXT *editor's bookmarks:*

Adieu, my son, I love you and I die
All philosophy is akin to atheism
And when love is sure of itself and knows response
Can any one prevent a gossip
Each one knows what the other is about to say
Good and bad days succeeded each other almost regularly
Great sorrows neither accuse nor blaspheme—they listen
Happiness of being pursued
He who is loved by a beautiful woman is sheltered from every blow
I neither love nor esteem sadness
It is a pity that you must seek pastimes
Man who suffers wishes to make her whom he loves suffer
No longer esteemed her highly enough to be jealous of her
Pure caprice that I myself mistook for a flash of reason
Quarrel had been, so to speak, less sad than our reconciliation
She pretended to hope for the best
Terrible words; I deserve them, but they will kill me
There are two different men in you
We have had a mass celebrated, and it cost us a large sum
What human word will ever express thy slightest caress
What you take for love is nothing more than desire

CONFESSION OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

(Confession d'un Enfant du Siecle)

By Alfred de musset

BOOK 3.

PART V

CHAPTER I

SWEET ANTICIPATIONS

Having decided on a long tour, we went first to Paris; the necessary preparations required time, and we took a furnished apartment for one month. The decision to leave France had changed everything: joy, hope, confidence, all returned; no more sorrow, no

more grief over approaching separation. We had now nothing but dreams of happiness and vows of eternal love; I wished, once for all, to make my dear mistress forget all the suffering I had caused her. How had I been able to resist such proof of tender affection and courageous resignation? Not only did Brigitte pardon me, but she was willing to make a still greater sacrifice and leave everything for me. As I felt myself unworthy of the devotion she exhibited, I wished to requite her by my love; at last my good angel had triumphed, and admiration and love resumed their sway in my heart. Brigitte and I examined a map to determine where we should go and bury ourselves from the world. We had not yet decided, and we found pleasure in that very uncertainty; while glancing over the map we said "Where shall we go? What shall we do? Where shall we begin life anew?" How shall I tell how deeply I repented my cruelty when I looked upon her smiling face, a face that laughed at the future, although still pale from the sorrows of the past! Blissful projects of future joy,

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you are perhaps the only true happiness known to man! For eight days we spent our time making purchases and preparing for our departure; then a young man presented himself at our apartments: he brought letters to Brigitte. After their interview I found her sad and distraught; but I could not guess the cause unless the letters were from N-----, that village where I had confessed my love and where Brigitte's only relatives lived. Nevertheless, our preparations progressed rapidly and I became impatient to get away; at the same time I was so happy that I could hardly rest. When I arose in the morning and the sun was shining through our windows, I experienced such transports of joy that I was almost intoxicated with happiness. So anxious was I to prove the sincerity of my love for Brigitte that I hardly dared kiss the hem of her skirt. Her lightest words made me tremble as if her voice were strange to me; I alternated between tears and laughter, and I never spoke of the past except with horror and disgust. Our room was full of personal effects scattered about in disorder—albums, pictures, books, and the dear map we loved so much. We went to and fro about the little apartment; at brief intervals I would stop and kneel before Brigitte who would call me an idler, saying that she had to do all the work, and that I was good for nothing; and all sorts of projects flitted through our minds. Sicily was far away, but the winters are so delightful there! Genoa is very pretty with its painted houses, its green gardens, and the Apennines in the background! But what noise! What crowds! Among every three men on the street, one is a monk and another a soldier. Florence is sad, it is the Middle Ages living in the midst of modern life. How can any one endure those grilled windows and that horrible brown color with which all the houses are tinted?

What could we do at Rome? We were not travelling in order to forget ourselves, much less for the sake of instruction. To the Rhine? But the season was over, and although we did not care for the world of fashion, still it is sad to visit its haunts when it has fled. But Spain? Too many restrictions there; one travels like an army on the march, and may expect everything except repose. Switzerland? Too many people go there, and most of them are deceived as to the nature of its attractions; but in that land are unfolded the three most beautiful colors on God's earth: the azure of the sky, the verdure of the plains, and the whiteness of the snows on the summits of glaciers.

"Let us go, let us go!" cried Brigitte, "let us fly away like two birds. Let us pretend, my dear Octave, that we met each other only yesterday. You met me at a ball, I pleased you and I love you; you tell me that some leagues distant, in a certain little town, you loved a certain Madame Pierson; what passed between you and her I do not know. You will not tell me the story of your love for another! And I will whisper to you that not long since I loved a terrible fellow who made me very unhappy; you will reprove me and close my mouth, and we will agree never to speak of such things."

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When Brigitte spoke thus I experienced a feeling that resembled avarice; I caught her in my arms and cried:

“Oh, God! I know not whether it is with joy or with fear that I tremble. I am about to carry off my treasure. Die, my youth; die, all memories of the past; die, all cares and regrets! Oh, my, good, my brave Brigitte! You have made a man out of a child. If I lose you now, I shall never love again. Perhaps, before I knew you, another woman might have cured me; but now you alone, of all the world, have power to destroy me or to save me, for I bear in my heart the wound of all the evil I have done you. I have been an ingrate, blind and cruel. God be praised! You love me still. If you ever return to that home under whose lindens I first met you, look carefully about that deserted house; you will find a phantom there, for the man who left it, and went away with you, is not the man who entered it.”

“Is it true?” said Brigitte, and her face, all radiant with love, was raised to heaven; “is it true that I am yours? Yes, far from this odious world in which you have grown old before your time, yes, my child, you shall really love. I shall have you as you are, and, wherever we go you will make me forget the possibility of a day when you will no longer love me. My mission will have been accomplished, and I shall always be thankful for it.”

Finally we decided to go to Geneva and then choose some resting place in the Alps. Brigitte was enthusiastic about the lake; I thought I could already breathe the air which floats over its surface, and the odor of the verdure-clad valley; already I beheld Lausanne, Vevey, Oberland, and in the distance the summits of Monte Rosa and the immense plain of Lombardy. Already oblivion, repose, travel, all the delights of happy solitude invited us; already, when in the evening with joined hands, we looked at each other in silence, we felt rising within us that sentiment of strange grandeur which takes possession of the heart on the eve of a long journey, the mysterious and indescribable vertigo which has in it something of the terrors of exile and the hopes of pilgrimage. Are there not in the human mind wings that flutter and sonorous chords that vibrate? How shall I describe it? Is there not a world of meaning in the simple words: “All is ready, we are about to go”?

Suddenly Brigitte became languid; she bowed her head in silence. When I asked her whether she was in pain, she said “No!” in a voice that was scarcely audible; when I spoke of our departure, she arose, cold and resigned, and continued her preparations; when I swore to her that she was going to be happy, and that I would consecrate my life to her, she shut herself up in her room and wept; when I kissed her she turned pale, and averted her eyes as my lips approached hers; when I told her that nothing had yet been done, that it was not too late to renounce our plans, she frowned severely; when I begged her to open her heart to me and told her I would die rather than cause her one regret, she threw her arms about my neck, then stopped and repulsed me as if involuntarily. Finally, I entered her room holding in my hand a ticket on which our places

were marked for the carriage to Besancon. I approached her and placed it in her lap; she stretched out her hand, screamed, and fell unconscious at my feet.

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CHAPTER II

THE DEMON OF DOUBT

All my efforts to divine the cause of so unexpected a change were as vain as the questions I had first asked. Brigitte was ill, and remained obstinately silent. After an entire day passed in supplication and conjecture, I went out without knowing where I was going. Passing the Opera, I entered it from mere force of habit.

I could pay no attention to what was going on in the theatre, I was so overwhelmed with grief, so stupefied, that I did not live, so to speak, except in myself, and exterior objects made no impression on my senses. All my powers were centred on a single thought, and the more I turned it over in my head, the less clearly could I distinguish its meaning.

What obstacle was this that had so suddenly come between us and the realization of our fondest hopes? If it was merely some ordinary event or even an actual misfortune, such as an accident or the loss of a friend, why that obstinate silence? After all that Brigitte had done, when our dreams seemed about to be realized, what could be the nature of a secret that destroyed our happiness and could not be confided to me? What! to conceal it from me! And yet I could not find it in my heart to suspect her. The appearance of suspicion revolted me and filled me with horror. On the other hand, how could I conceive of inconstancy or of caprice in that woman, as I knew her? I was lost in an abyss of doubt, and I could not discover a gleam of light, the smallest point, on which to base conjecture.

In front of me in the gallery sat a young man whose face was not unknown to me. As often happens when one is preoccupied, I looked at him without thinking of him as a personal identity or trying to fit a name on him. Suddenly I recognized him: it was he who had brought letters to Brigitte from N----- . I arose and started to accost him without thinking what I was doing. He occupied a place that I could not reach without disturbing a large number of spectators, and I was forced to await the entr'acte.

My first thought was that if any one could enlighten me it was this young man. He had had several interviews with Madame Pierson in the last few days, and I recalled the fact that she was always much depressed after his visits. He had seen her the morning of the day she was taken ill.

The letters he brought Brigitte had not been shown me; it was possible that he knew the reason why our departure was delayed. Perhaps he did not know all the circumstances, but he could doubtless enlighten me as to the contents of those letters, and there was no reason why I should hesitate to question him. When the curtain fell, I followed him to the foyer; I do not know that he saw me coming, but he hastened away and entered a box. I determined to wait until he should come out, and stood looking at the box for

fifteen minutes. At last he appeared. I bowed and approached him. He hesitated a moment, then turned and disappeared down a stairway.

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My desire to speak to him had been too evident to admit of any other explanation than deliberate intention on his part to avoid me. He surely knew my face, and, whether he knew it or not, a man who sees another approaching him ought, at least, to wait for him. We were the only persons in the corridor at the time, and there could be no doubt he did not wish to speak to me. I did not dream of such impertinent treatment from a man whom I had cordially received at my apartments; why should he insult me? He could have no other excuse than a desire to avoid an awkward interview, during which questions might be asked which he did not care to answer. But why? This second mystery troubled me almost as much as the first. Although I tried to drive the thought from my head, that young man's action in avoiding me seemed to have some connection with Brigitte's obstinate silence.

Of all torments uncertainty is the most difficult to endure, and during my life I have exposed myself to many dangers because I could not wait patiently. When I returned to my apartments I found Brigitte reading those same fateful letters from N----- . I told her that I could not remain longer in suspense, and that I wished to be relieved from it at any cost; that I desired to know the cause of the sudden change which had taken place in her, and that, if she refused to speak, I should look upon her silence as a positive refusal to go abroad with me and an order for me to leave her forever.

She reluctantly handed me the letters she was reading. Her relatives had written her that her departure had disgraced them, that every one knew the circumstances, and that they felt it their duty to warn her of the consequences; that she was living openly as my mistress, and that, although she was a widow and free to do as she chose, she ought to think of the name she bore; that neither they nor her old friends would ever see her again if she persisted in her course; finally, by all sorts of threats and entreaties, they urged her to return.

The tone of the letter angered me, and at first I took it as an insult.

"And that young man who brings you these remonstrances," I cried, "doubtless has orders to deliver them personally, and does not fail to do his own part to the best of his ability. Am I not right?"

Brigitte's dejection made me reflect and calm my wrath.

"You will do as you wish, and achieve my ruin," she said. "My fate rests with you; you have been for a long time my master. Avenge as you please the last effort my old friends have made to recall me to reason, to the world that I formerly respected, to the honor that I have lost. I have not a word to say, and if you wish to dictate my reply, I will obey you."



"I care to know nothing," I replied, "but your intentions; it is for me to comply with your wishes, and I assure you I am ready to do it. Tell me, do you desire to remain, to go away, or shall I go alone?"

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"Why that question?" asked Brigitte; "have I said that I had changed my mind? I am suffering, and can not travel in my present condition, but when I recover we will go to Geneva as we have planned."

We separated at these words, and the coldness with which she had expressed her resolution saddened me more than usual. It was not the first time our liaison had been threatened by her relatives; but up to this time whatever letters Brigitte had received she had never taken them so much to heart. How could I bring myself to believe that Brigitte had been so affected by protests which in less happy moments had had no effect on her? Could it be merely the weakness of a woman who recoils from an act of final significance? "I will do as you please," she had said. No, it does not please me to demand patience, and rather than look at that sorrowful face even a week longer, unless she speaks I will set out alone.

Fool that I was! Had I the strength to do it? I did not close my eyes that night, and the next morning I resolved to call on that young man I had seen at the opera. I do not know whether it was wrath or curiosity that impelled me to this course, nor did I know just what I desired to learn of him; but I reflected that he could not avoid me this time, and that was all I desired.

As I did not know his address, I asked Brigitte for it, pretending that I felt under an obligation to call on him after all the visits he had made us; I had not said a word about my experience at the opera. Brigitte's eyes betrayed signs of tears. When I entered her room she held out her hand and said:

"What do you wish?"

Her voice was sad but tender. We exchanged a few kind words, and I set out less unhappy.

The name of the young man I was going to see was Smith; he was living near us. When I knocked at his door, I experienced a strange sensation of uneasiness; I was dazed as though by a sudden flash of light. His first gesture froze my blood. He was in bed, and with the same accent Brigitte had employed, with a face as pale and haggard as hers, he held out his hand and said:

"What do you wish?"

Say what you please, there are things in a man's life which reason can not explain. I sat as still as if awakened from a dream, and began to repeat his questions. Why, in fact, had I come to see him? How could I tell him what had brought me there? Even if he had anything to tell me, how did I know he would speak? He had brought letters from N-----, and knew those who had written them. But it cost me an effort to question him, and I feared he would suspect what was in my mind. Our first words were polite

and insignificant. I thanked him for his kindness in bringing letters to Madame Pierson; I told him that upon leaving France we would ask him to do the same favor for us; and then we were silent, surprised to find ourselves vis-a-vis.

I looked about me in embarrassment. His room was on the fourth floor; everything indicated honest and industrious poverty. Some books, musical instruments, papers, a table and a few chairs, that was all, but everything was well cared for and presented an agreeable ensemble.

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As for him, his frank and animated face predisposed me in his favor. On the mantel I observed a picture of an old lady. I stepped up to look at it, and he said it was his mother.

I then recalled that Brigitte had often spoken of him; she had known him since childhood. Before I came to the country she used to see him occasionally at N-----, but at the time of her last visit there he was away. It was, therefore, only by chance that I had learned some particulars of his life, which now came to mind. He had an honest employment that enabled him to support his mother and sister.

His treatment of these two women deserved the highest praise; he deprived himself of everything for them, and although he possessed musical talents that would have enabled him to make a fortune, the immediate needs of those dependent on him, and an extreme reserve, had always led him to prefer an assured income to the uncertain chances of success in larger ventures.

In a word, he belonged to that small class who live quietly, and who are worth more to the world than those who do not appreciate them. I had learned of certain traits in his character which will serve to paint the man he had fallen in love with a beautiful girl in the neighborhood, and, after a year of devotion to her, had secured her parents' consent to their union. She was as poor as he. The contract was ready to be signed, the preparations for the wedding were complete, when his mother said:

"And your sister? Who will marry her?"

That simple remark made him understand that if he married he would spend all his money in the household expenses and his sister would have no dowry. He broke off the engagement, bravely renouncing his happy prospects; he then came to Paris.

When I heard that story I wished to see the hero. That simple, unassuming act of devotion seemed to me more admirable than all the glories of war.

The more I examined that young man, the less I felt inclined to broach the subject nearest my heart. The idea which had first occurred to me, that he would harm me in Brigitte's eyes, vanished at once. Gradually my thoughts took another course; I looked at him attentively, and it seemed to me that he was also examining me with curiosity.

We were both twenty-one years of age, but what a difference between us! He, accustomed to an existence regulated by the graduated tick of the clock; never having seen anything of life, except that part of it which lies between an obscure room on the fourth floor and a dingy government office; sending his mother all his savings, that farthing of human joy which the hand of toil clasps so greedily; having no thought except for the happiness of others, and that since his childhood, since he had been a babe in

arms! And I, during that precious time, so swift, so inexorable, during the time that with him had been a round of toil, what had I done? Was I a man? Which of us had lived?



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What I have said in a page can be comprehended in a moment. He spoke to me of our journey and the countries we were going to visit.

"When do you go?" he asked.

"I do not know; Madame Pierson is indisposed, and has been confined to her bed for three days."

"For three days!" he repeated, in surprise.

"Yes; why are you astonished?"

He arose and threw himself on me, his arms extended, his eyes fixed. He was trembling violently.

"Are you ill?" I asked, taking him by the hand. He pressed his hand to his head and burst into tears. When he had recovered sufficiently to speak, he said:

"Pardon me; be good enough to leave me. I fear I am not well; when I have sufficiently recovered I will return your visit."

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION OF SMITH

Brigitte was better. She had told me that she desired to go away as soon as she was well enough to travel. But I insisted that she ought to rest at least fifteen days before undertaking a long journey.

Whenever I attempted to persuade her to speak frankly, she assured me that the letter was the only cause of her melancholy, and begged me to say nothing more about it. Then I tried in vain to guess what was passing in her heart. We went to the theatre every night in order to avoid embarrassing interviews. There we sometimes pressed each other's hands at some fine bit of acting or beautiful strain of music, or exchanged, perhaps, a friendly glance, but going and returning we were mute, absorbed in our thoughts.

Smith came almost every day. Although his presence in the house had been the cause of all my sorrow, and although my visit to him had left singular suspicions in my mind, still his apparent good faith and his simplicity reassured me. I had spoken to him of the letters he had brought, and he did not appear offended, but saddened. He was ignorant of the contents, and his friendship for Brigitte led him to censure them severely. He would have refused to carry them, he said, had he known what they contained. On

account of Brigitte's tone of reserve in his presence, I did not think he was in her confidence.

I therefore welcomed him with pleasure, although there was always a sort of awkward embarrassment in our meeting. He was asked to act as intermediary between Brigitte and her relatives after our departure. When we three were together he noticed a certain coldness and restraint which he endeavored to banish by cheerful good-humor. If he spoke of our liaison it was with respect and as a man who looks upon love as a sacred bond; in fact, he was a kind friend, and inspired me with full confidence.

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But despite all this, despite all his efforts, he was sad, and I could not get rid of strange thoughts that came to my mind. The tears I had seen that young man shed, his illness coming on at the same time as Brigitte's, I know not what melancholy sympathy I thought I discovered between them, troubled and disquieted me. Not over a month ago I would have become violently jealous; but now, of what could I suspect Brigitte? Whatever the secret she was concealing from me, was she not going away with me? Even were it possible that Smith could share some secret of which I knew nothing, what could be the nature of the mystery? What was there to be censured in their sadness and in their friendship?

She had known him as a child; she met him again after long years just as she was about to leave France; she chanced to be in an unfortunate situation, and fate decreed that he should be the instrument of adding to her sorrow. Was it not natural that they should exchange sorrowful glances, that the sight of this young man should awaken memories and regrets? Could he, on the other hand, see her start off on a long journey, proscribed and almost abandoned, without grave apprehensions? I felt this that must be the explanation, and that it was my duty to assure them that I was capable of protecting the one from all dangers, and of requiting the other for the services he had rendered. And yet a deadly chill oppressed me, and I could not determine what course to pursue.

When Smith left us in the evening, we either were silent or talked of him. I do not know what fatal attraction led me to ask about him continually. She, however, told me just what I have told my reader; Smith's life had never been other than it was now—poor, obscure, and honest. I made her repeat the story of his life a number of times, without knowing why I took such an interest in it.

There was in my heart a secret cause of sorrow which I would not confess. If that young man had arrived at the time of our greatest happiness, had he brought an insignificant letter to Brigitte, had he pressed her hand while assisting her into the carriage, would I have paid the least attention to it? Had he recognized me at the opera or had he not—had he shed tears for some unknown reason, what would it matter so long as I was happy? But while unable to divine the cause of Brigitte's sorrow, I saw that my past conduct, whatever she might say of it, had something to do with her present state. If I had been what I ought to have been for the last six months that we had lived together, nothing in the world, I was persuaded, could have troubled our love.

Smith was only an ordinary man, but he was good and devoted; his simple and modest qualities resembled the large, pure lines which the eye seizes at the first glance; one could know him in a quarter of an hour, and he inspired confidence if not admiration. I could not help thinking that if he were Brigitte's lover, she would cheerfully go with him to the ends of the earth.

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I had deferred our departure purposely, but now I began to regret it. Brigitte, too, at times urged me to hasten the day.

“Why do you wait?” she asked. “Here I am recovered and everything is ready.”

Why did we wait, indeed? I do not know.

Seated near the fire, my eyes wandered from Smith to my loved one. I saw that they were both pale, serious, silent. I did not know why, and I could not help thinking that there was but one cause, or one secret to learn. This was not one of those vague, sickly suspicions, such as had formerly tormented me, but an instinct, persistent and fatal. What strange creatures are we! It pleased me to leave them alone before the fire, and to go out on the quay to dream, leaning on the parapet and looking at the water. When they spoke of their life at N-----, and when Brigitte, almost cheerful, assumed a motherly air to recall some incident of their childhood days, it seemed to me that I suffered, and yet took pleasure in it. I asked questions; I spoke to Smith of his mother, of his plans and his prospects; I gave him an opportunity to show himself in a favorable light, and forced his modesty to reveal his merit.

“You love your sister very much, do you not?” I asked. “When do you expect to marry her off?”

He blushed, and replied that his expenses were rather heavy and that it would probably be within two years, perhaps sooner, if his health would permit him to do some extra work which would bring in enough to provide her dowry; that there was a well-to-do family in the country, whose eldest son was her sweetheart; that they were almost agreed on it, and that fortune would one day come, like sleep, without thinking of it; that he had set aside for his sister a part of the money left by their father; that their mother was opposed to it, but that he would insist on it; that a young man can live from hand to mouth, but that the fate of a young girl is fixed on the day of her marriage. Thus, little by little, he expressed what was in his heart, and I watched Brigitte listening to him. Then, when he arose to leave us, I accompanied him to the door, and stood there, pensively listening to the sound of his footsteps on the stairs.

Upon examining our trunks we found that there were still a few things needed before we could start; Smith was asked to purchase them. He was remarkably active, and enjoyed attending to matters of this kind. When I returned to my apartments, I found him on the floor, strapping a trunk. Brigitte was at the piano we had rented by the week during our stay. She was playing one of those old airs into which she put so much expression, and which were so dear to us. I stopped in the hall; every note reached my ear distinctly; never had she sung so sadly, so divinely.

Smith was listening with pleasure; he was on his knees holding the buckle of the strap in his hands. He fastened it, then looked about the room at the other goods he had

packed and covered with a linen cloth. Satisfied with his work, he still remained kneeling in the same spot; Brigitte, her hands on the keys, was looking out at the horizon. For the second time I saw tears fall from the young man's eyes; I was ready to shed tears myself, and not knowing what was passing in me, I held out my hand to him.

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"Were you there?" asked Brigitte. She trembled and seemed surprised.

"Yes, I was there," I replied. "Sing, my dear, I beg of you. Let me hear your sweet voice."

She continued her song without a word; she noticed my emotion as well as Smith's; her voice faltered. With the last notes she arose, and came to me and kissed me.

On another occasion I had brought an album containing views of Switzerland. We were looking at them, all three of us, and when Brigitte found a scene that pleased her, she would stop to examine it. There was one view that seemed to attract her more than the others; it was a certain spot in the canton of Vaud, some distance from Brigues; some trees with cows grazing in the shade; in the distance a village consisting of some dozen houses, scattered here and there. In the foreground a young girl with a large straw hat, seated under a tree, and a farmer's boy standing before her, apparently pointing out, with his iron-tipped stick, the route over which he had come; he was directing her attention to a winding path that led to the mountain. Above them were the Alps, and the picture was crowned by three snow-capped summits. Nothing could be more simple or more beautiful than this landscape. The valley resembled a lake of verdure, and the eye followed its contour with delight.

"Shall we go there?" I asked Brigitte. I took a pencil and traced some figures on the picture.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I am trying to see if I can not change that face slightly and make it resemble yours. The pretty hat would become you, and can I not, if I am skilful, give that fine mountaineer some resemblance to me?"

The whim seemed to please her and she set about rubbing out the two faces. When I had painted her portrait, she wished to try mine. The faces were very small, hence not very difficult; it was agreed that the likenesses were striking. While we were laughing at it, the door opened and I was called away by the servant.

When I returned, Smith was leaning on the table and looking at the picture with interest. He was absorbed in a profound revery, and was not aware of my presence; I sat down near the fire, and it was not until I spoke to Brigitte that he raised his head. He looked at us a moment, then hastily took his leave and, as he approached the door, I saw him strike his forehead with his hand.

When I saw these signs of grief, I said to myself "What does it mean?" Then I clasped my hands to plead with—whom? I do not know; perhaps my good angel, perhaps my evil fate.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE FURNACE

My heart yearned to set out and yet I delayed; some secret influence rooted me to the spot.

When Smith came I knew no repose from the time he entered the room. How is it that sometimes we seem to enjoy unhappiness?

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One day a word, a flush, a glance, made me shudder; another day, another glance, another word, threw me into uncertainty. Why were they both so sad? Why was I as motionless as a statue where I had formerly been violent? Every evening in bed I said to myself: "Let me see; let me think that over." Then I would spring up, crying: "Impossible!" The next day I did the same thing.

In Smith's presence, Brigitte treated me with more tenderness than when we were alone. It happened one evening that some hard words escaped us; when she heard his voice in the hall she came and sat on my knees. As for him, it seemed to me he was always making an effort to control himself. His gestures were carefully regulated; he spoke slowly and prudently, so that his occasional moments of forgetfulness seemed all the more striking.

Was it curiosity that tormented me? I remember that one day I saw a man drowning near the Pont Royal. It was midsummer and we were rowing on the river; some thirty boats were crowded together under the bridge, when suddenly one of the occupants of a boat near mine threw up his hands and fell overboard. We immediately began diving for him, but in vain; some hours later the body was found under a raft.

I shall never forget my experience as I was diving for that man. I opened my eyes under the water and searched painfully here and there in the dark corners about the pier; then I returned to the surface for breath, then resumed my horrible search. I was filled with hope and terror; the thought that I might feel myself seized by convulsive arms allured me, and at the same time thrilled me with horror; when I was exhausted with fatigue, I climbed back into my boat.

Unless a man is brutalized by debauchery, eager curiosity is one of his marked traits. I have already remarked that I felt it on the occasion of my first visit to Desgenais. I will explain my meaning.

The truth, that skeleton of appearances, ordains that every man, whatsoever he be, shall come, in his day and hour, to touch the bones that lie forever at the bottom of some chance experience. It is called "knowing the world," and experience is purchased at that price. Some recoil in terror before that test; others, feeble and affrighted, vacillate like shadows. Some, the best perhaps, die at once. The large number forget, and thus all float on to death.

But there are some men, who, at the fell stroke of chance, neither die nor forget; when it comes their turn to touch misfortune, otherwise called truth, they approach it with a firm step and outstretched hand, and, horrible to say! they mistake love for the livid corpse they have found at the bottom of the river. They seize it, feel it, clasp it in their arms; they are drunk with the desire to know; they no longer look with interest upon things, except to see them pass; they do nothing except doubt and test; they ransack the world

as though they were God's spies; they sharpen their thoughts into arrows, and give birth to a monster.

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Roues, more than all others, are exposed to that fury, and the reason is very simple: ordinary life is the limpid surface, that of the roue is the rapid current swirling over and over, and at times touching the bottom. Coming from a ball, for instance, where they have danced with a modest girl, they seek the company of bad characters, and spend the night in riotous feasting. The last words they addressed to a beautiful and virtuous woman are still on their lips; they repeat them and burst into laughter. Shall I say it? Do they not raise, for some pieces of silver, the vesture of chastity, that robe so full of mystery, which respects the being it embellishes and engirds her without touching? What idea can they have of the world? They are like comedians in the greenroom. Who, more than they, is skilled in that delving to the bottom of things, in that groping at once profound and impious? See how they speak of everything; always in terms the most barren, crude, and abject; such words appear true to them; the rest is only parade, convention, prejudice. Let them tell a story, let them recount some experience, they will always use the same dirty and material expressions. They do not say "That woman loved me;" they say: "I betrayed that woman;" they do not say: "I love;" they say, "I desire;" they never say: "If God will;" they say: "If I will." I do not know what they think of themselves and of such monologues as these.

Hence, of a necessity, either from idleness or curiosity, while they strive to find evil in everything, they do not comprehend that others still believe in the good. Therefore they have to be so nonchalant as to stop their ears, lest the hum of the busy world should suddenly startle them from sleep. The father allows his son to go where so many others go, where Cato himself went; he says that youth is but fleeting. But when he returns, the youth looks upon his sister; and see what has taken place in him during an hour passed in the society of brutal reality! He says to himself: "My sister is not like that creature I have just left!" And from that day he is disturbed and uneasy.

Sinful curiosity is a vile malady born of impure contact. It is the prowling instinct of phantoms who raise the lids of tombs; it is an inexplicable torture with which God punishes those who have sinned; they wish to believe that all sin as they have done, and would be disappointed perhaps to find that it was not so. But they inquire, they search, they dispute; they wag their heads from side to side as does an architect who adjusts a column, and thus strive to find what they desire to find. Given proof of evil, they laugh at it; doubtful of evil, they swear that it exists; the good they refuse to recognize. "Who knows?" Behold the grand formula, the first words that Satan spoke when he saw heaven closing against him. Alas! for how many evils are those words responsible? How many disasters and deaths, how many strokes of fateful scythes in the ripening harvest of humanity! How many hearts, how many families where there is naught but ruin, since that word was first heard! "Who knows! Who knows!" Loathsome words! Rather than pronounce them one should be as sheep who graze about the slaughter-house and know it not. That is better than to be called a strong spirit, and to read La Rochefoucauld.

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What better illustration could I present than the one I have just given? My mistress was ready to set out and I had but to say the word. Why did I delay? What would have been the result if I had started at once on our trip? Nothing but a moment of apprehension that would have been forgotten after travelling three days. When with me, she had no thought but of me; why should I care to solve a mystery that did not threaten my happiness?

She would have consented, and that would have been the end of it. A kiss on her lips and all would be well; instead of that, see what I did.

One evening when Smith had dined with us, I retired at an early hour and left them together. As I closed my door I heard Brigitte order some tea. In the morning I happened to approach her table, and, sitting beside the teapot, I saw but one cup. No one had been in that room before me that morning, so the servant could not have carried away anything that had been used the night before. I searched everywhere for a second cup but could find none.

“Did Smith stay late?” I asked of Brigitte.

“He left about midnight.”

“Did you retire alone or did you call some one to assist you?”

“I retired alone; every one in the house was asleep.”

I continued my search and my hands trembled. In what burlesque comedy is there a jealous lover so stupid as to inquire what has become of a cup? Why seek to discover whether Smith and Madame Pierson had drunk from the same cup? What a brilliant idea that!

Nevertheless I found the cup and I burst into laughter, and threw it on the floor with such violence that it broke into a thousand pieces. I ground the pieces under my feet.

Brigitte looked at me without saying a word. During the two succeeding days she treated me with a coldness that had something of contempt in it, and I saw that she treated Smith with more deference and kindness than usual. She called him Henri and smiled on him sweetly.

“I feel that the air would do me good,” she said after dinner; “shall we go to the opera, Octave? I would enjoy walking that far.”

“No, I will stay here; go without me.” She took Smith’s arm and went out. I remained alone all evening; I had paper before me, and was trying to collect my thoughts in order to write, but in vain.

As a lonely lover draws from his bosom a letter from his mistress, and loses himself in delightful revery, thus I shut myself up in solitude and yielded to the sweet allurements of doubt. Before me were the two empty seats which Brigitte and Smith had just occupied; I scrutinized them anxiously as if they could tell me something. I revolved in my mind all the things I had heard and seen; from time to time I went to the door and cast my eyes over our trunks which had been piled against the wall for a month; I opened them and examined the contents so carefully packed away by those delicate little hands; I listened to the sound of passing carriages; the slightest noise made me tremble. I spread out on the table our map of Europe, and there, in the very presence of all my hopes, in that room where I had conceived and had so nearly realized them, I abandoned myself to the most frightful presentiments.

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But, strange as it may seem, I felt neither anger nor jealousy, but a terrible sense of sorrow and foreboding. I did not suspect, and yet I doubted. The mind of man is so strangely formed that, with what he sees and in spite of what he sees, he can conjure up a hundred objects of woe. In truth his brain resembles the dungeons of the Inquisition, where the walls are covered with so many instruments of torture that one is dazed, and asks whether these horrible contrivances he sees before him are pincers or playthings. Tell me, I say, what difference is there in saying to my mistress: "All women deceive," or, "You deceive me?"

What passed through my mind was perhaps as subtle as the finest sophistry; it was a sort of dialogue between the mind and the conscience. "If I should lose Brigitte?" I said to the mind. "She departs with you," said the conscience. "If she deceives me?"—"How can she deceive you? Has she not made out her will asking for prayers for you?"—"If Smith loves her?"—"Fool! What does it matter so long as you know that she loves you?"—"If she loves me why is she sad?"—"That is her secret, respect it."—"If I take her away with me, will she be happy?"—"Love her and she will be."—"Why, when that man looks at her, does she seem to fear to meet his glance?"—"Because she is a woman and he is young."—"Why does that young man turn pale when she looks at him?"—"Because he is a man and she is beautiful."—"Why, when I went to see him did he throw himself into my arms, and why did he weep and beat his head with his hands?"—"Do not seek to know what you must remain ignorant of."—"Why can I not know these things?"—"Because you are miserable and weak, and all mystery is of God."

"But why is it that I suffer? Why is it that my soul recoils in terror?"—"Think of your father and do good."—"But why am I unable to do as he did? Why does evil attract me to itself?"—"Get down on your knees and confess; if you believe in evil it is because your ways have been evil."—"If my ways were evil, was it my fault? Why did the good betray me?"—"Because you are in the shadow, would you deny the existence of light? If there are traitors, why are you one of them?"—"Because I am afraid of becoming the dupe."—"Why do you spend your nights in watching? Why are you alone now?"—"Because I think, I doubt, and I fear."—"When will you offer your prayer?"—"When I believe. Why have they lied to me?"—"Why do you lie, coward! at this very moment? Why not die if you can not suffer?"

Thus spoke and groaned within me two voices, voices that were defiant and terrible; and then a third voice cried out! "Alas! Alas! my innocence! Alas! Alas! the days that were!"

CHAPTER V

TRUTH AT LAST

What a frightful weapon is human thought! It is our defense and our safeguard, the most precious gift that God has made us. It is ours and it obeys us; we may launch it forth into space, but, once outside of our feeble brains, it is gone; we can no longer control it.

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While I was deferring the time of our departure from day to day I was gradually losing strength, and, although I did not perceive it, my vital forces were slowly wasting away. When I sat at table I experienced a violent distaste for food; at night two pale faces, those of Brigitte and Smith, pursued me through frightful dreams. When they went to the theatre in the evening I refused to go with them; then I went alone, concealed myself in the parquet, and watched them. I pretended that I had some business to attend to in a neighboring room and sat there an hour and listened to them. The idea occurred to me to seek a quarrel with Smith and force him to fight with me; I turned my back on him while he was talking; then he came to me with a look of surprise on his face, holding out his hand. When I was alone in the night and every one slept, I felt a strong desire to go to Brigitte's desk and take from it her papers. On one occasion I was obliged to go out of the house in order to resist the temptation. One day I felt like arming myself with a knife and threatening to kill them if they did not tell me why they were so sad; another day I turned all this fury against myself. With what shame do I write it! And if any one should ask me why I acted thus, I could not reply.

To see, to doubt, to search, to torture myself and make myself miserable, to pass entire days with my ear at the keyhole, and the night in a flood of tears, to repeat over and over that I should die of sorrow, to feel isolation and feebleness uprooting hope in my heart, to imagine that I was spying when I was only listening to the feverish beating of my own pulse; to con over stupid phrases, such as: "Life is a dream, there is nothing stable here below;" to curse and blaspheme God through misery and through caprice: that was my joy, the precious occupation for which I renounced love, the air of heaven, and liberty!

Eternal God, liberty! Yes, there were certain moments when, in spite of all, I still thought of it. In the midst of my madness, eccentricity, and stupidity, there were within me certain impulses that at times brought me to myself. It was a breath of air which struck my face as I came from my dungeon; it was a page of a book I read when, in my bitter days, I happened to read something besides those modern sycophants called pamphleteers, who, out of regard for the public health, ought to be prevented from indulging in their crude philosophizings. Since I have referred to these good moments, let me mention one of them, they were so rare. One evening I was reading the Memoirs of Constant; I came to the following lines:

"Salsdorf, a Saxon surgeon attached to Prince Christian, had his leg broken by a shell in the battle of Wagram. He lay almost lifeless on the dusty field. Fifteen paces distant, Amedee of Kerbourg, aide-de-camp (I have forgotten to whom), wounded in the breast by a bullet, fell to the ground vomiting blood. Salsdorf saw that if that young man was not cared for he would die of suffusion; summoning all his powers, he painfully dragged himself to the side of the wounded man, attended to him and saved his life. Salsdorf himself died four days later from the effects of amputation."

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When I read these words I threw down my book, and melted into tears.

I do not regret those tears, for they were such as I could shed only when my heart was right; I do not speak merely of Salsdorf, and do not care for that particular instance. I am sure, however, that I did not suspect any one that day. Poor dreamer! Ought I to remember that I have been other than I am? What good will it do me as I stretch out my arms in anguish to heaven and wait for the bolt that will deliver me forever? Alas! it was only a gleam that flashed across the night of my life.

Like those dervish fanatics who find ecstasy in vertigo, so thought, turning on itself, exhausted by the stress of introspection and tired of vain effort, falls terror-stricken. So it would seem that man must be a void and that by dint of delving unto himself he reaches the last turn of a spiral. There, as on the summits of mountains and at the bottom of mines, air fails, and God forbids man to go farther. Then, struck with a mortal chill, the heart, as if impaired by oblivion, seeks to escape into a new birth; it demands life of that which environs it, it eagerly drinks in the air; but it finds round about only its own chimeras, which have exhausted its failing powers and which, self-created, surround it like pitiless spectres.

This could not last long. Tired of uncertainty, I resolved to resort to a test that would discover the truth.

I ordered post-horses for ten in the evening. We had hired a caleche and I gave directions that all should be ready at the hour indicated. At the same time I asked that nothing be said to Madame Pierson. Smith came to dinner; at the table I affected unusual cheerfulness, and without a word about my plans, I turned the conversation to our journey. I would renounce all idea of going away, I said, if I thought Brigitte did not care to go; I was so well satisfied with Paris that I asked nothing better than to remain as long as she pleased. I made much of all the pleasures of the city; I spoke of the balls, the theatres, of the many opportunities for diversion on every hand. In short, since we were happy I did not see why we should make a change; and I did not think of going away at present.

I was expecting her to insist that we carry out our plan of going to Geneva, and was not disappointed. However, she insisted but feebly; but, after a few words, I pretended to yield, and then changing the subject I spoke of other things, as though it was all settled.

"And why will not Smith go with us?" I asked. "It is very true that he has duties here, but can he not obtain leave of absence? Moreover, will not the talents he possesses and which he is unwilling to use, assure him an honorable living anywhere? Let him come along with us; the carriage is large and we offer him a place in it. A young man should see the world, and there is nothing so irksome for a man of his age as confinement in an office and restriction to a narrow circle. Is it not true?" I asked, turning to Brigitte. "Come, my dear, let your wiles obtain from him what he might refuse me; urge him to

give us six weeks of his time. We will travel together, and after a tour of Switzerland he will return to his duties with new life."

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Brigitte joined her entreaties to mine, although she knew it was only a joke on my part. Smith could not leave Paris without danger of losing his position, and replied that he regretted being obliged to deny himself the pleasure of accompanying us. Nevertheless I continued to press him, and, ordering another bottle of wine, I repeated my invitation. After dinner I went out to assure myself that my orders were carried out; then I returned in high spirits, and seating myself at the piano I proposed some music.

“Let us pass the evening here,” I said; “believe me, it is better than going to the theatre; I can not take part myself, but I can listen. We will make Smith play if he tires of our company, and the time will pass pleasantly.”

Brigitte consented with good grace and began singing for us; Smith accompanied her on the violoncello. The materials for a bowl of punch were brought and the flame of burning rum soon cheered us with varied lights. The piano was abandoned for the table; then we had cards; everything passed off as I wished and we succeeded in diverting ourselves to my heart’s content.

I had my eyes fixed on the clock and waited impatiently for the hands to mark the hour of ten. I was tormented with anxiety, but allowed them to see nothing. Finally the hour arrived; I heard the postilion’s whip as the horses entered the court. Brigitte was seated near me; I took her by the hand and asked her if she was ready to depart. She looked at me with surprise, doubtless wondering if I was not joking. I told her that at dinner she had appeared so anxious to go that I had felt justified in sending for the horses, and that I went out for that purpose when I left the table.

“Are you serious?” asked Brigitte; “do you wish to set out to-night?”

“Why not?” I replied, “since we have agreed that we ought to leave Paris?”

“What! now? At this very moment?”

“Certainly; have we not been ready for a month? You see there is nothing to do but load our trunks on the carriage; as we have decided to go, ought we not go at once? I believe it is better to go now and put off nothing until tomorrow. You are in the humor to travel to-night and I hasten to profit by it. Why wait longer and continue to put it off? I can not endure this life. You wish to go, do you not? Very well, let us go and be done with it.”

Profound silence ensued. Brigitte stepped to the window and satisfied herself that the carriage was there. Moreover, the tone in which I spoke would admit of no doubt, and, however hasty my action may appear to her, it was due to her own expressed desire. She could not deny her own words, nor find any pretext for further delay. Her decision was made promptly; she asked a few questions as though to assure herself that all the

preparations had been made; seeing that nothing had been omitted, she began to search here and there. She found her hat and shawl, then continued her search.

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"I am ready," she said; "shall we go? We are really going?"

She took a light, went to my room, to her own, opened lockers and closets. She asked for the key to her secretary which she said she had lost. Where could that key be? She had it in her possession not an hour ago.

"Come, come! I am ready," she repeated in extreme agitation; "let us go, Octave, let us set out at once."

While speaking she continued her search and then came and sat down near us.

I was seated on the sofa watching Smith, who stood before me. He had not changed countenance and seemed neither troubled nor surprised; but two drops of sweat trickled down his forehead, and I heard an ivory counter crack between his fingers, the pieces falling to the floor. He held out both hands to us.

"Bon voyage, my friends!" he said.

Again silence; I was still watching him, waiting for him to add a word. "If there is some secret here," thought I, "when shall I learn it, if not now? It must be on the lips of both of them. Let it but come out into the light and I will seize it."

"My dear Octave," said Brigitte, "where are we to stop? You will write to us, Henri, will you not? You will not forget my relatives and will do what you can for me?" He replied in a voice that trembled slightly that he would do all in his power to serve her.

"I can answer for nothing," he said, "and, judging from the letters you have received, there is not much hope. But it will not be my fault if I do not send you good news. Count on me, I am devoted to you."

After a few more kind words he made ready to take his departure. I arose and left the room before him; I wished to leave them together a moment for the last time and, as soon as I had closed the door behind me, in a perfect rage of jealousy, I pressed my ear to the keyhole.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Never," replied Brigitte; "adieu, Henri." She held out her hand. He bent over it, pressed it to his lips and I had barely time to slip into a corner as he passed out without seeing me.

Alone with Brigitte, my heart sank within me. She was waiting for me, her shawl on her arm, and emotion plainly marked on her face. She had found the key she had been looking for and her desk was open. I returned and sat down near the fire. "Listen to me," I said, without daring to look at her; "I have been so culpable in my treatment of



you that I ought to wait and suffer without a word of complaint. The change which has taken place in you has thrown me into such despair that I have not been able to refrain from asking you the cause; but to-day I ask nothing more. Does it cost you an effort to depart? Tell me, and if so I am resigned."

"Let us go, let us go!" she replied.

"As you please, but be frank; whatever blow I may receive, I ought not to ask whence it comes; I should submit without a murmur. But if I lose you, do not speak to me of hope, for God knows I will not survive the loss."

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She turned on me like a flash.

"Speak to me of your love," she said, "not of your grief."

"Very well, I love you more than life. Beside my love, my grief is but a dream. Come with me to the end of the world, I will die or I will live with you."

With these words I advanced toward her; she turned pale and recoiled. She made a vain effort to force a smile on her contracted lips, and sitting down before her desk she said:

"One moment; I have some papers here I want to burn."

She showed me the letters from N-----, tore them up and threw them into the fire; she then took out other papers which she reread and then spread out on the table. They were bills of purchases she had made and some of them were still unpaid. While examining them she began to talk rapidly, while her cheeks burned as if with fever. Then she begged my pardon for her obstinate silence and her conduct since our arrival.

She gave evidence of more tenderness, more confidence than ever. She clapped her hands gleefully at the prospect of a happy journey; in short, she was all love, or at least apparently all love. I can not tell how I suffered at the sight of that factitious joy; there was in that grief which crazed her something more sad than tears and more bitter than reproaches. I would have preferred to have her cold and indifferent rather than thus excited; it seemed to me a parody of our happiest moments. There were the same words, the same woman, the same caresses; and that which, fifteen days before would have intoxicated me with love and happiness, repeated thus, filled me with horror.

"Brigitte," I suddenly inquired, "what secret are you concealing from me? If you love me, what horrible comedy is this you are enacting before me?"

"I!" said she, almost offended. "What makes you think I am acting?"

"What makes me think so? Tell me, my dear, that you have death in your soul and that you are suffering martyrdom. Behold my arms are ready to receive you; lean your head on me and weep. Then I will take you away, perhaps; but in truth, not thus."

"Let us go, let us go!" she again repeated.

"No, on my soul! No, not at present; no, not while there is between us a lie or a mask. I like unhappiness better than such cheerfulness as yours."

She was silent, astonished to see that I had not been deceived by her words and manner and that I saw through them both.

“Why should we delude ourselves?” I continued.

“Have I fallen so low in your esteem that you can dissimulate before me? That unfortunate journey, you think you are condemned to it, do you? Am I a tyrant, an absolute master? Am I an executioner who drags you to punishment? How much do you fear my wrath when you come before me with such mimicry? What terror impels you to lie thus?”

“You are wrong,” she replied; “I beg of you, not a word more.”

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"Why so little sincerity? If I am not your confidant, may I not at least be your friend? If I am denied all knowledge of the source of your tears, may I not at least see them flow? Have you not enough confidence in me to believe that I will respect your sorrow? What have I done that I should be ignorant of it? Might not the remedy lie right there?"

"No," she replied, "you are wrong; you will achieve your own unhappiness as well as mine if you press me farther. Is it not enough that we are going away?"

"And do you expect me to drag you away against your will? Is it not evident that you have consented reluctantly, and that you already begin to repent? Great God! What is it you are concealing from me? What is the use of playing with words when your thoughts are as clear as that glass before which you stand? Should I not be the meanest of men to accept at your hands what is yielded with so much regret? And yet how can I refuse it? What can I do if you refuse to speak?"

"No, I do not oppose you, you are mistaken; I love you, Octave; cease tormenting me thus."

She threw so much tenderness into these words that I fell down on my knees before her. Who could resist her glance and her voice?

"My God!" I cried, "you love me, Brigitte? My dear mistress, you love me?"

"Yes, I love you; yes. I belong to you; do with me what you will. I will follow you, let us go away together; come, Octave, the carriage is waiting."

She pressed my hand in hers, and kissed my forehead.

"Yes, it must be," she murmured, "it must be."

"It must be," I repeated to myself. I arose.

On the table there remained only one piece of paper that Brigitte was examining. She picked it up, then allowed it to drop to the floor.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes, that is all."

When I ordered the horses I had no idea that we would really go, I wished merely to make a trial, but circumstances bid fair to force me to carry my plans farther than I at first intended. I opened the door.

"It must be!" I said to myself. "It must be!" I repeated aloud.

“What do you mean by that, Brigitte? What is there in those words that I do not understand? Explain yourself, or I will not go. Why must you love me?”

She fell on the sofa and wrung her hands in grief.

“Ah! Unhappy man!” she cried, “you will never know how to love!”

“Yes, I think you are right, but, before God, I know how to suffer. You must love me, must you not? Very well, then you must answer me. Were I to lose you forever, were these walls to crumble over my head, I will not leave this spot until I have solved the mystery that has been torturing me for more than a month. Speak, or I will leave you. I may be a fool who destroys his own happiness; I may be demanding something that is not for me to possess; it may be that an explanation will separate us and raise before me an insurmountable barrier, which will render our tour, on which I have set my heart, impossible; whatever it may cost you and me, you shall speak or I will renounce everything.”

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"No, I will not speak."

"You will speak! Do you fondly imagine I am the dupe of your lies? When I see you change between morning and evening until you differ more from your natural self than does night from day, do you think I am deceived? When you give me as a cause some letters that are not worth the trouble of reading, do you imagine that I am to be put off with the first pretext that comes to hand because you do not choose to seek another? Is your face made of plaster, that it is difficult to see what is passing in your heart? What is your opinion of me? I do not deceive myself as much as you suppose, and take care lest in default of words your silence discloses what you so obstinately conceal."

"What do you imagine I am concealing?"

"What do I imagine? You ask me that! Is it to brave me you ask such a question! Do you think to make me desperate and thus get rid of me? Yes, I admit it, offended pride is capable of driving me to extremes. If I should explain myself freely, you would have at your service all feminine hypocrisy; you hope that I will accuse you, so that you can reply that such a woman as you does not stoop to justify herself. How skilfully the most guilty and treacherous of your sex contrive to use proud disdain as a shield! Your great weapon is silence; I did not learn that yesterday. You wish to be insulted and you hold your tongue until it comes to that. Come, struggle against my heart—where yours beats you will find it; but do not struggle against my head, it is harder than iron, and it has served me as long as yours!"

"Poor boy!" murmured Brigitte; "you do not want to go?"

"No, I shall not go except with my beloved, and you are not that now. I have struggled, I have suffered, I have eaten my own heart long enough. It is time for day to break, I have loved long enough in the night. Yes or no, will you answer me?"

"No."

"As you please; I will wait."

I sat down on the other side of the room, determined not to rise until I had learned what I wished to know. She appeared to be reflecting, and walked back and forth before me.

I followed her with an eager eye, while her silence gradually increased my anger. I was unwilling to have her perceive it and was undecided what to do. I opened the window.

"You may drive off," I called to those below, "and I will see that you are paid. I shall not start to-night."

"Poor boy!" repeated Brigitte. I quietly closed the window and sat down as if I had not heard her; but I was so furious with rage that I could hardly restrain myself. That cold



silence, that negative force, exasperated me to the last point. Had I been really deceived and convinced of the guilt of a woman I loved I could not have suffered more. As I had condemned myself to remain in Paris, I reflected that I must compel Brigitte to speak at any price. In vain I tried to think of some means of forcing

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her to enlighten me; for such power I would have given all I possessed. What could I do or say? She sat there calm and unruffled, looking at me with sadness. I heard the sound of the horses' hoofs on the paving as the carriage drew out of the court. I had merely to turn my hand to call them back, but it seemed to me that there was something irrevocable about their departure. I slipped the bolt on the door; something whispered in my ear: "You are face to face with the woman who must give you life or death."

While thus buried in thought I tried to invent some expedient that would lead to the truth. I recalled one of Diderot's romances in which a woman, jealous of her lover, resorted to a novel plan, for the purpose of clearing away her doubts. She told him that she no longer loved him and that she wished to leave him. The Marquis des Arcis (the name of the lover) falls into the trap, and confesses that he himself has tired of the liaison. That piece of strategy, which I had read at too early an age, had struck me as being very skilful, and the recollection of it at this moment made me smile. "Who knows?" said I to myself. "If I should try this with Brigitte, she might be deceived and tell me her secret."

My anger had become furious when the idea of resorting to such trickery occurred to me. Was it so difficult to make a woman speak in spite of herself? This woman was my mistress; I must be very weak if I could not gain my point. I turned over on the sofa with an air of indifference.

"Very well, my dear," said I, gayly, "this is not a time for confidences, then?"

She looked at me in astonishment.

"And yet," I continued, "we must some day come to the truth. Now I believe it would be well to begin at once; that will make you confiding, and there is nothing like an understanding between friends."

Doubtless my face betrayed me as I spoke these words; Brigitte did not appear to understand and kept on walking up and down.

"Do you know," I resumed, "that we have been together now six months? The life we are leading together is not one to be laughed at. You are young, I also; if this kind of life should become distasteful to you, are you the woman to tell me of it? In truth, if it were so, I would confess it to you frankly. And why not? Is it a crime to love? If not, it is not a crime to love less or to cease to love at all. Would it be astonishing if at our age we should feel the need of change?"

She stopped me.

“At our age!” said she. “Are you addressing me? What comedy are you now playing, yourself?”

Blood mounted to my face. I seized her hand. “Sit down here,” I said, “and listen to me.”

“What is the use? It is not you who speak.”

I felt ashamed of my own strategy and abandoned it.

“Listen to me,” I repeated, “and come, I beg of you, sit down near me. If you wish to remain silent yourself, at least hear what I have to say.”

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"I am listening, what have you to say to me?"

"If some one should say to me: 'You are a coward!' I, who am twenty-two years of age and have fought on the field of honor, would throw the taunt back in the teeth of my accuser. Have I not within me the consciousness of what I am? It would be necessary for me to meet my accuser on the field, and play my life against his; why? In order to prove that I am not a coward; otherwise the world would believe it. That single word demands that reply every time it is spoken, and it matters not by whom."

"It is true; what is your meaning?"

"Women do not fight; but as society is constituted there is no being, of whatever sex, who ought to submit to the indignity involved in an aspersion on all his or her past life, be that life regulated as by a pendulum. Reflect; who escapes that law? There are some, I admit; but what happens? If it is a man, dishonor; if it is a woman, what? Forgiveness? Every one who loves ought to give some evidence of life, some proof of existence. There is, then, for woman as well as for man, a time when an attack must be resented. If she is brave, she rises, announces that she is present and sits down again. A stroke of the sword is not for her. She must not only avenge herself, but she must forge her own arms. Someone suspects her; who? An outsider? She may hold him in contempt—her lover whom she loves? If so, it is her life that is in question, and she may not despise him."

"Her only recourse is silence."

"You are wrong; the lover who suspects her casts an aspersion on her entire life. I know it. Her plea is in her tears, her past life, her devotion and her patience. What will happen if she remains silent? Her lover will lose her by her own act and time will justify her. Is not that your thought?"

"Perhaps; silence before all."

"Perhaps, you say? Assuredly I will lose you if you do not speak; my resolution is made: I am going away alone."

"But, Octave—"

"But," I cried, "time will justify you! Let us put an end to it; yes or no?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"You hope so! Will you answer me definitely? This is doubtless the last time you will have the opportunity. You tell me that you love me, and I believe it. I suspect you; is it your intention to allow me to go away and rely on time to justify you?"

"Of what do you suspect me?"

"I do not choose to say, for I see that it would be useless. But, after all, misery for misery, at your leisure; I am as well pleased. You deceive me, you love another; that is your secret and mine."

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Smith."

She placed her hand on her lips and turned aside. I could say no more; we were both pensive, our eyes fixed on the floor.

"Listen to me," she began with an effort, "I have suffered much. I call heaven to bear me witness that I would give my life for you. So long as the faintest gleam of hope remains, I am ready to suffer anything; but, although I may rouse your anger in saying to you that I am a woman, I am nevertheless a woman, my friend. We can not go beyond the limits of human endurance. Beyond a certain point I will not answer for the consequences. All I can do at this moment is to get down on my knees before you and beseech you not to go away."

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She knelt down as she spoke. I arose.

"Fool that I am!" I muttered, bitterly; "fool, to try to get the truth from a woman! He who undertakes such a task will earn naught but derision and will deserve it! Truth! Only he who consorts with chambermaids knows it, only he who steals to their pillow and listens to the unconscious utterance of a dream, hears it. He alone knows it who makes a woman of himself, and initiates himself into the secrets of her cult of inconstancy! But man, who asks for it openly, he who opens a loyal hand to receive that frightful alms, he will never obtain it! They are on guard with him; for reply he receives a shrug of the shoulders, and, if he rouses himself in his impatience, they rise in righteous indignation like an outraged vestal, while there falls from their lips the great feminine oracle that suspicion destroys love, and they refuse to pardon an accusation which they are unable to meet. Ah! just God! How weary I am! When will all this cease?"

"Whenever you please," said she, coldly; "I am as tired of it as you."

"At this very moment; I leave you forever, and may time justify you! Time! Time! Oh! what a cold lover! Remember this adieu. Time! and thy beauty, and thy love, and thy happiness, where will they be? Is it thus, without regret, you allow me to go? Ah! the day when the jealous lover will know that he has been unjust, the day when he shall see proofs, he will understand what a heart he has wounded, is it not so? He will bewail his shame, he will know neither joy nor sleep; he will live only in the memory of the time when he might have been happy. But, on that day, his proud mistress will turn pale as she sees herself avenged; she will say to herself: 'If I had only done it sooner!' And believe me, if she loves him, pride will not console her."

I tried to be calm, but I was no longer master of myself, and I began to pace the floor as she had done. There are certain glances that resemble the clashing of drawn swords; such glances Brigitte and I exchanged at that moment. I looked at her as the prisoner looks on her at the door of his dungeon. In order to break her sealed lips and force her to speak I would give my life and hers.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What do you wish me to tell you?"

"What you have on your heart. Are you cruel enough to make me repeat it?"

"And you, you," she cried, "are you not a hundred times more cruel? Ah! fool, as you say, who would know the truth! Fool that I should be if I expected you to believe it! You would know my secret, and my secret is that I love you. Fool that I am! you will seek another. That pallor of which you are the cause, you accuse it, you question it. Like a fool, I have tried to suffer in silence, to consecrate to you my resignation; I have tried to conceal my tears; you have played the spy, and you have counted them as witnesses against me. Fool that I am! I have thought of crossing

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seas, of exiling myself from France with you, of dying far from all who have loved me, leaning for sole support on a heart that doubts me. Fool that I am! I thought that truth had a glance, an accent, that could not be mistaken, that would be respected! Ah! when I think of it, tears choke me. Why, if it must ever be thus, induce me to take a step that will forever destroy my peace? My head is confused, I do not know where I am!"

She leaned on me weeping. "Fool! Fool!" she repeated, in a heartrending voice.

"And what is it you ask?" she continued, "what can I do to meet those suspicions that are ever born anew, that alter with your moods? I must justify myself, you say! For what? For loving, for dying, for despairing? And if I assume a forced cheerfulness, even that cheerfulness offends you. I sacrifice everything to follow you and you have not gone a league before you look back. Always, everywhere, whatever I may do, insults and anger!"

"Ah! dear child, if you knew what a mortal chill comes over me, what suffering I endure in seeing my simplest words this taken up and hurled back at me with suspicion and sarcasm! By that course you deprive yourself of the only happiness there is in the world—perfect love. You kill all delicate and lofty sentiment in the hearts of those who love you; soon you will believe in nothing except the material and the gross; of love there will remain for you only that which is visible and can be touched with the finger. You are young, Octave, and you have still a long life before you; you will have other mistresses. Yes, as you say, pride is a little thing and it is not to it I look for consolation; but God wills that your tears shall one day pay me for those which I now shed for you!"

She arose.

"Must it be said? Must you know that for six months I have not sought repose without repeating to myself that it was all in vain, that you would never be cured; that I have never risen in the morning without saying that another effort must be made; that after every word you have spoken I have felt that I ought to leave you, and that you have not given me a caress that I would rather die than endure; that, day by day, minute by minute, hesitating between hope and fear, I have vainly tried to conquer either my love or my grief; that, when I opened my heart to you, you pierced it with a mocking glance, and that, when I closed it, it seemed to me I felt within it a treasure that none but you could dispense? Shall I speak of all the frailty and all the mysteries which seem puerile to those who do not respect them? Shall I tell you that when you left me in anger I shut myself up to read your first letters; that there is a favorite waltz that I never played in vain when I felt too keenly the suffering caused by your presence? Ah! wretch that I am! How dearly all these unnumbered tears, all these follies, so sweet to the feeble, are purchased! Weep now; not even this punishment, this sorrow, will avail you."

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I tried to interrupt her.

“Allow me to continue,” she said; “the time has come when I must speak. Let us see, why do you doubt me? For six months, in thought, in body, and in soul, I have belonged to no one but you. Of what do you dare suspect me? Do you wish to set out for Switzerland? I am ready, as you see. Do you think you have a rival? Send him a letter that I will sign and you will direct. What are we doing? Where are we going? Let us decide. Are we not always together? Very well then, why would you leave me? I can not be near you and separated from you at the same moment. It is necessary to have confidence in those we love. Love is either good or bad: if good, we must believe in it; if evil, we must cure ourselves of it. All this, you see, is a game we are playing; but our hearts and our lives are the stakes, and it is horrible! Do you wish to die? That would perhaps be better. Who am I that you should doubt me?”

She stopped before the glass.

“Who am I?” she repeated, “who am I? Think of it. Look at this face of mine.”

“Doubt thee!” she cried, addressing her own image; “poor, pale face, thou art suspected! poor, thin cheeks, poor, tired eyes, thou and thy tears are in disgrace. Very well, put an end to thy suffering; let those kisses that have wasted thee close thy lids! Descend into the cold earth, poor trembling body that can no longer support its own weight. When thou art there, perchance thou wilt be believed, if doubt believes in death. O sorrowful spectre! On the banks of what stream wilt thou wander and groan? What fires devour thee? Thou drest of a long journey and thou hast one foot in the grave!

“Die! God is thy witness that thou hast tried to love. Ah! what wealth of love has been awakened in thy heart! Ah! what dreams thou hast had, what poisons thou hast drunk! What evil hast thou committed that there should be placed in thy breast a fever that consumes! What fury animates that blind creature who pushes thee into the grave with his foot, while his lips speak to thee of love? What will become of you if you live? Is it not time to end it all? Is it not enough? What proof canst thou give that will satisfy when thou, poor, living proof, art not believed? To what torture canst thou submit that thou hast not already endured? By what torments, what sacrifices, wilt thou appease insatiable love? Thou wilt be only an object of ridicule, a thing to excite laughter; thou wilt vainly seek a deserted street to avoid the finger of scorn. Thou wilt lose all shame and even that appearance of virtue which has been so dear to you; and the man for whom you have disgraced yourself will be the first to punish you. He will reproach you for living for him alone, for braving the world for him, and while your friends are whispering about you, he will listen to assure himself that no word of pity is spoken; he will accuse you of deceiving him if another hand even then presses yours, and if, in the desert of life, you find some one who can spare you a word of pity in passing.



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"O God! dost thou remember a day when a wreath of roses was placed on my head? Was it this brow on which that crown rested? Ah! the hand that hung it on the wall of the oratory has now fallen, like it, to dust! Oh, my native valley! Oh, my old aunt, who now sleeps in peace! Oh, my lindens, my little white goat, my dear peasants who loved me so much! You remember when I was happy, proud, and respected? Who threw in my path that stranger who took me away from all this? Who gave him the right to enter my life? Ah! wretch! why didst thou turn the first day he followed you? Why didst thou receive him as a brother? Why didst thou open thy door, and why didst thou hold out thy hand? Octave, Octave, why have you loved me if all is to end thus?"

She was about to faint as I led her to a chair where she sank down and her head fell on my shoulder. The terrible effort she had made in speaking to me so bitterly had broken her down. Instead of an outraged woman I found now only a suffering child. Her eyes closed and she was motionless.

When she regained consciousness she complained of extreme languor, and begged to be left alone that she might rest. She could hardly walk; I carried her gently to her room and placed her on the bed. There was no mark of suffering on her face: she was resting from her sorrow as from great fatigue, and seemed not even to remember it. Her feeble and delicate body yielded without a struggle; the strain had been too great. She held my hand in hers; I kissed her; our lips met in loving union, and after the cruel scene through which she had passed, she slept smilingly on my heart as on the first day.

CHAPTER VI

SELF-SACRIFICE THE SOLUTION

Brigitte slept. Silent, motionless, I sat near her. As a husbandman, when the storm has passed, counts the sheaves that remain in his devastated field, thus I began to estimate the evil I had done.

The more I thought of it, the more irreparable I felt it to be. Certain sorrows, by their very excess, warn us of their limits, and the more shame and remorse I experienced, the more I felt that after such a scene, nothing remained for us to do but to say adieu. Whatever courage Brigitte had shown, she had drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of her sad love; unless I wished to see her die, I must give her repose. She had often addressed cruel reproaches to me, and had, perhaps, on certain other occasions shown more anger than in this scene; but what she had said this time was not dictated by offended pride; it was the truth, which, hidden closely in her heart, had broken it in escaping.



Our present relations, and the fact that I had refused to go away with her, destroyed all hope; she desired to pardon me, but she had not the power. This slumber even, this deathlike sleep of one who could suffer no more, was conclusive evidence; this sudden silence, the tenderness she had shown in the final moments, that pale face, and that kiss, confirmed me in the belief that all was over, and that I had broken forever whatever bond had united us. As surely as she slept now, as soon as I gave her cause for further suffering she would sleep in eternal rest. The clock struck and I felt that the last hour had carried away my life with hers.

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Unwilling to call any one, I lighted Brigitte's lamp; I watched its feeble flame and my thoughts seemed to flicker in the darkness like its uncertain rays.

Whatever I had said or done, the idea of losing Brigitte had never occurred to me up to this time. A hundred times I wished to leave her, but who has loved and is ready to say just what is in his heart? That was in times of despair or of anger. So long as I knew that she loved me, I was sure of loving her; stern necessity had just arisen between us for the first time. I experienced a dull languor and could distinguish nothing clearly. What my mind understood, my soul recoiled from accepting. "Come," I said to myself, "I have desired it and I have done it; there is not the slightest hope that we can live together; I am unwilling to kill this woman, so I have no alternative but to leave her. It is all over; I shall go away tomorrow."

And all the while I was thinking neither of my responsibility, nor of the past, nor future; I thought neither of Smith nor his connection with the affair; I could not say who had led me there, or what I had done during the last hour. I looked at the walls of the room and thought that all I had to do was to wait until to-morrow and decide what carriage I would take.

I remained for a long time in this strange calm, just as the man who receives a thrust from a poignard feels at first only the cold steel and can often travel some distance ere he becomes weak, and his eyes start from their sockets and he realizes what has happened. But drop by drop the blood flows, the ground under his feet becomes red, death comes; the man, at its approach, shudders with horror and falls as though struck by a thunderbolt. Thus, apparently calm, I awaited the coming of misfortune; I repeated in a low voice what Brigitte had said, and I placed near her all that I supposed she would need for the night; then I looked at her, then went to the window and pressed my forehead against the pane peering out at a sombre and lowering sky; then I returned to the bedside. That I was going away tomorrow was the only thought in my mind, and little by little the word "depart" became intelligible to me. "Ah! God!" I suddenly cried, "my poor mistress, I am about to lose you, and I have not known how to love you!"

I trembled at these words as if it had been another who had pronounced them; they resounded through all my being as resounds the string of the harp that has been plucked to the point of breaking. In an instant two years of suffering again racked my breast, and after them as their consequence and as their last expression, the present seized me. How shall I describe such woe? By a single word, perhaps, for those who have loved. I had taken Brigitte's hand, and, in a dream, doubtless, she had pronounced my name.

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I arose and went to my room; a torrent of tears flowed from my eyes. I held out my arms as if to seize the past which was escaping me. "Is it possible," I repeated, "that I am going to lose you? I can love no one but you. What! you are going away? And forever? What! you, my life, my adored mistress, you flee me, I shall never see you more? Never! never!" I said aloud; and, addressing myself to the slumbering Brigitte as if she could hear me, I added: "Never, never; do not think of it; I will never consent to it. And why so much pride? Are there no means of atoning for the offense I have committed? I beg of you, let us seek some expiation. Have you not pardoned me a thousand times? But you love me, you will not be able to go, for courage will fail you. What shall we do?"

A horrible madness seized me; I began to run here and there in search of some instrument of death. At last I fell on my knees and beat my head against the bed. Brigitte stirred, and I remained quiet, fearing I should waken her.

"Let her sleep until to-morrow," I said to myself; "I have all night to watch her."

I resumed my place; I was so frightened at the idea of waking Brigitte, that I scarcely dared breathe. Gradually I became more calm and less bitter tears began to course gently down my cheeks. Tenderness succeeded fury. I leaned over Brigitte and looked at her as if, for the last time, my better angel were urging me to grave on my soul the lines of that dear face!

How pale she was! Her large eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were moist with tears; her form, once so lithe, was bent as if beneath a burden; her cheek, wasted and leaden, rested on a hand that was spare and feeble; her brow seemed to bear the marks of that crown of thorns which is the diadem of resignation. I thought of the cottage. How young she was six months ago! How cheerful, how free, how careless! What had I done with all that? It seemed to me that a strange voice repeated an old romance that I had long since forgotten:

Altra volta gieri biele,
Blanch' e rossa com' un flore,
Ma ora no. Non son piu biele
Consumatis dal' amore.

My sorrow was too great; I sprang to my feet and once more began to walk the floor. "Yes," I continued, "look at her; think of those who are consumed by a grief that is not shared with another. The evils you endure others have suffered, and nothing is singular or peculiar to you. Think of those who have no mother, no relatives, no friends; of those who seek and do not find, of those who love in vain, of those who die and are forgotten."

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"Before thee, there on that bed, lies a being that nature, perchance, formed for thee. From the highest circles of intelligence to the deepest and most impenetrable mysteries of matter and of form, that soul and that body are thy affinities; for six months thy mouth has not spoken, thy heart has not beat, without a responsive word and heart-beat from her; and that woman, whom God has sent thee as He sends the rose to the field, is about to glide from thy heart. While rejoicing in each other's presence, while the angels of eternal love were singing before you, you were farther apart than two exiles at the two ends of the earth. Look at her, but be silent. Thou hast still one night to see her, if thy sobs do not awaken her."

Little by little, my thoughts mounted and became more sombre, until I recoiled in terror.

"To do evil! Such was the role imposed upon me by Providence. I, to do evil! I, to whom my conscience, even in the midst of my wildest follies, said that I was good! I, whom a pitiless destiny was dragging swiftly toward the abyss and whom a secret horror unceasingly warned of the awful fate to come! I, who, if I had shed blood with these hands, could yet repeat that my heart was not guilty; that I was deceived, that it was not I who did it, but my destiny, my evil genius, some unknown being who dwelt within me, but who was not born there!

"I do evil! For six months I had been engaged in that task, not a day had passed that I had not worked at that impious occupation, and I had at that moment the proof before my eyes. The man who had loved Brigitte, who had offended her, then insulted her, then abandoned her only to take her back again, trembling with fear, beset with suspicion, finally thrown on that bed of sorrow, where she now lay extended, was I!"

I beat my breast, and, although looking at her, I could not believe it. I touched her as if to assure myself that it was not a dream. My face, as I saw it in the glass, regarded me with astonishment. Who was that creature who appeared before me bearing my features? Who was that pitiless man who blasphemed with my mouth and tortured with my hands? Was it he whom my mother called Octave? Was it he who, at fifteen, leaning over the crystal waters of a fountain, had a heart not less pure than they? I closed my eyes and thought of my childhood days. As a ray of light pierces a cloud, a gleam from the past pierced my heart.

"No," I mused, "I did not do that. These things are but an absurd dream."

I recalled the time when I was ignorant of life, when I was taking my first steps in experience. I remembered an old beggar who used to sit on a stone bench before the farm gate, to whom I was sometimes sent with the remains of our morning meal. Holding out his feeble, wrinkled hands he would bless me as he smiled upon me. I felt the morning wind blowing on my brow and a freshness as of the rose descending from heaven into my soul. Then I opened my eyes and, by the light of the lamp, saw the reality before me.

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“And you do not believe yourself guilty?” I demanded, with horror. “O novice of yesterday, how corrupt art thou today! Because you weep, you fondly imagine yourself innocent? What you consider the evidence of your conscience is only remorse; and what murderer does not experience it? If your virtue cries out, is it not because it feels the approach of death? O wretch! those far-off voices that you hear groaning in your heart, do you think they are sobs? They are perhaps only the cry of the sea-mew, that funereal bird of the tempest, whose presence portends shipwreck. Who has ever told the story of the childhood of those who have died stained with human blood? They, also, have been good in their day; they sometimes bury their faces in their hands and think of those happy days. You do evil, and you repent? Nero did the same when he killed his mother. Who has told you that tears can wash away the stains of guilt?”

“And even if it were true that a part of your soul is not devoted to evil forever, what will you do with the other part that is not yours? You will touch with your left hand the wounds that you inflict with your right; you will make a shroud of your virtue in which to bury your crimes; you will strike, and like Brutus you will engrave on your sword the prattle of Plato! Into the heart of the being who opens her arms to you, you will plunge that blood-stained but repentant arm; you will follow to the cemetery the victim of your passion, and you will plant on her grave the sterile flower of your pity. You will say to those who see you ‘What could you expect? I have learned how to kill, and observe that I already, weep; learn that God made me better than you see me.’ You will speak of your youth, and you will persuade yourself that heaven ought to pardon you, that your misfortunes are involuntary, and you will implore sleepless nights to grant you a little repose.

“But who knows? You are still young. The more you trust in your heart, the farther astray you will be led by your pride. To-day you stand before the first ruin you are going to leave on your route. If Brigitte dies to-morrow you will weep on her tomb; where will you go when you leave her? You will go away for three months perhaps, and you will travel in Italy; you will wrap your cloak about you like a splenetic Englishman, and you will say some beautiful morning, sitting in your inn with your glasses before you, that it is time to forget in order to live again.

“You who weep too late, take care lest you weep more than one day. Who knows? When the present which makes you shudder shall have become the past, an old story, a confused memory, may it not happen some night of debauchery that you will overturn your chair and recount, with a smile on your lips, what you witnessed with tears in your eyes? It is thus that one drinks away shame. You have begun by being good, you will become weak, and you will become a monster.

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"My poor friend," said I, from the bottom of my heart, "I have a word of advice for you, and it is this: I believe that you must die. While there is still some virtue left, profit by it in order that you may not become altogether bad; while a woman you love lies there dying on that bed, and while you have a horror of yourself, strike the decisive blow; she still lives; that is enough; do not attend her funeral obsequies for fear that on the morrow you will not be consoled; turn the poignard against your own heart while that heart yet loves the God who made it. Is it your youth that gives you pause? And would you spare those youthful locks? Never allow them to whiten if they are not white to-night.

"And then what would you do in the world? If you go away, where will you go? What can you hope for if you remain? Ah! in looking at that woman you seem to have a treasure buried in your heart. It is not merely that you lose her; it is less what has been than what might have been. When the hands of the clock indicated such and such an hour, you might have been happy. If you suffer why do you not open your heart? If you love, why do you not say so? Why do you die of hunger, clasping a priceless treasure in your hands? You have closed the door, you miser; you debate with yourself behind locks and bolts. Shake them, for it was your hand that forged them.

"O fool! who desired and have possessed your desire, you have not thought of God! You play with happiness as a child plays with a rattle, and you do not reflect how rare and fragile a thing you hold in your hands; you treat it with disdain, you smile at it and you continue to amuse yourself with it, forgetting how many prayers it has cost your good angel to preserve for you that shadow of daylight! Ah! if there is in heaven one who watches over you, what is he doing at this moment? He is seated before an organ; his wings are half-folded, his hands extended over the ivory keys; he begins an eternal hymn; the hymn of love and immortal rest, but his wings droop, his head falls over the keys; the angel of death has touched him on the shoulder, he disappears into the Nirvana.

"And you, at the age of twenty-two, when a noble and exalted passion, when the strength of youth might perhaps have made something of you when after so many sorrows and bitter disappointments, a youth so dissipated, you saw a better time shining in the future; when your life, consecrated to the object of your adoration, gave promise of new strength, at that moment the abyss yawns before you! You no longer experience vague desires, but real regrets; your heart is no longer hungry, it is broken! And you hesitate? What do you expect? Since she no longer cares for your life, it counts for nothing! Since she abandons you, abandon yourself!

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"Let those who have loved you in your youth weep for you! They are not many. If you would live, you must not only forget love, but you must deny that it exists; not only deny what there has been of good in you, but kill all that may be good in the future; for what will you do if you remember? Life for you would be one ceaseless regret. No, no, you must choose between your soul and your body; you must kill one or the other. The memory of the good drives you to the evil, make a corpse of yourself unless you wish to become your own spectre. O child, child! die while you can! May tears be shed over your grave!"

I threw myself on the foot of the bed in such a frightful state of despair that my reason fled and I no longer knew where I was or what I was doing. Brigitte sighed.

My senses stirred within me. Was it grief or despair? I do not know. Suddenly a horrible idea occurred to me.

"What!" I muttered, "leave that for another! Die, descend into the ground, while that bosom heaves with the air of heaven? Just God! another hand than mine on that fine, transparent skin! Another mouth on those lips, another love in that heart! Brigitte happy, loving, adored, and I in a corner of the cemetery, crumbling into dust in a ditch! How long will it take her to forget me if I cease to exist to-morrow? How many tears will she shed? None, perhaps! Not a friend who speaks to her but will say that my death was a good thing, who will not hasten to console her, who will not urge her to forget me! If she weeps, they will seek to distract her attention from her loss; if memory haunts her, they will take her away; if her love for me survives me, they will seek to cure her as if she had been poisoned; and she herself, who will perhaps at first say that she desires to follow me, will a month later turn aside to avoid the weeping-willow planted over my grave!

"How could it be otherwise? Who, as beautiful as she, wastes life in idle regrets? If she should think of dying of grief, that beautiful bosom would urge her to live, and her mirror would persuade her; and the day when her exhausted tears give place to the first smile, who will not congratulate her on her recovery? When, after eight days of silence, she consents to hear my name pronounced in her presence, then she will speak of it herself as if to say: 'Console me;' then little by little she will no longer refuse to think of the past but will speak of it, and she will open her window some beautiful spring morning when the birds are singing in the garden; she will become pensive and say: 'I have loved!' Who will be there at her side? Who will dare to tell her that she must continue to love?

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"Ah! then I shall be no more! You will listen to him, faithless one! You will blush as does the budding rose, and the blood of youth will mount to your face. While saying that your heart is sealed, you will allow it to escape through that fresh aureole of beauty, each ray of which allures a kiss. How much they desire to be loved who say they love no more! And why should that astonish you? You are a woman; that body, that spotless bosom, you know what they are worth; when you conceal them under your dress you do not believe, as do the virgins, that all are alike, and you know the price of your modesty. How can a woman who has been praised resolve to be praised no more? Does she think she is living when she remains in the shadow and there is silence round about her beauty? Her beauty itself is the admiring glance of her lover. No, no, there can be no doubt of it; she who has loved, can not live without love; she who has seen death clings to life. Brigitte loves me and will perhaps die of love; I will kill myself and another will have her.

"Another, another!" I repeated, bending over her until my head touched her shoulder. "Is she not a widow? Has she not already seen death? Have not these little hands prepared the dead for burial? Her tears for the second will not flow as long as those shed for the first. Ah! God forgive me! While she sleeps why should I not kill her? If I should awaken her now and tell her that her hour had come, and that we were going to die with a last kiss, she would consent. What does it matter? Is it certain that all does not end with that?"

I found a knife on the table and I picked it up.

"Fear, cowardice, superstition! What do they know about it who talk of something else beyond? It is for the ignorant common people that a future life has been invented, but who really believes in it? What watcher in the cemetery has seen Death leave his tomb and hold consultation with a priest? In olden times there were phantoms; they are interdicted by the police in civilized cities, and no cries are now heard issuing from the earth except from those buried in haste. Who has silenced death, if it has ever spoken? Because funeral processions are no longer permitted to encumber our streets, does the celestial spirit languish?

"To die, that is the final purpose, the end. God has established it, man discusses it; but over every door is written: 'Do what thou wilt, thou shalt die.' What will be said if I kill Brigitte? Neither of us will hear. In to-morrow's journal would appear the intelligence that Octave de T-----had killed his mistress, and the day after no one would speak of it. Who would follow us to the grave? No one who, upon returning to his home, could not enjoy a hearty dinner; and when we were extended side by side in our narrow bed, the world could walk over our graves without disturbing us.

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"Is it not true, my well-beloved, is it not true that it would be well with us? It is a soft bed, that bed of earth; no suffering can reach us there; the occupants of the neighboring tombs will not gossip about us; our bones will embrace in peace and without pride, for death is solace, and that which binds does not also separate. Why should annihilation frighten thee, poor body, destined to corruption? Every hour that strikes drags thee on to thy doom, every step breaks the round on which thou hast just rested; thou art nourished by the dead; the air of heaven weighs upon and crushes thee, the earth on which thou treadest attracts thee by the soles of thy feet.

"Down with thee! Why art thou affrighted? Dost thou tremble at a word? Merely say: 'We will not live.' Is not life a burden that we long to lay down? Why hesitate when it is merely a question of a little sooner or a little later? Matter is indestructible, and the physicists, we are told, grind to infinity the smallest speck of dust without being able to annihilate it. If matter is the property of chance, what harm can it do to change its form since it can not cease to be matter? Why should God care what form I have received and with what livery I invest my grief? Suffering lives in my brain; it belongs to me, I kill it; but my bones do not belong to me and I return them to Him who lent them to me: may some poet make a cup of my skull from which to drink his new wine!

"What reproach can I incur and what harm can that reproach do me? What stern judge will tell me that I have done wrong? What does he know about it?

"Was he such as I? If every creature has his task to perform, and if it is a crime to shirk it, what culprits are the babes who die on the nurse's breast! Why should they be spared? Who will be instructed by the lessons which are taught after death? Must heaven be a desert in order that man may be punished for having lived? Is it not enough to have lived? I do not know who asked that question, unless it were Voltaire on his death-bed; it is a cry of despair worthy of the helpless old atheist.

"But to what purpose? Why so many struggles? Who is there above us who delights in so much agony? Who amuses himself and wiles away an idle hour watching this spectacle of creation, always renewed and always dying, seeing the work of man's hands rising, the grass growing; looking upon the planting of the seed and the fall of the thunderbolt; beholding man walking about upon his earth until he meets the beckoning finger of death; counting tears and watching them dry upon the cheek of pain; noting the pure profile of love and the wrinkled face of age; seeing hands stretched up to him in supplication, bodies prostrate before him, and not a blade of wheat more in the harvest!

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“Who is it, then, that has made so much for the pleasure of knowing that it all amounts to nothing! The earth is dying—Herschel says it is of cold; who holds in his hand the drop of condensed vapor and watches it as it dries up, as a fisher watches a grain of sand in his hand? That mighty law of attraction that suspends the world in space, torments it—and consumes it in endless desire—every planet that carries its load of misery and groans on its axle—calls to each other across the abyss, and each wonders which will stop first. God controls them; they accomplish assiduously and eternally their appointed and useless task; they whirl about, they suffer, they burn, they become extinct and they light up with new flame; they descend and they reascend, they follow and yet they avoid one another, they interlace like rings; they carry on their surface thousands of beings who are ceaselessly renewed; the beings move about, cross one another’s paths, clasp one another for an hour, and then fall, and others rise in their place.

“Where life fails, life hastens to the spot; where air is wanting, air rushes; no disorder, everything is regulated, marked out, written down in lines of gold and parables of fire; everything keeps step with the celestial music along the pitiless paths of life; and all for nothing! And we, poor nameless dreams, pale and sorrowful apparitions, helpless ephemera, we who are animated by the breath of a second in order that death may exist, we exhaust ourselves with fatigue in order to prove that we are living for a purpose, and that something indefinable is stirring within us.

“We hesitate to turn against our breasts a little piece of steel, or to blow out our brains with a little instrument no larger than our hands; it seems to us that chaos would return again; we have written and revised the laws both human and divine, and we are afraid of our catechisms; we suffer thirty years without murmuring and imagine that we are struggling; finally suffering becomes the stronger, we send a pinch of powder into the sanctuary of intelligence, and a flower pierces the soil above our grave.”

As I finished these words I directed the knife I held in my hand against Brigitte’s bosom. I was no longer master of myself, and in my delirious condition I know not what might have happened; I threw back the bed-clothing to uncover the heart, when I discovered on her white bosom a little ebony crucifix.

I recoiled, seized with sudden fear; my hand relaxed, my weapon fell to the floor. It was Brigitte’s aunt who had given her that little crucifix on her deathbed. I did not remember ever having seen it before; doubtless, at the moment of setting out, she had suspended it about her neck as a preserving charm against the dangers of the journey. Suddenly I joined my hands and knelt on the floor.

“O Lord, my God,” I said, in trembling tones, “Lord, my God, thou art there!”

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Let those who do not believe in Christ read this page; I no longer believed in Him. Neither as a child, nor at school, nor as a man, have I frequented churches; my religion, if I had any, had neither rite nor symbol, and I believed in a God without form, without a cult, and without revelation. Poisoned, from youth, by all the writings of the last century, I had sucked, at an early hour, the sterile milk of impiety. Human pride, that God of the egoist, closed my mouth against prayer, while my affrighted soul took refuge in the hope of nothingness. I was as if drunken or insensate when I saw that effigy of Christ on Brigitte's bosom; while not believing in Him myself, I recoiled, knowing that she believed in Him.

It was not vain terror that arrested my hand. Who saw me? I was alone and it was night. Was it prejudice? What prevented me from hurling out of my sight that little piece of black wood? I could have thrown it into the fire, but it was my weapon I threw there. Ah! what an experience that was and still is for my soul! What miserable wretches are men who mock at that which can save a human being! What matters the name, the form, the belief? Is not all that is good sacred? How dare any one touch God?

As at a glance from the sun the snows descend the mountains, and the glaciers that threatened heaven melt into streams in the valley, so there descended into my heart a stream that overflowed its banks. Repentance is a pure incense; it exhaled from all my suffering. Although I had almost committed a crime when my hand was arrested, I felt that my heart was innocent. In an instant, calm, self-possession, reason returned; I again approached the bed; I leaned over my idol and kissed the crucifix.

"Sleep in peace," I said to her, "God watches over you! While your lips were parting in a smile, you were in greater danger than you have ever known before. But the hand that threatened you will harm no one; I swear by the faith you profess I will not kill either you or myself! I am a fool, a madman, a child who thinks himself a man. God be praised! You are young and beautiful. You live and you will forget me. You will recover from the evil I have done you, if you can forgive me. Sleep in peace until day, Brigitte, and then decide our fate; to whatever sentence you pronounce I will submit without complaint.

"And thou, Lord, who hast saved me, grant me pardon. I was born in an impious century, and I have many crimes to expiate. Thou Son of God, whom men forget, I have not been taught to love Thee. I have never worshipped in Thy temples, but I thank heaven that where I find Thee, I tremble and bow in reverence. I have at least kissed with my lips a heart that is full of Thee. Protect that heart so long as life lasts; dwell within it, Thou Holy One; a poor unfortunate has been brave enough to defy death at the sight of Thy suffering and Thy death; though impious, Thou hast saved him from evil; if he had believed, Thou wouldst have consoled him.

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“Pardon those who have made him incredulous since Thou hast made him repentant; pardon those who blaspheme! When they were in despair they did not see Thee! Human joys are a mockery; they are scornful and pitiless; O Lord! the happy of this world think they have no need of Thee! Pardon them. Although their pride may outrage Thee, they will be, sooner or later, baptized in tears; grant that they may cease to believe in any other shelter from the tempest than Thy love, and spare them the severe lessons of unhappiness. Our wisdom and scepticism are in our hands but children's toys; forgive us for dreaming that we can defy Thee, Thou who smilest at Golgotha. The worst result of all our vain misery is that it tempts us to forget Thee.

“But Thou knowest that it is all but a shadow which a glance from Thee can dissipate. Hast not Thou Thyself been a man? It was sorrow that made Thee God; sorrow is an instrument of torture by which Thou hast mounted to the very throne of God, Thy Father, and it is sorrow that leads us to Thee with our crown of thorns to kneel before Thy mercy-seat; we touch Thy bleeding feet with our bloodstained hands, for Thou hast suffered martyrdom to be loved by the unfortunate.”

The first rays of dawn began to appear: man and nature were rousing themselves from sleep and the air was filled with the confusion of distant sounds. Weak and exhausted, I was about to leave Brigitte, and seek a little repose. As I was passing out of the room, a dress thrown on a chair slipped to the floor near me, and in its folds I spied a piece of paper. I picked it up; it was a letter, and I recognized Brigitte's hand. The envelope was not sealed. I opened it and read as follows:

23 December, 18—

“When you receive this letter I shall be far away from you, and shall perhaps never see you again. My destiny is bound up with that of a man for whom I have sacrificed everything; he can not live without me, and I am going to try to die for him. I love you; adieu, and pity us.”

I turned the letter over when I had read it, and saw that it was addressed to “M. Henri Smith, N-----, poste restante.”

On the morrow, a clear December day, a young man and a woman who rested on his arm, passed through the garden of the Palais-Royal. They entered a jeweler's store where they chose two similar rings which they smilingly exchanged. After a short walk they took breakfast at the Freres-Provencaux, in one of those little rooms which are, all things considered, the most beautiful spots in the world. There, when the garcon had left them, they sat near the windows hand in hand.

The young man was in travelling dress; to see the joy which shone on his face, one would have taken him for a young husband showing his young wife the beauties and pleasures of Parisian life. His happiness was calm and subdued, as true happiness

always is. The experienced would have recognized in him the youth who merges into manhood. From time to time he looked up at the sky, then at his companion, and tears glittered in his eyes, but he heeded them not, but smiled as he wept. The woman was pale and thoughtful, her eyes were fixed on the man. On her face were traces of sorrow which she could not conceal, although evidently touched by the exalted joy of her companion.

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When he smiled, she smiled too, but never alone; when he spoke, she replied, and she ate what he served her; but there was about her a silence which was only broken at his instance. In her languor could be clearly distinguished that gentleness of soul, that lethargy of the weaker of two beings who love, one of whom exists only in the other and responds to him as does the echo. The young man was conscious of it, and seemed proud of it and grateful for it; but it could be seen even by his pride that his happiness was new to him.

When the woman became sad and her eyes fell, he cheered her with his glance; but he could not always succeed, and seemed troubled himself. That mingling of strength and weakness, of joy and sorrow, of anxiety and serenity, could not have been understood by an indifferent spectator; at times they appeared the most happy of living creatures, and the next moment the most unhappy; but, although ignorant of their secret, one would have felt that they were suffering together, and, whatever their mysterious trouble, it could be seen that they had placed on their sorrow a seal more powerful than love itself—friendship. While their hands were clasped their glances were chaste; although they were alone they spoke in low tones. As if overcome by their feelings, they sat face to face, although their lips did not touch. They looked at each other tenderly and solemnly. When the clock struck one, the woman heaved a sigh and said:

“Octave, are you sure of yourself?”

“Yes, my friend, I am resolved. I shall suffer much, a long time, perhaps forever; but we will cure ourselves, you with time, I with God.”

“Octave, Octave,” repeated the woman, “are you sure you are not deceiving yourself?”

“I do not believe we can forget each other; but I believe that we can forgive, and that is what I desire even at the price of separation.”

“Why could we not meet again? Why not some day—you are so young!”

Then she added, with a smile:

“We could see each other without danger.”

“No, my friend, for you must know that I could never see you again without loving you. May he to whom I bequeath you be worthy of you! Smith is brave, good, and honest, but however much you may love him, you see very well that you still love me, for if I should decide to remain, or to take you away with me, you would consent.”

“It is true,” replied the woman.

“True! true!” repeated the young man, looking into her eyes with all his soul. “Is it true that if I wished it you would go with me?”

Then he continued, softly:

“That is the reason why I must never see you again. There are certain loves in life that overturn the head, the senses, the mind, the heart; there is among them all but one that does not disturb, that penetrates, and that dies only with the being in which it has taken root.”

“But you will write to me?”

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“Yes, at first, for what I have to suffer is so keen that the absence of the habitual object of my love would kill me. When I was unknown to you, I gradually approached closer and closer to you, until—but let us not go into the past. Little by little my letters will become less frequent until they cease altogether. I shall thus descend the hill that I have been climbing for the past year. When one stands before a fresh grave, over which are engraved two cherished names, one experiences a mysterious sense of grief, which causes tears to trickle down one’s cheeks; it is thus that I wish to remember having once lived.”

At these words the woman threw herself on the couch and burst into tears. The young man wept with her, but he did not move and seemed anxious to appear unconscious of her emotion. When her tears ceased to flow, he approached her, took her hand in his and kissed it.

“Believe me,” said he, “to be loved by you, whatever the name of the place I occupy in your heart, will give me strength and courage. Rest assured, Brigitte, no one will ever understand you better than I; another will love you more worthily, no one will love you more truly. Another will be considerate of those feelings that I offend, he will surround you with his love; you will have a better lover, you will not have a better brother. Give me your hand and let the world laugh at a sentence that it does not understand: Let us be friends, and part forever. Before we became such intimate friends there was something within that told us we were destined to mingle our lives. Let our souls never know that we have parted upon earth; let not the paltry chance of a moment undo our eternal happiness!”

He held the woman’s hand; she arose, tears streaming from her eyes, and, stepping up to the mirror with a strange smile on her face, she cut from her head a long tress of hair; then she looked at herself thus disfigured and deprived of a part of her beautiful crown, and gave it to her lover.

The clock struck again; it was time to go; when they passed out they seemed as joyful as when they entered.

“What a beautiful sun!” said the young man.

“And a beautiful day,” said Brigitte, “the memory of which shall never fade.”

They hastened away and disappeared in the crowd.

Some time later a carriage passed over a little hill behind Fontainebleau. The young man was the only occupant; he looked for the last time upon his native town as it disappeared in the distance, and thanked God that, of the three beings who had suffered through his fault, there remained but one of them still unhappy.

ETEXT *editor's bookmarks:*

Because you weep, you fondly imagine yourself innocent
Cold silence, that negative force
Contrive to use proud disdain as a shield
Fool who destroys his own happiness
Funeral processions are no longer permitted

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How much they desire to be loved who say they love no more
I can not be near you and separated from you at the same moment
Is it not enough to have lived?
Make a shroud of your virtue in which to bury your crimes
Reading the Memoirs of Constant
Sometimes we seem to enjoy unhappiness
Speak to me of your love, she said, "not of your grief"
Suffered, and yet took pleasure in it
Suspensions that are ever born anew
"Unhappy man!" she cried, "you will never know how to love"
Who has told you that tears can wash away the stains of guilt
You play with happiness as a child plays with a rattle
Your great weapon is silence

ETEXT editor's bookmarks of the entire child of A century:

A terrible danger lurks in the knowledge of what is possible
Accustomed to call its disguise virtue
Adieu, my son, I love you and I die
All philosophy is akin to atheism
All that is not life, it is the noise of life
And when love is sure of itself and knows response
Because you weep, you fondly imagine yourself innocent
Become corrupt, and you will cease to suffer
Began to forget my own sorrow in my sympathy for her
Beware of disgust, it is an incurable evil
Can any one prevent a gossip
Cold silence, that negative force
Contrive to use proud disdain as a shield
Death is more to be desired than a living distaste for life
Despair of a man sick of life, or the whim of a spoiled child
Do they think they have invented what they see
Each one knows what the other is about to say
Fool who destroys his own happiness
Force itself, that mistress of the world
Funeral processions are no longer permitted
Galileo struck the earth, crying: "Nevertheless it moves!"
Good and bad days succeeded each other almost regularly
Great sorrows neither accuse nor blaspheme—they listen
Grief itself was for her but a means of seducing



Happiness of being pursued
He who is loved by a beautiful woman is sheltered from every blow
He lives only in the body
How much they desire to be loved who say they love no more
Human weakness seeks association
I can not be near you and separated from you at the same moment
I can not love her, I can not love another
I boasted of being worse than I really was
I neither love nor esteem sadness
I do not intend either to boast or abase myself
Ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity
In what do you believe?
Indignation can solace grief and restore happiness
Is he a dwarf or a giant
Is it not enough to have lived?
It is a pity that you

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must seek pastimes

Make a shroud of your virtue in which to bury your crimes
Man who suffers wishes to make her whom he loves suffer
Men doubted everything: the young men denied everything
No longer esteemed her highly enough to be jealous of her
Of all the sisters of love, the most beautiful is pity
Perfection does not exist
Pure caprice that I myself mistook for a flash of reason
Quarrel had been, so to speak, less sad than our reconciliation
Reading the Memoirs of Constant
Resorted to exaggeration in order to appear original
Sceptic regrets the faith he has lost the power to regain
Seven who are always the same: the first is called hope
She pretended to hope for the best
Sometimes we seem to enjoy unhappiness
Speak to me of your love, she said, "not of your grief"
St. Augustine
Suffered, and yet took pleasure in it
Suspensions that are ever born anew
Terrible words; I deserve them, but they will kill me
There are two different men in you
Ticking of which (our arteries) can be heard only at night
"Unhappy man!" she cried, "you will never know how to love"
We have had a mass celebrated, and it cost us a large sum
What you take for love is nothing more than desire
What human word will ever express thy slightest caress
When passion sways man, reason follows him weeping and warning
Who has told you that tears can wash away the stains of guilt
Wine suffuses the face as if to prevent shame appearing there
You believe in what is said here below and not in what is done
You play with happiness as a child plays with a rattle
You turn the leaves of dead books
Your great weapon is silence
Youth is to judge of the world from first impressions

MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

By octave Feuillet

With a Preface by *Maxime du camp*, of the French Academy

OCTAVE FEUILLET

Octave FEUILLET'S works abound with rare qualities, forming a harmonious ensemble; they also exhibit great observation and knowledge of humanity, and through all of them runs an incomparable and distinctive charm. He will always be considered the leader of the idealistic school in the nineteenth century. It is now fifteen years since his death, and the judgment of posterity is that he had a great imagination, linked to great analytical power and insight; that his style is neat, pure, and fine, and at the same time brilliant and concise. He unites suppleness with force, he combines grace with vigor.

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Octave Feuillet was born at Saint-Lo (Manche), August 11, 1821, his father occupying the post of Secretary-General of the Prefecture de la Manche. Pupil at the Lycee Louis le Grand, he received many prizes, and was entered for the law. But he became early attracted to literature, and like many of the writers at that period attached himself to the "romantic school." He collaborated with Alexander Dumas pere and with Paul Bocage. It can not now be ascertained what share Feuillet may have had in any of the countless tales of the elder Dumas. Under his own name he published the novels 'Onesta' and 'Alix', in 1846, his first romances. He then commenced writing for the stage. We mention 'Echec et Mat' (Odeon, 1846); 'Palma, ou la Nuit du Vendredi-Saint' (Porte St. Martin, 1847); 'La Vieillesse de Richelieu' (Theatre Francais, 1848); 'York' (Palais Royal, 1852). Some of them are written in collaboration with Paul Bocage. They are dramas of the Dumas type, conventional, not without cleverness, but making no lasting mark.

Realizing this, Feuillet halted, pondered, abruptly changed front, and began to follow in the footsteps of Alfred de Musset. 'La Grise' (1854), 'Le Village' (1856), 'Dalila' (1857), 'Le Cheveu Blanc', and other plays obtained great success, partly in the Gymnase, partly in the Comedie Francaise. In these works Feuillet revealed himself as an analyst of feminine character, as one who had spied out all their secrets, and could pour balm on all their wounds. 'Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre' (Vaudeville, 1858) is probably the best known of all his later dramas; it was, of course, adapted for the stage from his romance, and is well known to the American public through Lester Wallack and Pierrepont Edwards. 'Tentation' was produced in the year 1860, also well known in this country under the title 'Led Astray'; then followed 'Montjoye' (1863), etc. The influence of Alfred de Musset is henceforth less perceptible. Feuillet now became a follower of Dumas fils, especially so in 'La Belle au Bois Dormant' (Vaudeville, 1865); 'Le Cas de Conscience' (Theatre Francais, 1867); 'Julie' (Theatre Francais 1869). These met with success, and are still in the repertoire of the Comedie Francaise.

As a romancer, Feuillet occupies a high place. For thirty years he was the representative of a noble and tender genre, and was preeminently the favorite novelist of the brilliant society of the Second Empire. Women literally devoured him, and his feminine public has always remained faithful to him. He is the advocate of morality and of the aristocracy of birth and feeling, though under this disguise he involves his heroes and heroines in highly romantic complications, whose outcome is often for a time in doubt. Yet as the accredited painter of the Faubourg Saint-Germain he contributed an essential element to the development of realistic fiction. No one has rendered so well as he the high-strung, neuropathic women of the



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upper class, who neither understand themselves nor are wholly comprehensible to others. In 'Monsieur de Camors', crowned by the Academy, he has yielded to the demands of a stricter realism. Especially after the fall of the Empire had removed a powerful motive for gilding the vices of aristocratic society, he painted its hard and selfish qualities as none of his contemporaries could have done. Octave Feuillet was elected to the Academie Francaise in 1862 to succeed Scribe. He died December 29, 1890.

Maximedu camp
de l'Acadamie Francaise.

MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

"The wages of sin is death"

Near eleven o'clock, one evening in the month of May, a man about fifty years of age, well formed, and of noble carriage, stepped from a coupe in the courtyard of a small hotel in the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. He ascended, with the walk of a master, the steps leading to the entrance, to the hall where several servants awaited him. One of them followed him into an elegant study on the first floor, which communicated with a handsome bedroom, separated from it by a curtained arch. The valet arranged the fire, raised the lamps in both rooms, and was about to retire, when his master spoke:

"Has my son returned home?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte. Monsieur is not ill?"

"Ill! Why?"

"Because Monsieur le Comte is so pale."

"Ah! It is only a slight cold I have taken this evening on the banks of the lake."

"Will Monsieur require anything?"

"Nothing," replied the Count briefly, and the servant retired. Left alone, his master approached a cabinet curiously carved in the Italian style, and took from it a long flat ebony box.

This contained two pistols. He loaded them with great care, adjusting the caps by pressing them lightly to the nipple with his thumb. That done, he lighted a cigar, and for half an hour the muffled beat of his regular tread sounded on the carpet of the gallery. He finished his cigar, paused a moment in deep thought, and then entered the adjoining room, taking the pistols with him.

This room, like the other, was furnished in a style of severe elegance, relieved by tasteful ornament. It showed some pictures by famous masters, statues, bronzes, and rare carvings in ivory. The Count threw a glance of singular interest round the interior of this chamber, which was his own—on the familiar objects—on the sombre hangings—on the bed, prepared for sleep. Then he turned toward a table, placed in a recess of the window, laid the pistols upon it, and dropping his head in his hands, meditated deeply many minutes. Suddenly he raised his head, and wrote rapidly as follows:

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"To my son:

"Life wearies me, my son, and I shall relinquish it. The true superiority of man over the inert or passive creatures that surround him, lies in his power to free himself, at will, from those, pernicious servitudes which are termed the laws of nature. Man, if he will it, need not grow old: the lion must. Reflect, my son, upon this text, for all human power lies in it." Science asserts and demonstrates it. Man, intelligent and free, is an animal wholly unpremeditated upon this planet. Produced by unexpected combinations and haphazard transformations, in the midst of a general subordination of matter, he figures as a dissonance and a revolt! "Nature has engendered without having conceived him. The result is as if a turkey-hen had unconsciously hatched the egg of an eagle. Terrified at the monster, she has sought to control it, and has overloaded it with instincts, commonly called duties, and police regulations known as religion. Each one of these shackles broken, each one of these servitudes overthrown, marks a step toward the thorough emancipation of humanity." I must say to you, however, that I die in the faith of my century, believing in matter uncreated, all-powerful, and eternal—the Nature of the ancients. There have been in all ages philosophers who have had conceptions of the truth. But ripe to-day, it has become the common property of all who are strong enough to stand it—for, in sooth, this latest religion of humanity is food fit only for the strong. It carries sadness with it, for it isolates man; but it also involves grandeur, making man absolutely free, or, as it were, a very god. It leaves him no actual duties except to himself, and it opens a superb field to one of brain and courage. "The masses still remain, and must ever remain, submissive under the yoke of old, dead religions, and under the tyranny of instincts. There will still be seen very much the same condition of things as at present in Paris; a society the brain of which is atheistic, and the heart religious. And at bottom there will be no more belief in Christ than in Jupiter; nevertheless, churches will continue to be built mechanically. There are no longer even Deists; for the old chimera of a personal, moral God-witness, sanction, and judge,—is virtually extinct; and yet hardly a word is said, or a line written, or a gesture made, in public or private life, which does not ever affirm that chimera. This may have its uses perchance, but it is nevertheless despicable. Slip forth from the common herd, my son, think for yourself, and write your own catechism upon a virgin page." As for myself, my life has been a failure, because I was born many years too soon. As yet the earth and the heavens were heaped up and cumbered with ruins, and people did not see. Science, moreover, was relatively still in its

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infancy. And, besides, I retained the prejudices and the repugnance to the doctrines of the new world that belonged to my name. I was unable to comprehend that there was anything better to be done than childishly to pout at the conqueror; that is, I could not recognize that his weapons were good, and that I should seize and destroy him with them. In short, for want of a definite principle of action I have drifted at random, my life without plan—I have been a mere trivial man of pleasure.

“Your life shall be more complete, if you will only follow my advice.

“What, indeed, may not a man of this age become if he have the good sense and energy to conform his life rigidly to his belief!

“I merely state the question, you must solve it; I can leave you only some cursory ideas, which I am satisfied are just, and upon which you may meditate at your leisure. Only for fools or the weak does materialism become a debasing dogma; assuredly, in its code there are none of those precepts of ordinary morals which our fathers entitled virtue; but I do find there a grand word which may well counterbalance many others, that is to say, Honor, self-esteem! Unquestionably a materialist may not be a saint; but he can be a gentleman, which is something. You have happy gifts, my son, and I know of but one duty that you have in the world—that of developing those gifts to the utmost, and through them to enjoy life unsparingly. Therefore, without scruple, use woman for your pleasure, man for your advancement; but under no circumstances do anything ignoble.” In order that ennui shall not drive you, like myself, prematurely from the world so soon as the season for pleasure shall have ended, you should leave the emotions of ambition and of public life for the gratification of your riper age. Do not enter into any engagements with the reigning government, and reserve for yourself to hear its eulogium made by those who will have subverted it. That is the French fashion. Each generation must have its own prey. You will soon feel the impulse of the coming generation. Prepare yourself, from afar, to take the lead in it.” In politics, my son, you are not ignorant that we all take our principles from our temperament. The bilious are demagogues, the sanguine, democrats, the nervous, aristocrats. You are both sanguine and nervous, an excellent constitution, for it gives you a choice. You may, for example, be an aristocrat in regard to yourself personally, and, at the same time, a democrat in relation to others; and in that you will not be exceptional.” Make yourself master of every question likely to interest your contemporaries, but do not become absorbed in any yourself. In reality, all principles are indifferent—true or false according to the hour and circumstance. Ideas are mere instruments with which you should learn to play seasonably, so as to sway men. In that path, likewise, you will have associates.

“Know, my son, that having attained my age, weary of all else, you will have need of strong sensations. The sanguinary diversions of revolution will then be for you the same as a love-affair at twenty.

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"But I am fatigued, my son, and shall recapitulate. To be loved by women, to be feared by men, to be as impassive and as imperturbable as a god before the tears of the one and the blood of the other, and to end in a whirlwind—such has been the lot in which I have failed, but which, nevertheless, I bequeath to you. With your great faculties you, however, are capable of accomplishing it, unless indeed you should fail through some ingrained weakness of the heart that I have noticed in you, and which, doubtless, you have imbibed with your mother's milk." "So long as man shall be born of woman, there will be something faulty and incomplete in his character. In fine, strive to relieve yourself from all thralldom, from all natural instincts, affections, and sympathies as from so many fetters upon your liberty, your strength.

"Do not marry unless some superior interest shall impel you to do so. In that event, have no children.

"Have no intimate friends. Caesar having grown old, had a friend. It was Brutus!

"Contempt for men is the beginning of wisdom.

"Change somewhat your style of fencing, it is altogether too open, my son. Do not get angry. Rarely laugh, and never weep. Adieu.

"Camors."

The feeble rays of dawn had passed through the slats of the blinds. The matin birds began their song in the chestnut-tree near the window. M. de Camors raised his head and listened in an absent mood to the sound which astonished him. Seeing that it was daybreak, he folded in some haste the pages he had just finished, pressed his seal upon the envelope, and addressed it, "For the Comte Louis de Camors." Then he rose.

M. de Camors was a great lover of art, and had carefully preserved a magnificent ivory carving of the sixteenth century, which had belonged to his wife. It was a Christ the pallid white relieved by a medallion of dark velvet.

His eye, meeting this pale, sad image, was attracted to it for a moment with strange fascination. Then he smiled bitterly, seized one of the pistols with a firm hand and pressed it to his temple.

A shot resounded through the house; the fall of a heavy body shook the floor—fragments of brains strewed the carpet. The Comte de Camors had plunged into eternity!

His last will was clenched in his hand.

To whom was this document addressed? Upon what kind of soil will these seeds fall?



At this time Louis de Camors was twenty-seven years old. His mother had died young. It did not appear that she had been particularly happy with her husband; and her son barely remembered her as a young woman, pretty and pale, and frequently weeping, who used to sing him to sleep in a low, sweet voice. He had been brought up chiefly by his father's mistress, who was known as the Vicomtesse d'Oilly, a widow, and a rather good sort of woman. Her

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natural sensibility, and the laxity of morals then reigning at Paris, permitted her to occupy herself at the same time with the happiness of the father and the education of the son. When the father deserted her after a time, he left her the child, to comfort her somewhat by this mark of confidence and affection. She took him out three times a week; she dressed him and combed him; she fondled him and took him with her to church, and made him play with a handsome Spaniard, who had been for some time her secretary. Besides, she neglected no opportunity of inculcating precepts of sound morality. Thus the child, being surprised at seeing her one evening press a kiss upon the forehead of her secretary, cried out, with the blunt candor of his age:

“Why, Madame, do you kiss a gentleman who is not your husband?”

“Because, my dear,” replied the Countess, “our good Lord commands us to be charitable and affectionate to the poor, the infirm, and the exile; and Monsieur Perez is an exile.”

Louis de Camors merited better care, for he was a generous-hearted child; and his comrades of the college of Louis-le-Grand always remembered the warm-heartedness and natural grace which made them forgive his successes during the week, and his varnished boots and lilac gloves on Sunday. Toward the close of his college course, he became particularly attached to a poor bursar, by name Lescande, who excelled in mathematics, but who was very ungraceful, awkwardly shy and timid, with a painful sensitiveness to the peculiarities of his person. He was nicknamed “Wolfhead,” from the refractory nature of his hair; but the elegant Camors stopped the scoffers by protecting the young man with his friendship. Lescande felt this deeply, and adored his friend, to whom he opened the inmost recesses of his heart, letting out some important secrets.

He loved a very young girl who was his cousin, but was as poor as himself. Still it was a providential thing for him that she was poor, otherwise he never should have dared to aspire to her. It was a sad occurrence that had first thrown Lescande with his cousin—the loss of her father, who was chief of one of the Departments of State.

After his death she lived with her mother in very straitened circumstances; and Lescande, on occasion of his last visit, found her with soiled cuffs. Immediately after he received the following note:

“Pardon me, dear cousin! Pardon my not wearing white cuffs. But I must tell you that we can change our cuffs—my mother and I—only three times a week. As to her, one would never discover it. She is neat as a bird. I also try to be; but, alas! when I practise the piano, my cuffs rub. After this explanation, my good Theodore, I hope you will love me as before.

“Juliette.”

Lescande wept over this note. Luckily he had his prospects as an architect; and Juliette had promised to wait for him ten years, by which time he would either be dead, or living deliciously in a humble house with his cousin. He showed the note, and unfolded his plans to Camors. “This is the only ambition I have, or which I can have,” added Lescande. “You are different. You are born for great things.”

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"Listen, my old Lescande," replied Camors, who had just passed his rhetoric examination in triumph. "I do not know but that my destiny may be ordinary; but I am sure my heart can never be. There I feel transports—passions, which give me sometimes great joy, sometimes inexpressible suffering. I burn to discover a world—to save a nation—to love a queen! I understand nothing but great ambitions and noble alliances, and as for sentimental love, it troubles me but little. My activity pants for a nobler and a wider field!

"I intend to attach myself to one of the great social parties, political or religious, that agitate the world at this era. Which one I know not yet, for my opinions are not very fixed. But as soon as I leave college I shall devote myself to seeking the truth. And truth is easily found. I shall read all the newspapers.

"Besides, Paris is an intellectual highway, so brilliantly lighted it is only necessary to open one's eyes and have good faith and independence, to find the true road.

"And I am in excellent case for this, for though born a gentleman, I have no prejudices. My father, who is himself very enlightened and very liberal, leaves me free. I have an uncle who is a Republican; an aunt who is a Legitimist—and what is still more, a saint; and another uncle who is a Conservative. It is not vanity that leads me to speak of these things; but only a desire to show you that, having a foot in all parties, I am quite willing to compare them dispassionately and make a good choice. Once master of the holy truth, you may be sure, dear old Lescande, I shall serve it unto death—with my tongue, with my pen, and with my sword!"

Such sentiments as these, pronounced with sincere emotion and accompanied by a warm clasp of the hand, drew tears from the old Lescande, otherwise called Wolfhead.

CHAPTER II

FRUIT FROM THE HOTBED OF PARIS

Early one morning, about eight years after these high resolves, Louis de Camors rode out from the 'porte-cochere' of the small hotel he had occupied with his father.

Nothing could be gayer than Paris was that morning, at that charming golden hour of the day when the world seems peopled only with good and generous spirits who love one another. Paris does not pique herself on her generosity; but she still takes to herself at this charming hour an air of innocence, cheerfulness, and amiable cordiality.

The little carts with bells, that pass one another rapidly, make one believe the country is covered with roses. The cries of old Paris cut with their sharp notes the deep murmur of a great city just awaking.

You see the jolly concierges sweeping the white footpaths; half-dressed merchants taking down their shutters with great noise; and groups of ostlers, in Scotch caps, smoking and fraternizing on the hotel steps.

You hear the questions of the sociable neighborhood; the news proper to awakening; speculations on the weather bandied across from door to door, with much interest.

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Young milliners, a little late, walk briskly toward town with elastic step, making now a short pause before a shop just opened; again taking wing like a bee just scenting a flower.

Even the dead in this gay Paris morning seem to go gayly to the cemetery, with their jovial coachmen grinning and nodding as they pass.

Superbly aloof from these agreeable impressions, Louis de Camors, a little pale, with half-closed eyes and a cigar between his teeth, rode into the Rue de Bourgogne at a walk, broke into a canter on the Champs Elysees, and galloped thence to the Bois. After a brisk run, he returned by chance through the Porte Maillot, then not nearly so thickly inhabited as it is to-day. Already, however, a few pretty houses, with green lawns in front, peeped out from the bushes of lilac and clematis. Before the green railings of one of these a gentleman played hoop with a very young, blond-haired child. His age belonged in that uncertain area which may range from twenty-five to forty. He wore a white cravat, spotless as snow; and two triangles of short, thick beard, cut like the boxwood at Versailles, ornamented his cheeks. If Camors saw this personage he did not honor him with the slightest notice. He was, notwithstanding, his former comrade Lescande, who had been lost sight of for several years by his warmest college friend. Lescande, however, whose memory seemed better, felt his heart leap with joy at the majestic appearance of the young cavalier who approached him. He made a movement to rush forward; a smile covered his good-natured face, but it ended in a grimace. Evidently he had been forgotten. Camors, now not more than a couple of feet from him, was passing on, and his handsome countenance gave not the slightest sign of emotion. Suddenly, without changing a single line of his face, he drew rein, took the cigar from his lips, and said, in a tranquil voice:

“Hello! You have no longer a wolf head!”

“Ha! Then you know me?” cried Lescande.

“Know you? Why not?”

“I thought—I was afraid—on account of my beard—”

“Bah! your beard does not change you—except that it becomes you. But what are you doing here?”

“Doing here! Why, my dear friend, I am at home here. Dismount, I pray you, and come into my house.”

“Well, why not?” replied Camors, with the same voice and manner of supreme indifference; and, throwing his bridle to the servant who followed him, he passed through the gardengate, led, supported, caressed by the trembling hand of Lescande.



The garden was small, but beautifully tended and full of rare plants. At the end, a small villa, in the Italian style, showed its graceful porch.

“Ah, that is pretty!” exclaimed Camors, at last.

“And you recognize my plan, Number Three, do you not?” asked Lescande, eagerly.

“Your plan Number Three? Ah, yes, perfectly,” replied Camors, absently. “And your pretty little cousin—is she within?”

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"She is there, my dear friend," answered Lescande, in a low voice—and he pointed to the closed shutters of a large window of a balcony surmounting the veranda. "She is there; and this is our son."

Camors let his hand pass listlessly over the child's hair. "The deuce!" he said; "but you have not wasted time. And you are happy, my good fellow?"

"So happy, my dear friend, that I am sometimes uneasy, for the good God is too kind to me. It is true, though, I had to work very hard. For instance, I passed two years in Spain—in the mountains of that infernal country. There I built a fairy palace for the Marquis of Buena-Vista, a great nobleman, who had seen my plan at the Exhibition and was delighted with it. This was the beginning of my fortune; but you must not imagine that my profession alone has enriched me so quickly. I made some successful speculations—some unheard of chances in lands; and, I beg you to believe, honestly, too. Still, I am not a millionaire; but you know I had nothing, and my wife less; now, my house paid for, we have ten thousand francs' income left. It is not a fortune for us, living in this style; but I still work and keep good courage, and my Juliette is happy in her paradise!"

"She wears no more soiled cuffs, then?" said Camors.

"I warrant she does not! Indeed, she has a slight tendency to luxury—like all women, you know. But I am delighted to see you remember so well our college follies. I also, through all my distractions, never forgot you a moment. I even had a foolish idea of asking you to my wedding, only I did not dare. You are so brilliant, so petted, with your establishment and your racers. My wife knows you very well; in fact, we have talked of you a hundred thousand times. Since she patronizes the turf and subscribes for 'The Sport', she says to me, 'Your friend's horse has won again'; and in our family circle we rejoice over your triumphs."

A flush tinged the cheek of Camors as he answered, quietly, "You are really too good."

They walked a moment in silence over the gravel path bordered by grass, before Lescande spoke again.

"And yourself, dear friend, I hope that you also are happy."

"I—happy!" Camors seemed a little astonished. "My happiness is simple enough, but I believe it is unclouded. I rise in the morning, ride to the Bois, thence to the club, go to the Bois again, and then back to the club. If there is a first representation at any theatre, I wish to see it. Thus, last evening they gave a new piece which was really exquisite. There was a song in it, beginning:



'He was a woodpecker,
A little woodpecker,
A young woodpecker—'

and the chorus imitated the cry of the woodpecker! Well, it was charming, and the whole of Paris will sing that song with delight for a year. I also shall do like the whole of Paris, and I shall be happy."

"Good heavens! my friend," laughed Lescande, "and that suffices you for happiness?"

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"That and—the principles of 'eighty-nine," replied Camors, lighting a fresh cigar from the old one.

Here their dialogue was broken by the fresh voice of a woman calling from the blinds of the balcony—

"Is that you, Theodore?"

Camors raised his eyes and saw a white hand, resting on the slats of the blind, bathed in sunlight.

"That is my wife. Conceal yourself!" cried Lescande, briskly; and he pushed Camors behind a clump of catalpas, as he turned to the balcony and lightly answered:

"Yes, my dear; do you wish anything?"

"Maxime is with you?"

"Yes, mother. I am here," cried the child. "It is a beautiful morning. Are you quite well?"

"I hardly know. I have slept too long, I believe." She opened the shutters, and, shading her eyes from the glare with her hand, appeared on the balcony.

She was in the flower of youth, slight, supple, and graceful, and appeared, in her ample morning-gown of blue cashmere, plumper and taller than she really was. Bands of the same color interlaced, in the Greek fashion, her chestnut hair—which nature, art, and the night had dishevelled—waved and curled to admiration on her small head.

She rested her elbows on the railing, yawned, showing her white teeth, and looking at her husband, asked:

"Why do you look so stupid?"

At the instant she observed Camors—whom the interest of the moment had withdrawn from his concealment—gave a startled cry, gathered up her skirts, and retired within the room.

Since leaving college up to this hour, Louis de Camors had never formed any great opinion of the Juliet who had taken Lescande as her Romeo. He experienced a flash of agreeable surprise on discovering that his friend was more happy in that respect than he had supposed.

"I am about to be scolded, my friend," said Lescande, with a hearty laugh, "and you also must stay for your share. You will stay and breakfast with us?"

Camors hesitated; then said, hastily, "No, no! Impossible! I have an engagement which I must keep."

Notwithstanding Camors's unwillingness, Lescande detained him until he had extorted a promise to come and dine with them—that is, with him, his wife, and his mother-in-law, Madame Mursois—on the following Tuesday. This acceptance left a cloud on the spirit of Camors until the appointed day. Besides abhorring family dinners, he objected to being reminded of the scene of the balcony. The indiscreet kindness of Lescande both touched and irritated him; for he knew he should play but a silly part near this pretty woman. He felt sure she was a coquette, notwithstanding which, the recollections of his youth and the character of her husband should make her sacred to him. So he was not in the most agreeable frame of mind when he stepped out of his dog-cart, that Tuesday evening, before the little villa of the Avenue Maillot.

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At his reception by Madame Lescande and her mother he took heart a little. They appeared to him what they were, two honest-hearted women, surrounded by luxury and elegance. The mother—an ex-beauty—had been left a widow when very young, and to this time had avoided any stain on her character. With them, innate delicacy held the place of those solid principles so little tolerated by French society. Like a few other women of society, Madame had the quality of virtue just as ermine has the quality of whiteness. Vice was not so repugnant to her as an evil as it was as a blemish. Her daughter had received from her those instincts of chastity which are oftener than we imagine hidden under the appearance of pride. But these amiable women had one unfortunate caprice, not uncommon at this day among Parisians of their position. Although rather clever, they bowed down, with the adoration of bourgeois, before that aristocracy, more or less pure, that paraded up and down the Champs Elysees, in the theatres, at the race-course, and on the most frequented promenades, its frivolous affairs and rival vanities.

Virtuous themselves, they read with interest the daintiest bits of scandal and the most equivocal adventures that took place among the elite. It was their happiness and their glory to learn the smallest details of the high life of Paris; to follow its feasts, speak in its slang, copy its toilets, and read its favorite books. So that if not the rose, they could at least be near the rose and become impregnated with her colors and her perfumes. Such apparent familiarity heightened them singularly in their own estimation and in that of their associates.

Now, although Camors did not yet occupy that bright spot in the heaven of fashion which was surely to be his one day, still he could here pass for a demigod, and as such inspire Madame Lescande and her mother with a sentiment of most violent curiosity. His early intimacy with Lescande had always connected a peculiar interest with his name: and they knew the names of his horses—most likely knew the names of his mistresses.

So it required all their natural tact to conceal from their guest the flutter of their nerves caused by his sacred presence; but they did succeed, and so well that Camors was slightly piqued. If not a coxcomb, he was at least young: he was accustomed to please: he knew the Princess de Clam-Goritz had lately applied to him her learned definition of an agreeable man—"He is charming, for one always feels in danger near him!"

Consequently, it seemed a little strange to him that the simple mother of the simple wife of simple Lescande should be able to bear his radiance with such calmness; and this brought him out of his premeditated reserve.

He took the trouble to be irresistible—not to Madame Lescande, to whom he was studiously respectful—but to Madame Mursois. The whole evening he scattered around

the mother the social epigrams intended to dazzle the daughter; Lescande meanwhile sitting with his mouth open, delighted with the success of his old schoolfellow.

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Next afternoon, Camors, returning from his ride in the Bois, by chance passed the Avenue Maillot. Madame Lescande was embroidering on the balcony, by chance, and returned his salute over her tapestry. He remarked, too, that she saluted very gracefully, by a slight inclination of the head, followed by a slight movement of her symmetrical, sloping shoulders.

When he called upon her two or three days after—as was only his duty—Camors reflected on a strong resolution he had made to keep very cool, and to expatiate to Madame Lescande only on her husband's virtues. This pious resolve had an unfortunate effect; for Madame, whose virtue had been piqued, had also reflected; and while an obtrusive devotion had not failed to frighten her, this course only reassured her. So she gave up without restraint to the pleasure of receiving in her boudoir one of the brightest stars from the heaven of her dreams.

It was now May, and at the races of La Marche—to take place the following Sunday—Camors was to be one of the riders. Madame Mursois and her daughter prevailed upon Lescande to take them, while Camors completed their happiness by admitting them to the weighing-stand. Further, when they walked past the judge's stand, Madame Mursois, to whom he gave his arm, had the delight of being escorted in public by a cavalier in an orange jacket and topboots. Lescande and his wife followed in the wake of the radiant mother-in-law, partaking of her ecstasy.

These agreeable relations continued for several weeks, without seeming to change their character. One day Camors would seat himself by the lady, before the palace of the Exhibition, and initiate her into the mysteries of all the fashionables who passed before them. Another time he would drop into their box at the opera, deign to remain there during an act or two, and correct their as yet incomplete views of the morals of the ballet. But in all these interviews he held toward Madame Lescande the language and manner of a brother: perhaps because he secretly persisted in his delicate resolve; perhaps because he was not ignorant that every road leads to Rome—and one as surely as another.

Madame Lescande reassured herself more and more; and feeling it unnecessary to be on her guard, as at first, thought she might permit herself a little levity. No woman is flattered at being loved only as a sister.

Camors, a little disquieted by the course things were taking, made some slight effort to divert it. But, although men in fencing wish to spare their adversaries, sometimes they find habit too strong for them, and lunge home in spite of themselves. Besides, he began to be really interested in Madame Lescande—in her coquettish ways, at once artful and simple, provoking and timid, suggestive and reticent—in short, charming.

The same evening that M. de Camors, the elder, returned to his home bent on suicide, his son, passing up the Avenue Maillot, was stopped by Lescande on the threshold of his villa.



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"My friend," said the latter, "as you are here you can do me a great favor. A telegram calls me suddenly to Melun—I must go on the instant. The ladies will be so lonely, pray stay and dine with them! I can't tell what the deuce ails my wife. She has been weeping all day over her tapestry; my mother-in-law has a headache. Your presence will cheer them. So stay, I beg you."

Camors refused, hesitated, made objections, and consented. He sent back his horse, and his friend presented him to the ladies, whom the presence of the unexpected guest seemed to cheer a little. Lescande stepped into his carriage and departed, after receiving from his wife an embrace more fervent than usual.

The dinner was gay. In the atmosphere was that subtle suggestion of coming danger of which both Camors and Madame Lescande felt the exhilarating influence. Their excitement, as yet innocent, employed itself in those lively sallies—those brilliant combats at the barriers—that ever precede the more serious conflict. About nine o'clock the headache of Madame Mursois—perhaps owing to the cigar they had allowed Camors—became more violent. She declared she could endure it no longer, and must retire to her chamber. Camors wished to withdraw, but his carriage had not yet arrived and Madame Mursois insisted that he should wait for it.

"Let my daughter amuse you with a little music until then," she added.

Left alone with her guest, the younger lady seemed embarrassed. "What shall I play for you?" she asked, in a constrained voice, taking her seat at the piano.

"Oh! anything—play a waltz," answered Camors, absently.

The waltz finished, an awkward silence ensued. To break it she arose hesitatingly; then clasping her hands together exclaimed, "It seems to me there is a storm. Do you not think so?" She approached the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. In a second Camors was at her side.

The night was beautifully clear. Before them stretched the sombre shadow of the wood, while nearer trembling rays of moonlight slept upon the lawn.

How still all was! Their trembling hands met and for a moment did not separate.

"Juliette!" whispered the young man, in a low, broken voice. She shuddered, repelled the arm that Camors passed round her, and hastily reentered the room.

"Leave me, I pray you!" she cried, with an impetuous gesture of her hand, as she sank upon the sofa, and buried her face in her hands.

Of course Camors did not obey. He seated himself by her.

In a little while Juliette awoke from her trance; but she awoke a lost woman!

How bitter was that awakening! She measured at a first glance the depth of the awful abyss into which she had suddenly plunged. Her husband, her mother, her infant, whirled like spectres in the mad chaos of her brain.

Sensible of the anguish of an irreparable wrong, she rose, passed her hand vacantly across her brow, and muttering, "Oh, God! oh, God!" peered vainly into the dark for light—hope—refuge! There was none!

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Her tortured soul cast herself utterly on that of her lover. She turned her swimming eyes on him and said:

“How you must despise me!”

Camors, half kneeling on the carpet near her, kissed her hand indifferently and half raised his shoulders in sign of denial. “Is it not so?” she repeated. “Answer me, Louis.”

His face wore a strange, cruel smile—“Do not insist on an answer, I pray you,” he said.

“Then I am right? You do despise me?”

Camors turned himself abruptly full toward her, looked straight in her face, and said, in a cold, hard voice, “I do!”

To this cruel speech the poor child replied by a wild cry that seemed to rend her, while her eyes dilated as if under the influence of strong poison. Camors strode across the room, then returned and stood by her as he said, in a quick, violent tone:

“You think I am brutal? Perhaps I am, but that can matter little now. After the irreparable wrong I have done you, there is one service—and only one which I can now render you. I do it now, and tell you the truth. Understand me clearly; women who fall do not judge themselves more harshly than their accomplices judge them. For myself, what would you have me think of you?”

“To his misfortune and my shame, I have known your husband since his boyhood. There is not a drop of blood in his veins that does not throb for you; there is not a thought of his day nor a dream of his night that is not yours; your every comfort comes from his sacrifices—your every joy from his exertion! See what he is to you!”

“You have only seen my name in the journals; you have seen me ride by your window; I have talked a few times with you, and you yield to me in one moment the whole of his life with your own—the whole of his happiness with your own.

“I tell you, woman, every man like me, who abuses your vanity and your weakness and afterward tells you he esteems you—lies! And if after all you still believe he loves you, you do yourself fresh injury. No: we soon learn to hate those irksome ties that become duties where we only sought pleasures; and the first effort after they are formed is to shatter them.

“As for the rest: women like you are not made for unholy love like ours. Their charm is their purity, and losing that, they lose everything. But it is a blessing to them to encounter one wretch, like myself, who cares to say—Forget me, forever! Farewell!”



He left her, passed from the room with rapid strides, and, slamming the door behind him, disappeared. Madame Lescande, who had listened, motionless, and pale as marble, remained in the same lifeless attitude, her eyes fixed, her hands clenched—yearning from the depths of her heart that death would summon her. Suddenly a singular noise, seeming to come from the next room, struck her ear. It was only a convulsive sob, or violent and smothered laughter. The wildest and most terrible ideas crowded to the mind of the unhappy woman; the foremost of them, that her husband had secretly returned, that he knew all—that his brain had given way, and that the laughter was the gibbering of his madness.

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Feeling her own brain begin to reel, she sprang from the sofa, and rushing to the door, threw it open. The next apartment was the dining-room, dimly lighted by a hanging lamp. There she saw Camors, crouched upon the floor, sobbing furiously and beating his forehead against a chair which he strained in a convulsive embrace. Her tongue refused its office; she could find no word, but seating herself near him, gave way to her emotion, and wept silently. He dragged himself nearer, seized the hem of her dress and covered it with kisses; his breast heaved tumultuously, his lips trembled and he gasped the almost inarticulate words, "Pardon! Oh, pardon me!"

This was all. Then he rose suddenly, rushed from the house, and the instant after she heard the rolling of the wheels as his carriage whirled him away.

If there were no morals and no remorse, French people would perhaps be happier. But unfortunately it happens that a young woman, who believes in little, like Madame Lescande, and a young man who believes in nothing, like M. de Camors, can not have the pleasures of an independent code of morals without suffering cruelly afterward.

A thousand old prejudices, which they think long since buried, start up suddenly in their consciences; and these revived scruples are nearly fatal to them.

Camors rushed toward Paris at the greatest speed of his thoroughbred, Fitz-Aymon, awakening along the route, by his elegance and style, sentiments of envy which would have changed to pity were the wounds of the heart visible. Bitter weariness, disgust of life and disgust for himself, were no new sensations to this young man; but he never had experienced them in such poignant intensity as at this cursed hour, when flying from the dishonored hearth of the friend of his boyhood. No action of his life had ever thrown such a flood of light on the depths of his infamy in doing such gross outrage to the friend of his purer days, to the dear confidant of the generous thoughts and proud aspirations of his youth. He knew he had trampled all these under foot. Like Macbeth, he had not only murdered one asleep, but had murdered sleep itself.

His reflections became insupportable. He thought successively of becoming a monk, of enlisting as a soldier, and of getting drunk—ere he reached the corner of the Rue Royale and the Boulevard. Chance favored his last design, for as he alighted in front of his club, he found himself face to face with a pale young man, who smiled as he extended his hand. Camors recognized the Prince d'Errol.

"The deuce! You here, my Prince! I thought you in Cairo."

"I arrived only this morning."

"Ah, then you are better?—Your chest?"

"So—so."

“Bah! you look perfectly well. And isn’t Cairo a strange place?”

“Rather; but I really believe Providence has sent you to me.”

“You really think so, my Prince? But why?”

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"Because—pshaw! I'll tell you by-and-bye; but first I want to hear all about your quarrel."

"What quarrel?"

"Your duel for Sarah."

"That is to say, against Sarah!"

"Well, tell me all that passed; I heard of it only vaguely while abroad."

"Well, I only strove to do a good action, and, according to custom, I was punished for it. I heard it said that that little imbecile La Brede borrowed money from his little sister to lavish it upon that Sarah. This was so unnatural that you may believe it first disgusted, and then irritated me. One day at the club I could not resist saying, 'You are an ass, La Bride, to ruin yourself—worse than that, to ruin your sister, for the sake of a snail, as little sympathetic as Sarah, a girl who always has a cold in her head, and who has already deceived you.' 'Deceived me!' cried La Brede, waving his long arms. 'Deceived me! and with whom?'—'With me.' As he knew I never lied, he panted for my life. Luckily my life is a tough one."

"You put him in bed for three months, I hear."

"Almost as long as that, yes. And now, my friend, do me a service. I am a bear, a savage, a ghost! Assist me to return to life. Let us go and sup with some sprightly people whose virtue is extraordinary."

"Agreed! That is recommended by my physician."

"From Cairo? Nothing could be better, my Prince."

Half an hour later Louis de Camors, the Prince d'Errol, and a half-dozen guests of both sexes, took possession of an apartment, the closed doors of which we must respect.

Next morning, at gray dawn, the party was about to disperse; and at the moment a ragpicker, with a gray beard, was wandering up and down before the restaurant, raking with his hook in the refuse that awaited the public sweepers. In closing his purse, with an unsteady hand, Camors let fall a shining louis d'or, which rolled into the mud on the sidewalk. The ragpicker looked up with a timid smile.

"Ah! Monsieur," he said, "what falls into the trench should belong to the soldier."

"Pick it up with your teeth, then," answered Camors, laughing, "and it is yours."

The man hesitated, flushed under his sunburned cheeks, and threw a look of deadly hatred upon the laughing group round him. Then he knelt, buried his chest in the mire, and sprang up next moment with the coin clenched between his sharp white teeth. The spectators applauded. The chiffonnier smiled a dark smile, and turned away.

“Hello, my friend!” cried Camors, touching his arm, “would you like to earn five Louis? If so, give me a knock-down blow. That will give you pleasure and do me good.”

The man turned, looked him steadily in the eye, then suddenly dealt him such a blow in the face that he reeled against the opposite wall. The young men standing by made a movement to fall upon the graybeard.

“Let no one harm him!” cried Camors. “Here, my man, are your hundred francs.”



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"Keep them," replied the other, "I am paid;" and walked away.

"Bravo, Belisarius!" laughed Camors. "Faith, gentlemen, I do not know whether you agree with me, but I am really charmed with this little episode. I must go dream upon it. By-bye, young ladies! Good-day, Prince!"

An early cab was passing, he jumped in, and was driven rapidly to his hotel, on the Rue Babet-de-Jouy.

The door of the courtyard was open, but being still under the influence of the wine he had drunk, he failed to notice a confused group of servants and neighbors standing before the stable-doors. Upon seeing him, these people became suddenly silent, and exchanged looks of sympathy and compassion. Camors occupied the second floor of the hotel; and ascending the stairs, found himself suddenly facing his father's valet. The man was very pale, and held a sealed paper, which he extended with a trembling hand.

"What is it, Joseph?" asked Camors.

"A letter which—which Monsieur le Comte wrote for you before he left."

"Before he left! my father is gone, then? But—where—how? What, the devil! why do you weep?"

Unable to speak, the servant handed him the paper. Camors seized it and tore it open.

"Good God! there is blood! what is this!" He read the first words—"My son, life is a burden to me. I leave it—" and fell fainting to the floor.

The poor lad loved his father, notwithstanding the past.

They carried him to his chamber.

CHAPTER III

DEBRIS FROM THE REVOLUTION

De Camors, on leaving college had entered upon life with a heart swelling with the virtues of youth—confidence, enthusiasm, sympathy. The horrible neglect of his early education had not corrupted in his veins those germs of weakness which, as his father declared, his mother's milk had deposited there; for that father, by shutting him up in a college to get rid of him for twelve years, had rendered him the greatest service in his power.

Those classic prisons surely do good. The healthy discipline of the school; the daily contact of young, fresh hearts; the long familiarity with the best works, powerful intellects, and great souls of the ancients—all these perhaps may not inspire a very rigid morality, but they do inspire a certain sentimental ideal of life and of duty which has its value.

The vague heroism which Camors first conceived he brought away with him. He demanded nothing, as you may remember, but the practical formula for the time and country in which he was destined to live. He found, doubtless, that the task he set himself was more difficult than he had imagined; that the truth to which he would devote himself—but which he must first draw from the bottom of its well—did not stand upon many compliments. But he failed no preparation to serve her valiantly as a man might, as soon as she answered his appeal. He had the advantage of several years of opposing to the excitements of his age and of an opulent life the austere meditations of the poor student.

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During that period of ardent, laborious youth, he faithfully shut himself up in libraries, attended public lectures, and gave himself a solid foundation of learning, which sometimes awakened surprise when discovered under the elegant frivolity of the gay turfman. But while arming himself for the battle of life, he lost, little by little, what was more essential than the best weapons—true courage.

In proportion as he followed Truth day by day, she flew before and eluded him, taking, like an unpleasant vision, the form of the thousand-headed Chimera.

About the middle of the last century, Paris was so covered with political and religious ruins, that the most piercing vision could scarcely distinguish the outlines of the fresh structures of the future. One could, see that everything was overthrown; but one could not see any power that was to raise the ruins. Over the confused wrecks and remains of the Past, the powerful intellectual life of the Present—Progress—the collision of ideas—the flame of French wit, criticism and the sciences—threw a brilliant light, which, like the sun of earlier ages, illuminated the chaos without making it productive. The phenomena of Life and of Death were commingled in one huge fermentation, in which everything decomposed and whence nothing seemed to spring up again.

At no period of history, perhaps, has Truth been less simple, more enveloped in complications; for it seemed that all essential notions of humanity had been fused in a great furnace, and none had come out whole.

The spectacle is grand; but it troubles profoundly all souls—or at least those that interest and curiosity do not suffice to fill; which is to say, nearly all. To disengage from this bubbling chaos one pure religious moral, one positive social idea, one fixed political creed, were an enterprise worthy of the most sincere. This should not be beyond the strength of a man of good intentions; and Louis de Camors might have accomplished the task had he been aided by better instruction and guidance.

It is the common misfortune of those just entering life to find in it less than their ideal. But in this respect Camors was born under a particularly unfortunate star, for he found in his surroundings—in his own family even—only the worst side of human nature; and, in some respects, of those very opinions to which he was tempted to adhere.

The Camors were originally from Brittany, where they had held, in the eighteenth century, large possessions, particularly some extensive forests, which still bear their name. The grandfather of Louis, the Comte Herve de Camors, had, on his return from the emigration, bought back a small part of the hereditary demesne. There he established himself in the old-fashioned style, and nourished until his death incurable prejudices against the French Revolution and against Louis XVIII.

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Count Herve had four children, two boys and two girls, and, feeling it his duty to protest against the levelling influences of the Civil Code, he established during his life, by a legal subterfuge, a sort of entail in favor of his eldest son, Charles-Henri, to the prejudice of Robert-Sosthene, Eleanore-Jeanne and Louise-Elizabeth, his other heirs. Eleanore-Jeanne and Louise-Elizabeth accepted with apparent willingness the act that benefited their brother at their expense—notwithstanding which they never forgave him. But Robert-Sosthene, who, in his position as representative of the younger branch, affected Liberal leanings and was besides loaded with debt, rebelled against the paternal procedure. He burned his visiting-cards, ornamented with the family crest and his name “Chevalier Lange d’Ardenne”—and had others printed, simply “Dardennes, junior (du Morbihan).”

Of these he sent a specimen to his father, and from that hour became a declared Republican.

There are people who attach themselves to a party by their virtues; others, again, by their vices. No recognized political party exists which does not contain some true principle; which does not respond to some legitimate aspiration of human society. At the same time, there is not one which can not serve as a pretext, as a refuge, and as a hope, for the basest passions of our nature.

The most advanced portion of the Liberal party of France is composed of generous spirits, ardent and absolute, who torture a really elevated ideal; that of a society of manhood, constituted with a sort of philosophic perfection; her own mistress each day and each hour; delegating few of her powers, and yielding none; living, not without laws, but without rulers; and, in short, developing her activity, her well-being, her genius, with that fulness of justice, of independence, and of dignity, which republicanism alone gives to all and to each one.

Every other system appears to them to preserve some of the slaveries and iniquities of former ages; and it also appears open to the suspicion of generating diverse interests—and often hostile ones—between the governors and the governed. They claim for all that political system which, without doubt, holds humanity in the most esteem; and however one may despise the practical working of their theory, the grandeur of its principles can not be despised.

They are in reality a proud race, great-hearted and high-spirited. They have had in their age their heroes and their martyrs; but they have had, on the other hand, their hypocrites, their adventurers, and their radicals—their greatest enemies.

Young Dardennes, to obtain grace for the equivocal origin of his convictions, placed himself in the front rank of these last.



Until he left college Louis de Camors never knew his uncle, who had remained on bad terms with his father; but he entertained for him, in secret; an enthusiastic admiration, attributing to him all the virtues of that principle of which he seemed the exponent.

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The Republic of '48 soon died: his uncle was among the vanquished; and this, to the young man, had but an additional attraction. Without his father's knowledge, he went to see him, as if on a pilgrimage to a holy shrine; and he was well received.

He found his uncle exasperated—not so much against his enemies as against his own party, to which he attributed all the disasters of the cause.

"They never can make revolutions with gloves on," he said in a solemn, dogmatic tone. "The men of 'ninety-three did not wear them. You can not make an omelette without first breaking the eggs.

"The pioneers of the future should march on, axe in hand!

"The chrysalis of the people is not hatched upon roses!

"Liberty is a goddess who demands great holocausts. Had they made a Reign of Terror in 'forty-eight, they would now be masters!"

These high-flown maxims astonished Louis de Camors. In his youthful simplicity he had an infinite respect for the men who had governed his country in her darkest hour; not more that they had given up power as poor as when they assumed it, than that they left it with their hands unstained with blood: To this praise—which will be accorded them in history, which redresses many contemporary injustices—he added a reproach which he could not reconcile with the strange regrets of his uncle. He reproached them with not having more boldly separated the New Republic, in its management and minor details, from the memories of the old one. Far from agreeing with his uncle that a revival of the horrors of 'ninety-three would have assured the triumph of the New Republic, he believed it had sunk under the bloody shadow of its predecessor. He believed that, owing to this boasted Terror, France had been for centuries the only country in which the dangers of liberty outweighed its benefits.

It is useless to dwell longer on the relations of Louis de Camors with his uncle Dardennes. It is enough that he was doubtful and discouraged, and made the error of holding the cause responsible for the violence of its lesser apostles, and that he adopted the fatal error, too common in France at that period, of confounding progress with discord, liberty with license, and revolution with terrorism!

The natural result of irritation and disenchantment on this ardent spirit was to swing it rapidly around to the opposite pole of opinion. After all, Camors argued, his birth, his name, his family ties all pointed out his true course, which was to combat the cruel and despotic doctrines which he believed he detected under these democratic theories. Another thing in the habitual language of his uncle also shocked and repelled him—the profession of an absolute atheism. He had within him, in default of a formal creed, a fund of general belief and respect for holy things—that kind of religious sensibility which

was shocked by impious cynicism. Further he could not comprehend then, or ever afterward, how principles alone, without faith in some higher sanction, could sustain themselves by their own strength in the human conscience.

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God—or no principles! This was the dilemma from which no German philosophy could rescue him.

This reaction in his mind drew him closer to those other branches of his family which he had hitherto neglected. His two aunts, living at Paris, had been compelled, in consequence of their small fortunes, to make some sacrifices to enter into the blessed state of matrimony. The elder, Eleanore-Jeanne, had married, during her father's life, the Comte de la Roche-Jugan—a man long past fifty, but still well worthy of being loved. Nevertheless, his wife did not love him. Their views on many essential points differed widely. M. de la Roche-Jugan was one of those who had served the Government of the Restoration with an unshaken but hopeless devotion. In his youth he had been attached to the person and to the ministry of the Duc de Richelieu; and he had preserved the memory of that illustrious man—of the elevated moderation of his sentiments—of the warmth of his patriotism and of his constancy. He saw the pitfalls ahead, pointed them out to his prince—displeased him by so doing, but still followed his fortunes. Once more retired to private life with but small means, he guarded his political principles rather like a religion than a hope. His hopes, his vivacity, his love of right—all these he turned toward God.

His piety, as enlightened as profound, ranked him among the choicest spirits who then endeavored to reconcile the national faith of the past with the inexorable liberty of thought of the present. Like his collaborators in this work, he experienced only a mortal sadness under which he sank. True, his wife contributed no little to hasten his end by the intemperance of her zeal and the acrimony of her bigotry.

She had little heart and great pride, and made her God subserve her passions, as Dardennes made liberty subserve his malice.

No sooner had she become a widow than she purified her salons. Thenceforth figured there only parishioners more orthodox than their bishops, French priests who denied Bossuet; consequently she believed that religion was saved in France. Louis de Camors, admitted to this choice circle by title both of relative and convert, found there the devotion of Louis XI and the charity of Catherine de Medicis; and he there lost very soon the little faith that remained to him.

He asked himself sadly whether there was no middle ground between Terror and Inquisition; whether in this world one must be a fanatic or nothing. He sought a middle course, possessing the force and cohesion of a party; but he sought in vain. It seemed to him that the whole world of politics and religion rushed to extremes; and that what was not extreme was inert and indifferent—dragging out, day by day, an existence without faith and without principle.

Thus at least appeared to him those whom the sad changes of his life showed him as types of modern politics.

His younger aunt, Louise-Elizabeth, who enjoyed to the full all the pleasures of modern life, had already profited by her father's death to make a rich misalliance. She married the Baron Tonnelier, whose father, although the son of a miller, had shown ability and honesty enough to fill high positions under the First Empire.

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The Baron Tonnelier had a large fortune, increasing every day by successful speculation. In his youth he had been a good horseman, a Voltairian, and a Liberal.

In time—though he remained a Voltairian—he renounced horsemanship, and Liberalism. Although he was a simple deputy, he had a twinge of democracy now and then; but after he was invested with the peerage, he felt sure from that moment that the human species had no more progress to make.

The French Revolution was ended; its giddiest height attained. No longer could any one walk, talk, write, or rise. That perplexed him. Had he been sincere, he would have avowed that he could not comprehend that there could be storms, or thunder-clouds in the heavens—that the world was not perfectly happy and tranquil, while he himself was so. When his nephew was old enough to comprehend him, Baron Tonnelier was no longer peer of France; but being one who does himself no hurt—and sometimes much good by a fall, he filled a high office under the new government. He endeavored to discharge its duties conscientiously, as he had those of the preceding reign.

He spoke with peculiar ease of suppressing this or that journal—such an orator, such a book; of suppressing everything, in short, except himself. In his view, France had been in the wrong road since 1789, and he sought to lead her back from that fatal date.

Nevertheless, he never spoke of returning, in his proper person, to his grandfather's mill; which, to say the least, was inconsistent. Had Liberty been mother to this old gentleman, and had he met her in a clump of woods, he would have strangled her. We regret to add that he had the habit of terming "old duffers" such ministers as he suspected of liberal views, and especially such as were in favor of popular education. A more hurtful counsellor never approached a throne; but luckily, while near it in office, he was far from it in influence.

He was still a charming man, gallant and fresh—more gallant, however, than fresh. Consequently his habits were not too good, and he haunted the greenroom of the opera. He had two daughters, recently married, before whom he repeated the most piquant witticisms of Voltaire, and the most improper stories of Tallemant de Reaux; and consequently both promised to afford the scandalmongers a series of racy anecdotes, as their mother had before them.

While Louis de Camors was learning rapidly, by the association and example of the collateral branches of his family, to defy equally all principles and all convictions, his terrible father finished the task.

Worldling to the last extreme, depraved to his very core; past-master in the art of Parisian high life; an unbridled egotist, thinking himself superior to everything because he abased everything to himself; and, finally, flattering himself for despising all duties, which he had all his life prided himself on dispensing with—such was his father. But for

all this, he was the pride of his circle, with a pleasing presence and an indefinable charm of manner.



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The father and son saw little of each other. M. de Camors was too proud to entangle his son in his own debaucheries; but the course of every-day life sometimes brought them together at meal-time. He would then listen with cool mockery to the enthusiastic or despondent speeches of the youth. He never deigned to argue seriously, but responded in a few bitter words, that fell like drops of sleet on the few sparks still glowing in the son's heart.

Becoming gradually discouraged, the latter lost all taste for work, and gave himself up, more and more, to the idle pleasures of his position. Abandoning himself wholly to these, he threw into them all the seductions of his person, all the generosity of his character—but at the same time a sadness always gloomy, sometimes desperate.

The bitter malice he displayed, however, did not prevent his being loved by women and renowned among men. And the latter imitated him.

He aided materially in founding a charming school of youth without smiles. His air of ennui and lassitude, which with him at least had the excuse of a serious foundation, was servilely copied by the youth around him, who never knew any greater distress than an overloaded stomach, but whom it pleased, nevertheless, to appear faded in their flower and contemptuous of human nature.

We have seen Camors in this phase of his existence. But in reality nothing was more foreign to him than the mask of careless disdain that the young man assumed. Upon falling into the common ditch, he, perhaps, had one advantage over his fellows: he did not make his bed with base resignation; he tried persistently to raise himself from it by a violent struggle, only to be hurled upon it once more.

Strong souls do not sleep easily: indifference weighs them down.

They demand a mission—a motive for action—and faith.

Louis de Camors was yet to find his.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW ACTRESS IN A NOVEL ROLE

Louis de Camor's father had not I told him all in that last letter.

Instead of leaving him a fortune, he left him only embarrassments, for he was three fourths ruined. The disorder of his affairs had begun a long time before, and it was to repair them that he had married; a process that had not proved successful. A large inheritance on which he had relied as coming to his wife went elsewhere—to endow a charity hospital. The Comte de Camors began a suit to recover it before the tribunal of



the Council of State, but compromised it for an annuity of thirty thousand francs. This stopped at his death. He enjoyed, besides, several fat sinecures, which his name, his social rank, and his personal address secured him from some of the great insurance companies. But these resources did not survive him; he only rented the house he had occupied; and the young Comte de Camors found himself suddenly reduced to the provision of his mother's dowry—a bare pittance to a man of his habits and rank.

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His father had often assured him he could leave him nothing, so the son was accustomed to look forward to this situation. Therefore, when he realized it, he was neither surprised nor revolted by the improvident egotism of which he was the victim. His reverence for his father continued unabated, and he did not read with the less respect or confidence the singular missive which figures at the beginning of this story. The moral theories which this letter advanced were not new to him. They were a part of the very atmosphere around him; he had often revolved them in his feverish brain; yet, never before had they appeared to him in the condensed form of a dogma, with the clear precision of a practical code; nor as now, with the authorization of such a voice and of such an example.

One incident gave powerful aid in confirming the impression of these last pages on his mind. Eight days after his father's death, he was reclining on the lounge in his smoking-room, his face dark as night and as his thoughts, when a servant entered and handed him a card. He took it listlessly, and read "Lescande, architect." Two red spots rose to his pale cheeks—"I do not see any one," he said.

"So I told this gentleman," replied the servant, "but he insists in such an extraordinary manner—"

"In an extraordinary manner?"

"Yes, sir; as if he had something very serious to communicate."

"Something serious—aha! Then let him in." Camors rose and paced the chamber, a smile of bitter mockery wreathing his lips. "And must I now kill him?" he muttered between his teeth.

Lescande entered, and his first act dissipated the apprehension his conduct had caused. He rushed to the young Count and seized him by both hands, while Camors remarked that his face was troubled and his lips trembled. "Sit down and be calm," he said.

"My friend," said the other, after a pause, "I come late to see you, for which I crave pardon; but—I am myself so miserable! See, I am in mourning!"

Camors felt a chill run to his very marrow. "In mourning! and why?" he asked, mechanically.

"Juliette is dead!" sobbed Lescande, and covered his eyes with his great hands.

"Great God!" cried Camors in a hollow voice. He listened a moment to Lescande's bitter sobs, then made a movement to take his hand, but dared not do it. "Great God! is it possible?" he repeated.



"It was so sudden!" sobbed Lescande, brokenly. "It seems like a dream—a frightful dream! You know the last time you visited us she was not well. You remember I told you she had wept all day. Poor child! The morning of my return she was seized with congestion—of the lungs—of the brain—I don't know!—but she is dead! And so good!—so gentle, so loving! to the last moment! Oh, my friend! my friend! A few moments before she died, she called me to her side. 'Oh, I love you so! I love you so!' she said. 'I never loved any but you—you only! Pardon me!—oh, pardon me!' Pardon her, poor child! My God, for what? for dying?—for she never gave me a moment's grief before in this world. Oh, God of mercy!"

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"I beseech you, my friend—"

"Yes, yes, I do wrong. You also have your griefs.

"But we are all selfish, you know. However, it was not of that that I came to speak. Tell me—I know not whether a report I hear is correct. Pardon me if I mistake, for you know I never would dream of offending you; but they say that you have been left in very bad circumstances. If this is indeed so, my friend—"

"It is not," interrupted Camors, abruptly.

"Well, if it were—I do not intend keeping my little house. Why should I, now? My little son can wait while I work for him. Then, after selling my house, I shall have two hundred thousand francs. Half of this is yours—return it when you can!"

"I thank you, my unselfish friend," replied Camors, much moved, "but I need nothing. My affairs are disordered, it is true; but I shall still remain richer than you."

"Yes, but with your tastes—"

"Well?"

"At all events, you know where to find me. I may count upon you—may I not?"

"You may."

"Adieu, my friend! I can do you no good now; but I shall see you again—shall I not?"

"Yes—another time."

Lescande departed, and the young Count remained immovable, with his features convulsed and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

This moment decided his whole future.

Sometimes a man feels a sudden, unaccountable impulse to smother in himself all human love and sympathy.

In the presence of this unhappy man, so unworthily treated, so broken-spirited, so confiding, Camors—if there be any truth in old spiritual laws—should have seen himself guilty of an atrocious act, which should have condemned him to a remorse almost unbearable.

But if it were true that the human herd was but the product of material forces in nature, producing, haphazard, strong beings and weak ones—lambs and lions—he had played

only the lion's part in destroying his companion. He said to himself, with his father's letter beneath his eyes, that this was the fact; and the reflection calmed him.

The more he thought, that day and the next, in depth of the retreat in which he had buried himself, the more was he persuaded that this doctrine was that very truth which he had sought, and which his father had bequeathed to him as the whole rule of his life. His cold and barren heart opened with a voluptuous pleasure under this new flame that filled and warmed it.

From this moment he possessed a faith—a principle of action—a plan of life—all that he needed; and was no longer oppressed by doubts, agitation, and remorse. This doctrine, if not the most elevated, was at least above the level of the most of mankind. It satisfied his pride and justified his scorn.

To preserve his self-esteem, it was only necessary for him to preserve his honor, to do nothing low, as his father had said; and he determined never to do anything which, in his eyes, partook of that character. Moreover, were there not men he himself had met thoroughly steeped in materialism, who were yet regarded as the most honorable men of their day?

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Perhaps he might have asked himself whether this incontestable fact might not, in part, have been attributed rather to the individual than to the doctrine; and whether men's beliefs did not always influence their actions. However that might have been, from the date of this crisis Louis de Camors made his father's will the rule of his life.

To develop in all their strength the physical and intellectual gifts which he possessed; to make of himself the polished type of the civilization of the times; to charm women and control men; to revel in all the joys of intellect, of the senses, and of rank; to subdue as servile instincts all natural sentiments; to scorn, as chimeras and hypocrisies, all vulgar beliefs; to love nothing, fear nothing, respect nothing, save honor—such, in fine, were the duties which he recognized, and the rights which he arrogated to himself.

It was with these redoubtable weapons, and strengthened by a keen intelligence and vigorous will, that he would return to the world—his brow calm and grave, his eye caressing while unyielding, a smile upon his lips, as men had known him.

From this moment there was no cloud either upon his mind or upon his face, which wore the aspect of perpetual youth. He determined, above all, not to retrench, but to preserve, despite the narrowness of his present fortune, those habits of elegant luxury in which he still might indulge for several years, by the expenditure of his principal.

Both pride and policy gave him this council in an equal degree. He was not ignorant that the world is as cold toward the needy as it is warm to those not needing its countenance. Had he been thus ignorant, the attitude of his family, just after the death of his father, would have opened his eyes to the fact.

His aunt de la Roche-Jugan and his uncle Tonnelier manifested toward him the cold circumspection of people who suspected they were dealing with a ruined man. They had even, for greater security, left Paris, and neglected to notify the young Count in what retreat they had chosen to hide their grief. Nevertheless he was soon to learn it, for while he was busied in settling his father's affairs and organizing his own projects of fortune and ambition, one fine morning in August he met with a lively surprise.

He counted among his relatives one of the richest landed proprietors of France, General the Marquis de Campvallon d'Armignes, celebrated for his fearful outbursts in the Corps Legislatif. He had a voice of thunder, and when he rolled out, "Bah! Enough! Stop this order of the day!" the senate trembled, and the government commissioners bounced on their chairs. Yet he was the best fellow in the world, although he had killed two fellow-creatures in duels—but then he had his reasons for that.

Camors knew him but slightly, paid him the necessary respect that politeness demanded toward a relative; met him sometimes at the club, over a game of whist, and that was all.

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Two years before, the General had lost a nephew, the direct heir to his name and fortune. Consequently he was hunted by an eager pack of cousins and relatives; and Madame de la Roche-Jugan and the Baroness Tonnelier gave tongue in their foremost rank.

Camors was indifferent, and had, since that event, been particularly reserved in his intercourse with the General. Therefore he was considerably astonished when he received the following letter:

"Dear kinsman:

"Your two aunts and their families are with me in the country. When it is agreeable to you to join them, I shall always feel happy to give a cordial greeting to the son of an old friend and companion-in-arms.

"I presented myself at your house before leaving Paris, but you were not visible.

"Believe me, I comprehend your grief: that you have experienced an irreparable loss, in which I sympathize with you most sincerely.

*"Receive, my dear kinsman, the best wishes of
general, the marquis de Campvallon D'ARMIGNES.*

"Chateau de Campvallon, Voie de l'ouest.

"P.S.—It is probable, my young cousin, that I may have something of interest to communicate to you!"

This last sentence, and the exclamation mark that followed it, failed not to shake slightly the impassive calm that Camors was at that moment cultivating. He could not help seeing, as in a mirror, under the veil of the mysterious postscript, the reflection of seven hundred thousand francs of ground-rent which made the splendid income of the General. He recalled that his father, who had served some time in Africa, had been attached to the staff of M. de Campvallon as aide-de-camp, and that he had besides rendered him a great service of a different nature.

Notwithstanding that he felt the absurdity of these dreams, and wished to keep his heart free from them, he left the next day for Campvallon. After enjoying for seven or eight hours all the comforts and luxuries the Western line is reputed to afford its guests, Camors arrived in the evening at the station, where the General's carriage awaited him. The seignorial pile of the Chateau Campvallon soon appeared to him on a height, of which the sides were covered with magnificent woods, sloping down nearly to the plain, there spreading out widely.

It was almost the dinner-hour; and the young man, after arranging his toilet, immediately descended to the drawing-room, where his presence seemed to throw a wet blanket over the assembled circle. To make up for this, the General gave him the warmest welcome; only—as he had a short memory or little imagination—he found nothing better to say than to repeat the expressions of his letter, while squeezing his hand almost to the point of fracture.

“The son of my old friend and companion-in-arms,” he cried; and the words rang out in such a sonorous voice they seemed to impress even himself—for it was noticeable that after a remark, the General always seemed astonished, as if startled by the words that came out of his mouth—and that seemed suddenly to expand the compass of his ideas and the depth of his sentiments.

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To complete his portrait: he was of medium size, square, and stout; panting when he ascended stairs, or even walking on level ground; a face massive and broad as a mask, and reminding one of those fabled beings who blew fire from their nostrils; a huge moustache, white and grizzly; small gray eyes, always fixed, like those of a doll, but still terrible. He marched toward a man slowly, imposingly, with eyes fixed, as if beginning a duel to the death, and demanded of him imperatively—the time of day!

Camors well knew this innocent weakness of his host, but, notwithstanding, was its dupe for one instant during the evening.

They had left the dining-table, and he was standing carelessly in the alcove of a window, holding a cup of coffee, when the General approached him from the extreme end of the room with a severe yet confidential expression, which seemed to preface an announcement of the greatest importance.

The postscript rose before him. He felt he was to have an immediate explanation.

The General approached, seized him by the buttonhole, and withdrawing him from the depth of the recess, looked into his eyes as if he wished to penetrate his very soul. Suddenly he spoke, in his thunderous voice. He said:

“What do you take in the morning, young man?”

“Tea, General.”

“Aha! Then give your orders to Pierre—just as if you were at home;” and, turning on his heel and joining the ladies, he left Camors to digest his little comedy as he might.

Eight days passed. Twice the General made his guest the object of his formidable advance. The first time, having put him out of countenance, he contented himself with exclaiming:

“Well, young man!” and turned on his heel.

The next time he bore down upon Camors, he said not a word, and retired in silence.

Evidently the General had not the slightest recollection of the postscript. Camors tried to be contented, but would continually ask himself why he had come to Campvallon, in the midst of his family, of whom he was not overfond, and in the depths of the country, which he execrated. Luckily, the castle boasted a library well stocked with works on civil and international law, jurisprudence, and political economy. He took advantage of it; and, resuming the thread of those serious studies which had been broken off during his period of hopelessness, plunged into those recondite themes that pleased his active intelligence and his awakened ambition. Thus he waited patiently until politeness would permit him to bring to an explanation the former friend and companion-in-arms of his



father. In the morning he rode on horseback; gave a lesson in fencing to his cousin Sigismund, the son of Madame de la Roche-Jugan; then shut himself up in the library until the evening, which he passed at bezique with the General. Meantime he viewed with the eye of a philosopher the strife of the covetous relatives who hovered around their rich prey.

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Madame de la Roche-Jugan had invented an original way of making herself agreeable to the General, which was to persuade him he had disease of the heart. She continually felt his pulse with her plump hand, sometimes reassuring him, and at others inspiring him with a salutary terror, although he denied it.

“Good heavens! my dear cousin!” he would exclaim, “let me alone. I know I am mortal like everybody else. What of that? But I see your aim—it is to convert me! Ta-ta!”

She not only wished to convert him, but to marry him, and bury him besides.

She based her hopes in this respect chiefly on her son Sigismund; knowing that the General bitterly regretted having no one to inherit his name. He had but to marry Madame de la Roche-Jugan and adopt her son to banish this care. Without a single allusion to this fact, the Countess failed not to turn the thoughts of the General toward it with all the tact of an accomplished intrigante, with all the ardor of a mother, and with all the piety of an unctuous devotee.

Her sister, the Baroness Tonnelier, bitterly confessed her own disadvantage. She was not a widow. And she had no son. But she had two daughters, both of them graceful, very elegant and sparkling. One was Madame Bacquiere, the wife of a broker; the other, Madame Van-Cuyp, wife of a young Hollander, doing business at Paris.

Both interpreted life and marriage gayly; both floated from one year into another dancing, riding, hunting, coquetting, and singing recklessly the most risque songs of the minor theatres. Formerly, Camors, in his pensive mood, had taken an aversion to these little examples of modern feminine frivolity. Since he had changed his views of life he did them more justice. He said, calmly:

“They are pretty little animals that follow their instincts.”

Mesdames Bacquiere and Van-Cuyp, instigated by their mother, applied themselves assiduously to making the General feel all the sacred joys that cluster round the domestic hearth. They enlivened his household, exercised his horses, killed his game, and tortured his piano. They seemed to think that the General, once accustomed to their sweetness and animation, could not do without it, and that their society would become indispensable to him. They mingled, too, with their adroit manoeuvres, familiar and delicate attentions, likely to touch an old man. They sat on his knees like children, played gently with his moustache, and arranged in the latest style the military knot of his cravat.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan never ceased to deplore confidentially to the General the unfortunate education of her nieces; while the Baroness, on her side, lost no opportunity of holding up in bold relief the emptiness, impertinence, and sulkiness of young Count Sigismund.

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In the midst of these honorable conflicts one person, who took no part in them, attracted the greatest share of Camors's interest; first for her beauty and afterward for her qualities. This was an orphan of excellent family, but very poor, of whom Madame de la Roche-Jugan and Madame Tonnelier had taken joint charge. Mademoiselle Charlotte de Luc d'Estrelles passed six months of each year with the Countess and six with the Baroness. She was twenty-five years of age, tall and blonde, with deep-set eyes under the shadow of sweeping, black lashes. Thick masses of hair framed her sad but splendid brow; and she was badly, or rather poorly dressed, never condescending to wear the cast-off clothes of her relatives, but preferring gowns of simplest material made by her own hands. These draperies gave her the appearance of an antique statue.

Her Tonnelier cousins nicknamed her "the goddess." They hated her; she despised them. The name they gave her, however, was marvellously suitable.

When she walked, you would have imagined she had descended from a pedestal; the pose of her head was like that of the Greek Venus; her delicate, dilating nostrils seemed carved by a cunning chisel from transparent ivory. She had a startled, wild air, such as one sees in pictures of huntress nymphs. She used a naturally fine voice with great effect; and had already cultivated, so far as she could, a taste for art.

She was naturally so taciturn one was compelled to guess her thoughts; and long since Camors had reflected as to what was passing in that self-centred soul. Inspired by his innate generosity, as well as his secret admiration, he took pleasure in heaping upon this poor cousin the attentions he might have paid a queen; but she always seemed as indifferent to them as she was to the opposite course of her involuntary benefactress. Her position at Campvallon was very odd. After Camors's arrival, she was more taciturn than ever; absorbed, estranged, as if meditating some deep design, she would suddenly raise the long lashes of her blue eyes, dart a rapid glance here and there, and finally fix it on Camors, who would feel himself tremble under it.

One afternoon, when he was seated in the library, he heard a gentle tap at the door, and Mademoiselle entered, looking very pale. Somewhat astonished, he rose and saluted her.

"I wish to speak with you, cousin," she said. The accent was pure and grave, but slightly touched with evident emotion. Camors stared at her, showed her to a divan, and took a chair facing her.

"You know very little of me, cousin," she continued, "but I am frank and courageous. I will come at once to the object that brings me here. Is it true that you are ruined?"

"Why do you ask, Mademoiselle?"

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"You always have been very good to me—you only. I am very grateful to you; and I also —" She stopped, dropped her eyes, and a bright flush suffused her cheeks. Then she bent her head, smiling like one who has regained courage under difficulty. "Well, then," she resumed, "I am ready to devote my life to you. You will deem me very romantic, but I have wrought out of our united poverty a very charming picture, I believe. I am sure I should make an excellent wife for the husband I loved. If you must leave France, as they tell me you must, I will follow you—I will be your brave and faithful helpmate. Pardon me, one word more, Monsieur de Camors. My proposition would be immodest if it concealed any afterthought. It conceals none. I am poor. I have but fifteen hundred francs' income. If you are richer than I, consider I have said nothing; for nothing in the world would then induce me to marry you!"

She paused; and with a manner of mingled yearning, candor, and anguish, fixed on him her large eyes full of fire.

There was a solemn pause. Between these strange natures, both high and noble, a terrible destiny seemed pending at this moment, and both felt it.

At length Camors responded in a grave, calm voice: "It is impossible, Mademoiselle, that you can appreciate the trial to which you expose me; but I have searched my heart, and I there find nothing worthy of you. Do me the justice to believe that my decision is based neither upon your fortune nor upon my own: but I am resolved never to marry." She sighed deeply, and rose. "Adieu, cousin," she said.

"I beg—I pray you to remain one moment," cried the young man, reseating her with gentle force upon the sofa. He walked half across the room to repress his agitation; then leaning on a table near the young girl, said:

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, you are unhappy; are you not?"

"A little, perhaps," she answered.

"I do not mean at this moment, but always?"

"Always!"

"Aunt de la Roche-Jugan treats you harshly?"

"Undoubtedly; she dreads that I may entrap her son. Good heavens!"

"The little Tonneliers are jealous of you, and Uncle Tonnelier torments you?"

"Basely!" she said; and two tears swam on her eyelashes, then glistened like diamonds on her cheek.

“And what do you believe of the religion of our aunt?”

“What would you have me believe of religion that bestows no virtue—restrains no vice?”

“Then you are a non-believer?”

“One may believe in God and the Gospel without believing in the religion of our aunt.”

“But she will drive you into a convent. Why, then, do you not enter one?”

“I love life,” the girl said.

He looked at her silently a moment, then continued “Yes, you love life—the sunlight, the thoughts, the arts, the luxuries—everything that is beautiful, like yourself. Then, Mademoiselle Charlotte, all these are in your hands; why do you not grasp them?”

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"How?" she queried, surprised and somewhat startled.

"If you have, as I believe you have, as much strength of soul as intelligence and beauty, you can escape at once and forever the miserable servitude fate has imposed upon you. Richly endowed as you are, you might become to-morrow a great artiste, independent, feted, rich, adored—the mistress of Paris and of the world!"

"And yours also?—No!" said this strange girl.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle Charlotte. I did not suspect you of any improper idea, when you offered to share my uncertain fortunes. Render me, I pray you, the same justice at this moment. My moral principles are very lax, it is true, but I am as proud as yourself. I never shall reach my aim by any subterfuge. No; strive to study art. I find you beautiful and seductive, but I am governed by sentiments superior to personal interests. I was profoundly touched by your sympathetic leaning toward me, and have sought to testify my gratitude by friendly counsel. Since, however, you now suspect me of striving to corrupt you for my own ends, I am silent, Mademoiselle, and permit you to depart."

"Pray proceed, Monsieur de Camors."

"You will then listen to me with confidence?"

"I will do so."

"Well, then, Mademoiselle, you have seen little of the world, but you have seen enough to judge and to be certain of the value of its esteem. The world! That is your family and mine: Monsieur and Madame Tonnelier, Monsieur and Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and the little Sigismund!"

"Well, then, Mademoiselle Charlotte, the day that you become a great artiste, rich, triumphant, idolized, wealthy—drinking, in deep draughts, all the joys of life—that day Uncle Tonnelier will invoke outraged morals, our aunt will swoon with prudery in the arms of her old lovers, and Madame de la Roche-Jugan will groan and turn her yellow eyes to heaven! But what will all that matter to you?"

"Then, Monsieur, you advise me to lead an immoral life."

"By no manner of means. I only urge you, in defiance of public opinion, to become an actress, as the only sure road to independence, fame, and fortune. And besides, there is no law preventing an actress marrying and being 'honorable,' as the world understands the word. You have heard of more than one example of this."

"Without mother, family, or protector, it would be an extraordinary thing for me to do! I can not fail to see that sooner or later I should be a lost girl."



Camors remained silent. "Why do you not answer?" she asked.

"Heavens! Mademoiselle, because this is so delicate a subject, and our ideas are so different about it. I can not change mine; I must leave you yours. As for me, I am a very pagan."

"How? Are good and bad indifferent to you?"

"No; but to me it seems bad to fear the opinion of people one despises, to practise what one does not believe, and to yield before prejudices and phantoms of which one knows the unreality. It is bad to be a slave or a hypocrite, as are three fourths of the world. Evil is ugliness, ignorance, folly, and baseness. Good is beauty, talent, ability, and courage! That is all."

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"And God?" the girl cried. He did not reply. She looked fixedly at him a moment without catching the eyes he kept turned from her. Her head drooped heavily; then raising it suddenly, she said: "There are sentiments men can not understand. In my bitter hours I have often dreamed of this free life you now advise; but I have always recoiled before one thought—only one."

"And that?"

"Perhaps the sentiment is not peculiar to me—perhaps it is excessive pride, but I have a great regard for myself—my person is sacred to me. Should I come to believe in nothing, like you—and I am far from that yet, thank God!—I should even then remain honest and true—faithful to one love, simply from pride. I should prefer," she added, in a voice deep and sustained, but somewhat strained, "I should prefer to desecrate an altar rather than myself!"

Saying these words, she rose, made a haughty movement of the head in sign of an adieu, and left the room.

CHAPTER V

THE COUNT LOSES A LADY AND FINDS A MISSION

Camors sat for some time plunged in thought.

He was astonished at the depths he had discovered in her character; he was displeased with himself without well knowing why; and, above all, he was much struck by his cousin.

However, as he had but a slight opinion of the sincerity of women, he persuaded himself that Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, when she came to offer him her heart and hand, nevertheless knew he was not altogether a despicable match for her. He said to himself that a few years back he might have been duped by her apparent sincerity, and congratulated himself on not having fallen into this attractive snare—on not having listened to the first promptings of credulity and sincere emotion.

He might have spared himself these compliments. Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, as he was soon to discover, had been in that perfectly frank, generous, and disinterested state of mind in which women sometimes are.

Only, would it happen to him to find her so in the future? That was doubtful, thanks to M. de Camors. It often happens that by despising men too much, we degrade them; in suspecting women too much, we lose them.

About an hour passed; there was another rap at the library door. Camors felt a slight palpitation and a secret wish that it should prove Mademoiselle Charlotte.

It was the General who entered. He advanced with measured stride, puffed like some sea-monster, and seized Camors by the lapel of his coat. Then he said, impressively:

“Well, young gentleman!”

“Well, General.”

“What are you doing in here?”

“Oh, I am at work.”

“At work? Um! Sit down there—sit down, sit down!” He threw himself on the sofa where Mademoiselle had been, which rather changed the perspective for Camors.

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"Well, well!" he repeated, after a long pause.

"But what then, General?"

"What then? The deuce! Why, have you not noticed that I have been for some days extraordinarily agitated?"

"No, General, I have not noticed it."

"You are not very observing! I am extraordinarily agitated—enough to fatigue the eyes. So agitated, upon my word of honor, that there are moments when I am tempted to believe your aunt is right: that I have disease of the heart!"

"Bah, General! My aunt is dreaming; you have the pulse of an infant."

"You believe so, really? I do not fear death; but it is always annoying to think of it. But I am too much agitated—it is necessary to put a stop to it. You understand?"

"Perfectly; but how can it concern me?"

"Concern you? You are about to hear. You are my cousin, are you not?"

"Truly, General, I have that honor."

"But very distant, eh? I have thirty-six cousins as near as you, and—the devil! To speak plainly, I owe you nothing."

"And I have never demanded payment even of that, General."

"Ah, I know that! Well, you are my cousin, very far removed! But you are more than that. Your father saved my life in the Atlas. He has related it all to you—No? Well, that does not astonish me; for he was no braggart, that father of yours; he was a man! Had he not quitted the army, a brilliant career was before him. People talk a great deal of Pelissier, of Canrobert, of MacMahon, and of others. I say nothing against them; they are good men doubtless—at least I hear so; but your father would have eclipsed them all had he taken the trouble. But he didn't take the trouble!

"Well, for the story: We were crossing a gorge of the Atlas; we were in retreat; I had lost my command; I was following as a volunteer. It is useless to weary you with details; we were in retreat; a shower of stones and bullets poured upon us, as if from the moon. Our column was slightly disordered; I was in the rearguard—whack! my horse was down, and I under him!

"We were in a narrow gorge with sloping sides some fifteen feet high; five dirty guerillas slid down the sides and fell upon me and on the beast—forty devils! I can see them

now! Just here the gorge took a sudden turn, so no one could see my trouble; or no one wished to see it, which comes to the same thing.

“I have told you things were in much disorder; and I beg you to remember that with a dead horse and five live Arabs on top of me, I was not very comfortable. I was suffocating; in fact, I was devilish far from comfortable.

“Just then your father ran to my assistance, like the noble fellow he was! He drew me from under my horse; he fell upon the Arabs. When I was up, I aided him a little—but that is nothing to the point—I never shall forget him!”

There was a pause, when the General added:

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"Let us understand each other, and speak plainly. Would it be very repugnant to your feelings to have seven hundred thousand francs a year, and to be called, after me, Marquis de Campvallon d'Armignes? Come, speak up, and give me an answer."

The young Count reddened slightly.

"My name is Camors," he said, gently.

"What! You would not wish me to adopt you? You refuse to become the heir of my name and of my fortune?"

"Yes, General."

"Do you not wish time to reflect upon it?"

"No, General. I am sincerely grateful for your goodness; your generous intentions toward me touch me deeply, but in a question of honor I never reflect or hesitate."

The General puffed fiercely, like a locomotive blowing off steam. Then he rose and took two or three turns up and down the gallery, shuffling his feet, his chest heaving. Then he returned and reseated himself.

"What are your plans for the future?" he asked, abruptly.

"I shall try, in the first place, General, to repair my fortune, which is much shattered. I am not so great a stranger to business as people suppose, and my father's connections and my own will give me a footing in some great financial or industrial enterprise. Once there, I shall succeed by force of will and steady work. Besides, I shall fit myself for public life, and aspire, when circumstances permit me, to become a deputy."

"Well, well, a man must do something. Idleness is the parent of all vices. See; like yourself, I am fond of the horse—a noble animal. I approve of racing; it improves the breed of horses, and aids in mounting our cavalry efficiently. But sport should be an amusement, not a profession. Hem! so you aspire to become a deputy?"

"Assuredly."

"Then I can help you in that, at least. When you are ready I will send in my resignation, and recommend to my brave and faithful constituents that you take my place. Will that suit you?"

"Admirably, General; and I am truly grateful. But why should you resign?"

"Why? Well, to be useful to you in the first place; in the second, I am sick of it. I shall not be sorry to give personally a little lesson to the government, which I trust will profit

by it. You know me—I am no Jacobin; at first I thought that would succeed. But when I see what is going on!”

“What is going on, General?”

“When I see a Tonnelier a great dignitary! It makes me long for the pen of Tacitus, on my word. When I was retired in 'forty-eight, under a mean and cruel injustice they did me, I had not reached the age of exemption. I was still capable of good and loyal service; but probably I could have waited until an amendment. I found it at least in the confidence of my brave and faithful constituents. But, my young friend, one tires of everything. The Assemblies at the Luxembourg—I mean the Palace of the Bourbons—fatigue me. In short, whatever regret I may feel at parting from my honorable colleagues, and from my faithful constituents, I shall abdicate my functions whenever you are ready and willing to accept them. Have you not some property in this district?”

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"Yes, General, a little property which belonged to my mother; a small manor, with a little land round it, called Reuilly."

"Reuilly! Not two steps from Des Rameures! Certainly—certainly! Well, that is one foot in the stirrup."

"But then there is one difficulty; I am obliged to sell it."

"The devil! And why?"

"It is all that is left to me, and it only brings me eleven thousand francs a year; and to embark in business I need capital—a beginning. I prefer not to borrow."

The General rose, and once more his military tramp shook the gallery. Then he threw himself back on the sofa.

"You must not sell that property! I owe you nothing, 'tis true, but I have an affection for you. You refuse to be my adopted son. Well, I regret this, and must have recourse to other projects to aid you. I warn you I shall try other projects. You must not sell your lands if you wish to become a deputy, for the country people—especially those of Des Rameures—will not hear of it. Meantime you will need funds. Permit me to offer you three hundred thousand francs. You may return them when you can, without interest, and if you never return them you will confer a very great favor upon me."

"But in truth, General—"

"Come, come! Accept it as from a relative—from a friend—from your father's friend—on any ground you please, so you accept. If not, you will wound me seriously."

Camors rose, took the General's hand, and pressing it with emotion, said, briefly:

"I accept, sir. I thank you!"

The General sprang up at these words like a furious lion, his moustache bristling, his nostrils dilating, his chest heaving. Staring at the young Count with real ferocity, he suddenly drew him to his breast and embraced him with great fervor. Then he strode to the door with his usual solemnity, and quickly brushing a tear from his cheek, left the room.

The General was a good man; but, like many good people, he had not been happy. You might smile at his oddities: you never could reproach him with vices.

He was a small man, but he had a great soul. Timid at heart, especially with women, he was delicate, passionate, and chaste. He had loved but little, and never had been loved at all. He declared that he had retired from all friendship with women, because of a

wrong that he had suffered. At forty years of age he had married the daughter of a poor colonel who had been killed by the enemy. Not long after, his wife had deceived him with one of his aides-de-camp.

The treachery was revealed to him by a rival, who played on this occasion the infamous role of Iago. Campvallon laid aside his starred epaulettes, and in two successive duels, still remembered in Africa, killed on two successive days the guilty one and his betrayer. His wife died shortly after, and he was left more lonely than ever. He was not the man to console himself with venal love; a gross remark made him blush; the corps de ballet inspired him with terror. He did not dare to avow it, but the dream of his old age, with his fierce moustache and his grim countenance, was the devoted love of some young girl, at whose feet he might pour out, without shame, without distrust even, all the tenderness of his simple and heroic heart.

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On the evening of the day which had been marked for Camors by these two interesting episodes, Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles did not come down to dinner, but sent word she had a headache. This message was received with a general murmur, and with some sharp remarks from Madame de la Roche-Jugan, which implied Mademoiselle was not in a position which justified her in having a headache. The dinner, however, was not less gay than usual, thanks to Mesdames Bacquiere and Van-Cuyp, and to their husbands, who had arrived from Paris to pass Sunday with them.

To celebrate this happy meeting, they drank very freely of champagne, talked slang, and imitated actors, causing much amusement to the servants. Returning to the drawing-room, these innocent young things thought it very funny to take their husbands' hats, put their feet in them, and, thus shod, to run a steeplechase across the room. Meantime Madame de la Roche-Jugan felt the General's pulse frequently, and found it variable.

Next morning at breakfast all the General's guests assembled, except Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, whose headache apparently was no better. They remarked also the absence of the General, who was the embodiment of politeness and punctuality. A sense of uneasiness was beginning to creep over all, when suddenly the door opened and the General appeared leading Mademoiselle d'Estrelles by the hand.

The young girl's eyes were red; her face was very pale. The General's face was scarlet. He advanced a few steps, like an actor about to address his audience; cast fierce glances on all sides of him, and cleared his throat with a sound that echoed like the bass notes of a grand piano. Then he spoke in a voice of thunder:

"My dear guests and friends, permit me to present to you the Marquise de Campvallon d'Armignès!"

An iceberg at the North Pole is not colder than was the General's salon at this announcement.

He held the young lady by the hand, and retaining his position in the centre of the room, launched out fierce glances. Then his eyes began to wander and roll convulsively in their sockets, as if he was himself astonished at the effect his announcement had produced.

Camors was the first to come to the rescue, and taking his hand, said: "Accept, my dear General, my congratulations. I am extremely happy, and rejoice at your good fortune; the more so, as I feel the lady is so well worthy of you." Then, bowing to Mademoiselle d'Estrelles with a grave grace, he pressed her hand, and turning away, was struck dumb at seeing Madame de la Roche-Jugan in the arms of the General. She passed from his into those of Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, who feared at first, from the violence of the caresses, that there was a secret design to strangle her.

“General,” said Madame de la Roche-Jugan in a plaintive voice, “you remember I always recommended her to you. I always spoke well of her. She is my daughter—my second child. Sigismund, embrace your sister! You permit it, General? Ah, we never know how much we love these children until we lose them! I always spoke well of her; did I not—Ge—General?” And here Madame de la Roche-Jugan burst into tears.

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The General, who began to entertain a high opinion of the Countess's heart, declared that Mademoiselle d'Estrelles would find in him a friend and father. After which flattering assurance, Madame de la Roche-Jugan seated herself in a solitary corner, behind a curtain, whence they heard sobs and moans issue for a whole hour. She could not even breakfast; happiness had taken away her appetite.

The ice once broken, all tried to make themselves agreeable. The Tonneliers did not behave, however, with the same warmth as the tender Countess, and it was easy to see that Mesdames Bacquiere and Van Cuyp could not picture to themselves, without envy, the shower of gold and diamonds about to fall into the lap of their cousin. Messrs. Bacquiere and Van-Cuyp were naturally the first sufferers, and their charming wives made them understand, at intervals during the day, that they thoroughly despised them. It was a bitter Sunday for those poor fellows. The Tonnelier family also felt that little more was to be done there, and left the next morning with a very cold adieu.

The conduct of the Countess was more noble. She declared she would wait upon her dearly beloved Charlotte from the altar to the very threshold of the nuptial chamber; that she would arrange her trousseau, and that the marriage should take place from her house.

"Deuce take me, my dear Countess!" cried the General, "I must declare one thing—you astonish me. I was unjust, cruelly unjust, toward you. I reproach myself, on my faith! I believed you worldly, interested, not open-hearted. But you are none of these; you are an excellent woman—a heart of gold—a noble soul! My dear friend, you have found the best way to convert me. I have always believed the religion of honor was sufficient for a man—eh, Camors? But I am not an unbeliever, my dear Countess, and, on my sacred word, when I see a perfect creature like you, I desire to believe everything she believes, if only to be pleasant to her!"

When Camors, who was not quite so innocent, asked himself what was the secret of his aunt's politic conduct, but little effort was necessary to understand it.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had finally convinced herself that the General had an aneurism, flattered herself that the cares of matrimony would hasten the doom of her old friend. In any event, he was past seventy years of age. But Charlotte was young, and so also was Sigismund. Sigismund could become tender; if necessary, could quietly court the young Marquise until the day when he could marry her, with all her appurtenances, over the mausoleum of the General. It was for this that Madame de la Roche-Jugan, crushed for a moment under the unexpected blow that ruined her hopes, had modified her tactics and drawn her batteries, so to speak, under cover of the enemy. This was what she was contriving while she was weeping behind the curtain.

Camors's personal feelings at the announcement of this marriage were not of the most agreeable description. First, he was obliged to acknowledge that he had unjustly

judged Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, and that at the moment of his accusing her of speculating on his small fortune, she was offering to sacrifice for him the annual seven hundred thousand francs of the General.

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He felt his vanity injured, that he had not had the best part of this affair. Besides, he felt obliged to stifle from this moment the secret passion with which the beautiful and singular girl had inspired him. Wife or widow of the General, it was clear that Mademoiselle d'Estrelles had forever escaped him. To seduce the wife of this good old man from whom he accepted such favors, or even to marry her, widowed and rich, after refusing her when poor, were equal unworthiness and baseness that honor forbade in the same degree and with the same rigor as if this honor, which he made the only law of his life, were not a mockery and an empty word.

Camors, however, did not fail to comprehend the position in this light, and he resigned himself to it.

During the four or five days he remained at Campvallon his conduct was perfect. The delicate and reserved attentions with which he surrounded Mademoiselle d'Estrelles were tinged with a melancholy that showed her at the same time his gratitude, his respect, and his regrets.

M. de Campvallon had not less reason to congratulate himself on the conduct of the young Count. He entered into the folly of his host with affectionate grace. He spoke to him little of the beauty of his fiancée: much of her high moral qualities; and let him see his most flattering confidence in the future of this union.

On the eve of his departure Camors was summoned into the General's study. Handing his young relative a check for three hundred thousand francs, the General said:

"My dear young friend, I ought to tell you, for the peace of your conscience, that I have informed Mademoiselle d'Estrelles of this little service I render you. She has a great deal of love and affection for you, my dear young friend; be sure of that.

"She therefore received my communication with sincere pleasure. I also informed her that I did not intend taking any receipt for this sum, and that no reclamation of it should be made at any time, on any account.

"Now, my dear Camors, do me one favor. To tell you my inmost thought, I shall be most happy to see you carry into execution your project of laudable ambition. My own new position, my age, my tastes, and those I perceive in the Marquise, claim all my leisure—all my liberty of action. Consequently, I desire as soon as possible to present you to my generous and faithful constituents, as well for the Corps Legislatif as for the General Council. You had better make your preliminary arrangements as soon as possible. Why should you defer it? You are very well cultivated—very capable. Well, let us go ahead—let us begin at once. What do you say?"

"I should prefer, General, to be more mature; but it would be both folly and ingratitude in me not to accede to your kind wish. What shall I do first?"

“Well, my young friend, instead of leaving tomorrow for Paris, you must go to your estate at Reuilly: go there and conquer Des Rameures.”

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"And who are the Des Rameures, General?"

"You do not know the Des Rameures? The deuce! no; you can not know them! That is unfortunate, too.

"Des Rameures is a clever fellow, a very clever fellow, and all-powerful in his neighborhood. He is an original, as you will see; and with him lives his niece, a charming woman. I tell you, my boy, you must please them, for Des Rameures is the master of the county. He protects me, or else, upon my honor, I should be stopped on the road!"

"But, General, what shall I do to please this Des Rameures?"

"You will see him. He is, as I tell you, a great oddity. He has not been in Paris since 1825; he has a horror of Paris and Parisians. Very well, it only needs a little tact to flatter his views on that point. We always need a little tact in this world, young man."

"But his niece, General?"

"Ah, the deuce! You must please the niece also. He adores her, and she manages him completely, although he grumbles a little sometimes."

"And what sort of woman is she?"

"Oh, a respectable woman—a perfectly respectable woman. A widow; somewhat a devotee, but very well informed. A woman of great merit."

"But what course must I take to please this lady?"

"What course? By my faith, young man, you ask a great many questions. I never yet learned to please a woman. I am green as a goose with them always. It is a thing I can not understand; but as for you, my young comrade, you have little need to be instructed in that matter. You can't fail to please her; you have only to make yourself agreeable. But you will know how to do it—you will conduct yourself like an angel, I am sure."

"Captivate Des Rameures and his niece—this is your advice!"

Early next morning Camors left the Chateau de Campvallou, armed with these imperfect instructions; and, further, with a letter from the General to Des Rameures.

He went in a hired carriage to his own domain of Reully, which lay ten leagues off. While making this transit he reflected that the path of ambition was not one of roses; and that it was hard for him, at the outset of his enterprise, to be compelled to encounter two faces likely to be as disquieting as those of Des Rameures and his niece.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD DOMAIN OF REUILLY

The domain of Reuilly consisted of two farms and of a house of some pretension, inhabited formerly by the maternal family of M. de Camors. He had never before seen this property when he reached it on the evening of a beautiful summer day. A long and gloomy avenue of elms, interlacing their thick branches, led to the dwelling-house, which was quite unequal to the imposing approach to it; for it was but an inferior construction of the past century, ornamented simply by a gable and a bull's-eye, but flanked by a lordly dovecote.

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It derived a certain air of dignity from two small terraces, one above the other, in front of it, while the triple flight of steps was supported by balusters of granite. Two animals, which had once, perhaps, resembled lions, were placed one upon each side of the balustrade at the platform of the highest terrace; and they had been staring there for more than a hundred and fifty years. Behind the house stretched the garden; and in its midst, mounted on a stone arch, stood a dismal sun-dial with hearts and spades painted between its figures; while the trees around it were trimmed into the shapes of confessionals and chess-pawns. To the right, a labyrinth of young trees, similarly clipped in the fashion of the time, led by a thousand devious turns to a mysterious valley, where one heard continually a low, sad murmur. This proceeded from a nymph in terra-cotta, from whose urn dripped, day and night, a thin rill of water into a small fishpond, bordered by grand old poplars, whose shadows threw upon its surface, even at mid-day, the blackness of Acheron.

Camors's first reflection at viewing this prospect was an exceedingly painful one; and the second was even more so.

At another time he would doubtless have taken an interest in searching through these souvenirs of the past for traces of an infant nurtured there, who had a mother, and who had perhaps loved these old relics. But his system did not admit of sentiment, so he crushed the ideas that crowded to his mind, and, after a rapid glance around him, called for his dinner.

The old steward and his wife—who for thirty years had been the sole inhabitants of Reuilly—had been informed of his coming. They had spent the day in cleaning and airing the house; an operation which added to the discomfort they sought to remove, and irritated the old residents of the walls, while it disturbed the sleep of hoary spiders in their dusty webs. A mixed odor of the cellar, of the sepulchre, and of an old coach, struck Camors when he penetrated into the principal room, where his dinner was to be served.

Taking up one or two flickering candles, the like of which he had never seen before, Camors proceeded to inspect the quaint portraits of his ancestors, who seemed to stare at him in great surprise from their cracked canvases. They were a dilapidated set of old nobles, one having lost a nose, another an arm, others again sections of their faces. One of them—a chevalier of St. Louis—had received a bayonet thrust through the centre in the riotous times of the Revolution; but he still smiled at Camors, and sniffed at a flower, despite the daylight shining through him.

Camors finished his inspection, thinking to himself they were a highly respectable set of ancestors, but not worth fifteen francs apiece. The housekeeper had passed half the previous night in slaughtering various dwellers in the poultry-yard; and the results of the sacrifice now successively appeared, swimming in butter. Happily, however, the fatherly kindness of the General had despatched a hamper of provisions from Campvallon, and



a few slices of pate, accompanied by sundry glasses of Chateau-Yquem helped the Count to combat the dreary sadness with which his change of residence, solitude, the night, and the smoke of his candles, all conspired to oppress him.

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Regaining his usual good spirits, which had deserted him for a moment, he tried to draw out the old steward, who was waiting on him. He strove to glean from him some information of the Des Rameures; but the old servant, like every Norman peasant, held it as a tenet of faith that he who gave a plain answer to any question was a dishonored man. With all possible respect he let Camors understand plainly that he was not to be deceived by his affected ignorance into any belief that M. le Comte did not know a great deal better than he who and what M. des Rameures was—where he lived, and what he did; that M. le Comte was his master, and as such was entitled to his respect, but that he was nevertheless a Parisian, and—as M. des Rameures said—all Parisians were jesters.

Camors, who had taken an oath never to get angry, kept it now; drew from the General's old cognac a fresh supply of patience, lighted a cigar, and left the room.

For a few moments he leaned over the balustrade of the terrace and looked around. The night, clear and beautiful, enveloped in its shadowy veil the widestretching fields, and a solemn stillness, strange to Parisian ears, reigned around him, broken only at intervals by the distant bay of a hound, rising suddenly, and dying into peace again. His eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, Camors descended the terrace stairs and passed into the old avenue, which was darker and more solemn than a cathedral-aisle at midnight, and thence into an open road into which it led by chance.

Strictly speaking, Camors had never, until now, been out of Paris; for wherever he had previously gone, he had carried its bustle, worldly and artificial life, play, and the races with him; and the watering-places and the seaside had never shown him true country, or provincial life. It gave him a sensation for the first time; but the sensation was an odious one.

As he advanced up this silent road, without houses or lights, it seemed to him he was wandering amid the desolation of some lunar region. This part of Normandy recalled to him the least cultivated parts of Brittany. It was rustic and savage, with its dense shrubbery, tufted grass, dark valleys, and rough roads.

Some dreamers love this sweet but severe nature, even at night; they love the very things that grated most upon the pampered senses of Camors, who strode on in deep disgust, flattering himself, however, that he should soon reach the Boulevard de Madeleine. But he found, instead, peasants' huts scattered along the side of the road, their low, mossy roofs seeming to spring from the rich soil like an enormous fungus growth. Two or three of the dwellers in these huts were taking the fresh evening air on their thresholds, and Camors could distinguish through the gloom their heavy figures and limbs, roughened by coarse toil in the fields, as they stood mute, motionless, and ruminating in the darkness like tired beasts.

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Camors, like all men possessed by a dominant idea, had, ever since he adopted the religion of his father as his rule of life, taken the pains to analyze every impression and every thought. He now said to himself, that between these countrymen and a refined man like himself there was doubtless a greater difference than between them and their beasts of burden; and this reflection was as balm to the scornful aristocracy that was the cornerstone of his theory. Wandering on to an eminence, his discouraged eye swept but a fresh horizon of apple-trees and heads of barley, and he was about to turn back when a strange sound suddenly arrested his steps. It was a concert of voice and instruments, which in this lost solitude seemed to him like a dream, or a miracle. The music was good-even excellent. He recognized a prelude of Bach, arranged by Gounod. Robinson Crusoe, on discovering the footprint in the sand, was not more astonished than Camors at finding in this desert so lively a symptom of civilization.

Filled with curiosity, and led by the melody he heard, he descended cautiously the little hill, like a king's son in search of the enchanted princess. The palace he found in the middle of the path, in the shape of the high back wall of a dwelling, fronting on another road. One of the upper windows on this side, however, was open; a bright light streamed from it, and thence he doubted not the sweet sounds came.

To an accompaniment of the piano and stringed instruments rose a fresh, flexible woman's voice, chanting the mystic words of the master with such expression and power as would have given even him delight. Camors, himself a musician, was capable of appreciating the masterly execution of the piece; and was so much struck by it that he felt an irresistible desire to see the performers, especially the singer. With this impulse he climbed the little hedge bordering the road, placed himself on the top, and found himself several feet above the level of the lighted window. He did not hesitate to use his skill as a gymnast to raise himself to one of the branches of an old oak stretching across the lawn; but during the ascent he could not disguise from himself that his was scarcely a dignified position for the future deputy of the district. He almost laughed aloud at the idea of being surprised in this position by the terrible Des Rameures, or his niece.

He established himself on a large, leafy branch, directly in front of the interesting window; and notwithstanding that he was at a respectful distance, his glance could readily penetrate into the chamber where the concert was taking place. A dozen persons, as he judged, were there assembled; several women, of different ages, were seated at a table working; a young man appeared to be drawing; while other persons lounged on comfortable seats around the room. Around the piano was a group which chiefly attracted the attention of the young Count. At the instrument was seated a grave young girl of about twelve years; immediately behind her stood an old man, remarkable for his great height, his head bald, with a crown of white hair, and his bushy black eyebrows. He played the violin with priestly dignity. Seated near him was a man of about fifty, in the dress of an ecclesiastic, and wearing a huge pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, who played the violincello with great apparent gusto.

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Between them stood the singer. She was a pale brunette, slight and graceful, and apparently not more than twenty-five years of age. The somewhat severe oval of her face was relieved by a pair of bright black eyes that seemed to grow larger as she sang. One hand rested gently on the shoulder of the girl at the piano, and with this she seemed to keep time, pressing gently on the shoulder of the performer to stimulate her zeal. And that hand was delicious!

A hymn by Palestrina had succeeded the Bach prelude. It was a quartette, to which two new voices lent their aid. The old priest laid aside his violoncello, stood up, took off his spectacles, and his deep bass completed the full measure of the melody.

After the quartette followed a few moments of general conversation, during which—after embracing the child pianist, who immediately left the room—the songstress walked to the window. She leaned out as if to breathe the fresh air, and her profile was sharply relieved against the bright light behind her, in which the others formed a group around the priest, who once more donned his spectacles, and drew from his pocket a paper that appeared to be a manuscript.

The lady leaned from the window, gently fanning herself, as she looked now at the sky, now at the dark landscape. Camors imagined he could distinguish her gentle breathing above the sound of the fan; and leaning eagerly forward for a better view, he caused the leaves to rustle slightly. She started at the sound, then remained immovable, and the fixed position of her head showed that her gaze was fastened upon the oak in which he was concealed.

He felt the awkwardness of his position, but could not judge whether or not he was visible to her; but, under the danger of her fixed regard, he passed the most painful moments of his life.

She turned into the room and said, in a calm voice, a few words which brought three or four of her friends to the window; and among them Camors recognized the old man with the violin.

The moment was a trying one. He could do nothing but lie still in his leafy retreat—silent and immovable as a statue. The conduct of those at the window went far to reassure him, for their eyes wandered over the gloom with evident uncertainty, convincing him that his presence was only suspected, not discovered. But they exchanged animated observations, to which the hidden Count lent an attentive ear. Suddenly a strong voice—which he recognized as belonging to him of the violin—rose over them all in the pleasing order: “Loose the dog!”

This was sufficient for Camors. He was not a coward; he would not have budged an inch before an enraged tiger; but he would have travelled a hundred miles on foot to avoid the shadow of ridicule. Profiting by the warning and a moment when he seemed



unobserved, he slid from the tree, jumped into the next field, and entered the wood at a point somewhat farther down than the spot where he had scaled the hedge. This done, he resumed his walk with the assured tread of a man who had a right to be there. He had gone but a few steps, when he heard behind him the wild barking of the dog, which proved his retreat had been opportune.

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Some of the peasants he had noticed as he passed before, were still standing at their doors. Stopping before one of them he asked:

"My friend, to whom does that large house below there, facing the other road, belong? and whence comes that music?"

"You probably know that as well as I," replied the man, stolidly.

"Had I known, I should hardly have asked you," said Camors.

The peasant did not deign further reply. His wife stood near him; and Camors had remarked that in all classes of society women have more wit and goodhumor than their husbands. Therefore he turned to her and said:

"You see, my good woman, I am a stranger here. To whom does that house belong? Probably to Monsieur des Rameures?"

"No, no," replied the woman, "Monsieur des Rameures lives much farther on."

"Ah! Then who lives here?"

"Why, Monsieur de Tecle, of course!"

"Ah, Monsieur de Tecle! But tell me, he does not live alone? There is a lady who sings—his wife?—his sister? Who is she?"

"Ah, that is his daughter-in-law, Madame de Tecle Madame Elise, who—"

"Ah! thank you, thank you, my good woman! You have children? Buy them sabots with this," and dropping a gold piece in the lap of the obliging peasant, Camors walked rapidly away. Returning home the road seemed less gloomy and far shorter than when he came. As he strode on, humming the Bach prelude, the moon rose, the country looked more beautiful, and, in short, when he perceived, at the end of its gloomy avenue, his chateau bathed in the white light, he found the spectacle rather enjoyable than otherwise. And when he had once more ensconced himself in the maternal domicile, and inhaled the odor of damp paper and mouldy trees that constituted its atmosphere, he found great consolation in the reflection that there existed not very far away from him a young woman who possessed a charming face, a delicious voice, and a pretty name.

Next morning, after plunging into a cold bath, to the profound astonishment of the old steward and his wife, the Comte de Camors went to inspect his farms. He found the buildings very similar in construction to the dams of beavers, though far less comfortable; but he was amazed to hear his farmers arguing, in their patois, on the various modes of culture and crops, like men who were no strangers to all modern



improvements in agriculture. The name of Des Rameures frequently occurred in the conversation as confirmation of their own theories, or experiments. M. des Rameures gave preference to this manure, to this machine for winnowing; this breed of animals was introduced by him. M. des Rameures did this, M. des Rameures did that, and the farmers did like him, and found it to their advantage. Camors found the General had not exaggerated the local importance of this personage, and that it was most essential to conciliate him. Resolving therefore to call on him during the day, he went to breakfast.

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This duty toward himself fulfilled, the young Count lounged on the terrace, as he had the evening before, and smoked his cigar. Though it was near midday, it was doubtful to him whether the solitude and silence appeared less complete and oppressive than on the preceding night. A hushed cackling of fowls, the drowsy hum of bees, and the muffled chime of a distant bell—these were all the sounds to be heard.

Camors lounged on the terrace, dreaming of his club, of the noisy Paris crowd, of the rumbling omnibuses, of the playbill of the little kiosk, of the scent of heated asphalt—and the memory of the least of these enchantments brought infinite peace to his soul. The inhabitant of Paris has one great blessing, which he does not take into account until he suffers from its loss—one great half of his existence is filled up without the least trouble to himself. The all-potent vitality which ceaselessly envelops him takes away from him in a vast degree the exertion of amusing himself. The roar of the city, rising like a great bass around him, fills up the gaps in his thoughts, and never leaves that disagreeable sensation—a void.

There is no Parisian who is not happy in the belief that he makes all the noise he hears, writes all the books he reads, edits all the journals on which he breakfasts, writes all the vaudevilles on which he sups, and invents all the ‘bon mots’ he repeats.

But this flattering allusion vanishes the moment chance takes him a mile away from the Rue Vivienne. The proof confounds him, for he is bored terribly, and becomes sick of himself. Perhaps his secret soul, weakened and unnerved, may even be assailed by the suspicion that he is a feeble human creature after all! But no! He returns to Paris; the collective electricity again inspires him; he rebounds; he recovers; he is busy, keen to discern, active, and recognizes once more, to his intense satisfaction, that he is after all one of the elect of God’s creatures—momentarily degraded, it may be, by contact with the inferior beings who people the departments.

Camors had within himself more resources than most men to conquer the blue-devils; but in these early hours of his experience in country life, deprived of his club, his horses, and his cook, banished from all his old haunts and habits, he began to feel terribly the weight of time. He, therefore, experienced a delicious sensation when suddenly he heard that regular beat of hoofs upon the road which to his trained ear announced the approach of several riding-horses. The next moment he saw advancing up his shaded avenue two ladies on horseback, followed by a groom with a black cockade.

Though quite amazed at this charming spectacle, Camors remembered his duty as a gentleman and descended the steps of the terrace. But the two ladies, at sight of him, appeared as surprised as himself, suddenly drew rein and conferred hastily. Then, recovering, they continued their way, traversed the lower court below the terraces, and disappeared in the direction of the lake.

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As they passed the lower balustrade Camors bowed low, and they returned his salutation by a slight inclination; but he was quite sure, in spite of the veils that floated from their riding-hats, that he recognized the black-eyed singer and the young pianist. After a moment he called to his old steward,

“Monsieur Leonard,” he said, “is this a public way?”

“It certainly is not a public way, Monsieur le Comte,” replied Leonard.

“Then what do these ladies mean by using this road?”

“Bless me, Monsieur le Comte, it is so long since any of the owners have been at Reuilly! These ladies mean no harm by passing through your woods; and sometimes they even stop at the chateau while my wife gives them fresh milk. Shall I tell them that this displeases Monsieur le Comte?”

“My good Leonard, why the deuce do you suppose it displeases me? I only asked for information. And now who are the ladies?”

“Oh! Monsieur, they are quite respectable ladies; Madame de Tecle, and her daughter, Mademoiselle Marie.”

“So? And the husband of Madame, Monsieur de Tecle, never rides out with them?”

“Heavens! no, Monsieur. He never rides with them.” And the old steward smiled a dry smile. “He has been among the dead men for a long time, as Monsieur le Comte well knows.”

“Granting that I know it, Monsieur Leonard, I wish it understood these ladies are not to be interfered with. You comprehend?”

Leonard seemed pleased that he was not to be the bearer of any disagreeable message; and Camors, suddenly conceiving that his stay at Reuilly might be prolonged for some time, reentered the chateau and examined the different rooms, arranging with the steward the best plan of making the house habitable. The little town of I-----, but two leagues distant, afforded all the means, and M. Leonard proposed going there at once to confer with the architect.

CHAPTER VII

ELISE DE TECLE

Meantime Camors directed his steps toward the residence of M. des Rameures, of which he at last obtained correct information. He took the same road as the preceding

evening, passed the monastic-looking building that held Madame de Tecle, glanced at the old oak that had served him for an observatory, and about a mile farther on he discovered the small house with towers that he sought.

It could only be compared to those imaginary edifices of which we have all read in childhood's happy days in taking text, under an attractive picture: "The castle of M. de Valmont was agreeably situated at the summit of a pretty hill." It had a really picturesque surrounding of fields sloping away, green as emerald, dotted here and there with great bouquets of trees, or cut by walks adorned with huge roses or white bridges thrown over rivulets. Cattle and sheep were resting here and there, which might have figured at the Opera Comique, so shining were the skins of the cows and so white the wool of the sheep. Camors swung open the gate, took the first road he saw, and reached the top of the hill amid trees and flowers. An old servant slept on a bench before the door, smiling in his dreams.

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Camors waked him, inquired for the master of the house, and was ushered into a vestibule. Thence he entered a charming apartment, where a young lady in a short skirt and round hat was arranging bouquets in Chinese vases.

She turned at the noise of the opening door, and Camors saw—Madame de Tecle!

As he saluted her with an air of astonishment and doubt, she looked fixedly at him with her large eyes. He spoke first, with more of hesitation than usual.

“Pardon me, Madame, but I inquired for Monsieur des Rameures.”

“He is at the farm, but will soon return. Be kind enough to wait.”

She pointed to a chair, and seated herself, pushing away with her foot the branches that strewed the floor.

“But, Madame, in the absence of Monsieur des Rameures may I have the honor of speaking with his niece?”

The shadow of a smile flitted over Madame de Tecle’s brown but charming face. “His niece?” she said: “I am his niece.”

“You I Pardon me, Madame, but I thought—they said—I expected to find an elderly—a—person—that is, a respectable” he hesitated, then added simply—“and I find I am in error.”

Madame de Tecle seemed completely unmoved by this compliment.

“Will you be kind enough, Monsieur,” she said, “to let me know whom I have the honor of receiving?”

“I am Monsieur de Camors.”

“Ah! Then I have excuses also to make. It was probably you whom we saw this morning. We have been very rude—my daughter and I—but we were ignorant of your arrival; and Reuilly has been so long deserted.”

“I sincerely hope, Madame, that your daughter and yourself will make no change in your rides.”

Madame de Tecle replied by a movement of the hand that implied certainly she appreciated the offer, and certainly she should not accept it. Then there was a pause long enough to embarrass Camors, during which his eye fell upon the piano, and his lips almost formed the original remark—“You are a musician, Madame.” Suddenly

recollecting his tree, however, he feared to betray himself by the allusion, and was silent.

"You come from Paris, Monsieur de Camors?" Madame de Tecle at length asked.

"No, Madame, I have been passing several weeks with my kinsman, General de Campvallan, who has also the honor, I believe, to be a friend of yours; and who has requested me to call upon you."

"We are delighted that you have done so; and what an excellent man the General is!"

"Excellent indeed, Madame." There was another pause.

"If you do not object to a short walk in the sun," said Madame de Tecle at length, "let us walk to meet my uncle. We are almost sure to meet him." Camors bowed. Madame de Tecle rose and rang the bell: "Ask Mademoiselle Marie," she said to the servant, "to be kind enough to put on her hat and join us."

A moment after, Mademoiselle Marie entered, cast on the stranger the steady, frank look of an inquisitive child, bowed slightly to him, and they all left the room by a door opening on the lawn.

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Madame de Tecle, while responding courteously to the graceful speeches of Camors, walked on with a light and rapid step, her fairy-like little shoes leaving their impression on the smooth fine sand of the path.

She walked with indescribable, unconscious grace; with that supple, elastic undulation which would have been coquettish had it not been undeniably natural. Reaching the wall that enclosed the right side of the park, she opened a wicket that led into a narrow path through a large field of ripe corn. She passed into this path, followed in single file by Mademoiselle Marie and by Camors. Until now the child had been very quiet, but the rich golden corn-tassels, entangled with bright daisies, red poppies, and hollyhocks, and the humming concert of myriads of flies-blue, yellow, and reddishbrown which sported amid the sweets, excited her beyond self-control. Stopping here and there to pluck a flower, she would turn and cry, "Pardon, Monsieur;" until, at length, on an apple-tree growing near the path she descried on a low branch a green apple, no larger than her finger. This temptation proved irresistible, and with one spring into the midst of the corn, she essayed to reach the prize, if Providence would permit. Madame de Tecle, however, would not permit. She seemed much displeased, and said, sharply:

"Marie, my child! In the midst of the corn! Are you crazy!"

The child returned promptly to the path, but unable to conquer her wish for the apple, turned an imploring eye to Camors and said, softly: "Pardon, Monsieur, but that apple would make my bouquet complete."

Camors had only to reach up, stretch out his hand, and detach the branch from the tree.

"A thousand thanks!" cried the child, and adding this crowning glory to her bouquet, she placed the whole inside the ribbon around her hat and walked on with an air of proud satisfaction.

As they approached the fence running across the end of the field, Madame de Tecle suddenly said: "My uncle, Monsieur;" and Camors, raising his head, saw a very tall man looking at them over the fence and shading his eyes with his hand. His robust limbs were clad in gaiters of yellow leather with steel buttons, and he wore a loose coat of maroon velvet and a soft felt hat. Camors immediately recognized the white hair and heavy black eyebrows as the same he had seen bending over the violin the night before.

"Uncle," said Madame de Tecle, introducing the young Count by a wave of the hand: "This is Monsieur de Camors."

"Monsieur de Camors," repeated the old man, in a deep and sonorous voice, "you are most welcome;" and opening the gate he gave his guest a soft, brown hand, as he continued: "I knew your mother intimately, and am charmed to have her son under my

roof. Your mother was a most amiable person, Monsieur, and certainly merited—" The old man hesitated, and finished his sentence by a sonorous "Hem!" that resounded and rumbled in his chest as if in the vault of a church.

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Then he took the letter Camors handed to him, held it a long distance from his eyes, and began reading it. The General had told the Count it would be impolite to break suddenly to M. des Rameures the plan they had concocted. The latter, therefore, found the note only a very warm introduction of Camors. The postscript gave him the announcement of the marriage.

"The devil!" he cried. "Did you know this, Elise? Campvallou is to be married!"

All women, widows, matrons, or maids, are deeply interested in matters pertaining to marriage.

"What, uncle! The General! Can it be? Are you sure?"

"Um—rather. He writes the news himself. Do you know the lady, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles is my cousin," Camors replied.

"Ah! That is right; and she is of a certain age?"

"She is about twenty-five."

M. des Rameures received this intelligence with one of the resonant coughs peculiar to him.

"May I ask, without indiscretion, whether she is endowed with a pleasing person?"

"She is exceedingly beautiful," was the reply.

"Hem! So much the better. It seems to me the General is a little old for her: but every one is the best judge of his own affairs: Hem! the best judge of his own affairs. Elise, my dear, whenever you are ready we will follow you. Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte, for receiving you in this rustic attire, but I am a laborer. Agricola—a mere herdsman—'custos gregis', as the poet says. Walk before me, Monsieur le Comte, I beg you. Marie, child, respect my corn!

"And can we hope, Monsieur de Camors, that you have the happy idea of quitting the great Babylon to install yourself among your rural possessions? It will be a good example, Monsieur—an excellent example! For unhappily today more than ever we can say with the poet:

'Non ullus aratro

Dignus honos; squalent abductis arva colonis,
Et—et—'

“And, by gracious! I’ve forgotten the rest—poor memory! Ah, young sir, never grow old—never grow old!”

“‘Et curvae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem,’”

said Camors, continuing the broken quotation.

“Ah! you quote Virgil. You read the classics. I am charmed, really charmed. That is not the characteristic of our rising generation, for modern youth has an idea it is bad taste to quote the ancients. But that is not my idea, young sir—not in the least. Our fathers quoted freely because they were familiar with them. And Virgil is my poet. Not that I approve of all his theories of cultivation. With all the respect I accord him, there is a great deal to be said on that point; and his plan of breeding in particular will never do—never do! Still, he is delicious, eh? Very well, Monsieur Camors, now you see my little domain—‘*mea paupera regna*’—the retreat of the sage. Here I live, and live happily, like an old shepherd in the golden age—loved by my neighbors, which is not easy; and venerating the gods, which is perhaps easier. Ah, young sir, as you read Virgil, you will excuse me once more. It was for me he wrote:

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'Fortunate senex, hic inter flumina nota,
Et fontes sacros frigus captabis opacum.'

"And this as well:

'Fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestes,
Panaque, Silvanumque senem!'"

"Nymphasque sorores!" finished Camors, smiling and moving his head slightly in the direction of Madame de Tecle and her daughter, who preceded them.

"Quite to the point. That is pure truth!" cried M. des Rameures, gayly. "Did you hear that, niece?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And did you understand it, niece?"

"No, uncle."

"I do not believe you, my dear! I do not believe you!" The old man laughed heartily. "Do not believe her, Monsieur de Camors; women have the faculty of understanding compliments in every language."

This conversation brought them to the chateau, where they sat down on a bench before the drawing-room windows to enjoy the view.

Camors praised judiciously the well-kept park, accepted an invitation to dinner the next week, and then discreetly retired, flattering himself that his introduction had made a favorable impression upon M. des Rameures, but regretting his apparent want of progress with the fairy-footed niece.

He was in error.

"This youth," said M. des Rameures, when he was left alone with Madame de Tecle, "has some touch of the ancients, which is something; but he still resembles his father, who was vicious as sin itself. His eyes and his smile recall some traits of his admirable mother; but positively, my dear Elise, he is the portrait of his father, whose manners and whose principles they say he has inherited."

"Who says so, uncle?"

"Current rumor, niece."

“Current rumor, my dear uncle, is often mistaken, and always exaggerates. For my part, I like the young man, who seems thoroughly refined and at his ease.”

“Bah! I suppose because he compared you to a nymph in the fable.”

“If he compared me to a nymph in the fable he was wrong; but he never addressed to me a word in French that was not in good taste. Before we condemn him, uncle, let us see for ourselves. It is a habit you have always recommended to me, you know.”

“You can not deny, niece,” said the old man with irritation, “that he exhales the most decided and disagreeable odor of Paris! He is too polite—too studied! Not a shadow of enthusiasm—no fire of youth! He never laughs as I should wish to see a man of his age laugh; a young man should roar to split his waistband!”

“What! you would see him merry so soon after losing his father in such a tragic manner, and he himself nearly ruined! Why, uncle, what can you mean?”

“Well, well, perhaps you are right. I retract all I have said against him. If he be half ruined I will offer him my advice—and my purse if he need it—for the sake of the memory of his mother, whom you resemble. Ah, ’tis thus we end all our disputes, naughty child! I grumble; I am passionate; I act like a Tartar. Then you speak with your good sense and sweetness, my darling, and the tiger becomes a lamb. All unhappy beings whom you approach in the same way submit to your subtle charm. And that is the reason why my old friend, La Fontaine, said of you:

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'Sur diferentes fleurs l'abeille se repose,
Et fait du miel de toute chose!'"

CHAPTER VIII

A DISH OF POLITICS

Elise de Tecle was thirty years of age, but appeared much younger. At seventeen she had married, under peculiar conditions, her cousin Roland de Tecle. She had been left an orphan at an early age and educated by her mother's brother, M. des Rameures. Roland lived very near her Everything brought them together—the wishes of the family, compatibility of fortune, their relations as neighbors, and a personal sympathy. They were both charming; they were destined for each other from infancy, and the time fixed for their marriage was the nineteenth birthday of Elise. In anticipation of this happy event the Comte de Tecle rebuilt almost entirely one wing of his castle for the exclusive use of the young pair. Roland was continually present, superintending and urging on the work with all the ardor of a lover.

One morning loud and alarming cries from the new wing roused all the inhabitants of the castle; the Count rushed to the spot, and found his son stunned and bleeding in the arms of one of the workmen. He had fallen from a high scaffolding to the pavement. For several months the unfortunate young man hovered between life and death; but in the paroxysms of fever he never ceased calling for his cousin—his betrothed; and they were obliged to admit the young girl to his bedside. Slowly he recovered, but was ever after disfigured and lame; and the first time they allowed him to look in a glass he had a fainting-fit that proved almost fatal.

But he was a youth of high principle and true courage. On recovering from his swoon he wept a flood of bitter tears, which would not, however, wash the scars from his disfigured face. He prayed long and earnestly; then shut himself up with his father. Each wrote a letter, the one to M. des Rameures, the other to Elise. M. des Rameures and his niece were then in Germany. The excitement and fatigue consequent upon nursing her cousin had so broken her health that the physicians urged a trial of the baths of Ems. There she received these letters; they released her from her engagement and gave her absolute liberty.

Roland and his father implored her not to return in haste; explained that their intention was to leave the country in a few weeks' time and establish themselves at Paris; and added that they expected no answer, and that their resolution—impelled by simple justice to her—was irrevocable.

Their wishes were complied with. No answer came.



Roland, his sacrifice once made, seemed calm and resigned; but he fell into a sort of languor, which made fearful progress and hinted at a speedy and fatal termination, for which in fact he seemed to long. One evening they had taken him to the lime-tree terrace at the foot of the garden. He gazed with absent eye on the tints with which the setting sun purpled the glades of the wood, while his father paced the terrace with long strides-smiling as he passed him and hastily brushing away a tear as he turned his back.

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Suddenly Elise de Tecle appeared before them, like an angel dropped from heaven. She knelt before the crippled youth, kissed his hand, and, brightening him with the rays of her beautiful eyes, told him she never had loved him half so well before. He felt she spoke truly; he accepted her devotion, and they were married soon after.

Madame de Tecle was happy—but she alone was so. Her husband, notwithstanding the tenderness with which she treated him—notwithstanding the happiness which he could not fail to read in her tranquil glance—notwithstanding the birth of a daughter—seemed never to console himself. Even with her he was always possessed by a cold constraint; some secret sorrow consumed him, of which they found the key only on the day of his death.

“My darling,” he then said to his young wife—“my darling, may God reward you for your infinite goodness! Pardon me, if I never have told you how entirely I love you. With a face like mine, how could I speak of love to one like you! But my poor heart has been brimming over with it all the while. Oh, Elise! how I have suffered when I thought of what I was before—how much more worthy of you! But we shall be reunited, dearest—shall we not?—where I shall be as perfect as you, and where I may tell you how much I adore you! Do not weep for me, my own Elise! I am happy now, for the first time, for I have dared to open my heart to you. Dying men do not fear ridicule. Farewell, Elise—darling-wife! I love you!” These tender words were his last.

After her husband's death, Madame de Tecle lived with her father-in-law, but passed much of her time with her uncle. She busied herself with the greatest solicitude in the education of her daughter, and kept house for both the old men, by both of whom she was equally idolized.

From the lips of the priest at Reuilly, whom he called on next day, Camors learned some of these details, while the old man practiced the violoncello with his heavy spectacles on his nose. Despite his fixed resolution of preserving universal scorn, Camors could not resist a vague feeling of respect for Madame de Tecle; but it did not entirely eradicate the impure sentiment he was disposed to dedicate to her. Fully determined to make her, if not his victim, at least his ally, he felt that this enterprise was one of unusual difficulty. But he was energetic, and did not object to difficulties—especially when they took such charming shape as in the present instance.

His meditations on this theme occupied him agreeably the rest of that week, during which time he overlooked his workmen and conferred with his architect. Besides, his horses, his books, his domestics, and his journals arrived successively to dispel ennui. Therefore he looked remarkably well when he jumped out of his dog-cart the ensuing Monday in front of M. des Rameures's door under the eyes of Madame de Tecle. As the latter gently stroked with her white hand the black and smoking shoulder of the thoroughbred Fitz-Aymon, Camors was for the first time presented to the Comte de Tecle, a quiet, sad, and taciturn old gentleman. The cure, the subprefect of the district

and his wife, the tax-collector, the family physician, and the tutor completed, as the journals say, the list of the guests.

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During dinner Camors, secretly excited by the immediate vicinity of Madame de Tecle, essayed to triumph over that hostility that the presence of a stranger invariably excites in the midst of intimacies which it disturbs. His calm superiority asserted itself so mildly it was pardoned for its grace. Without a gayety unbecoming his mourning, he nevertheless made such lively sallies and such amusing jokes about his first mishaps at Reuilly as to break up the stiffness of the party. He conversed pleasantly with each one in turn, and, seeming to take the deepest interest in his affairs, put him at once at his ease.

He skilfully gave M. des Rameures the opportunity for several happy quotations; spoke naturally to him of artificial pastures, and artificially of natural pastures; of breeding and of non-breeding cows; of Dishley sheep—and of a hundred other matters he had that morning crammed from an old encyclopaedia and a county almanac.

To Madame de Tecle directly he spoke little, but he did not speak one word during the dinner that was not meant for her; and his manner to women was so caressing, yet so chivalric, as to persuade them, even while pouring out their wine, that he was ready to die for them. The dear charmers thought him a good, simple fellow, while he was the exact reverse.

On leaving the table they went out of doors to enjoy the starlight evening, and M. des Rameures—whose natural hospitality was somewhat heightened by a goblet of his own excellent wine—said to Camors:

“My dear Count, you eat honestly, you talk admirably, you drink like a man. On my word, I am disposed to regard you as perfection—as a paragon of neighbors—if in addition to all the rest you add the crowning one. Do you love music?”

“Passionately!” answered Camors, with effusion.

“Passionately? Bravo! That is the way one should love everything that is worth loving. I am delighted, for we make here a troupe of fanatical melomaniacs, as you will presently perceive. As for myself, I scrape wildly on the violin, as a simple country amateur—‘Orpheus in silvis’. Do not imagine, however, Monsieur le Comte, that we let the worship of this sweet art absorb all our faculties—all our time—certainly not. When you take part in our little reunions, which of course you will do, you will find we disdain no pursuit worthy of thinking beings. We pass from music to literature—to science—even to philosophy; but we do this—I pray you to believe—without pedantry and without leaving the tone of familiar converse. Sometimes we read verses, but we never make them; we love the ancients and do not fear the moderns: we only fear those who would lower the mind and debase the heart. We love the past while we render justice to the present; and flatter ourselves at not seeing many things that to you appear beautiful, useful, and true.



“Such are we, my young friend. We call ourselves the ‘Colony of Enthusiasts,’ but our malicious neighbors call us the ‘Hotel de Rambouillet.’ Envy, you know, is a plant that does not flourish in the country; but here, by way of exception, we have a few jealous people—rather bad for them, but of no consequence to us.

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"We are an odd set, with the most opposite opinions. For me, I am a Legitimist; then there is Durocher, my physician and friend, who is a rabid Republican; Hedouin, the tutor, is a parliamentarian; while Monsieur our sub-prefect is a devotee to the government, as it is his duty to be. Our cure is a little Roman—I am Gallican—'et sic ceteris'. Very well—we all agree wonderfully for two reasons: first, because we are sincere, which is a very rare thing; and then because all opinions contain at bottom some truth, and because, with some slight mutual concessions, all really honest people come very near having the same opinions.

"Such, my dear Count, are the views that hold in my drawing-room, or rather in the drawing-room of my niece; for if you would see the divinity who makes all our happiness—look at her! It is in deference to her good taste, her good sense, and her moderation, that each of us avoids that violence and that passion which warps the best intentions. In one word, to speak truly, it is love that makes our common tie and our mutual protection. We are all in love with my niece—myself first, of course; next Durocher, for thirty years; then the subprefect and all the rest of them.

"You, too, Cure! you know that you are in love with Elise, in all honor and all good faith, as we all are, and as Monsieur de Camors shall soon be, if he is not so already—eh, Monsieur le Comte?"

Camors protested, with a sinister smile, that he felt very much inclined to fulfil the prophecy of his host; and they reentered the dining-room to find the circle increased by the arrival of several visitors. Some of these rode, others came on foot from the country-seats around.

M. des Rameures soon seized his violin; while he tuned it, little Marie seated herself at the piano, and her mother, coming behind her, rested her hand lightly on her shoulder, as if to beat the measure.

"The music will be nothing new to you," Camors's host said to him. "It is simply Schubert's Serenade, which we have arranged, or deranged, after our own fancy; of which you shall judge. My niece sings, and the curate and I—'Arcades ambo'—respond successively—he on the bass-viol and I on my Stradivarius. Come, my dear Cure, let us begin—'incipie, Mopse, prior."

In spite of the masterly execution of the old gentleman and of the delicate science of the cure, it was Madame de Tecle who appeared to Camors the most remarkable of the three virtuosi. The calm repose of her features, and the gentle dignity of her attitude, contrasting with the passionate swell of her voice, he found most attractive.

In his turn he seated himself at the piano, and played a difficult accompaniment with real taste; and having a good tenor voice, and a thorough knowledge of its powers, he exerted them so effectually as to produce a profound sensation. During the rest of the

evening he kept much in the background in order to observe the company, and was much astonished thereby. The tone of this little society, as much removed from vulgar gossip as from affected pedantry, was truly elevated. There was nothing to remind him of a porter's lodge, as in most provincial salons; or of the greenroom of a theatre, as in many salons of Paris; nor yet, as he had feared, of a lecture-room.

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There were five or six women—some pretty, all well bred—who, in adopting the habit of thinking, had not lost the habit of laughing, nor the desire to please. But they all seemed subject to the same charm; and that charm was sovereign. Madame de Tecle, half hidden on her sofa, and seemingly busied with her embroidery, animated all by a glance, softened all by a word. The glance was inspiring; the word always appropriate. Her decision on all points they regarded as final—as that of a judge who sentences, or of a woman who is beloved.

No verses were read that evening, and Camors was not bored. In the intervals of the music, the conversation touched on the new comedy by Augier; the last work of Madame Sand; the latest poem of Tennyson; or the news from America.

“My dear Mopsus,” M. des Rameures said to the cure, “you were about to read us your sermon on superstition last Thursday, when you were interrupted by that joker who climbed the tree in order to hear you better. Now is the time to recompense us. Take this seat and we will all listen to you.”

The worthy cure took the seat, unfolded his manuscript, and began his discourse, which we shall not here report: profiting by the example of our friend Sterne, not to mingle the sacred with the profane.

The sermon met with general approval, though some persons, M. des Rameures among them, thought it above the comprehension of the humble class for whom it was intended. M. de Tecle, however, backed by republican Durocher, insisted that the intelligence of the people was underrated; that they were frequently debased by those who pretended to speak only up to their level—and the passages in dispute were retained.

How they passed from the sermon on superstition to the approaching marriage of the General, I can not say; but it was only natural after all, for the whole country, for twenty miles around, was ringing with it. This theme excited Camors’s attention at once, especially when the sub-prefect intimated with much reserve that the General, busied with his new surroundings, would probably resign his office as deputy.

“But that would be embarrassing,” exclaimed Des Rameures. “Who the deuce would replace him? I give you warning, Monsieur Prefect, if you intend imposing on us some Parisian with a flower in his buttonhole, I shall pack him back to his club—him, his flower, and his buttonhole! You may set that down for a sure thing—”

“Dear uncle!” said Madame de Tecle, indicating Camors with a glance.

“I understand you, Elise,” laughingly rejoined M. des Rameures, “but I must beg Monsieur de Camors to believe that I do not in any case intend to offend him. I shall

also beg him to tolerate the monomania of an old man, and some freedom of language with regard to the only subject which makes him lose his sang froid."

"And what is that subject, Monsieur?" said Camors, with his habitual captivating grace of manner.

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"That subject, Monsieur, is the arrogant supremacy assumed by Paris over all the rest of France. I have not put my foot in the place since 1825, in order to testify the abhorrence with which it inspires me. You are an educated, sensible young man, and, I trust, a good Frenchman. Very well! Is it right, I ask, that Paris shall every morning send out to us our ideas ready-made, and that all France shall become a mere humble, servile faubourg to the capital? Do me the favor, I pray you, Monsieur, to answer that?"

"There is doubtless, my dear sir," replied Camors, "some excess in this extreme centralization of France; but all civilized countries must have their capitals, and a head is just as necessary to a nation as to an individual."

"Taking your own image, Monsieur, I shall turn it against you. Yes, doubtless a head is as necessary to a nation as to an individual; if, however, the head becomes monstrous and deformed, the seat of intelligence will be turned into that of idiocy, and in place of a man of intellect, you have a hydrocephalus. Pray give heed to what Monsieur the Sub-prefect, may say in answer to what I shall ask him. Now, my dear Sub-prefect, be frank. If tomorrow, the deputation of this district should become vacant, can you find within its broad limits, or indeed within the district, a man likely to fill all functions, good and bad?"

"Upon my word," answered the official, "if you continue to refuse the office, I really know of no one else fit for it."

"I shall persist all my life, Monsieur, for at my age assuredly I shall not expose myself to the buffoonery of your Parisian jesters."

"Very well! In that event you will be obliged to take some stranger—perhaps, even one of those Parisian jesters."

"You have heard him, Monsieur de Camors," said M. des Rameures, with exultation.

"This district numbers six hundred thousand souls, and yet does not contain within it the material for one deputy. There is no other civilized country, I submit, in which we can find a similar instance so scandalous. For the people of France this shame is reserved exclusively, and it is your Paris that has brought it upon us. Paris, absorbing all the blood, life, thought, and action of the country, has left a mere geographical skeleton in place of a nation! These are the benefits of your centralization, since you have pronounced that word, which is quite as barbarous as the thing itself."

"But pardon me, uncle," said Madame de Tecle, quietly plying her needle, "I know nothing of these matters, but it seems to me that I have heard you say this centralization was the work of the Revolution and of the First Consul. Why, therefore, do you call Monsieur de Camors to account for it? That certainly does not seem to me just."

"Nor does it seem so to me," said Camors, bowing to Madame de Tecle.

“Nor to me either,” rejoined M. des Rameures, smiling.

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"However, Madame," resumed Camors, "I may to some extent be held responsible in this matter, for though, as you justly suggest, I have not brought about this centralization, yet I confess I strongly approve the course of those who did."

"Bravo! So much the better, Monsieur. I like that. One should have his own positive opinions, and defend them."

"Monsieur," said Camors, "I shall make an exception in your honor, for when I dine out, and especially when I dine well, I always have the same opinion with my host; but I respect you too highly not to dare to differ with you. Well, then, I think the revolutionary Assembly, and subsequently the First Consul, were happily inspired in imposing a vigorous centralized political administration upon France. I believe, indeed, that it was indispensable at the time, in order to mold and harden our social body in its new form, to adjust it in its position, and fix it firmly under the new laws—that is, to establish and maintain this powerful French unity which has become our national peculiarity, our genius and our strength."

"You speak rightly, sir," exclaimed Durocher.

"Parbleu I unquestionably you are right," warmly rejoined M. des Rameures. "Yes, that is quite true. The excessive centralization of which I complain has had its hour of utility, nay, even of necessity, I will admit; but, Monsieur, in what human institution do you pretend to implant the absolute, the eternal? Feudalism, also, my dear sir, was a benefit and a progress in its day, but that which was a benefit yesterday may it not become an evil to-morrow—a danger? That which is progress to-day, may it not one hundred years hence have become mere routine, and a downright trammel? Is not that the history of the world? And if you wish to know, Monsieur, by what sign we may recognize the fact that a social or political system has attained its end, I will tell you: it is when it is manifest only in its inconveniences and abuses. Then the machine has finished its work, and should be replaced. Indeed, I declare that French centralization has reached its critical term, that fatal point at which, after protecting, it oppresses; at which, after vivifying, it paralyzes; at which, having saved France, it crushes her."

"Dear uncle, you are carried away by your subject," said Madame de Tecle.

"Yes, Elise, I am carried away, I admit, but I am right. Everything justifies me—the past and the present, I am sure; and so will the future, I fear. Did I say the past? Be assured, Monsieur de Camors, I am not a narrow-minded admirer of the past. Though a Legitimist from personal affections, I am a downright Liberal in principles. You know that, Durocher? Well, then, in short, formerly between the Alps, the Rhine, and the Pyrenees, was a great country which lived, thought, and acted, not exclusively through its capital, but for itself. It had a head, assuredly; but it had also a heart,

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muscles, nerves, and veins with blood in them, and yet the head lost nothing by that. There was then a France, Monsieur. The province had an existence, subordinate doubtless, but real, active, and independent. Each government, each office, each parliamentary centre was a living intellectual focus. The great provincial institutions and local liberties exercised the intellect on all sides, tempered the character, and developed men. And now note well, Durocher! If France had been centralized formerly as to-day, your dear Revolution never would have occurred—do you understand? Never! because there would have been no men to make it. For may I not ask, whence came that prodigious concourse of intelligences all fully armed, and with heroic hearts, which the great social movement of '78 suddenly brought upon the scene? Please recall to mind the most illustrious men of that era—lawyers, orators, soldiers. How many were from Paris? All came from the provinces, the fruitful womb of France! But to-day we have simply need of a deputy, peaceful times; and yet, out of six hundred thousand souls, as we have seen, we can not find one suitable man. Why is this the case, gentlemen? Because upon the soil of uncentralized France men grew, while only functionaries germinate in the soil of centralized France.”

“God bless you, Monsieur!” said the Sub-prefect, with a smile.

“Pardon me, my dear Sub-prefect, but you, too, should understand that I really plead your cause as well as my own, when I claim for the provinces, and for all the functions of provincial life, more independence, dignity, and grandeur. In the state to which these functions are reduced at present, the administration and the judiciary are equally stripped of power, prestige, and patronage. You smile, Monsieur, but no longer, as formerly, are they the centres of life, of emulation, and of light, civic schools and manly gymnasiums; they have become merely simple, passive clockwork; and that is the case with the rest, Monsieur de Camors. Our municipal institutions are a mere farce, our provincial assemblies only a name, our local liberties naught! Consequently, we have not now a man for a deputy. But why should we complain? Does not Paris undertake to live, to think for us? Does she not deign to cast to us, as of yore the Roman Senate cast to the suburban plebeians, our food for the day-bread and vaudevilles—‘panem et circenses’. Yes, Monsieur, let us turn from the past to the present—to France of to-day! A nation of forty millions of people who await each morning from Paris the signal to know whether it is day or night, or whether, indeed, they shall laugh or weep! A great people, once the noblest, the cleverest in the world, repeating the same day, at the same hour, in all the salons, and at all the crossways in the empire, the same imbecile gabble engendered the evening before in the mire of the boulevards. I tell you? Monsieur, it is humiliating that all Europe, once jealous of us,

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should now shrug her shoulders in our faces.—Besides, it is fatal even for Paris, which, permit me to add, drunk with prosperity in its haughty isolation and self-fetishism, not a little resembles the Chinese Empire—a focus of warmed-over, corrupt, and frivolous civilization! As for the future, my dear sir, may God preserve me from despair, since it concerns my country! This age has already seen great things, great marvels, in fact; for I beg you to remember I am by no means an enemy to my time. I approve the Revolution, liberty, equality, the press, railways, and the telegraph; and as I often say to Monsieur le Cure, every cause that would live must accommodate itself cheerfully to the progress of its epoch, and study how to serve itself by it. Every cause that is in antagonism with its age commits suicide. Indeed, Monsieur, I trust this century will see one more great event, the end of this Parisian tyranny, and the resuscitation of provincial life; for I must repeat, my dear sir, that your centralization, which was once an excellent remedy, is a detestable regimen! It is a horrible instrument of oppression and tyranny, ready-made for all hands, suitable for every despotism, and under it France stifles and wastes away. You must agree with me yourself, Durocher; in this sense the Revolution overshot its mark, and placed in jeopardy even its purposes; for you, who love liberty, and do not wish it merely for yourself alone, as some of your friends do, but for all the world, surely you can not admire centralization, which proscribes liberty as manifestly as night obscures the day. As for my part, gentlemen, there are two things which I love equally—liberty and France. Well, then, as I believe in God, do I believe that both must perish in the throes of some convulsive catastrophe if all the life of the nation shall continue to be concentrated in the brain, and the great reform for which I call is not made: if a vast system of local franchise, if provincial institutions, largely independent and conformable to the modern spirit, are not soon established to yield fresh blood for our exhausted veins, and to fertilize our impoverished soil. Undoubtedly the work will be difficult and complicated; it will demand a firm resolute hand, but the hand that may accomplish it will have achieved the most patriotic work of the century. Tell that to your sovereign, Monsieur Sub-prefect; say to him that if he do that, there is one old French heart that will bless him. Tell him, also, that he will encounter much passion, much derision, much danger, peradventure; but that he will have a commensurate recompense when he shall see France, like Lazarus, delivered from its swathings and its shroud, rise again, sound and whole, to salute him!”

These last words the old gentleman had pronounced with fire, emotion, and extraordinary dignity; and the silence and respect with which he had been listened to were prolonged after he had ceased to speak. This appeared to embarrass him, but taking the arm of Camors he said, with a smile, “‘Semel insanivimus omnes.’ My dear sir, every one has his madness. I trust that mine has not offended you. Well, then, prove it to me by accompanying me on the piano in this song of the sixteenth century.”

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Camors complied with his usual good taste; and the song of the sixteenth century terminated the evening's entertainment; but the young Count, before leaving, found the means of causing Madame de Tecle the most profound astonishment. He asked her, in a low voice, and with peculiar emphasis, whether she would be kind enough, at her leisure, to grant him the honor of a moment's private conversation.

Madame de Tecle opened still wider those large eyes of hers, blushed slightly, and replied that she would be at home the next afternoon at four o'clock.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Bad to fear the opinion of people one despises
Camors refused, hesitated, made objections, and consented
Confounding progress with discord, liberty with license
Contempt for men is the beginning of wisdom
Cried out, with the blunt candor of his age
Dangers of liberty outweighed its benefits
Demanded of him imperatively—the time of day
Do not get angry. Rarely laugh, and never weep
Every cause that is in antagonism with its age commits suicide
Every one is the best judge of his own affairs
Every road leads to Rome—and one as surely as another
God—or no principles!
He is charming, for one always feels in danger near him
Intemperance of her zeal and the acrimony of her bigotry
Man, if he will it, need not grow old: the lion must
Never can make revolutions with gloves on
Once an excellent remedy, is a detestable regimen
Pleasures of an independent code of morals
Police regulations known as religion
Principles alone, without faith in some higher sanction
Property of all who are strong enough to stand it
Semel insanivimus omnes.' (every one has his madness)
Slip forth from the common herd, my son, think for yourself
Suspicion that he is a feeble human creature after all!
There will be no more belief in Christ than in Jupiter
Ties that become duties where we only sought pleasures
Truth is easily found. I shall read all the newspapers
Whether in this world one must be a fanatic or nothing
Whole world of politics and religion rushed to extremes
With the habit of thinking, had not lost the habit of laughing
You can not make an omelette without first breaking the eggs



MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

By octave Feuillet

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE CONQUERS PHILOSOPHY

To M. de Camors, in principle it was a matter of perfect indifference whether France was centralized or decentralized. But his Parisian instinct induced him to prefer the former. In spite of this preference, he would not have scrupled to adopt the opinions of M. des Rameures, had not his own fine tact shown him that the proud old gentleman was not to be won by submission.

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He therefore reserved for him the triumph of his gradual conversion. Be that as it might, it was neither of centralization nor of decentralization that the young Count proposed to speak to Madame de Tecle, when, at the appointed hour, he presented himself before her. He found her in the garden, which, like the house, was of an ancient, severe, and monastic style. A terrace planted with limetrees extended on one side of the garden. It was at this spot that Madame de Tecle was seated under a group of lime-trees, forming a rustic bower.

She was fond of this place, because it recalled to her that evening when her unexpected apparition had suddenly inspired with a celestial joy the pale, disfigured face of her betrothed.

She was seated on a low chair beside a small rustic table, covered with pieces of wool and silk; her feet rested on a stool, and she worked on a piece of tapestry, apparently with great tranquillity.

M. de Camors, an expert in all the niceties and exquisite devices of the feminine mind, smiled to himself at this audience in the open air. He thought he fathomed its meaning. Madame de Tecle desired to deprive this interview of the confidential character which closed doors would have given it.

It was the simple truth. This young woman, who was one of the noblest of her sex, was not at all simple. She had not passed ten years of her youth, her beauty, and her widowhood without receiving, under forms more or less direct, dozens of declarations that had inspired her with impressions, which, although just, were not always too flattering to the delicacy and discretion of the opposite sex. Like all women of her age, she knew her danger, and, unlike most of them, she did not love it. She had invariably turned into the broad road of friendship all those she had surprised rambling within the prohibited limits of love. The request of M. de Camors for a private interview had seriously preoccupied her since the previous evening. What could be the object of this mysterious interview? She puzzled her brain to imagine, but could not divine.

It was not probable that M. de Camors, at the beginning of their acquaintance, would feel himself entitled to declare a passion. However vividly the famed gallantry of the young Count rose to her memory, she thought so noted a ladykiller as he might adopt unusual methods, and might think himself entitled to dispense with much ceremony in dealing with an humble provincial.

Animated by these ideas, she resolved to receive him in the garden, having remarked, during her short experience, that open air and a wide, open space were not favorable to bold wooers.

M. de Camors bowed to Madame de Tecle as an Englishman would have bowed to his queen; then seating himself, drew his chair nearer to hers, mischievously perhaps, and

lowering his voice into a confidential tone, said: "Madame, will you permit me to confide a secret to you, and to ask your counsel?"

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She raised her graceful head, fixed upon the Count her soft, bright gaze, smiled vaguely, and by a slight movement of the hand intimated to him, "You surprise me; but I will listen to you."

"This is my first secret, Madame—I desire to become deputy for this district."

At this unexpected declaration, Madame de Tecle looked at him, breathed a slight sigh of relief, and gravely awaited what he had to say.

"The General de Campvallou, Madame," continued the young man, "has manifested a father's kindness to me. He intends to resign in my favor, and has not concealed from me that the support of your uncle is indispensable to my success as a candidate. I have therefore come here, by the General's advice, in the hope of obtaining this support, but the ideas and opinions expressed yesterday by your uncle appear to me so directly opposed to my pretensions that I feel truly discouraged. To be brief, Madame, in my perplexity I conceived the idea—indiscreet doubtless—to appeal to your kindness, and ask your advice—which I am determined to follow, whatever it may be."

"But, Monsieur! you embarrass me greatly," said the young woman, whose pretty face, at first clouded, brightened up immediately with a frank smile.

"I have no special claims on your kindness—on the contrary perhaps—but I am a human being, and you are charitable. Well, in truth, Madame, this matter seriously concerns my fortune, my future, and my whole destiny. This opportunity which now presents itself for me to enter public life so young is exceptional. I should regret very much to lose it; would you therefore be so kind as to aid me?"

"But how can I?" replied Madame de Tecle. "I never interfere in politics, and that is precisely what you ask me."

"Nevertheless, Madame, I pray you not to oppose me."

"Why should I oppose you?"

"Ah, Madame! You have a right more than any other person to be severe. My youth was a little dissipated. My reputation, in some respects, is not over-good, I know, and I doubt not you may have heard so, and I can not help fearing it has inspired you with some dislike to me."

"Monsieur, we lived a retired life here. We know nothing of what passes in Paris. If we did, this would not prevent my assisting you, if I knew how, for I think that serious and elevated labors could not fail happily to change your ordinary habits."

"It is truly a delicious thing," thought the young Count, "to mystify so spiritual a person."



“Madame,” he continued, with his quiet grace, “I join in your hopes, and as you deign to encourage my ambition, I believe I shall succeed in obtaining your uncle’s support. You know him well. What shall I do to conciliate him? What course shall I adopt?—because I can not do without his assistance. Were I to renounce that, I should be compelled to renounce my projects.”

“It is truly difficult,” said Madame de Tecle, with a reflective air—“very difficult!”

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"Is it not, Madame?"

Camors's voice expressed such confidence and submission that Madame de Tecle was quite touched, and even the devil himself would have been charmed by it, had he heard it in Gehenna.

"Let me reflect on this a little," she said, and she placed her elbows on the table, leaned her head on her hands, her fingers, like a fan, half shading her eyes, while sparks of fire from her rings glittered in the sunshine, and her ivory nails shone against her smooth brow. M. de Camors continued to regard her with the same submissive and candid air.

"Well, Monsieur," she said at last, smiling, "I think you can do nothing better than keep on."

"Pardon me, but how?"

"By persevering in the same system you have already adopted with my uncle! Say nothing to him for the present. Beg the General also to be silent. Wait quietly until intimacy, time, and your own good qualities have sufficiently prepared my uncle for your nomination. My role is very simple. I cannot, at this moment, aid you, without betraying you. My assistance would only injure you, until a change comes in the aspect of affairs. You must conciliate him."

"You overpower me," said Camors, "in taking you for my confidante in my ambitious projects, I have committed a blunder and an impertinence, which a slight contempt from you has mildly punished. But speaking seriously, Madame, I thank you with all my heart. I feared to find in you a powerful enemy, and I find in you a strong neutral, almost an ally."

"Oh! altogether an ally, however secret," responded Madame de Tecle, laughing. "I am glad to be useful to you; as I love General Campvallou very much, I am happy to enter into his views. Come here, Marie?" These last words were addressed to her daughter, who appeared on the steps of the terrace, her cheeks scarlet, and her hair dishevelled, holding a card in her hand. She immediately approached her mother, giving M. de Camors one of those awkward salutations peculiar to young, growing girls.

"Will you permit me," said Madame de Tecle, "to give to my daughter a few orders in English, which we are translating? You are too warm—do not run any more. Tell Rosa to prepare my bodice with the small buttons. While I am dressing, you may say your catechism to me."

"Yes, mother."

"Have you written your exercise?"

“Yes, mother. How do you say ‘joli’ in English for a man?” asked the little girl.

“Why?”

“That question is in my exercise, to be said of a man who is ‘beau, joli, distingue.’”

“Handsome, nice, and charming,” replied her mother.

“Very well, mother, this gentleman, our neighbor, is altogether handsome, nice, and charming.”

“Silly child!” exclaimed Madame de Tecle, while the little girl rushed down the steps.

M. de Camors, who had listened to this dialogue with cool calmness, rose. “I thank you again, Madame,” he said; “and will you now excuse me? You will allow me, from time to time, to confide in you my political hopes and fears?”

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"Certainly, Monsieur."

He bowed and retired. As he was crossing the courtyard, he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Marie. He gave her a most respectful bow. "Another time, Miss Mary, be more careful. I understand English perfectly well!"

Mademoiselle Marie remained in the same attitude, blushed up to the roots of her hair, and cast on M. de Camors a startled look of mingled shame and anger.

"You are not satisfied, Miss Mary," continued Camors.

"Not at all," said the child, quickly, her strong voice somewhat husky.

M. Camors laughed, bowed again, and departed, leaving Mademoiselle Marie in the midst of the court, transfixed with indignation.

A few moments later Marie threw herself into the arms of her mother, weeping bitterly, and told her, through her tears, of her cruel mishap.

Madame de Tecle, in using this opportunity of giving her daughter a lesson on reserve and on convenance, avoided treating the matter too seriously and even seemed to laugh heartily at it, although she had little inclination to do so, and the child finished by laughing with her.

Camors, meanwhile, remained at home, congratulating himself on his campaign, which seemed to him, not without reason, to have been a masterpiece of stratagem. By a clever mingling of frankness and cunning he had quickly enlisted Madame de Tecle in his interest. From that moment the realization of his ambitious dreams seemed assured, for he was not ignorant of the incomparable value of woman's assistance, and knew all the power of that secret and continued labor, of those small but cumulative efforts, and of those subterranean movements which assimilate feminine influence with the secret and irresistible forces of nature. Another point gained—he had established a secret between that pretty woman and himself, and had placed himself on a confidential footing with her. He had gained the right to keep secret their clandestine words and private conversation, and such a situation, cleverly managed, might aid him to pass very agreeably the period occupied in his political canvass.

Camors on entering the house sat down to write the General, to inform him of the opening of his operations, and admonish him to have patience. From that day he turned his attention to following up the two persons who could control his election.

His policy as regarded M. des Rameures was as simple as it was clever. It has already been clearly indicated, and further details would be unnecessary. Profiting by his growing familiarity as neighbor, he went to school, as it were, at the model farm of the gentleman-farmer, and submitted to him the direction of his own domain. By this quiet

compliment, enhanced by his captivating courtesy, he advanced insensibly in the good graces of the old man. But every day, as he grew to know M. de Rameures better, and as he felt more the strength of his character, he began to fear that on essential points he was quite inflexible.

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After some weeks of almost daily intercourse, M. des Rameures graciously praised his young neighbor as a charming fellow, an excellent musician, an amiable associate; but, regarding him as a possible deputy, he saw some things which might disqualify him. Madame de Tecle feared this, and did not hide it from M. de Camors. The young Count did not preoccupy himself so much on this subject as might be supposed, for his second ambition had superseded his first; in other words his fancy for Madame de Tecle had become more ardent and more pressing than his desire for the deputyship. We are compelled to admit, not to his credit, that he first proposed to himself, to ensnare his charming neighbor as a simple pastime, as an interesting adventure, and, above all, as a work of art, which was extremely difficult and would greatly redound to his honor. Although he had met few women of her merit, he judged her correctly. He believed Madame de Tecle was not virtuous simply from force of habit or duty. She had passion. She was not a prude, but was chaste. She was not a devotee, but was pious. He discerned in her at the same time a spirit elevated, yet not narrow; lofty and dignified sentiments, and deeply rooted principles; virtue without rigor, pure and lambent as flame.

Nevertheless he did not despair, trusting to his own principles, to the fascinations of his manner and his previous successes. Instinctively, he knew that the ordinary forms of gallantry would not answer with her. All his art was to surround her with absolute respect, and to leave the rest to time and to the growing intimacy of each day.

There was something very touching to Madame de Tecle in the reserved and timid manner of this 'mauvais sujet', in her presence—the homage of a fallen spirit, as if ashamed of being such, in presence of a spirit of light.

Never, either in public or when tete-a-tete, was there a jest, a word, or a look which the most sensitive virtue could fear.

This young man, ironical with all the rest of the world, was serious with her. From the moment he turned toward her, his voice, face, and conversation became as serious as if he had entered a church. He had a great deal of wit, and he used and abused it beyond measure in conversations in the presence of Madame de Tecle, as if he were making a display of fireworks in her honor. But on coming to her this was suddenly extinguished, and he became all submission and respect.

Not every woman who receives from a superior man such delicate flattery as this necessarily loves him, but she does like him. In the shadow of the perfect security in which M. de Camors had placed her, Madame de Tecle could not but be pleased in the company of the most distinguished man she had ever met, who had, like herself, a taste for art, music, and for high culture.



Thus these innocent relations with a young man whose reputation was rather equivocal could not but awaken in the heart of Madame de Tecle a sentiment, or rather an illusion, which the most prudish could not condemn.



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Libertines offer to vulgar women an attraction which surprises, but which springs from a reprehensible curiosity. To a woman of society they offer another, more noble yet not less dangerous—the attraction of reforming them. It is rare that virtuous women do not fall into the error of believing that it is for virtue's sake alone such men love them. These, in brief, were the secret sympathies whose slight tendrils intertwined, blossomed, and flowered little by little in this soul, as tender as it was pure.

M. de Camors had vaguely foreseen all this: that which he had not foreseen was that he himself would be caught in his own snare, and would be sincere in the role which he had so judiciously adopted. From the first, Madame de Tecle had captivated him. Her very puritanism, united with her native grace and worldly elegance, composed a kind of daily charm which piqued the imagination of the cold young man. If it was a powerful temptation for the angels to save the tempted, the tempted could not harbor with more delight the thought of destroying the angels. They dream, like the reckless Epicureans of the Bible, of mingling, in a new intoxication, the earth with heaven. To these sombre instincts of depravity were soon united in the feelings of Camors a sentiment more worthy of her. Seeing her every day with that childlike intimacy which the country encourages—enhancing the graceful movements of this accomplished person, ever self-possessed and equally prepared for duty or for pleasure—as animated as passion, yet as severe as virtue—he conceived for her a genuine worship. It was not respect, for that requires the effort of believing in such merits, and he did not wish to believe. He thought Madame de Tecle was born so. He admired her as he would admire a rare plant, a beautiful object, an exquisite work, in which nature had combined physical and moral grace with perfect proportion and harmony. His deportment as her slave when near her was not long a mere bit of acting. Our fair readers have doubtless remarked an odd fact: that where a reciprocal sentiment of two feeble human beings has reached a certain point of maturity, chance never fails to furnish a fatal occasion which betrays the secret of the two hearts, and suddenly launches the thunderbolt which has been gradually gathering in the clouds. This is the crisis of all love. This occasion presented itself to Madame de Tecle and M. de Camors in the form of an unpoetic incident.

It occurred at the end of October. Camors had gone out after dinner to take a ride in the neighborhood. Night had already fallen, clear and cold; but as the Count could not see Madame de Tecle that evening, he began only to think of being near her, and felt that unwillingness to work common to lovers—striving, if possible, to kill time, which hung heavy on his hands.

He hoped also that violent exercise might calm his spirit, which never had been more profoundly agitated. Still young and unpractised in his pitiless system, he was troubled at the thought of a victim so pure as Madame de Tecle. To trample on the life, the repose, and the heart of such a woman, as the horse tramples on the grass of the road, with as little care or pity, was hard for a novice.

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Strange as it may appear, the idea of marrying her had occurred to him. Then he said to himself that this weakness was in direct contradiction to his principles, and that she would cause him to lose forever his mastery over himself, and throw him back into the nothingness of his past life. Yet with the corrupt inspirations of his depraved soul he foresaw that the moment he touched her hands with the lips of a lover a new sentiment would spring up in her soul. As he abandoned himself to these passionate imaginings, the recollection of young Madame Lescande came back suddenly to his memory. He grew pale in the darkness. At this moment he was passing the edge of a little wood belonging to the Comte de Tecle, of which a portion had recently been cleared. It was not chance alone that had directed the Count's ride to this point. Madame de Tecle loved this spot, and had frequently taken him there, and on the preceding evening, accompanied by her daughter and her father-in-law, had visited it with him.

The site was a peculiar one. Although not far from houses, the wood was very wild, as if a thousand miles distant from any inhabited place.

You would have said it was a virgin forest, untouched by the axe of the pioneer. Enormous stumps without bark, trunks of gigantic trees, covered the declivity of the hill, and barricaded, here and there, in a picturesque manner, the current of the brook which ran into the valley. A little farther up the dense wood of tufted trees contributed to diffuse that religious light half over the rocks, the brushwood and the fertile soil, and on the limpid water, which is at once the charm and the horror of old neglected woods. In this solitude, and on a space of cleared ground, rose a sort of rude hut, constructed by a poor devil who was a sabot-maker by trade, and who had been allowed to establish himself there by the Comte de Tecle, and to use the beech-trees to gain his humble living. This Bohemian interested Madame de Tecle, probably because, like M. de Camors, he had a bad reputation. He lived in his cabin with a woman who was still pretty under her rags, and with two little boys with golden curls.

He was a stranger in the neighborhood, and the woman was said not to be his wife. He was very taciturn, and his features seemed fine and determined under his thick, black beard.

Madame de Tecle amused herself seeing him make his sabots. She loved the children, who, though dirty, were beautiful as angels; and she pitied the woman. She had a secret project to marry her to the man, in case she had not yet been married, which seemed probable.

Camors walked his horse slowly over the rocky and winding path on the slope of the hillock. This was the moment when the ghost of Madame Lescande had risen before him, and he believed he could almost hear her weep. Suddenly this illusion gave place to a strange reality. The voice of a woman plainly called him by name, in accents of distress—"Monsieur de Camors!"

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Stopping his horse on the instant, he felt an icy shudder pass through his frame. The same voice rose higher and called him again. He recognized it as the voice of Madame de Tecle. Looking around him in the obscure light with a rapid glance, he saw a light shining through the foliage in the direction of the cottage of the sabot-maker. Guided by this, he put spurs to his horse, crossed the cleared ground up the hillside, and found himself face to face with Madame de Tecle. She was standing at the threshold of the hut, her head bare, and her beautiful hair dishevelled under a long, black lace veil. She was giving a servant some hasty orders. When she saw Camors approach, she came toward him.

“Pardon me,” she said, “but I thought I recognized you, and I called you. I am so much distressed—so distressed! The two children of this man are dying! What is to be done? Come in—come in, I beg of you!”

He leaped to the ground, threw the reins to his servant, and followed Madame de Tekle into the interior of the cabin.

The two children with the golden hair were lying side by side on a little bed, immovable, rigid, their eyes open and the pupils strangely dilated—their faces red, and agitated by slight convulsions. They seemed to be in the agony of death. The old doctor, Du Rocher, was leaning over them, looking at them with a fixed, anxious, and despairing eye. The mother was on her knees, her head clasped in her hands, and weeping bitterly. At the foot of the bed stood the father, with his savage mien—his arms crossed, and his eyes dry. He shuddered at intervals, and murmured, in a hoarse, hollow voice: “Both of them! Both of them!” Then he relapsed into his mournful attitude. M. Durocher, approached Camors quickly. “Monsieur,” said he, “what can this be? I believe it to be poisoning, but can detect no definite symptoms: otherwise, the parents should know—but they know nothing! A sunstroke, perhaps; but as both were struck at the same time—and then at this season—ah! our profession is quite useless sometimes.”

Camors made rapid inquiries. They had sought M. Durocher, who was dining with Madame de Tecle an hour before. He had hastened, and found the children already speechless, in a state of fearful congestion. It appeared they had fallen into this state when first attacked, and had become delirious.

Camors conceived an idea. He asked to see the clothes the children had worn during the day. The mother gave them to him. He examined them with care, and pointed out to the doctor several red stains on the poor rags. The doctor touched his forehead, and turned over with a feverish hand the small linen—the rough waistcoat—searched the pockets, and found dozens of a small fruit-like cherries, half crushed. “Belladonna!” he exclaimed. “That idea struck me several times, but how could I be sure? You can not find it within twenty miles of this place, except in this cursed wood—of that I am sure.”

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"Do you think there is yet time?" asked the young Count, in a low voice. "The children seem to me to be very ill."

"Lost, I fear; but everything depends on the time that has passed, the quantity they have taken, and the remedies I can procure."

The old man consulted quickly with Madame de Tecle, who found she had not in her country pharmacy the necessary remedies, or counter-irritants, which the urgency of the case demanded. The doctor was obliged to content himself with the essence of coffee, which the servant was ordered to prepare in haste, and to send to the village for the other things needed.

"To the village!" cried Madame de Tecle. "Good heavens! it is four leagues—it is night, and we shall have to wait probably three or four hours!"

Camors heard this: "Doctor, write your prescription," he said: "Trilby is at the door, and with him I can do the four leagues in an hour—in one hour I promise to return here."

"Oh! thank you, Monsieur!" said Madame de Tecle.

He took the prescription which Dr. Durocher had rapidly traced on a leaf of his pocketbook, mounted his horse, and departed.

The highroad was fortunately not far distant. When he reached it he rode like the phantom horseman.

It was nine o'clock when Madame de Tecle witnessed his departure—it was a few moments after ten when she heard the tramp of his horse at the foot of the hill and ran to the door of the hut. The condition of the two children seemed to have grown worse in the interval, but the old doctor had great hopes in the remedies which Camors was to bring. She waited with impatience, and received him like the dawn of the last hope. She contented herself with pressing his hand, when, breathless, he descended from his horse. But this adorable creature threw herself on Trilby, who was covered with foam and steaming like a furnace.

"Poor Trilby," she said, embracing him in her two arms, "dear Trilby—good Trilby! you are half dead, are you not? But I love you well. Go quickly, Monsieur de Camors, I will attend to Trilby"—and while the young man entered the cabin, she confided Trilby to the charge of her servant, with orders to take him to the stable, and a thousand minute directions to take good care of him after his noble conduct. Dr. Durocher had to obtain the aid of Camors to pass the new medicine through the clenched teeth of the unfortunate children. While both were engaged in this work, Madame de Tecle was sitting on a stool with her head resting against the cabin wall. Durocher suddenly raised his eyes and fixed them on her.

“My dear Madame,” he said, “you are ill. You have had too much excitement, and the odors here are insupportable. You must go home.”

“I really do not feel very well,” she murmured.

“You must go at once. We shall send you the news. One of your servants will take you home.”

She raised herself, trembling; but one look from the young wife of the sabot-maker arrested her. To this poor woman, it seemed that Providence deserted her with Madame de Tecle.

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"No!" she said with a divine sweetness; "I will not go. I shall only breathe a little fresh air. I will remain until they are safe, I promise you;" and she left the room smiling upon the poor woman. After a few minutes, Durocher said to M. de Camors:

"My dear sir, I thank you—but I really have no further need of your services; so you too may go and rest yourself, for you also are growing pale."

Camors, exhausted by his long ride, felt suffocated by the atmosphere of the hut, and consented to the suggestion of the old man, saying that he would not go far.

As he put his foot outside of the cottage, Madame de Tecle, who was sitting before the door, quickly rose and threw over his shoulders a cloak which they had brought for her. She then reseated herself without speaking.

"But you can not remain here all night," he said.

"I should be too uneasy at home."

"But the night is very cold—shall I make you a fire?"

"If you wish," she said.

"Let us see where we can make this little fire. In the midst of this wood it is impossible—we should have a conflagration to finish the picture. Can you walk?"

"Then take my arm, and we shall go and search for a place for our encampment."

She leaned lightly on his arm, and took a few steps with him toward the forest.

"Do you think they are saved?" she asked.

"I hope so," he replied. "The face of Doctor Durocher is more cheerful."

"Oh! how glad I am!"

Both of them stumbled over a root, and laughed like two children for several minutes.

"We shall soon be in the woods," said Madame de Tecle, "and I declare I can go no farther: good or bad, I choose this spot."

They were still quite close to the hut, but the branches of the old trees which had been spared by the axe spread like a sombre dome over their heads. Near by was a large rock, slightly covered with moss, and a number of old trunks of trees, on which Madame de Tecle took her seat.

"Nothing could be better," said Camors, gayly. "I must collect my materials."

A moment after he reappeared, bringing in his arms brushwood, and also a travelling-rug which his servant had brought him.

He got on his knees in front of the rock, prepared the fagots, and lighted them with a match. When the flame began to flicker on the rustic hearth Madame de Tecle trembled with joy, and held out both hands to the blaze.

“Ah! how nice that is!” she said; “and then it is so amusing; one would say we had been shipwrecked.

“Now, Monsieur, if you would be perfect go and see what Durocher reports.”

He ran to the hut. When he returned he could not avoid stopping half way to admire the elegant and simple silhouette of the young woman, defined sharply against the blackness of the wood, her fine countenance slightly illuminated by the firelight. The moment she saw him:

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"Well!" she cried.

"A great deal of hope."

"Oh! what happiness, Monsieur!" She pressed his hand.

"Sit down there," she said.

He sat down on a rock contiguous to hers, and replied to her eager questions. He repeated, in detail, his conversation with the doctor, and explained at length the properties of belladonna. She listened at first with interest, but little by little, with her head wrapped in her veil and resting on the boughs interlaced behind her, she seemed to be uncomfortably resting from fatigue.

"You are likely to fall asleep there," he said, laughing.

"Perhaps!" she murmured—smiled, and went to sleep.

Her sleep resembled death, it was so profound, and so calm was the beating of her heart, so light her breathing.

Camors knelt down again by the fire, to listen breathlessly and to gaze upon her. From time to time he seemed to meditate, and the solitude was disturbed only by the rustling of the leaves. His eyes followed the flickering of the flame, sometimes resting on the white cheek, sometimes on the grove, sometimes on the arches of the high trees, as if he wished to fix in his memory all the details of this sweet scene. Then his gaze rested again on the young woman, clothed in her beauty, grace, and confiding repose.

What heavenly thoughts descended at that moment on this sombre soul—what hesitation, what doubt assailed it! What images of peace, truth, virtue, and happiness passed into that brain full of storm, and chased away the phantoms of the sophistries he cherished! He himself knew, but never told.

The brisk crackling of the wood awakened her. She opened her eyes in surprise, and as soon as she saw the young man kneeling before her, addressed him:

"How are they now, Monsieur?"

He did not know how to tell her that for the last hour he had had but one thought, and that was of her. Durocher appeared suddenly before them.

"They are saved, Madame," said the old man, brusquely; "come quickly, embrace them, and return home, or we shall have to treat you to-morrow. You are very imprudent to have remained in this damp wood, and it was absurd of Monsieur to let you do so."

She took the arm of the old doctor, smiling, and reentered the hut. The two children, now roused from the dangerous torpor, but who seemed still terrified by the threatened death, raised their little round heads. She made them a sign to keep quiet, and leaned over their pillow smiling upon them, and imprinted two kisses on their golden curls.

“To-morrow, my angels,” she said. But the mother, half laughing, half crying, followed Madame de Tecle step by step, speaking to her, and kissing her garments.

“Let her alone,” cried the old doctor, querulously. “Go home, Madame. Monsieur de Camors, take her home.”

She was going out, when the man, who had not before spoken, and who was sitting in the corner of his hut as if stupefied, rose suddenly, seized the arm of Madame de Tecle, who, slightly terrified, turned round, for the gesture of the man was so violent as to seem menacing; his eyes, hard and dry, were fixed upon her, and he continued to press her arm with a contracted hand.

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"My friend!" she said, although rather uncertain.

"Yes, your friend," muttered the man with a hollow voice; "yes, your friend."

He could not continue, his mouth worked as if in a convulsion, suppressed weeping shook his frame; he then threw himself on his knees, and they saw a shower of tears force themselves through the hands clasped over his face.

"Take her away, Monsieur," said the old doctor.

Camors gently pushed her out of the but and followed her. She took his arm and descended the rugged path which led to her home.

It was a walk of twenty minutes from the wood. Half the distance was passed without interchanging a word. Once or twice, when the rays of the moon pierced through the clouds, Camors thought he saw her wipe away a tear with the end of her glove. He guided her cautiously in the darkness, although the light step of the young woman was little slower in the obscurity. Her springy step pressed noiselessly the fallen leaves—avoided without assistance the ruts and marshes, as if she had been endowed with a magical clairvoyance. When they reached a crossroad, and Camors seemed uncertain, she indicated the way by a slight pressure of the arm. Both were no doubt embarrassed by the long silence—it was Madame de Tecle who first broke it.

"You have been very good this evening, Monsieur," she said in a low and slightly agitated voice.

"I love you so much!" said the young man.

He pronounced these simple words in such a deep impassioned tone that Madame de Tecle trembled and stood still in the road.

"Monsieur de Camors!"

"What, Madame?" he demanded, in a strange tone.

"Heavens!—in fact-nothing!" said she, "for this is a declaration of friendship, I suppose—and your friendship gives me much pleasure."

He let go her arm at once, and in a hoarse and angry voice said—"I am not your friend!"

"What are you then, Monsieur?"

Her voice was calm, but she recoiled a few steps, and leaned against one of the trees which bordered the road. The explosion so long pent up burst forth, and a flood of words poured from the young man's lips with inexpressible impetuosity.



“What I am I know not! I no longer know whether I am myself—if I am dead or alive—if I am good or bad—whether I am dreaming or waking. Oh, Madame, what I wish is that the day may never rise again—that this night would never finish—that I should wish to feel always—always—in my head, my heart, my entire being—that which I now feel, near you—of you—for you! I should wish to be stricken with some sudden illness, without hope, in order to be watched and wept for by you, like those children—and to be embalmed in your tears; and to see you bowed down in terror before me is horrible to me! By the name of your God, whom you have made me respect, I swear you are sacred to me—the child in the arms of its mother is not more so!”

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"I have no fear," she murmured.

"Oh, no!—have no fear!" he repeated in a tone of voice infinitely softened and tender. "It is I who am afraid—it is I who tremble—you see it; for since I have spoken, all is finished. I expect nothing more—I hope for nothing—this night has no possible tomorrow. I know it. Your husband I dare not be—your lover I should not wish to be. I ask nothing of you—understand well! I should like to burn my heart at your feet, as on an altar—this is all. Do you believe me? Answer! Are you tranquil? Are you confident? Will you hear me? May I tell you what image I carry of you in the secret recesses of my heart? Dear creature that you are, you do not—ah, you do not know how great is your worth; and I fear to tell you; so much am I afraid of stripping you of your charms, or of one of your virtues. If you had been proud of yourself, as you have a right to be, you would be less perfect, and I should love you less. But I wish to tell you how lovable and how charming you are. You alone do not know it. You alone do not see the soft flame of your large eyes—the reflection of your heroic soul on your young but serene brow. Your charm is over everything you do—your slightest gesture is engraven on my heart. Into the most ordinary duties of every-day life you carry a peculiar grace, like a young priestess who recites her daily devotions. Your hand, your touch, your breath purifies everything—even the most humble and the most wicked beings—and myself first of all!

"I am astonished at the words which I dare to pronounce, and the sentiments which animate me, to whom you have made clear new truths. Yes, all the rhapsodies of the poets, all the loves of the martyrs, I comprehend in your presence. This is truth itself. I understand those who died for their faith by the torture—because I should like to suffer for you—because I believe in you—because I respect you—I cherish you—I adore you!"

He stopped, shivering, and half prostrating himself before her, seized the end of her veil and kissed it.

"Now," he continued, with a kind of grave sadness, "go, Madame, I have forgotten too long that you require repose. Pardon me—proceed. I shall follow you at a distance, until you reach your home, to protect you—but fear nothing from me."

Madame de Tecle had listened, without once interrupting him even by a sigh. Words would only excite the young man more. Probably she understood, for the first time in her life, one of those songs of love—one of those hymns alive with passion, which every woman wishes to hear before she dies. Should she die because she had heard it? She remained without speaking, as if just awakening from a dream, and said quite simply, in a voice as soft and feeble as a sigh, "My God!" After another pause she advanced a few steps on the road.

"Give me your arm as far as my house, Monsieur," she said.

He obeyed her, and they continued their walk toward the house, the lights of which they soon saw. They did not exchange a word—only as they reached the gate, Madame de Tecle turned and made him a slight gesture with her hand, in sign of adieu. In return, M. de Camors bowed low, and withdrew.

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CHAPTER X

THE PROLOGUE TO THE TRAGEDY

The Comte de Camors had been sincere. When true passion surprises the human soul, it breaks down all resolves, sweeps away all logic, and crushes all calculations.

In this lies its grandeur, and also its danger. It suddenly seizes on you, as the ancient god inspired the priestess on her tripod—speaks through your lips, utters words you hardly comprehend, falsifies your thoughts, confounds your reason, and betrays your secrets. When this sublime madness possesses you, it elevates you—it transfigures you. It can suddenly convert a common man into a poet, a coward into a hero, an egotist into a martyr, and Don Juan himself into an angel of purity.

With women—and it is to their honor—this metamorphosis can be durable, but it is rarely so with men. Once transported to this stormy sky, women frankly accept it as their proper home, and the vicinity of the thunder does not disquiet them.

Passion is their element—they feel at home there. There are few women worthy of the name who are not ready to put in action all the words which passion has caused to bubble from their lips. If they speak of flight, they are ready for exile. If they talk of dying, they are ready for death. Men are far less consistent with their ideas.

It was not until late the next morning that Camors regretted his outbreak of sincerity; for, during the remainder of the night, still filled with his excitement, agitated and shaken by the passage of the god, sunk into a confused and feverish reverie, he was incapable of reflection. But when, on awakening, he surveyed the situation calmly and by the plain light of day, and thought over the preceding evening and its events, he could not fail to recognize the fact that he had been cruelly duped by his own nervous system. To love Madame de Tecle was perfectly proper, and he loved her still—for she was a person to be loved and desired—but to elevate that love or any other as the master of his life, instead of its plaything, was one of those weaknesses interdicted by his system more than any other. In fact, he felt that he had spoken and acted like a school-boy on a holiday. He had uttered words, made promises, and taken engagements on himself which no one demanded of him. No conduct could have been more ridiculous. Happily, nothing was lost. He had yet time to give his love that subordinate place which this sort of fantasy should occupy in the life of man. He had been imprudent; but this very imprudence might finally prove of service to him. All that remained of this scene was a declaration—gracefully made, spontaneous, natural—which subjected Madame de Tecle to the double charm of a mystic idolatry which pleased her sex, and to a manly ardor which could not displease her.

He had, therefore, nothing to regret—although he certainly would have preferred, from the point of view of his principles, to have displayed a somewhat less childish weakness.

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But what course should he now adopt? Nothing could be more simple. He would go to Madame de Tecle—implore her forgiveness—throw himself again at her feet, promising eternal respect, and succeed. Consequently, about ten o'clock, M. de Camors wrote the following note:

"Madame

"I can not leave without bidding you adieu, and once more demanding your forgiveness.

"Will you permit me?

"Camors."

This letter he was about despatching, when he received one containing the following words:

"I shall be happy, Monsieur, if you will call upon me to-day, about four o'clock.

"Elise de Tecle."

Upon which M. de Camors threw his own note in the fire, as entirely superfluous.

No matter what interpretation he put upon this note, it was an evident sign that love had triumphed and that virtue was defeated; for, after what had passed the previous evening between Madame de Tecle and himself, there was only one course for a virtuous woman to take; and that was never to see him again. To see him was to pardon him; to pardon him was to surrender herself to him, with or without circumlocution. Camors did not allow himself to deplore any further an adventure which had so suddenly lost its gravity. He soliloquized on the weakness of women. He thought it bad taste in Madame de Tecle not to have maintained longer the high ideal his innocence had created for her. Anticipating the disenchantment which follows possession, he already saw her deprived of all her prestige, and ticketed in the museum of his amorous souvenirs.

Nevertheless, when he approached her house, and had the feeling of her near presence, he was troubled. Doubt—and anxiety assailed him. When he saw through the trees the window of her room, his heart throbbed so violently that he had to sit down on the root of a tree for a moment.

"I love her like a madman!" he murmured; then leaping up suddenly he exclaimed, "But she is only a woman, after all—I shall go on!"



For the first time Madame de Tecle received him in her own apartment. This room M. de Camors had never seen. It was a large and lofty apartment, draped and furnished in sombre tints.

It contained gilded mirrors, bronzes, engravings, and old family jewelry lying on tables—the whole presenting the appearance of the ornamentation of a church.

In this severe and almost religious interior, however rich, reigned a vague odor of flowers; and there were also to be seen boxes of lace, drawers of perfumed linen, and that dainty atmosphere which ever accompanies refined women.

But every one has her personal individuality, and forms her own atmosphere which fascinates her lover. Madame de Tecle, finding herself almost lost in this very large room, had so arranged some pieces of furniture as to make herself a little private nook near the chimneypiece, which her daughter called, “My mother’s chapel.” It was there Camors now perceived her, by the soft light of a lamp, sitting in an armchair, and, contrary to her custom, having no work in her hands. She appeared calm, though two dark circles surrounded her eyes. She had evidently suffered much, and wept much.

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On seeing that dear face, worn and haggard with grief, Camors forgot the neat phrases he had prepared for his entrance. He forgot all except that he really adored her.

He advanced hastily toward her, seized in his two hands those of the young woman and, without speaking, interrogated her eyes with tenderness and profound pity.

"It is nothing," she said, withdrawing her hand and bending her pale face gently; "I am better; I may even be very happy, if you wish it."

There was in the smile, the look, and the accent of Madame de Tecle something indefinable, which froze the blood of Camors.

He felt confusedly that she loved him, and yet was lost to him; that he had before him a species of being he did not understand, and that this woman, saddened, broken, and lost by love, yet loved something else in this world better even than that love.

She made him a slight sign, which he obeyed like a child, and he sat down beside her.

"Monsieur," she said to him, in a voice tremulous at first, but which grew stronger as she proceeded, "I heard you last night perhaps with a little too much patience. I shall now, in return, ask from you the same kindness. You have told me that you love me, Monsieur; and I avow frankly that I entertain a lively affection for you. Such being the case, we must either separate forever, or unite ourselves by the only tie worthy of us both. To part:—that will afflict me much, and I also believe it would occasion much grief to you. To unite ourselves:—for my own part, Monsieur, I should be willing to give you my life; but I can not do it, I can not wed you without manifest folly. You are younger than I; and as good and generous as I believe you to be, simple reason tells me that by so doing I should bring bitter repentance on myself. But there is yet another reason. I do not belong to myself, I belong to my daughter, to my family, to my past. In giving up my name for yours I should wound, I should cruelly afflict, all the friends who surround me, and, I believe, some who exist no longer. Well, Monsieur," she continued, with a smile of celestial grace and resignation, "I have discovered a way by which we yet can avoid breaking off an intimacy so sweet to both of us—in fact, to make it closer and more dear. My proposal may surprise you, but have the kindness to think over it, and do not say no, at once."

She glanced at him, and was terrified at the pallor which overspread his face. She gently took his hand, and said:

"Have patience!"

"Speak on!" he muttered, hoarsely.

"Monsieur," she continued, with her smile of angelic charity, "God be praised, you are quite young; in our society men situated as you are do not marry early, and I think they

are right. Well, then, this is what I wish to do, if you will allow me to tell you. I wish to blend in one affection the two strongest sentiments of my heart! I wish to concentrate all my care, all my tenderness,

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all my joy on forming a wife worthy of you—a young soul who will make you happy, a cultivated intellect of which you can be proud. I will promise you, Monsieur, I will swear to you, to consecrate to you this sweet duty, and to consecrate to it all that is best in myself. I shall devote to it all my time, every instant of my life, as to the holy work of a saint. I swear to you that I shall be very happy if you will only tell me that you will consent to this.”

His answer was an impatient exclamation of irony and anger: then he spoke:

“You will pardon me, Madame,” he said, “if so sudden a change in my sentiments can not be as prompt as you wish.”

She blushed slightly.

“Yes,” she said, with a faint smile; “I can understand that the idea of my being your mother-in-law may seem strange to you; but in some years, even in a very few years’ time, I shall be an old woman, and then it will seem to you very natural.”

To consummate her mournful sacrifice, the poor woman did not shrink from covering herself, even in the presence of the man she loved, with the mantle of old age.

The soul of Camors was perverted, but not base, and it was suddenly touched at this simple heroism. He rendered it the greatest homage he could pay, for his eyes suddenly filled with tears. She observed it, for she watched with an anxious eye the slightest impression she produced upon him. So she continued more cheerfully:

“And see, Monsieur, how this will settle everything. In this way we can continue to see each other without danger, because your little affianced wife will be always between us. Our sentiments will soon be in harmony with our new thoughts. Even your future prospects, which are now also mine, will encounter fewer obstacles, because I shall push them more openly, without revealing to my uncle what ought to remain a secret between us two. I can let him suspect my hopes, and that will enlist him in your service. Above all, I repeat to you that this will insure my happiness. Will you thus accept my maternal affection?”

M. de Camors, by a powerful effort of will, had recovered his self-control.

“Pardon me, Madame,” he said, with a faint smile, “but I should wish at least to preserve honor. What do you ask of me? Do you yourself fully comprehend? Have you reflected well on this? Can either of us contract, without imprudence, an engagement of so delicate a nature for so long a time?”



"I demand no engagement of you," she replied, "for I feel that would be unreasonable. I only pledge myself as far as I can, without compromising the future fate of my daughter. I shall educate her for you. I shall, in my secret heart, destine her for you, and it is in this light I shall think of you for the future. Grant me this. Accept it like an honest man, and remain single. This is probably a folly, but I risk my repose upon it. I will run all the risk, because I shall have all the

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joy. I have already had a thousand thoughts on this subject, which I can not yet tell you, but which I shall confess to God this night. I believe—I am convinced that my daughter, when I have done all that I can for her, will make an excellent wife for you. She will benefit you, and be an honor to you, and will, I hope, one day thank me with all her heart; for I perceive already what she wishes, and what she loves. You can not know, you can not even suspect—but I—I know it. There is already a woman in that child, and a very charming woman—much more charming than her mother, Monsieur, I assure you.”

Madame de Tecle stopped suddenly, the door opened, and Mademoiselle Marie entered the room brusquely, holding in each hand a gigantic doll.

M. Camors rose, bowed gravely to her, and bit his lip to avoid smiling, which did not altogether escape Madame de Tecle.

“Marie!” she cried out, “really you are absurd with your dolls!”

“My dolls! I adore them!” replied Mademoiselle Marie.

“You are absurd! Go away with your dolls,” said her mother.

“Not without embracing you,” said the child.

She laid her dolls on the carpet, sprang on her mother’s neck, and kissed her on both cheeks passionately, after which she took up her dolls, saying to them:

“Come, my little dears!” and left the room.

“Good heavens!” said Madame de Tecle, laughing, “this is an unfortunate incident; but I still insist, and I implore you to take my word. She will have sense, courage, and goodness. Now,” she continued in a more serious tone, “take time to think over it, and return to give me your decision, should it be favorable. If not, we must bid each other adieu.”

“Madame,” said Camors, rising and standing before her, “I will promise never to address a word to you which a son might not utter to his mother. Is it not this which you demand?”

Madame de Tecle fixed upon him for an instant her beautiful eyes, full of joy and gratitude, then suddenly covered her face with her two hands.

“I thank you!” she murmured, “I am very happy!” She extended her hand, wet with her tears, which he took and pressed to his lips, bowed low, and left the room.

If there ever was a moment in his fatal career when the young man was really worthy of admiration, it was this. His love for Madame de Tecle, however unworthy of her it might be, was nevertheless great. It was the only true passion he had ever felt. At the moment when he saw this love, the triumph of which he thought certain, escape him forever, he was not only wounded in his pride but was crushed in his heart.

Yet he took the stroke like a gentleman. His agony was well borne. His first bitter words, checked at once, alone betrayed what he suffered.

He was as pitiless for his own sorrows as he sought to be for those of others. He indulged in none of the common injustice habitual to discarded lovers.

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He recognized the decision of Madame de Tecle as true and final, and was not tempted for a moment to mistake it for one of those equivocal arrangements by which women sometimes deceive themselves, and of which men always take advantage. He realized that the refuge she had sought was inviolable. He neither argued nor protested against her resolve. He submitted to it, and nobly kissed the noble hand which smote him. As to the miracle of courage, chastity, and faith by which Madame de Tecle had transformed and purified her love, he cared not to dwell upon it. This example, which opened to his view a divine soul, naked, so to speak, destroyed his theories. One word which escaped him, while passing to his own house, proved the judgment which he passed upon it, from his own point of view. "Very childish," he muttered, "but sublime!"

On returning home Camors found a letter from General Campvallon, notifying him that his marriage with Mademoiselle d'Estrelles would take place in a few days, and inviting him to be present. The marriage was to be strictly private, with only the family to assist at it.

Camors did not regret this invitation, as it gave him the excuse for some diversion in his thoughts, of which he felt the need. He was greatly tempted to go away at once to diminish his sufferings, but conquered this weakness. The next evening he passed at the chateau of M. des Rameures; and though his heart was bleeding, he piqued himself on presenting an unclouded brow and an inscrutable smile to Madame de Tecle. He announced the brief absence he intended, and explained the reason.

"You will present my best wishes to the General," said M. des Rameures. "I hope he may be happy, but I confess I doubt it devilishly."

"I shall bear your good wishes to the General, Monsieur."

"The deuce you will! 'Exceptis excipiendis', I hope," responded the old gentleman, laughing.

As for Madame de Tecle, to tell of all the tender attentions and exquisite delicacies, that a sweet womanly nature knows so well how to apply to heal the wounds it has inflicted—how graciously she glided into her maternal relation with Camors—to tell all this would require a pen wielded by her own soft hands.

Two days later M. de Camors left Reuilly for Paris. The morning after his arrival, he repaired at an early hour to the General's house, a magnificent hotel in the Rue Vanneau. The marriage contract was to be signed that evening, and the civil and religious ceremonies were to take place next morning.

Camors found the General in a state of extraordinary agitation, pacing up and down the three salons which formed the ground floor of the hotel. The moment he perceived the



young man entering—"Ah, it is you!" he cried, darting a ferocious glance upon him. "By my faith, your arrival is fortunate."

"But, General!"

"Well, what! Why do you not embrace me?"

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"Certainly, General!"

"Very well! It is for to-morrow, you know!"

"Yes, General."

"Sacrebleu! You are very cool! Have you seen her?"

"Not yet, General. I have just arrived."

"You must go and see her this morning. You owe her this mark of interest; and if you discover anything, you must tell me."

"But what should I discover, General?"

"How do I know? But you understand women much better than I! Does she love me, or does she not love me? You understand, I make no pretensions of turning her head, but still I do not wish to be an object of repulsion to her. Nothing has given me reason to suppose so, but the girl is so reserved, so impenetrable."

"Mademoiselle d'Estrelles is naturally cold," said Camors.

"Yes," responded the General. "Yes, and in some respects I—but really now, should you discover anything, I rely on your communicating it to me. And stop!—when you have seen her, have the kindness to return here, for a few moments—will you? You will greatly oblige me!"

"Certainly, General, I shall do so."

"For my part, I love her like a fool."

"That is only right, General!"

"Hum—and what of Des Rameures?"

"I think we shall agree, General!"

"Bravo! we shall talk more of this later. Go and see her, my dear child!"

Camors proceeded to the Rue St. Dominique, where Madame de la Roche-Jugan resided.

"Is my aunt in, Joseph?" he inquired of the servant whom he found in the antechamber, very busy in the preparations which the occasion demanded.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte, Madame la Comtesse is in and will see you."

“Very well,” said Camors; and directed his steps toward his aunt’s chamber. But this chamber was no longer hers. This worthy woman had insisted on giving it up to Mademoiselle Charlotte, for whom she manifested, since she had become the betrothed of the seven hundred thousand francs’ income of the General, the most humble deference. Mademoiselle d’Estrelles had accepted this change with a disdainful indifference. Camors, who was ignorant of this change, knocked therefore most innocently at the door. Obtaining no answer, he entered without hesitation, lifted the curtain which hung in the doorway, and was immediately arrested by a strange spectacle. At the other extremity of the room, facing him, was a large mirror, before which stood Mademoiselle d’Estrelles. Her back was turned to him.

She was dressed, or rather draped, in a sort of dressing-gown of white cashmere, without sleeves, which left her arms and shoulders bare. Her auburn hair was unbound and floating, and fell in heavy masses almost to her feet. One hand rested lightly on the toilet-table, the other held together, over her bust, the folds of her dressing-gown.

She was gazing at herself in the glass, and weeping bitterly.

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The tears fell drop by drop on her white, fresh bosom, and glittered there like the drops of dew which one sees shining in the morning on the shoulders of the marble nymphs in the gardens.

Then Camors noiselessly dropped the portiere and noiselessly retired, taking with him, nevertheless, an eternal souvenir of this stolen visit. He made inquiries; and finally received the embraces of his aunt, who had taken refuge in the chamber of her son, whom she had put in the little chamber formerly occupied by Mademoiselle d'Estrelles. His aunt, after the first greetings, introduced her nephew into the salon, where were displayed all the pomps of the trousseau. Cashmeres, laces, velvets, silks of the finest quality, covered the chairs. On the chimneypiece, the tables, and the consoles, were strewn the jewel-cases.

While Madame de la Roche-Jugan was exhibiting to Camors these magnificent things—of which she failed not to give him the prices—Charlotte, who had been notified of the Count's presence, entered the salon.

Her face was not only serene—it was joyous. “Good morning, cousin!” she said gayly, extending her hand to Camors. “How very kind of you to come! Well, you see how the General spoils me?”

“This is the trousseau of a princess, Mademoiselle!”

“And if you knew, Louis,” said Madame de la Roche, “how well all this suits her! Dear child! you would suppose she had been born to a throne. However, you know she is descended from the kings of Spain.”

“Dear aunt!” said Mademoiselle, kissing her on the forehead.

“You know, Louis, that I wish her to call me aunt now?” said the Countess, affecting the plaintive tone, which she thought the highest expression of human tenderness.

“Ah, indeed!” said Camors.

“Let us see, little one! Only try on your coronet before your cousin.”

“I should like to see it on your brow,” said Camors.

“Your slightest wishes are commands,” replied Charlotte, in a voice harmonious and grave, but not untouched with irony.

In the midst of the jewelry which encumbered the salon was a full marquise's coronet set in precious stones and pearls. The young girl adjusted it on her head before the glass, and then stood near Camors with majestic composure.

“Look!” she said; and he gazed at her bewildered, for she looked wonderfully beautiful and proud under her coronet.

Suddenly she darted a glance full into the eyes of the young man, and lowering her voice to a tone of inexpressible bitterness, said:

“At least I sell myself dearly, do I not?” Then turning her back to him she laughed, and took off her coronet.

After some further conversation Camors left, saying to himself that this adorable person promised to become very dangerous; but not admitting that he might profit by it.

In conformity with his promise he returned immediately to the General, who continued to pace the three rooms, and cried out as he saw him:



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"Eh, well?"

"Very well indeed, General, perfect—everything goes well."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And she said to you—"

"Not much; but she seemed enchanted."

"Seriously, you did not remark anything strange?"

"I remarked she was very lovely!"

"Parbleu! and you think she loves me a little?"

"Assuredly, after her way—as much as she can love, for she has naturally a very cold disposition."

"Ah! as to that I console myself. All that I demand is not to be disagreeable to her. Is it not so? Very well, you give me great pleasure. Now, go where you please, my dear boy, until this evening."

"Adieu until this evening, General!"

The signing of the contract was marked by no special incident; only when the notary, with a low, modest voice read the clause by which the General made Mademoiselle d'Estrelles heiress to all his fortune, Camors was amused to remark the superb indifference of Mademoiselle Charlotte, the smiling exasperation of Mesdames Bacquiere and Van-Cuyp, and the amorous regard which Madame de la Roche-Jugan threw at the same time on Charlotte, her son, and the notary. Then the eye of the Countess rested with a lively interest on the General, and seemed to say that it detected with pleasure in him an unhealthy appearance.

The next morning, on leaving the Church of St. Thomas daikon, the young Marquise only exchanged her wedding-gown for a travelling-costume, and departed with her husband for Campvallon, bathed in the tears of Madame de la Roche-Jugan, whose lacrimal glands were remarkably tender.

Eight days later M. de Camors returned to Reuilly. Paris had revived him, his nerves were strong again.

As a practical man he took a more healthy view of his adventure with Madame de Tecle, and began to congratulate himself on its denouement. Had things taken a different turn, his future destiny would have been compromised and deranged for him. His political future especially would have been lost, or indefinitely postponed, for his liaison with Madame de Tecle would have been discovered some day, and would have forever alienated the friendly feelings of M. des Rameures.

On this point he did not deceive himself. Madame de Tecle, in the first conversation she had with him, confided to him that her uncle seemed much pleased when she laughingly let him see her idea of marrying her daughter some day to M. de Camors.

Camors seized this occasion to remind Madame de Tecle, that while respecting her projects for the future, which she did him the honor to form, he had not pledged himself to their realization; and that both reason and honor compelled him in this matter to preserve his absolute independence.

She assented to this with her habitual sweetness. From this moment, without ceasing to exhibit toward him every mark of affectionate preference, she never allowed herself the slightest allusion to the dear dream she cherished. Only her tenderness for her daughter seemed to increase, and she devoted herself to the care of her education with redoubled fervor. All this would have touched the heart of M. de Camors, if the heart of M. de Camors had not lost, in its last effort at virtue, the last trace of humanity.

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His honor set at rest by his frank avowals to Madame de Tecle, he did not hesitate to profit by the advantages of the situation. He allowed her to serve him as much as she desired, and she desired it passionately. Little by little she had persuaded her uncle that M. de Camors was destined by his character and talents for a great future, and that he would, one day, be an excellent match for Marie; that he was becoming daily more attached to agriculture, which turned toward decentralization, and that he should be attached by firmer bonds to a province which he would honor. While this was going on General Campvallon brought the Marquise to present her to Madame de Tecle; and in a confidential interview with M. des Rameures unmasked his batteries. He was going to Italy to remain some time, but desired first to tender his resignation, and to recommend Camors to his faithful electors.

M. des Rameures, gained over beforehand, promised his aid; and that aid was equivalent to success. Camors had only to make some personal visits to the more influential electors; but his appearance was as seductive as it was striking, and he was one of those fortunate men who can win a heart or a vote by a smile. Finally, to comply with the requisitions, he established himself for several weeks in the chief town of the department. He made his court to the wife of the prefect, sufficiently to flatter the functionary without disquieting the husband. The prefect informed the minister that the claims of the Comte de Camors were pressed upon the department by an irresistible influence; that the politics of the young Count appeared undecided and a little suspicious, but that the administration, finding it useless to oppose, thought it more politic to sustain him.

The minister, not less politic than the prefect, was of the same opinion.

In consequence of this combination of circumstances, M. de Camors, toward the end of his twenty-eighth year, was elected, at intervals of a few days, member of the Council-General, and deputy to the Corps Legislatif.

"You have desired it, my dear Elise," said M. des Rameures, on learning this double result "you have desired it, and I have supported this young Parisian with all my influence. But I must say, he does not possess my confidence. May we never regret our triumph. May we never have to say with the poet: 'Vita Dais oxidated Malians.'"— [The evil gods have heard our vows.]

CHAPTER XI

NEW MAN OF THE NEW EMPIRE

It was now five years since the electors of Reuilly had sent the Comte de Camors to the Corps Legislatif, and they had seen no cause to regret their choice. He understood marvellously well their little local interests, and neglected no occasion of forwarding

them. Furthermore, if any of his constituents, passing through Paris, presented themselves at his small hotel on the Rue de l'Imperatrice—it

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had been built by an architect named Lescande, as a compliment from the deputy to his old friend—they were received with a winning affability that sent them back to the province with softened hearts. M. de Camors would condescend to inquire whether their wives or their daughters had borne them company; he would place at their disposal tickets for the theatres and passes into the Legislative Chamber; and would show them his pictures and his stables. He also trotted out his horses in the court under their eyes. They found him much improved in personal appearance, and even reported affectionately that his face was fuller and had lost the melancholy cast it used to wear. His manner, once reserved, was now warmer, without any loss of dignity; his expression, once morose, was now marked by a serenity at once pleasing and grave. His politeness was almost a royal grace; for he showed to women—young or old, rich or poor, virtuous or otherwise—the famous suavity of Louis the Fourteenth.

To his equals, as to his inferiors, his urbanity was perfection; for he cultivated in the depths of his soul—for women, for his inferiors, for his equals, and for his constituents—the same contempt.

He loved, esteemed, and respected only himself; but that self he loved, esteemed, and respected as a god! In fact, he had now, realized as completely as possible, in his own person, that almost superhuman ideal he had conceived in the most critical hour of his life.

When he surveyed himself from head to foot in the mental mirror before him, he was content! He was truly that which he wished to be. The programme of his life, as he had laid it down, was faithfully carried out.

By a powerful effort of his mighty will, he succeeded in himself adopting, rather than disdaining in others, all those animal instincts that govern the vulgar. These he believed fetters which bound the feeble, but which the strong could use. He applied himself ceaselessly to the development and perfection of his rare physical and intellectual gifts, only that he might, during the short passage from the cradle to the tomb, extract from them the greatest amount of pleasure. Fully convinced that a thorough knowledge of the world, delicacy of taste and elegance, refinement and the point of honor constituted a sort of moral whole which formed the true gentleman, he strove to adorn his person with the graver as well as the lighter graces. He was like a conscientious artist, who would leave no smallest detail incomplete. The result of his labor was so satisfactory, that M. de Camors, at the moment we rejoin him, was not perhaps one of the best men in the world, but he was beyond doubt one of the happiest and most amiable. Like all men who have determined to cultivate ability rather than scrupulousness, he saw all things developing to his satisfaction. Confident of his future, he discounted it boldly, and lived as if very opulent. His rapid elevation was explained by his unfailing audacity, by his cool judgment and neat finesse, by his great connection and by his moral

independence. He had a hard theory, which he continually expounded with all imaginable grace: "Humanity," he would say, "is composed of speculators!"

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Thoroughly imbued with this axiom, he had taken his degree in the grand lodge of financiers. There he at once made himself an authority by his manner and address; and he knew well how to use his name, his political influence, and his reputation for integrity. Employing all these, yet never compromising one of them, he influenced men by their virtues, or their vices, with equal indifference. He was incapable of meanness; he never wilfully entrapped a friend, or even an enemy, into a disastrous speculation; only, if the venture proved unsuccessful, he happened to get out and leave the others in it. But in financial speculations, as in battles, there must be what is called “food for powder;” and if one be too solicitous about this worthless pabulum, nothing great can be accomplished. So Camors passed as one of the most scrupulous of this goodly company; and his word was as potential in the region of “the rings,” as it was in the more elevated sphere of the clubs and of the turf.

Nor was he less esteemed in the Corps Legislatif, where he assumed the curious role of a working member until committees fought for him. It surprised his colleagues to see this elegant young man, with such fine abilities, so modest and so laborious—to see him ready on the driest subjects and with the most tedious reports. Ponderous laws of local interest neither frightened nor mystified him. He seldom spoke in the public debates, except as a reporter; but in the committee he spoke often, and there his manner was noted for its grave precision, tinged with irony. No one doubted that he was one of the statesmen of the future; but it could be seen he was biding his time.

The exact shade of his politics was entirely unknown. He sat in the “centre left;” polite to every one, but reserved with all. Persuaded, like his father, that the rising generation was preparing, after a time, to pass from theories to revolution—and calculating with pleasure that the development of this periodical catastrophe would probably coincide with his fortieth year, and open to his blase maturity a source of new emotions—he determined to wait and mold his political opinions according to circumstances.

His life, nevertheless, had sufficient of the agreeable to permit him to wait the hour of ambition. Men respected, feared, and envied him. Women adored him.

His presence, of which he was not prodigal, adorned an entertainment: his intrigues could not be gossiped about, being at the same time choice, numerous, and most discreetly conducted.

Passions purely animal never endure long, and his were most ephemeral; but he thought it due to himself to pay the last honors to his victims, and to inter them delicately under the flowers of his friendship. He had in this way made many friends among the Parisian women—a few only of whom detested him. As for the husbands—they were universally fond of him.

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To these elegant pleasures he sometimes added a furious debauch, when his imagination was for the moment maddened by champagne. But low company disgusted him, and he shunned it; he was not a man for frequent orgies, and economized his health, his energies, and his strength. His tastes were as thoroughly elevated as could be those of a being who strove to repress his soul. Refined intrigues, luxury in music, paintings, books, and horses—these constituted all the joy of his soul, of his sense, and of his pride. He hovered over the flowers of Parisian elegance; as a bee in the bosom of a rose, he drank in its essence and revelled in its beauty.

It is easy to understand that M. de Camors, relishing this prosperity, attached himself more and more to the moral and religious creed that assured it to him; that he became each day more and more confirmed in the belief that the testament of his father and his own reflection had revealed to him the true evangel of men superior to their species. He was less and less tempted to violate the rules of the game of life; but among all the useless cards, to hold which might disturb his system, the first he discarded was the thought of marriage. He pitied himself too tenderly at the idea of losing the liberty of which he made such agreeable use; at the idea of taking on himself gratuitously the restraints, the tedium, the ridicule, and even the danger of a household. He shuddered at the bare thought of a community of goods and interest; and of possible paternity.

With such views he was therefore but little disposed to encourage the natural hopes in which Madame de Tecle had entombed her love. He determined so to conduct himself toward her as to leave no ground for the growth of her illusion. He ceased to visit Reuilly, remaining there but two or three weeks in each year, as such time as the session of the Council-General summoned him to the province.

It is true that during these rare visits Camors piqued himself on rendering Madame de Tecle and M. des Rameures all the duties of respectful gratitude. Yet avoiding all allusion to the past, guarding himself scrupulously from confidential converse, and observing a frigid politeness to Mademoiselle Marie, there remained doubt in his mind that, the fickleness of the fair sex aiding him, the young mother of the girl would renounce her chimerical project. His error was great: and it may be here remarked that a hard and scornful scepticism may in this world engender as many false judgments and erroneous calculations as candor or even inexperience can. He believed too much in what had been written of female fickleness; in deceived lovers, who truly deserved to be such; and in what disappointed men had judged of them.

The truth is, women are generally remarkable for the tenacity of their ideas and for fidelity to their sentiments. Inconstancy of heart is the special attribute of man; but he deems it his privilege as well, and when woman disputes the palm with him on this ground, he cries aloud as if the victim of a robber.

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Rest assured this theory is no paradox; as proven by the prodigies of patient devotion—tenacious, inviolable—every day displayed by women of the lower classes, whose natures, if gross, retain their primitive sincerity. Even with women of the world, depraved though they be by the temptations that assail them, nature asserts herself; and it is no rarity to see them devote an entire life to one idea, one thought, or one affection! Their lives do not know the thousand distractions which at once disturb and console men; and any idea that takes hold upon them easily becomes fixed. They dwell upon it in the crowd and in solitude; when they read and while they sew; in their dreams and in their prayers. In it they live—for it they die.

It was thus that Madame de Tecle had dwelt year after year on the project of this alliance with unalterable fervor, and had blended the two pure affections that shared her heart in this union of her daughter with Camors, and in thus securing the happiness of both. Ever since she had conceived this desire—which could only have had its birth in a soul as pure as it was tender—the education of her child had become the sweet romance of her life. She dreamed of it always, and of nothing else.

Without knowing or even suspecting the evil traits lurking in the character of Camors, she still understood that, like the great majority of the young men of his day, the young Count was not overburdened with principle. But she held that one of the privileges of woman, in our social system, was the elevation of their husbands by connection with a pure soul, by family affections, and by the sweet religion of the heart. Seeking, therefore, by making her daughter an amiable and lovable woman, to prepare her for the high mission for which she was destined, she omitted nothing which could improve her. What success rewarded her care the sequel of this narrative will show. It will suffice, for the present, to inform the reader that Mademoiselle de Tecle was a young girl of pleasing countenance, whose short neck was placed on shoulders a little too high. She was not beautiful, but extremely pretty, well educated, and much more vivacious than her mother.

Mademoiselle Marie was so quick-witted that her mother often suspected she knew the secret which concerned herself. Sometimes she talked too much of M. de Camors; sometimes she talked too little, and assumed a mysterious air when others spoke of him.

Madame de Tecle was a little disturbed by these eccentricities. The conduct of M. de Camors, and his more than reserved bearing, annoyed her occasionally; but when we love any one we are likely to interpret favorably all that he does, or all that he omits to do. Madame de Tecle readily attributed the equivocal conduct of the Count to the inspiration of a chivalric loyalty. As she believed she knew him thoroughly, she thought he wished to avoid committing himself, or awakening public observation, before he had made up his mind.

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He acted thus to avoid disturbing the repose of both mother and daughter. Perhaps also the large fortune which seemed destined for Mademoiselle de Tecle might add to his scruples by rousing his pride.

His not marrying was in itself a good augury, and his little fiancée was reaching a marriageable age. She therefore did not despair that some day M. de Camors would throw himself at her feet, and say, "Give her to me!"

If God did not intend that this delicious page should ever be written in the book of her destiny, and she was forced to marry her daughter to another, the poor woman consoled herself with the thought that all the cares she lavished upon her would not be lost, and that her dear child would thus be rendered better and happier.

The long months which intervened between the annual apparition of Camors at Reuilly, filled up by Madame de Tecle with a single idea and by the sweet monotony of a regular life, passed more rapidly than the Count could have imagined. His own life, so active and so occupied, placed ages and abysses between each of his periodical voyages. But Madame de Tecle, after five years, was always only a day removed from the cherished and fatal night on which her dream had begun. Since that period there had been no break in her thoughts, no void in her heart, no wrinkle on her forehead. Her dream continued young, like herself. But in spite of the peaceful and rapid succession of her days, it was not without anxiety that she saw the approach of the season which always heralded the return of Camors.

As her daughter matured, she preoccupied herself with the impression she would make on the mind of the Count, and felt more sensibly the solemnity of the matter.

Mademoiselle Marie, as we have already stated, was a cunning little puss, and had not failed to perceive that her tender mother chose habitually the season of the convocation of the Councils-General to try a new style of hair-dressing for her. The same year on which we have resumed our recital there passed, on one occasion, a little scene which rather annoyed Madame de Tecle. She was trying a new coiffure on Mademoiselle Marie, whose hair was very pretty and very black; some stray and rebellious portions had frustrated her mother's efforts.

There was one lock in particular, which in spite of all combing and brushing would break away from the rest, and fall in careless curls. Madame de Tecle finally, by the aid of some ribbons, fastened down the rebellious curl:

"Now I think it will do," she said sighing, and stepping back to admire the effect of her work.

“Don’t believe it,” said Marie, who was laughing and mocking. “I do not think so. I see exactly what will happen: the bell rings—I run out—my net gives way—Monsieur de Camors walks in—my mother is annoyed—tableau!”

“I should like to know what Monsieur de Camors has to do with it?” said Madame de Tecle.

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Her daughter threw her arms around her neck—"Nothing!" she said.

Another time Madame de Tecle detected her speaking of M. de Camors in a tone of bitter irony. He was "the great man"—"the mysterious personage"—"the star of the neighborhood"—"the phoenix of guests in their woods"—or simply "the Prince!"

Such symptoms were of so serious a nature as not to escape Madame de Tecle.

In presence of "the Prince," it is true, the young girl lost her gayety; but this was another cross. Her mother found her cold, awkward, and silent—brief, and slightly caustic in her replies. She feared M. de Camors would misjudge her from such appearances.

But Camors formed no judgment, good or bad; Mademoiselle de Tecle was for him only an insignificant little girl, whom he never thought of for a moment in the year.

There was, however, at this time in society a person who did interest him very much, and the more because against his will. This was the Marquise de Campvallon, nee de Luc d'Estrelles.

The General, after making the tour of Europe with his young wife, had taken possession of his hotel in the Rue Vanneau, where he lived in great splendor. They resided at Paris during the winter and spring, but in July returned to their chateau at Campvallon, where they entertained in great state until the autumn. The General invited Madame de Tecle and her daughter, every year, to pass some weeks at Campvallon, rightly judging that he could not give his young wife better companions. Madame de Tecle accepted these invitations cheerfully, because it gave her an opportunity of seeing the elite of the Parisian world, from whom the whims of her uncle had always isolated her. For her own part, she did not much enjoy it; but her daughter, by moving in the midst of such fashion and elegance could thus efface some provincialisms of toilet or of language; perfect her taste in the delicate and fleeting changes of the prevailing modes, and acquire some additional graces. The young Marquise, who reigned and scintillated like a bright star in these high regions of social life, lent herself to the designs of her neighbor. She seemed to take a kind of maternal interest in Mademoiselle de Tecle, and frequently added her advice to her example. She assisted at her toilet and gave the final touches with her own dainty hands; and the young girl, in return, loved, admired, and confided in her.

Camors also enjoyed the hospitalities of the General once every season, but was not his guest as often as he wished. He seldom remained at Campvallon longer than a week. Since the return of the Marquise to France he had resumed the relations of a kinsman and friend with her husband and herself; but, while trying to adopt the most natural manner, he treated them both with a certain reserve, which astonished the General. It will not surprise the reader, who recollects the secret and powerful reasons which justified this circumspection.

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For Camors, in renouncing the greater part of the restraints which control and bind men in their relations with one another, had religiously intended to preserve one—the sentiment of honor. Many times, in the course of this life, he had felt himself embarrassed to limit and fix with certainty the boundaries of the only moral law he wished to respect.

It is easy to know exactly what is in the Bible; it is not easy to know exactly what the code of honor commands.

CHAPTER XII

CIRCE

But there exists, nevertheless, in this code one article, as to which M. de Camors could not deceive himself, and it was that which forbade his attempting to assail the honor of the General under penalty of being in his own eyes, as a gentleman, a felon and foresworn. He had accepted from this old man confidence, affection, services, benefits—everything which could bind one man inviolably to another man—if there be beneath the heavens anything called honor. He felt this profoundly.

His conduct toward Madame de Campvallion had been irreproachable; and all the more so, because the only woman he was interdicted from loving was the only woman in Paris, or in the universe, who naturally pleased him most. He entertained for her, at once, the interest which attaches to forbidden fruit, to the attraction of strange beauty, and to the mystery of an impenetrable sphinx. She was, at this time, more goddess-like than ever. The immense fortune of her husband, and the adulation which it brought her, had placed her on a golden car. On this she seated herself with a gracious and native majesty, as if in her proper place.

The luxury of her toilet, of her jewels, of her house and of her equipages, was of regal magnificence. She blended the taste of an artist with that of a patrician. Her person appeared really to be made divine by the rays of this splendor. Large, blonde, graceful, the eyes blue and unfathomable, the forehead grave, the mouth pure and proud it was impossible to see her enter a salon with her light, gliding step, or to see her reclining in her carriage, her hands folded serenely, without dreaming of the young immortals whose love brought death.

She had even those traits of physiognomy, stern and wild, which the antique sculptors doubtless had surprised in supernatural visitations, and which they have stamped on the eyes and the lips of their marble gods. Her arms and shoulders, perfect in form, seemed models, in the midst of the rosy and virgin snow which covered the neighboring mountains. She was truly superb and bewitching. The Parisian world respected as much as it admired her, for she played her difficult part of young bride to an old man so



perfectly as to avoid scandal. Without any pretence of extraordinary devotion, she knew how to join to her worldly pomps the exercise of charity, and all the other practices of an elegant piety. Madame de la Roche-Jugan,

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who watched her closely, as one watching a prey, testified, herself, in her favor; and judged her more and more worthy of her son. And Camors, who observed her, in spite of himself, with an eager curiosity, was finally induced to believe, as did his aunt and all the world, that she conscientiously performed her difficult duties, and that she found in the éclat of her life and the gratification of her pride a sufficient compensation for the sacrifice of her youth, her heart, and her beauty; but certain souvenirs of the past, joined to certain peculiarities, which he fancied he remarked in the Marquise, induced him to distrust.

There were times, when recalling all that he had once witnessed—the abysses and the flame at the bottom of that heart—he was tempted to suspect the existence of many storms under all this calm exterior, and perhaps some wickedness. It is true she never was with him precisely as she was before the world. The character of their relations was marked by a peculiar tone. It was precisely that tone of covert irony adopted by two persons who desired neither to remember nor to forget. This tone, softened in the language of Camors by his worldly tact and his respect, was much more pointed, and had much more of bitterness on the side of the young woman.

He even fancied, at times, that he discovered a shade of coquetry under this treatment; and this provocation, vague as it was, coming from this beautiful, cold, and inscrutable creature, seemed to him a game fearfully mysterious, that at once attracted and disturbed him.

This was the state of things when the Count came, according to custom, to pass the first days of September at the chateau of Campvallon, and met there Madame de Tecle and her daughter. The visit was a painful one, this year, for Madame de Tecle. Her confidence deserted her, and serious concern took its place. She had, it is true, fixed in her mind, as the last point of her hopes, the moment when her daughter should have reached twenty years of age; and Marie was only eighteen.

But she already had had several offers, and several times public rumor had already declared her to be betrothed.

Now, Camors could not have been ignorant of the rumors circulating in the neighborhood, and yet he did not speak. His countenance did not change. He was coldly affectionate to Madame de Tecle, but toward Marie, in spite of her beautiful blue eyes, like her mother's, and her curly hair, he preserved a frozen indifference. For Camors had other anxieties, of which Madame de Tecle knew nothing. The manner of Madame Campvallon toward him had assumed a more marked character of aggressive raillery. A defensive attitude is never agreeable to a man, and Camors felt it more disagreeable than most men—being so little accustomed to it.



He resolved promptly to shorten his visit at Campvallon.

On the eve of his departure, about five o'clock in the afternoon, he was standing at his window, looking beyond the trees at the great black clouds sailing over the valley, when he heard the sound of a voice that had power to move him deeply—"Monsieur de Camors!" He saw the Marquise standing under his window.



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"Will you walk with me?" she added.

He bowed and descended immediately. At the moment he reached her:

"It is suffocating," she said. "I wish to walk round the park and will take you with me."

He muttered a few polite phrases, and they began walking, side by side, through the alleys of the park.

She moved at a rapid pace, with her majestic motion, her body swaying, her head erect. One would have looked for a page behind her, but she had none, and her long blue robe—she rarely wore short skirts—trailed on the sand and over the dry leaves with the soft rustle of silk.

"I have disturbed you, probably?" she said, after a moment's pause. "What were you dreaming of up there?"

"Nothing—only watching the coming storm."

"Are you becoming poetical, cousin?"

"There is no necessity for becoming, for I already am infinitely so!"

"I do not think so. Shall you leave to-morrow?"

"I shall."

"Why so soon?"

"I have business elsewhere."

"Very well. But Vau—Vautrot—is he not there?"

Vautrot was the secretary of M. de Camors.

"Vautrot can not do everything," he replied.

"By the way, I do not like your Vautrot."

"Nor I. But he was recommended to me by my old friend, Madame d'Oilly, as a freethinker, and at the same time by my aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan, as a religious man!"

"How amusing!"

"Nevertheless," said Camors, "he is intelligent and witty, and writes a fine hand."



"And you?"

"How? What of me?"

"Do you also write a good hand?"

"I will show you, whenever you wish!"

"Ah! and will you write to me?"

It is difficult to imagine the tone of supreme indifference and haughty persiflage with which the Marquise sustained this dialogue, without once slackening her pace, or glancing at her companion, or changing the proud and erect pose of her head.

"I will write you either prose or verse, as you wish," said Camors.

"Ah! you know how to compose verses?"

"When I am inspired!"

"And when are you inspired?"

"Usually in the morning."

"And we are now in the evening. That is not complimentary to me."

"But you, Madame, had no desire to inspire me, I think."

"Why not, then? I should be happy and proud to do so. Do you know what I should like to put there?" and she stopped suddenly before a rustic bridge, which spanned a murmuring rivulet.

"I do not know!"

"You can not even guess? I should like to put an artificial rock there."

"Why not a natural one? In your place I should put a natural one!"

"That is an idea," said the Marquise, and walking on she crossed the bridge.

"But it really thunders. I like to hear thunder in the country. Do you?"



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"I prefer to hear it thunder at Paris."

"Why?"

"Because then I should not hear it."

"You have no imagination."

"I have; but I smother it."

"Possibly. I have suspected you of hiding your merits, and particularly from me."

"Why should I conceal my merits from you?"

"'Why should I conceal my merits' is good!" said the Marquise, ironically. "Why? Out of charity, Monsieur, not to dazzle me, and in regard for my repose! You are really too good, I assure you. Here comes the rain."

Large drops of rain began to fall on the dry leaves, and on the yellow sand of the alley. The day was dying, and the sudden shower bent the boughs of the trees.

"We must return," said the young woman; "this begins to get serious."

She took, in haste, the path which led to the chateau; but after a few steps a bright flash broke over her head, the noise of the thunder resounded, and a deluge of rain fell upon the fields.

There was fortunately, near by, a shelter in which the Marquise and her companion could take refuge. It was a ruin, preserved as an ornament to the park, which had formerly been the chapel of the ancient chateau. It was almost as large as the village chapel—the broken walls half concealed under a thick mantle of ivy. Its branches had pushed through the roof and mingled with the boughs of the old trees which surrounded and shaded it. The timbers had disappeared. The extremity of the choir, and the spot formerly occupied by the altar, were alone covered by the remains of the roof. Wheelbarrows, rakes, spades, and other garden tools were piled there.

The Marquise had to take refuge in the midst of this rubbish, in the narrow space, and her companion followed her.

The storm, in the mean time, increased in violence. The rain fell in torrents through the old walls, inundating the soil in the ancient nave. The lightning flashed incessantly. Every now and then fragments of earth and stone detached themselves from the roof, and fell into the choir.

"I find this magnificent!" said Madame de Campvallon.

"I also," said Camors, raising his eyes to the crumbling roof which half protected them; "but I do not know whether we are safe here!"

"If you fear, you would better go!" said the Marquise.

"I fear for you."

"You are too good, I assure you."

She took off her cap and brushed it with her glove, to remove the drops of rain which had fallen upon it. After a slight pause, she suddenly raised her uncovered head and cast on Camors one of those searching looks which prepares a man for an important question.

"Cousin!" she said, "if you were sure that one of these flashes of lightning would kill you in a quarter of an hour, what would you do?"

"Why, cousin, naturally I should take a last farewell of you."

"How?"

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He regarded her steadily, in his turn. "Do you know," he said, "there are moments when I am tempted to think you a devil?"

"Truly! Well, there are times when I am tempted to think so myself—for example, at this moment. Do you know what I should wish? I wish I could control the lightning, and in two seconds you would cease to exist."

"For what reason?"

"Because I recollect there was a man to whom I offered myself, and who refused me, and that this man still lives. And this displeases me a little—a great deal—passionately."

"Are you serious, Madame?" replied Camors.

She laughed.

"I hope you did not think so. I am not so wicked. It was a joke—and in bad taste, I admit. But seriously now, cousin, what is your opinion of me? What kind of woman has time made me?"

"I swear to you I am entirely ignorant."

"Admitting I had become, as you did me the honor to suppose, a diabolical person, do you think you had nothing to do with it? Tell me! Do you not believe that there is in the life of a woman a decisive hour, when the evil seed which is cast upon her soul may produce a terrible harvest? Do you not believe this? Answer me! And should I not be excusable if I entertained toward you the sentiment of an exterminating angel; and have I not some merit in being what I am—a good woman, who loves you well—with a little rancor, but not much—and who wishes you all sorts of prosperity in this world and the next? Do not answer me: it might embarrass you, and it would be useless."

She left her shelter, and turned her face toward the lowering sky to see whether the storm was over.

"It has stopped raining," she said, "let us go."

She then perceived that the lower part of the nave had been transformed into a lake of mud and water. She stopped at its brink, and uttered a little cry:

"What shall I do?" she said, looking at her light shoes. Then, turning toward Camors, she added, laughing:

"Monsieur, will you get me a boat?"

Camors, himself, recoiled from stepping into the greasy mud and stagnant water which filled the whole space of the nave.

"If you will wait a little," he said, "I shall find you some boots or sabots, no matter what."

"It will be much easier," she said abruptly, "for you to carry me to the door;" and without waiting for the young man's reply, she tucked up her skirts carefully, and when she had finished, she said, "Carry me!"

He looked at her with astonishment, and thought for a moment she was jesting; but soon saw she was perfectly serious.

"Of what are you afraid?" she asked.

"I am not at all afraid," he answered.

"Is it that you are not strong enough?"

"Mon Dieu! I should think I was."

He took her in his arms, as in a cradle, while she held up her skirts with both hands. He then descended the steps and moved toward the door with his strange burden. He was obliged to be very careful not to slip on the wet earth, and this absorbed him during the first few steps; but when he found his footing more sure, he felt a natural curiosity to observe the countenance of the Marquise.

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The uncovered head of the young woman rested a little on the arm with which he held her. Her lips were slightly parted with a half-wicked smile that showed her fine white teeth; the same expression of ungovernable malice burned in her dark eyes, which she riveted for some seconds on those of Camors with persistent penetration—then suddenly veiled them under the fringe of her dark lashes. This glance sent a thrill like lightning to his very marrow.

“Do you wish to drive me mad?” he murmured.

“Who knows?” she replied.

The same moment she disengaged herself from his arms, and placing her foot on the ground again, left the ruin.

They reached the chateau without exchanging a word. Just before entering the house the young Marquise turned toward Camors and said to him:

“Be sure that at heart I am very good, really.”

Notwithstanding this assertion, Camors was yet more determined to leave the next morning, as he had previously decided. He carried away the most painful impression of the scene of that evening.

She had wounded his pride, inflamed his hopeless passion, and disquieted his honor.

“What is this woman, and what does she want of me? Is it love or vengeance that inspires her with this fiendish coquetry?” he asked himself. Whatever it was, Camors was not such a novice in similar adventures as not to perceive clearly the yawning abyss under the broken ice. He resolved sincerely to close it again between them, and forever. The best way to succeed in this, avowedly, was to cease all intercourse with the Marquise. But how could such conduct be explained to the General, without awakening his suspicion and lowering his wife in his esteem? That plan was impossible. He armed himself with all his courage, and resigned himself to endure with resolute soul all the trials which the love, real or pretended, of the Marquise reserved for him.

He had at this time a singular idea. He was a member of several of the most aristocratic clubs. He organized a chosen group of men from the elite of his companions, and formed with them a secret association, of which the object was to fix and maintain among its members the principles and points of honor in their strictest form. This society, which had only been vaguely spoken of in public under the name of “Societe des Raffines,” and also as “The Templars” which latter was its true name—had nothing in common with “The Devourers,” illustrated by Balzac. It had nothing in it of a romantic or dramatic character. Those who composed this club did not, in any way, defy

ordinary morals, nor set themselves above the laws of their country. They did not bind themselves by any vows of mutual aid in extremity. They bound themselves simply by their word of honor to observe, in their reciprocal relations, the rules of purest honor.

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These rules were specified in their code. The text it is difficult to give; but it was based entirely on the point of honor, and regulated the affairs of the club, such as the card-table, the turf, duelling, and gallantry. For example, any member was disqualified from belonging to this association who either insulted or interfered with the wife or relative of one of his colleagues. The only penalty was exclusion: but the consequences of this exclusion were grave; for all the members ceased thereafter to associate with, recognize, or even bow to the offender. The Templars found in this secret society many advantages. It was a great security in their intercourse with one another, and in the different circumstances of daily life, where they met continually either at the opera, in salons, or on the turf.

Camors was an exception among his companions and rivals in Parisian life by the systematic decision of his doctrine. It was not so much an embodiment of absolute scepticism and practical materialism; but the want of a moral law is so natural to man, and obedience to higher laws so sweet to him, that the chosen adepts to whom the project of Camors was submitted accepted it with enthusiasm. They were happy in being able to substitute a sort of positive and formal religion for restraints so limited as their own confused and floating notions of honor. For Camors himself, as is easily understood, it was a new barrier which he wished to erect between himself and the passion which fascinated him. He attached himself to this with redoubled force, as the only moral bond yet left him. He completed his work by making the General accept the title of President of the Association. The General, to whom Honor was a sort of mysterious but real goddess, was delighted to preside over the worship of his idol. He felt flattered by his young friend's selection, and esteemed him the more.

It was the middle of winter. The Marquise Campvallon had resumed for some time her usual course of life, which was at the same time strict but elegant. Punctual at church every morning, at the Bois and at charity bazaars during the day, at the opera or the theatres in the evening, she had received M. de Camors without the shadow of apparent emotion. She even treated him more simply and more naturally than ever, with no recurrence to the past, no allusion to the scene in the park during the storm; as if she had, on that day, disclosed everything that had lain hidden in her heart. This conduct so much resembled indifference, that Camors should have been delighted; but he was not—on the contrary he was annoyed by it. A cruel but powerful interest, already too dear to his blase soul, was disappearing thus from his life. He was inclined to believe that Madame de Campvallon possessed a much less complicated character than he had fancied; and that little by little absorbed in daily trifles, she had become in reality what she pretended to be—a good woman, inoffensive, and contented with her lot.

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He was one evening in his orchestra-stall at the opera. They were singing *The Huguenots*. The Marquise occupied her box between the columns. The numerous acquaintances Camors met in the passages during the first entr'acte prevented his going as soon as usual to pay his respects to his cousin. At last, after the fourth act, he went to visit her in her box, where he found her alone, the General having descended to the parterre for a few moments. He was astonished, on entering, to find traces of tears on the young woman's cheeks. Her eyes were even moist. She seemed displeased at being surprised in the very act of sentimentality.

"Music always excites my nerves," she said.

"Indeed!" said Camors. "You, who always reproach me with hiding my merits, why do you hide yours? If you are still capable of weeping, so much the better."

"No! I claim no merit for that. Oh, heavens! If you only knew! It is quite the contrary."

"What a mystery you are!"

"Are you very curious to fathom this mystery? Only that? Very well—be happy! It is time to put an end to this."

She drew her chair from the front of the box out of public view, and, turning toward Camors, continued: "You wish to know what I am, what I feel, and what I think; or rather, you wish to know simply whether I dream of love? Very well, I dream only of that! Have I lovers, or have I not? I have none, and never shall have, but that will not be because of my virtue. I believe in nothing, except my own self-esteem and my contempt of others. The little intrigues, the petty passions, which I see in the world, make me indignant to the bottom of my soul. It seems to me that women who give themselves for so little must be base creatures. As for myself, I remember having said to you one day—it is a million years since then!—that my person is sacred to me; and to commit a sacrilege I should wish, like the vestals of Rome, a love as great as my crime, and as terrible as death. I wept just now during that magnificent fourth act. It was not because I listened to the most marvellous music ever heard on this earth; it was because I admire and envy passionately the superb and profound love of that time. And it is ever thus—when I read the history of the glorious sixteenth century, I am in ecstasies. How well those people knew how to love and how to die! One night of love—then death. That is delightful. Now, cousin, you must leave me. We are observed. They will believe we love each other, and as we have not that pleasure, it is useless to incur the penalties. Since I am still in the midst of the court of Charles Tenth, I pity you, with your black coat and round hat. Good-night."

"I thank you very much," replied Camors, taking the hand she extended to him coldly, and left the box. He met M. de Campvallion in the passage.

“Parbleu! my dear friend,” said the General, seizing him by the arm. “I must communicate to you an idea which has been in my brain all the evening.”

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"What idea, General?"

"Well, there are here this evening a number of charming young girls. This set me to thinking of you, and I even said to my wife that we must marry you to one of these young women!"

"Oh, General!"

"Well, why not?"

"That is a very serious thing—if one makes a mistake in his choice—that is everything."

"Bah! it is not so difficult a thing. Take a wife like mine, who has a great deal of religion, not much imagination, and no fancies. That is the whole secret. I tell you this in confidence, my dear fellow!"

"Well, General, I will think of it."

"Do think of it," said the General, in a serious tone; and went to join his young wife, whom he understood so well.

As to her, she thoroughly understood herself, and analyzed her own character with surprising truth.

Madame de Campvallon was just as little what her manner indicated as was M. de Camors on his side. Both were altogether exceptional in French society. Equally endowed by nature with energetic souls and enlightened minds, both carried innate depravity to a high degree. The artificial atmosphere of high Parisian civilization destroys in women the sentiment and the taste for duty, and leaves them, nothing but the sentiment and the taste for pleasure. They lose in the midst of this enchanted and false life, like theatrical fairyland, the true idea of life in general, and Christian life in particular. And we can confidently affirm that all those who do not make for themselves, apart from the crowd, a kind of Thebaid—and there are such—are pagans. They are pagans, because the pleasures of the senses and of the mind alone interest them, and they have not once, during the year, an impression of the moral law, unless the sentiment, which some of them detest, recalls it to them. They are pagans, like the beautiful, worldly Catholics of the fifteenth century—loving luxury, rich stuffs, precious furniture, literature, art, themselves, and love. They were charming pagans, like Marie Stuart, and capable, like her, of remaining true Catholics even under the axe.

We are speaking, let it be understood, of the best of the elite—of those that read, and of those that dream. As to the rest, those who participate in the Parisian life on its lighter side, in its childish whirl, and the trifling follies it entails, who make rendezvous, waste their time, who dress and are busy day and night doing nothing, who dance frantically in

the rays of the Parisian sun, without thought, without passion, without virtue, and even without vice—we must own it is impossible to imagine anything more contemptible.

The Marquise de Campvallon was then—as she truly said to the man she resembled—a great pagan; and, as she also said to herself in one of her serious moments when a woman's destiny is decided by the influence of those they love, Camors had sown in her heart a seed which had marvellously fructified.

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Camors dreamed little of reproaching himself for it, but struck with all the harmony that surrounded the Marquise, he regretted more bitterly than ever the fatality which separated them.

He felt, however, more sure of himself, since he had bound himself by the strictest obligations of honor. He abandoned himself from this moment with less scruple to the emotions, and to the danger against which he believed himself invincibly protected. He did not fear to seek often the society of his beautiful cousin, and even contracted the habit of repairing to her house two or three times a week, after leaving the Chamber of Deputies. Whenever he found her alone, their conversation invariably assumed a tone of irony and of raillery, in which both excelled. He had not forgotten her reckless confidences at the opera, and recalled it to her, asking her whether she had yet discovered that hero of love for whom she was looking, who should be, according to her ideas, a villain like Bothwell, or a musician like Rizzio.

"There are," she replied, "villains who are also musicians; but that is imagination. Sing me, then, something apropos."

It was near the close of winter. The Marquise gave a ball. Her fetes were justly renowned for their magnificence and good taste. She did the honors with the grace of a queen. This evening she wore a very simple costume, as was becoming in the courteous hostess. It was a gown of dark velvet, with a train; her arms were bare, without jewels; a necklace of large pearls lay on her rose-tinted bosom, and the heraldic coronet sparkled on her fair hair.

Camors caught her eye as he entered, as if she were watching for him. He had seen her the previous evening, and they had had a more lively skirmish than usual. He was struck by her brilliancy—her beauty heightened, without doubt, by the secret ardor of the quarrel, as if illuminated by an interior flame, with all the clear, soft splendor of a transparent alabaster vase.

When he advanced to join her and salute her, yielding, against his will, to an involuntary movement of passionate admiration, he said:

"You are truly beautiful this evening. Enough so to make one commit a crime."

She looked fixedly in his eyes, and replied:

"I should like to see that," and then left him, with superb nonchalance.

The General approached, and tapping the Count on the shoulder, said:

"Camors! you do not dance, as usual. Let us play a game of piquet."

“Willingly, General;” and traversing two or three salons they reached the private boudoir of the Marquise. It was a small oval room, very lofty, hung with thick red silk tapestry, covered with black and white flowers. As the doors were removed, two heavy curtains isolated the room completely from the neighboring gallery. It was there that the General usually played cards and slept during his fetes. A small card-table was placed before a divan. Except this addition, the boudoir preserved its every-day aspect. Woman’s work, half finished, books, journals, and reviews were strewn upon the furniture. They played two or three games, which the General won, as Camors was very abstracted.

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"I reproach myself, young man," said the former, "in having kept you so long away from the ladies. I give you back your liberty—I shall cast my eye on the journals."

"There is nothing new in them, I think," said Camors, rising. He took up a newspaper himself, and placing his back against the mantelpiece, warmed his feet, one after the other. The General threw himself on the divan, ran his eye over the 'Moniteur de l'Armee', approving of some military promotions, and criticising others; and, little by little, he fell into a doze, his head resting on his chest.

But Camors was not reading. He listened vaguely to the music of the orchestra, and fell into a reverie. Through these harmonies, through the murmurs and warm perfume of the ball, he followed, in thought, all the evolutions of her who was mistress and queen of all. He saw her proud and supple step—he heard her grave and musical voice—he felt her breath.

This young man had exhausted everything. Love and pleasure had no longer for him secrets or temptations; but his imagination, cold and blase, had arisen all inflamed before this beautiful, living, palpitating statue. She was really for him more than a woman—more than a mortal. The antique fables of amorous goddesses and drunken Bacchantes—the superhuman voluptuousness unknown in terrestrial pleasures—were in reach of his hand, separated from him only by the shadow of this sleeping old man. But a shadow was ever between them—it was honor.

His eyes, as if lost in thought, were fixed straight before him on the curtain opposite the chimney. Suddenly this curtain was noiselessly raised, and the young Marquise appeared, her brow surmounted by her coronet. She threw a rapid glance over the boudoir, and after a moment's pause, let the curtain fall gently, and advanced directly toward Camors, who stood dazzled and immovable. She took both his hands, without speaking, looked at his steadily—throwing a rapid glance at her husband, who still slept—and, standing on tiptoe, offered her lips to the young man.

Bewildered, and forgetting all else, he bent, and imprinted a kiss on her lips.

At that very moment, the General made a sudden movement and woke up; but the same instant the Marquise was standing before him, her hands resting on the card-table; and smiling upon him, she said, "Good-morning, my General!"

The General murmured a few words of apology, but she laughingly pushed him back on his divan.

"Continue your nap," she said; "I have come in search of my cousin, for the last cotillon." The General obeyed.

She passed out by the gallery. The young man; pale as a spectre, followed her.

Passing under the curtain, she turned toward him with a wild light burning in her eyes. Then, before she was lost in the throng, she whispered, in a low, thrilling voice:

“There is the crime!”

CHAPTER XIII



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THE FIRST ACT OF THE TRAGEDY

Camors did not attempt to rejoin the Marquise, and it seemed to him that she also avoided him. A quarter of an hour later, he left the Hotel Campvallon.

He returned immediately home. A lamp was burning in his chamber. When he saw himself in the mirror, his own face terrified him. This exciting scene had shaken his nerves.

He could no longer control himself. His pupil had become his master. The fact itself did not surprise him. Woman is more exalted than man in morality. There is no virtue, no devotion, no heroism in which she does not surpass him; but once impelled to the verge of the abyss, she falls faster and lower than man. This is attributable to two causes: she has more passion, and she has no honor. For honor is a reality and must not be underrated. It is a noble, delicate, and salutary quality. It elevates manly attributes; in fact, it constitutes the modesty of man. It is sometimes a force, and always a grace. But to think that honor is all-sufficient; that in the face of great interests, great passions, great trials in life, it is a support and an infallible defence; that it can enforce the precepts which come from God—in fact that it can replace God—this is a terrible mistake. It exposes one in a fatal moment to the loss of one's self-esteem, and to fall suddenly and forever into that dismal ocean of bitterness where Camors at that instant was struggling in despair, like a drowning man in the darkness of midnight.

He abandoned himself, on this evil night, to a final conflict full of agony; and he was beaten.

The next evening at six o'clock he was at the house of the Marquise. He found her in her boudoir, surrounded by all her regal luxury. She was half buried in a fauteuil in the chimney-corner, looking a little pale and fatigued. She received him with her usual coldness and self-possession.

"Good-day," she said. "How are you?"

"Not very well," replied Camors.

"What is the matter?"

"I fancy that you know."

She opened her large eyes wide with surprise, but did not reply.

"I entreat you, Madame," continued Camors, smiling—"no more music, the curtain is raised, and the drama has begun."

"Ah! we shall see."



"Do you love me?" he continued; "or were you simply acting, to try me, last night? Can you, or will you, tell me?"

"I certainly could, but I do not wish to do so."

"I had thought you more frank."

"I have my hours."

"Well, then," said Camors, "if your hours of frankness have passed, mine have begun."

"That would be compensation," she replied.

"And I will prove it to you," continued Camors.

"I shall make a fete of it," said the Marquise, throwing herself back on the sofa, as if to make herself comfortable in order to enjoy an agreeable conversation.

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"I love you, Madame; and as you wish to be loved. I love you devotedly and unto death—enough to kill myself, or you!"

"That is well," said the Marquise, softly.

"But," he continued in a hoarse and constrained tone, "in loving you, in telling you of it, in trying to make you share my love, I violate basely the obligations of honor of which you know, and others of which you know not. It is a crime, as you have said. I do not try to extenuate my offence. I see it, I judge it, and I accept it. I break the last moral tie that is left me; I leave the ranks of men of honor, and I leave also the ranks of humanity. I have nothing human left except my love, nothing sacred but you; but my crime elevates itself by its magnitude. Well, I interpret it thus: I imagine two beings, equally free and strong, loving and valuing each other beyond all else, having no affection, no loyalty, no devotion, no honor, except toward each other—but possessing all for each other in a supreme degree.

"I give and consecrate absolutely to you, my person, all that I can be, or may become, on condition of an equal return, still preserving the same social conventionalities, without which we should both be miserable.

"Secretly united, and secretly isolated; though in the midst of the human herd, governing and despising it; uniting our gifts, our faculties, and our powers, our two Parisian royalties—yours, which can not be greater, and mine, which shall become greater if you love me and living thus, one for the other, until death. You have dreamed, you told me, of strange and almost sacrilegious love. Here it is; only before accepting it, reflect well, for I assure you it is a serious thing. My love for you is boundless. I love you enough to disdain and trample under foot that which the meanest human being still respects. I love you enough to find in you alone, in your single esteem, and in your sole tenderness, in the pride and madness of being yours, oblivion and consolation for friendship outraged, faith betrayed, and honor lost. But, Madame, this is a sentiment which you will do well not to trifle with. You should thoroughly understand this. If you desire my love, if you consent to this alliance, opposed to all human laws, but grand and singular also, deign to tell me so, and I shall fall at your feet. If you do not wish it, if it terrifies you, if you are not prepared for the double obligation it involves, tell me so, and fear not a word of reproach. Whatever it might cost me—I would ruin my life, I would leave you forever, and that which passed yesterday should be eternally forgotten."

He ceased, and remained with his eyes fixed on the young woman with a burning anxiety. As he went on speaking her air became more grave; she listened to him, her head a little inclined toward him in an attitude of overpowering interest, throwing upon him at intervals a glance full of gloomy fire. A slight but rapid palpitation of the bosom, a scarcely perceptible quivering of the nostrils, alone betrayed the storm raging within her.



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"This," she said, after a moment's silence, "becomes really interesting; but you do not intend to leave this evening, I suppose?"

"No," said Camors.

"Very well," she replied, inclining her head in sign of dismissal, without offering her hand; "we shall see each other again."

"But when?"

"At an early day."

He thought she required time for reflection, a little terrified doubtless by the monster she had evoked; he saluted her gravely and departed.

The next day, and on the two succeeding days, he vainly presented himself at her door.

The Marquise was either dining out or dressing.

It was for Camors a whole century of torment. One thought which often disquieted him revisited him with double poignancy. The Marquise did not love him. She only wished to revenge herself for the past, and after disgracing him would laugh at him. She had made him sign the contract, and then had escaped him. In the midst of these tortures of his pride, his passion, instead of weakening, increased.

The fourth day after their interview he did not go to her house. He hoped to meet her in the evening at the Viscountess d'Oilly's, where he usually saw her every Friday. This lady had been formerly the most tender friend of the Count's father. It was to her the Count had thought proper to confide the education of his son.

Camors had preserved for her a kind of affection. She was an amiable woman, whom he liked and laughed at.

No longer young, she had been compelled to renounce gallantry, which had been the chief occupation of her youth, and never having had much taste for devotion, she conceived the idea of having a salon. She received there some distinguished men, savants and artists, who piqued themselves on being free-thinkers.

The Viscountess, in order to fit herself for her new position, resolved to enlighten herself. She attended public lectures and conferences, which began to be fashionable. She spoke easily about spontaneous generation. She manifested a lively surprise when Camors, who delighted in tormenting her, deigned to inform her that men were descended from monkeys.

“Now, my friend,” she said to him, “I can not really admit that. How can you think your grandfather was a monkey, you who are so handsome?”

She reasoned on everything with the same force.

Although she boasted of being a sceptic, sometimes in the morning she went out, concealed by a thick veil, and entered St. Sulpice, where she confessed and put herself on good terms with God, in case He should exist. She was rich and well connected, and in spite of the irregularities of her youth, the best people visited her house.

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Madame de Campvallon permitted herself to be introduced by M. de Camors. Madame de la Roche-Jugan followed her there, because she followed her everywhere, and took her son Sigismund. On this evening the reunion was small. M. de Camors had only been there a few moments, when he had the satisfaction of seeing the General and the Marquise enter. She tranquilly expressed to him her regret at not having been at home the preceding day; but it was impossible to hope for a more decided explanation in a circle so small, and under the vigilant eye of Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Camors interrogated vainly the face of his young cousin. It was as beautiful and cold as usual. His anxiety increased; he would have given his life at that moment to hear her say one word of love.

The Viscountess liked the play of wit, as she had little herself. They played at her house such little games as were then fashionable. Those little games are not always innocent, as we shall see.

They had distributed pencils, pens, and packages of paper—some of the players sitting around large tables, and some in separate chairs—and scratched mysteriously, in turn, questions and answers. During this time the General played whist with Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Madame Campvallon did not usually take part in these games, as they fatigued her. Camors was therefore astonished to see her accept the pencil and paper offered her.

This singularity awakened his attention and put him on his guard. He himself joined in the game, contrary to his custom, and even charged himself with collecting in the basket the small notes as they were written.

An hour passed without any special incident. The treasures of wit were dispensed. The most delicate and unexpected questions—such as, “What is love?” “Do you think that friendship can exist between the sexes?” “Is it sweeter to love or to beloved?”—succeeded each other with corresponding replies. All at once the Marquise gave a slight scream, and they saw a drop of blood trickle down her forehead. She laughed, and showed her little silver pencil-case, which had a pen at one end, with which she had scratched her forehead in her abstraction.

The attention of Camors was redoubled from this moment—the more so from a rapid and significant glance from the Marquise, which seemed to warn him of an approaching event. She was sitting a little in shadow in one corner, in order to meditate more at ease on questions and answers. An instant later Camors was passing around the room collecting notes. She deposited one in the basket, slipping another into his hand with the cat-like dexterity of her sex. In the midst of these papers, which each person amused himself with reading, Camors found no difficulty in retaining without remark the clandestine note of the Marquise. It was written in red ink, a little pale, but very legible, and contained these words:

"I belong, soul, body, honor, riches, to my best-beloved cousin,
Louis de Camors, from this moment and forever.



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"Written and signed with the pure blood of my veins, March 5, 185-.

"Charlotte de Luc. D'ESTRELLES."

All the blood of Camors surged to his brain—a cloud came over his eyes—he rested his hand on the marble table, then suddenly his face was covered with a mortal paleness. These symptoms did not arise from remorse or fear; his passion overshadowed all. He felt a boundless joy. He saw the world at his feet.

It was by this act of frankness and of extraordinary audacity, seasoned by the bloody mysticism so familiar to the sixteenth century, which she adored, that the Marquise de Campvallion surrendered herself to her lover and sealed their fatal union.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

Nearly six weeks had passed after this last episode. It was five o'clock in the afternoon and the Marquise awaited Camors, who was to come after the session of the Corps Legislatif. There was a sudden knock at one of the doors of her room, which communicated with her husband's apartment. It was the General. She remarked with surprise, and even with fear, that his countenance was agitated.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" she said. "Are you ill?"

"No," replied the General, "not at all."

He placed himself before her, and looked at her some moments before speaking, his eyes rolling wildly.

"Charlotte!" he said at last, with a painful smile, "I must own to you my folly. I am almost mad since morning—I have received such a singular letter. Would you like to see it?"

"If you wish," she replied.

He took a letter from his pocket, and gave it to her. The writing was evidently carefully disguised, and it was not signed.

"An anonymous letter?" said the Marquise, whose eyebrows were slightly raised, with an expression of disdain; then she read the letter, which was as follows:

"A true friend, General, feels indignant at seeing your confidence and your loyalty abused. You are deceived by those whom you love most.



“A man who is covered with your favors and a woman who owes everything to you are united by a secret intimacy which outrages you. They are impatient for the hour when they can divide your spoils.” He who regards it as a pious duty to warn you does not desire to calumniate any one. He is sure that your honor is respected by her to whom you have confided it, and that she is still worthy of your confidence and esteem. She wrongs you in allowing herself to count upon the future, which your best friend dates from your death. He seeks your widow and your estate. “The poor woman submits against her will to the fascinations of a man too celebrated for his successful affairs of the heart. But this man, your friend—almost your son—how can he excuse his conduct? Every honest person must be shocked by such behavior, and particularly he whom a chance conversation informed of the fact, and who obeys his conscience in giving you this information.”

The Marquise, after reading it, returned the letter coldly to the General.

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"Sign it Eleanore-Jeanne de la Roche-Jugan!" she said.

"Do you think so?" asked the General.

"It is as clear as day," replied the Marquise. "These expressions betray her—'a pious duty to warn you—'celebrated for his successful affairs of the heart'—'every honest person.' She can disguise her writing, but not her style. But what is still more conclusive is that which she attributes to Monsieur de Camors—for I suppose it alludes to him—and to his private prospects and calculations. This can not have failed to strike you, as it has me, I suppose?"

"If I thought this vile letter was her work," cried the General, "I never would see her again during my life."

"Why not? It is better to laugh at it!"

The General began one of his solemn promenades across the room. The Marquise looked uneasily at the clock. Her husband, intercepting one of these glances, suddenly stopped.

"Do you expect Camors to-day?" he inquired.

"Yes; I think he will call after the session."

"I think he will," responded the General, with a convulsive smile. "And do you know, my dear," he added, "the absurd idea which has haunted me since I received this infamous letter?—for I believe that infamy is contagious."

"You have conceived the idea of observing our interview?" said the Marquise, in a tone of indolent raillery.

"Yes," said the General, "there—behind that curtain—as in a theatre; but, thank God! I have been able to resist this base intention. If ever I allow myself to play so mean a part, I should wish at least to do it with your knowledge and consent."

"And do you ask me to consent to it?" asked the Marquise.

"My poor Charlotte!" said the General, in a sad and almost supplicating tone, "I am an old fool—an overgrown child—but I feel that this miserable letter will poison my life. I shall have no more an hour of peace and confidence. What can you expect? I was so cruelly deceived before. I am an honorable man, but I have been taught that all men are not like myself. There are some things which to me seem as impossible as walking on my head, yet I see others doing these things every day. What can I say to you? After reading this perfidious letter, I could not help recollecting that your intimacy with Camors has greatly increased of late!"



“Without doubt,” said the Marquise, “I am very fond of him!”

“I remembered also your tete-a-tete with him, the other night, in the boudoir, during the ball. When I awoke you had both an air of mystery. What mysteries could there be between you two?”

“Ah, what indeed!” said the Marquise, smiling.

“And will you not tell me?”

“You shall know it at the proper time.”

“Finally, I swear to you that I suspect neither of you—I neither suspect you of wronging me—of disgracing me—nor of soiling my name . . . God help me!



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"But if you two should love each other, even while respecting my honor: if you love each other and confess it—if you two, even at my side, in my heart—if you, my two children, should be calculating with impatient eyes the progress of my old age—planning your projects for the future, and smiling at my approaching death—postponing your happiness only for my tomb you may think yourselves guiltless, but no, I tell you it would be shameful!"

Under the empire of the passion which controlled him, the voice of the General became louder. His common features assumed an air of sombre dignity and imposing grandeur. A slight shade of paleness passed over the lovely face of the young woman and a slight frown contracted her forehead.

By an effort, which in a better cause would have been sublime, she quickly mastered her weakness, and, coldly pointing out to her husband the draped door by which he had entered, said:

"Very well, conceal yourself there!"

"You will never forgive me?"

"You know little of women, my friend, if you do not know that jealousy is one of the crimes they not only pardon but love."

"My God, I am not jealous!"

"Call it yourself what you will, but station yourself there!"

"And you are sincere in wishing me to do so?"

"I pray you to do so! Retire in the interval, leave the door open, and when you hear Monsieur de Camors enter the court of the hotel, return."

"No!" said the General, after a moment's hesitation; "since I have gone so far"—and he sighed deeply "I do not wish to leave myself the least pretext for distrust. If I leave you before he comes, I am capable of fancying—"

"That I might secretly warn him? Nothing more natural. Remain here, then. Only take a book; for our conversation, under such circumstances, can not be lively."

He sat down.

"But," he said, "what mystery can there be between you two?"

"You shall hear!" she said, with her sphinx-like smile.



The General mechanically took up a book. She stirred the fire, and reflected. As she liked terror, danger, and dramatic incidents to blend with her intrigues, she should have been content; for at that moment shame, ruin, and death were at her door. But, to tell the truth, it was too much for her; and when she looked, in the midst of the silence which surrounded her, at the true character and scope of the perils which surrounded her, she thought her brain would fail and her heart break.

She was not mistaken as to the origin of the letter. This shameful work had indeed been planned by Madame de la Roche-Jugan. To do her justice, she had not suspected the force of the blow she was dealing. She still believed in the virtue of the Marquise; but during the perpetual surveillance she had never relaxed, she could not fail to see the changed nature of the intercourse between Camors and the Marquise.

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It must not be forgotten that she dreamed of securing for her son Sigismund the succession to her old friend; and she foresaw a dangerous rivalry—the germ of which she sought to destroy. To awaken the distrust of the General toward Camors, so as to cause his doors to be closed against him, was all she meditated. But her anonymous letter, like most villainies of this kind, was a more fatal and murderous weapon than its base author imagined.

The young Marquise, then, mused while stirring the fire, casting, from time to time, a furtive glance at the clock.

M. de Camors would soon arrive—how could she warn him? In the present state of their relations it was not impossible that the very first words of. Camors might immediately divulge their secret: and once betrayed, there was not only for her personal dishonor, a scandalous fall, poverty, a convent—but for her husband or her lover—perhaps for both—death!

When the bell in the lower court sounded, announcing the Count's approach, these thoughts crowded into the brain of the Marquise like a legion of phantoms. But she rallied her courage by a desperate effort and strained all her faculties to the execution of the plan she had hastily conceived, which was her last hope. And one word, one gesture, one mistake, or one carelessness of her lover, might overthrow it in a second. A moment later the door was opened by a servant, announcing M. de Camors. Without speaking, she signed to her husband to gain his hiding-place. The General, who had risen at the sound of the bell, seemed still to hesitate, but shrugging his shoulders, as if in disdain of himself, retired behind the curtain which faced the door.

M. de Camors entered the room carelessly, and advanced toward the fireplace where sat the Marquise; his smiling lips half opened to speak, when he was struck by the peculiar expression on the face of the Marquise, and the words were frozen on his lips. This look, fixed upon him from his entrance, had a strange, weird intensity, which, without expressing anything, made him fear everything. But he was accustomed to trying situations, and as wary and prudent as he was intrepid. He ceased to smile and did not speak, but waited.

She gave him her hand without ceasing to look at him with the same alarming intensity.

"Either she is mad," he said to himself, "or there is some great peril!"

With the rapid perception of her genius and of her love, she felt he understood her; and not leaving him time to speak and compromise her, instantly said:

"It is very kind of you to keep your promise."

“Not at all,” said Camors, seating himself.

“Yes! For you know you come here to be tormented.” There was a pause.

“Have you at last become a convert to my fixed idea?” she added after a second.

“What fixed idea? It seems to me you have a great many!”

“Yes! But I speak of a good one—my best one, at least—of your marriage!”

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"What! again, cousin?" said Camors, who, now assured of his danger and its nature, marched with a firmer foot over the burning soil.

"Yes, again, cousin; and I will tell you another thing—I have found the person."

"Ah! Then I shall run away!"

She met his smile with an imperious glance.

"Then you still adhere to that plan?" said Camors, laughing.

"Most firmly! I need not repeat to you my reasons—having preached about it all winter—in fact so much so as to disturb the General, who suspects some mystery between us."

"The General? Indeed!"

"Oh, nothing serious, you must understand. Well, let us resume the subject. Miss Campbell will not do—she is too blonde—an odd objection for me to make by the way; not Mademoiselle de Silas—too thin; not Mademoiselle Rolet, in spite of her millions; not Mademoiselle d'Esgrigny—too much like the Bacquieres and Van-Cuyps. All this is a little discouraging, you will admit; but finally everything clears up. I tell you I have discovered the right one—a marvel!"

"Her name?" said Camors.

"Marie de Tecle!"

There was silence.

"Well, you say nothing," resumed the Marquise, "because you can have nothing to say! Because she unites everything—personal beauty, family, fortune, everything—almost like a dream. Then, too, your properties join. You see how I have thought of everything, my friend! I can not imagine how we never came to think of this before!"

M. de Camors did not reply, and the Marquise began to be surprised at his silence.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "you may look a long time—there can not be a single objection—you are caught this time. Come, my friend, say yes, I implore you!" And while her lips said "I implore you," in a tone of gracious entreaty, her look said, with terrible emphasis, "You must!"

"Will you allow me to reflect upon it, Madame?" he said at last.

"No, my friend!"

“But really,” said Camors, who was very pale, “it seems to me you dispose of the hand of Mademoiselle de Tecle very readily. Mademoiselle de Tecle is rich and courted on all sides—also, her great-uncle has ideas of the province, and her mother, ideas of religion, which might well—”

“I charge myself with all that,” interrupted the Marquise.

“What a mania you have for marrying people!”

“Women who do not make love, cousin, always have a mania for matchmaking.”

“But seriously, you will give me a few days for reflection?”

“To reflect about what? Have you not always told me you intended marrying and have been only waiting the chance? Well, you never can find a better one than this; and if you let it slip, you will repent the rest of your life.”

“But give me time to consult my family!”

“Your family—what a joke! It seems to me you have reached full age; and then—what family? Your aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan?”

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"Doubtless! I do not wish to offend her:"

"Ah, my dear cousin, don't be uneasy; suppress this uneasiness; I assure you she will be delighted!"

"Why should she?"

"I have my reasons for thinking so;" and the young woman in uttering these words was seized with a fit of sardonic laughter which came near convulsion, so shaken were her nerves by the terrible tension.

Camors, to whom little by little the light fell stronger on the more obscure points of the terrible enigma proposed to him, saw the necessity of shortening a scene which had overtaken her faculties to an almost insupportable degree. He rose:

"I am compelled to leave you," he said; "for I am not dining at home. But I will come to-morrow, if you will permit me."

"Certainly. You authorize me to speak to the General?"

"Well, yes, for I really can see no reasonable objection."

"Very good. I adore you!" said the Marquise. She gave him her hand, which he kissed and immediately departed.

It would have required a much keener vision than that of M. de Campvallion to detect any break, or any discordance, in the audacious comedy which had just been played before him by these two great artists.

The mute play of their eyes alone could have betrayed them; and that he could not see.

As to their tranquil, easy, natural dialogue there was not in it a word which he could seize upon, and which did not remove all his disquietude, and confound all his suspicions. From this moment, and ever afterward, every shadow was effaced from his mind; for the ability to imagine such a plot as that in which his wife in her despair had sought refuge, or to comprehend such depth of perversity, was not in the General's pure and simple spirit.

When he reappeared before his wife, on leaving his concealment, he was constrained and awkward. With a gesture of confusion and humility he took her hand, and smiled upon her with all the goodness and tenderness of his soul beaming from his face.

At this moment the Marquise, by a new reaction of her nervous system, broke into weeping and sobbing; and this completed the General's despair.

Out of respect to this worthy man, we shall pass over a scene the interest of which otherwise is not sufficient to warrant the unpleasant effect it would produce on all honest people. We shall equally pass over without record the conversation which took place the next day between the Marquise and M. de Camors.

Camors had experienced, as we have observed, a sentiment of repulsion at hearing the name of Mademoiselle de Tecle appear in the midst of this intrigue. It amounted almost to horror, and he could not control the manifestation of it. How could he conquer this supreme revolt of his conscience to the point of submitting to the expedient which would make his intrigue safe? By what detestable sophistries he dared persuade himself that he owed everything to his accomplice—even this, we shall not attempt to explain. To explain would be to extenuate, and that we wish not to do. We shall only say that he resigned himself to this marriage. On the path which he had entered a man can check himself as little as he can check a flash of lightning.

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As to the Marquise, one must have formed no conception of this depraved though haughty spirit, if astonished at her persistence, in cold blood, and after reflection, in the perfidious plot which the imminence of her danger had suggested to her. She saw that the suspicions of the General might be reawakened another day in a more dangerous manner, if this marriage proved only a farce. She loved Camors passionately; and she loved scarcely less the dramatic mystery of their liaison. She had also felt a frantic terror at the thought of losing the great fortune which she regarded as her own; for the disinterestedness of her early youth had long vanished, and the idea of sinking miserably in the Parisian world, where she had long reigned by her luxury as well as her beauty, was insupportable to her.

Love, mystery, fortune—she wished to preserve them all at any price; and the more she reflected, the more the marriage of Camors appeared to her the surest safeguard.

It was true, it would give her a sort of rival. But she had too high an opinion of herself to fear anything; and she preferred Mademoiselle de Tecle to any other, because she knew her, and regarded her as an inferior in everything.

About fifteen days after, the General called on Madame de Tecle one morning, and demanded for M. de Camors her daughter's hand. It would be painful to dwell on the joy which Madame de Tecle felt; and her only surprise was that Camors had not come in person to press his suit. But Camors had not the heart to do so. He had been at Reuilly since that morning, and called on Madame de Tecle, where he learned his overture was accepted. Once having resolved on this monstrous action, he was determined to carry it through in the most correct manner, and we know he was master of all social arts.

In the evening Madame de Tecle and her daughter, left alone, walked together a long time on their dear terrace, by the soft light of the stars—the daughter blessing her mother, and the mother thanking God—both mingling their hearts, their dreams, their kisses, and their tears—happier, poor women, than is permitted long to human beings. The marriage took place the ensuing month.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A defensive attitude is never agreeable to a man
Believing that it is for virtue's sake alone such men love them
Determined to cultivate ability rather than scrupulousness
Disenchantment which follows possession
Have not that pleasure, it is useless to incur the penalties
Inconstancy of heart is the special attribute of man
Knew her danger, and, unlike most of them, she did not love it
Put herself on good terms with God, in case He should exist
Two persons who desired neither to remember nor to forget

MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

By octave Feuillet



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BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNTESS DE CAMORS

After passing the few weeks of the honeymoon at Reuilly, the Comte and Comtesse de Camors returned to Paris and established themselves at their hotel in the Rue de l'Imperatrice. From this moment, and during the months that followed, the young wife kept up an active correspondence with her mother; and we here transcribe some of the letters, which will make us more intimately acquainted with the character of the young woman.

Madame de Camors to Madame de Tecle.

"October.

"Am I happy? No, my dearest mother! No—not happy! I have only wings and soar to heaven like a bird! I feel the sunshine in my head, in my eyes, in my heart.

"It blinds me, it enchants me, it causes me to shed delicious tears! Happy? No, my tender mother; that is not possible, when I think that I am his wife! The wife—understand me—of him who has reigned in my poor thoughts since I was able to think—of him whom I should have chosen out of the whole universe! When I remember that I am his wife, that we are united forever, how I love life! how I love you! how I love God!

"The Bois and the lake are within a few steps of us, as you know. We ride thither nearly every morning, my husband and I!—I repeat, I and my husband! We go there, my husband and I—I and my husband!

"I know not how it is, but it is always delicious weather to me, even when it rains—as it does furiously to-day; for we have just come in, driven home by the storm.

"During our ride to-day, I took occasion to question him quietly as to some points of our history which puzzled me. First, why had he married me?

"‘Because you pleased me apparently, Miss Mary.’ He likes to give me this name, which recalls to him I know not what episode of my untamed youth—untamed still to him.

"‘If I pleased you, why did I see you so seldom?’

“‘Because I did not wish to court you until I had decided on marrying.’

“‘How could I have pleased you, not being at all beautiful?’

“‘You are not beautiful, it is true,’ replies this cruel young man, ‘but you are very pretty; and above all you are grace itself, like your mother.’

“All these obscure points being cleared up to the complete satisfaction of Miss Mary, Miss Mary took to fast galloping; not because it was raining, but because she became suddenly—we do not know the reason why—as red as a poppy.

“Oh, beloved mother! how sweet it is to be loved by him we adore, and to be loved precisely as we wish—as we have dreamed—according to the exact programme of our young, romantic hearts!



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"Did you ever believe I had ideas on such a delicate subject? Yes, dear mother, I had them. Thus, it seemed to me there were many different styles of loving—some vulgar, some pretentious, some foolish, and others, again, excessively comic. None of these seemed suited to the Prince, our neighbor. I ever felt he should love, like the Prince he is, with grace and dignity; with serious tenderness, a little stern perhaps; with amiability, but almost with condescension—as a lover, but as a master, too—in fine, like my husband!

"Dear angel, who art my mother! be happy in my happiness, which was your sole work. I kiss your hands—I kiss your wings!

"I thank you! I bless you! I adore you!

"If you were near me, it would be too much happiness! I should die, I think. Nevertheless, come to us very soon. Your chamber awaits you. It is as blue as the heavens in which I float. I have already told you this, but I repeat it.

"Good-by, mother of the happiest woman in the world!

"*Miss Mary,*

"Comtesse de Camors."

.....

"November.

"*My mother:*

"You made me weep—I who await you every morning. I will say nothing to you, however; I will not beg you. If the health of my grandfather seems to you so feeble as to demand your presence, I know no prayer would take you away from your duty. Nor would I make the prayer, my angel mother!" But exaggerate nothing, I pray you, and think your little Marie can not pass by the blue chamber without feeling a swelling of the heart. Apart from this grief which you cause her, she continues to be as happy as even you could wish." Her charming Prince is ever charming and ever her Prince! He takes her to see the monuments, the museums, the theatres, like the poor little provincial that she is. Is it not touching on the part of so great a personage?

"He is amused at my ecstasies—for I have ecstasies. Do not breathe it to my Uncle Des Rameures, but Paris is superb! The days here count double our own for thought and life.



“My husband took me to Versailles yesterday. I suspect that this, in the eyes of the people here, is rather a ridiculous episode; for I notice the Count did not boast of it. Versailles corresponds entirely with the impressions you had given me of it; for there is not the slightest change since you visited it with my grandfather.” It is grand, solemn, and cold. There is, though, a new and very curious museum in the upper story of the palace, consisting chiefly of original portraits of the famous men of history. Nothing pleases me more than to see these heroes of my memory passing before me in grand procession—from Charles the Bold to George Washington. Those

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faces my imagination has so often tried to evoke, that it seems to me we are in the Elysian Fields, and hold converse with the dead: "You must know, my mother, I was familiar with many things that surprised M. de Camors very much. He was greatly struck by my knowledge of science and my genius. I did no more, as you may imagine, than respond to his questions; but it seemed to astonish him that I could respond at all.

"Why should he ask me these things? If he did not know how to distinguish the different Princesses of Conti, the answer is simple.

"But I knew, because my mother taught me. That is simple enough too.

"We dined afterward, at my suggestion, at a restaurant. Oh, my mother! this was the happiest moment of my life! To dine at a restaurant with my husband was the most delightful of all dissipations!" I have said he seemed astonished at my learning. I ought to add in general, he seemed astonished whenever I opened my lips. Did he imagine me a mute? I speak little, I acknowledge, however, for he inspires me with a ceaseless fear: I am afraid of displeasing him, of appearing silly before him, or pretentious, or pedantic. The day when I shall be at ease with him, and when I can show him my good sense and gratitude—if that day ever comes—I shall be relieved of a great weight on my mind, for truly I sometimes fear he looks on me as a child.

"The other day I stopped before a toy-shop on the Boulevard. What a blunder! And as he saw my eye fixed on a magnificent squadron of dolls—

"Do you wish one, Miss Mary?' he said.

"Was not this horrible, my mother—from him who knows everything except the Princesses of Conti? He explained everything to me; but briefly in a word, as if to a person he despaired of ever making understand him. And I understand so well all the time, my poor little mother!

"But so much the better, say I; for if he loves me while thinking me silly, what will it be later!

"With fond love, your

"*Marie.*"

.....

“December.

“All Paris has returned once more, my dear mother, and for fifteen days I have been occupied with visits. The men here do not usually visit; but my husband is obliged to present me for the first time to the persons I ought to know. He accompanies me there, which is much more agreeable to me than to him, I believe.” He is more serious than usual. Is not this the only form in which amiable men show their bad humor? The people we visit look on me with a certain interest. The woman whom this great lord has honored with his choice is evidently an object of great curiosity. This flatters and intimidates me; I blush and feel constrained; I appear awkward. When they find me awkward

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and insignificant, they stare. They believe he married me for my fortune: then I wish to cry. We reenter the carriage, he smiles upon me, and I am in heaven! Such are our visits. "You must know, my mother, that to me Madame Campvallon is divine. She often takes me to her box at the Italiens, as mine will not be vacant until January. Yesterday she gave a little fete for me in her beautiful salon: the General opened the ball with me.

"Oh! my mother, what a wonderfully clever man the General is! And I admire him because he admires you!

"The Marquise presented to me all the best dancers. They were young gentlemen, with their necks so uncovered it almost gave me a chill. I never before had seen men bare-necked and the fashion is not becoming. It was very evident, however, that they considered themselves indispensable and charming. Their deportment was insolent and self-sufficient; their eyes were disdainful and all-conquering. "Their mouths ever open to breathe freer, their coat-tails flapping like wings, they take one by the waist—as one takes his own property. Informing you by a look that they are about to do you the honor of removing you, they whirl you away; then, panting for breath, inform you by another look that they will do themselves the pleasure of stopping—and they stop. Then they rest a moment, panting, laughing, showing their teeth; another look—and they repeat the same performance. They are wonderful!

"Louis waltzed with me and seemed satisfied. I saw him for the first time waltz with the Marquise. Oh, my mother, it was the dance of the stars!

"One thing which struck me this evening, as always, was the manifest idolatry with which the women regard my husband. This, my tender mother, terrifies me. Why—I ask myself—why did he choose me? How can I please him? How can I succeed?

"Behold the result of all my meditations! A folly perhaps, but of which the effect is to reassure me:

"Portrait of the Comtesse de Camors, drawn by herself.

"The Comtesse de Camors, formerly Marie de Tecle, is a personage who, having reached her twentieth year, looks older. She is not beautiful, as her husband is the first person to confess. He says she is pretty; but she doubts even this. Let us see. She has very long limbs, a fault which she shares with Diana, the Huntress, and which probably gives to the gait of the Countess a lightness it might not otherwise possess. Her body is naturally short, and on horseback appears to best advantage. She is plump without being gross. "Her features are irregular; the mouth being too large and the lips too thick, with—alas! the shade of a moustache; white teeth, a little too small; a commonplace nose, a slightly pug; and her mother's eyes—her best feature.

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She has the eyebrows of her Uncle Des Rameures, which gives an air of severity to the face and neutralizes the good-natured expression—a reflex from the softness of her heart. “She has the dark complexion of her mother, which is more becoming to her mother than to her. Add to all this, blue-black hair in great silky masses. On the whole, one knows not what to pronounce her.

“There, my mother, is my portrait! Intended to reassure me, it has hardly done so; for it seems to me to be that of an ugly little woman!

“I wish to be the most lively of women; I wish to be one of the most distinguished. I wish to be one of the most captivating! But, oh, my mother! if I please him I am still more enchanted! On the whole, thank God! he finds me perhaps much better than I am: for men have not the same taste in these matters that we have.” But what I really can not comprehend, is why he has so little admiration for the Marquise de Campvallon. His manner is very cold to her. Were I a man, I should be wildly in love with that superb woman! Good-night, most beloved of mothers!”

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“January.

“You complain of me, my cherished one! The tone of my letters wounds you! You can not comprehend how this matter of my personal appearance haunts me. I scrutinize it; I compare it with that of others. There is something of levity in that which hurts you? You ask how can I think a man attaches himself to these things, while the merits of mind and soul go for nothing?” But, my dearest mother, how will these merits of mind and of soul—supposing your daughter to possess them—serve her, unless she possesses the courage or has the opportunity to display them? And when I summon up the courage, it seems to me the occasion never comes.

“For I must confess to you that this delicious Paris is not perfect; and I discover, little by little, the spots upon the sun.

“Paris is the most charming place! The only pity is that it has inhabitants! Not but that they are agreeable, for they are only too much so; only they are also very careless, and appear to my view to live and die without reflecting much on what they are doing. It is not their fault; they have no time.” Without leaving Paris, they are incessant travellers, eternally distracted by motion and novelty. Other travellers, when they have visited some distant corner—forgetting for a while their families, their duties, and their homes—return and settle down again. But these Parisians never do. Their life is an endless voyage; they have no home. That which elsewhere is the great aim of life is secondary

here. One has here, as elsewhere, an establishment—a house, a private chamber. One must have. Here one is wife or mother, husband or father,

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just as elsewhere; but, my poor mother, they are these things just as little as possible. The whole interest centres not in the homes; but in the streets, the museums, the salons, the theatres, and the clubs. It radiates to the immense outside life, which in all its forms night and day agitates Paris, attracts, excites, and enervates you; steals your time, your mind, your soul—and devours them all!

“Paris is the most delicious of places to visit—the worst of places to live in.

“Understand well, my mother, that in seeking by what qualifies I can best attract my husband—who is the best of men, doubtless, but of Parisian men nevertheless—I have continually reflected on merits which may be seen at once, which do not require time to be appreciated.” Finally, I do not deny that all this is miserable cynicism, unworthy of you and of myself; for you know I am not at heart a bad little woman. Certainly, if I could keep Monsieur de Camors for a year or two at an old chateau in the midst of a solitary wood, I should like it much. I could then see him more frequently, I could then become familiar with his august person, and could develop my little talents under his charmed eyes. But then this might weary him and would be too easy. Life and happiness, I know, are not so easily managed. All is difficulty, peril, and conflict. “What joy, then, to conquer! And I swear to you, my mother, that I will conquer! I will force him to know me as you know me; to love me, not as he now does, but as you do, for many good reasons of which he does not yet dream.

“Not that he believes me absolutely a fool; I think he has abandoned that idea for at least two days past.

“How he came thus to think, my next letter shall explain.

“Your own

“*Marie.*”

CHAPTER XVI

THE REPTILE STRIVES TO CLIMB

“March.

“You will remember, my mother, that the Count has as secretary a man named Vautrot. The name is a bad one; but the man himself is a good enough creature, except that I somewhat dislike his catlike style of looking at one.” Well, Monsieur de Vautrot lives in the house with us. He comes early in the morning, breakfasts at some neighboring cafe, passes the day in the Count’s study, and often remains to dine with us, if he has

work to finish in the evening. "He is an educated man, and knows a little of everything; and he has undertaken many occupations before he accepted the subordinate though lucrative post he now occupies with my husband. He loves literature; but not that of his time and of his country, perhaps because he himself has failed in this. He prefers foreign writers and poets, whom he quotes with some taste, though with too much declamation.

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"Most probably his early education was defective; for on all occasions, when speaking with us, he says, 'Yes, Monsieur le Comte!' or 'Certainly, Madame la Comtesse!' as if he were a servant. Yet withal, he has a peculiar pride, or perhaps I should say insufferable vanity. But his great fault, in my eyes, is the scoffing tone he adopts, when the subject is religion or morals.

"Two days ago, while we were dining, Vautrot allowed himself to indulge in a rather violent tirade of this description. It was certainly contrary to all good taste.

"My dear Vautrot,' my husband said quietly to him, 'to me these pleasantries of yours are indifferent; but pray remember, that while you are a strong-minded man, my wife is a weak-minded woman; and strength, you know, should respect weakness.'"Monsieur Vautrot first grew white, then red, and finally green. He rose, bowed awkwardly, and immediately afterward left the table. Since that time I have remarked his manner has been more reserved. The moment I was alone with Louis, I said:

"You may think me indiscreet, but pray let me ask you a question. How can you confide all your affairs and all your secrets to a man who professes to have no principles?"

"Monsieur de Camors laughed.

"Oh, he talks thus out of bravado,' he answered. 'He thinks to make himself more interesting in your eyes by these Mephistophelian airs. At bottom he is a good fellow.'

"But,' I answered, 'he has faith in nothing.'

"Not in much, I believe. Yet he has never deceived me. He is an honorable man.'

"I opened my eyes wide at this.

"Well,' he said, with an amused look, 'what is the matter, Miss Mary?"

"What is this honor you speak of?"

"Let me ask your definition of it, Miss Mary,' he replied.

"Mon Dieu!' I cried, blushing deeply, 'I know but little of it, but it seems to me that honor separated from morality is no great thing; and morality without religion is nothing. They all constitute a chain. Honor hangs to the last link, like a flower; but if the chain be broken, honor falls with the rest.' He looked at me with strange eyes, as if he were not

only confounded but disquieted by my philosophy. Then he gave a deep sigh, and rising said:

“‘Very neat, that definition-very neat.’

“That night, at the opera, he plied me with bonbons and orange ices. Madame de Campvallon accompanied us; and at parting, I begged her to call for me next day on her way to the Bois, for she is my idol. She is so lovely and so distinguished—and she I knows it well. I love to be with her. On our return home, Louis remained silent, contrary to his custom. Suddenly he said, brusquely:

“‘Marie, do you go with the Marquise to the Bois to-morrow?’

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“‘Yes.’

“‘But you see her often, it seems to me—morning and evening. You are always with her.’

“‘Heavens! I do it to be agreeable to you. Is not Madame de Campvallon a good associate?’

“‘Excellent; only in general I do not admire female friendships. But I did wrong to speak to you on this subject. You have wit and discretion enough to preserve the proper limits.’

“‘This, my mother, was what he said to me. I embrace you.

Ever your
“*Marie.*”

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“March.

“I hope, my own mother, not to bore you this year with a catalogue of fetes and festivals, lamps and girandoles; for Lent is coming. To-day is Ash-Wednesday. Well, we dance to-morrow evening at Madame d’Oilly’s. I had hoped not to go, but I saw Louis was disappointed, and I feared to offend Madame d’Oilly, who has acted a mother’s part to my husband. Lent here is only an empty name. I sigh to myself: ‘Will they never stop! Great heavens! will they never cease amusing themselves?’

“I must confess to you, my darling mother, I amuse myself too much to be happy. I depended on Lent for some time to myself, and see how they efface the calendar!

“This dear Lent! What a sweet, honest, pious invention it is, notwithstanding. How sensible is our religion! How well it understands human weakness and folly! How far-seeing in its regulations! How indulgent also! for to limit pleasure is to pardon it.” I also love pleasure—the beautiful toilets that make us resemble flowers, the lighted salons, the music, the gay voices and the dance. Yes, I love all these things; I experience their charming confusion; I palpitate, I inhale their intoxication. But always—always! at Paris in the winter—at the springs in summer—ever this crowd, ever this whirl, this intoxication of pleasure! All become like savages, like negroes, and—dare I say so?—bestial! Alas for Lent!

"*He* foresaw it. *He* told us, as the priest told me this morning:
'Remember you have a soul: Remember you have duties!—a husband
—a child—a mother—a God!'

"Then, my mother, we should retire within ourselves; should pass the time in grave thought between the church and our homes; should converse on solemn and serious subjects; and should dwell in the moral world to gain a foothold in heaven! This season is intended as a wholesome interval to prevent our running frivolity into dissipation, and pleasure into convulsion; to prevent our winter's mask from becoming our permanent visage. This is entirely the opinion of Madame Jaubert."Who is this Madame Jaubert? you will ask. She is a little Parisian angel whom my mother would dearly love! I met her almost

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everywhere—but chiefly at St. Phillipe de Roule—for several months without being aware that she is our neighbor, that her hotel adjoins ours. Such is Paris!“She is a graceful person, with a soft and tender, but decided air. We sat near each other at church; we gave each other side-glances; we pushed our chairs to let each other pass; and in our softest voices would say, ‘Excuse me, Madame!’ ‘Oh, Madame!’ My glove would fall, she would pick it up; I would offer her the holy water, and receive a sweet smile, with ‘Dear Madame!’ Once at a concert at the Tuileries we observed each other at a distance, and smiled recognition; when any part of the music pleased us particularly we glanced smilingly at each other. Judge of my surprise next morning when I saw my affinity enter the little Italian house next ours—and enter it, too, as if it were her home. On inquiry I found she was Madame Jaubert, the wife of a tall, fair young man who is a civil engineer.

“I was seized with a desire to call upon my neighbor. I spoke of it to Louis, blushing slightly, for I remembered he did not approve of intimacies between women. But above all, he loves me!

“Notwithstanding he slightly shrugged his shoulders—‘Permit me at least, Miss Mary, to make some inquiries about these people.’

“A few days afterward he had made them, for he said: ‘Miss Mary, you may visit Madame Jaubert; she is a perfectly proper person.’

“I first flew to my husband’s neck, and thence went to call upon Madame Jaubert.

“‘It is I, Madame!’

“‘Oh, Madame, permit me!’

“And we embraced each other and were good friends immediately.

“Her husband is a civil engineer, as I have said. He was once occupied with great inventions and with great industrial works; but that was only for a short time. Having inherited a large estate, he abandoned his studies and did nothing—at least nothing but mischief. When he married to increase his fortune, his pretty little wife had a sad surprise. He was never seen at home; always at the club—always behind the scenes at the opera—always going to the devil! He gambled, he had mistresses and shameful affairs. But worse than all, he drank—he came to his wife drunk. One incident, which my pen almost refuses to write, will give you an idea. Think of it! He conceived the idea of sleeping in his boots! There, my mother, is the pretty fellow my sweet little friend transformed, little by little, into a decent man, a man of merit, and an excellent husband!

“And she did it all by gentleness, firmness, and sagacity. Now is not this encouraging?—for, God knows, my task is less difficult.

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"Their household charms me; for it proves that one may build for one's self, even in the midst of this Paris, a little nest such as one dreams of. These dear neighbors are inhabitants of Paris—not its prey. They have their fireside; they own it, and it belongs to them. Paris is at their door—so much the better. They have ever a relish for refined amusement; 'they drink at the fountain,' but do not drown themselves in it. Their habits are the same, passing their evenings in conversation, reading, or music; stirring the fire and listening to the wind and rain without, as if they were in a forest.

"Life slips gently through their fingers, thread by thread, as in our dear old country evenings.

"My mother, they are happy!

"Here, then, is my dream—here is my plan.

"My husband has no vices, as Monsieur Jaubert had. He has only the habits of all the brilliant men of his Paris-world. It is necessary, my own mother, gradually to reform him; to suggest insensibly to him the new idea that one may pass one evening at home in company with a beloved and loving wife, without dying suddenly of consumption.

"The rest will follow.

"What is this rest? It is the taste for a quiet life, for the serious sweetness of the domestic hearth—the family taste—the idea of seclusion—the recovered soul!

"Is it not so, my good angel? Then trust me. I am more than ever full of ardor, courage, and confidence. For he loves me with all his heart, with more levity, perhaps, than I deserve; but still—he loves me!

"He loves me; he spoils me; he heaps presents upon me. There is no pleasure he does not offer me, except, be it understood, the pleasure of passing one evening at home together.

"But he loves me! That is the great point—he loves me!

"Now, dearest mother, let me whisper one final word—a word that makes me laugh and cry at the same time. It seems to me that for some time past I have had two hearts—a large one of my own, and—another—smaller!" "Oh, my mother! I see you in tears. But it is a great mystery this. It is a dream of heaven; but perhaps only a dream, which I have not yet told even to my husband—only to my adorable mother! Do not weep, for it is not yet quite certain.

"Your naughty
Miss *Mary*."



In reply to this letter Madame de Camors received one three mornings after, announcing to her the death of her grandfather. The Comte de Tecle had died of apoplexy, of which his state of health had long given warning. Madame de Tecle foresaw that the first impulse of her daughter would be to join her to share her sad bereavement. She advised her strongly against undertaking the fatigue of the journey, and promised to visit her in Paris, as soon as she conveniently could. The mourning in the family heightened in the heart of the Countess the uneasy feeling and vague sadness her last letters had indicated.

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She was much less happy than she told her mother; for the first enthusiasm and first illusions of marriage could not long deceive a spirit so quick and acute as hers.

A young girl who marries is easily deceived by the show of an affection of which she is the object. It is rare that she does not adore her husband and believe she is adored by him, simply because he has married her.

The young heart opens spontaneously and diffuses its delicate perfume of love and its songs of tenderness; and enveloped in this heavenly cloud all seems love around it. But, little by little, it frees itself; and, too often, recognizes that this delicious harmony and intoxicating atmosphere which charmed it came only from itself.

Thus was it with the Countess; so far as the pen can render the shadows of a feminine soul. Such were the impressions which, day by day, penetrated the very soul of our poor "Miss Mary."

It was nothing more than this; but this was everything to her!

The idea of being betrayed by her husband—and that, too, with cruel premeditation—never had arisen to torture her soul. But, beyond those delicate attentions to her which she never exaggerated in her letters to her mother, she felt herself disdained and slighted. Marriage had not changed Camors's habits: he dined at home, instead of at his club, that was all. She believed herself loved, however, but with a lightness that was almost offensive. Yet, though she was sometimes sad and nearly in tears, she did not despair; this valiant little heart attached itself with intrepid confidence to all the happy chances the future might have in store for it.

M. de Camors continued very indifferent—as one may readily comprehend—to the agitation which tormented this young heart, but which never occurred to him for a moment. For himself, strange as it may appear, he was happy enough. This marriage had been a painful step to take; but, once confirmed in his sin, he became reconciled to it. But his conscience, seared as it was, had some living fibres in it; and he would not have failed in the duty he thought he owed to his wife. These sentiments were composed of a sort of indifference, blended with pity. He was vaguely sorry for this child, whose existence was absorbed and destroyed between those of two beings of nature superior to her own; and he hoped she would always remain ignorant of the fate to which she was condemned. He resolved never to neglect anything that might extenuate its rigor; but he belonged, nevertheless, more than ever solely to the passion which was the supreme crime of his life. For his intrigue with Madame de Campvallon, continually excited by mystery and danger—and conducted with profound address by a woman whose cunning was equal to her beauty—continued as strong, after years of enjoyment, as at first.



The gracious courtesy of M. de Camors, on which he piqued himself, as regarded his wife, had its limits; as the young Countess perceived whenever she attempted to abuse it. Thus, on several occasions she declined receiving guests on the ground of indisposition, hoping her husband would not abandon her to her solitude. She was in error.

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The Count gave her in reality, under these circumstances, a tete-a-tete of a few minutes after dinner; but near nine o'clock he would leave her with perfect tranquillity. Perhaps an hour later she would receive a little packet of bonbons, or a pretty basket of choice fruit, that would permit her to pass the evening as she might. These little gifts she sometimes divided with her neighbor, Madame Jaubert; sometimes with M. de Vautrot, secretary to her husband.

This M. de Vautrot, for whom she had at first conceived an aversion, was gradually getting into her good graces. In the absence of her husband she always found him at hand; and referred to him for many little details, such as addresses, invitations, the selection of books and the purchase of furniture. From this came a certain familiarity; she began to call him Vautrot, or "My good Vautrot," while he zealously performed all her little commissions. He manifested for her a great deal of respectful attention, and even refrained from indulging in the sceptical sneers which he knew displeased her. Happy to witness this reform and to testify her gratitude, she invited him to remain on two or three evenings when he came to take his leave, and talked with him of books and the theatres.

When her mourning kept her at home, M. de Camors passed the two first evenings with her until ten o'clock. But this effort fatigued him, and the poor young woman, who had already erected an edifice for the future on this frail basis, had the mortification of observing that on the third evening he had resumed his bachelor habits.

This was a great blow to her, and her sadness became greater than it had been up to that time; so much so in fact, that solitude was almost unbearable. She had hardly been long enough in Paris to form intimacies. Madame Jaubert came to her friend as often as she could; but in the intervals the Countess adopted the habit of retaining Vautrot, or even of sending for him. Camors himself, three fourths of the time, would bring him in before going out in the evening.

"I bring you Vautrot, my dear," he would say, "and Shakespeare. You can read him together."

Vautrot read well; and though his heavy declamatory style frequently annoyed the Countess, she thus managed to kill many a long evening, while waiting the expected visit of Madame de Tecle. But Vautrot, whenever he looked at her, wore such a sympathetic air and seemed so mortified when she did not invite him to stay, that, even when wearied of him, she frequently did so.

About the end of the month of April, M. Vautrot was alone with the Countess de Camors about ten o'clock in the evening. They were reading Goethe's Faust, which she had never before heard. This reading seemed to interest the young woman more than usual, and with her eyes fixed on the reader, she listened to it with rapt attention. She

was not alone fascinated by the work, but—as is frequently the case—she traced her own thoughts and her own history in the fiction of the poet.

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We all know with what strange clairvoyance a mind possessed with a fixed idea discovers resemblances and allusions in accidental description. Madame de Camors perceived without doubt some remote connection between her husband and Faust—between herself and Marguerite; for she could not help showing that she was strangely agitated. She could not restrain the violence of her emotion, when Marguerite in prison cries out, in her agony and madness:

Marguerite.

Who has given you, headsman, this power over me? You come to me while it is yet midnight. Be merciful and let me live.

Is not to-morrow morning soon enough?

I am yet so young—so young! and am to die already! I was fair, too; that was my undoing. My true love was near, now he is far away.

Torn lies my garland; scattered the flowers. Don't take hold of me so roughly! spare me! spare me. What have I done to you? Let me not implore you in vain! I never saw you before in all my life; you know.

Faust.

Can I endure this misery?

Marguerite.

I am now entirely in thy power. Only let me give suck to the child. I pressed it this whole night to my heart. They took it away to vex me, and now say I killed it, and I shall never be happy again. They sing songs upon me! It is wicked of the people. An old tale ends so—who bids them apply it?

Faust.

A lover lies at thy feet, to unloose the bonds of wickedness.

What a blending of confused sentiments, of powerful sympathies, of vague apprehensions, suddenly seized on the breast of the young Countess! One can hardly imagine their force—to the very verge of distracting her. She turned on her fauteuil and closed her beautiful eyes, as if to keep back the tears which rolled under the fringe of the long lashes.

At this moment Vautrot ceased to read, dropped his book, sighed profoundly, and stared a moment.

Then he knelt at the feet of the Comtesse de Camors! He took her hand; he said, with a tragic sigh, "Poor angel!"

It will be difficult to understand this incident and the unfortunately grave results that followed it, without having the moral and physical portrait of its principal actor.

M. Hippolyte Vautrot was a handsome man and knew it perfectly. He even flattered himself on a certain resemblance to his patron, the Comte de Camors. Partly from nature and partly from continual imitation, this idea had some foundation; for he resembled the Count as much as a vulgar man can resemble one of the highest polish.

He was the son of a small confectioner in the provinces; had received from his father an honestly acquired fortune, and had dissipated it in the varied enterprises of his adventurous life. The influence of his college, however, obtained for him a place in the Seminary. He left it to come to Paris and study law; placed himself with an attorney; attempted literature without success; gambled on the Bourse and lost there.

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He had successively knocked with feverish hand at all the doors of Fortune, and none had opened to him, because, though his ambition was great, his capacity was limited. Subordinate positions, for which alone he was fit, he did not want. He would have made a good tutor: he sighed to be a poet. He would have been a respectable cure in the country: he pined to be a bishop. Fitted for an excellent secretary, he aspired to be a minister. In fine, he wished to be a great man, and consequently was a failure as a little one.

But he made himself a hypocrite; and that he found much easier. He supported himself on the one hand by the philosophic society to be met at Madame d'Oilly's; on the other, by the orthodox reunions of Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

By these influences he contrived to secure the secretaryship to the Comte de Camors, who, in his general contempt of the human species, judged Vautrot to be as good as any other. Now, familiarity with M. de Camors was, morally, fearfully prejudicial to the secretary. It had, it is true, the effect of stripping off his devout mask, which he seldom put on before his patron; but it terribly increased in venom the depravity which disappointment and wounded pride had secreted in his ulcerated heart.

Of course no one will imagine that M. de Camors had the bad taste to undertake deliberately the demoralization of his secretary; but contact, intimacy, and example sufficed fully to do this. A secretary is always more or less a confidant. He divines that which is not revealed to him; and Vautrot could not be long in discovering that his patron's success did not arise, morally, from too much principle—in politics, from excess of conviction—in business, from a mania for scruples! The intellectual superiority of Camors, refined and insolent as it was, aided to blind Vautrot, showing him evil which was not only prosperous, but was also radiant in grace and prestige. For these reasons he most profoundly admired his master—admired, imitated, and execrated him!

Camors professed for him and for his solemn airs an utter contempt, which he did not always take the trouble to conceal; and Vautrot trembled when some burning sarcasm fell from such a height on the old wound of his vanity—that wound which was ever sore within him. What he hated most in Camors was his easy and insolent triumph—his rapid and unmerited fortune—all those enjoyments which life yielded him without pain, without toil, without conscience—peacefully tasted! But what he hated above all, was that this man had thus obtained these things while he had vainly striven for them.

Assuredly, in this Vautrot was not an exception. The same example presented to a healthier mind would not have been much more salutary, for we must tell those who, like M. de Camors, trample under foot all principles of right, and nevertheless imagine that their secretaries, their servants, their wives and their children, may remain virtuous—we must tell these that while they wrong others they deceive themselves! And this was the case with Hippolyte Vautrot.

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He was about forty years of age—a period of life when men often become very vicious, even when they have been passably virtuous up to that time. He affected an austere and puritanical air; was the great man of the cafe he frequented; and there passed judgment on his contemporaries and pronounced them all inferior. He was difficult to please—in point of virtue demanding heroism; in talent, genius; in art, perfection.

His political opinions were those of Erostratus, with this difference—always in favor of the ancient—that Vautrot, after setting fire to the temple, would have robbed it also. In short, he was a fool, but a vicious fool as well.

If M. de Camors, at the moment of leaving his luxurious study that evening, had had the bad taste to turn and apply his eye to the keyhole, he would have seen something greatly to astonish even him.

He would have seen this “honorable man” approach a beautiful Italian cabinet inlaid with ivory, turn over the papers in the drawers, and finally open in the most natural manner a very complicated lock, the key of which the Count at that moment had in his pocket.

It was after this search that M. Vautrot repaired with his volume of Faust to the boudoir of the young Countess, at whose feet we have already left him too long.

CHAPTER XVII

LIGHTNING FROM A CLEAR SKY

Madame de Camors had closed her eyes to conceal her tears. She opened them at the instant Vautrot seized her hand and called her “Poor angel!”

Seeing the man on his knees, she could not comprehend it, and only exclaimed, simply:

“Are you mad, Vautrot?”

“Yes, I am mad!” Vautrot threw his hair back with a romantic gesture common to him, and, as he believed, to the poets—“Yes, I am mad with love and with pity, for I see your sufferings, pure and noble victim!”

The Countess only stared in blank astonishment.

“Repose yourself with confidence,” he continued, “on a heart that will be devoted to you until death—a heart into which your tears now penetrate to its most sacred depths!”

The Countess did not wish her tears to penetrate to such a distance, so she dried them.

A man on his knees before a woman he adores must appear to her either sublime or ridiculous. Unfortunately, the attitude of Vautrot, at once theatrical and awkward, did not seem sublime to the Countess. To her lively imagination it was irresistibly ludicrous. A bright gleam of amusement illumined her charming countenance; she bit her lip to conceal it, but it shone out of her eyes nevertheless.

A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror. Otherwise, like Vautrot, he exposes himself to be laughed at.

“Rise, my good Vautrot,” the Countess said, gravely. “This book has evidently bewildered you. Go and take some rest and we will forget this; only you must never forget yourself again in this manner.”



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Vautrot rose. He was livid.

"Madame la Comtesse," he said, bitterly, "the love of a great heart never can be an offence. Mine at least would have been sincere; mine would have been faithful: mine would not have been an infamous snare!"

The emphasis of these words displayed so evident an intention, the countenance of the young woman changed immediately. She moved uneasily on her fauteuil.

"What do you mean, Monsieur Vautrot?"

"Nothing, Madame, which you do not know, I think," he replied, meaningly.

She rose.

"You shall explain your meaning immediately to me, Monsieur!" she exclaimed; "or later, to my husband."

"But your sadness, your tears," cried the secretary, in a tone of admirable sincerity—"these made me sure you were not ignorant of it!"

"Of what? You hesitate! Speak, man!"

"I am not a wretch! I love you and pity you!—that is all;" and Vautrot sighed deeply.

"And why do you pity me?" She spoke haughtily; and though Vautrot had never suspected this imperiousness of manner or of language, he reflected hurriedly on the point at which he had arrived. More sure than ever of success, after a moment he took from his pocket a folded letter. It was one with which he had provided himself to confirm the suspicions of the Countess, now awakened for the first time.

In profound silence he unfolded and handed it to her. She hesitated a moment, then seized it. A single glance recognized the writing, for she had often exchanged notes with the Marquise de Campvallon.

Words of the most burning passion terminated thus:

"—Always a little jealous of Mary; half vexed at having given her to you. For—she is pretty and—but I! I am beautiful, am I not, my beloved?—and, above all, I adore you!"

At the first word the Countess became fearfully pale. Finishing, she uttered a deep groan; then she reread the letter and returned it to Vautrot, as if unconscious of what she was doing.

For a few seconds she remained motionless—petrified—her eyes fixed on vacancy. A world seemed rolling down and crushing her heart.

Suddenly she turned, passed with rapid steps into her boudoir; and Vautrot heard the sound of opening and shutting drawers. A moment after she reappeared with bonnet and cloak, and crossed the boudoir with the same strong and rapid step.

Vautrot, greatly terrified, rushed to stop her.

“Madame!” he cried, throwing himself before her.

She waved him aside with an imperious gesture of her hand; he trembled and obeyed, and she left the boudoir. A moment later she was in the Avenue des Champs Elysees, going toward Paris.

It was now near midnight; cold, damp April weather, with the rain falling in great drops. The few pedestrians still on the broad pavement turned to follow with their eyes this majestic young woman, whose gait seemed hastened by some errand of life or death.

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But in Paris nothing is surprising, for people witness all manner of things there. Therefore the strange appearance of Madame de Camors did not excite any extraordinary attention. A few men smiled and nodded; others threw a few words of raillery at her—both were unheeded alike. She traversed the Place de la Concorde with the same convulsive haste, and passed toward the bridge. Arriving on it, the sound of the swollen Seine rushing under the arches and against the pillars, caught her ear; she stopped, leaned against the parapet, and gazed into the angry water; then bowing her head she uttered a deep sigh, and resumed her rapid walk.

In the Rue Vanneau she stopped before a brilliantly lighted mansion, isolated from the adjoining houses by a garden wall. It was the dwelling of the Marquise de Campvallon: Arrived there, the unfortunate child knew not what to do, nor even why she had come. She had some vague design of assuring herself palpably of her misfortune; to touch it with her finger; or perhaps to find some reason, some pretext to doubt it.

She dropped down on a stone bench against the garden wall, and hid her face in both her hands, vainly striving to think. It was past midnight. The streets were deserted: a shower of rain was falling over Paris, and she was chilled to numbness.

A sergent-de-ville passed, enveloped in his cape. He turned and stared at the young woman; then took her roughly by the arm.

“What are you doing here?” he said, brutally.

She looked up at him with wondering eyes.

“I do not know myself,” she answered.

The man looked more closely at her, discovered through all her confusion a nameless refinement and the subtle perfume of purity. He took pity on her.

“But, Madame, you can not stay here,” he rejoined in a softer voice.

“No?”

“You must have some great sorrow?”

“Very great.”

“What is your name?”

“The Comtesse de Camors,” she said, simply.

The man looked bewildered.

“Will you tell me where you live, Madame?”

She gave the address with perfect simplicity and perfect indifference. She seemed to be thinking nothing of what she was saying. The man took a few steps, then stopped and listened to the sound of wheels approaching. The carriage was empty. He stopped it, opened the door, and requested the Countess to get in. She did so quietly, and he placed himself beside the driver.

The Comte de Camors had just reached his house and heard with surprise, from the lips of his wife’s maid, the details of the Countess’s mysterious disappearance, when the bell rang violently.

He rushed out and met his wife on the stairs. She had somewhat recovered her calmness on the road, and as he interrogated her with a searching glance, she made a ghastly effort to smile.

“I was slightly ill and went out a little,” she said. “I do not know the streets and lost my way.”

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Notwithstanding the improbability of the explanation, he did not hesitate. He murmured a few soft words of reproach and placed her in the hands of her maid, who removed her wet garments.

During that time he called the sergent-de-ville, who remained in the vestibule, and closely interrogated him. On learning in what street and what precise spot he had found the Countess, her husband knew at once and fully the whole truth.

He went directly to his wife. She had retired and was trembling in every limb. One of her hands was resting outside the coverlet. He rushed to take it, but she withdrew it gently, with sad and resolute dignity.

The simple gesture told him they were separated forever.

By a tacit agreement, arranged by her and as tacitly accepted by him, Madame de Camors became virtually a widow.

He remained for some seconds immovable, his expression lost in the shadow of the bed-hangings; then walked slowly across the chamber. The idea of lying to defend himself never occurred to him.

His line of conduct was already arranged—calmly, methodically. But two blue circles had sunk around his eyes, and his face wore a waxen pallor. His hands, joined behind his back, were clenched; and the ring he wore sparkled with their tremulous movement. At intervals he seemed to cease breathing, as he listened to the chattering teeth of his young wife.

After half an hour he approached the bed.

“Marie!” he said in a low voice. She turned upon him her eyes gleaming with fever.

“Marie, I am ignorant of what you know, and I shall not ask,” he continued. “I have been very criminal toward you, but perhaps less so than you think. Terrible circumstances bound me with iron bands. Fate ruled me! But I seek no palliation. Judge me as severely as you wish; but I beg of you to calm yourself—preserve yourself! You spoke to me this morning of your presentiments—of your maternal hopes. Attach yourself to those thoughts, and you will always be mistress of your life. As for myself, I shall be whatever you will—a stranger or a friend. But now I feel that my presence makes you ill. I would leave you for the present, but not alone. Do you wish Madame Jaubert to come to you tonight?”

“Yes!” she murmured, faintly.

“I shall go for her; but it is not necessary to tell you that there are confidences one must reserve even from one’s dearest friends.”

"Except a mother?" She murmured the question with a supplicating agony very painful to see.

He grew still paler. After an instant, "Except a mother!" he said. "Be it so!"

She turned her face and buried it in the pillow.

"Your mother arrives to-morrow, does she not?" She made an affirmative motion of her head. "You can make your arrangements with her. I shall accept everything."

"Thank you," she replied, feebly.

He left the room and went to find Madame Jaubert, whom he awakened, and briefly told her that his wife had been seized with a severe nervous attack—the effect of a chill. The amiable little woman ran hastily to her friend and spent the night with her.

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But she was not the dupe of the explanation Camors had given her. Women quickly understand one another in their grief. Nevertheless she asked no confidences and received none; but her tenderness to her friend redoubled. During the silence of that terrible night, the only service she could render her was to make her weep.

Nor did those laggard hours pass less bitterly for M. de Camors. He tried to take no rest, but walked up and down his apartment until daylight in a sort of frenzy. The distress of this poor child wounded him to the heart. The souvenirs of the past rose before him and passed in sad procession. Then the morrow would show him the crushed daughter with her mother—and such a mother! Mortally stricken in all her best illusions, in all her dearest beliefs, in all connected with the happiness of life!

He found that he still had in his heart lively feelings of pity; still some remorse in his conscience.

This weakness irritated him, and he denounced it to himself. Who had betrayed him? This question agitated him to an equal degree; but from the first instant he had not been deceived in this matter.

The sudden grief and half-crazed conviction of his wife, her despairing attitude and her silence, could only be explained by strong assurance and certain revelation. After turning the matter over and over in his own mind, he arrived at the conclusion that nothing could have thrown such clear light into his life save the letters of Madame de Campvallon.

He never wrote the Marquise, but could not prevent her writing to him; for to her, as to all women, love without letters was incomplete.

But the fault of the Count—inexcusable in a man of his tact—was in preserving these letters. No one, however, is perfect, and he was an artist. He delighted in these the ‘chefs-d’oeuvre’ of passionate eloquence, was proud of inspiring them, and could not make up his mind to burn or destroy them. He examined at once the secret drawer where he had concealed them and, by certain signs, discovered the lock had been tampered with. Nevertheless no letter was missing; the arrangement of them alone had been disturbed.

His suspicions at once reverted to Vautrot, whose scruples he suspected were slight; and in the morning they were confirmed beyond doubt by a letter from the secretary. In fact Vautrot, after passing on his part a most wretched night, did not feel his nerves equal in the morning to meeting the reception the Count possibly had in waiting for him. His letter was skilfully penned to put suspicion to sleep if it had not been fully roused, and if the Countess had not betrayed him.

It announced his acceptance of a lucrative situation suddenly offered him in a commercial house in London. He was obliged to decide at once, and to sail that same morning for fear of losing an opportunity which could not occur again. It concluded with expressions of the liveliest gratitude and regret.



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Camors could not reach his secretary to strangle him; so he resolved to pay him. He not only sent him all arrears of salary, but a large sum in addition as a testimonial of his sympathy and good wishes.

This, however, was a simple precaution; for the Count apprehended nothing more from the venomous reptile so far beneath him, after he had once shaken it off. Seeing him deprived of the only weapon he could use against him, he felt safe. Besides, he had lost the only interest he could desire to subserve, for he knew M. Vautrot had done him the compliment of courting his Wife.

And he really esteemed him a little less low, after discovering this gentlemanly taste!

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE GLEAM OF HOPE

It required on the part of M. de Camors, this morning, an exertion of all his courage to perform his duty as a gentleman in going to receive Madame de Tecle at the station. But courage had been for some time past his sole remaining virtue; and this at least he sought never to lose. He received, then, most gracefully his mother-in-law, robed in her mourning attire. She was surprised at not seeing her daughter with him. He informed her that she had been a little indisposed since the preceding evening. Notwithstanding the precautions he took in his language and by his smile, he could not prevent Madame de Tecle from feeling a lively alarm.

He did not pretend, however, entirely to reassure her. Under his reserved and measured replies, she felt the presentiment of some disaster. After first pressing him with many questions, she kept silent during the rest of the drive.

The young Countess, to spare her mother the first shock, had quitted her bed; and the poor child had even put a little rouge on her pale cheeks. M. de Camors himself opened for Madame de Tecle the door of her daughter's chamber, and then withdrew.

The young woman raised herself with difficulty from her couch, and her mother took her in her arms.

All that passed between them at first was a silent interchange of mutual caresses. Then the mother seated herself near her daughter, drew her head on her bosom, and looked into the depths of her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she said, sadly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing hopeless! only you must love your little Mary more than ever. Will you not?"

“Yes; but why?”

“I must not worry you; and I must not wrong myself either—you know why!”

“Yes; but I implore you, my darling, to tell me.”

“Very well; I will tell you everything; but, mother, you must be brave as I am.”

She buried her head lower still on her mother’s breast, and recounted to her, in a low voice, without looking up once, the terrible revelation which had been made to her, and which her husband’s avowal had confirmed.

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Madame de Tecle did not once interrupt her during this cruel recital. She only imprinted a kiss on her hair from time to time. The young Countess, who did not dare to raise her eyes to her, as if she were ashamed of another's crime, might have imagined that she had exaggerated the gravity of her misfortune, since her mother had received the confidence with so much calmness. But the calmness of Madame de Tecle at this terrible moment was that of the martyrs; for all that could have been suffered by the Christians under the claws of the tiger, or on the rack of the torturer, this mother was suffering at the hands of her best-beloved daughter. Her beautiful pale face—her large eyes upturned to heaven, like those that artists give to the pure victims kneeling in the Roman circus—seemed to ask God whether He really had any consolation for such torture.

When she had heard all, she summoned strength to smile at her daughter, who at last looked up to her with an expression of timid uncertainty—embracing her more tightly still.

"Well, my darling," said she, at last, "it is a great affliction, it is true. You are right, notwithstanding; there is nothing to despair of."

"Do you really believe so?"

"Certainly. There is some inconceivable mystery under all this; but be assured that the evil is not so terrible as it appears."

"My poor mother! but he has acknowledged it?"

"I am better pleased that he has acknowledged it. That proves he has yet some pride, and that some good is left in his soul. Then, too, he feels very much afflicted—he suffers as much as we. Think of that. Let us think of the future, my darling."

They clasped each other's hands, and smiled at each other to restrain the tears which filled the eyes of both. After a few minutes—"I wish much, my child," said Madame de Tecle, "to repose for half an hour; and then also I wish to arrange my toilet."

"I will conduct you to your chamber. Oh, I can walk! I feel a great deal better."

Madame de Camors took her mother's arm and conducted her as far as the door of the chamber prepared for her. On the threshold she left her.

"Be sensible," said Madame de Tecle, turning and giving her another smile.

"And you also," said the young woman, whose voice failed her.

Madame de Tecle, as soon as the door was closed, raised her clasped hands toward heaven; then, falling on her knees before the bed, she buried her head in it, and wept despairingly.

The library of M. de Camors was contiguous to this chamber. He had been walking with long strides up and down this corridor, expecting every moment to see Madame de Tecle enter. As the time passed, he sat himself down and tried to read, but his thoughts wandered. His ear eagerly caught, against his will, the slightest sounds in the house. If a foot seemed approaching him, he rose suddenly and tried to compose his countenance. When the door

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of the neighboring chamber was opened, his agony was redoubled. He distinguished the whispering of the two voices; then, an instant after, the dull fall of Madame de Tecle upon the carpet; then her despairing sobs. M. de Camors threw from him violently the book which he was forcing himself to read, and, placing his elbows on the bureau which was before him, held, for a long time, his pale brow tightened in his contracted hands. When the sound of sobs abated little by little, and then ceased, he breathed freer. About midday he received this note:

"If you will permit me to take my daughter to the country for a few days, I shall be grateful to you.

"Elisede Tecle."

He returned immediately this simple reply:

"You can do nothing of which I do not approve to-day and always.
Camors."

Madame de Tecle, in fact, having consulted the inclination and the strength of her daughter, had determined to remove her without delay, if possible, from the impressions of the spot where she had suffered so severely from the presence of her husband, and from the unfortunate embarrassment of their situation. She desired also to meditate in solitude, in order to decide what course to take under such unexampled circumstances. Finally, she had not the courage to see M. de Camors again—if she ever could see him again—until some time had elapsed. It was not without anxiety that she awaited the reply of the Count to the request she had addressed him.

In the midst of the troubled confusion of her ideas, she believed him capable of almost anything; and she feared everything from him. The Count's note reassured her. She hastened to read it to her daughter; and both of them, like two poor lost creatures who cling to the smallest twig, remarked with pleasure the tone of respectful abandonment with which he had reposed their destinies in their own hands. He spent his whole day at the session of the Corps Legislatif; and when he returned, they had departed.

Madame de Camors woke up the next morning in the chamber where her girlhood had passed. The birds of spring were singing under her windows in the old ancestral gardens. As she recognized these friendly voices, so familiar to her infancy, her heart melted; but several hours' sleep had restored to her her natural courage. She banished the thoughts which had weakened her, rose, and went to surprise her mother at her first waking. Soon after, both of them were walking together on the terrace of lime-trees. It was near the end of April; the young, scented verdure spread itself out beneath the sunbeams; buzzing flies already swarmed in the half-opened roses, in the blue

pyramids of lilacs, and in the clusters of pink clover. After a few turns made in silence in the midst of this fresh and enchanting scene, the young Countess, seeing her mother absorbed in reverie, took her hand.

“Mother,” she said, “do not be sad. Here we are as formerly—both of us in our little nook. We shall be happy.”

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The mother looked at her, took her head and kissed her fervently on the forehead.

“You are an angel!” she said.

It must be confessed that their uncle, Des Rameures, notwithstanding the tender affection he showed them, was rather in the way. He never had liked Camors; he had accepted him as a nephew as he had accepted him for a deputy—with more of resignation than enthusiasm. His antipathy was only too well justified by the event; but it was necessary to keep him in ignorance of it. He was an excellent man; but rough and blunt. The conduct of Camors, if he had but suspected it, would surely have urged him to some irreparable quarrel. Therefore Madame de Tecle and her daughter, in his presence, were compelled to make only half utterances, and maintain great reserve—as much as if he had been a stranger. This painful restraint would have become insupportable had not the young Countess’s health, day by day, assumed a less doubtful character, and furnished them with excuses for their preoccupation, their disquiet, and their retired life.

Madame de Tecle, who reproached herself with the misfortunes of her daughter, as her own work, and who condemned herself with an unspeakable bitterness, did not cease to search, in the midst of those ruins of the past and of the present, some reparation, some refuge for the future. The first idea which presented itself to her imagination had been to separate absolutely, and at any cost, the Countess from her husband. Under the first shock of fright which the duplicity of Camors had inflicted upon her, she could not dwell without horror on the thought of replacing her child at the side of such a man. But this separation—supposing they could obtain it, through the consent of M. de Camors, or the authority of the law—would give to the public a secret scandal, and might entail redoubled catastrophes. Were it not for these consequences she would, at least, have dug between Madame de Camors and her husband an eternal abyss. Madame de Tecle did not desire this. By force of reflection she had finally seen through the character of M. de Camors in one day—not probably more favorably, but more truly. Madame de Tecle, although a stranger to all wickedness, knew the world and knew life, and her penetrating intelligence divined yet more than she knew certainly. She then very nearly understood what species of moral monster M. de Camors was. Such as she understood him, she hoped something from him still. However, the condition of the Countess offered her some consolation in the future, which she ought not to risk depriving herself of; and God might permit that this pledge of this unfortunate union might some day reunite the severed ties.

Madame de Tecle, in communicating her reflections, her hopes, and her fears to her daughter, added: “My poor child, I have almost lost the right to give you counsel; but I tell you, were it myself I should act thus.”

“Very well, mother, I shall do so,” replied the young woman.

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“Reflect well on it first, for the situation which you are about to accept will have much bitterness in it; but we have only a choice of evils.”

At the close of this conversation, and eight days after their arrival in the country, Madame de Tecle wrote M. de Camors a letter, which she read to her daughter, who approved it.

“I understood you to say, that you would restore to your wife her liberty if she wished to resume it. She neither wishes, nor could she accept it. Her first duty is to the child which will bear your name. It does not depend on her to keep this name stainless. She prays you, then, to reserve for her a place in your house. You need not fear any trouble or any reproach from her. She and I know how to suffer in silence. Nevertheless, I supplicate you to be true to her—to spare her. Will you leave her yet a few days in peace, then recall, or come for her?”

This letter touched M. de Camors deeply. Impassive as he was, it can easily be imagined that after the departure of his wife he had not enjoyed perfect ease of mind. Uncertainty is the worst of all evils, because everything may be apprehended. Deprived entirely of all news for eight days, there was no possible catastrophe he did not fancy floating over his head. He had the haughty courage to conceal from Madame de Campvallon the event that had occurred in his house, and to leave her undisturbed while he himself was sleepless for many nights. It was by such efforts of energy and of indomitable pride that this strange man preserved within his own consciousness a proud self-esteem. The letter of Madame de Tecle came to him like a deliverance. He sent the following brief reply:

“I accept your decision with gratitude and respect. The resolution of your daughter is generous. I have yet enough of generosity left myself to comprehend this. I am forever, whether you wish it or not, her friend and yours.

“Camors.”

A week later, having taken the precaution of announcing his intention, he arrived one evening at Madame de Tecle’s.

His young wife kept her chamber. They had taken care to have no witnesses, but their meeting was less painful and less embarrassing than they apprehended.

Madame de Tecle and her daughter found in his courteous reply a gleam of nobleness which inspired them with a shadow of confidence. Above all, they were proud, and more averse to noisy scenes than women usually are. They received him coldly, then, but calmly. On his part, he displayed toward them in his looks and language a subdued seriousness and sadness, which did not lack either dignity or grace.



The conversation having dwelt for some time on the health of the Countess, turned on current news, on local incidents, and took, little by little, an easy and ordinary tone. M. de Camors, under the pretext of slight fatigue, retired as he had entered—saluting both the ladies, but without attempting to take their hands. Thus was inaugurated, between Madame de Camors and her husband, the new, singular relation which should hereafter be the only tie in their common life.

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The world might easily be silenced, because M. de Camors never had been very demonstrative in public toward his wife, and his courteous but reserved manner toward her did not vary from his habitual demeanor. He remained two days at Reuilly.

Madame de Tecle vainly waited for these two days for a slight explanation, which she did not wish to demand, but which she hoped for.

What were the terrible circumstances which had overruled the will of M. de Camors, to the point of making him forget the most sacred sentiments? When her thoughts plunged into this dread mystery, they never approached the truth. M. de Camors might have committed this base action under the menace of some great danger to save the fortune, the honor, probably the life of Madame de Campvallon. This, though a poor excuse in the mother's eyes, still was an extenuation. Probably also he had in his heart, while marrying her daughter, the resolution to break off this fatal liaison, which he had again resumed against his will, as often happens. On all these painful points she dwelt after the departure of M. de Camors, as she had previous to his arrival; confined to her own conjectures, when she suggested to her daughter the most consolatory appearances. It was agreed upon that Madame de Camors should remain in the country until her health was reestablished: only her husband expressed the desire that she should reside ordinarily on his estate at Reuilly, the chateau on which had recently been restored with the greatest taste.

Madame de Tecle felt the propriety of this arrangement. She herself abandoned the old habitation of the Comte de Tecle, to install herself near her daughter in the modest chateau which belonged to the maternal ancestors of M. de Camors, and which we have already described in another place, with its solemn avenue, its balustrades of granite, its labyrinths of hornbeams and the black fishpond, shaded with poplars.

Both dwelt there in the midst of their sweetest and most pleasant souvenirs; for this little chateau, so long deserted—the neglected woods which surrounded it the melancholy piece of water—the solitary nymph all this had been their particular domain, the favorite framework of their reveries, the legend of their infancy, the poetry of their youth. It was doubtless a great grief to revisit again, with tearful eyes and wounded hearts and heads bowed by the storms of life, the familiar paths where they once knew happiness and peace. But, nevertheless, all these dear confidants of past joys, of blasted hopes, of vanished dreams—if they are mournful witnesses they are also friends. We love them; and they seem to love us. Thus these two poor women, straying amid these woods, these waters, these solitudes, bearing with them their incurable wounds, fancied they heard voices which pitied them and breathed a healing sympathy. The most cruel trial reserved to Madame de Camors in the life which she had the courage and judgment to adopt, was assuredly the duty of again seeing the Marquise de Campvallon, and preserving with her such relations as might blind the eyes of the General and of the world.

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She resigned herself even to this; but she desired to defer as long as possible the pain of such a meeting. Her health supplied her with a natural excuse for not going, during that summer, to Campvallon, and also for keeping herself confined to her own room the day the Marquise visited Reuilly, accompanied by the General.

Madame de Tecle received her with her usual kindness. Madame de Campvallon, whom M. de Camors had already warned, did not trouble herself much; for the best women, like the worst, excel in comedy, and everything passed off without the General having conceived the shadow of a suspicion.

The fine season had passed. M. de Camors had visited the country several times, strengthening at every interview the new tone of his relations with his wife. He remained at Reuilly, as was his custom, during the month of August; and under the pretext of the health of the Countess, did not multiply his visits that year to Campvallon. On his return to Paris, he resumed his old habits, and also his careless egotism, for he recovered little by little from the blow he had received. He began to forget his sufferings and those of his wife; and even to felicitate himself secretly on the turn that chance had given to her situation. He had obtained the advantage and had no longer any annoyance. His wife had been enlightened, and he no longer deceived her—which was a comfortable thing for him. As for her, she would soon be a mother, she would have a plaything, a consolation; and he designed redoubling his attentions and regards to her.

She would be happy, or nearly so; as much so as two thirds of the women in the world.

Everything was for the best. He gave anew the reins to his car and launched himself afresh on his brilliant career—proud of his royal mistress, and foreseeing in the distance, to crown his life, the triumphs of ambition and power. Pleading various doubtful engagements, he went to Reuilly only once during the autumn; but he wrote frequently, and Madame de Tecle sent him in return brief accounts of his wife's health.

One morning toward the close of November, he received a despatch which made him understand, in telegraphic style, that his presence was immediately required at Reuilly, if he wished to be present at the birth of his son.

Whenever social duties or courtesy were required of M. de Camors, he never hesitated. Seeing he had not a moment to spare if he wished to catch the train which left that morning, he jumped into a cab and drove to the station. His servant would join him the next morning.

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The station at Reuilly was several miles distant from the house. In the confusion no arrangement had been made to receive him on his arrival, and he was obliged to content himself with making the intermediate journey in a heavy country-wagon. The bad condition of the roads was a new obstacle, and it was three o'clock in the morning when the Count, impatient and travel-worn, jumped out of the little cart before the railings of his avenue. He strode toward the house under the dark and silent dome of the tufted elms. He was in the middle of the avenue when a sharp cry rent the air. His heart bounded in his breast: he suddenly stopped and listened attentively. The cry echoed through the stillness of the night. One would have deemed it the despairing shriek of a human being under the knife of a murderer.

These dolorous sounds gradually ceasing, he continued his walk with greater haste, and only heard the hollow and muffled sound of his own beating heart. At the moment he saw the lights of the chateau, another agonized cry, more shrill and alarming than the first, arose.

This time Camors stopped. Notwithstanding that the natural explanation of these agonized cries presented itself to his mind, he was troubled.

It is not unusual that men like him, accustomed to a purely artificial life, feel a strange surprise when one of the simplest laws of nature presents itself all at once before them with a violence as imperious and irresistible as a divine law. Camors soon reached the house, and receiving some information from the servants, notified Madame de Tecle of his arrival. Madame de Tecle immediately descended from her daughter's room. On seeing her convulsed features and streaming eyes, "Are you alarmed?" Camors asked, quickly.

"Alarmed? No," she replied; "but she suffers much, and it is very long."

"Can I see her?"

There was a moment's silence.

Madame de Tecle, whose forehead was contracted, lowered her eyes, then raised them. "If you insist on it," she said.

"I insist on nothing! If you believe my presence would do her harm—" The voice of Camors was not as steady as usual.

"I am afraid," replied Madame de Tecle, "that it would agitate her greatly; and if you will have confidence in me, I shall be much obliged to you."

"But at least," said Camors, "she might probably be glad to know that I have come, and that I am here—that I have not abandoned her."

“I shall tell her.”

“It is well.” He saluted Madame de Tecle with a slight movement of his head, and turned away immediately.

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He entered the garden at the back of the house, and walked abstractedly from alley to alley. We know that generally the role of men in the situation in which M. de Camors at this moment was placed is not very easy or very glorious; but the common annoyance of this position was particularly aggravated to him by painful reflections. Not only was his assistance not needed, but it was repelled; not only was he far from a support on the contrary, he was but an additional danger and sorrow. In this thought was a bitterness which he keenly felt. His native generosity, his humanity, shuddered as he heard the terrible cries and accents of distress which succeeded each other without intermission. He passed some heavy hours in the damp garden this cold night, and the chilly morning which succeeded it. Madame de Tecle came frequently to give him the news. Near eight o'clock he saw her approach him with a grave and tranquil air.

"Monsieur," she said, "it is a boy."

"I thank you. How is she?"

"Well. I shall request you to go and see her shortly."

Half an hour later she reappeared on the threshold of the vestibule, and called:

"Monsieur de Camors!" and when he approached her, she added, with an emotion which made her lips tremble:

"She has been uneasy for some time past. She is afraid that you have kept terms with her in order to take the child. If ever you have such a thought—not now, Monsieur. Have you?"

"You are severe, Madame," he replied in a hoarse voice.

She breathed a sigh.

"Come!" she said, and led the way upstairs. She opened the door of the chamber and permitted him to enter it alone.

His first glance caught the eyes of his young wife fixed upon him. She was half sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, and whiter than the curtains whose shadow enveloped her. She held clasped to her breast her sleeping infant, which was already covered, like its mother, with lace and pink ribbons. From the depths of this nest she fixed on her husband her large eyes, sparkling with a kind of savage light—an expression in which the sentiment of triumph was blended with one of profound terror. He stopped within a few feet of the bed, and saluted her with his most winning smile.

"I have pitied you very much, Marie," he said.

"I thank you!" she replied, in a voice as feeble as a sigh.

She continued to regard him with the same suppliant and affrighted air.

“Are you a little happier now?” he continued.

The glittering eye of the young woman was fastened on the calm face of her infant. Then turning toward Camors:

“You will not take him from me?”

“Never!” he replied.

As he pronounced these words his eyes were suddenly dimmed, and he was astonished himself to feel a tear trickling down his cheek. He experienced a singular feeling, he bent over, seized the folds of the sheet, raised them to his lips, rose immediately and left the room.

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In this terrible struggle, too often victorious against nature and truth, the man was for once vanquished. But it would be idle to imagine that a character of this temperament and of this obduracy could transform itself, or could be materially modified under the stroke of a few transitory emotions, or of a few nervous shocks. M. de Camors rallied quickly from his weakness, if even he did not repent it. He spent eight days at Reuilly, remarking in the countenance of Madame de Tecle and in her manner toward him, more ease than formerly.

On his return to Paris, with thoughtful care he made some changes in the interior arrangement of his mansion. This was to prepare for the Countess and her son, who were to join him a few weeks later, larger and more comfortable apartments, in which they were to be installed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REPTILE TURNS TO STING

When Madame de Camors came to Paris and entered the home of her husband, she there experienced the painful impressions of the past, and the sombre preoccupations of the future; but she brought with her, although in a fragile form, a powerful consolation.

Assailed by grief, and ever menaced by new emotion she was obliged to renounce the nursing of her child; but, nevertheless, she never left him, for she was jealous even of his nurse. She at least wished to be loved by him. She loved him with an infinite passion. She loved him because he was her own son and of her blood. He was the price of her misfortune—of her pain. She loved him because he was her only hope of human happiness hereafter. She loved him because she found him as beautiful as the day. And it was true he was so; for he resembled his father—and she loved him also on that account. She tried to concentrate her heart and all her thoughts on this dear creature, and at first she thought she had succeeded. She was surprised at herself, at her own tranquillity, when she saw Madame de Campvallon; for her lively imagination had exhausted, in advance, all the sadness which her new existence could contain; but when she had lost the kind of torpor into which excessive suffering had plunged her—when her maternal sensations were a little quieted by custom, her woman's heart recovered itself in the mother's. She could not prevent herself from renewing her passionate interest in her graceful though terrible husband.

Madame de Tecle went to pass two months with her daughter in Paris, and then returned to the country.

Madame de Camors wrote to her, in the beginning of the following spring, a letter which gave her an exact idea of the sentiments of the young woman at the time, and of the

turn her domestic life had taken. After a long and touching detail of the health and beauty of her son Robert, she added:

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"His father is always to me what you have seen him. He spares me everything he can spare me, but evidently the fatality he has obeyed continues under the same form. Notwithstanding, I do not despair of the future, my beloved mother. Since I saw that tear in his eye, confidence has entered my poor heart. Be assured, my adored mother, that he will love me one day, if it is only through our child, whom he begins quietly to love without himself perceiving it. At first, as you remember, this infant was no more to him than I was. When he surprised him on my knee, he would give him a cold kiss, say, 'Good-morning, Monsieur,' and withdraw. It is just one month—I have forgotten the date—it was, 'Good-morning, my son—how pretty you are!' You see the progress; and do you know, finally, what passed yesterday? I entered Robert's room noiselessly; the door was open—what did I behold, my mother! Monsieur de Camors, with his head resting on the pillow of the cradle, and laughing at this little creature, who smiled back at him! I assure you, he blushed and excused himself: 'The door was open,' he said, 'and I came in.' I assured him that he had done nothing wrong." Monsieur de Camors is very odd sometimes. He occasionally passes the limits which were agreed upon as necessary. He is not only polite, but takes great trouble. Alas! once these courtesies would have fallen upon my heart like roses from heaven—now they annoy me a little. Last evening, for example, I sat down, as is my custom, at my piano after dinner, he reading a journal at the chimney-corner—his usual hour for going out passed. Behold me, much surprised. I threw a furtive glance, between two bars of music, at him: he was not reading, he was not sleeping—he was dreaming. 'Is there anything new in the Journal?'—'No, no; nothing at all.' Another two or three bars of music, and I entered my son's room. He was in bed and asleep. I devoured him with kisses and returned—Monsieur de Camors was still there. And now, surprise after surprise: 'Have you heard from your mother? What does she say? Have you seen Madame Jaubert? Have you read this review?' Just like one who sought to open a conversation. Once I would willingly have paid with my blood for one of these evenings, and now he offers them to me, when I know not what to do with them. Notwithstanding I remember the advice of my mother, I do not wish to discourage these symptoms. I adopt a festive manner. I light four extra waxlights. I try to be amiable without being coquettish; for coquetry here would be shameful—would it not, my dear mother? Finally, we chatted together; he sang two airs to the piano; I played two others; he painted the design of a little Russian costume for Robert to wear next year; then talked politics to me. This enchanted me. He explained to me his situation in the Chamber. Midnight arrived; I became remarkably silent; he rose: 'May I press your hand in friendship?'—"



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Mon Dieu! yes.'—'Good-night, Marie.'—' Goodnight.' Yes, my mother, I read your thoughts. There is danger here! but you have shown it to me; and I believe also, I should have perceived it by myself. Do not fear, then. I shall be happy at his good inclinations, and shall encourage them to the best of my power; but I shall not be in haste to perceive a return, on his part, toward virtue and myself. I see here in society arrangements which revolt me. In the midst of my misfortune I remain pure and proud; but I should fall into the deepest contempt of myself if I should ever permit myself to be a plaything for Monsieur de Camors. A man so fallen does not raise himself in a day. If ever he really returns to me, it will be necessary for me to have much proof. I never have ceased to love him, and probably he doubts it: but he will learn that if this sad love can break my heart it can never abase it; and it is unnecessary to tell my mother that I shall live and die courageously in my widow's robe."There are other symptoms which also strike me. He is more attentive to me when she is present. This may probably be arranged between them, but I doubt it. The other evening we were at the General's. She was waltzing, and Monsieur de Camors, as a rare favor, came and seated himself at your daughter's side. In passing before us she threw him a look—a flash. I felt the flame. Her blue eyes glared ferociously. He perceived it. I have not assuredly much tenderness for her. She is my most cruel enemy; but if ever she suffers what she has made me suffer—yes, I believe I shall pity her. My mother, I embrace you. I embrace our dear lime- trees. I taste their young leaves as in olden times. Scold me as in old times, and love, above all things, as in old times, your

"Marie."

This wise young woman, matured by misfortune, observed everything saw everything—and exaggerated nothing. She touched, in this letter, on the most delicate points in the household of M. de Camors—and even of his secret thoughts—with accurate justice. For Camors was not at all converted, nor near being so; but it would be belying human nature to attribute to his heart, or that of any other human being, a supernatural impassibility. If the dark and implacable theories which M. de Camors had made the law of his existence could triumph absolutely, this would be true. The trials he had passed through did not reform him, they only staggered him. He did not pursue his paths with the same firmness; he strayed from his programme. He pitied one of his victims, and, as one wrong always entails another, after pitying his wife, he came near loving his child. These two weaknesses had glided into his petrified soul as into a marble fount, and there took root—two imperceptible roots, however. The child occupied him not more than a few moments every day. He thought of him, however, and would return home a little earlier than usual each day than was his habit, secretly

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attracted by the smile of that fresh face. The mother was for him something more. Her sufferings, her youthful heroism had touched him. She became somebody in his eyes. He discovered many merits in her. He perceived she was remarkably well-informed for a woman, and prodigiously so for a French woman. She understood half a word—knew a great deal—and guessed at the remainder. She had, in short, that blending of grace and solidity which gives to the conversation of a woman of cultivated mind an incomparable charm. Habituated from infancy to her mental superiority as to her pretty face, she carried the one as unconsciously as the other. She devoted herself to the care of his household as if she had no idea beyond it. There were domestic details which she would not confide to servants. She followed them into her salons, into her boudoirs, a blue feather-brush in hand, lightly dusting the 'etageres', the 'jardinières', the 'consoles'. She arranged one piece of furniture and removed another, put flowers in a vase—gliding about and singing like a bird in a cage.

Her husband sometimes amused himself in following her with his eye in these household occupations. She reminded him of the princesses one sees in the ballet of the opera, reduced by some change of fortune to a temporary servitude, who dance while putting the house in order.

"How you love order, Marie!" said he to her one day.

"Order" she said, gravely, "is the moral beauty of things."

She emphasized the word things—and, fearing she might be considered pretentious, she blushed.

She was a lovable creature, and it can be understood that she might have many attractions, even for her husband. Yet though he had not for one instant the idea of sacrificing to her the passion that ruled his life, it is certain, however, that his wife pleased him as a charming friend, which she was, and probably as a charming forbidden fruit, which she also was. Two or three years passed without making any sensible change in the relations of the different persons in this history. This was the most brilliant phase and probably the happiest in the life of M. de Camors.

His marriage had doubled his fortune, and his clever speculations augmented it every day. He had increased the retinue of his house in proportion to his new resources. In the region of elegant high life he decidedly held the sceptre. His horses, his equipages, his artistic tastes, even his toilet, set the law.

His liaison with Madame de Campvallou, without being proclaimed, was suspected, and completed his prestige. At the same time his capacity as a political man began to be acknowledged. He had spoken in some recent debate, and his maiden speech was a

triumph. His prosperity was great. It was nevertheless true that M. de Camors did not enjoy it without trouble. Two black spots darkened the sky above his head, and might contain destroying thunder. His life was eternally suspended on a thread.

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Any day General Campvallon might be informed of the intrigue which dishonored him, either through some selfish treason, or through some public rumor, which might begin to spread. Should this ever happen, he knew the General never would submit to it; and he had determined never to defend his life against his outraged friend.

This resolve, firmly decided upon in his secret soul, gave him the last solace to his conscience. All his future destiny was thus at the mercy of an accident most likely to happen. The second cause of his disquietude was the jealous hatred of Madame Campvallon toward the young rival she had herself selected. After jesting freely on this subject at first, the Marquise had, little by little, ceased even to allude to it.

M. de Camors could not misunderstand certain mute symptoms, and was sometimes alarmed at this silent jealousy. Fearing to exasperate this most violent feminine sentiment in so strong a soul, he was compelled day by day to resort to tricks which wounded his pride, and probably his heart also; for his wife, to whom his new conduct was inexplicable, suffered intensely, and he saw it.

One evening in the month of May, 1860, there was a reception at the Hotel Campvallon. The Marquise, before leaving for the country, was making her adieus to a choice group of her friends. Although this fete professed to be but an informal gathering, she had organized it with her usual elegance and taste. A kind of gallery, composed of verdure and of flowers, connected the salon with the conservatory at the other end of the garden.

This evening proved a very painful one to the Comtesse de Camors. Her husband's neglect of her was so marked, his assiduities to the Marquise so persistent, their mutual understanding so apparent, that the young wife felt the pain of her desertion to an almost insupportable degree. She took refuge in the conservatory, and finding herself alone there, she wept.

A few moments later, M. de Camors, not seeing her in the salon, became uneasy. She saw him, as he entered the conservatory, in one of those instantaneous glances by which women contrive to see without looking. She pretended to be examining the flowers, and by a strong effort of will dried her tears. Her husband advanced slowly toward her.

"What a magnificent camellia!" he said to her. "Do you know this variety?"

"Very well," she replied; "this is the camellia that weeps."

He broke off the flowers.

"Marie," he said, "I never have been much addicted to sentimentality, but this flower I shall keep."

She turned upon him her astonished eyes.

“Because I love it,” he added.

The noise of a step made them both turn. It was Madame de Campvallon, who was crossing the conservatory on the arm of a foreign diplomat.

“Pardon me,” she said, smiling; “I have disturbed you! How awkward of me!” and she passed out.

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Madame de Camors suddenly grew very red, and her husband very pale. The diplomat alone did not change color, for he comprehended nothing. The young Countess, under pretext of a headache, which her face did not belie, returned home immediately, promising her husband to send back the carriage for him. Shortly after, the Marquise de Campvallon, obeying a secret sign from M. de Camors, rejoined him in the retired boudoir, which recalled to them both the most culpable incident of their lives. She sat down beside him on the divan with a haughty nonchalance.

"What is it?" she said.

"Why do you watch me?" asked Camors. "It is unworthy of you!"

"Ah! an explanation? a disagreeable thing. It is the first between us—at least let us be quick and complete."

She spoke in a voice of restrained passion—her eyes fixed on her foot, which she twisted in her satin shoe.

"Well, tell the truth," she said. "You are in love with your wife."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Unworthy of you, I repeat."

"What, then, mean these delicate attentions to her?"

"You ordered me to marry her, but not to kill her, I suppose?"

She made a strange movement of her eyebrows, which he did not see, for neither of them looked at the other. After a pause she said:

"She has her son! She has her mother! I have no one but you. Hear me, my friend; do not make me jealous, for when I am so, ideas torment me which terrify even myself. Wait an instant. Since we are on this subject, if you love her, tell me so. You know me—you know I am not fond of petty artifices. Well, I fear so much the sufferings and humiliations of which I have a presentiment, I am so much afraid of myself, that I offer you, and give you, your liberty. I prefer this horrible grief, for it is at least open and noble! It is no snare that I set for you, believe me! Look at me. I seldom weep." The dark blue of her eyes was bathed in tears. "Yes, I am sincere; and I beg of you, if it is so, profit by this moment, for if you let it escape, you never will find it again."

M. de Camors was little prepared for this decided proposal. The idea of breaking off his liaison with the Marquise never had entered his mind. This liaison seemed to him very reconcilable with the sentiments with which his wife could inspire him.

It was at the same time the greatest wickedness and the perpetual danger of his life, but it was also the excitement, the pride, and the magnificent voluptuousness of it. He

shuddered. The idea of losing the love which had cost him so dear exasperated him. He cast a burning glance on this beautiful face, refined and exalted as that of a warring archangel.

“My life is yours,” he said. “How could you have dreamed of breaking ties like ours? How could you have alarmed yourself, or even thought of my feelings toward another? I do what honor and humanity command me—nothing more. As for you—I love you—understand that.”

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"Is it true?" she asked. "It is true! I believe you!"

She took his hand, and gazed at him a moment without speaking—her eye dimmed, her bosom palpitating; then suddenly rising, she said, "My friend, you know I have guests!" and saluting him with a smile, left the boudoir.

This scene, however, left a disagreeable impression on the mind of Camors. He thought of it impatiently the next morning, while trying a horse on the Champs Elysees—when he suddenly found himself face to face with his former secretary, Vautrot. He had never seen this person since the day he had thought proper to give himself his own dismissal.

The Champs Elysees was deserted at this hour. Vautrot could not avoid, as he had probably done more than once, encountering Camors.

Seeing himself recognized he saluted him and stopped, with an uneasy smile on his lips. His worn black coat and doubtful linen showed a poverty unacknowledged but profound. M. de Camors did not notice these details, or his natural generosity would have awakened, and curbed the sudden indignation that took possession of him.

He reined in his horse sharply.

"Ah, is it you, Monsieur Vautrot?" he said. "You have left England then! What are you doing now?"

"I am looking for a situation, Monsieur de Camors," said Vautrot, humbly, who knew his old patron too well not to read clearly in the curl of his moustache the warning of a storm.

"And why," said Camors, "do you not return to your trade of locksmith? You were so skilful at it! The most complicated locks had no secrets for you."

"I do not understand your meaning," murmured Vautrot.

"Droll fellow!" and throwing out these words with an accent of withering scorn, M. de Camors struck Vautrot's shoulder lightly with the end of his riding-whip, and tranquilly passed on at a walk.

Vautrot was truly in search of a place, had he consented to accept one fitted to his talents; but he was, as will be remembered, one of those whose vanity was greater than his merit, and one who loved an office better than work.



CHAPTER XX

THE SECOND ACT OF THE TRAGEDY

Vautrot had at this time fallen into the depth of want and distress, which, if aggravated, would prompt him to evil and even to crime. There are many examples of the extremes to which this kind of intelligence, at once ambitious, grasping, yet impotent, can transport its possessor. Vautrot, in awaiting better times, had relapsed into his old role of hypocrite, in which he had formerly succeeded so well. Only the evening before he had returned to the house of Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and made honorable amends for his philosophical heresies; for he was like the Saxons in the time of Charlemagne, who asked to be baptized every time they wanted new tunics. Madame de la Roche-Jugan had given a kind reception to this sad prodigal son, but she chilled perceptibly on seeing him more discreet than she desired on certain subjects, the mystery of which she had set her heart upon unravelling.

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She was now more preoccupied than ever about the relations which she suspected to exist between M. de Camors and Madame de Campvallou. These relations could not but prove fatal to the hopes she had so long founded on the widowhood of the Marquise and the heritage of the General. The marriage of M. de Camors had for the moment deceived her, but she was one of those pious persons who always think evil, and whose suspicions are soon reawakened. She tried to obtain from Vautrot, who had so long been intimate with her nephew, some explanation of the mystery; but as Vautrot was too prudent to enlighten her, she turned him out of doors.

After his encounter with M. de Camors, he immediately turned his steps toward the Rue St. Dominique, and an hour later Madame de la Roche-Jugan had the pleasure of knowing all that he knew of the liaison between the Count and the Marquise. But we remember that he knew everything. These revelations, though not unexpected, terrified Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who saw her maternal projects destroyed forever. To her bitter feeling at this deception was immediately joined, in this base soul, a sudden thirst for revenge. It was true she had been badly recompensed for her anonymous letter, by which she had previously attempted to open the eyes of the unfortunate General; for from that moment the General, the Marquise, and M. de Camors himself, without an open rupture, let her feel their marks of contempt, which embittered her heart. She never would again expose herself to a similar slight of this kind; but she must assuredly, in the cause of good morals, at once confront the blind with the culpable, and this time with such proofs as would make the blow irresistible. By the mere thought, Madame de la Roche-Jugan had persuaded herself that the new turn events were taking might become favorable to the expectations which had become the fixed idea of her life.

Madame de Campvallou destroyed, M. de Camors set aside, the General would be alone in the world; and it was natural to suppose he would turn to his young relative Sigismund, if only to recognize the far-sighted affection and wounded heart of Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

The General, in fact, had by his marriage contract settled all his property on his wife; but Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had consulted a lawyer on this question, knew that he had the power of alienating his fortune during life, and of stripping his unworthy wife and transferring it to Sigismund.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan did not shrink from the probability—which was most likely—of an encounter between the General and Camors. Every one knows the disdainful intrepidity of women in the matter of duels. She had no scruple, therefore, in engaging Vautrot in the meritorious work she meditated. She secured him by some immediate advantages and by promises; she made him believe the General would recompense him largely. Vautrot, smarting still from the cut of Camors's whip on his shoulder, and ready to kill him with his own hand had he dared, hardly required the additional stimulus of gain to aid his protectress in her vengeance by acting as her instrument.

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He resolved, however, since he had the opportunity, to put himself, once for all, beyond misery and want, by cleverly speculating, through the secret he held, on the great fortune of the General. This secret he had already given to Madame de Camors under the inspiration of another sentiment, but he had then in his hands the proofs, which he now was without.

It was necessary, then, for him to arm himself with new and infallible proofs; but if the intrigue he was required to unmask still existed, he did not despair of detecting something certain, aided by the general knowledge he had of the private habits and ways of Camors. This was the task to which he applied himself from this moment, day and night, with an evil ardor of hate and jealousy. The absolute confidence which the General reposed in his wife and Camors after the latter's marriage with Marie de Tecle, had doubtless allowed them to dispense with much of the mystery and adventure of their intrigue; but that which was ardent, poetic, and theatrical to the Marquise's imagination had not been lost. Love alone was not sufficient for her. She needed danger, scenic effect, and pleasure heightened by terror. Once or twice, in the early time, she was reckless enough to leave her house during the night and to return before day. But she was obliged to renounce these audacious flights, finding them too perilous.

These nocturnal interviews with M. de Camors were rare, and she had usually received him at home. This was their arrangement: An open space, sometimes used as a woodyard, was next the garden of the Hotel Campvallon. The General had purchased a portion of it and had had a cottage erected in the midst of a kitchen-garden, and had placed in it, with his usual kind-heartedness, an old 'sous-officier', named Mesnil, who had served under him in the artillery. This Mesnil enjoyed his master's confidence. He was a kind of forester on the property; he lived in Paris in the winter, but occasionally passed two or three days in the country whenever the General wished to obtain information about the crops. Madame de Campvallon and M. de Camors chose the time of these absences for their dangerous interviews at night. Camors, apprised from within by some understood signal, entered the enclosure surrounding the cottage of Mesnil, and thence proceeded to the garden belonging to the house. Madame de Campvallon always charged herself with the peril that charmed her—with keeping open one of the windows on the ground floor. The Parisian custom of lodging the domestics in the attics gave to this hardihood a sort of security, notwithstanding its being always hazardous. Near the end of May, one of these occasions, always impatiently awaited on both sides, presented itself, and M. de Camors at midnight penetrated into the little garden of the old 'sous-officier'. At the moment when he turned the key in the gate of the enclosure, he thought he heard a slight sound behind him. He turned, cast a rapid glance over the dark space that surrounded him, and thinking himself mistaken, entered. An instant after, the shadow of a man appeared at the angle of a pile of lumber, which was scattered over the carpenter's yard. This shadow remained for some time immovable in front of the windows of the hotel and then plunged again into the darkness.

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The following week M. de Camors was at the club one evening, playing whist with the General. He remarked that the General was not playing his usual game, and saw also imprinted on his features a painful preoccupation.

“Are you in pain, General?” said he, after they had finished their game.

“No, no!” said the General; “I am only annoyed—a tiresome affair between two of my people in the country. I sent Mesnil away this morning to examine into it.”

The General took a few steps, then returned to Camors and took him aside: “My friend,” he said, “I deceived you, just now; I have something on my mind—something very serious. I am even very unhappy!”

“What is the matter?” said Camors, whose heart sank.

“I shall tell you that probably to-morrow. Come, in any case, to see me to-morrow morning. Won’t you?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Thanks! Now I shall go—for I am really not well.”

He clasped his hand more affectionately than usual.

“Adieu, my dear child,” he added, and turned around brusquely to hide the tears which suddenly filled his eyes. M. de Camors experienced for some moments a lively disquietude, but the friendly and tender adieus of the General reassured him that it did not relate to himself. Still he continued astonished and even affected by the emotion of the old man.

Was it not strange? If there was one man in the world whom he loved, or to whom he would have devoted himself, it was this one whom he had mortally wronged.

He had, however, good reason to be uneasy; and was wrong in reassuring himself; for the General in the course of that evening had been informed of the treachery of his wife—at least he had been prepared for it. Only he was still ignorant of the name of her accomplice.

Those who informed him were afraid of encountering the blind and obstinate faith of the General, had they named Camors.

It was probable, also, after what had already occurred, that had they again pronounced that name, the General would have repelled the suspicion as a monstrous impossibility, regretting even the thought.

M. de Camors remained until one o'clock at the club and then went to the Rue Vanneau. He was introduced into the Hotel Campvallon with the customary precautions; and this time we shall follow him there. In traversing the garden, he raised his eyes to the General's window, and saw the soft light of the night-lamp burning behind the blinds.

The Marquise awaited him at the door of her boudoir, which opened on a rotunda at an elevation of a few feet. He kissed her hand, and told her in few words of the General's sadness.

She replied that she had been very uneasy about his health for some days. This explanation seemed natural to M. de Camors, and he followed the Marquise through the dark and silent salon. She held in her hand a candle, the feeble light of which threw on her delicate features a strange pallor. When they passed up the long, echoing staircase, the rustling of her skirt on the steps was the only sound that betrayed her light movement.

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She stopped from time to time, shivering—as if better to taste the dramatic solemnity that surrounded them—turned her blonde head a little to look at Camors; then cast on him her inspiring smile, placed her hand on her heart, as if to say, “I am fearful,” and went on. They reached her chamber, where a dim lamp faintly illumined the sombre magnificence, the sculptured wainscotings, and the heavy draperies.

The flame on the hearth which flickered up at intervals, threw a bright gleam on two or three pictures of the Spanish school, which were the only decorations of this sumptuous, but stern-looking apartment.

The Marquise sank as if terrified on a divan near the chimney, and pushed with her feet two cushions before her, on which Camors half reclined; she then thrust back the thick braids of her hair, and leaned toward her lover.

“Do you love me to-day?” she asked.

The soft breath of her voice was passing over the face of Camors, when the door suddenly opened before them. The General entered. The Marquise and Camors instantly rose to their feet, and standing side by side, motionless, gazed upon him. The General paused near the door. As he saw them a shudder passed over his frame, and his face assumed a livid pallor. For an instant his eye rested on Camors with a stupefied surprise and almost bewilderment; then he raised his arms over his head, and his hands struck together with a sharp sound. At this terrible moment Madame de Campvallion seized the arm of Camors, and threw him a look so profound, supplicating, and tragic, that it alarmed him.

He roughly pushed her from him, crossed his arms, and waited the result.

The General walked slowly toward him. Suddenly his face became inflamed with a purple hue; his lips half opened, as if about to deliver some deadly insult. He advanced rapidly, his hand raised; but after a few steps the old man suddenly stopped, beat the air with both hands, as if seeking some support, then staggered and fell forward, striking his head against the marble mantelpiece, rolled on the carpet, and remained motionless. There was an ominous silence. A stifled cry from M. de Camors broke it. At the same time he threw himself on his knees by the side of the motionless old man, touched first his hand, then his heart. He saw that he was dead. A thin thread of blood trickled down his pale forehead where it had struck the marble; but this was only a slight wound. It was not that which had killed him. It was the treachery of those two beings whom he had loved, and who, he believed, loved him. His heart had been broken by the violence of the surprise, the grief, and the horror.

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One look of Camors told Madame de Campvallion she was a widow. She threw herself on the divan, buried her face in the cushions and sobbed aloud. Camors still stood, his back against the mantelpiece, his eyes fixed, wrapped in his own thoughts. He wished in all sincerity of heart that he could have awakened the dead and restored him to life. He had sworn to deliver himself up to him without defence, if ever the old man demanded it of him for forgotten favors, betrayed friendship, and violated honor. Now he had killed him. If he had not slain him with his own hand, the crime was still there, in its most hideous form. He saw it before him, he inhaled its odor—he breathed its blood. An uneasy glance of the Marquise recalled him to himself and he approached her. They then conversed together in whispers, and he hastily explained to her the line of conduct she should adopt.

She must summon the servants, say the General had been taken suddenly ill, and that on entering her room he had been seized by an apoplectic stroke.

It was with some effort that she understood she was to wait long enough before giving the alarm to give Camors sufficient time to escape; and until then she was to remain in this frightful tete-a-tete, alone with the dead.

He pitied her, and decided on leaving the hotel by the apartment of M. de Campvallion, which had a private entrance on the street.

The Marquise immediately rang violently several times, and Camors did not retire till he heard the sound of hastening feet on the stairs. The apartment of the General communicated with that of his wife by a short gallery. There was a suite of apartments—first a study, then his sleeping-room. M. de Camors traversed this room with feelings we shall not attempt to describe and gained the street. The surgeon testified that the General had died from the rupture of a vessel in the heart. Two days after the interment took place, at which M. de Camors attended. The same evening he left Paris to join his wife, who had gone to Reuilly the preceding week.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FEATHER IN THE BALANCE

One of the sweetest sensations in the world is that of a man who has just escaped the fantastic terrors of night mare; and who, awaking, his fore head bathed with icy sweat, says to himself, "It was only a dream!" This was, in some degree, the impression which Camors felt on awaking, the morning after his arrival at Reuilly, when his first glance fell on the sunlight streaming over the foliage, and when he heard beneath his window the joyous laugh of his little son. He, however, was not dreaming; but his soul, crushed by the horrible tension of recent emotions, had a moment's respite, and drank in, almost

without alloy, the new calm that surrounded him. He hastily dressed himself and descended to the garden, where his son ran to meet him.

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M. de Camors embraced the child with tenderness; and leaning toward him, spoke to him in a low voice, and asked after his mother and about his amusements, with a singularly soft and sad manner. Then he let him go, and walked with a slow step, breathing the fresh morning air, examining the leaves and the flowers with extraordinary interest. From time to time a deep, sad sigh broke from his oppressed chest; he passed his hand over his brow as if to efface the importunate images. He sat down amid the quaintly clipped boxwood which ornamented the garden in the antique fashion, called his son again to him, held him between his knees, interrogating him again, in a low voice, as he had done before; then drew him toward him and clasped him tightly for a long time, as if to draw into his own heart the innocence and peace of the child's. Madame de Camors surprised him in this gush of feeling, and remained mute with astonishment. He rose immediately and took her hand.

"How well you bring him up!" he said. "I thank you for it. He will be worthy of you and of your mother."

She was so surprised at the soft, sad tone of his voice, that she replied, stammering with embarrassment, "And worthy of you also, I hope."

"Of me?" said Camors, whose lips were slightly tremulous. "Poor child, I hope not!" and rapidly withdrew.

Madame de Camors and Madame de Tecle had learned, the previous morning, of the death of the General. The evening of the Count's arrival they did not speak to him on the subject, and were cautious not to make any allusion to it. The next day, and the succeeding ones, they practised the same reserve, though very far from suspecting the fatal circumstances which rendered this souvenir so painful to M. de Camors. They thought it only natural he should be pained at so sudden a catastrophe, and that his conscience should be disturbed; but they were astonished when this impression prolonged itself from day to day, until it took the appearance of a lasting sentiment.

They began to believe that there had arisen between Madame de Campvallon and himself, probably occasioned by the General's death, some quarrel which had weakened the tie between them.

A journey of twenty-four hours, which he made fifteen days after his arrival, was to them a confirmation of the truth they before suspected; but his prompt return, his new tastes, which kept him at Reuilly during the summer, seemed to them favorable symptoms.

He was singularly sad, pensive, and more inactive than usual in his habits. He took long walks alone. Sometimes he took his son with him, as if by chance. He sometimes attempted a little timid tenderness with his wife; and this awkwardness, on his part, was quite touching.

“Marie,” he said to her one day, “you, who are a fairy, wave your wand over Reuilly and make of it an island in mid-ocean.”

“You say that because you know how to swim,” said she, laughing and shaking her head; but the heart of the young woman was joyful.

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"You embrace me now every moment, my little one," said Madame de Tecle to her. "Is this really all intended for me?"

"My adorable mother," while embracing her again, "I assure you he is really courting me again. Why, I am ignorant; but he is courting me and you also, my mother. Observe it!"

Madame de Tecle did observe it. In his conversation with her, M. de Camors sought, under every pretext, to recall the souvenirs of the past, common to them both. It seemed he wished to link the past with his new life; to forget the rest, and pray of them to forget it also.

It was not without fear that these two charming women abandoned themselves to their hopes. They remembered they were in the presence of an uncertain person; they little trusted a change so sudden, the reason of which they could not comprehend. They feared it was some passing caprice, which would return to them, if they were its dupes, all their misfortunes, without the dignity which had hitherto attended them.

They were not the only ones struck by this transformation. M. des Rameures remarked it to them. The neighboring country people felt in the Count's language something new—as it were, a tender humility; they said that in other years he had been polite, but this year he was angelic. Even the inanimate things, the woods, the trees, the heavens, should have borne the same testimony, for he looked at and studied them with a benevolent curiosity with which he had never before honored them.

In truth, a profound trouble had invaded him and would not leave him. More than once, before this epoch, his soul, his philosophy, his pride, had received a rude shock, but he had no less pursued his path, rising after every blow, like a lion wounded, but unconquered. In trampling under his feet all moral belief which binds the vulgar, he had reserved honor as an inviolable limit. Then, under the empire of his passions, he said to himself that, after all, honor, like all the rest, was conventional. Then he encountered crime—he touched it with his hand—horror seized him—and he recoiled. He rejected with disgust the principle which had conducted him there—asked himself what would become of human society if it had no other.

The simple truths which he had misunderstood now appeared to him in their tranquil splendor. He could not yet distinguish them clearly; he did not try to give them a name, but he plunged with a secret delight into their shadows and their peace. He sought them in the pure heart of his child, in the pure love of his young wife, in the daily miracles of nature, in the harmonies of the heavens, and probably already in the depths of his thoughts—in God. In the midst of this approach toward a new life he hesitated. Madame de Campvallion was there. He still loved her vaguely. Above all, he could not abandon her without being guilty of a kind of baseness. Terrible struggles agitated him. Having done so much evil, would he now be permitted to do good, and gracefully

partake of the joys he foresaw? These ties with the past, his fortune dishonestly acquired, his fatal mistress—the spectre of that old man would they permit it?

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And we may add, would Providence suffer it? Not that we should lightly use this word Providence, and suspend over M. de Camors a menace of supernatural chastisement. Providence does not intervene in human events except through the logic of her eternal laws. She has only the sanction of these laws; and it is for this reason she is feared. At the end of August M. de Camors repaired to the principal town in the district, to perform his duties in the Council-General. The session finished, he paid a visit to Madame de Campvallon before returning to Reuilly. He had neglected her a little in the course of the summer, and had only visited Campvallon at long intervals, as politeness compelled him. The Marquise wished to keep him for dinner, as she had no guests with her. She pressed him so warmly that, reproaching himself all the time, he consented. He never saw her without pain. She always brought back to him those terrible memories, but also that terrible intoxication. She had never been more beautiful. Her deep mourning embellished yet more her languishing and regal grace; it made her pale complexion yet more fair, and it heightened the brilliancy of her look. She had the air of a young tragic queen, or of an allegory of Night. In the evening an hour arrived when the reserve which for some time had marked their relations was forgotten. M. de Camors found himself, as in olden time, at the feet of the young Marquise—his eyes gazing into hers, and covering with kisses her lovely hands. She was strange that evening. She looked at him with a wild tenderness, instilling, at pleasure, into his veins the poison of burning passion then escaping him, the tears gathering in her eyes. Suddenly, by one of those magical movements of hers, she enveloped with her hands the head of her lover, and spoke to him quite low beneath the shadow of this perfumed veil.

"We might be so happy!" she said.

"Are we not so?" said Camors.

"No! I at least am not, for you are not all mine, as I am yours. This appears harder, now that I am free. If you had remained free—when I think of it! or if you could become so, it would be heaven!"

"You know that I am not so! Why speak of it?"

She drew nearer to him, and with her breath, more than with her voice, answered:

"Is it impossible? Tell me!"

"How?" he demanded.

She did not reply, but her fixed look, caressing and cruel, answered him.

"Speak, then, I beg of you!" murmured Camors.

"Have you not told me—I have not forgotten it—that we are united by ties stronger than all others; that the world and its laws exist no longer for us; that there is no other good,

no other bad for us, but our happiness or our unhappiness? Well, we are not happy, and if we could be so—listen, I have thought well over it!"

Her lips touched the cheek of Camors, and the murmur of her last words was lost in her kisses.

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Camors roughly repelled her, sprang up, and stood before her.

"Charlotte," he said, sternly, "this is only a trial, I hope; but, trial or no, never repeat it—never! Remember!"

She also quickly drew herself up.

"Ah! how you love her!" she cried. "Yes, you love her, it is she you love—I know it, I feel it, and I—I am only the wretched object of your pity, or of your caprice. Very well, go back to her—go and protect her, for I swear to you she is in peril!"

He smiled with his haughty irony.

"Let us see your plot," he said. "So you intend to kill her?"

"If I can!" she said; and her superb arm was stretched out as if to seize a weapon.

"What! with your own hand?"

"The hand shall be found."

"You are so beautiful at this moment!" said Camors; "I am dying with the desire to fall at your feet. Acknowledge only that you wished to try me, or that you were mad for a moment."

She gave a savage smile.

"Oh! you fear, my friend," she said, coldly; then raising again her voice, which assumed a malignant tone, "You are right, I am not mad, I did not wish to try you; I am jealous, I am betrayed, and I shall revenge myself—no matter what it costs me—for I care for nothing more in this world!—Go, and guard her!"

"Be it so; I go," said Camors. He immediately left the salon and the chateau; he reached the railway station on foot, and that evening arrived at Reuilly.

Something terrible there awaited him.

During his absence, Madame de Camors, accompanied by her mother, had gone to Paris to make some purchases. She remained there three days. She had returned only that morning. He himself arrived late in the evening. He thought he observed some constraint in their reception of him, but he did not dwell upon it in the state of mind in which he was.

This is what had occurred: Madame de Camors, during her stay in Paris, had gone, as was her custom, to visit her aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Their intercourse had

always been very constrained. Neither their characters nor their religion coincided. Madame de Camors contented herself with not liking her aunt, but Madame de la Roche-Jugan hated her niece. She found a good occasion to prove this, and did not lose it. They had not seen each other since the General's death. This event, which should have caused Madame de la Roche-Jugan to reproach herself, had simply exasperated her. Her bad action had recoiled upon herself. The death of M. Campvallon had finally destroyed her last hopes, which she had believed she could have founded on the anger and desperation of the old man. Since that time she was animated against her nephew and the Marquise with the rage of one of the Furies. She learned through Vautrot that M. de Camors had been in the chamber of Madame de Campvallon the night of the General's death. On this foundation of truth she did not fear to frame the most odious suspicions; and Vautrot, baffled like her in his vengeance and in his envy, had aided her. A few sinister rumors, escaping apparently from this source, had even crept at this time into Parisian society.



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M. de Camors and Madame de Campvallou, suspecting that they had been betrayed a second time by Madame de la Roche-Jugan, had broken with her; and she could presume that, should she present herself at the door of the Marquise, orders would have been given not to admit her. This affront made her angrier still. She was still a prey to the violence of her wrath when she received a visit from Madame de Camors. She affected to make the General's death the theme of conversation, shed a few tears over her old friend, and kissed the hand of her niece with a burst of tenderness.

"My poor little thing!" she said to her; "it is for you also I weep—for you will yet be more unhappy than heretofore, if that can be possible."

"I do not understand you, Madame," answered the young woman, coldly.

"If you do not understand me, so much the better," replied Madame de la Roche-Jugan, with a shade of bitterness; then, after a moment's pause—"Listen, my dear! this is a duty of conscience which I comply with. You see, an honest creature like you merits a better fate; and your mother too, who is also a dupe. That man would deceive the good God. In the name of my family, I feel bound to ask your pardon for both of them."

"I repeat, Madame, that I do not understand you."

"But it is impossible, my child—come!—it is impossible that all this time you have suspected nothing."

"I suspect nothing, Madame," said Madame de Camors, "because I know all."

"Ah!" continued Madame de la Roche-Jugan, dryly; "if this be so, I have nothing to say. But there are persons, in that case, who can accommodate their consciences to very strange things."

"That is what I thought a moment ago, Madame," said the young woman, rising.

"As you wish, my dear; but I speak in your own interest, and I shall reproach myself for not having spoken to you more clearly. I know my nephew better than you will ever know him; and the other also. Notwithstanding you say so, you do not know all; let me tell you. The General died very suddenly; and after him, it is your turn! Be very careful, my poor child!"

"Oh, Madame!" cried the young woman, becoming ghastly pale; "I shall never see you again while I live!" She left on the instant—ran home, and there found her mother. She repeated to her the terrible words she had just heard, and her mother tried to calm her; but she herself was disturbed. She went immediately to Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and supplicated her to have pity on them and to retract the abominable innuendo she had thrown out, or to explain it more fully. She made her understand that she would inform M. de Camors of the affair in case of need, and that he would hold his cousin

Sigismund responsible. Terrified in her turn, Madame de la Roche-Jugan judged the best method was to destroy M. de Camors in the estimation of Madame de Tecle. She related what had been told her by Vautrot, being

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careful not to compromise herself in the recital. She informed her of the presence of M. de Camors at the General's house the night of his death. She told her of the reports that were circulated, and mingling calumny with truth, redoubling at the same time her affection, her caresses, and her tears, she succeeded in giving Madame de Tecle such an estimate of the character of M. de Camors, that there were no suspicions or apprehensions which the poor woman, from that moment, did not consider legitimate as connected with him.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan finally offered to send Vautrot to her, that she might herself interrogate him. Madame de Tecle, affecting an incredulity and a tranquillity she did not feel, refused and withdrew.

On her returning to her daughter, she forced herself to deceive her as to the impressions she had received, but she did not succeed; for her anxious face belied her reassuring words. They separated the following night, mutually concealing the trouble and distress of their souls; but accustomed so long to think, feel, and suffer together, they met, so to speak, in the same reflections, the same reasonings, and in the same terrors. They went over, in their memories, all the incidents of the life of Camors—all his faults; and, under the shadow of the monstrous action imputed to him, his faults took a criminal character which they were surprised they had not seen before. They discovered a series and a sequence in his designs, all of which were imputed to him as crimes—even his good actions. Thus his conduct during the last few months, his strange ways, his fancy for his child and for his wife, his assiduous tenderness toward her, were nothing more than the hypocritical meditation of a new crime—a mask which he was preparing in advance.

What was to be done? What kind of life was it possible to live in common, under the weight of such thoughts? What present—what future? These thoughts bewildered them. Next day Camors could not fail remarking the singular change in their countenances in his presence; but he knew that his servant, without thinking of harm, had spoken of his visit to Madame de Campvallou, and he attributed the coldness and embarrassment of the two women to this fact. He was less disquieted at this, because he was resolved to keep them entirely safe. As a result of his reflections during the night, he had determined to break off forever his intrigue with Madame de Campvallou. For this rupture, which he had made it a point of honor not to provoke, Madame de Campvallou had herself furnished him a sufficient pretext.

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The criminal thought she had suggested was, he knew, only a feint to test him, but it was enough to justify his abandonment of her. As to the violent and menacing words the Marquise had used, he held them of little value, though at times the remembrance of them troubled him. Nevertheless, for many years he had not felt his heart so light. This wicked tie once broken, it seemed as if he had resumed, with his liberty, his youth and virtue. He walked and played a part of the day with his little son. After dinner, just as night fell, clear and pure, he proposed to Madame de Camors a tete-a-tete excursion in the woods. He spoke to her of a view which had struck him shortly before on such a night, and which would please, he said laughingly, her romantic taste.

He would not permit himself to be surprised at the disinclination she manifested, at the disquietude which her face indicated, or at the rapid glance she exchanged with her mother.

The same thought, and that a most fearful one; entered the minds of both these unfortunate women at the same moment.

They were still under the impression of the shock which had so weakened their nerves, and the brusque proposition of M. de Camors, so contrary to his usual habits—the hour, the night, and the solitary walk—had suddenly awakened in their brains the sinister images which Madame de la Roche-Jugan had laid there. Madame de Camors, however, with an air of resolution the circumstances did not seem entitled to demand, prepared immediately to go out, then followed her husband from the house, leaving her little son in charge of her mother. They had only to cross the garden to find themselves on the edge of the wood which almost touched their dwelling, and which stretched to the old fields inherited from the Comte de Tecle. The intention of Camors in seeking this tete-a-tete was to confide to his wife the decisive determination he had taken of delivering up to her absolutely and without reserve his heart and life, and to enjoy in these solitudes his first taste of true happiness. Surprised at the cold distraction with which his young wife replied to the affectionate gayety of his language, he redoubled his efforts to bring their conversation to a tone of more intimacy and confidence. While stopping at intervals to point out to her some effects of light and shadow in their walk, he began to question her on her recent trip to Paris, and on the persons she had seen there. She named Madame Jaubert and a few others; then, lowering her voice against her will, mentioned Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

“That one,” said Camors, “you could very well have dispensed with. I forgot to warn you that I no longer recognize her.”

“Why?” asked she, timidly.

“Because she is a bad woman,” said Camors. “When we are a little more intimate with each other, you and I,” he added, laughing, “I shall edify you on this character, I shall tell you all—all, understand.”

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There was so much of nature, and even of goodness in the accent with which he pronounced these words, that the Countess felt her heart half comforted from the oppression which had weighed it down. She gave herself up with more abandon to the gracious advances of her husband and to the slight incidents of her walk.

The phantoms disappeared little by little from her mind, and she began to say to herself that she had been the sport of a bad dream, and of a true madness, when a singular change in her husband's face renewed all her terrors. M. de Camors, in his turn, had become absent and visibly preoccupied with some grave care. He spoke with an effort, made half replies, meditated; then stopped quickly to look around him, like a frightened child. These strange ways, so different from his former temper, alarmed the young woman, the more so as she just then found herself in the most distant part of the wood.

There was an extraordinary similarity in the thoughts which occupied them both. At the moment when Madame Camors was trembling for fear near her husband, he was trembling for her.

He thought he detected that they were followed; at different times he thought he heard in the thicket the cracking of branches, rattling of leaves, and finally the sound of stealthy steps. These noises always ceased on his stopping, and began again the moment he resumed his walk. He thought, a moment later, he saw the shadow of a man pass rapidly among the underwood behind them. The idea of some woodman came first to his mind, but he could not reconcile this with the persistence with which they were followed.

He finally had no doubt that they were dogged—but by whom? The repeated menaces of Madame de Campvallion against the life of Madame de Camors, the passionate and unbridled character of this woman, soon presented itself to his thoughts, suggested this mysterious pursuit, and awakened these frightful suspicions.

He did not imagine for a moment that the Marquise would charge herself personally with the infliction of her vengeance; but she had said—he then remembered—that the hand would be found. She was rich enough to find it, and this hand might now be here.

He did not wish to alarm his wife by calling her attention to this spectre, which he believed at her side, but he could not hide from her his agitation, which every movement of his caused her to construe as falsely as cruelly.

“Marie,” he said, “let us walk a little faster, I beg of you! I am cold.”

He quickened his steps, resolved to return to the chateau by the public road, which was bordered with houses.

When he reached the border of the woods, although he thought he still heard at intervals the sound which had alarmed him, he reassured himself and resumed his flow of spirits as if a little ashamed even of his panic. He stopped the Countess to look at the pretext of this excursion. This was the rocky wall of the deep excavation of a marl-pit, long since abandoned. The arbutus-trees of fantastic shape which covered the summit of these rocks, the pendant vines, the sombre ivy which carpeted the cliffs, the gleaming white stones, the vague reflections in the stagnant pool at the bottom of the pit, the mysterious light of the moon, made a scene of wild beauty.

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The ground in the neighborhood of the marl-pit was so irregular, and the thorny underbrush so thick, that when pedestrians wished to reach the nearest highway they, were compelled either to make a long detour or to cross the deepest part of the excavation by means of the trunks of two great trees, which had been cut in half, lashed together, and thrown across the chasm. Thus they formed a crude bridge, affording a passage across the deep hollow and adding to the picturesque aspect of this romantic spot.

Madame de Camors never had seen anything like this peculiar bridge, which had been laid recently at her husband's orders. After they had gazed in silence a moment into the depths of the marl-pit, Camors called his wife's attention to the unique construction.

"Do you intend to cross that?" she asked, briefly.

"Yes, if you are not afraid," said Camors; "I shall be close beside you, you know."

He saw that she hesitated, and, looking at her closely in the moonlight, he thought her face was strangely pale, and could not refrain from saying:

"I believed that you had more courage."

She hesitated no longer, but stepped upon the dangerous bridge. In spite of herself, she turned her head half around, in a backward glance, and her steady step faltered. Suddenly she tottered. M. de Camors sprang forward, and, in the agitation of the moment, seized her in an almost violent grasp. The unhappy woman uttered a piercing shriek, made a gesture as if to defend herself, repelling his touch; then, running wildly across the bridge, she rushed into the woods. M. de Camors, astounded, alarmed, not knowing how to interpret his wife's strange conduct, immediately followed her. He found her a short distance beyond the bridge, leaning against the first tree she had been able to reach. She turned to face him, with an expression of mingled terror and menace, and as he approached, she shot forth the single word:

"Coward!"

He stared at her in sheer amazement. At that moment there was a sound of hurried footsteps; a shadowy form glided toward them from the depth of the thicket, and the next instant Camors recognized Madame de Tecle. She ran, dishevelled and breathless, toward her daughter, seized her by the hand and, drawing herself up, said to Camors:

"If you kill one of us, kill both!"

He understood the mystery in a flash. A stifled cry escaped him; for an instant he buried his face in his hands; then, flinging out his arms in a gesture of despair, he said:

“So you took me for a murderer!”

There was a moment of dead silence.

“Well!” he cried, stamping his foot with sudden violence, “why do you stay here, then? Run! Fly! Save yourselves from me!”

Overcome with terror, the two women fled, the mother dragging her daughter. The next moment they had disappeared in the darkness of the woods.

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Camors remained in that lonely spot many hours, without being aware of the passage of time. At intervals he paced feverishly to and fro along the narrow strip of land between the woods and the bridge; then, stopping short, with fixed eyes, he became lost in thought, and stood as motionless as the trunk of the tree against which he leaned. If, as we hope, there is a Divine hand which measures justly our sorrows according to our sins, the unhappy man, in this dark hour, must have rendered his account.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CURTAIN FALLS

The next morning the Marquise de Campvallon was strolling beside a large circular sheet of water which ornamented the lower part of her park, the metallic gleam of the rippling waves being discernible from afar through the branches of the surrounding trees.

She walked slowly along the bank of the lake, her head bowed, and the long skirt of her mourning-robe sweeping the grass. Two large and dazzlingly white swans, watching their mistress eagerly, in expectation of receiving their usual titbits from her hands, swam close to the bank, following her steps as if escorting her.

Suddenly the Comte de Camors appeared before her. She had believed that she never should see him again. She raised her head quickly and pressed one hand to her heart.

"Yes, it is I!" said Camors. "Give me your hand."

She gave it to him.

"You were right, Charlotte," he said, after a moment of silence. "Ties like ours can not be broken. I have reflected on everything. I was seized with a momentary cowardice, for which I have reproached myself bitterly, and for which, moreover, I have been sufficiently punished. But I come to you to ask your forgiveness."

The Marquise led him tenderly into the deep shadow of the great plane-trees that surrounded the lake; she knelt before him with theatric grace, and fixed on him her swimming eyes. She covered his head with kisses. He raised her and pressed her to his heart.

"But you do not wish that crime to be committed?" he said in a low voice.

She bent her head with mournful indecision.

"For that matter," he added, bitterly, "it would only make us worthier of each other; for, as to myself, they have already believed me capable of it."

He took her arm and recounted to her briefly the scene of the night before.

He told her he had not returned home, and never should. This was the result of his mournful meditations. To attempt an explanation with those who had so mortally outraged him—to open to them the depth of his heart—to allude to the criminal thought they had accused him of—he had repelled with horror, the evening before, when proposed by another. He thought of all this; but this humiliation—if he could have so abased himself—would have been useless. How could he hope to conquer by these words the distrust capable of creating such suspicions?

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He confusedly divined the origin, and understood that this distrust, envenomed by remembrance of the past, was incurable.

The sentiment of the irreparable, of revolted pride, indignation, and even injustice, had shown him but one refuge, and it was this to which he had fled.

The Comtesse de Camors and Madame de Tecle learned only through their servants and the public of the removal of the Count to a country-house he had rented near the Chateau Campvallon. After writing ten letters—all of which he had burned—he had decided to maintain an absolute silence. They sometimes trembled at the thought he might take away his son. He thought of it; but it was a kind of vengeance that he disdained.

This move, which publicly proclaimed the relations existing between M. de Camors and the Marquise, made a sensation in the Parisian world, where it was soon known. It revived again the strange recollections and rumors that all remembered. Camors heard of them, but despised them.

His pride, which was then exasperated by a savage irritation, was gratified at defying public opinion, which had been so easily duped before. He knew there was no situation one could not impose upon the world providing one had wealth and audacity. From this day he resumed energetically the love of his life, his habits, his labors, and his thoughts for the future. Madame de Campvallon was the confidante of all his projects, and added her own care to them; and both occupied themselves in organizing in advance their mutual existence, hereafter blended forever. The personal fortune of M. de Camors, united to that of the Marquise, left no limits to the fancies which their imagination could devise. They arranged to live separately at Paris, though the Marquise's salon should be common to both; but their double influence would shine at the same time, and they would be the social centre of a sovereign influence. The Marquise would reign by the splendor of her person over the society of letters, art, and politics. Camors would there find the means of action which could not fail to accomplish the high destiny to which his talent and his ambition called him.

This was the life that had appeared to them in the origin of their liaison as a sort of ideal of human happiness—that of two superior beings, who proudly shared, above the masses, all the pleasures of earth, the intoxication of passion, the enjoyment of intellectual strength, the satisfaction of pride, and the emotions of power. The eclat of such a life would constitute the vengeance of Camors, and force to repent bitterly those who had dared to misunderstand him. The recent mourning of the Marquise commanded them, notwithstanding, to adjourn the realization of their dream, if they did not wish to wound the conscience of the public. They felt it, and resolved to travel for a few months before settling in Paris. The time that passed in their preparations for the future, and in arrangements for this voyage, was to

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Madame de Campvallan the sweetest period of her life. She finally tasted to the full an intimacy, so long troubled, of which the charm, in truth, was very great; for her lover, as if to make her forget his momentary desertion, was prodigal in the effusion of his tenderness. He brought to private studies, as well as to their common schemes, an ardor, a fire, which displayed itself in his face, in his eyes, and which seemed yet more to heighten his manly beauty. It often happened, after quitting the Marquise in the evening, that he worked very late at home, sometimes until morning. One night, shortly before the day fixed for their departure, a private servant of the Count, who slept in the room above his master's, heard a noise which alarmed him.

He went down in great haste, and found M. de Camors stretched apparently lifeless on the floor at the foot of his desk. The servant, whose name was Daniel, had all his master's confidence, and he loved him with that singular affection which strong natures often inspire in their inferiors.

He sent for Madame de Campvallan, who soon came. M. de Camors, recovering from his fainting-fit, was very pale, and was walking across the room when she entered. He seemed irritated at seeing her, and rebuked his servant sharply for his ill-advised zeal.

He said he had only had a touch of vertigo, to which he was subject. Madame de Campvallan soon retired, having first supplicated him not to overwork himself again. When he came to her next day, she could not help being surprised at the dejection stamped on his face, which she attributed to the attack he had had the night before. But when she spoke of their approaching departure, she was astonished, and even alarmed by his reply:

"Let us defer it a little, I beg of you," he said. "I do not feel in a state fit for travelling."

Days passed; he made no further allusion to the voyage. He was serious, silent, and cold. The active ardor, almost feverish, which had animated until then his life, his speech, his eyes, was suddenly quenched. One symptom which disquieted the Marquise above all was the absolute idleness to which he now abandoned himself.

He left her in the evening at an early hour. Daniel told the Marquise that the Count worked no longer; that he heard him pacing up and down the greater part of the night. At the same time his health failed visibly. The Marquise ventured once to interrogate him. As they were both walking one day in the park, she said:

"You are hiding something from me. You suffer, my friend. What is the cause?"

"There is nothing."

"I pray you tell me!"

“Nothing is the matter with me,” he replied, petulantly.

“Is it your son that you regret?”

“I regret nothing.” After a few steps taken in silence—“When I think,” he said, quickly, “that there is one person in the world who considers me a coward—for I hear always that word in my ear—and who treated me like a coward, and who believed it when it was said, and believes it still! If it had been a man, it would be easy, but it was a woman.”

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After this sudden explosion he was silent.

“Very well; what do you desire?” said the Marquise, with vexation. “Do you wish that I should go and tell her the truth—tell her that you were ready to defend her against me—that you love her, and hate me? If it be that you wish, say so. I believe if this life continues I shall be capable of doing anything!”

“Do not you also outrage me! Dismiss me, if that will give you pleasure; but I love you only. My pride bleeds, that is all; and I give you my word of honor that if you ever affront me by going to justify me, I shall never in my life see you or her. Embrace me!” and he pressed her to his heart.

She was calm for a few hours.

The house he occupied was about to be taken again by its proprietor. The middle of September approached, and it was the time when the Marquise was in the habit of returning to Paris. She proposed to M. de Camors to occupy the chateau during the few days he purposed passing in the country. He accepted; but whenever she spoke of returning to Paris:

“Why so soon?” he would say; “are we not very well here?”

A little later she reminded him that the session of the Chamber was about to open. He made his health a pretext for delay, saying that he felt weak and wished to send in his resignation as deputy. She induced him only by her urgent prayer to content himself with asking leave of absence.

“But you, my beloved!” he said, “I am condemning you to a sad existence!”

“With you,” she replied, “I am happy everywhere and always!”

It was not true that she was happy, but it was true that she loved him and was devoted to him. There was no suffering she would not have resigned herself to, no sacrifice she would not make, were it for him.

From this moment the prospect of worldly sovereignty, which she thought she had touched with her hand, escaped her. She had a presentiment of a melancholy future of solitude, of renunciation, of secret tears; but near him grief became a fete. One knows with what rapidity life passes with those who busy themselves without distraction in some profound grief—the days themselves are long, but the succession of them is rapid and imperceptible. It was thus that the months and then the seasons succeeded one another, for Camors and the Marquise, with a monotony that left hardly any trace on their thoughts. Their daily relations were marked, on the part of the Count with an invariably cold and distant courtesy, and very often silence; on the part of the Marquise by an attentive tenderness and a constrained grief. Every day they rode out on



horseback, both clad in black, sympathetic by their beauty and their sadness, and surrounded in the country by distant respect. About the beginning of the ensuing winter Madame de Campvallou experienced a serious disquietude. Although M. de Camors never complained, it was evident his health was gradually failing. A dark and almost clayey tint covered his thin cheeks, and spread nearly to the whites of his eyes. The Marquise showed some emotion on perceiving it, and persuaded him to consult a physician. The physician perceived symptoms of chronic debility. He did not think it dangerous, but recommended a season at Vichy, a few hygienic precautions, and absolute repose of mind and body.



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When the Marquise proposed to Camors this visit to Vichy, he only shrugged his shoulders without reply.

A few days after, Madame de Campvallion on entering the stable one morning, saw Medjid, the favorite mare of Camors, white with foam, panting and exhausted. The groom explained, with some awkwardness, the condition of the animal, by a ride the Count had taken that morning. The Marquise had recourse to Daniel, of whom she made a confidant, and having questioned him, drew out the acknowledgment that for some time his master had been in the habit of going out in the evening and not returning until morning. Daniel was in despair with these nightly wanderings, which he said greatly fatigued his master. He ended by confessing to Madame de Campvallion the goal of his excursions.

The Comtesse de Camors, yielding to considerations the details of which would not be interesting, had continued to live at Reuilly since her husband had abandoned her. Reuilly was distant twelve leagues from Campvallion, which could be made shorter by a crosscut. M. de Camors did not hesitate to pass over this distance twice in the same night, to give himself the emotion of breathing for a few minutes the same air with his wife and child.

Daniel had accompanied him two or three times, but the Count generally went alone. He left his horse in the wood, and approached as near as he could without risking discovery; and, hiding himself like a malefactor behind the shadows of the trees, he watched the windows, the lights, the house, the least signs of those dear beings, from whom an eternal abyss had divided him.

The Marquise, half frightened, half irritated, by an oddity which seemed to border on madness, pretended to be ignorant of it. But these two spirits were too accustomed to each other, day by day, to be able to hide anything. He knew she was aware of his weakness, and seemed no longer to care to make a mystery of it.

One evening in the month of July, he left on horseback in the afternoon, and did not return for dinner. He arrived at the woods of Reuilly at the close of the day, as he had premeditated. He entered the garden with his usual precaution, and, thanks to his knowledge of the habits of the household, he could approach, without being noticed, the pavilion where the Countess's chamber was situated, and which was also that of his son. This chamber, by a particular arrangement of the house, was elevated at the side of the court by the height of an entresol, but was level with the garden. One of the windows was open, owing to the heat of the evening. Camors hid himself behind the shutters, which were half closed, and gazed eagerly into the chamber.

He had not seen for two years either his wife, his child, or Madame de Tecle. He now saw all three there. Madame de Tecle was working near the chimney. Her face was unchanged. She had the same youthful look, but her hair was as white, as snow.

Madame de Camors was sitting on a couch nearly in front of the window and undressing her son, at the same time talking to and caressing him.

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The child, at a sign, knelt down at his mother's feet in his light night-garments, and while she held his joined hands in her own, he began in a loud voice his evening prayers. She whispered him from time to time a word that escaped him. This prayer, composed of a number of phrases adapted to a youthful mind, terminated with these words: "O God! be good and merciful to my mother, my grandmother, to me—and above all, O God, to my unfortunate father." He pronounced these words with childish haste, but under a serious look from his mother, he repeated them immediately, with some emotion, as a child who repeats the inflection of a voice which has been taught him.

Camors turned suddenly and retired noiselessly, leaving the garden by the nearest gate. A fixed idea tortured him. He wished to see his son—to speak to him—to embrace him, and to press him to his heart. After that, he cared for little.

He remembered they had formerly the habit of taking the child to the dairy every morning to give him a cup of milk. He hoped they had continued this custom. Morning arrived, and soon came the hour for which he waited. He hid himself in the walk which led to the farm. He heard the noise of feet, of laughter, and of joyous cries, and his son suddenly appeared running in advance. He was a charming little boy of five or six years, of a graceful and proud mien. On perceiving M. de Camors in the middle of the walk he stopped, he hesitated at this unknown or half-forgotten face; but the tender and half-supplicating smile of Camors reassured him.

"Monsieur!" he said, doubtfully.

Camors opened his arms and bent as if to kneel before him.

"Come and embrace me, I beg of you," he murmured.

The child had already advanced smiling, when the woman who was following him, who was his old nurse, suddenly appeared. 'She made a gesture of fright:

"Your father!" she said, in a stifled voice.

At these words the child uttered a cry of terror, rushed back to the nurse, pressed against her, and regarded his father with frightened eyes.

The nurse took him by the arm, and earned him off in great haste.

M. de Camors did not weep. A frightful contraction distorted the corners of his mouth, and exaggerated the thinness of his cheeks. He had two or three shudderings as if seized with sudden fever. He slowly passed his hand over his forehead, sighed profoundly, and departed.

Madame de Campvallou knew nothing of this sad scene, but she saw its consequences; and she herself felt them bitterly. The character of M. de Camors, already so changed,

became after this unrecognizable. He showed her no longer even the cold politeness he had manifested for her up to that period. He exhibited a strange antipathy toward her. He fled from her. She perceived he avoided even touching her hand.

They saw each other rarely now. The health of Camors did not admit of his taking regular meals. These two desolate existences offered then, in the midst of the almost royal state which surrounded them, a spectacle of pity.

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In this magnificent park—across these beautiful gardens, with great vases of marble—under long arcades of verdure peopled with more statues-both wandered separately, like two sad shadows, meeting sometimes but never speaking.

One day, near the end of September, Camors did not descend from his apartment. Daniel told the Marquise he had given orders to let no one enter.

“Not even me?” she said. He bent his head mournfully. She insisted.

“Madame, I should lose my place!”

The Count persisted in this mania of absolute seclusion. She was compelled from this moment to content herself with the news she obtained from his servant. M. de Camors was not bedridden. He passed his time in a sad reverie, lying on his divan. He got up at intervals, wrote a few lines, then lay down again. His weakness appeared great, though he did not complain of any suffering.

After two or three weeks, the Marquise read in the features of Daniel a more marked disquietude than usual. He supplicated her to call in the country physician who had once before seen him. It was so decided. The unfortunate woman, when the physician was shown into the Count’s apartment, leaned against the door listening in agony. She thought she heard the voice of Camors loudly raised, then the noise ceased.

The doctor, when departing, simply said to her: “Madame, his sad case appears to me serious—but not hopeless. I did not wish to press him to-day, but he allows me to return tomorrow.”

In the night which followed, at two o’clock, Madame de Campvallon heard some one calling her, and recognized the voice of Daniel. She rose immediately, threw a mantle around her, and admitted him.

“Madame,” he said, “Monsieur le Comte asks for you,” and burst into tears.

“Mon Dieu! what is the matter?”

“Come, Madame—you must hasten!”

She accompanied him immediately. From the moment she put her foot in the chamber, she could not deceive herself—Death was there. Crushed by sorrow, this existence, so full, so proud, so powerful, was about to terminate. The head of Camors, turned on the pillow, seemed already to have assumed a death-like immobility. His beautiful features, sharpened by suffering, took the rigid outline of sculpture; his eye alone yet lived and looked at her.

She approached him hastily and wished to seize the hand resting on the sheet.

He withdrew it. She gave a despairing groan. He continued to look fixedly at her. She thought he was trying to speak, but could not; but his eyes spoke. They addressed to her some request, at the same time with an imperious though supplicating expression, which she doubtless understood; for she said aloud, with an accent full of sadness and tenderness:

“I promise it to you.”

He appeared to make a painful effort, and his look indicated a large sealed letter lying on the bed. She took it, and read on the envelope—"To my son."

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"I promise you," she said, again, falling on her knees, and moistening the sheet with her tears.

He extended his hand toward her. "Thanks!" was all he said. Her tears flowed faster. She set her lips on this hand already cold. When she raised her head, she saw at the same instant the eyes of Camors slightly moist, rolling wildly—then extinguished! She uttered a cry, threw herself on the bed, and kissed madly those eyes still open—yet void of light forever!

Thus ended Camors, who was a great sinner, but nevertheless a *man*!

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror
One of those pious persons who always think evil

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror
A defensive attitude is never agreeable to a man
Bad to fear the opinion of people one despises
Believing that it is for virtue's sake alone such men love them
Camors refused, hesitated, made objections, and consented
Confounding progress with discord, liberty with license
Contempt for men is the beginning of wisdom
Cried out, with the blunt candor of his age
Dangers of liberty outweighed its benefits
Demanded of him imperatively—the time of day
Determined to cultivate ability rather than scrupulousness
Disenchantment which follows possession
Do not get angry. Rarely laugh, and never weep
Every one is the best judge of his own affairs
Every road leads to Rome—and one as surely as another
Every cause that is in antagonism with its age commits suicide
God—or no principles!
Have not that pleasure, it is useless to incur the penalties
He is charming, for one always feels in danger near him
Inconstancy of heart is the special attribute of man
Intemperance of her zeal and the acrimony of her bigotry
Knew her danger, and, unlike most of them, she did not love it
Man, if he will it, need not grow old: the lion must
Never can make revolutions with gloves on
Once an excellent remedy, is a detestable regimen
One of those pious persons who always think evil



Pleasures of an independent code of morals
Police regulations known as religion
Principles alone, without faith in some higher sanction
Property of all who are strong enough to stand it
Put herself on good terms with God, in case He should exist
Semel insanivimus omnes.' (every one has his madness)
Slip forth from the common herd, my son, think for yourself
Suspicion that he is a feeble human creature after all!
There will be no more belief in Christ than in Jupiter
Ties that become duties where we only sought pleasures

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Truth is easily found. I shall read all the newspapers
Two persons who desired neither to remember nor to forget
Whether in this world one must be a fanatic or nothing
Whole world of politics and religion rushed to extremes
With the habit of thinking, had not lost the habit of laughing
You can not make an omelette without first breaking the eggs

CINQ MARS

By Alfred de vigny

With a Prefaces by *Charles de MAZADE*, and *Gaston BOISSIER* of the French Academy.

ALFRED DE VIGNY

The reputation of Alfred de Vigny has endured extraordinary vicissitudes in France. First he was lauded as the precursor of French romantic poetry and stately prose; then he sank in semi-oblivion, became the curiosity of criticism, died in retirement, and was neglected for a long time, until the last ten years or so produced a marked revolution of taste in France. The supremacy of Victor Hugo has been, if not questioned, at least mitigated; other poets have recovered from their obscurity. Lamartine shines now like a lamp relighted; and the pure, brilliant, and profoundly original genius of Alfred de Vigny now takes, for the first time, its proper place as one of the main illuminating forces of the nineteenth century.

It was not until one hundred years after this poet's birth that it became clearly recognized that he is one of the most important of all the great writers of France, and he is distinguished not only in fiction, but also in poetry and the drama. He is a follower of Andre Chenier, Lamartine, and Victor Hugo, a lyric sun, a philosophic poet, later, perhaps in consequence of the Revolution of 1830, becoming a "Symbolist." He has been held to occupy a middle ground between De Musset and Chenier, but he has also something suggestive of Madame de Stael, and, artistically, he has much in common with Chateaubriand, though he is more coldly impersonal and probably much more sincere in his philosophy. If Sainte-Beuve, however, calls the poet in his *Nouveaux Lundis* a "beautiful angel, who has been drinking vinegar," then the modern reader needs a strong caution against malice and raillery, if not jealousy and perfidy, although the article on De Vigny abounds otherwise with excessive critical cleverness.



At times, indeed, under the cruel deceptions of love, he seemed to lose faith in his idealism; his pessimism, nevertheless, always remained noble, restrained, sympathetic, manifesting itself not in appeals for condolence, but in pitying care for all who were near and dear to him. Yet his lofty prose and poetry, interpenetrated with the stern despair of pessimistic idealism, will always be unintelligible to the many. As a poet, De Vigny appeals to the chosen few alone. In his dramas his genius is more emancipated from himself, in his novels most of all. It is by these that he is most widely known, and by these that he exercised the greatest influence on the literary life of his generation.

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Alfred-Victor, Count de Vigny, was born in Loches, Touraine, March 27, 1797. His father was an army officer, wounded in the Seven Years' War. Alfred, after having been well educated, also selected a military career and received a commission in the "Mousquetaires Rouges," in 1814, when barely seventeen. He served until 1827, "twelve long years of peace," then resigned. Already in 1822 appeared a volume of 'Poemes' which was hardly noticed, although containing poetry since become important to the evolution of French verse: 'La Neige, le Coy, le Deluge, Elva, la Frigate', etc., again collected in 'Poemes antiques et modernes' (1826). Other poems were published after his death in 'Les Destinies' (1864).

Under the influence of Walter Scott, he wrote a historical romance in 1826, 'Cinq-Mars, ou une Conjuraison sans Louis XIII'. It met with the most brilliant and decided success and was crowned by the Academy. Cinq-Mars will always be remembered as the earliest romantic novel in France and the greatest and most dramatic picture of Richelieu now extant. De Vigny was a convinced Anglophile, well acquainted with the writings of Shakespeare and Milton, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Matthew Arnold, and Leopardi. He also married an English lady in 1825—Lydia Bunbury.

Other prose works are 'Stello' (1832), in the manner of Sterne and Diderot, and 'Servitude et Grandeur militaire' (1835), the language of which is as caustic as that of Merimee. As a dramatist, De Vigny produced a translation of 'Othello—Le More de Venice' (1829); also 'La Marechale d'Ancre' (1832); both met with moderate success only. But a decided "hit" was 'Chatterton' (1835), an adaption from his prose-work 'Stello, ou les Diables bleus'; it at once established his reputation on the stage; the applause was most prodigious, and in the annals of the French theatre can only be compared with that of 'Le Cid'. It was a great victory for the Romantic School, and the type of Chatterton, the slighted poet, "the marvellous boy, the sleepless soul that perished in his pride," became contagious as erstwhile did the type of Werther.

For twenty years before his death Alfred de Vigny wrote nothing. He lived in retirement, almost a recluse, in La Charente, rarely visiting Paris. Admitted into L'Academie Francaise in 1845, he describes in his 'Journal d'un Poete' his academic visits and the reception held out to him by the members of L'Institut. This work appeared posthumously in 1867.

He died in Paris, September 17, 1863.

Charlesde MAZADE
de l'Academie Francaise.

PREFACE

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Considering Alfred de Vigny first as a writer, it is evident that he wished the public to regard him as different from the other romanticists of his day; in fact, in many respects, his method presents a striking contrast to theirs. To their brilliant facility, their prodigious abundance, and the dazzling luxury of color in their pictures of life he opposes a style always simple, pure, clear, with delicacy of touch, careful drawing of character, correct locution, and absolute chastity. Yet, even though he had this marked regard for purity in literary style, no writer had more dislike of mere pedantry. His high ideal in literary art and his self-respect inspired him with an invincible repugnance toward the artificialities of style of that period, which the romanticists—above all, Chateaubriand, their master—had so much abused.

Every one knows of the singular declaration made by Chateaubriand to Joubert, while relating the details of a nocturnal voyage: “The moon shone upon me in a slender crescent, and that prevented me from writing an untruth, for I feel sure that had not the moon been there I should have said in my letter that it was shining, and then you would have convicted me of an error in my almanac!”

This habit of sacrificing truth and exactitude of impression, for the sake of producing a harmonious phrase or a picturesque suggestion, disgusted Alfred de Vigny. “The worst thing about writers is that they care very little whether what they write is true, so long as they only write,” we read on one page of his *Journal*. He adds, “They should seek words only in their own consciences.” On another page he says: “The most serious lack in literary work is sincerity. Perceiving clearly that the combination of technical labor and research for effective expression, in producing literary work, often leads us to a paradox, I have resolved to sacrifice all to conviction and truth, so that this precious element of sincerity, complete and profound, shall dominate my books and give to them the sacred character which the divine presence of truth always gives.”

Besides sincerity, De Vigny possessed, in a high degree, a gift which was not less rare in that age—good taste. He had taste in the art of writing, a fine literary tact, a sense of proportion, a perception of delicate shades of expression, an instinct that told him what to say and what to suppress, to insinuate, or to be left to the understanding. Even in his innovations in form, in his boldness of style, he showed a rare discretion; never did he do violence to the genius of the French language, and one may apply to him without reserve the eulogy that Quintilian pronounced upon Horace: ‘*Verbis felicissime audax*’.

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He cherished also a fixed principle that art implied selection. He was neither idealist nor realist, in the exclusive and opposing sense in which we understand these terms; he recommended a scrupulous observance of nature, and that every writer should draw as close to it as possible, but only in order to interpret it, to reveal it with a true feeling, yet without a too intimate analysis, and that no one should attempt to portray it exactly or servilely copy it. "Of what use is art," he says, "if it is only a reduplication of existence? We see around us only too much of the sadness and disenchantment of reality." The three novels that compose the volume '*Servitude et Grandeur militaire*' are, in this respect, models of romantic composition that never will be surpassed, bearing witness to the truth of the formula followed by De Vigny in all his literary work: "Art is the chosen truth."

If, as a versifier, Alfred de Vigny does not equal the great poets of his time, if they are his superiors in distinction and brilliancy, in richness of vocabulary, freedom of movement, and variety of rhythm, the cause is to be ascribed less to any lack of poetic genius than to the nature of his inspiration, even to the laws of poesy, and to the secret and irreducible antinomy that exists between art and thought. When, for example, Theophile Gautier reproached him with being too little impressed with the exigencies of rhyme, his criticism was not well grounded, for richness of rhyme, though indispensable in works of descriptive imagination, has no '*raison d'être*' in poems dominated by sentiment and thought. But, having said that, we must recognize in his poetry an element, serious, strong, and impressive, characteristic of itself alone, and admire, in the strophes of '*Mozse*', in the imprecations of '*Samson*', and in the '*Destinees*', the majestic simplicity of the most beautiful Hebraic verse.

Moreover, the true originality of De Vigny does not lie in the manner of composition; it was primarily in the role of precursor that he played his part on the stage of literature. Let us imagine ourselves at the period about the beginning of the year 1822. Of the three poets who, in making their literary debuts, had just published the '*Meditations, Poemes antiques et modernes, and Odes*', only one had, at that time, the instinct of renewal in the spirit of French poesy, and a sense of the manner in which this must be accomplished; and that one was not Lamartine, and certainly it was not Victor Hugo.

Sainte-Beuve has said, with authority, that in Lamartine there is something suggestive of Millevoeye, of Voltaire (he of the charming epistles), and of Fontanes; and Victor Hugo wrote with very little variation from the technical form of his predecessors. "But with Alfred de Vigny," he says, "we seek in vain for a resemblance to any French poetry preceding his work. For example, where can we find anything resembling '*Moise, Eloa, Doloeida*'? Where did he find his inspiration for style and composition in these poems? If the poets of the Pleiades of the Restoration seem to have found their inspiration within themselves, showing no trace of connection with the literature of the past, thus throwing into confusion old habits of taste and of routine, certain it is that among them Alfred de Vigny should be ranked first."

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Even in the collection that bears the date of 1822, some years before the future author of *Legende des Siecles* had taken up romanticism, Alfred de Vigny had already conceived the idea of setting forth, in a series of little epics, the migrations of the human soul throughout the ages. "One feels," said he in his Preface, "a keen intellectual delight in transporting one's self, by mere force of thought, to a period of antiquity; it resembles the pleasure an old man feels in recalling first his early youth, and then the whole course of his life. In the age of simplicity, poetry was devoted entirely to the beauties of the physical forms of nature and of man; each step in advance that it has made since then toward our own day of civilization and of sadness, seems to have blended it more and more with our arts, and even with the sufferings of our souls. At present, with all the serious solemnity of Religion and of Destiny, it lends to them their chief beauty. Never discouraged, Poetry has followed Man in his long journey through the ages, like a sweet and beautiful companion. I have attempted, in our language, to show some of her beauties, in following her progress toward the present day."

The arrangement of the poems announced in this Preface is tripartite, like that of the '*Legende des Siecles: Poemes antiques, poemes judaïques, poemes modernes.—Livre mystique, livre antique, livre moderne*'. But the name of precursor would be a vain title if all that were necessary to merit it was the fact that one had been the first to perceive a new path to literary glory, to salute it from a distance, yet never attempt to make a nearer approach.

In one direction at least, Alfred de Vigny was a true innovator, in the broadest and most meritorious sense of the word: he was the creator of philosophic poetry in France. Until Jocelyn appeared, in 1836, the form of poetic expression was confined chiefly to the ode, the ballad, and the elegy; and no poet, with the exception of the author of '*Moïse*' and '*Eloa*', ever dreamed that abstract ideas and themes dealing with the moralities could be expressed in the melody of verse.

To this priority, of which he knew the full value, Alfred de Vigny laid insistent claim. "The only merit," he says in one of his prefaces, "that any one ever has disputed with me in this sort of composition is the honor of having promulgated in France all works of the kind in which philosophic thought is presented in either epic or dramatic form."

But it was not alone priority in the sense of time that gave him right of way over his contemporaries; he was the most distinguished representative of poetic philosophy of his generation. If the phrases of Lamartine seem richer, if his flight is more majestic, De Vigny's range is surer and more powerful. While the philosophy of the creator of '*Les Harmonies*' is uncertain and inconsistent, that of the poet of '*Les Destinées*' is strong and substantial, for the reason that the former inspires more sentiment than ideas, while the latter, soaring far above the narrow sphere of personal emotion, writes of everything that occupies the intellect of man.



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Thus, by his vigor and breadth of thought, by his profound understanding of life, by the intensity of his dreams, Alfred de Vigny is superior to Victor Hugo, whose genius was quite different, in his power to portray picturesque scenes, in his remarkable fecundity of imagination, and in his sovereign mastery of technique.

But nowhere in De Vigny's work is that superiority of poetic thought so clearly shown as in those productions wherein the point of departure was farthest from the domain of intellect, and better than any other has he understood that truth proclaimed by Hegel: "The passions of the soul and the affections of the heart are matter for poetic expression only in so far as they are general, solid, and eternal."

De Vigny was also the only one among our poets that had a lofty ideal of woman and of love. And in order to convince one's self of this it is sufficient to reread successively the four great love-poems of that period: 'Le Lac, La Tristesse d'Olympio, Le Souvenir, and La Colere de Samson'.

Lamartine's conception of love was a sort of mild ecstasy, the sacred rapture in which the senses play no part, and noble emotions that cause neither trouble nor remorse. He ever regarded love as a kind of sublime and passionate religion, of which 'Le Lac' was the most beautiful hymn, but in which the image of woman is so vague that she almost seems to be absent.

On the other hand, what is 'La Tristesse d'Olympio' if not an admirable but common poetic rapture, a magnificent summary of the sufferings of the heart—a bit of lyric writing equal to the most beautiful canzoni of the Italian masters, but wherein we find no idea of love, because all is artificial and studied; no cry from the soul is heard,—no trace of passion appears.

After another fashion the same criticism applies to *Le Souvenir*; it was written under a stress of emotion resulting from too recent events; and the imagination of the author, subservient to a memory relentlessly faithful, as is often the case with those to whom passion is the chief principle of inspiration, was far from fulfilling the duties of his high vocation, which is to purify the passions of the poet from individual and accidental characteristics in order to leave unhampered whatever his work may contain that is powerful and imperishable.

Alfred de Vigny alone, of the poets of his day, in his 'Colere de Samson', has risen to a just appreciation of woman and of love; his ideal is grand and tragic, it is true, and reminds one of that gloomy passage in *Ecclesiastes* which says: "Woman is more bitter than death, and her arms are like chains."

It is by this character of universality, of which all his writings show striking evidence, that Alfred de Vigny is assured of immortality. A heedless generation neglected him because it preferred to seek subjects in strong contrast to life of its own time. But that which was



not appreciated by his contemporaries will be welcomed by posterity. And when, in French literature, there shall remain of true romanticism only a slight trace and the memory of a few great names, the author of the 'Destinees' will still find an echo in all hearts.

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No writer, no matter how gifted, immortalizes himself unless he has crystallized into expressive and original phrase the eternal sentiments and yearnings of the human heart. "A man does not deserve the name of poet unless he can express personal feeling and emotion, and only that man is worthy to be called a poet who knows how to assimilate the varied emotions of mankind." If this fine phrase of Goethe's is true, if true poetry is only that which implies a mastery of spiritual things as well as of human emotion, Alfred de Vigny is assuredly one of our greatest poets, for none so well as he has realized a complete vision of the universe, no one has brought before the world with more boldness the problem of the soul and that of humanity. Under the title of poet he belongs not only to our national literature, but occupies a distinctive place in the world of intellect, with Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe, among those inspired beings who transmit throughout succeeding centuries the light of reason and the traditions of the loftiest poetic thought.

Alfred de Vigny was elected to a chair in the French Academy in 1846 and died at Paris, September 17, 1863.

*Gaston*BOISSIER
Secetaire Perpetuel de l'Academie Francaise.

TRUTH IN ART

The study of social progress is to-day not less needed in literature than is the analysis of the human heart. We live in an age of universal investigation, and of exploration of the sources of all movements. France, for example, loves at the same time history and the drama, because the one explores the vast destinies of humanity, and the other the individual lot of man. These embrace the whole of life. But it is the province of religion, of philosophy, of pure poetry only, to go beyond life, beyond time, into eternity.

Of late years (perhaps as a result of our political changes) art has borrowed from history more than ever. All of us have our eyes fixed on our chronicles, as though, having reached manhood while going on toward greater things, we had stopped a moment to cast up the account of our youth and its errors. We have had to double the interest by adding to it recollection.

As France has carried farther than other nations this love of facts, and as I had chosen a recent and well-remembered epoch, it seemed to me that I ought not to imitate those foreigners who in their pictures barely show in the horizon the men who dominate their history. I placed ours in the foreground of the scene; I made them leading actors in this tragedy, wherever I endeavored to represent the three kinds of ambition by which we are influenced, and with them the beauty of self-sacrifice to a noble ideal. A treatise on the fall of the feudal system; on the position, at home and abroad, of France in the seventeenth century; on foreign alliances; on the justice of parliaments or of secret

commissions, or on accusations of sorcery, would not perhaps have been read. But the romance was read.

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I do not mean to defend this last form of historical composition, being convinced that the real greatness of a work lies in the substance of the author's ideas and sentiments, and not in the literary form in which they are dressed. The choice of a certain epoch necessitates a certain treatment—to another epoch it would be unsuitable; these are mere secrets of the workshop of thought which there is no need of disclosing. What is the use of theorizing as to wherein lies the charm that moves us? We hear the tones of the harp, but its graceful form conceals from us its frame of iron. Nevertheless, since I have been convinced that this book possesses vitality, I can not help throwing out some reflections on the liberty which the imagination should employ in weaving into its tapestry all the leading figures of an age, and, to give more consistency to their acts, in making the reality of fact give way to the idea which each of them should represent in the eyes of posterity; in short, on the difference which I find between Truth in art and the True in fact.

Just as we descend into our consciences to judge of actions which our minds can not weigh, can we not also search in ourselves for the feeling which gives birth to forms of thought, always vague and cloudy? We shall find in our troubled hearts, where discord reigns, two needs which seem at variance, but which merge, as I think, in a common source—the love of the true, and the love of the fabulous.

On the day when man told the story of his life to man, history was born. Of what use is the memory of facts, if not to serve as an example of good or of evil? But the examples which the slow train of events presents to us are scattered and incomplete. They lack always a tangible and visible coherence leading straight on to a moral conclusion. The acts of the human race on the world's stage have doubtless a coherent unity, but the meaning of the vast tragedy enacted will be visible only to the eye of God, until the end, which will reveal it perhaps to the last man. All systems of philosophy have sought in vain to explain it, ceaselessly rolling up their rock, which, never reaching the top, falls back upon them—each raising its frail structure on the ruins of the others, only to see it fall in its turn.

I think, then, that man, after having satisfied his first longing for facts, wanted something fuller—some grouping, some adaptation to his capacity and experience, of the links of this vast chain of events which his sight could not take in. Thus he hoped to find in the historic recital examples which might support the moral truths of which he was conscious. Few single careers could satisfy this longing, being only incomplete parts of the elusive whole of the history of the world; one was a quarter, as it were, the other a half of the proof; imagination did the rest and completed them. From this, without doubt, sprang the fable. Man created it thus, because it was not given him to see more than himself and nature, which surrounds him; but he created it true with a truth all its own.

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This Truth, so beautiful, so intellectual, which I feel, I see, and long to define, the name of which I here venture to distinguish from that of the True, that I may the better make myself understood, is the soul of all the arts. It is the selection of the characteristic token in all the beauties and the grandeurs of the visible True; but it is not the thing itself, it is something better: it is an ideal combination of its principal forms, a luminous tint made up of its brightest colors, an intoxicating balm of its purest perfumes, a delicious elixir of its best juices, a perfect harmony of its sweetest sounds—in short, it is a concentration of all its good qualities. For this Truth, and nothing else, should strive those works of art which are a moral representation of life-dramatic works. To attain it, the first step is undoubtedly to learn all that is true in fact of every period, to become deeply imbued with its general character and with its details; this involves only a cheap tribute of attention, of patience, and of memory: But then one must fix upon some chosen centre, and group everything around it; this is the work of imagination, and of that sublime common-sense which is genius itself.

Of what use were the arts if they were only the reproduction and the imitation of life? Good heavens! we see only too clearly about us the sad and disenchanting reality—the insupportable lukewarmness of feeble characters, of shallow virtues and vices, of irresolute loves, of tempered hates, of wavering friendships, of unsettled beliefs, of constancy which has its height and its depth, of opinions which evaporate. Let us dream that once upon a time have lived men stronger and greater, who were more determined for good or for evil; that does us good. If the paleness of your True is to follow us into art, we shall close at once the theatre and the book, to avoid meeting it a second time. What is wanted of works which revive the ghosts of human beings is, I repeat, the philosophical spectacle of man deeply wrought upon by the passions of his character and of his epoch; it is, in short, the artistic Truth of that man and that epoch, but both raised to a higher and ideal power, which concentrates all their forces. You recognize this Truth in works of the imagination just as you cry out at the resemblance of a portrait of which you have never seen the original; for true talent paints life rather than the living.

To banish finally the scruples on this point of the consciences of some persons, timorous in literary matters, whom I have seen affected with a personal sorrow on viewing the rashness with which the imagination sports with the most weighty characters of history, I will hazard the assertion that, not throughout this work, I dare not say that, but in many of these pages, and those perhaps not of the least merit, history is a romance of which the people are the authors. The human mind, I believe, cares for the True only in the general character of an epoch. What it values most of all is the sum total of events and the advance of civilization, which carries individuals along with it; but, indifferent to details, it cares less to have them real than noble or, rather, grand and complete.

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Examine closely the origin of certain deeds, of certain heroic expressions, which are born one knows not how; you will see them leap out ready-made from hearsay and the murmurs of the crowd, without having in themselves more than a shadow of truth, and, nevertheless, they will remain historical forever. As if by way of pleasantry, and to put a joke upon posterity, the public voice invents sublime utterances to mark, during their lives and under their very eyes, men who, confused, avow themselves as best they may, as not deserving of so much glory—

[In our time has not a Russian General denied the fire of Moscow, which we have made heroic, and which will remain so? Has not a French General denied that utterance on the field of Waterloo which will immortalize it? And if I were not withheld by my respect for a sacred event, I might recall that a priest has felt it to be his duty to disavow in public a sublime speech which will remain the noblest that has ever been pronounced on a scaffold: "Son of Saint Louis, rise to heaven!" When I learned not long ago its real author, I was overcome by the destruction of my illusion, but before long I was consoled by a thought that does honor to humanity in my eyes. I feel that France has consecrated this speech, because she felt the need of reestablishing herself in her own eyes, of blinding herself to her awful error, and of believing that then and there an honest man was found who dared to speak aloud.]

and as not being able to support so high renown. In vain; their disclaimers are not received. Let them cry out, let them write, let them print, let them sign—they are not listened to. These utterances are inscribed in bronze; the poor fellows remain historical and sublime in spite of themselves. And I do not find that all this is done in the ages of barbarism alone; it is still going on, and it molds the history of yesterday to the taste of public opinion—a Muse tyrannical and capricious, which preserves the general purport and scorns detail.

Which of you knows not of such transformation? Do you not see with your own eyes the chrysalis fact assume by degrees the wings of fiction? Half formed by the necessities of the time, a fact is hidden in the ground obscure and incomplete, rough, misshapen, like a block of marble not yet rough-hewn. The first who unearth it, and take it in hand, would wish it differently shaped, and pass it, already a little rounded, into other hands; others polish it as they pass it along; in a short time it is exhibited transformed into an immortal statue. We disclaim it; witnesses who have seen and heard pile refutations upon explanations; the learned investigate, pore over books, and write. No one listens to them any more than to the humble heroes who disown it; the torrent rolls on and bears with it the whole thing under the form which it has pleased it to give to these individual actions. What was needed for all this work? A nothing,

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a word; sometimes the caprice of a journalist out of work. And are we the losers by it? No. The adopted fact is always better composed than the real one, and it is even adopted only because it is better. The human race feels a need that its destinies should afford it a series of lessons; more careless than we think of the reality of facts, it strives to perfect the event in order to give it a great moral significance, feeling sure that the succession of scenes which it plays upon earth is not a comedy, and that since it advances, it marches toward an end, of which the explanation must be sought beyond what is visible.

For my part, I acknowledge my gratitude to the voice of the people for this achievement; for often in the finest life are found strange blemishes and inconsistencies which pain me when I see them. If a man seems to me a perfect model of a grand and noble character, and if some one comes and tells me of a mean trait which disfigures him, I am saddened by it, even though I do not know him, as by a misfortune which affects me in person; and I could almost wish that he had died before the change in his character.

Thus, when the Muse (and I give that name to art as a whole, to everything which belongs to the domain of imagination, almost in the same way as the ancients gave the name of Music to all education), when the Muse has related, in her impassioned manner, the adventures of a character whom I know to have lived; and when she reshapes his experiences into conformity with the strongest idea of vice or virtue which can be conceived of him—filling the gaps, veiling the incongruities of his life, and giving him that perfect unity of conduct which we like to see represented even in evil—if, in addition to this, she preserves the only thing essential to the instruction of the world, the spirit of the epoch, I know no reason why we should be more exacting with her than with this voice of the people which every day makes every fact undergo so great changes.

The ancients carried this liberty even into history; they wanted to see in it only the general march, and broad movements of peoples and nations; and on these great movements, brought to view in courses very distinct and very clear, they placed a few colossal figures—symbols of noble character and of lofty purpose.

One might almost reckon mathematically that, having undergone the double composition of public opinion and of the author, their history reaches us at third hand and is thus separated by two stages from the original fact.

It is because in their eyes history too was a work of art; and in consequence of not having realized that such is its real nature, the whole Christian world still lacks an historical monument like those which dominate antiquity and consecrate the memory of its destinies—as its pyramids, its obelisks, its pylons, and its porticos still dominate the earth which was known to them, and thereby commemorate the grandeur of antiquity.



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If, then, we find everywhere evidence of this inclination to desert the positive, to bring the ideal even into historic annals, I believe that with greater reason we should be completely indifferent to historical reality in judging the dramatic works, whether poems, romances, or tragedies, which borrow from history celebrated characters. Art ought never to be considered except in its relations with its ideal beauty. Let it be said that what is true in fact is secondary merely; it is only an illusion the more with which it adorns itself—one of our prejudices which it respects. It can do without it, for the Truth by which it must live is the truth of observation of human nature, and not authenticity of fact. The names of the characters have nothing to do with the matter. The idea is everything; the proper name is only the example and the proof of the idea.

So much the better for the memory of those who are chosen to represent philosophical or moral ideas; but, once again, that is not the question. The imagination can produce just as fine things without them; it is a power wholly creative; the imaginary beings which it animates are endowed with life as truly as the real beings which it brings to life again. We believe in Othello as we do in Richard III., whose tomb is in Westminster; in Lovelace and Clarissa as in Paul and Virginia, whose tombs are in the Isle of France. It is with the same eye that we must watch the performance of its characters, and demand of the Muse only her artistic Truth, more lofty than the True—whether collecting the traits of a character dispersed among a thousand entire individuals, she composes from them a type whose name alone is imaginary; or whether she goes to their tomb to seek and to touch with her galvanic current the dead whose great deeds are known, forces them to arise again, and drags them dazzled to the light of day, where, in the circle which this fairy has traced, they re-assume unwillingly their passions of other days, and begin again in the sight of their descendants the sad drama of life. *Alfred de Vigny*. 1827.

CINQ-MARS

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE ADIEU

Fare thee well! and if forever,
Still forever fare thee well!

Lord Byron.

Do you know that charming part of our country which has been called the garden of France—that spot where, amid verdant plains watered by wide streams, one inhales the purest air of heaven?

If you have travelled through fair Touraine in summer, you have no doubt followed with enchantment the peaceful Loire; you have regretted the impossibility of determining upon which of its banks you would choose to dwell with your beloved. On its right bank one sees valleys dotted with white houses surrounded by woods, hills yellow with vines or white with the blossoms of the cherry-tree, walls covered with honeysuckles, rose-gardens, from which pointed roofs rise suddenly. Everything reminds the traveller either of the fertility of the land or of the antiquity of its monuments; and everything interests him in the work of its busy inhabitants.

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Nothing has proved useless to them; it seems as if in their love for so beautiful a country—the only province of France never occupied by foreigners—they have determined not to lose the least part of its soil, the smallest grain of its sand. Do you fancy that this ruined tower is inhabited only by hideous night-birds? No; at the sound of your horse's hoofs, the smiling face of a young girl peeps out from the ivy, whitened with the dust from the road. If you climb a hillside covered with vines, a light column of smoke shows you that there is a chimney at your feet; for the very rock is inhabited, and families of vine-dressers breathe in its caverns, sheltered at night by the kindly earth which they laboriously cultivate during the day. The good people of Touraine are as simple as their life, gentle as the air they breathe, and strong as the powerful earth they dig. Their countenances, like their characters, have something of the frankness of the true people of St. Louis; their chestnut locks are still long and curve around their ears, as in the stone statues of our old kings; their language is the purest French, with neither slowness, haste, nor accent—the cradle of the language is there, close to the cradle of the monarchy.

But the left bank of the stream has a more serious aspect; in the distance you see Chambord, which, with its blue domes and little cupolas, appears like some great city of the Orient; there is Chanteloup, raising its graceful pagoda in the air. Near these a simpler building attracts the eyes of the traveller by its magnificent situation and imposing size; it is the chateau of Chaumont. Built upon the highest hill of the shore, it frames the broad summit with its lofty walls and its enormous towers; high slate steeples increase their loftiness, and give to the building that conventual air, that religious form of all our old chateaux, which casts an aspect of gravity over the landscape of most of our provinces. Black and tufted trees surround this ancient mansion, resembling from afar the plumes that encircled the hat of King Henry. At the foot of the hill, connected with the chateau by a narrow path, lies a pretty village, whose white houses seem to have sprung from the golden sand; a chapel stands halfway up the hill; the lords descended and the villagers ascended to its altar—the region of equality, situated like a neutral spot between poverty and riches, which have been too often opposed to each other in bitter conflict.

Here, one morning in the month of June, 1639, the bell of the chateau having, as usual, rung at midday, the dinner-hour of the family, occurrences of an unusual kind were passing in this ancient dwelling. The numerous domestics observed that in repeating the morning prayers before the assembled household, the Marechale d'Effiat had spoken with a broken voice and with tears in her eyes, and that she had appeared in a deeper mourning than was customary. The people of the household and the Italians of the Duchesse

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de Mantua, who had at that time retired for a while to Chaumont, saw with surprise that sudden preparations were being made for departure. The old domestic of the Marechal d'Effiat (who had been dead six months) had taken again to his travelling-boots, which he had sworn to abandon forever. This brave fellow, named Grandchamp, had followed the chief of the family everywhere in the wars, and in his financial work; he had been his equerry in the former, and his secretary in the latter. He had recently returned from Germany, to inform the mother and the children of the death of the Marechal, whose last sighs he had heard at Luzzelstein. He was one of those faithful servants who are become too rare in France; who suffer with the misfortunes of the family, and rejoice with their joys; who approve of early marriages, that they may have young masters to educate; who scold the children and often the fathers; who risk death for them; who serve without wages in revolutions; who toil for their support; and who in prosperous times follow them everywhere, or exclaim at their return, "Behold our vines!" He had a severe and remarkable face, a coppery complexion, and silver-gray hair, in which, however, some few locks, black as his heavy eyebrows, made him appear harsh at first; but a gentle countenance softened this first impression. At present his voice was loud. He busied himself much that day in hastening the dinner, and ordered about all the servants, who were in mourning like himself.

"Come," said he, "make haste to serve the dinner, while Germain, Louis, and Etienne saddle their horses; Monsieur Henri and I must be far away by eight o'clock this evening. And you, gentlemen, Italians, have you warned your young Princess? I wager that she is gone to read with her ladies at the end of the park, or on the banks of the lake. She always comes in after the first course, and makes every one rise from the table."

"Ah, my good Grandchamp," said in a low voice a young maid servant who was passing, "do not speak of the Duchess; she is very sorrowful, and I believe that she will remain in her apartment. Santa Maria! what a shame to travel to-day! to depart on a Friday, the thirteenth of the month, and the day of Saint Gervais and of Saint-Protais—the day of two martyrs! I have been telling my beads all the morning for Monsieur de Cinq-Mars; and I could not help thinking of these things. And my mistress thinks of them too, although she is a great lady; so you need not laugh!"

With these words the young Italian glided like a bird across the large dining-room, and disappeared down a corridor, startled at seeing the great doors of the salon opened.

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Grandchamp had hardly heard what she had said, and seemed to have been occupied only with the preparations for dinner; he fulfilled the important duties of major-domo, and cast severe looks at the domestics to see whether they were all at their posts, placing himself behind the chair of the eldest son of the house. Then all the inhabitants of the mansion entered the salon. Eleven persons seated themselves at table. The Marechale came in last, giving her arm to a handsome old man, magnificently dressed, whom she placed upon her left hand. She seated herself in a large gilded arm-chair at the middle of one side of the table, which was oblong in form. Another seat, rather more ornamented, was at her right, but it remained empty. The young Marquis d'Effiat, seated in front of his mother, was to assist her in doing the honors of the table. He was not more than twenty years old, and his countenance was insignificant; much gravity and distinguished manners proclaimed, however, a social nature, but nothing more. His young sister of fourteen, two gentlemen of the province, three young Italian noblemen of the suite of Marie de Gonzaga (Duchesse de Mantua), a lady-in-waiting, the governess of the young daughter of the Marechale, and an abbe of the neighborhood, old and very deaf, composed the assembly. A seat at the right of the elder son still remained vacant.

The Marechale, before seating herself, made the sign of the cross, and repeated the Benedicite aloud; every one responded by making the complete sign, or upon the breast alone. This custom was preserved in many families in France up to the Revolution of 1789; some still practise it, but more in the provinces than in Paris, and not without some hesitation and some preliminary words upon the weather, accompanied by a deprecatory smile when a stranger is present—for it is too true that virtue also has its blush.

The Marechale possessed an imposing figure, and her large blue eyes were remarkably beautiful. She did not appear to have yet attained her forty-fifth year; but, oppressed with sorrow, she walked slowly and spoke with difficulty, closing her eyes, and allowing her head to droop for a moment upon her breast, after she had been obliged to raise her voice. At such efforts her hand pressed to her bosom showed that she experienced sharp pain. She saw therefore with satisfaction that the person who was seated at her left, having at the beginning engrossed the conversation, without having been requested by any one to talk, persisted with an imperturbable coolness in engrossing it to the end of the dinner. This was the old Marechal de Bassompierre; he had preserved with his white locks an air of youth and vivacity curious to see. His noble and polished manners showed a certain gallantry, antiquated like his costume—for he wore a ruff in the fashion of Henri IV, and the slashed sleeves fashionable in the former reign, an absurdity which was unpardonable in the eyes of the beaux of the court. This would not have appeared more singular than anything else at present; but it is admitted that in every age we laugh at the costume of our fathers, and, except the Orientals, I know of no people who have not this fault.

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One of the Italian gentlemen had hardly finished asking the Marechal what he thought of the way in which the Cardinal treated the daughter of the Duc de Mantua, when he exclaimed, in his familiar language:

“Heavens, man! what are you talking about? what do I comprehend of this new system under which France is living? We old companions-in-arms of his late Majesty can ill understand the language spoken by the new court, and that in its turn does not comprehend ours. But what do I say? We speak no language in this sad country, for all the world is silent before the Cardinal; this haughty little, vassal looks upon us as merely old family portraits, which occasionally he shortens by the head; but happily the motto always remains. Is it not true, my dear Puy-Laurens?”

This guest was about the same age as the Marechal, but, being more grave and cautious, he answered in vague and few words, and made a sign to his contemporary in order to induce him to observe the unpleasant emotions which he had caused the mistress of the house by reminding her of the recent death of her husband and in speaking thus of the minister, his friend. But it was in vain, for Bassompierre, pleased with the sign of half-approval, emptied at one draught a great goblet of wine—a remedy which he lauds in his Memoirs as infallible against the plague and against reserve; and leaning back to receive another glass from his esquire, he settled himself more firmly than ever upon his chair, and in his favorite ideas.

“Yes, we are in the way here; I said so the other day to my dear Duc de Guise, whom they have ruined. They count the minutes that we have to live, and shake the hour-glass to hasten the descent of its sands. When Monsieur le Cardinal-Duc observes in a corner three or four of our tall figures, who never quitted the side of the late King, he feels that he is unable to move those statues of iron, and that to do it would require the hand of a great man; he passes quickly by, and dares not meddle with us, who fear him not. He believes that we are always conspiring; and they say at this very moment that there is talk of putting me in the Bastille.”

“Eh! Monsieur le Marechal, why do you delay your departure?” said the Italian. “I know of no place, except Flanders, where you can find shelter.”

“Ah, Monsieur! you do not know me. So far from flying, I sought out the King before his departure, and told him that I did so in order to save people the trouble of looking for me; and that if I knew when he wished to send me, I would go myself without being taken. He was as kind as I expected him to be, and said to me, ‘What, my old friend, could you have thought that I desired to send you there? You know well that I love you.’”

“Ah, my dear Marechal, let me compliment you,” said Madame d’Effiat, in a soft voice. “I recognize the benevolence of the King in these words; he remembers the affection which the King, his father, had toward you. It appears to me that he always accorded to

you all that you desired for your friends," she added, with animation, in order to put him into the track of praise, and to beguile him from the discontent which he had so loudly declared.

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"Assuredly, Madame," answered he; "no one is more willing to recognize his virtues than Francois de Bassompierre. I shall be faithful to him to the end, because I gave myself, body and fortune, to his father at a ball; and I swear that, with my consent at least, none of my family shall ever fail in their duties toward the King of France. Although the Besteins are foreigners and Lorrains, a shake of the hand from Henri IV gained us forever. My greatest grief has been to see my brother die in the service of Spain; and I have just written to my nephew to say that I shall disinherit him if he has passed over to the Emperor, as report says he has."

One of the gentlemen guests who had as yet been silent, and who was remarkable for the profusion of knots, ribbons, and tags which covered his dress, and for the black cordon of the Order of St. Michael which decorated his neck, bowed, observing that it was thus all faithful subjects ought to speak.

"I' faith, Monsieur de Launay, you deceive yourself very much," said the Marechal, to whom the recollection of his ancestors now occurred; "persons of our blood are subjects only at our own pleasure, for God has caused us to be born as much lords of our lands as the King is of his. When I came to France, I came at my ease, accompanied by my gentlemen and pages. I perceive, however, that the farther we go, the more we lose sight of this idea, especially at the court. But here is a young man who arrives very opportunely to hear me."

The door indeed opened, and a young man of fine form entered. He was pale; his hair was brown, his eyes were black, his expression was sad and reckless. This was Henri d'Effiat, Marquis de Cinq-Mars (a name taken from an estate of his family). His dress and his short cloak were black; a collar of lace fell from his neck halfway down his breast; his stout, small, and very wide-spurred boots made so much noise upon the flags of the salon that his approach was heard at a distance. He walked directly toward the Marechale, bowed low, and kissed her hand.

"Well, Henri," she said, "are your horses ready? At what hour do you depart?"

"Immediately after dinner, Madame, if you will allow me," said he to his mother, with the ceremonious respect of the times; and passing behind her, he saluted M. de Bassompierre before seating himself at the left of his eldest brother.

"Well," said the Marechal, continuing to eat with an excellent appetite, "you are about to depart, my son; you are going to the court—a slippery place nowadays. I am sorry for your sake that it is not now what it used to be. In former times, the court was simply the drawing-room of the King, in which he received his natural friends: nobles of great family, his peers, who visited him to show their devotion and their friendship, lost their money with him, and accompanied him in his pleasure parties, but never received anything from him, except permission to bring their vassals with them, to break their heads in his service. The honors a man of quality received did not enrich him, for he



paid for them out of his purse. I sold an estate for every grade I received; the title of colonel-general of the Swiss cost me four hundred thousand crowns, and at the baptism of the present King I had to buy a costume that cost me a hundred thousand francs."

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"Ah!" said the mistress of the house, smiling, "you must acknowledge for once that you were not obliged to do that. We have all heard of your splendid dress of pearls; but I should be much vexed were it still the custom to wear such."

"Oh, Madame la Marquise, do not fear, those times of magnificence never will return. We committed follies, no doubt, but they proved our independence; it is clear that it would then have been hard to convert from their allegiance to the King adherents who were attached to him by love alone, and whose coronets contained as many diamonds as his own locked-up crown. It is also certain that ambition could not then attack all classes, since such expenses could come only from rich hands, and since gold comes only from mines. Those great houses, which are being so furiously assailed, were not ambitious, and frequently, desiring no employment from the Government, maintained their places at court by their own weight, existed upon their own foundation, and might say, as one of them did say, 'The Prince condescends not; I am Rohan.' It was the same with every noble family, to which its own nobility sufficed; the King himself expressed it in writing to one of my friends: 'Money is not a common thing between gentlemen like you and me.'"

"But, Monsieur le Marechal," coldly, and with extreme politeness, interrupted M. de Launay, who perhaps intended to anger him, "this independence has produced as many civil wars and revolts as those of Monsieur de Montmorency."

"Monsieur! I can not consent to hear these things spoken," said the fiery Marechal, leaping up in his armchair. "Those revolts and wars had nothing to do with the fundamental laws of the State, and could no more have overturned the throne than a duel could have done so. Of all the great party-chiefs, there was not one who would not have laid his victory at the feet of the King, had he succeeded, knowing well that all the other lords who were as great as himself would have abandoned the enemy of the legitimate sovereign. Arms were taken against a faction, and not against the sovereign authority; and, this destroyed, everything went on again in the old way. But what have you done in crushing us? You have crushed the arm of the throne, and have not put anything in its place. Yes, I no longer doubt that the Cardinal-Duke will wholly accomplish his design; the great nobility will leave and lose their lands, and, ceasing to be great proprietors, they will cease to be a great power. The court is already no more than a palace where people beg; by and by it will become an antechamber, when it will be composed only of those who constitute the suite of the King. Great names will begin by ennobling vile offices; but, by a terrible reaction, those offices will end by rendering great names vile. Estranged from their homes, the nobility will be dependent upon the employments which they shall have received; and if the people, over whom they will no longer have any influence, choose to revolt—"

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"How gloomy you are to-day, Marechal!" interrupted the Marquise; "I hope that neither I nor my children will ever see that time. I no longer perceive your cheerful disposition, now that you talk like a politician. I expected to hear you give advice to my son. Henri, what troubles you? You seem very absent."

Cinq-Mars, with eyes fixed upon the, great bay window of the dining-room, looked sorrowfully upon the magnificent landscape. The sun shone in full splendor, and colored the sands of the Loire, the trees, and the lawns with gold and emerald. The sky was azure, the waves were of a transparent yellow, the islets of a vivid green; behind their rounded outlines rose the great sails of the merchant-vessels, like a fleet in ambuscade.

"O Nature, Nature!" he mused; "beautiful Nature, farewell! Soon will my heart cease to be of simplicity enough to feel your charm, soon you will no longer please my eyes. This heart is already burned by a deep passion; and the mention of the interests of men stirs it with hitherto unknown agitation. I must, however, enter this labyrinth; I may, perchance, lose myself there, but for Marie—"

At this moment, aroused by the words of his mother, and fearing to exhibit a childish regret at leaving his beautiful country and his family, he said:

"I am thinking, Madame, of the road which I shall take to Perpignan, and also of that which shall bring me back to you."

"Do not forget to take that of Poitiers, and to go to Loudun to see your old tutor, our good Abbe Quillet; he will give you useful advice about the court. He is on very good terms with the Duc de Bouillon; and besides, though he may not be very necessary to you, it is a mark of deference which you owe him."

"Is it, then, to the siege of Perpignan that you are going, my boy?" asked the old Marechal, who began to think that he had been silent a long time. "Ah! it is well for you. Plague upon it! a siege! 'tis an excellent opening. I would have given much had I been able to assist the late King at a siege, upon my arrival in his court; it would have been better to be disembowelled then than at a tourney, as I was. But we were at peace; and I was compelled to go and shoot the Turks with the Rosworm of the Hungarians, in order that I might not afflict my family by my idleness. For the rest, may his Majesty receive you as kindly as his father received me! It is true that the King is good and brave; but they have unfortunately taught him that cold Spanish etiquette which arrests all the impulses of the heart. He restrains himself and others by an immovable presence and an icy look; as for me, I confess that I am always waiting for the moment of thaw, but in vain. We were accustomed to other manners from the witty and simple-hearted Henri; and we were at least free to tell him that we loved him."

Cinq-Mars, with eyes fixed upon those of Bassompierre, as if to force himself to attend to his discourse, asked him what was the manner of the late king in conversation.

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"Lively and frank," said he. "Some time after my arrival in France, I played with him and with the Duchesse de Beaufort at Fontainebleau; for he wished, he said, to win my gold-pieces, my fine Portugal money. He asked me the reason why I came into this country. 'Truly, Sire,' said I, frankly, 'I came with no intention of enlisting myself in your service, but only to pass some time at your court, and afterward at that of Spain; but you have charmed me so much that, instead of going farther, if you desire my service, I will devote myself to you till death.' Then he embraced me, and assured me that I could not find a better master, or one who would love me more. Alas! I have found it so. And for my part, I sacrificed everything to him, even my love; and I would have done more, had it been possible to do more than renounce Mademoiselle de Montmorency."

The good Marechal had tears in his eyes; but the young Marquis d'Effiat and the Italians, looking at one another, could not help smiling to think that at present the Princesse de Conde was far from young and pretty. Cinq-Mars noticed this interchange of glances, and smiled also, but bitterly.

"Is it true then," he thought, "that the affections meet the same fate as the fashions, and that the lapse of a few years can throw the same ridicule upon a costume and upon love? Happy is he who does not outlive his youth and his illusions, and who carries his treasures with him to the grave!"

But—again, with effort breaking the melancholy course of his thoughts, and wishing that the good Marechal should read nothing unpleasant upon the countenances of his hosts, he said:

"People spoke, then, with much freedom to King Henri? Possibly, however, he found it necessary to assume that tone at the beginning of his reign; but when he was master did he change it?"

"Never! no, never, to his last day, did our great King cease to be the same. He did not blush to be a man, and he spoke to men with force and sensibility. Ah! I fancy I see him now, embracing the Duc de Guise in his carriage, on the very day of his death; he had just made one of his lively pleasantries to me, and the Duke said to him, 'You are, in my opinion, one of the most agreeable men in the world, and destiny ordained us for each other. For, had you been but an ordinary man, I should have taken you into my service at whatever price; but since heaven ordained that you should be born a great King, it is inevitable that I belong to you.' Oh, great man!" cried Bassompierre, with tears in his eyes, and perhaps a little excited by the frequent bumpers he had drunk, "you said well, 'When you have lost me you will learn my value.'"

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During this interlude, the guests at the table had assumed various attitudes, according to their position in public affairs. One of the Italians pretended to chat and laugh in a subdued manner with the young daughter of the Marechale; the other talked to the deaf old Abbe, who, with one hand behind his ear that he might hear, was the only one who appeared attentive. Cinq-Mars had sunk back into his melancholy abstraction, after throwing a glance at the Marechal, as one looks aside after throwing a tennis-ball until its return; his elder brother did the honors of the table with the same calm. Puy-Laurens observed the mistress of the house with attention; he was devoted to the Duc d'Orleans, and feared the Cardinal. As for the Marechale, she had an anxious and afflicted air. Careless words had often recalled the death of her husband or the departure of her son; and, oftener still, she had feared lest Bassompierre should compromise himself. She had touched him many times, glancing at the same time toward M. de Launay, of whom she knew little, and whom she had reason to believe devoted to the prime minister; but to a man of his character, such warnings were useless. He appeared not to notice them; but, on the contrary, crushing that gentleman with his bold glance and the sound of his voice, he affected to turn himself toward him, and to direct all his conversation to him. M. de Launay assumed an air of indifference and of assenting politeness, which he preserved until the moment when the folding-doors opened, and "Mademoiselle la Duchesse de Mantua" was announced.

The conversation which we have transcribed so lengthily passed, in reality, with rapidity; and the repast was only half over when the arrival of Marie de Gonzaga caused the company to rise. She was small, but very well made, and although her eyes and hair were black, her complexion was as dazzling as the beauty of her skin. The Marechale arose to acknowledge her rank, and kissed her on the forehead, in recognition of her goodness and her charming age.

"We have waited a long time for you to-day, dear Marie," she said, placing the Duchess beside her; "fortunately, you remain with me to replace one of my children, who is about to depart."

The young Duchess blushed, lowered her head and her eyes, in order that no one might see their redness, and said, timidly:

"Madame, that may well be, since you have taken toward me the place of a mother;" and a glance thrown at Cinq-Mars, at the other end of the table, made him turn pale.

This arrival changed the conversation; it ceased to be general, and each guest conversed in a low voice with his neighbor. The Marechal alone continued to utter a few sentences concerning the magnificence of the old court, his wars in Turkey, the tournaments, and the avarice of the new court; but, to his great regret, no one made any reply, and the company were about to leave the table, when, as the clock struck two, five horses appeared in the courtyard. Four were mounted by servants, cloaked and

armed; the other horse, black and spirited, was held by old Grandchamp—it was his master's steed.

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"Ah!" exclaimed Bassompierre; "see, our battlehorses are saddled and bridled. Come, young man, we must say, with our old Marot:

'Adieu la cour, adieu les dames!
Adieu les filles et les femmes!
Adieu vous dy pour quelque temps;
Adieu vos plaisans parse-temps!
Adieu le bal, adieu la dance;
Adieu mesure, adieu cadance,
Tabourins, Hautbois, Violons,
Puisqu'a la guerre nous allons!'"

These old verses and the air of the Marechal made all the guests laugh, except three persons.

"Heavens!" he continued, "it seems to me as if, like him, I were only seventeen years old; he will return to us covered with embroidery. Madame, we must keep his chair vacant for him."

The Marechale suddenly grew pale, and left the table in tears; every one rose with her; she took only two steps, and sank into another chair. Her sons and her daughter and the young Duchess gathered anxiously around her, and heard her say, amid the sighs and tears which she strove to restrain:

"Pardon, my friends! it is foolish of me—childish; but I am weak at present, and am not mistress of myself. We were thirteen at table; and you, my dear Duchess, were the cause of it. But it is very wrong of me to show so much weakness before him. Farewell, my child; give me your forehead to kiss, and may God conduct you! Be worthy of your name and of your father."

Then, as Homer says, "smiling under tears," she raised herself, pushed her son from her, and said:

"Come, let me see you on horseback, fair sir!"

The silent traveller kissed the hands of his mother, and made a low bow to her; he bowed also to the Duchess, without raising his eyes. Then, embracing his elder brother, pressing the hand of the Marechal, and kissing the forehead of his young sister almost simultaneously, he went forth, and was on horseback in an instant. Every one went to the windows which overlooked the court, except Madame d'Effiat, who was still seated and suffering.

"He sets off at full gallop. That is a good sign," said the Marechal, laughing.

"Oh, heavens!" cried the young Princess, retiring from the bay-window.

“What is the matter?” said the mother.

“Nothing, nothing!” said M. de Launay. “Your son’s horse stumbled under the gateway; but he soon pulled him up. See, he salutes us from the road.”

“Another ominous presage!” said the Marquise, upon retiring to her apartments.

Every one imitated her by being silent or speaking low.

The day was sad, and in the evening the supper was silent at the chateau of Chaumont.

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At ten o'clock that evening, the old Marechal, conducted by his valet, retired to the northern tower near the gateway, and opposite the river. The heat was extreme; he opened the window, and, enveloping himself in his great silk robe, placed a heavy candlestick upon the table and desired to be left alone. His window looked out upon the plain, which the moon, in her first quarter, indistinctly lighted; the sky was charged with thick clouds, and all things disposed the mind to melancholy. Although Bassompierre had nothing of the dreamer in his character, the tone which the conversation had taken at dinner returned to his memory, and he reconsidered his life, the sad changes which the new reign had wrought in it, a reign which seemed to have breathed upon him a wind of misfortune—the death of a cherished sister; the irregularities of the heir of his name; the loss of his lands and of his favor; the recent fate of his friend, the Marechal d'Effiat, whose chambers he now occupied. All these thoughts drew from him an involuntary sigh, and he went to the window to breathe.

At that moment he fancied he heard the tramp of a troop of horse at the side of the wood; but the wind rising made him think that he had been mistaken, and, as the noise suddenly ceased, he forgot it. He still watched for some time all the lights of the chateau, which were successively extinguished, after winding among the windows of the staircases and rambling about the courtyards and the stables. Then, leaning back in his great tapestried armchair, his elbow resting on the table, he abandoned himself to his reflections. After a while, drawing from his breast a medallion which hung concealed, suspended by a black ribbon, he said:

“Come, my good old master, talk with me as you have so often talked; come, great King, forget your court for the smile of a true friend; come, great man, consult me concerning ambitious Austria; come, inconstant chevalier, speak to me of the lightness of thy love, and of the fidelity of thine inconstancy; come, heroic soldier, complain to me again that I obscure you in combat. Ah, had I only done it in Paris! Had I only received thy wound? With thy blood the world has lost the benefits of thine interrupted reign—”

The tears of the Marechal obscured the glass that covered the large medallion, and he was effacing them with respectful kisses, when, his door being roughly opened, he quickly drew his sword.

“Who goes there?” he cried, in his surprise, which was much increased when he saw M. de Launay, who, hat in hand, advanced toward him, and said to him, with embarrassment:

“Monsieur, it is with a heart pierced with grief that I am forced to tell you that the King has commanded me to arrest you. A carriage awaits you at the gate, attended by thirty of the Cardinal-Duke's musketeers.”

Bassompierre had not risen: and he still held the medallion in his right hand, and the sword in the other. He tendered it disdainfully to this man, saying:

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"Monsieur, I know that I have lived too long, and it is that of which I was thinking; in the name of the great Henri, I restore this sword peacefully to his son. Follow me."

He accompanied these words with a look so firm that De Launay was depressed, and followed him with drooping head, as if he had himself been arrested by the noble old man, who, seizing a flambeau, issued from the court and found all the doors opened by horse-guards, who had terrified the people of the chateau in the name of the King, and commanded silence. The carriage was ready, and departed rapidly, followed by many horses. The Marechal, seated beside M. de Launay, was about to fall asleep, rocked by the movement of the vehicle, when a voice cried to the driver, "Stop!" and, as he continued, a pistol-shot followed. The horses stopped.

"I declare, Monsieur, that this is done without my participation," said Bassompierre. Then, putting his head out at the door, he saw that they were in a little wood, and that the road was too narrow to allow the horses to pass to either the right or the left of the carriage—a great advantage for the aggressors, since the musketeers could not advance. He tried to see what was going on when a cavalier, having in his hand a long sword, with which he parried the strokes of the guard, approached the door, crying:

"Come, come, Monsieur le Marechal!"

"What! is that you, you madcap, Henri, who are playing these pranks? Gentlemen, let him alone; he is a mere boy."

And, as De Launay called to the musketeers to cease, Bassompierre recognized the cavalier.

"And how the devil came you here?" cried Bassompierre. "I thought you were at Tours, or even farther, if you had done your duty; but here you are returned to make a fool of yourself."

"Truly, it was not for you I returned, but for a secret affair," said Cinq-Mars, in a lower tone; "but, as I take it, they are about to introduce you to the Bastille, and I am sure you will not betray me, for that delightful edifice is the very Temple of Discretion. Yet had you thought fit," he continued, aloud, "I should have released you from these gentlemen in the wood here, which is so dense that their horses would not have been able to stir. A peasant informed me of the insult passed upon us, more than upon you, by this violation of my father's house."

"It is the King's order, my boy, and we must respect his will; reserve your ardor for his service, though I thank you with all my heart. Now farewell, and let me proceed on my agreeable journey."



De Launay interposed, "I may inform you, Monsieur de Cinq-Mars, that I have been desired by the King himself to assure Monsieur le Marechal, that he is deeply afflicted at the step he has found it necessary to take, and that it is solely from an apprehension that Monsieur le Marechal may be led into evil that his Majesty requests him to remain for a few days in the Bastille."—[He remained there twelve years.]

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Bassompierre turned his head toward Cinq-Mars with a hearty laugh. "You see, my friend, how we young men are placed under guardianship; so take care of yourself."

"I will go, then," said Henri; "this is the last time I shall play the knight-errant for any one against his will;" and, reentering the wood as the carriage dashed off at full speed, he proceeded by narrow paths toward the castle, followed at a short distance by Grandchamp and his small escort.

On arriving at the foot of the western tower, he reined in his horse. He did not alight, but, approaching so near the wall that he could rest his foot upon an abutment, he stood up, and raised the blind of a window on the ground-floor, made in the form of a portcullis, such as is still seen on some ancient buildings.

It was now past midnight, and the moon was hidden behind the clouds. No one but a member of the family could have found his way through darkness so profound. The towers and the roof formed one dark mass, which stood out in indistinct relief against the sky, hardly less dark; no light shone throughout the chateau, wherein all inmates seemed buried in slumber. Cinq-Mars, enveloped in a large cloak, his face hidden under the broad brim of his hat, awaited in suspense a reply to his signal.

It came; a soft voice was heard from within:

"Is that you, Monsieur Cinq-Mars?"

"Alas, who else should it be? Who else would return like a criminal to his paternal house, without entering it, without bidding one more adieu to his mother? Who else would return to complain of the present, without a hope for the future, but I?"

The gentle voice replied, but its tones were agitated, and evidently accompanied with tears: "Alas! Henri, of what do you complain? Have I not already done more, far more than I ought? It is not my fault, but my misfortune, that my father was a sovereign prince. Can one choose one's birthplace or one's rank, and say for example, 'I will be a shepherdess?' How unhappy is the lot of princesses! From the cradle, the sentiments of the heart are prohibited to them; and when they have advanced beyond childhood, they are ceded like a town, and must not even weep. Since I have known you, what have I not done to bring my future life within the reach of happiness, in removing it far from a throne? For two years I have struggled in vain, at once against my evil fortune, that separates me from you, and against you, who estrange me from the duty I owe to my family. I have sought to spread a belief that I was dead; I have almost longed for revolutions. I should have blessed a change which deprived me of my rank, as I thanked Heaven when my father was dethroned; but the court wonders at my absence; the Queen requires me to attend her. Our dreams are at an end, Henri; we have already slumbered too long. Let us awake, be courageous, and think no more of those

dear two years—forget all in the one recollection of our great resolve. Have but one thought; be ambitious for—be ambitious—for my sake.”

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"Must we, then, indeed, forget all, Marie?" murmured Cinq-Mars.

She hesitated.

"Yes, forget all—that I myself have forgotten." Then, after a moment's pause, she continued with earnestness: "Yes, forget our happy days together, our long evenings, even our walks by the lake and through the wood; but keep the future ever in mind. Go, Henri; your father was Marechal. Be you more; be you Constable, Prince. Go; you are young, noble, rich, brave, beloved—"

"Beloved forever?" said Henri.

"Forever; for life and for eternity."

Cinq-Mars, tremulously extending his hand to the window, exclaimed:

"I swear, Marie, by the Virgin, whose name you bear, that you shall be mine, or my head shall fall on the scaffold!"

"Oh, Heaven! what is it you say?" she cried, seizing his hand in her own. "Swear to me that you will share in no guilty deeds; that you will never forget that the King of France is your master. Love him above all, next to her who will sacrifice all for you, who will await you amid suffering and sorrow. Take this little gold cross and wear it upon your heart; it has often been wet with my tears, and those tears will flow still more bitterly if ever you are faithless to the King. Give me the ring I see on your finger. Oh, heavens, my hand and yours are red with blood!"

"Oh, only a scratch. Did you hear nothing, an hour ago?"

"No; but listen. Do you hear anything now?"

"No, Marie, nothing but some bird of night on the tower."

"I heard whispering near us, I am sure. But whence comes this blood? Tell me, and then depart."

"Yes, I will go, while the clouds are still dark above us. Farewell, sweet soul; in my hour of danger I will invoke thee as a guardian angel. Love has infused the burning poison of ambition into my soul, and for the first time I feel that ambition may be ennobled by its aim. Farewell! I go to accomplish my destiny."

"And forget not mine."

"Can they ever be separated?"

“Never!” exclaimed Marie, “but by death.”

“I fear absence still more,” said Cinq-Mars.

“Farewell! I tremble; farewell!” repeated the beloved voice, and the window was slowly drawn down, the clasped hands not parting till the last moment.

The black horse had all the while been pawing the earth, tossing his head with impatience, and whinnying. Cinq-Mars, as agitated and restless as his steed, gave it the rein; and the whole party was soon near the city of Tours, which the bells of St. Gatien had announced from afar. To the disappointment of old Grandchamp, Cinq-Mars would not enter the town, but proceeded on his way, and five days later he entered, with his escort, the old city of Loudun in Poitou, after an uneventful journey.

CHAPTER II

THE STREET

Je m’avançais d’un pas pénible et mal assuré vers le but de ce convoi tragique.—NODIER, ‘Smarra’.

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The reign of which we are about to paint a few years—a reign of feebleness, which was like an eclipse of the crown between the splendors of Henri IV and those of Louis le Grand—afflicts the eyes which contemplate it with dark stains of blood, and these were not all the work of one man, but were caused by great and grave bodies. It is melancholy to observe that in this age, still full of disorder, the clergy, like a nation, had its populace, as it had its nobility, its ignorant and its criminal prelates, as well as those who were learned and virtuous. Since that time, its remnant of barbarism has been refined away by the long reign of Louis XIV, and its corruptions have been washed out in the blood of the martyrs whom it offered up to the revolution of 1793.

We felt it necessary to pause for a moment to express this reflection before entering upon the recital of the facts presented by the history of this period, and to intimate that, notwithstanding this consolatory reflection, we have found it incumbent upon us to pass over many details too odious to occupy a place in our pages, sighing in spirit at those guilty acts which it was necessary to record, as in relating the life of a virtuous old man, we should lament over the impetuosities of his passionate youth, or over the corrupt tendencies of his riper age.

When the cavalcade entered the narrow streets of Loudun, they heard strange noises all around them. The streets were filled with agitated masses; the bells of the church and of the convent were ringing furiously, as if the town was in flames; and the whole population, without paying any attention to the travellers, was pressing tumultuously toward a large edifice that adjoined the church. Here and there dense crowds were collected, listening in silence to some voice that seemed raised in exhortation, or engaged in emphatic reading; then, furious cries, mingled with pious exclamations, arose from the crowd, which, dispersing, showed the travellers that the orator was some Capuchin or Franciscan friar, who, holding a wooden crucifix in one hand, pointed with the other to the large building which was attracting such universal interest.

“Jesu Maria!” exclaimed an old woman, “who would ever have thought that the Evil Spirit would choose our old town for his abode?”

“Ay, or that the pious Ursulines should be possessed?” said another.

“They say that the demon who torments the Superior is called Legion,” cried a third:

“One demon, say you?” interrupted a nun; “there were seven in her poor body, whereunto, doubtless, she had attached too much importance, by reason of its great beauty, though now ’tis but the receptacle of evil spirits. The prior of the Carmelites yesterday expelled the demon Eazas through her mouth; and the reverend Father Lactantius has driven out in like manner the demon Beherit. But the other five will not depart, and when the holy exorcists (whom Heaven support!) summoned them in Latin to withdraw, they replied insolently that they would not go till they had proved their power, to the conviction even of the Huguenots and heretics, who, misbelieving

wretches! seem to doubt it. The demon Elimi, the worst of them all, as you know, has threatened to take off Monsieur de Laubardemont's skull-cap to-day, and to dangle it in the air at Miserere."

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"Holy Virgin!" rejoined the first speaker, "I'm all of a tremble! And to think that many times I have got this magician Urbain to say masses for me!"

"For myself," exclaimed a girl, crossing herself; "I too confessed to him ten months ago! No doubt I should have been possessed myself, but for the relic of Saint-Genevieve I luckily had about me, and—"

"Luckily, indeed, Martine," interposed a fat gossip; "for—no offence!—you, as I remember, were long enough with the handsome sorcerer."

"Pshaw!" said a young soldier, who had joined the group, smoking his pipe, "don't you know that pretty Martine was dispossessed a month ago."

The girl blushed, and drew the hood of her black cloak over her face. The elder gossips cast a glance of indignation at the reckless trooper, and finding themselves now close to the door of the building, and thus sure of making their way in among the first when it should be thrown open, sat down upon the stone bench at the side, and, talking of the latest wonders, raised the expectations of all as to the delight they were about to have in being spectators of something marvellous—an apparition, perhaps, but at the very least, an administration of the torture.

"Is it true, aunt," asked Martine of the eldest gossip, "that you have heard the demons speak?"

"Yes, child, true as I see you; many and many can say the same; and it was to convince you of it I brought you with me here, that you may see the power of the Evil One."

"What kind of voice has he?" continued the girl, glad to encourage a conversation which diverted from herself the invidious attention procured her by the soldier's raillery.

"Oh, he speaks with a voice like that of the Superior herself, to whom Our Lady be gracious! Poor young woman! I was with her yesterday a long time; it was sad to see her tearing her breast, turning her arms and her legs first one way and then another, and then, all of a sudden, twisting them together behind her back. When the holy Father Lactantius pronounced the name of Urbain Grandier, foam came out of her mouth, and she talked Latin for all the world as if she were reading the Bible. Of course, I did not understand what she said, and all I can remember of it now is, 'Urbanus Magicus rosas diabolica,' which they tell me means that the magician Urbain had bewitched her with some roses the Devil had given him; and so it must have been, for while Father Lactantius spoke, out of her ears and neck came a quantity of flame-colored roses, all smelling of sulphur so strongly that the judge-Advocate called out for every one present to stop their noses and eyes, for that the demons were about to come out."

“Ah, look there now!” exclaimed with shrill voices and a triumphant air the whole bevy of assembled women, turning toward the crowd, and more particularly toward a group of men attired in black, among whom was standing the young soldier who had cut his joke just before so unceremoniously.

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"Listen to the noisy old idiots!" exclaimed the soldier. "They think they're at the witches' Sabbath, but I don't see their broomsticks."

"Young man, young man!" said a citizen, with a sad air, "jest not upon such subjects in the open air, or, in such a time as this, the wind may become gushing flames and destroy you."

"Pooh! I laugh at your exorcists!" returned the soldier; "my name is Grand-Ferre, and I've got here a better exorciser than any of you can show."

And significantly grasping the handle of his rapier in one hand, with the other he twisted up his blond moustache, as he looked fiercely around; but meeting no glance which returned the defiance of his own, he slowly withdrew, left foot foremost, and strolled along the dark, narrow streets with all the reckless nonchalance of a young soldier who has just donned his uniform, and a profound contempt for all who wear not a military coat.

In the meantime eight or ten of the more substantial and rational inhabitants traversed in a body, slowly and silently, the agitated throng; they seemed overwhelmed with amazement and distress at the agitation and excitement they witnessed everywhere, and as each new instance of the popular frenzy appeared, they exchanged glances of wonder and apprehension. Their mute depression communicated itself to the working-people, and to the peasants who had flocked in from the adjacent country, and who, all sought a guide for their opinions in the faces of the principal townsmen, also for the most part proprietors of the surrounding districts. They saw that something calamitous was on foot, and resorted accordingly to the only remedy open to the ignorant and the beguiled—apathetic resignation.

Yet, in the character of the French peasant is a certain scoffing finesse of which he makes effective use, sometimes with his equals, and almost invariably with his superiors. He puts questions to power as embarrassing as are those which infancy puts to mature age. He affects excessive humility, in order to confuse him whom he addresses with the very height of his isolated elevation. He exaggerates the awkwardness of his manner and the rudeness of his speech, as a means of covering his real thoughts under the appearance of mere uncouthness; yet, despite all his self-command, there is something in his air, certain fierce expressions which betray him to the close observer, who discerns in his sardonic smile, and in the marked emphasis with which he leans on his long staff, the hopes that secretly nourish his soul, and the aid upon which he ultimately relies.

One of the oldest of the peasants whom we have indicated came on vigorously, followed by ten or twelve young men, his sons and nephews, all wearing the broad-brimmed hat and the blue frock or blouse of the ancient Gauls, which the peasants of

France still wear over their other garments, as peculiarly adapted to their humid climate and their laborious habits.

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When the old man had reached the group of personages of whom we have just spoken, he took off his hat—an example immediately followed by his whole family—and showed a face tanned with exposure to the weather, a forehead bald and wrinkled with age, and long, white hair. His shoulders were bent with years and labor, but he was still a hale and sturdy man. He was received with an air of welcome, and even of respect, by one of the gravest of the grave group he had approached, who, without uncovering, however, extended to him his hand.

“What! good Father Guillaume Leroux!” said he, “and have you, too, left our farm of La Chenaie to visit the town, when it’s not market-day? Why, ’tis as if your oxen were to unharness themselves and go hunting, leaving their work to see a poor rabbit run down!”

“Faith, Monsieur le Comte du Lude,” replied the farmer, “for that matter, sometimes the rabbit runs across our path of itself; but, in truth, I’ve a notion that some of the people here want to make fools of us, and so I’ve come to see about it.”

“Enough of that, my friend,” returned the Count; “here is Monsieur Fournier, the Advocate, who assuredly will not deceive you, for he resigned his office of Attorney-General last night, that he might henceforth devote his eloquence to the service of his own noble thoughts. You will hear him, perhaps, to-day, though truly, I dread his appearing for his own sake as much as I desire it for that of the accused.”

“I care not for myself,” said Fournier; “truth is with me a passion, and I would have it taught in all times and all places.”

He that spoke was a young man, whose face, pallid in the extreme, was full of the noblest expression. His blond hair, his light-blue eyes, his thinness, the delicacy of his frame, made him at first sight seem younger than he was; but his thoughtful and earnest countenance indicated that mental superiority and that precocious maturity of soul which are developed by deep study in youth, combined with natural energy of character. He was attired wholly in black, with a short cloak in the fashion of the day, and carried under his left arm a roll of documents, which, when speaking, he would take in the right hand and grasp convulsively, as a warrior in his anger grasps the pommel of his sword. At one moment it seemed as if he were about to unfurl the scroll, and from it hurl lightning upon those whom he pursued with looks of fiery indignation—three Capuchins and a Franciscan, who had just passed.

“Pere Guillaume,” pursued M. du Lude, “how is it you have brought with you only your sons, and they armed with their staves?”

“Faith, Monsieur, I have no desire that our girls should learn to dance of the nuns; and, moreover, just now the lads with their staves may bestir themselves to better purpose than their sisters would.”



“Take my advice, my old friend,” said the Count, “and don’t bestir yourselves at all; rather stand quietly aside to view the procession which you see approaching, and remember that you are seventy years old.”

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“Ah!” murmured the old man, drawing up his twelve sons in double military rank, “I fought under good King Henriot, and can play at sword and pistol as well as the worthy ‘ligueurs’;” and shaking his head he leaned against a post, his knotty staff between his crossed legs, his hands clasped on its thick butt-end, and his white, bearded chin resting on his hands. Then, half closing his eyes, he appeared lost in recollections of his youth.

The bystanders observed with interest his dress, slashed in the fashion of Henri IV, and his resemblance to the Bearnese monarch in the latter years of his life, though the King’s hair had been prevented by the assassin’s blade from acquiring the whiteness which that of the old peasant had peacefully attained. A furious pealing of the bells, however, attracted the general attention to the end of the great street, down which was seen filing a long procession, whose banners and glittering pikes rose above the heads of the crowd, which successively and in silence opened a way for the at once absurd and terrible train.

First, two and two, came a body of archers, with pointed beards and large plumed hats, armed with long halberds, who, ranging in a single file on each side of the middle of the street, formed an avenue along which marched in solemn order a procession of Gray Penitents—men attired in long, gray robes, the hoods of which entirely covered their heads; masks of the same stuff terminated below their chins in points, like beards, each having three holes for the eyes and nose. Even at the present day we see these costumes at funerals, more especially in the Pyrenees. The Penitents of Loudun carried enormous wax candles, and their slow, uniform movement, and their eyes, which seemed to glitter under their masks, gave them the appearance of phantoms.

The people expressed their various feelings in an undertone:

“There’s many a rascal hidden under those masks,” said a citizen.

“Ay, and with a face uglier than the mask itself,” added a young man.

“They make me afraid,” tremulously exclaimed a girl.

“I’m only afraid for my purse,” said the first speaker.

“Ah, heaven! there are our holy brethren, the Penitents,” cried an old woman, throwing back her hood, the better to look at them. “See the banner they bear! Ah, neighbors, ’tis a joyful thing to have it among us! Beyond a doubt it will save us; see, it shows the devil in flames, and a monk fastening a chain round his neck, to keep him in hell. Ah, here come the judges—noble gentlemen! dear gentlemen! Look at their red robes; how beautiful! Blessed be the Virgin, they’ve been well chosen!”

"Every man of them is a personal enemy of the Cure," whispered the Count du Lude to the advocate Fournier, who took a note of the information.

"Don't you know them, neighbors?" pursued the shrill, sharp voice of the old woman, as she elbowed one and pinched another of those near her to attract their attention to the objects of her admiration; "see, there's excellent Monsieur Mignon, whispering to Messieurs the Counsellors of the Court of Poitiers; Heaven bless them all, say I!"

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"Yes, there are Roatin, Richard, and Chevalier—the very men who tried to have him dismissed a year ago," continued M. du Lude, in undertones, to the young advocate, who, surrounded and hidden from public observation by the group of dark-clad citizens, was writing down his observations in a note-book under his cloak.

"Here; look, look!" screamed the woman. "Make way! here's Monsieur Barre, the Cure of Saint-Jacques at Chinon."

"A saint!" murmured one bystander.

"A hypocrite!" exclaimed a manly voice.

"See how thin he is with fasting!"

"See how pale he is with remorse!"

"He's the man to drive away devils!"

"Yes, but not till he's done with them for his own purposes."

The dialogue was interrupted by the general exclamation, "How beautiful she is!"

The Superior of the Ursulines advanced, followed by all her nuns. Her white veil was raised; in order that the people might see the features of the possessed ones, it had been ordered that it should be thus with her and six of the sisterhood. Her attire had no distinguishing feature, except a large rosary extending from her neck nearly to her feet, from which hung a gold cross; but the dazzling pallor of her face, rendered still more conspicuous by the dark hue of her capuchon, at once fixed the general gaze upon her. Her brilliant, dark eyes, which bore the impress of some deep and burning passion, were crowned with eyebrows so perfectly arched that Nature herself seemed to have taken as much pains to form them as the Circassian women to pencil theirs artistically; but between them a slight fold revealed the powerful agitation within. In her movements, however, and throughout her whole bearing, she affected perfect calm; her steps were slow and measured, and her beautiful hands were crossed on her bosom, as white and motionless as those of the marble statues joined in eternal prayer.

"See, aunt," ejaculated Martine, "see how Sister Agnes and Sister Claire are weeping, next to the Superior!"

"Ay, niece, they weep because they are the prey of the demon."

"Or rather," interposed the same manly voice that spoke before, "because they repent of having mocked Heaven."

A deep silence now pervaded the multitude; not a word was heard, not a movement, hardly a breath. Every one seemed paralyzed by some sudden enchantment, when, following the nuns, among four Penitents who held him in chains, appeared the Cure of the Church of *Ste. Croix*, attired in his pastor's robe. His was a noble, fine face, with grandeur in its whole expression, and gentleness in every feature. Affecting no scornful indifference to his position, he looked calmly and kindly around, as if he sought on his dark path the affectionate glances of those who loved him. Nor did he seek in vain; here and there he encountered those glances, and joyfully returned them. He even heard sobs, and he saw hands extended toward him, many of which grasped weapons. But no gesture of his encouraged these mute offers of aid; he lowered his eyes and went on, careful not to compromise those who so trusted in him, or to involve them in his own misfortunes. This was Urbain Grandier.

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Suddenly the procession stopped, at a sign from the man who walked apart, and who seemed to command its progress. He was tall, thin, sallow; he wore a long black robe, with a cap of the same material and color; he had the face of a Don Basilio, with the eye of Nero. He motioned the guards to surround him more closely, when he saw with affright the dark group we have mentioned, and the strong-limbed and resolute peasants who seemed in attendance upon them. Then, advancing somewhat before the Canons and Capuchins who were with him, he pronounced, in a shrill voice, this singular decree:

“We, Sieur de Laubardemont, referendary, being delegated and invested with discretionary power in the matter of the trial of the magician Urbain Grandier, upon the various articles of accusation brought against him, assisted by the reverend Fathers Mignon, canon, Barre, cure of St. Jacques at Chinon, Father Lactantius, and all the other judges appointed to try the said magician, have decreed as follows: “Primo: the factitious assembly of proprietors, noble citizens of this town and its environs, is dissolved, as tending to popular sedition; its proceedings are declared null, and its letter to the King, against us, the judges, which has been intercepted, shall be publicly burned in the marketplace as calumniating the good Ursulines and the reverend fathers and judges.”Secundo: it is forbidden to say, publicly or in private, that the said nuns are not possessed by the Evil Spirit, or to doubt of the power of the exorcists, under pain of a fine of twenty thousand livres, and corporal punishment.

“Let the bailiffs and sheriffs obey this. Given the eighteenth of June, in the year of grace 1639.”

Before he had well finished reading the decree, the discordant blare of trumpets, bursting forth at a prearranged signal, drowned, to a certain extent, the murmurs that followed its proclamation, amid which Laubardemont urged forward the procession, which entered the great building already referred to—an ancient convent, whose interior had crumbled away, its walls now forming one vast hall, well adapted for the purpose to which it was about to be applied. Laubardemont did not deem himself safe until he was within the building and had heard the heavy, double doors creak on their hinges as, closing, they excluded the furious crowd without.

CHAPTER III

THE GOOD PRIEST

L'homme de paix me parla ainsi.—VICAIRE *Savoyard*.

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Now that the diabolical procession is in the arena destined for its spectacle, and is arranging its sanguinary representation, let us see what Cinq-Mars had been doing amid the agitated throng. He was naturally endowed with great tact, and he felt that it would be no easy matter for him to attain his object of seeing the Abbe Quillet, at a time when public excitement was at its height. He therefore remained on horseback with his four servants in a small, dark street that led into the main thoroughfare, whence he could see all that passed. No one at first paid any attention to him; but when public curiosity had no other aliment, he became an object of general interest. Weary of so many strange scenes, the inhabitants looked upon him with some exasperation, and whispered to one another, asking whether this was another exorcist come among them. Feeling that it was time to take a decided course, he advanced with his attendants, hat in hand, toward the group in black of whom we have spoken, and addressing him who appeared its chief member, said, "Monsieur, where can I find Monsieur l'Abbe Quillet?"

At this name, all regarded him with an air of terror, as if he had pronounced that of Lucifer. Yet no anger was shown; on the contrary, it seemed that the question had favorably changed for him the minds of all who heard him. Moreover, chance had served him well in his choice; the Comte du Lude came up to his horse, and saluting him, said, "Dismount, Monsieur, and I will give you some useful information concerning him."

After speaking a while in whispers, the two gentlemen separated with all the ceremonious courtesy of the time. Cinq-Mars remounted his black horse, and passing through numerous narrow streets, was soon out of the crowd with his retinue.

"How happy I am!" he soliloquized, as he went his way; "I shall, at all events, for a moment see the good and kind clergyman who brought me up; even now I recall his features, his calm air, his voice so full of gentleness."

As these tender thoughts filled his mind, he found himself in the small, dark street which had been indicated to him; it was so narrow that the knee-pieces of his boots touched the wall on each side. At the end of the street he came to a one-storied wooden house, and in his eagerness knocked at the door with repeated strokes.

"Who is there?" cried a furious voice within; and at the same moment, the door opening revealed a little short, fat man, with a very red face, dressed in black, with a large white ruff, and riding-boots which engulfed his short legs in their vast depths. In his hands were a pair of horse-pistols.

"I will sell my life dearly!" he cried; "and—"

"Softly, Abbe, softly," said his pupil, taking his arm; "we are friends."

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"Ah, my son, is it you?" said the good man, letting fall his pistols, which were picked up by a domestic, also armed to the teeth. "What do you here? The abomination has entered the town, and I only await the night to depart. Make haste within, my dear boy, with your people. I took you for the archers of Laubardemont, and, faith, I intended to take a part somewhat out of my line. You see the horses in the courtyard there; they will convey me to Italy, where I shall rejoin our friend, the Duc de Bouillon. Jean! Jean! hasten and close the great gate after Monsieur's domestics, and recommend them not to make too much noise, although for that matter we have no habitation near us."

Grandchamp obeyed the intrepid little Abbe, who then embraced Cinq-Mars four consecutive times, raising himself on the points of his boots, so as to attain the middle of his pupil's breast. He then hurried him into a small room, which looked like a deserted granary; and seating him beside himself upon a black leather trunk, he said, warmly:

"Well, my son, whither go you? How came Madame la Marechale to allow you to come here? Do you not see what they are doing against an unhappy man, whose death alone will content them? Alas, merciful Heaven! is this the first spectacle my dear pupil is to see? And you at that delightful period of life when friendship, love, confidence, should alone encompass you; when all around you should give you a favorable opinion of your species, at your very entry into the great world! How unfortunate! alas, why did you come?"

When the good Abbe had followed up this lamentation by pressing affectionately both hands of the young traveller in his own, so red and wrinkled, the latter answered:

"Can you not guess, my dear Abbe, that I came to Loudun because you are here? As to the spectacle you speak of, it appears to me simply ridiculous; and I swear that I do not a whit the less on its account love that human race of which your virtues and your good lessons have given me an excellent idea. As to the five or six mad women who—"

"Let us not lose time; I will explain to you all that matter; but answer me, whither go you, and for what?"

"I am going to Perpignan, where the Cardinal-Duke is to present me to the King."

At this the worthy but hasty Abbe rose from his box, and walked, or rather ran, to and fro, stamping. "The Cardinal! the Cardinal!" he repeated, almost choking, his face becoming scarlet, and the tears rising to his eyes; "My poor child! they will destroy him! Ah, mon Dieu! what part would they have him play there? What would they do with him? Ah, who will protect thee, my son, in that dangerous place?" he continued, reseating himself, and again taking his pupil's hands in his own with a paternal solicitude, as he endeavored to read his thoughts in his countenance.

“Why, I do not exactly know,” said Cinq-Mars, looking up at the ceiling; “but I suppose it will be the Cardinal de Richelieu, who was the friend of my father.”

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"Ah, my dear Henri, you make me tremble; he will ruin you unless you become his docile instrument. Alas, why can not I go with you? Why must I act the young man of twenty in this unfortunate affair? Alas, I should be perilous to you; I must, on the contrary, conceal myself. But you will have Monsieur de Thou near you, my son, will you not?" said he, trying to reassure himself; "he was your friend in childhood, though somewhat older than yourself. Heed his counsels, my child, he is a wise young man of mature reflection and solid ideas."

"Oh, yes, my dear Abbe, you may depend upon my tender attachment for him; I never have ceased to love him."

"But you have ceased to write to him, have you not?" asked the good Abbe, half smilingly.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Abbe, I wrote to him once, and again yesterday, to inform him that the Cardinal has invited me to court."

"How! has he himself desired your presence?"

Cinq-Mars hereupon showed the letter of the Cardinal-Duke to his mother, and his old preceptor grew gradually calmer.

"Ah, well!" said he to himself, "this is not so bad, perhaps, after all. It looks promising; a captain of the guards at twenty—that sounds well!" and the worthy Abbe's face became all smiles.

The young man, delighted to see these smiles, which so harmonized with his own thoughts, fell upon the neck of the Abbe and embraced him, as if the good man had thus assured to him a futurity of pleasure, glory, and love.

But the good Abbe, with difficulty disengaging himself from this warm embrace, resumed his walk, his reflections, and his gravity. He coughed often and shook his head; and Cinq-Mars, not venturing to pursue the conversation, watched him, and became sad as he saw him become serious.

The old man at last sat down, and in a mournful tone addressed his pupil:

"My friend, my son, I have for a moment yielded like a father to your hopes; but I must tell you, and it is not to afflict you, that they appear to me excessive and unnatural. If the Cardinal's sole aim were to show attachment and gratitude toward your family, he would not have carried his favors so far; no, the extreme probability is that he has designs upon you. From what has been told him, he thinks you adapted to play some part, as yet impossible for us to divine, but which he himself has traced out in the deepest recesses of his mind. He wishes to educate you for this; he wishes to drill you into it. Allow me the expression in consideration of its accuracy, and think seriously of it

when the time shall come. But I am inclined to believe that, as matters are, you would do well to follow up this vein in the great mine of State; in this way high fortunes have begun. You must only take heed not to be blinded and led at will. Let not favors dazzle you, my poor child, and let not elevation turn your head. Be not so indignant at the suggestion; the thing has happened to older men than yourself. Write to me often, as well as to your mother; see Monsieur de Thou, and together we will try to keep you in good counsel. Now, my son, be kind enough to close that window through which the wind comes upon my head, and I will tell you what has been going on here."

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Henri, trusting that the moral part of the discourse was over, and anticipating nothing in the second part but a narrative more or less interesting, closed the old casement, festooned with cobwebs, and resumed his seat without speaking.

"Now that I reflect further," continued the Abbe, "I think it will not perhaps be unprofitable for you to have passed through this place, although it be a sad experience you shall have acquired; but it will supply what I may not have formerly told you of the wickedness of men. I hope, moreover, that the result will not be fatal, and that the letter we have written to the King will arrive in time."

"I heard that it had been intercepted," interposed Cinq-Mars.

"Then all is over," said the Abbe Quillet; "the Cure is lost. But listen. God forbid, my son, that I, your old tutor, should seek to assail my own work, and attempt to weaken your faith! Preserve ever and everywhere that simple creed of which your noble family has given you the example, which our fathers possessed in a still higher degree than we, and of which the greatest captains of our time are not ashamed. Always, while you wear a sword, remember that you hold it for the service of God. But at the same time, when you are among men, avoid being deceived by the hypocrite. He will encompass you, my son; he will assail you on the vulnerable side of your ingenuous heart, in addressing your religion; and seeing the extravagance of his affected zeal, you will fancy yourself lukewarm as compared with him. You will think that your conscience cries out against you; but it will not be the voice of conscience that you hear. And what cries would not that conscience send forth, how fiercely would it not rise upon you, did you contribute to the destruction of innocence by invoking Heaven itself as a false witness against it?"

"Oh, my father! can such things be possible?" exclaimed Henri d'Effiat, clasping his hands.

"It is but too true," continued the Abbe; "you saw a partial execution of it this morning. God grant you may not witness still greater horrors! But listen! whatever you may see, whatever crime they dare to commit, I conjure you, in the name of your mother and of all that you hold dear, say not a word; make not a gesture that may indicate any opinion whatever. I know the impetuous character that you derive from the Marechal, your father; curb it, or you are lost. These little ebullitions of passion give but slight satisfaction, and bring about great misfortunes. I have observed you give way to them too much. Oh, did you but know the advantage that a calm temper gives one over men! The ancients stamped it on the forehead of the divinity as his finest attribute, since it shows that he is superior to our fears and to our hopes, to our pleasures and to our pains. Therefore, my dear child, remain passive in the scenes you are about to witness; but see them you must. Be present at this sad trial; for me, I must suffer the consequences of my schoolboy folly. I will relate it to you; it will prove to you that with a bald head one may be as much a child as with your fine chestnut curls."

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And the excellent old Abbe, taking his pupil's head affectionately between his hands, continued:

“Like other people, my dear son, I was curious to see the devils of the Ursulines; and knowing that they professed to speak all languages, I was so imprudent as to cease speaking Latin and to question them in Greek. The Superior is very pretty, but she does not know Greek! Duncan, the physician, observed aloud that it was surprising that the demon, who knew everything, should commit barbarisms and solecisms in Latin, and not be able to answer in Greek. The young Superior, who was then upon her bed, turned toward the wall to weep, and said in an undertone to Father Barre, ‘I can not go on with this, father.’ I repeated her words aloud, and infuriated all the exorcists; they cried out that I ought to know that there are demons more ignorant than peasants, and said that as to their power and physical strength, it could not be doubted, since the spirits named Gresil des Trones, Aman des Puissance, and Asmodeus, had promised to carry off the calotte of Monsieur de Laubardemont. They were preparing for this, when the physician Duncan, a learned and upright man, but somewhat of a scoffer, took it into his head to pull a cord he discovered fastened to a column like a bell-rope, and which hung down just close to the referendary's head; whereupon they called him a Huguenot, and I am satisfied that if Marechal de Breze were not his protector, it would have gone ill with him. The Comte du Lude then came forward with his customary ‘sang-froid’, and begged the exorcists to perform before him. Father Lactantius, the Capuchin with the dark visage and hard look, proceeded with Sister Agnes and Sister Claire; he raised both his hands, looking at them as a serpent would look at two dogs, and cried in a terrible voice, ‘Quis to misit, Diabole?’ and the two sisters answered, as with one voice, ‘Urbanus.’ He was about to continue, when Monsieur du Lude, taking out of his pocket, with an air of veneration, a small gold box, said that he had in it a relic left by his ancestors, and that though not doubting the fact of the possession, he wished to test it. Father Lactantius seized the box with delight, and hardly had he touched the foreheads of the two sisters with it when they made great leaps and twisted about their hands and feet. Lactantius shouted forth his exorcisms; Barre threw himself upon his knees with all the old women; and Mignon and the judges applauded. The impassible Laubardemont made the sign of the cross, without being struck dead for it! When Monsieur du Lude took back his box the nuns became still. ‘I think,’ said Lactantius, insolently, ‘that—you will not question your relics now.’ ‘No more than I do the possession,’ answered Monsieur du Lude, opening his box and showing that it was empty. ‘Monsieur, you mock us,’ said Lactantius. I was indignant at these mummeries, and said to him, ‘Yes, Monsieur, as you mock God and men.’ And this, my dear friend, is the reason why you see me in my seven-league boots, so heavy that they hurt my legs, and with pistols; for our friend Laubardemont has ordered my person to be seized, and I don't choose it to be seized, old as it is.”

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"What, is he so powerful, then?" cried Cinq-Mars.

"More so than is supposed—more so than could be believed. I know that the possessed Abbess is his niece, and that he is provided with an order in council directing him to judge, without being deterred by any appeals lodged in Parliament, the Cardinal having prohibited the latter from taking cognizance of the matter of Urbain Grandier."

"And what are his offences?" asked the young man, already deeply interested.

"Those of a strong mind and of a great genius, an inflexible will which has irritated power against him, and a profound passion which has driven his heart and him to commit the only mortal sin with which I believe he can be reproached; and it was only by violating the sanctity of his private papers, which they tore from Jeanne d'Estievre, his mother, an old woman of eighty, that they discovered his love for the beautiful Madeleine de Brou. This girl had refused to marry, and wished to take the veil. May that veil have concealed from her the spectacle of this day! The eloquence of Grandier and his angelic beauty drove the women half mad; they came miles and miles to hear him. I have seen them swoon during his sermons; they declared him an angel, and touched his garment and kissed his hands when he descended from the pulpit. It is certain that, unless it be his beauty, nothing could equal the sublimity of his discourses, ever full of inspiration. The pure honey of the gospel combined on his lips with the flashing flame of the prophecies; and one recognized in the sound of his voice a heart overflowing with holy pity for the evils to which mankind are subject, and filled with tears, ready to flow for us."

The good priest paused, for his own voice and eyes were filled with tears; his round and naturally Joyous face was more touching than a graver one under the same circumstances, for it seemed as if it bade defiance to sadness. Cinq-Mars, even more moved, pressed his hand without speaking, fearful of interrupting him. The Abbe took out a red handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and continued:

"This is the second attack upon Urbain by his combined enemies. He had already been accused of bewitching the nuns; but, examined by holy prelates, by enlightened magistrates, and learned physicians, he was immediately acquitted, and the judges indignantly imposed silence upon these devils in human form. The good and pious Archbishop of Bordeaux, who had himself chosen the examiners of these pretended exorcists, drove the prophets away and shut up their hell. But, humiliated by the publicity of the result, annoyed at seeing Grandier kindly received by our good King when he threw himself at his feet at Paris, they saw that if he triumphed they were lost, and would be universally regarded as impostors. Already the convent of the Ursulines was looked upon only as a theatre for disgraceful comedies, and the nuns themselves as shameless actresses. More than a hundred persons, furious against the Cure, had compromised themselves in the hope of destroying him. Their plot, instead of being

abandoned, has gained strength by its first check; and here are the means that have been set to work by his implacable enemies.

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“Do you know a man called ‘L’Eminence Grise’, that formidable Capuchin whom the Cardinal employs in all things, consults upon some, and always despises? It was to him that the Capuchins of Loudun addressed themselves. A woman of this place, of low birth, named Hamon, having been so fortunate as to please the Queen when she passed through Loudun, was taken into her service. You know the hatred that separates her court from that of the Cardinal; you know that Anne of Austria and Monsieur de Richelieu have for some time disputed for the King’s favor, and that, of her two sons, France never knew in the evening which would rise next morning. During a temporary eclipse of the Cardinal, a satire appeared, issuing from the planetary system of the Queen; it was called, ‘La cordonniere de la seine-mere’. Its tone and language were vulgar; but it contained things so insulting about the birth and person of the Cardinal that the enemies of the minister took it up and gave it a publicity which irritated him. It revealed, it is said, many intrigues and mysteries which he had deemed impenetrable. He read this anonymous work, and desired to know its author. It was just at this time that the Capuchins of this town wrote to Father Joseph that a constant correspondence between Grandier and La Hamon left no doubt in their minds as to his being the author of this diatribe. It was in vain that he had previously published religious books, prayers, and meditations, the style of which alone ought to have absolved him from having put his hand to a libel written in the language of the marketplace; the Cardinal, long since prejudiced against Urbain, was determined to fix upon him as the culprit. He remembered that when he was only prior of Coussay, Grandier disputed precedence with him and gained it; I fear this achievement of precedence in life will make poor Grandier precede the Cardinal in death also.”

A melancholy smile played upon the lips of the good Abbe as he uttered this involuntary pun.

“What! do you think this matter will go so far as death?”

“Ay, my son, even to death; they have already taken away all the documents connected with his former absolution that might have served for his defence, despite the opposition of his poor mother, who preserved them as her son’s license to live. Even now they affect to regard a work against the celibacy of priests, found among his papers, as destined to propagate schism. It is a culpable production, doubtless, and the love which dictated it, however pure it may be, is an enormous sin in a man consecrated to God alone; but this poor priest was far from wishing to encourage heresy, and it was simply, they say, to appease the remorse of Mademoiselle de Brou that he composed the work. It was so evident that his real faults would not suffice to condemn him to death that they have revived the accusation of sorcery, long since disposed of; but, feigning to believe this, the Cardinal has established a new tribunal in this town, and has placed Laubardemont at its head, a sure sign of death. Heaven grant that you never become acquainted with what the corruption of governments call coups-d’etat!”

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At this moment a terrible shriek sounded from beyond the wall of the courtyard; the Abbe arose in terror, as did Cinq-Mars.

"It is the cry of a woman," said the old man.

"'Tis heartrending!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars. "What is it?" he asked his people, who had all rushed out into the courtyard.

They answered that they heard nothing further.

"Well, well," said the Abbe, "make no noise." He then shut the window, and put his hands before his eyes.

"Ah, what a cry was that, my son!" he said, with his face of an ashy paleness—"what a cry! It pierced my very soul; some calamity has happened. Ah, holy Virgin! it has so agitated me that I can talk with you no more. Why did I hear it, just as I was speaking to you of your future career? My dear child, may God bless you! Kneel!"

Cinq-Mars did as he was desired, and knew by a kiss upon his head that he had been blessed by the old man, who then raised him, saying:

"Go, my son, the time is advancing; they might find you with me. Go, leave your people and horses here; wrap yourself in a cloak, and go; I have much to write ere the hour when darkness shall allow me to depart for Italy."

They embraced once more, promising to write to each other, and Henri quitted the house. The Abby, still following him with his eyes from the window, cried:

"Be prudent, whatever may happen," and sent him with his hands one more paternal blessing, saying, "Poor child! poor child!"

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIAL

Oh, vendetta di Dio, quanto to dei
Esser temuta da ciascun che legge
Cio, che fu manifesto agli occhi miei.—*Dante*.

Notwithstanding the custom of having secret trials, freely countenanced by Richelieu, the judges of the Cure of Loudun had resolved that the court should be open to the public; but they soon repented this measure. They were all interested in the destruction of Urbain Grandier; but they desired that the indignation of the country should in some

degree sanction the sentence of death they had received orders to pass and to carry into effect.

Laubardemont was a kind of bird of prey, whom the Cardinal always let loose when he required a prompt and sure agent for his vengeance; and on this occasion he fully justified the choice that had been made of him. He committed but one error—that of allowing a public trial, contrary to the usual custom; his object had been to intimidate and to dismay. He dismayed, indeed, but he created also a feeling of indignant horror.

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The throng without the gates had waited there two hours, during which time the sound of hammers indicated that within the great hall they were hastily completing their mysterious preparations. At length the archers laboriously turned upon their hinges the heavy gates opening into the street, and the crowd eagerly rushed in. The young Cinq-Mars was carried along with the second enormous wave, and, placed behind a thick column, stood there, so as to be able to see without being seen. He observed with vexation that the group of dark-clad citizens was near him; but the great gates, closing, left the part of the court where the people stood in such darkness that there was no likelihood of his being recognized. Although it was only midday, the hall was lighted with torches; but they were nearly all placed at the farther end, where rose the judges' bench behind a long table. The chairs, tables, and steps were all covered with black cloth, and cast a livid hue over the faces of those near them. A seat reserved for the prisoner was placed upon the left, and on the crape robe which covered him flames were represented in gold embroidery to indicate the nature of the offence. Here sat the accused, surrounded by archers, with his hands still bound in chains, held by two monks, who, with simulated terror, affected to start from him at his slightest motion, as if they held a tiger or enraged wolf, or as if the flames depicted on his robe could communicate themselves to their clothing. They also carefully kept his face from being seen in the least degree by the people.

The impassible countenance of M. de Laubardemont was there to dominate the judges of his choice; almost a head taller than any of them, he sat upon a seat higher than theirs, and each of his glassy and uneasy glances seemed to convey a command. He wore a long, full scarlet robe, and a black cap covered his head; he seemed occupied in arranging papers, which he then passed to the judges. The accusers, all ecclesiastics, sat upon the right hand of the judges; they wore their albs and stoles. Father Lactantius was distinguishable among them by his simple Capuchin habit, his tonsure, and the extreme hardness of his features. In a side gallery sat the Bishop of Poitiers, hidden from view; other galleries were filled with veiled women. Below the bench of judges a group of men and women, the dregs of the populace, stood behind six young Ursuline nuns, who seemed full of disgust at their proximity; these were the witnesses.

The rest of the hall was filled with an enormous crowd, gloomy and silent, clinging to the arches, the gates, and the beams, and full of a terror which communicated itself to the judges, for it arose from an interest in the accused. Numerous archers, armed with long pikes, formed an appropriate frame for this lugubrious picture.

At a sign from the President, the witnesses withdrew through a narrow door opened for them by an usher. As the Superior of the Ursulines passed M. de Laubardemont she was heard to say to him, "You have deceived me, Monsieur." He remained immovable, and she went on. A profound silence reigned throughout the whole assembly.

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Rising with all the gravity he could assume, but still with visible agitation, one of the judges, named Houmain, judge-Advocate of Orleans, read a sort of indictment in a voice so low and hoarse that it was impossible to follow it. He made himself heard only when what he had to say was intended to impose upon the minds of the people. He divided the evidence into two classes: one, the depositions of seventy-two witnesses; the other, more convincing, that resulting from "the exorcisms of the reverend fathers here present," said he, crossing himself.

Fathers Lactantius, Barre, and Mignon bowed low, repeating the sacred sign.

"Yes, my lords," said Houmain, addressing the judges, "this bouquet of white roses and this manuscript, signed with the blood of the magician, a counterpart of the contract he has made with Lucifer, and which he was obliged to carry about him in order to preserve his power, have been recognized and brought before you. We read with horror these words written at the bottom of the parchment: 'The original is in hell, in Lucifer's private cabinet.'"

A roar of laughter, which seemed to come from stentorian lungs, was heard in the throng. The president reddened, and made a sign to the archers, who in vain endeavored to discover the disturber. The judge-Advocate continued:

"The demons have been forced to declare their names by the mouths of their victims. Their names and deeds are deposited upon this table. They are called Astaroth, of the order of Seraphim; Eazas, Celsus, Acaos, Cedron, Asmodeus, of the order of Thrones; Alex, Zebulon, Cham, Uriel, and Achas, of the order of Principalities, and so on, for their number is infinite. For their actions, who among us has not been a witness of them?"

A prolonged murmur arose from the gathering, but, upon some halberdiers advancing, all became silent.

"We have seen, with grief, the young and respectable Superior of the Ursulines tear her bosom with her own hands and grovel in the dust; we have seen the sisters, Agnes, Claire, and others, deviate from the modesty of their sex by impassioned gestures and unseemly laughter. When impious men have inclined to doubt the presence of the demons, and we ourselves felt our convictions shaken, because they refused to answer to unknown questions in Greek or Arabic, the reverend fathers have, to establish our belief, deigned to explain to us that the malignity of evil spirits being extreme, it was not surprising that they should feign this ignorance in order that they might be less pressed with questions; and that in their answers they had committed various solecisms and other grammatical faults in order to bring contempt upon themselves, so that out of this disdain the holy doctors might leave them in quiet. Their hatred is so inveterate that just before performing one of their miraculous feats, they suspended a rope from a beam in order to involve the reverend personages in a suspicion of fraud, whereas it has been deposed on oath by credible people that there never had been a cord in that place.

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“But, my lords, while Heaven was thus miraculously explaining itself by the mouths of its holy interpreters, another light has just been thrown upon us. At the very time the judges were absorbed in profound meditation, a loud cry was heard near the hall of council; and upon going to the spot, we found the body of a young lady of high birth. She had just exhaled her last breath in the public street, in the arms of the reverend Father Mignon, Canon; and we learned from the said father here present, and from several other grave personages, that, suspecting the young lady to be possessed, by reason of the current rumor for some time past of the admiration Urbain Grandier had for her, an idea of testing it happily occurred to the Canon, who suddenly said, approaching her, ‘Grandier has just been put to death,’ whereat she uttered one loud scream and fell dead, deprived by the demon of the time necessary for giving her the assistance of our holy Mother, the Catholic Church.”

A murmur of indignation arose from the crowd, among whom the word “Assassin” was loudly reechoed; the halberdiers commanded silence with a loud voice, but it was obtained rather by the judge resuming his address, the general curiosity triumphing.

“Oh, infamy!” he continued, seeking to fortify himself by exclamations; “upon her person was found this work, written by the hand of Urbain Grandier,” and he took from among his papers a book bound in parchment.

“Heavens!” cried Urbain from his seat.

“Look to your prisoner!” cried the judge to the archers who surrounded him.

“No doubt the demon is about to manifest himself,” said Father Lactantius, in a sombre voice; “tighten his bonds.” He was obeyed.

The judge-Advocate continued, “Her name was Madeleine de Brou, aged nineteen.”

“O God! this is too much!” cried the accused, as he fell fainting on the ground.

The assembly was deeply agitated; for a moment there was an absolute tumult.

“Poor fellow! he loved her,” said some.

“So good a lady!” cried the women.

Pity began to predominate. Cold water was thrown upon Grandier, without his being taken from the court, and he was tied to his seat. The Judge-Advocate went on:

“We are directed to read the beginning of this book to the court,” and he read as follows:

“It is for thee, dear and gentle Madeleine, in order to set at rest thy troubled conscience, that I have described in this book one thought of my soul. All those thoughts tend to thee, celestial creature, because in thee they return to the aim and object of my whole existence; but the thought I send thee, as 'twere a flower, comes from thee, exists only in thee, and returns to thee alone.” Be not sad because thou lovest me; be not afflicted because I adore thee. The angels of heaven, what is it that they do? The souls of the blessed, what is it that is promised

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them? Are we less pure than the angels? Are our souls less separated from the earth than they will be after death? Oh, Madeleine, what is there in us wherewith the Lord can be displeased? Can it be that we pray together, that with faces prostrate in the dust before His altars, we ask for early death to take us while yet youth and love are ours? Or that, musing together beneath the funereal trees of the churchyard, we yearned for one grave, smiling at the idea of death, and weeping at life? Or that, when thou kneelest before me at the tribunal of penitence, and, speaking in the presence of God, canst find naught of evil to reveal to me, so wholly have I kept thy soul in the pure regions of heaven? What, then, could offend our Creator? Perhaps—yes! perhaps some spirit of heaven may have envied me my happiness when on Easter morn I saw thee kneeling before me, purified by long austerities from the slight stain which original sin had left in thee! Beautiful, indeed, wert thou! Thy glance sought thy God in heaven, and my trembling hand held His image to thy pure lips, which human lip had never dared to breathe upon. Angelic being! I alone participated in the secret of the Lord, in the one secret of the entire purity of thy soul; I it was that united thee to thy Creator, who at that moment descended also into my bosom. Ineffable espousals, of which the Eternal himself was the priest, you alone were permitted between the virgin and her pastor! the sole joy of each was to see eternal happiness beginning for the other, to inhale together the perfumes of heaven, to drink in already the harmony of the spheres, and to feel assured that our souls, unveiled to God and to ourselves alone, were worthy together to adore Him.

“What scruple still weighs upon thy soul, O my sister? Dost thou think I have offered too high a worship to thy virtue? Fearest thou so pure an admiration should deter me from that of the Lord?”

Houmain had reached this point when the door through which the witnesses had withdrawn suddenly opened. The judges anxiously whispered together. Laubardemont, uncertain as to the meaning of this, signed to the fathers to let him know whether this was some scene executed by their orders; but, seated at some distance from him, and themselves taken by surprise, they could not make him understand that they had not prepared this interruption. Besides, ere they could exchange looks, to the amazement of the assembly, three women, ‘en chemise’, with naked feet, each with a cord round her neck and a wax taper in her hand, came through the door and advanced to the middle of the platform. It was the Superior of the Ursulines, followed by Sisters Agnes and Claire. Both the latter were weeping; the Superior was very pale, but her bearing was firm, and her eyes were fixed and tearless. She knelt; her companions followed her example. Everything was in such confusion that no one thought of checking them; and in a clear, firm voice she pronounced these words, which resounded in every corner of the hall:

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"In the name of the Holy Trinity, I, Jeanne de Belfiel, daughter of the Baron de Cose, I, the unworthy Superior of the Convent of the Ursulines of Loudun, ask pardon of God and man for the crime I have committed in accusing the innocent Urbain Grandier. My possession was feigned, my words were dictated; remorse overwhelms me."

"Bravo!" cried the spectators, clapping their hands. The judges arose; the archers, in doubt, looked at the president; he shook in every limb, but did not change countenance.

"Let all be silent," he said, in a sharp voice; "archers, do your duty."

This man felt himself supported by so strong a hand that nothing could affright him—for no thought of Heaven ever visited him.

"What think you, my fathers?" said he, making a sign to the monks.

"That the demon seeks to save his friend. Obmutesce, Satanas!" cried Father Lactantius, in a terrible voice, affecting to exorcise the Superior.

Never did fire applied to gunpowder produce an effect more instantaneous than did these two words. Jeanne de Belfiel started up in all the beauty of twenty, which her awful nudity served to augment; she seemed a soul escaped from hell appearing to, her seducer. With her dark eyes she cast fierce glances upon the monks; Lactantius lowered his beneath that look. She took two steps toward him with her bare feet, beneath which the scaffolding rung, so energetic was her movement; the taper seemed, in her hand, the sword of the avenging angel.

"Silence, impostor!" she cried, with warmth; "the demon who possessed me was yourself. You deceived me; you said he was not to be tried. To-day, for the first time, I know that he is to be tried; to-day, for the first time, I know that he is to be murdered. And I will speak!"

"Woman, the demon bewilders thee."

"Say, rather, that repentance enlightens me. Daughters, miserable as myself, arise; is he not innocent?"

"We swear he is," said the two young lay sisters, still kneeling and weeping, for they were not animated with so strong a resolution as that of the Superior.

Agnes, indeed, had hardly uttered these words when turning toward the people, she cried, "Help me! they will punish me; they will kill me!" And hurrying away her companion, she drew her into the crowd, who affectionately received them. A thousand voices swore to protect them. Imprecations arose; the men struck their staves against the floor; the officials dared not prevent the people from passing the sisters on from one to another into the street.

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During this strange scene the amazed and panic-struck judges whispered; M. Laubardemont looked at the archers, indicating to them the points they were especially to watch, among which, more particularly, was that occupied by the group in black. The accusers looked toward the gallery of the Bishop of Poitiers, but discovered no expression in his dull countenance. He was one of those old men of whom death appears to take possession ten years before all motion entirely ceases in them. His eyes seemed veiled by a half sleep; his gaping mouth mumbled a few vague and habitual words of prayer without meaning or application; the entire amount of intelligence he retained was the ability to distinguish the man who had most power, and him he obeyed, regardless at what price. He had accordingly signed the sentence of the doctors of the Sorbonne which declared the nuns possessed, without even deducing thence the consequence of the death of Urbain; the rest seemed to him one of those more or less lengthy ceremonies, to which he paid not the slightest attention — accustomed as he was to see and live among them, himself an indispensable part and parcel of them. He therefore gave no sign of life on this occasion, merely preserving an air at once perfectly noble and expressionless.

Meanwhile, Father Lactantius, having had a moment to recover from the sudden attack made upon him, turned toward the president and said:

“Here is a clear proof, sent us by Heaven, of the possession, for the Superior never before has forgotten the modesty and severity of her order.”

“Would that all the world were here to see me!” said Jeanne de Belfiel, firm as ever. “I can not be sufficiently humiliated upon earth, and Heaven will reject me, for I have been your accomplice.”

Perspiration appeared upon the forehead of Laubardemont, but he tried to recover his composure. “What absurd tale is this, Sister; what has influenced you herein?”

The voice of the girl became sepulchral; she collected all her strength, pressed her hand upon her heart as if she desired to stay its throbbing, and, looking at Urbain Grandier, answered, “Love.”

A shudder ran through the assembly. Urbain, who since he had fainted had remained with his head hanging down as if dead, slowly raised his eyes toward her, and returned entirely to life only to undergo a fresh sorrow. The young penitent continued:

“Yes, the love which he rejected, which he never fully knew, which I have breathed in his discourses, which my eyes drew in from his celestial countenance, which his very counsels against it have increased.

“Yes, Urbain is pure as an angel, but good as a man who has loved. I knew not that he had loved! It is you,” she said more energetically, pointing to Lactantius, Barre, and



Mignon, and changing her passionate accents for those of indignation—"it is you who told me that he loved; you, who this morning have too cruelly avenged me by killing my rival with a word. Alas, I only sought to separate them! It was a crime; but, by my mother, I am an Italian! I burned with love, with jealousy; you allowed me to see Urbain, to have him as a friend, to see him daily." She was silent for a moment, then exclaimed, "People, he is innocent! Martyr, pardon me, I embrace thy feet!"

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She prostrated herself before Urbain and burst into a torrent of tears.

Urbain raised his closely bound hands, and giving her his benediction, said, gently:

“Go, Sister; I pardon thee in the name of Him whom I shall soon see. I have before said to you, and you now see, that the passions work much evil, unless we seek to turn them toward heaven.”

The blood rose a second time to Laubardemont’s forehead. “Miscreant!” he exclaimed, “darest thou pronounce the words of the Church?”

“I have not quitted her bosom,” said Urbain.

“Remove the girl,” said the President.

When the archers went to obey, they found that she had tightened the cord round her neck with such force that she was of a livid hue and almost lifeless. Fear had driven all the women from the assembly; many had been carried out fainting, but the hall was no less crowded. The ranks thickened, for the men out of the streets poured in.

The judges arose in terror, and the president attempted to have the hall cleared; but the people, putting on their hats, stood in alarming immobility. The archers were not numerous enough to repel them. It became necessary to yield; and accordingly Laubardemont in an agitated voice announced that the council would retire for half an hour. He broke up the sitting; the people remained gloomily, each man fixed firmly to his place.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Adopted fact is always better composed than the real one
Advantage that a calm temper gives one over men
Art is the chosen truth
Artificialities of style of that period
Artistic Truth, more lofty than the True
As Homer says, “smiling under tears”
Difference which I find between Truth in art and the True in fac
Happy is he who does not outlive his youth
He did not blush to be a man, and he spoke to men with force
History too was a work of art
In every age we laugh at the costume of our fathers
It is not now what it used to be
It is too true that virtue also has its blush
Lofty ideal of woman and of love
Money is not a common thing between gentlemen like you and me



Monsieur, I know that I have lived too long
Neither idealist nor realist
No writer had more dislike of mere pedantry
Offices will end by rendering great names vile
Princesses ceded like a town, and must not even weep
Principle that art implied selection
Recommended a scrupulous observance of nature
Remedy infallible against the plague and against reserve
True talent paints life rather than the living
Truth, I here venture to distinguish from that of the True
Urbain Grandier
What use is the memory of facts, if not to serve as an example
Woman is more bitter than death, and her arms are like chains
Yes, we are in the way here

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CINQ MARS

By Alfred de vigny

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER V

THE MARTYRDOM

‘La torture interroge, et la douleur repond.’
RAYNOURARD, Les Templiers.

The continuous interest of this half-trial, its preparations, its interruptions, all had held the minds of the people in such attention that no private conversations had taken place. Some irrepressible cries had been uttered, but simultaneously, so that no man could accuse his neighbor. But when the people were left to themselves, there was an explosion of clamorous sentences.

There was at this period enough of primitive simplicity among the lower classes for them to be persuaded by the mysterious tales of the political agents who were deluding them; so that a large portion of the throng in the hall of trial, not venturing to change their judgment, though upon the manifest evidence just given them, awaited in painful suspense the return of the judges, interchanging with an air of mystery and inane importance the usual remarks prompted by imbecility on such occasions.

“One does not know what to think, Monsieur?”

“Truly, Madame, most extraordinary things have happened.”

“We live in strange times!”

“I suspected this; but, i’ faith, it is not wise to say what one thinks.”

“We shall see what we shall see,” and so on—the unmeaning chatter of the crowd, which merely serves to show that it is at the command of the first who chooses to sway it. Stronger words were heard from the group in black.

“What! shall we let them do as they please, in this manner? What! dare to burn our letter to the King!”

“If the King knew it!”

“The barbarian impostors! how skilfully is their plot contrived! What! shall murder be committed under our very eyes? Shall we be afraid of these archers?”

“No, no, no!” rang out in trumpet-like tones.

Attention was turned toward the young advocate, who, standing on a branch, began tearing to pieces a roll of paper; then he cried:

“Yes, I tear and scatter to the winds the defence I had prepared for the accused. They have suppressed discussion; I am not allowed to speak for him. I can only speak to you, people; I rejoice that I can do so. You heard these infamous judges. Which of them can hear the truth? Which of them is worthy to listen to an honest man? Which of them will dare to meet his gaze? But what do I say? They all know the truth. They carry it in their guilty breasts; it stings their hearts like a serpent. They tremble in their lair, where doubtless they are devouring their victim; they tremble because they have heard the cries of three deluded women. What was I about to do? I was about to speak in behalf of Urbain Grandier! But what eloquence could equal that of those unfortunates? What words could better have shown you his innocence? Heaven has taken up arms for him in bringing them to repentance and to devotion; Heaven will finish its work—”

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"Vade retro, Satanas," was heard through a high window in the hall.

Fournier stopped for a moment, then said:

"You hear these voices parodying the divine language? If I mistake not, these instruments of an infernal power are, by this song, preparing some new spell."

"But," cried those who surrounded him, "what shall we do? What have they done with him?"

"Remain here; be immovable, be silent," replied the young advocate. "The inertia of a people is all-powerful; that is its true wisdom, that its strength. Observe them closely, and in silence; and you will make them tremble."

"They surely will not dare to appear here again," said the Comte du Lude.

"I should like to look once more at the tall scoundrel in red," said Grand-Ferre, who had lost nothing of what had occurred.

"And that good gentleman, the Cure," murmured old Father Guillaume Leroux, looking at all his indignant parishioners, who were talking together in a low tone, measuring and counting the archers, ridiculing their dress, and beginning to point them out to the observation of the other spectators.

Cinq-Mars, still leaning against the pillar behind which he had first placed himself, still wrapped in his black cloak, eagerly watched all that passed, lost not a word of what was said, and filled his heart with hate and bitterness. Violent desires for slaughter and revenge, a vague desire to strike, took possession of him, despite himself; this is the first impression which evil produces on the soul of a young man. Later, sadness takes the place of fury, then indifference and scorn, later still, a calculating admiration for great villains who have been successful; but this is only when, of the two elements which constitute man, earth triumphs over spirit.

Meanwhile, on the right of the hall near the judges' platform, a group of women were watching attentively a child about eight years old, who had taken it into his head to climb up to a cornice by the aid of his sister Martine, whom we have seen the subject of jest with the young soldier, Grand-Ferre. The child, having nothing to look at after the court had left the hall, had climbed to a small window which admitted a faint light, and which he imagined to contain a swallow's nest or some other treasure for a boy; but after he was well established on the cornice, his hands grasping the bars of an old shrine of Jerome, he wished himself anywhere else, and cried out:

"Oh, sister, sister, lend me your hand to get down!"

"What do you see there?" asked Martine.

“Oh, I dare not tell; but I want to get down,” and he began to cry.

“Stay there, my child; stay there!” said all the women. “Don’t be afraid; tell us all that you see.”

“Well, then, they’ve put the Cure between two great boards that squeeze his legs, and there are cords round the boards.”

“Ah! that is the rack,” said one of the townsmen. “Look again, my little friend, what do you see now?”

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The child, more confident, looked again through the window, and then, withdrawing his head, said:

"I can not see the Cure now, because all the judges stand round him, and are looking at him, and their great robes prevent me from seeing. There are also some Capuchins, stooping down to whisper to him."

Curiosity attracted more people to the boy's perch; every one was silent, waiting anxiously to catch his words, as if their lives depended on them.

"I see," he went on, "the executioner driving four little pieces of wood between the cords, after the Capuchins have blessed the hammer and nails. Ah, heavens! Sister, how enraged they seem with him, because he will not speak. Mother! mother! give me your hand, I want to come down!"

Instead of his mother, the child, upon turning round, saw only men's faces, looking up at him with a mournful eagerness, and signing him to go on. He dared not descend, and looked again through the window, trembling.

"Oh! I see Father Lactantius and Father Barre themselves forcing in more pieces of wood, which squeeze his legs. Oh, how pale he is! he seems praying. There, his head falls back, as if he were dying! Oh, take me away!"

And he fell into the arms of the young Advocate, of M. du Lude, and of Cinq-Mars, who had come to support him.

"Deus stetit in synagoga deorum: in medio autem Deus dijudicat—" chanted strong, nasal voices, issuing from the small window, which continued in full chorus one of the psalms, interrupted by blows of the hammer—an infernal deed beating time to celestial songs. One might have supposed himself near a smithy, except that the blows were dull, and manifested to the ear that the anvil was a man's body.

"Silence!" said Fournier, "He speaks. The chanting and the blows stop."

A weak voice within said, with difficulty, "Oh, my fathers, mitigate the rigor of your torments, for you will reduce my soul to despair, and I might seek to destroy myself!"

At this the fury of the people burst forth like an explosion, echoing along the vaulted roofs; the men sprang fiercely upon the platform, thrust aside the surprised and hesitating archers; the unarmed crowd drove them back, pressed them, almost suffocated them against the walls, and held them fast, then dashed against the doors which led to the torture chamber, and, making them shake beneath their blows, threatened to drive them in; imprecations resounded from a thousand menacing voices and terrified the judges within.

“They are gone; they have taken him away!” cried a man who had climbed to the little window.

The multitude at once stopped short, and changing the direction of their steps, fled from this detestable place and spread rapidly through the streets, where an extraordinary confusion prevailed.

Night had come on during the long sitting, and the rain was pouring in torrents. The darkness was terrifying. The cries of women slipping on the pavement or driven back by the horses of the guards; the shouts of the furious men; the ceaseless tolling of the bells which had been keeping time with the strokes of the question;



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[Torture ('Question') was regulated in scrupulous detail by Holy Mother The Church: The ordinary question was regulated for minor infractions and used for interrogating women and children. For more serious crimes the suspect (and sometimes the witnesses) were put to the extraordinary question by the officiating priests. D.W.]

the roll of distant thunder—all combined to increase the disorder. If the ear was astonished, the eyes were no less so. A few dismal torches lighted up the corners of the streets; their flickering gleams showed soldiers, armed and mounted, dashing along, regardless of the crowd, to assemble in the Place de St. Pierre; tiles were sometimes thrown at them on their way, but, missing the distant culprit, fell upon some unoffending neighbor. The confusion was bewildering, and became still more so, when, hurrying through all the streets toward the Place de St. Pierre, the people found it barricaded on all sides, and filled with mounted guards and archers. Carts, fastened to the posts at each corner, closed each entrance, and sentinels, armed with arquebuses, were stationed close to the carts. In the centre of the Place rose a pile composed of enormous beams placed crosswise upon one another, so as to form a perfect square; these were covered with a whiter and lighter wood; an enormous stake arose from the centre of the scaffold. A man clothed in red and holding a lowered torch stood near this sort of mast, which was visible from a long distance. A huge chafing-dish, covered on account of the rain, was at his feet.

At this spectacle, terror inspired everywhere a profound silence; for an instant nothing was heard but the sound of the rain, which fell in floods, and of the thunder, which came nearer and nearer.

Meanwhile, Cinq-Mars, accompanied by *mm.* du Lude and Fournier and all the more important personages of the town, had sought refuge from the storm under the peristyle of the church of *Ste.-Croix*, raised upon twenty stone steps. The pile was in front, and from this height they could see the whole of the square. The centre was entirely clear, large streams of water alone traversed it; but all the windows of the houses were gradually lighted up, and showed the heads of the men and women who thronged them.

The young D'Effiat sorrowfully contemplated this menacing preparation. Brought up in sentiments of honor, and far removed from the black thoughts which hatred and ambition arouse in the heart of man, he could not conceive that such wrong could be done without some powerful and secret motive. The audacity of such a condemnation seemed to him so enormous that its very cruelty began to justify it in his eyes; a secret horror crept into his soul, the same that silenced the people. He almost forgot the interest with which the unhappy Urbain had inspired him, in thinking whether it were not possible that some secret correspondence with the infernal powers had justly provoked such excessive severity; and the public revelations of the nuns, and the statement of his respected tutor, faded from his memory, so powerful is success, even in the eyes of superior men! so strongly does force impose upon men, despite the voice of conscience!

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The young traveller was asking himself whether it were not probable that the torture had forced some monstrous confession from the accused, when the obscurity which surrounded the church suddenly ceased. Its two great doors were thrown open; and by the light of an infinite number of flambeaux, appeared all the judges and ecclesiastics, surrounded by guards. Among them was Urbain, supported, or rather carried, by six men clothed as Black Penitents—for his limbs, bound with bandages saturated with blood, seemed broken and incapable of supporting him. It was at most two hours since Cinq-Mars had seen him, and yet he could hardly recognize the face he had so closely observed at the trial. All color, all roundness of form had disappeared from it; a livid pallor covered a skin yellow and shining like ivory; the blood seemed to have left his veins; all the life that remained within him shone from his dark eyes, which appeared to have grown twice as large as before, as he looked languidly around him; his long, chestnut hair hung loosely down his neck and over a white shirt, which entirely covered him—or rather a sort of robe with large sleeves, and of a yellowish tint, with an odor of sulphur about it; a long, thick cord encircled his neck and fell upon his breast. He looked like an apparition; but it was the apparition of a martyr.

Urbain stopped, or, rather, was set down upon the peristyle of the church; the Capuchin Lactantius placed a lighted torch in his right hand, and held it there, as he said to him, with his hard inflexibility:

“Do penance, and ask pardon of God for thy crime of magic.”

The unhappy man raised his voice with great difficulty, and with his eyes to heaven said:

“In the name of the living God, I cite thee, Laubardemont, false judge, to appear before Him in three years. They have taken away my confessor, and I have been fain to pour out my sins into the bosom of God Himself, for my enemies surround me. I call that God of mercy to witness I never have dealt in magic. I have known no mysteries but those of the Catholic religion, apostolic and Roman, in which I die; I have sinned much against myself, but never against God and our Lord—”

“Cease!” cried the Capuchin, affecting to close his mouth ere he could pronounce the name of the Saviour. “Obdurate wretch, return to the demon who sent thee!”

He signed to four priests, who, approaching with sprinklers in their hands, exorcised with holy water the air the magician breathed, the earth he touched, the wood that was to burn him. During this ceremony, the judge-Advocate hastily read the decree, dated the 18th of August, 1639, declaring Urbain Grandier duly attainted and convicted of the crime of sorcery, witchcraft, and possession, in the persons of sundry Ursuline nuns of Loudun, and others, laymen, *etc.*

The reader, dazzled by a flash of lightning, stopped for an instant, and, turning to M. de Laubardemont, asked whether, considering the awful weather, the execution could not be deferred till the next day.



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"The decree," coldly answered Laubardemont, "commands execution within twenty-four hours. Fear not the incredulous people; they will soon be convinced."

All the most important persons of the town and many strangers were under the peristyle, and now advanced, Cinq-Mars among them.

"The magician never has been able to pronounce the name of the Saviour, and repels his image."

Lactantius at this moment issued from the midst of the Penitents, with an enormous iron crucifix in his hand, which he seemed to hold with precaution and respect; he extended it to the lips of the sufferer, who indeed threw back his head, and collecting all his strength, made a gesture with his arm, which threw the cross from the hands of the Capuchin.

"You see," cried the latter, "he has thrown down the cross!"

A murmur arose, the meaning of which was doubtful.

"Profanation!" cried the priests.

The procession moved toward the pile.

Meanwhile, Cinq-Mars, gliding behind a pillar, had eagerly watched all that passed; he saw with astonishment that the cross, in falling upon the steps, which were more exposed to the rain than the platform, smoked and made a noise like molten lead when thrown into water. While the public attention was elsewhere engaged, he advanced and touched it lightly with his bare hand, which was immediately scorched. Seized with indignation, with all the fury of a true heart, he took up the cross with the folds of his cloak, stepped up to Laubardemont, and, striking him with it on the forehead, cried:

"Villain, I brand thee with the mark of this red-hot iron!"

The crowd heard these words and rushed forward.

"Arrest this madman!" cried the unworthy magistrate.

He was himself seized by the hands of men who cried, "Justice! justice, in the name of the King!"

"We are lost!" said Lactantius; "to the pile, to the pile!"

The Penitents dragged Urbain toward the Place, while the judges and archers reentered the church, struggling with the furious citizens; the executioner, having no time to tie up the victim, hastened to lay him on the wood, and to set fire to it. But the rain still fell in

torrents, and each piece of wood had no sooner caught the flame than it became extinguished. In vain did Lactantius and the other canons themselves seek to stir up the fire; nothing could overcome the water which fell from heaven.

Meanwhile, the tumult which had begun in the peristyle of the church extended throughout the square. The cry of "Justice!" was repeated and circulated, with the information of what had been discovered; two barricades were forced, and despite three volleys of musketry, the archers were gradually driven back toward the centre of the square. In vain they spurred their horses against the crowd; it overwhelmed them with its swelling waves. Half an hour passed in this struggle, the guards still receding toward the pile, which they concealed as they pressed closer upon it.

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"On! on!" cried a man; "we will deliver him; do not strike the soldiers, but let them fall back. See, Heaven will not permit him to die! The fire is out; now, friend, one effort more! That is well! Throw down that horse! Forward! On!"

The guard was broken and dispersed on all sides. The crowd rushed to the pile, but no more light was there: all had disappeared, even the executioner. They tore up and threw aside the beams; one of them was still burning, and its light showed under a mass of ashes and ensanguined mire a blackened hand, preserved from the fire by a large iron bracelet and chain. A woman had the courage to open it; the fingers clasped a small ivory cross and an image of St. Magdalen.

"These are his remains," she said, weeping.

"Say, the relics of a martyr!" exclaimed a citizen, baring his head.

CHAPTER VI

THE DREAM

Meanwhile, Cinq-Mars, amid the excitement which his outbreak had provoked, felt his left arm seized by a hand as hard as iron, which, drawing him from the crowd to the foot of the steps, pushed him behind the wall of the church, and he then saw the dark face of old Grandchamp, who said to him in a sharp voice:

"Sir, your attack upon thirty musketeers in a wood at Chaumont was nothing, because we were near you, though you knew it not, and, moreover, you had to do with men of honor; but here 'tis different. Your horses and people are at the end of the street; I request you to mount and leave the town, or to send me back to Madame la Marechale, for I am responsible for your limbs, which you expose so freely."

Cinq-Mars was somewhat astonished at this rough mode of having a service done him, was not sorry to extricate himself thus from the affair, having had time to reflect how very awkward it might be for him to be recognized, after striking the head of the judicial authority, the agent of the very Cardinal who was to present him to the King. He observed also that around him was assembled a crowd of the lowest class of people, among whom he blushed to find himself. He therefore followed his old domestic without argument, and found the other three servants waiting for him. Despite the rain and wind he mounted, and was soon upon the highroad with his escort, having put his horse to a gallop to avoid pursuit.

He had, however, hardly left Loudun when the sandy road, furrowed by deep ruts completely filled with water, obliged him to slacken his pace. The rain continued to fall heavily, and his cloak was almost saturated. He felt a thicker one thrown over his

shoulders; it was his old valet, who had approached him, and thus exhibited toward him a maternal solicitude.

“Well, Grandchamp,” said Cinq-Mars, “now that we are clear of the riot, tell me how you came to be there when I had ordered you to remain at the Abbe’s.”

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"Parbleu, Monsieur!" answered the old servant, in a grumbling tone, "do you suppose that I should obey you any more than I did Monsieur le Marechal? When my late master, after telling me to remain in his tent, found me behind him in the cannon's smoke, he made no complaint, because he had a fresh horse ready when his own was killed, and he only scolded me for a moment in his thoughts; but, truly, during the forty years I served him, I never saw him act as you have in the fortnight I have been with you. Ah!" he added with a sigh, "things are going strangely; and if we continue thus, there's no knowing what will be the end of it."

"But knowest thou, Grandchamp, that these scoundrels had made the crucifix red hot? —a thing at which no honest man would have been less enraged than I."

"Except Monsieur le Marechal, your father, who would not have done at all what you have done, Monsieur."

"What, then, would he have done?"

"He would very quietly have let this cure be burned by the other cures, and would have said to me, 'Grandchamp, see that my horses have oats, and let no one steal them'; or, 'Grandchamp, take care that the rain does not rust my sword or wet the priming of my pistols'; for Monsieur le Marechal thought of everything, and never interfered in what did not concern him. That was his great principle; and as he was, thank Heaven, alike good soldier and good general, he was always as careful of his arms as a recruit, and would not have stood up against thirty young gallants with a dress rapier."

Cinq-Mars felt the force of the worthy servitor's epigrammatic scolding, and feared that he had followed him beyond the wood of Chaumont; but he would not ask, lest he should have to give explanations or to tell a falsehood or to command silence, which would at once have been taking him into confidence on the subject. As the only alternative, he spurred his horse and rode ahead of his old domestic; but the latter had not yet had his say, and instead of keeping behind his master, he rode up to his left and continued the conversation.

"Do you suppose, Monsieur, that I should allow you to go where you please? No, Monsieur, I am too deeply impressed with the respect I owe to Madame la Marquise, to give her an opportunity of saying to me: 'Grandchamp, my son has been killed with a shot or with a sword; why were you not before him?' Or, 'He has received a stab from the stiletto of an Italian, because he went at night beneath the window of a great princess; why did you not seize the assassin?' This would be very disagreeable to me, Monsieur, for I never have been reproached with anything of the kind. Once Monsieur le Marechal lent me to his nephew, Monsieur le Comte, to make a campaign in the Netherlands, because I know Spanish. I fulfilled the duty with honor, as I always do. When Monsieur le Comte received a bullet in his heart, I myself brought back his horses, his mules, his tent, and all his equipment, without so much as a pocket-

handkerchief being missed; and I can assure you that the horses were as well dressed and harnessed when we reentered Chaumont as if Monsieur le Comte had been about to go a-hunting. And, accordingly, I received nothing but compliments and agreeable things from the whole family, just in the way I like."

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"Well, well, my friend," said Henri d'Effiat, "I may some day, perhaps, have these horses to take back; but in the mean time take this great purse of gold, which I have well-nigh lost two or three times, and thou shalt pay for me everywhere. The money wearies me."

"Monsieur le Marechal did not so, Monsieur. He had been superintendent of finances, and he counted every farthing he paid out of his own hand. I do not think your estates would have been in such good condition, or that you would have had so much money to count yourself, had he done otherwise; have the goodness, therefore, to keep your purse, whose contents, I dare swear, you do not know."

"Faith, not I."

Grandchamp sent forth a profound sigh at his master's disdainful exclamation.

"Ah, Monsieur le Marquis! Monsieur le Marquis! When I think that the great King Henri, before my eyes, put his chamois gloves into his pocket to keep the rain from spoiling them; when I think that Monsieur de Rosni refused him money when he had spent too much; when I think—"

"When thou dost think, thou art egregiously tedious, my old friend," interrupted his master; "and thou wilt do better in telling me what that black figure is that I think I see walking in the mire behind us."

"It looks like some poor peasant woman who, perhaps, wants alms of us. She can easily follow us, for we do not go at much of a pace in this sand, wherein our horses sink up to the hams. We shall go to the Landes perhaps some day, Monsieur, and you will see a country all the same as this sandy road, and great, black firs all the way along. It looks like a churchyard; this is an exact specimen of it. Look, the rain has ceased, and we can see a little ahead; there is nothing but furze-bushes on this great plain, without a village or a house. I don't know where we can pass the night; but if you will take my advice, you will let us cut some boughs and bivouac where we are. You shall see how, with a little earth, I can make a hut as warm as a bed."

"I would rather go on to the light I see in the horizon," said Cinq-Mars; "for I fancy I feel rather feverish, and I am thirsty. But fall back, I would ride alone; rejoin the others and follow."

Grandchamp obeyed; he consoled himself by giving Germain, Louis, and Etienne lessons in the art of reconnoitring a country by night.

Meanwhile, his young master was overcome with fatigue. The violent emotions of the day had profoundly affected his mind; and the long journey on horseback, the last two days passed almost without nourishment, owing to the hurried pressure of events, the heat of the sun by day, the icy coldness of the night, all contributed to increase his

indisposition and to weary his delicate frame. For three hours he rode in silence before his people, yet the light he had seen in the horizon seemed no nearer; at last he ceased to follow it with his eyes, and his head, feeling heavier and heavier,

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sank upon his breast. He gave the reins to his tired horse, which of its own accord followed the high-road, and, crossing his arms, allowed himself to be rocked by the monotonous motion of his fellow-traveller, which frequently stumbled against the large stones that strewed the road. The rain had ceased, as had the voices of his domestics, whose horses followed in the track of their master's. The young man abandoned himself to the bitterness of his thoughts; he asked himself whether the bright object of his hopes would not flee from him day by day, as that phosphoric light fled from him in the horizon, step by step. Was it probable that the young Princess, almost forcibly recalled to the gallant court of Anne of Austria, would always refuse the hands, perhaps royal ones, that would be offered to her? What chance that she would resign herself to renounce a present throne, in order to wait till some caprice of fortune should realize romantic hopes, or take a youth almost in the lowest rank of the army and lift him to the elevation she spoke of, till the age of love should be passed? How could he be certain that even the vows of Marie de Gonzaga were sincere?

"Alas!" he said, "perhaps she has blinded herself as to her own sentiments; the solitude of the country had prepared her soul to receive deep impressions. I came; she thought I was he of whom she had dreamed. Our age and my love did the rest. But when at court, she, the companion of the Queen, has learned to contemplate from an exalted position the greatness to which I aspire, and which I as yet see only from a very humble distance; when she shall suddenly find herself in actual possession of the future she aims at, and measures with a more correct eye the long road I have to travel; when she shall hear around her vows like mine, pronounced by lips which could undo me with a word, with a word destroy him whom she awaits as her husband, her lord—oh, madman that I have been!—she will see all her folly, and will be incensed at mine."

Thus did doubt, the greatest misery of love, begin to torture his unhappy heart; he felt his hot blood rush to his head and oppress it. Ever and anon he fell forward upon the neck of his horse, and a half sleep weighed down his eyes; the dark firs that bordered the road seemed to him gigantic corpses travelling beside him. He saw, or thought he saw, the same woman clothed in black, whom he had pointed out to Grandchamp, approach so near as to touch his horse's mane, pull his cloak, and then run off with a jeering laugh; the sand of the road seemed to him a river running beneath him, with opposing current, back toward its source. This strange sight dazzled his worn eyes; he closed them and fell asleep on his horse.

Presently, he felt himself stopped, but he was numbed with cold and could not move. He saw peasants, lights, a house, a great room into which they carried him, a wide bed, whose heavy curtains were closed by Grandchamp; and he fell asleep again, stunned by the fever that whirled in his ears.



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Dreams that followed one another more rapidly than grains of sand before the wind rushed through his brain; he could not catch them, and moved restlessly on his bed. Urbain Grandier on the rack, his mother in tears, his tutor armed, Bassompierre loaded with chains, passed before him, making signs of farewell; at last, as he slept, he instinctively put his hand to his head to stay the passing dream, which then seemed to unfold itself before his eyes like pictures in shifting sands.

He saw a public square crowded with a foreign people, a northern people, who uttered cries of joy, but they were savage cries; there was a line of guards, ferocious soldiers—these were Frenchmen. “Come with me,” said the soft voice of Marie de Gonzaga, who took his hand. “See, I wear a diadem; here is thy throne, come with me.” And she hurried him on, the people still shouting. He went on, a long way. “Why are you sad, if you are a queen?” he said, trembling. But she was pale, and smiled and spoke not. She ascended, step after step, up to a throne, and seated herself. “Mount!” said she, forcibly pulling his hand. But, at every movement, the massive stairs crumbled beneath his feet, so that he could not ascend. “Give thanks to love,” she continued; and her hand, now more powerful, raised him to the throne. The people still shouted. He bowed low to kiss that helping hand, that adored hand; it was the hand of the executioner!

“Oh, heavens!” exclaimed Cinq-Mars, as, heaving a deep sigh, he opened his eyes. A flickering lamp lighted the ruinous chamber of the inn; he again closed his eyes, for he had seen, seated on his bed, a woman, a nun, young and beautiful! He thought he was still dreaming, but she grasped his hand firmly. He opened his burning eyes, and fixed them upon her.

“Is it you, Jeannede Belfiel? The rain has drenched your veil and your black hair! Why are you here, unhappy woman?”

“Hark! awake not my Urbain; he sleeps there in the next room. Ay, my hair is indeed wet, and my feet—see, my feet that were once so white, see how the mud has soiled them. But I have made a vow—I will not wash them till I have seen the King, and until he has granted me Urbain’s pardon. I am going to the army to find him; I will speak to him as Grandier taught me to speak, and he will pardon him. And listen, I will also ask thy pardon, for I read it in thy face that thou, too, art condemned to death. Poor youth! thou art too young to die, thy curling hair is beautiful; but yet thou art condemned, for thou hast on thy brow a line that never deceives. The man thou hast struck will kill thee. Thou hast made too much use of the cross; it is that which will bring evil upon thee. Thou hast struck with it, and thou wearest it round thy neck by a hair chain. Nay, hide not thy face; have I said aught to afflict thee, or is it that thou lovest, young man? Ah, reassure thyself, I will not tell all this to thy love. I am mad, but I am gentle, very gentle; and three days ago I was beautiful. Is she also beautiful? Ah! she will weep some day! Yet, if she can weep, she will be happy!”

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And then suddenly Jeanne began to recite the service for the dead in a monotonous voice, but with incredible rapidity, still seated on the bed, and turning the beads of a long rosary.

Suddenly the door opened; she looked up, and fled through another door in the partition.

"What the devil's that—an imp or an angel, saying the funeral service over you, and you under the clothes, as if you were in a shroud?"

This abrupt exclamation came from the rough voice of Grandchamp, who was so astonished at what he had seen that he dropped the glass of lemonade he was bringing in. Finding that his master did not answer, he became still more alarmed, and raised the bedclothes. Cinq-Mars's face was crimson, and he seemed asleep, but his old domestic saw that the blood rushing to his head had almost suffocated him; and, seizing a jug full of cold water, he dashed the whole of it in his face. This military remedy rarely fails to effect its purpose, and Cinq-Mars returned to himself with a start.

"Ah! it is thou, Grandchamp; what frightful dreams I have had!"

"Peste! Monsieur le Marquis, your dreams, on the contrary, are very pretty ones. I saw the tail of the last as I came in; your choice is not bad."

"What dost mean, blockhead?"

"Nay, not a blockhead, Monsieur; I have good eyes, and I have seen what I have seen. But, really ill as you are, Monsieur le Marechal would never—"

"Thou art utterly doting, my friend; give me some drink, I am parched with thirst. Oh, heavens! what a night! I still see all those women."

"All those women, Monsieur? Why, how many are here?"

"I am speaking to thee of a dream, blockhead. Why standest there like a post, instead of giving me some drink?"

"Enough, Monsieur; I will get more lemonade." And going to the door, he called over the staircase, "Germain! Etienne! Louis!"

The innkeeper answered from below: "Coming, Monsieur, coming; they have been helping me to catch the madwoman."

"What mad-woman?" said Cinq-Mars, rising in bed.

The host entered, and, taking off his cotton cap, said, respectfully: "Oh, nothing, Monsieur le Marquis, only a madwoman that came here last night on foot, and whom we put in the next room; but she has escaped, and we have not been able to catch her."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars, returning to himself and putting his hand to his eyes, "it was not a dream, then. And my mother, where is she? and the Marechal, and—Ah! and yet it is but a fearful dream! Leave me."

As he said this, he turned toward the wall, and again pulled the clothes over his head.

The innkeeper, in amazement, touched his forehead three times with his finger, looking at Grandchamp as if to ask him whether his master were also mad.

Grandchamp motioned him away in silence, and in order to watch the rest of the night by the side of Cinq-Mars, who was in a deep sleep, he seated himself in a large armchair, covered with tapestry, and began to squeeze lemons into a glass of water with an air as grave and severe as Archimedes calculating the condensing power of his mirrors.

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CHAPTER VII

THE CABINET

Men have rarely the courage to be wholly good or wholly bad.
Machiavelli.

Let us leave our young traveller sleeping; he will soon pursue a long and beautiful route. Since we are at liberty to turn to all points of the map, we will fix our eyes upon the city of Narbonne.

Behold the Mediterranean, not far distant, washing with its blue waters the sandy shores. Penetrate into that city resembling Athens; and to find him who reigns there, follow that dark and irregular street, mount the steps of the old archiepiscopal palace, and enter the first and largest of its apartments.

This was a very long salon, lighted by a series of high lancet windows, of which the upper part only retained the blue, yellow, and red panes that shed a mysterious light through the apartment. A large round table occupied its entire breadth, near the great fireplace; around this table, covered with a colored cloth and scattered with papers and portfolios, were seated, bending over their pens, eight secretaries copying letters which were handed to them from a smaller table. Other men quietly arranged the completed papers in the shelves of a bookcase, partly filled with books bound in black.

Notwithstanding the number of persons assembled in the room, one might have heard the movements of the wings of a fly. The only interruption to the silence was the sound of pens rapidly gliding over paper, and a shrill voice dictating, stopping every now and then to cough. This voice proceeded from a great armchair placed beside the fire, which was blazing, notwithstanding the heat of the season and of the country. It was one of those armchairs that you still see in old castles, and which seem made to read one's self to sleep in, so easy is every part of it. The sitter sinks into a circular cushion of down; if the head leans back, the cheeks rest upon pillows covered with silk, and the seat juts out so far beyond the elbows that one may believe the provident upholsterers of our forefathers sought to provide that the book should make no noise in falling so as to awaken the sleeper.

But we will quit this digression, and speak of the man who occupied the chair, and who was very far from sleeping. He had a broad forehead, bordered with thin white hair, large, mild eyes, a wan face, to which a small, pointed, white beard gave that air of subtlety and finesse noticeable in all the portraits of the period of Louis XIII. His mouth was almost without lips, which Lavater deems an indubitable sign of an evil mind, and it was framed in a pair of slight gray moustaches and a 'royale'—an ornament then in fashion, which somewhat resembled a comma in form. The old man wore a close red

cap, a large 'robe-dechambre', and purple silk stockings; he was no less a personage than Armand Duplessis, Cardinal de Richelieu.

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Near him, around the small table, sat four youths from fifteen to twenty years of age; these were pages, or domestics, according to the term then in use, which signified familiars, friends of the house. This custom was a relic of feudal patronage, which still existed in our manners. The younger members of high families received wages from the great lords, and were devoted to their service in all things, challenging the first comer at the wish of their patron. The pages wrote letters from the outline previously given them by the Cardinal, and after their master had glanced at them, passed them to the secretaries, who made fair copies. The Duke, for his part, wrote on his knee private notes upon small slips of paper, inserting them in almost all the packets before sealing them, which he did with his own hand.

He had been writing a short time, when, in a mirror before him, he saw the youngest of his pages writing something on a sheet of paper much smaller than the official sheet. He hastily wrote a few words, and then slipped the paper under the large sheet which, much against his inclination, he had to fill; but, seated behind the Cardinal, he hoped that the difficulty with which the latter turned would prevent him from seeing the little manoeuvre he had tried to exercise with much dexterity. Suddenly Richelieu said to him, dryly, "Come here, Monsieur Olivier."

These words came like a thunder-clap on the poor boy, who seemed about sixteen. He rose at once, however, and stood before the minister, his arms hanging at his side and his head lowered.

The other pages and the secretaries stirred no more than soldiers when a comrade is struck down by a ball, so accustomed were they to this kind of summons. The present one, however, was more energetic than usual.

"What were you writing?"

"My lord, what your Eminence dictated."

"What!"

"My lord, the letter to Don Juan de Braganza."

"No evasions, Monsieur; you were writing something else."

"My lord," said the page, with tears in his eyes, "it was a letter to one of my cousins."

"Let me see it."

The page trembled in every limb and was obliged to lean against the chimney-piece, as he said, in a hardly audible tone, "It is impossible."

“Monsieur le Vicomte Olivier d’Entraigues,” said the minister, without showing the least emotion, “you are no longer in my service.” The page withdrew. He knew that there was no reply; so, slipping his letter into his pocket, and opening the folding-doors just wide enough to allow his exit, he glided out like a bird escaped from the cage.

The minister went on writing the note upon his knee.

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The secretaries redoubled their silent zeal, when suddenly the two wings of the door were thrown back and showed, standing in the opening, a Capuchin, who, bowing, with his arms crossed over his breast, seemed waiting for alms or for an order to retire. He had a dark complexion, and was deeply pitted with smallpox; his eyes, mild, but somewhat squinting, were almost hidden by his thick eyebrows, which met in the middle of his forehead; on his mouth played a crafty, mischievous, and sinister smile; his beard was straight and red, and his costume was that of the order of St. Francis in all its repulsiveness, with sandals on his bare feet, that looked altogether unfit to tread upon carpet.

Such as he was, however, this personage appeared to create a great sensation throughout the room; for, without finishing the phrase, the line, or even the word begun, every person rose and went out by the door where he was still standing—some saluting him as they passed, others turning away their heads, and the young pages holding their fingers to their noses, but not till they were behind him, for they seemed to have a secret fear of him. When they had all passed out, he entered, making a profound reverence, because the door was still open; but, as soon as it was shut, unceremoniously advancing, he seated himself near the Cardinal, who, having recognized him by the general movement he created, saluted him with a dry and silent inclination of the head, regarding him fixedly, as if awaiting some news and unable to avoid knitting his brows, as at the aspect of a spider or some other disagreeable creature.

The Cardinal could not resist this movement of displeasure, because he felt himself obliged, by the presence of his agent, to resume those profound and painful conversations from which he had for some days been free, in a country whose pure air, favorable to him, had somewhat soothed the pain of his malady; that malady had changed to a slow fever, but its intervals were long enough to enable him to forget during its absence that it must return. Giving, therefore, a little rest to his hitherto indefatigable mind, he had been awaiting, for the first time in his life perhaps, without impatience, the return of the couriers he had sent in all directions, like the rays of a sun which alone gave life and movement to France. He had not expected the visit he now received, and the sight of one of those men, whom, to use his own expression, he “steeped in crime,” rendered all the habitual disquietudes of his life more present to him, without entirely dissipating the cloud of melancholy which at that time obscured his thoughts.

The beginning of his conversation was tinged with the gloomy hue of his late reveries; but he soon became more animated and vigorous than ever, when his powerful mind had reentered the real world.

His confidant, seeing that he was expected to break the silence, did so in this abrupt fashion:

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"Well, my lord, of what are you thinking?"

"Alas, Joseph, of what should we all think, but of our future happiness in a better life? For many days I have been reflecting that human interests have too much diverted me from this great thought; and I repent me of having spent some moments of my leisure in profane works, such as my tragedies, 'Europe' and 'Mirame,' despite the glory they have already gained me among our brightest minds—a glory which will extend unto futurity."

Father Joseph, full of what he had to say, was at first surprised at this opening; but he knew his master too well to betray his feelings, and, well skilled in changing the course of his ideas, replied:

"Yes, their merit is very great, and France will regret that these immortal works are not followed by similar productions."

"Yes, my dear Joseph; but it is in vain that such men as Boisrobert, Claveret, Colletet, Corneille, and, above all, the celebrated Mairet, have proclaimed these tragedies the finest that the present or any past age has produced. I reproach myself for them, I swear to you, as for a mortal sin, and I now, in my hours of repose, occupy myself only with my 'Methode des Controverses', and my book on the 'Perfection du Chretien.' I remember that I am fifty-six years old, and that I have an incurable malady."

"These are calculations which your enemies make as precisely as your Eminence," said the priest, who began to be annoyed with this conversation, and was eager to talk of other matters.

The blood mounted to the Cardinal's face.

"I know it! I know it well!" he said; "I know all their black villainy, and I am prepared for it. But what news is there?"

"According to our arrangement, my lord, we have removed Mademoiselle d'Hautefort, as we removed Mademoiselle de la Fayette before her. So far it is well; but her place is not filled, and the King—"

"Well!"

"The King has ideas which he never had before."

"Ha! and which come not from me? 'Tis well, truly," said the minister, with an ironic sneer.

"What, my lord, leave the place of the favorite vacant for six whole days? It is not prudent; pardon me for saying so."



“He has ideas—ideas!” repeated Richelieu, with a kind of terror; “and what are they?”

“He talks of recalling the Queen-mother,” said the Capuchin, in a low voice; “of recalling her from Cologne.”

“Marie de Medicis!” cried the Cardinal, striking the arms of his chair with his hands. “No, by Heaven, she shall not again set her foot upon the soil of France, whence I drove her, step by step! England has not dared to receive her, exiled by me; Holland fears to be crushed by her; and my kingdom to receive her! No, no, such an idea could not have originated with himself! To recall my enemy! to recall his mother! What perfidy! He would not have dared to think of it.”

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Then, having mused for a moment, he added, fixing a penetrating look still full of burning anger upon Father Joseph:

“But in what terms did he express this desire? Tell me his precise words.”

“He said publicly; and in the presence of Monsieur: ‘I feel that one of the first duties of a Christian is to be a good son, and I will resist no longer the murmurs of my conscience.’”

“Christian! conscience! these are not his expressions. It is Father Caussin—it is his confessor who is betraying me,” cried the Cardinal. “Perfidious Jesuit! I pardoned thee thy intrigue with La Fayette; but I will not pass over thy secret counsels. I will have this confessor dismissed, Joseph; he is an enemy to the State, I see it clearly. But I myself have acted with negligence for some days past; I have not sufficiently hastened the arrival of the young d’Effiat, who will doubtless succeed. He is handsome and intellectual, they say. What a blunder! I myself merit disgrace. To leave that fox of a Jesuit with the King, without having given him my secret instructions, without a hostage, a pledge, or his fidelity to my orders! What neglect! Joseph, take a pen, and write what I shall dictate for the other confessor, whom we will choose better. I think of Father Sirmond.”

Father Joseph sat down at the large table, ready to write, and the Cardinal dictated to him those duties, of a new kind, which shortly afterward he dared to have given to the King, who received them, respected them, and learned them by heart as the commandments of the Church. They have come down to us, a terrible monument of the empire that a man may seize upon by means of circumstances, intrigues, and audacity:

“I. A prince should have a prime minister, and that minister three qualities: (1) He should have no passion but for his prince; (2) He should be able and faithful; (3) He should be an ecclesiastic.

“II. A prince ought perfectly to love his prime minister.

“III. Ought never to change his prime minister.

“IV. Ought to tell him all things.

“V. To give him free access to his person.

“VI. To give him sovereign authority over his people.

“VII. Great honors and large possessions.

“VIII. A prince has no treasure more precious than his prime minister.

“IX. A prince should not put faith in what people say against his prime minister, nor listen to any such slanders.

“X. A prince should reveal to his prime minister all that is said against him, even though he has been bound to keep it secret.

“XI. A prince should prefer not only the well-being of the State, but also his prime minister, to all his relations.”

Such were the commandments of the god of France, less astonishing in themselves than the terrible naivete which made him bequeath them to posterity, as if posterity also must believe in him.

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While he dictated his instructions, reading them from a small piece of paper, written with his own hand, a deep melancholy seemed to possess him more and more at each word; and when he had ended, he fell back in his chair, his arms crossed, and his head sunk on his breast.

Father Joseph, dropping his pen, arose and was inquiring whether he were ill, when he heard issue from the depths of his chest these mournful and memorable words:

“What utter weariness! what endless trouble! If the ambitious man could see me, he would flee to a desert. What is my power? A miserable reflection of the royal power; and what labors to fix upon my star that incessantly wavering ray! For twenty years I have been in vain attempting it. I can not comprehend that man. He dare not flee me; but they take him from me—he glides through my fingers. What things could I not have done with his hereditary rights, had I possessed them? But, employing such infinite calculation in merely keeping one’s balance, what of genius remains for high enterprises? I hold Europe in my hand, yet I myself am suspended by a trembling hair. What is it to me that I can cast my eyes confidently over the map of Europe, when all my interests are concentrated in his narrow cabinet, and its few feet of space give me more trouble to govern than the whole country besides? See, then, what it is to be a prime minister! Envy me, my guards, if you can.”

His features were so distorted as to give reason to fear some accident; and at the same moment he was seized with a long and violent fit of coughing, which ended in a slight hemorrhage. He saw that Father Joseph, alarmed, was about to seize a gold bell that stood on the table, and, suddenly rising with all the vivacity of a young man, he stopped him, saying:

“’Tis nothing, Joseph; I sometimes yield to these fits of depression; but they do not last long, and I leave them stronger than before. As for my health, I know my condition perfectly; but that is not the business in hand. What have you done at Paris? I am glad to know the King has arrived in Bearn, as I wished; we shall be able to keep a closer watch upon him. How did you induce him to come away?”

“A battle at Perpignan.”

“That is not bad. Well, we can arrange it for him; that occupation will do as well as another just now. But the young Queen, what says she?”

“She is still furious against you; her correspondence discovered, the questioning to which you had subjected her—”

“Bah! a madrigal and a momentary submission on my part will make her forget that I have separated her from her house of Austria and from the country of her Buckingham. But how does she occupy herself?”

“In machinations with Monsieur. But as we have his entire confidence, here are the daily accounts of their interviews.”

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"I shall not trouble myself to read them; while the Duc de Bouillon remains in Italy I have nothing to fear in that quarter. She may have as many petty plots with Gaston in the chimney-corner as she pleases; he never got beyond his excellent intentions, forsooth! He carries nothing into effect but his withdrawal from the kingdom. He has had his third dismissal; I will manage a fourth for him whenever he pleases; he is not worth the pistol-shot you had the Comte de Soissons settled with, and yet the poor Comte had scarce more energy than he."

And the Cardinal, reseating himself in his chair, began to laugh gayly enough for a statesman.

"I always laugh when I think of their expedition to Amiens. They had me between them, Each had fully five hundred gentlemen with him, armed to the teeth, and all going to despatch me, like Concini; but the great Vitry was not there. They very quietly let me talk for an hour with them about the hunt and the Fete Dieu, and neither of them dared make a sign to their cut-throats. I have since learned from Chavigny that for two long months they had been waiting that happy moment. For myself, indeed, I observed nothing, except that little villain, the Abbe de Gondy,—[Afterward Cardinal de Retz.]—who prowled near me, and seemed to have something hidden under his sleeve; it was he that made me get into the coach."

"Apropos of the Abbe, my lord, the Queen insists upon making him coadjutor."

"She is mad! he will ruin her if she connects herself with him; he's a musketeer in canonicals, the devil in a cassock. Read his 'Histoire de Fiesque'; you may see himself in it. He will be nothing while I live."

"How is it that with a judgment like yours you bring another ambitious man of his age to court?"

"That is an entirely different matter. This young Cinq-Mars, my friend, will be a mere puppet. He will think of nothing but his ruff and his shoulder-knots; his handsome figure assures me of this. I know that he is gentle and weak; it was for this reason I preferred him to his elder brother. He will do whatever we wish."

"Ah, my lord," said the monk, with an expression of doubt, "I never place much reliance on people whose exterior is so calm; the hidden flame is often all the more dangerous. Recollect the Marechal d'Effiat, his father."

"But I tell you he is a boy, and I shall bring him up; while Gondy is already an accomplished conspirator, an ambitious knave who sticks at nothing. He has dared to dispute Madame de la Meilleraie with me. Can you conceive it? He dispute with me! A petty priestling, who has no other merit than a little lively small-talk and a cavalier air. Fortunately, the husband himself took care to get rid of him."

Father Joseph, who listened with equal impatience to his master when he spoke of his 'bonnes fortunes' or of his verses, made, however, a grimace which he meant to be very sly and insinuating, but which was simply ugly and awkward; he fancied that the expression of his mouth, twisted about like a monkey's, conveyed, "Ah! who can resist your Eminence?" But his Eminence only read there, "I am a clown who knows nothing of the great world"; and, without changing his voice, he suddenly said, taking up a despatch from the table:

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"The Duc de Rohan is dead, that is good news; the Huguenots are ruined. He is a lucky man. I had him condemned by the Parliament of Toulouse to be torn in pieces by four horses, and here he dies quietly on the battlefield of Rheinfeld. But what matters? The result is the same. Another great head is laid low! How they have fallen since that of Montmorency! I now see hardly any that do not bow before me. We have already punished almost all our dupes of Versailles; assuredly they have nothing with which to reproach me. I simply exercise against them the law of retaliation, treating them as they would have treated me in the council of the Queen-mother. The old dotard Bassompierre shall be doomed for perpetual imprisonment, and so shall the assassin Marechal de Vitry, for that was the punishment they voted me. As for Marillac, who counselled death, I reserve death for him at the first false step he makes, and I beg thee, Joseph, to remind me of him; we must be just to all. The Duc de Bouillon still keeps up his head proudly on account of his Sedan, but I shall make him yield. Their blindness is truly marvellous! They think themselves all free to conspire, not perceiving that they are merely fluttering at the ends of the threads that I hold in my hand, and which I lengthen now and then to give them air and space. Did the Huguenots cry out as one man at the death of their dear duke?"

"Less so than at the affair of Loudun, which is happily concluded."

"What! Happily? I hope that Grandier is dead?"

"Yes; that is what I meant. Your Eminence may be fully satisfied. All was settled in twenty-four hours. He is no longer thought of. Only Laubardemont committed a slight blunder in making the trial public. This caused a little tumult; but we have a description of the rioters, and measures have been taken to seek them out."

"This is well, very well. Urbain was too superior a man to be left there; he was turning Protestant. I would wager that he would have ended by abjuring. His work against the celibacy of priests made me conjecture this; and in cases of doubt, remember, Joseph, it is always best to cut the tree before the fruit is gathered. These Huguenots, you see, form a regular republic in the State. If once they had a majority in France, the monarchy would be lost, and they would establish some popular government which might be durable."

"And what deep pain do they daily cause our holy Father the Pope!" said Joseph.

"Ah," interrupted the Cardinal, "I see; thou wouldst remind me of his obstinacy in not giving thee the hat. Be tranquil; I will speak to-day on the subject to the new ambassador we are sending, the Marechal d'Estrees, and he will, on his arrival, doubtless obtain that which has been in train these two years—thy nomination to the cardinalate. I myself begin to think that the purple would become thee well, for it does not show blood-stains."

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And both burst into laughter—the one as a master, overwhelming the assassin whom he pays with his utter scorn; the other as a slave, resigned to all the humiliation by which he rises.

The laughter which the ferocious pleasantry of the old minister had excited had hardly subsided, when the door opened, and a page announced several couriers who had arrived simultaneously from different points. Father Joseph arose, and, leaning against the wall like an Egyptian mummy, allowed nothing to appear upon his face but an expression of stolid contemplation. Twelve messengers entered successively, attired in various disguises; one appeared to be a Swiss soldier, another a sutler, a third a master-mason. They had been introduced into the palace by a secret stairway and corridor, and left the cabinet by a door opposite that at which they had entered, without any opportunity of meeting one another or communicating the contents of their despatches. Each laid a rolled or folded packet of papers on the large table, spoke for a moment with the Cardinal in the embrasure of a window and withdrew. Richelieu had risen on the entrance of the first messenger, and, careful to do all himself, had received them all, listened to all, and with his own hand had closed the door upon all. When the last was gone, he signed to Father Joseph, and, without speaking, both proceeded to unfold, or, rather, to tear open, the packets of despatches, and in a few words communicated to each other the substance of the letters.

“The Due de Weimar pursues his advantage; the Duc Charles is defeated. Our General is in good spirits; here are some of his lively remarks at table. Good!”

“Monseigneur le Vicomte de Turenne has retaken the towns of Lorraine; and here are his private conversations—”

“Oh! pass over them; they can not be dangerous. He is ever a good and honest man, in no way mixing himself up with politics; so that some one gives him a little army to play at chess with, no matter against whom, he is content. We shall always be good friends.”

“The Long Parliament still endures in England. The Commons pursue their project; there are massacres in Ireland. The Earl of Strafford is condemned to death.”

“To death! Horrible!”

“I will read: ‘His Majesty Charles I has not had the courage to sign the sentence, but he has appointed four commissioners.’”

“Weak king, I abandon thee! Thou shalt have no more of our money. Fall, since thou art ungrateful! Unhappy Wentworth!”



A tear rose in the eyes of Richelieu as he said this; the man who had but now played with the lives of so many others wept for a minister abandoned by his prince. The similarity between that position and his own affected him, and it was his own case he deplored in the person of the foreign minister. He ceased to read aloud the despatches that he opened, and his confidant followed his example. He examined with scrupulous attention

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the detailed accounts of the most minute and secret actions of each person of any importance—accounts which he always required to be added to the official despatches made by his able spies. All the despatches to the King passed through his hands, and were carefully revised so as to reach the King amended to the state in which he wished him to read them. The private notes were all carefully burned by the monk after the Cardinal had ascertained their contents. The latter, however, seemed by no means satisfied, and he was walking quickly to and fro with gestures expressive of anxiety, when the door opened, and a thirteenth courier entered. This one seemed a boy hardly fourteen years old; he held under his arm a packet sealed with black for the King, and gave to the Cardinal only a small letter, of which a stolen glance from Joseph could collect but four words. The Cardinal started, tore the billet into a thousand pieces, and, bending down to the ear of the boy, spoke to him for a long time; all that Joseph heard was, as the messenger went out:

“Take good heed to this; not until twelve hours from this time.”

During this aside of the Cardinal, Joseph was occupied in concealing an infinite number of libels from Flanders and Germany, which the minister always insisted upon seeing, however bitter they might be to him. In this respect, he affected a philosophy which he was far from possessing, and to deceive those around him he would sometimes pretend that his enemies were not wholly wrong, and would outwardly laugh at their pleasantries; but those who knew his character better detected bitter rage lurking under this apparent moderation, and knew that he was never satisfied until he had got the hostile book condemned by the parliament to be burned in the Place de Greve, as “injurious to the King, in the person of his minister, the most illustrious Cardinal,” as we read in the decrees of the time, and that his only regret was that the author was not in the place of his book—a satisfaction he gave himself whenever he could, as in the case of Urbain Grandier.

It was his colossal pride which he thus avenged, without avowing it even to himself—nay, laboring for a length of time, sometimes for a whole twelvemonth together, to persuade himself that the interest of the State was concerned in the matter. Ingenious in connecting his private affairs with the affairs of France, he had convinced himself that she bled from the wounds which he received. Joseph, careful not to irritate his ill-temper at this moment, put aside and concealed a book entitled ‘Mystres Politiques du Cardinal de la Rochelle’; also another, attributed to a monk of Munich, entitled ‘Questions quolibetiques, ajustees au temps present, et Impiete Sanglante du dieu Mars’. The worthy advocate Aubery, who has given us one of the most faithful histories of the most eminent Cardinal, is transported with rage at the mere title of the first of these books, and exclaims that “the great

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minister had good reason to glorify himself that his enemies, inspired against their will with the same enthusiasm which conferred the gift of rendering oracles upon the ass of Balaam, upon Caiaphas and others, who seemed most unworthy of the gift of prophecy, called him with good reason Cardinal de la Rochelle, since three years after their writing he reduced that town; thus Scipio was called Africanus for having subjugated that *province!*" Very little was wanting to make Father Joseph, who had necessarily the same feelings, express his indignation in the same terms; for he remembered with bitterness the ridiculous part he had played in the siege of Rochelle, which, though not a province like Africa, had ventured to resist the most eminent Cardinal, and into which Father Joseph, piquing himself on his military skill, had proposed to introduce the troops through a sewer. However, he restrained himself, and had time to conceal the libel in the pocket of his brown robe ere the minister had dismissed his young courier and returned to the table.

"And now to depart, Joseph," he said. "Open the doors to all that court which besieges me, and let us go to the King, who awaits me at Perpignan; this time I have him for good."

The Capuchin drew back, and immediately the pages, throwing open the gilded doors, announced in succession the greatest lords of the period, who had obtained permission from the King to come and salute the minister. Some, even, under the pretext of illness or business, had departed secretly, in order not to be among the last at Richelieu's reception; and the unhappy monarch found himself almost as alone as other kings find themselves on their deathbeds. But with him, the throne seemed, in the eyes of the court, his dying couch, his reign a continual last agony, and his minister a threatening successor.

Two pages, of the first families of France, stood at the door, where the ushers announced each of the persons whom Father Joseph had found in the ante room. The Cardinal, still seated in his great arm chair, remained motionless as the common couriers entered, inclined his head to the more distinguished, and to princes alone put his hands on the elbows of his chair and slightly rose; each person, having profoundly saluted him, stood before him near the fireplace, waited till he had spoken to him, and then, at a wave of his hand, completed the circuit of the room, and went out by the same door at which he had entered, paused for a moment to salute Father Joseph, who aped his master, and who for that reason had been named "his Gray Eminence," and at last quitted the palace, unless, indeed, he remained standing behind the chair, if the minister had signified that he should, which was considered a token of very great favor.

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He allowed to pass several insignificant persons, and many whose merits were useless to him; the first whom he stopped in the procession was the Marechal d'Estrees, who, about to set out on an embassy to Rome, came to make his adieux; those behind him stopped short. This circumstance warned the courtiers in the anteroom that a longer conversation than usual was on foot, and Father Joseph, advancing to the threshold, exchanged with the Cardinal a glance which seemed to say, on the one side, "Remember the promise you have just made me," on the other, "Set your mind at rest." At the same time, the expert Capuchin let his master see that he held upon his arm one of his victims, whom he was forming into a docile instrument; this was a young gentleman who wore a very short green cloak, a pourpoint of the same color, close-fitting red breeches, with glittering gold garters below the knee-the costume of the pages of Monsieur. Father Joseph, indeed, spoke to him secretly, but not in the way the Cardinal imagined; for he contemplated being his equal, and was preparing other connections, in case of defection on the part of the prime minister.

"Tell Monsieur not to trust in appearances, and that he has no servant more faithful than I. The Cardinal is on the decline, and my conscience tells me to warn against his faults him who may inherit the royal power during the minority. To give your great Prince a proof of my faith, tell him that it is intended to arrest his friend, Puy-Laurens, and that he had better be kept out of the way, or the Cardinal will put him in the Bastille."

While the servant was thus betraying his master, the master, not to be behindhand with him, betrayed his servant. His self-love, and some remnant of respect to the Church, made him shudder at the idea of seeing a contemptible agent invested with the same hat which he himself wore as a crown, and seated as high as himself, except as to the precarious position of minister. Speaking, therefore, in an undertone to the Marechal d'Estrees, he said:

"It is not necessary to importune Urbain VIII any further in favor of the Capuchin you see yonder; it is enough that his Majesty has deigned to name him for the cardinalate. One can readily conceive the repugnance of his Holiness to clothe this mendicant in the Roman purple."

Then, passing on to general matters, he continued:

"Truly, I know not what can have cooled the Holy Father toward us; what have we done that was not for the glory of our Holy Mother, the Catholic Church?"

"I myself said the first mass at Rochelle, and you see for yourself, Monsieur le Marechal, that our habit is everywhere; and even in your armies, the Cardinal de la Vallette has commanded gloriously in the palatinate."

"And has just made a very fine retreat," said the Marechal, laying a slight emphasis upon the word.

The minister continued, without noticing this little outburst of professional jealousy, and raising his voice, said:

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"God has shown that He did not scorn to send the spirit of victory upon his Levites, for the Duc de Weimar did not more powerfully aid in the conquest of Lorraine than did this pious Cardinal, and never was a naval army better commanded than by our Archbishop of Bordeaux at Rochelle."

It was well known that at this very time the minister was incensed against this prelate, whose haughtiness was so overbearing, and whose impertinent ebullitions were so frequent as to have involved him in two very disagreeable affairs at Bordeaux. Four years before, the Duc d'Epemon, then governor of Guyenne, followed by all his train and by his troops, meeting him among his clergy in a procession, had called him an insolent fellow, and given him two smart blows with his cane; whereupon the Archbishop had excommunicated him. And again, recently, despite this lesson, he had quarrelled with the Marechal de Vitry, from whom he had received "twenty blows with a cane or stick, which you please," wrote the Cardinal Duke to the Cardinal de la Vallette, "and I think he would like to excommunicate all France." In fact, he did excommunicate the Marechal's baton, remembering that in the former case the Pope had obliged the Duc d'Epemon to ask his pardon; but M. Vitry, who had caused the Marechal d'Ancre to be assassinated, stood too high at court for that, and the Archbishop, in addition to his beating, got well scolded by the minister.

M. d'Estrees thought, therefore, sagely that there might be some irony in the Cardinal's manner of referring to the warlike talents of the Archbishop, and he answered, with perfect sang-froid:

"It is true, my lord, no one can say that it was upon the sea he was beaten."

His Eminence could not restrain a smile at this; but seeing that the electrical effect of that smile had created others in the hall, as well as whisperings and conjectures, he immediately resumed his gravity, and familiarly taking the Marechal's arm, said:

"Come, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, you are ready at repartee. With you I should not fear Cardinal Albornos, or all the Borgias in the world—no, nor all the efforts of their Spain with the Holy Father."

Then, raising his voice, and looking around, as if addressing himself to the silent, and, so to speak, captive assembly, he continued:

"I hope that we shall no more be reproached, as formerly, for having formed an alliance with one of the greatest men of our day; but as Gustavus Adolphus is dead, the Catholic King will no longer have any pretext for soliciting the excommunication of the most Christian King. How say you, my dear lord?" addressing himself to the Cardinal de la Vallette, who now approached, fortunately without having heard the late allusion to himself. "Monsieur d'Estrees, remain near our chair; we have still many things to say to you, and you are not one too many in our conversations, for we have no secrets. Our

policy is frank and open to all men; the interest of his Majesty and of the State—nothing more.”

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The Marechal made a profound bow, fell back behind the chair of the minister, and gave place to the Cardinal de la Vallette, who, incessantly bowing and flattering and swearing devotion and entire obedience to the Cardinal, as if to expiate the obduracy of his father, the Duc d'Epemon, received in return a few vague words, to no meaning or purpose, the Cardinal all the while looking toward the door, to see who should follow. He had even the mortification to find himself abruptly interrupted by the minister, who cried at the most flattering period of his honeyed discourse:

“Ah! is that you at last, my dear Fabert? How I have longed to see you, to talk of the siege!”

The General, with a brusque and awkward manner, saluted the Cardinal-Generalissimo, and presented to him the officers who had come from the camp with him. He talked some time of the operations of the siege, and the Cardinal seemed to be paying him court now, in order to prepare him afterward for receiving his orders even on the field of battle; he spoke to the officers who accompanied him, calling them by their names, and questioning them about the camp.

They all stood aside to make way for the Duc d'Angouleme—that Valois, who, having struggled against Henri IV, now prostrated himself before Richelieu. He solicited a command, having been only third in rank at the siege of Rochelle. After him came young Mazarin, ever supple and insinuating, but already confident in his fortune.

The Duc d'Halluin came after them; the Cardinal broke off the compliments he was addressing to the others, to utter, in a loud voice:

“Monsieur le Duc, I inform you with pleasure that the King has made you a marshal of France; you will sign yourself Schomberg, will you not, at Leucate, delivered, as we hope, by you? But pardon me, here is Monsieur de Montauron, who has doubtless something important to communicate.”

“Oh, no, my lord, I would only say that the poor young man whom you deigned to consider in your service is dying of hunger.”

“Pshaw! at such a moment to speak of things like this! Your little Corneille will not write anything good; we have only seen ‘Le Cid’ and ‘Les Horaces’ as yet. Let him work, let him work! it is known that he is in my service, and that is disagreeable. However, since you interest yourself in the matter, I give him a pension of five hundred crowns on my privy purse.”

The Chancellor of the Exchequer retired, charmed with the liberality of the minister, and went home to receive with great affability the dedication of Cinna, wherein the great Corneille compares his soul to that of Augustus, and thanks him for having given alms ‘a quelques Muses’.

The Cardinal, annoyed by this importunity, rose, observing that the day was advancing, and that it was time to set out to visit the King.

At this moment, and as the greatest noblemen present were offering their arms to aid him in walking, a man in the robe of a referendary advanced toward him, saluting him with a complacent and confident smile which astonished all the people there, accustomed to the great world, seeming to say: "We have secret affairs together; you shall see how agreeable he makes himself to me. I am at home in his cabinet." His heavy and awkward manner, however, betrayed a very inferior being; it was Laubardemont.

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Richelieu knit his brows when he saw him, and cast a glance at Joseph; then, turning toward those who surrounded him, he said, with bitter scorn:

“Is there some criminal about us to be apprehended?”

Then, turning his back upon the discomfited Laubardemont, the Cardinal left him redder than his robe, and, preceded by the crowd of personages who were to escort him in carriages or on horseback, he descended the great staircase of the palace.

All the people and the authorities of Narbonne viewed this royal departure with amazement.

The Cardinal entered alone a spacious square litter, in which he was to travel to Perpignan, his infirmities not permitting him to go in a coach, or to perform the journey on horseback. This kind of moving chamber contained a bed, a table, and a small chair for the page who wrote or read for him. This machine, covered with purple damask, was carried by eighteen men, who were relieved at intervals of a league; they were selected among his guards, and always performed this service of honor with uncovered heads, however hot or wet the weather might be. The Duc d'Angouleme, the Marechals de Schomberg and d'Estrees, Fabert, and other dignitaries were on horseback beside the litter; after them, among the most prominent were the Cardinal de la Vallette and Mazarin, with Chavigny, and the Marechal de Vitry, anxious to avoid the Bastille, with which it was said he was threatened.

Two coaches followed for the Cardinal's secretaries, physicians, and confessor; then eight others, each with four horses, for his gentlemen, and twenty-four mules for his luggage. Two hundred musketeers on foot marched close behind him, and his company of men-at-arms of the guard and his light-horse, all gentlemen, rode before and behind him on splendid horses.

Such was the equipage in which the prime minister proceeded to Perpignan; the size of the litter often made it necessary to enlarge the roads, and knock down the walls of some of the towns and villages on the way, into which it could not otherwise enter, “so that,” say the authors and manuscripts of the time, full of a sincere admiration for all this luxury—“so that he seemed a conqueror entering by the breach.” We have sought in vain with great care in these documents, for any account of proprietors or inhabitants of these dwellings so making room for his passage who shared in this admiration; but we have been unable to find any mention of such.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERVIEW

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The pompous cortege of the Cardinal halted at the beginning of the camp. All the armed troops were drawn up in the finest order; and amid the sound of cannon and the music of each regiment the litter traversed a long line of cavalry and infantry, formed from the outermost tent to that of the minister, pitched at some distance from the royal quarters, and which its purple covering distinguished at a distance. Each general of division obtained a nod or a word from the Cardinal, who at length reaching his tent and, dismissing his train, shut himself in, waiting for the time to present himself to the King. But, before him, every person of his escort had repaired thither individually, and, without entering the royal abode, had remained in the long galleries covered with striped stuff, and arranged as became avenues leading to the Prince. The courtiers walking in groups, saluted one another and shook hands, regarding each other haughtily, according to their connections or the lords to whom they belonged. Others whispered together, and showed signs of astonishment, pleasure, or anger, which showed that something extraordinary had taken place. Among a thousand others, one singular dialogue occurred in a corner of the principal gallery.

“May I ask, Monsieur l’Abbe, why you look at me so fixedly?”

“Parbleu! Monsieur de Launay, it is because I’m curious to see what you will do. All the world abandons your Cardinal-Duke since your journey into Touraine; if you do not believe it, go and ask the people of Monsieur or of the Queen. You are behind-hand ten minutes by the watch with the Cardinal de la Vallette, who has just shaken hands with Rochefort and the gentlemen of the late Comte de Soissons, whom I shall regret as long as I live.”

“Monsieur de Gondi, I understand you; is it a challenge with which you honor me?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Comte,” answered the young Abbe, saluting him with all the gravity of the time; “I sought an occasion to challenge you in the name of Monsieur d’Attichi, my friend, with whom you had something to do at Paris.”

“Monsieur l’Abbe, I am at your command. I will seek my seconds; do you the same.”

“On horseback, with sword and pistol, I suppose?” added Gondi, with the air of a man arranging a party of pleasure, lightly brushing the sleeve of his cassock.

“If you please,” replied the other. And they separated for a time, saluting one another with the greatest politeness, and with profound bows.

A brilliant crowd of gentlemen circulated around them in the gallery. They mingled with it to procure friends for the occasion. All the elegance of the costumes of the day was displayed by the court that morning—small cloaks of every color, in velvet or in satin, embroidered with gold or silver; crosses of St. Michael and of the Holy Ghost; the ruffs, the sweeping hat-plumes, the gold shoulder-knots, the chains by which the long swords



hung: all glittered and sparkled, yet not so brilliantly as did the fiery glances of those warlike youths, or their sprightly conversation, or their intellectual laughter. Amid the assembly grave personages and great lords passed on, followed by their numerous gentlemen.

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The little Abbe de Gondi, who was very shortsighted, made his way through the crowd, knitting his brows and half shutting his eyes, that he might see the better, and twisting his moustache, for ecclesiastics wore them in those days. He looked closely at every one in order to recognize his friends, and at last stopped before a young man, very tall and dressed in black from head to foot; his sword, even, was of quite dark, bronzed steel. He was talking with a captain of the guards, when the Abbe de Gondi took him aside.

“Monsieur de Thou,” said he, “I need you as my second in an hour, on horseback, with sword and pistol, if you will do me that honor.”

“Monsieur, you know I am entirely at your service on all occasions. Where shall we meet?”

“In front of the Spanish bastion, if you please.”

“Pardon me for returning to a conversation that greatly interests me. I will be punctual at the rendezvous.”

And De Thou quitted him to rejoin the Captain. He had said all this in the gentlest of voices with unalterable coolness, and even with somewhat of an abstracted manner.

The little Abbe squeezed his hand with warm satisfaction, and continued his search.

He did not so easily effect an agreement with the young lords to whom he addressed himself; for they knew him better than did De Thou, and when they saw him coming they tried to avoid him, or laughed at him openly, and would not promise to serve him.

“Ah, Abbe! there you are hunting again; I'll swear it's a second you want,” said the Duc de Beaufort.

“And I wager,” added M. de la Rochefoucauld, “that it's against one of the Cardinal-Duke's people.”

“You are both right, gentlemen; but since when have you laughed at affairs of honor?”

“The saints forbid I should,” said M. de Beaufort. “Men of the sword like us ever reverence tierce, quarte, and octave; but as for the folds of the cassock, I know nothing of them.”

“Pardieu! Monsieur, you know well enough that it does not embarrass my wrist, as I will prove to him who chooses; as to the gown itself, I should like to throw it into the gutter.”

“Is it to tear it that you fight so often?” asked La Rochefoucauld. “But remember, my dear Abbe, that you yourself are within it.”



Gondi turned to look at the clock, wishing to lose no more time in such sorry jests; but he had no better success elsewhere. Having stopped two gentlemen in the service of the young Queen, whom he thought ill-affected toward the Cardinal, and consequently glad to measure weapons with his creatures, one of them said to him very gravely:

“Monsieur de Gondi, you know what has just happened; the King has said aloud, ‘Whether our imperious Cardinal wishes it or not, the widow of Henri le Grand shall no longer remain in exile.’ Imperious! the King never before said anything so strong as that, Monsieur l’Abbe, mark that. Imperious! it is open disgrace. Certainly no one will dare to speak to him; no doubt he will quit the court this very day.”

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"I have heard this, Monsieur, but I have an affair—"

"It is lucky for you he stopped short in the middle of your career."

"An affair of honor—"

"Whereas Mazarin is quite a friend of yours."

"But will you, or will you not, listen to me?"

"Yes, a friend indeed! your adventures are always uppermost in his thoughts. Your fine duel with Monsieur de Coutenan about the pretty little pin-maker,—he even spoke of it to the King. Adieu, my dear Abbe, we are in great haste; adieu, adieu!" And, taking his friend's arm, the young mocker, without listening to another word, walked rapidly down the gallery and disappeared in the throng.

The poor Abbe was much mortified at being able to get only one second, and was watching sadly the passing of the hour and of the crowd, when he perceived a young gentleman whom he did not know, seated at a table, leaning on his elbow with a pensive air; he wore mourning which indicated no connection with any great house or party, and appeared to await, without any impatience, the time for attending the King, looking with a heedless air at those who surrounded him, and seeming not to notice or to know any of them.

Gondi looked at him a moment, and accosted him without hesitation:

"Monsieur, I have not the honor of your acquaintance, but a fencing-party can never be unpleasant to a man of honor; and if you will be my second, in a quarter of an hour we shall be on the ground. I am Paul de Gondi; and I have challenged Monsieur de Launay, one of the Cardinal's clique, but in other respects a very gallant fellow."

The unknown, apparently not at all surprised at this address, replied, without changing his attitude: "And who are his seconds?"

"Faith, I don't know; but what matters it who serves him? We stand no worse with our friends for having exchanged a thrust with them."

The stranger smiled nonchalantly, paused for an instant to pass his hand through his long chestnut hair, and then said, looking idly at a large, round watch which hung at his waist:

"Well, Monsieur, as I have nothing better to do, and as I have no friends here, I am with you; it will pass the time as well as anything else."



And, taking his large, black-plumed hat from the table, he followed the warlike Abbe, who went quickly before him, often running back to hasten him on, like a child running before his father, or a puppy that goes backward and forward twenty times before it gets to the end of a street.

Meanwhile, two ushers, attired in the royal livery, opened the great curtains which separated the gallery from the King's tent, and silence reigned. The courtiers began to enter slowly, and in succession, the temporary dwelling of the Prince. He received them all gracefully, and was the first to meet the view of each person introduced.

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Before a very small table surrounded with gilt armchairs stood Louis XIII, encircled by the great officers of the crown. His dress was very elegant: a kind of fawn-colored vest, with open sleeves, ornamented with shoulder-knots and blue ribbons, covered him down to the waist. Wide breeches reached to the knee, and the yellow-and-red striped stuff of which they were made was ornamented below with blue ribbons. His riding-boots, reaching hardly more than three inches above the ankle, were turned over, showing so lavish a lining of lace that they seemed to hold it as a vase holds flowers. A small mantle of blue velvet, on which was embroidered the cross of the Holy Ghost, covered the King's left arm, which rested on the hilt of his sword.

His head was uncovered, and his pale and noble face was distinctly visible, lighted by the sun, which penetrated through the top of the tent. The small, pointed beard then worn augmented the appearance of thinness in his face, while it added to its melancholy expression. By his lofty brow, his classic profile, his aquiline nose, he was at once recognized as a prince of the great race of Bourbon. He had all the characteristic traits of his ancestors except their penetrating glance; his eyes seemed red from weeping, and veiled with a perpetual drowsiness; and the weakness of his vision gave him a somewhat vacant look.

He called around him, and was attentive to, the greatest enemies of the Cardinal, whom he expected every moment; and, balancing himself with one foot over the other, an hereditary habit of his family, he spoke quickly, but pausing from time to time to make a gracious inclination of the head, or a gesture of the hand, to those who passed before him with low reverences.

The court had been thus paying its respects to the King for two hours before the Cardinal appeared; the whole court stood in close ranks behind the Prince, and in the long galleries which extended from his tent. Already longer intervals elapsed between the names of the courtiers who were announced.

"Shall we not see our cousin the Cardinal?" said the King, turning, and looking at Montresor, one of Monsieur's gentlemen, as if to encourage him to answer.

"He is said to be very ill just now, Sire," was the answer.

"And yet I do not see how any but your Majesty can cure him," said the Duc de Beaufort.

"We cure nothing but the king's evil," replied Louis; "and the complaints of the Cardinal are always so mysterious that we own we can not understand them."

The Prince thus essayed to brave his minister, gaining strength in jests, the better to break his yoke, insupportable, but so difficult to remove. He almost thought he had succeeded in this, and, sustained by the joyous air surrounding him, he already



privately congratulated himself on having been able to assume the supreme empire, and for the moment enjoyed all the power of which he fancied himself possessed. An involuntary

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agitation in the depth of his heart had warned him indeed that, the hour passed, all the burden of the State would fall upon himself alone; but he talked in order to divert the troublesome thought, and, concealing from himself the doubt he had of his own inability to reign, he set his imagination to work upon the result of his enterprises, thus forcing himself to forget the tedious roads which had led to them. Rapid phrases succeeded one another on his lips.

"We shall soon take Perpignan," he said to Fabert, who stood at some distance.

"Well, Cardinal, Lorraine is ours," he added to La Vallette. Then, touching Mazarin's arm:

"It is not so difficult to manage a State as is supposed, eh?"

The Italian, who was not so sure of the Cardinal's disgrace as most of the courtiers, answered, without compromising himself:

"Ah, Sire, the late successes of your Majesty at home and abroad prove your sagacity in choosing your instruments and in directing them, and—"

But the Duc de Beaufort, interrupting him with that self-confidence, that loud voice and overbearing air, which subsequently procured him the surname of Important, cried out, vehemently:

"Pardieu! Sire, it needs only to will. A nation is driven like a horse, with spur and bridle; and as we are all good horsemen, your Majesty has only to choose among us."

This fine sally had not time to take effect, for two ushers cried, simultaneously, "His Eminence!"

The King's face flushed involuntarily, as if he had been surprised en flagrant delit. But immediately gaining confidence, he assumed an air of resolute haughtiness, which was not lost upon the minister.

The latter, attired in all the pomp of a cardinal, leaning upon two young pages, and followed by his captain of the guards and more than five hundred gentlemen attached to his house, advanced toward the King slowly and pausing at each step, as if forced to it by his sufferings, but in reality to observe the faces before him. A glance sufficed.

His suite remained at the entrance of the royal tent; of all those within it, not one was bold enough to salute him, or to look toward him. Even La Vallette feigned to be occupied in a conversation with Montresor; and the King, who desired to give him an

unfavorable reception, greeted him lightly and continued a private conversation in a low voice with the Duc de Beaufort.

The Cardinal was therefore forced, after the first salute, to stop and pass to the side of the crowd of courtiers, as if he wished to mingle with them, but in reality to test them more closely; they all recoiled as at the sight of a leper. Fabert alone advanced toward him with the frank, brusque air habitual with him, and, making use of the terms belonging to his profession, said:

“Well, my lord, you make a breach in the midst of them like a cannon-ball; I ask pardon in their name.”

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"And you stand firm before me as before the enemy," said the Cardinal; "you will have no cause to regret it in the end, my dear Fabert."

Mazarin also approached the Cardinal, but with caution, and, giving to his mobile features an expression of profound sadness, made him five or six very low bows, turning his back to the group gathered around the King, so that in the latter quarter they might be taken for those cold and hasty salutations which are made to a person one desires to be rid of, and, on the part of the Duke, for tokens of respect, blended with a discreet and silent sorrow.

The minister, ever calm, smiled disdainfully; and, assuming that firm look and that air of grandeur which he always wore in the hour of danger, he again leaned upon his pages, and, without waiting for a word or a glance from his sovereign, he suddenly resolved upon his line of conduct, and walked directly toward him, traversing the whole length of the tent. No one had lost sight of him, although all affected not to observe him. Every one now became silent, even those who were conversing with the King. All the courtiers bent forward to see and to hear.

Louis XIII turned toward him in astonishment, and, all presence of mind totally failing him, remained motionless and waited with an icy glance-his sole force, but a force very effectual in a prince.

The Cardinal, on coming close to the monarch, did not bow; and, without changing his attitude, with his eyes lowered and his hands placed on the shoulders of the two boys half bending, he said:

"Sire, I come to implore your Majesty at length to grant me the retirement for which I have long sighed. My health is failing; I feel that my life will soon be ended. Eternity approaches me, and before rendering an account to the eternal King, I would render one to my earthly sovereign. It is eighteen years, Sire, since you placed in my hands a weak and divided kingdom; I return it to you united and powerful. Your enemies are overthrown and humiliated. My work is accomplished. I ask your Majesty's permission to retire to Citeaux, of which I am abbot, and where I may end my days in prayer and meditation."

The King, irritated by some haughty expressions in this address, showed none of the signs of weakness which the Cardinal had expected, and which he had always seen in him when he had threatened to resign the management of affairs. On the contrary, feeling that he had the eyes of the whole court upon him, Louis looked upon him with the air of a king, and coldly replied:

"We thank you, then, for your services, Monsieur le Cardinal, and wish you the repose you desire."



Richelieu was deeply moved, but no indication of his anger appeared upon his countenance. "Such was the coldness with which you left Montmorency to die," he said to himself; "but you shall not escape me thus." He then continued aloud, bowing at the same time:

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"The only recompense I ask for my services is that your Majesty will deign to accept from me, as a gift, the Palais-Cardinal I have erected at my own expense in Paris."

The King, astonished, bowed his assent. A murmur of surprise for a moment agitated the attentive court.

"I also throw myself at your Majesty's feet, to beg that you will grant me the revocation of an act of rigor, which I solicited (I publicly confess it), and which I perhaps regarded too hastily beneficial to the repose of the State. Yes, when I was of this world, I was too forgetful of my early sentiments of personal respect and attachment, in my eagerness for the public welfare; but now that I already enjoy the enlightenment of solitude, I see that I have done wrong, and I repent."

The attention of the spectators was redoubled, and the uneasiness of the King became visible.

"Yes, there is one person, Sire, whom I have always loved, despite her wrong toward you, and the banishment which the affairs of the kingdom forced me to bring about for her; a person to whom I have owed much, and who should be very dear to you, notwithstanding her armed attempts against you; a person, in a word, whom I implore you to recall from exile—the Queen Marie de Medicis, your mother!"

The King uttered an involuntary exclamation, so little did he expect to hear that name. A repressed agitation suddenly appeared upon every face. All waited in silence the King's reply. Louis XIII looked for a long time at his old minister without speaking, and this look decided the fate of France; in that instant he called to mind all the indefatigable services of Richelieu, his unbounded devotion, his wonderful capacity, and was surprised at himself for having wished to part with him. He felt deeply affected at this request, which had probed for the exact cause of his anger at the bottom of his heart, and uprooted it, thus taking from his hands the only weapon he had against his old servant. Filial love brought words of pardon to his lips and tears into his eyes. Rejoicing to grant what he desired most of all things in the world, he extended his hands to the Duke with all the nobleness and kindness of a Bourbon. The Cardinal bowed and respectfully kissed it; and his heart, which should have burst with remorse, only swelled in the joy of a haughty triumph.

The King, deeply touched, abandoning his hand to him, turned gracefully toward his court and said, with a trembling voice:

"We often deceive ourselves, gentlemen, and especially in our knowledge of so great a politician as this."

"I hope he will never leave us, since his heart is as good as his head."

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Cardinal de la Vallette instantly seized the sleeve of the King's mantle, and kissed it with all the ardor of a lover, and the young Mazarin did much the same with Richelieu himself, assuming, with admirable Italian suppleness, an expression radiant with joy and tenderness. Two streams of flatterers hastened, one toward the King, the other toward the minister; the former group, not less adroit than the second, although less direct, addressed to the Prince thanks which could be heard by the minister, and burned at the feet of the one incense which was intended for the other. As for Richelieu, bowing and smiling to right and left, he stepped forward and stood at the right hand of the King as his natural place. A stranger entering would rather have thought, indeed, that it was the King who was on the Cardinal's left hand. The Marechal d'Estrees, all the ambassadors, the Duc d'Angouleme, the Due d'Halluin (Schomberg), the Marechal de Chatillon, and all the great officers of the crown surrounded him, each waiting impatiently for the compliments of the others to be finished, in order to pay his own, fearing lest some one else should anticipate him with the flattering epigram he had just improvised, or the phrase of adulation he was inventing.

As for Fabert, he had retired to a corner of the tent, and seemed to have paid no particular attention to the scene. He was chatting with Montresor and the gentlemen of Monsieur, all sworn enemies of the Cardinal, because, out of the throng he avoided, he had found none but these to speak to. This conduct would have seemed extremely tactless in one less known; but although he lived in the midst of the court, he was ever ignorant of its intrigues. It was said of him that he returned from a battle he had gained, like the King's hunting-horse, leaving the dogs to caress their master and divide the quarry, without seeking even to remember the part he had had in the triumph.

The storm, then, seemed entirely appeased, and to the violent agitations of the morning succeeded a gentle calm. A respectful murmur, varied with pleasant laughter and protestations of attachment, was all that was heard in the tent. The voice of the Cardinal arose from time to time: "The poor Queen! We shall, then, soon again see her! I never had dared to hope for such happiness while I lived!" The King listened to him with full confidence, and made no attempt to conceal his satisfaction. "It was assuredly an idea sent to him from on high," he said; "this good Cardinal, against whom they had so incensed me, was thinking only of the union of my family. Since the birth of the Dauphin I have not tasted greater joy than at this moment. The protection of the Holy Virgin is manifested over our kingdom."

At this moment, a captain of the guards came up and whispered in the King's ear.

"A courier from Cologne?" said the King; "let him wait in my cabinet."

Then, unable to restrain his impatience, "I will go! I will go!" he said, and entered alone a small, square tent attached to the larger one. In it he saw a young courier holding a black portfolio, and the curtains closed upon the King.

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The Cardinal, left sole master of the court, concentrated all its homage; but it was observed that he no longer received it with his former presence of mind. He inquired frequently what time it was, and exhibited an anxiety which was not assumed; his hard, unquiet glances turned toward the smaller tent. It suddenly opened; the King appeared alone, and stopped on the threshold. He was paler than usual, and trembled in every limb; he held in his hand a large letter with five black seals.

“Gentlemen,” said he, in a loud but broken voice, “the Queen has just died at Cologne; and I perhaps am not the first to hear of it,” he added, casting a severe look toward the impassible Cardinal, “but God knows all! To horse in an hour, and attack the lines! Marechals, follow me.” And he turned his back abruptly, and reentered his cabinet with them.

The court retired after the minister, who, without giving any sign of sorrow or annoyance, went forth as gravely as he had entered, but now a victor.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Doubt, the greatest misery of love
Never interfered in what did not concern him
So strongly does force impose upon men
The usual remarks prompted by imbecility on such occasions

CINQ MARS

By Alfred de vigny

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER IX

THE SIEGE

There are moments in our life when we long ardently for strong excitement to drown our petty griefs—times when the soul, like the lion in the fable, wearied with the continual attacks of the gnat, earnestly desires a mightier enemy and real danger. Cinq-Mars found himself in this condition of mind, which always results from a morbid sensibility in the organic constitution and a perpetual agitation of the heart. Weary of continually turning over in his mind a combination of the events which he desired, and of those which he dreaded; weary of calculating his chances to the best of his power; of summoning to his assistance all that his education had taught him concerning the lives of illustrious men, in order to compare it with his present situation; oppressed by his



regrets, his dreams, predictions, fancies, and all that imaginary world in which he had lived during his solitary journey—he breathed freely upon finding himself thrown into a real world almost as full of agitation; and the realizing of two actual dangers restored circulation to his blood, and youth to his whole being.

Since the nocturnal scene at the inn near Loudun, he had not been able to resume sufficient empire over his mind to occupy himself with anything save his cherished though sad reflections; and consumption was already threatening him, when happily he arrived at the camp of Perpignan, and happily also had the opportunity of accepting the proposition of the Abbe de Gondi—for the reader has no doubt recognized Cinq-Mars in the person of that young stranger in mourning, so careless and so melancholy, whom the duellist in the cassock invited to be his second.

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He had ordered his tent to be pitched as a volunteer in the street of the camp assigned to the young noblemen who were to be presented to the King and were to serve as aides-de-camp to the Generals; he soon repaired thither, and was quickly armed, horsed, and cuirassed, according to the custom of the time, and set out alone for the Spanish bastion, the place of rendezvous. He was the first arrival, and found that a small plot of turf, hidden among the works of the besieged place, had been well chosen by the little Abbe for his homicidal purposes; for besides the probability that no one would have suspected officers of engaging in a duel immediately beneath the town which they were attacking, the body of the bastion separated them from the French camp, and would conceal them like an immense screen. It was wise to take these precautions, for at that time it cost a man his head to give himself the satisfaction of risking his body.

While waiting for his friends and his adversaries, Cinq-Mars had time to examine the southern side of Perpignan, before which he stood. He had heard that these works were not those which were to be attacked, and he tried in vain to account for the besieger's projects. Between this southern face of the town, the mountains of Albere, and the Col du Perthus, there might have been advantageous lines of attack, and redoubts against the accessible point; but not a single soldier was stationed there. All the forces seemed directed upon the north of Perpignan, upon the most difficult side, against a brick fort called the Castillet, which surmounted the gate of Notre-Dame. He discovered that a piece of ground, apparently marshy, but in reality very solid, led up to the very foot of the Spanish bastion; that this post was guarded with true Castilian negligence, although its sole strength lay entirely in its defenders; for its battlements, almost in ruin, were furnished with four pieces of cannon of enormous calibre, embedded in the turf, and thus rendered immovable, and impossible to be directed against a troop advancing rapidly to the foot of the wall.

It was easy to see that these enormous pieces had discouraged the besiegers from attacking this point, and had kept the besieged from any idea of addition to its means of defence. Thus, on the one side, the vedettes and advanced posts were at a distance, and on the other, the sentinels were few and ill supported. A young Spaniard, carrying a long gun, with its rest suspended at his side and the burning match in his right hand, who was walking with nonchalance upon the rampart, stopped to look at Cinq-Mars, who was riding about the ditches and moats.

"Senor caballero," he cried, "are you going to take the bastion by yourself on horseback, like Don Quixote—Quixada de la Mancha?"

At the same time he detached from his side the iron rest, planted it in the ground, and supported upon it the barrel of his gun in order to take aim, when a grave and older Spaniard, enveloped in a dirty brown cloak, said to him in his own tongue:

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“‘Ambrosio de demonio’, do you not know that it is forbidden to throw away powder uselessly, before sallies or attacks are made, merely to have the pleasure of killing a boy not worth your match? It was in this very place that Charles the Fifth threw the sleeping sentinel into the ditch and drowned him. Do your duty, or I shall follow his example.”

Ambrosio replaced the gun upon his shoulder, the rest at his side, and continued his walk upon the rampart.

Cinq-Mars had been little alarmed at this menacing gesture, contenting himself with tightening the reins of his horse and bringing the spurs close to his sides, knowing that with a single leap of the nimble animal he should be carried behind the wall of a hut which stood near by, and should thus be sheltered from the Spanish fusil before the operation of the fork and match could be completed. He knew, too, that a tacit convention between the two armies prohibited marksmen from firing upon the sentinels; each party would have regarded it as assassination. The soldier who had thus prepared to attack Cinq-Mars must have been ignorant of this understanding. Young D’Effiat, therefore, made no visible movement; and when the sentinel had resumed his walk upon the rampart, he again betook himself to his ride upon the turf, and presently saw five cavaliers directing their course toward him. The first two, who came on at full gallop, did not salute him, but, stopping close to him, leaped to the ground, and he found himself in the arms of the Counsellor de Thou, who embraced him tenderly, while the little Abbe de Gondi, laughing heartily, cried:

“Behold another Orestes recovering his Pylades, and at the moment of immolating a rascal who is not of the family of the King of kings, I assure you.”

“What! is it you, my dear Cinq-Mars?” cried De Thou; “and I knew not of your arrival in the camp! Yes, it is indeed you; I recognize you, although you are very pale. Have you been ill, my dear friend? I have often written to you; for my boyish friendship has always remained in my heart.”

“And I,” answered Henri d’Effiat, “I have been very culpable toward you; but I will relate to you all the causes of my neglect. I can speak of them, but I was ashamed to write them. But how good you are! Your friendship has never relaxed.”

“I knew you too well,” replied De Thou; “I knew that there could be no real coldness between us, and that my soul had its echo in yours.”

With these words they embraced once more, their eyes moist with those sweet tears which so seldom flow in one’s life, but with which it seems, nevertheless, the heart is always charged, so much relief do they give in flowing.

This moment was short; and during these few words, Gondi had been pulling them by their cloaks, saying:

“To horse! to horse, gentlemen! Pardieu! you will have time enough to embrace, if you are so affectionate; but do not delay. Let our first thought be to have done with our good friends who will soon arrive. We are in a fine position, with those three villains there before us, the archers close by, and the Spaniards up yonder! We shall be under three fires.”

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He was still speaking, when De Launay, finding himself at about sixty paces from his opponents, with his seconds, who were chosen from his own friends rather than from among the partisans of the Cardinal, put his horse to a canter, advanced gracefully toward his young adversaries, and gravely saluted them.

"Gentlemen, I think that we shall do well to select our men, and to take the field; for there is talk of attacking the lines, and I must be at my post."

"We are ready, Monsieur," said Cinq-Mars; "and as for selecting opponents, I shall be very glad to become yours, for I have not forgotten the Marechal de Bassompierre and the wood of Chaumont. You know my opinion concerning your insolent visit to my mother."

"You are very young, Monsieur. In regard to Madame, your mother, I fulfilled the duties of a man of the world; toward the Marechal, those of a captain of the guard; here, those of a gentleman toward Monsieur l'Abbe, who has challenged me; afterward I shall have that honor with you."

"If I permit you," said the Abbe, who was already on horseback.

They took sixty paces of ground—all that was afforded them by the extent of the meadow that enclosed them. The Abbe de Gondi was stationed between De Thou and his friend, who sat nearest the ramparts, upon which two Spanish officers and a score of soldiers stood, as in a balcony, to witness this duel of six persons—a spectacle common enough to them. They showed the same signs of joy as at their bullfights, and laughed with that savage and bitter laugh which their temperament derives from their admixture of Arab blood.

At a sign from Gondi, the six horses set off at full gallop, and met, without coming in contact, in the middle of the arena; at that instant, six pistol-shots were heard almost together, and the smoke covered the combatants.

When it dispersed, of the six cavaliers and six horses but three men and three animals were on their legs. Cinq-Mars was on horseback, giving his hand to his adversary, as calm as himself; at the other end of the field, De Thou stood by his opponent, whose horse he had killed, and whom he was helping to rise. As for Gondi and De Launay, neither was to be seen. Cinq-Mars, looking about for them anxiously, perceived the Abbe's horse, which, caracoling and curvetting, was dragging after him the future cardinal, whose foot was caught in the stirrup, and who was swearing as if he had never studied anything but the language of the camp. His nose and hands were stained and bloody with his fall and with his efforts to seize the grass; and he was regarding with considerable dissatisfaction his horse, which in spite of himself he irritated with his spurs, making its way to the trench, filled with water, which surrounded the bastion,

when, happily, Cinq-Mars, passing between the edge of the swamp and the animal, seized its bridle and stopped its career.

“Well, my dear Abbe, I see that no great harm has come to you, for you speak with decided energy.”

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“Corbleu!” cried Gondi, wiping the dust out of his eyes, “to fire a pistol in the face of that giant I had to lean forward and rise in my stirrups, and thus I lost my balance; but I fancy that he is down, too.”

“You are right, sir,” said De Thou, coming up; “there is his horse swimming in the ditch with its master, whose brains are blown out. We must think now of escaping.”

“Escaping! That, gentlemen, will be rather difficult,” said the adversary of Cinq-Mars, approaching. “Hark! there is the cannon-shot, the signal for the attack. I did not expect it would have been given so soon. If we return we shall meet the Swiss and the foot-soldiers, who are marching in this direction.”

“Monsieur de Fontrailles says well,” said De Thou; “but if we do not return, here are these Spaniards, who are running to arms, and whose balls we shall presently have whistling about our heads.”

“Well, let us hold a council,” said Gondi; “summon Monsieur de Montresor, who is uselessly occupied in searching for the body of poor De Launay. You have not wounded him, Monsieur De Thou?”

“No, Monsieur l’Abbe; not every one has so good an aim as you,” said Montresor, bitterly, limping from his fall. “We shall not have time to continue with the sword.”

“As to continuing, I will not consent to it, gentlemen,” said Fontrailles; “Monsieur de Cinq-Mars has behaved too nobly toward me. My pistol went off too soon, and his was at my very cheek—I feel the coldness of it now—but he had the generosity to withdraw it and fire in the air. I shall not forget it; and I am his in life and in death.”

“We must think of other things now,” interrupted Cinq-Mars; “a ball has just whistled past my ear. The attack has begun on all sides; and we are surrounded by friends and by enemies.”

In fact, the cannonading was general; the citadel, the town, and the army were covered with smoke. The bastion before them as yet was unassailed, and its guards seemed less eager to defend it than to observe the fate of the other fortifications.

“I believe that the enemy has made a sally,” said Montresor, “for the smoke has cleared from the plain, and I see masses of cavalry charging under the protection of the battery.”

“Gentlemen,” said Cinq-Mars, who had not ceased to observe the walls, “there is a very decided part which we could take, an important share in this—we might enter this ill-guarded bastion.”

“An excellent idea, Monsieur,” said Fontrailles; “but we are but five against at least thirty, and are in plain sight and easily counted.”

“Faith, the idea is not bad,” said Gondi; “it is better to be shot up there than hanged down here, as we shall be if we are found, for De Launay must be already missed by his company, and all the court knows of our quarrel.”

“Parbleu! gentlemen,” said Montresor, “help is coming to us.”

A numerous troop of horse, in great disorder, advanced toward them at full gallop; their red uniform made them visible from afar. It seemed to be their intention to halt on the very ground on which were our embarrassed duellists, for hardly had the first cavalier reached it when cries of “Halt!” were repeated and prolonged by the voices of the chiefs who were mingled with their cavaliers.

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"Let us go to them; these are the men-at-arms of the King's guard," said Fontrailles. "I recognize them by their black cockades. I see also many of the light-horse with them; let us mingle in the disorder, for I fancy they are 'ramenes'."

This is a polite phrase signifying in military language "put to rout." All five advanced toward the noisy and animated troops, and found that this conjecture was right. But instead of the consternation which one might expect in such a case, they found nothing but a youthful and rattling gayety, and heard only bursts of laughter from the two companies.

"Ah, pardieu! Cahuzac," said one, "your horse runs better than mine; I suppose you have exercised it in the King's hunts!"

"Ah, I see, 'twas that we might be the sooner rallied that you arrived here first," answered the other.

"I think the Marquis de Coislin must be mad, to make four hundred of us charge eight Spanish regiments."

"Ha! ha! Locmaria, your plume is a fine ornament; it looks like a weeping willow. If we follow that, it will be to our burial."

"Gentlemen, I said to you before," angrily replied the young officer, "that I was sure that Capuchin Joseph, who meddles in everything, was mistaken in telling us to charge, upon the part of the Cardinal. But would you have been satisfied if those who have the honor of commanding you had refused to charge?"

"No, no, no!" answered all the young men, at the same time forming themselves quickly into ranks.

"I said," interposed the old Marquis de Coislin, who, despite his white head, had all the fire of youth in his eyes, "that if you were commanded to mount to the assault on horseback, you would do it."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried all the men-at-arms, clapping their hands.

"Well, Monsieur le Marquis," said Cinq-Mars, approaching, "here is an opportunity to execute what you have promised. I am only a volunteer; but an instant ago these gentlemen and I examined this bastion, and I believe that it is possible to take it."

"Monsieur, we must first examine the ditch to see—"

At this moment a ball from the rampart of which they were speaking struck in the head the horse of the old captain, laying it low.

“Locmaria, De Mouy, take the command, and to the assault!” cried the two noble companies, believing their leader dead.

“Stop a moment, gentlemen,” said old Coislin, rising, “I will lead you, if you please. Guide us, Monsieur volunteer, for the Spaniards invite us to this ball, and we must reply politely.”

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Hardly had the old man mounted another horse, which one of his men brought him, and drawn his sword, when, without awaiting his order, all these ardent youths, preceded by Cinq-Mars and his friends, whose horses were urged on by the squadrons behind, had thrown themselves into the morass, wherein, to their great astonishment and to that of the Spaniards, who had counted too much upon its depth, the horses were in the water only up to their hams; and in spite of a discharge of grape-shot from the two largest pieces, all reached pell-mell a strip of land at the foot of the half-ruined ramparts. In the ardor of the rush, Cinq-Mars and Fontrailles, with the young Locmaria, forced their horses upon the rampart itself; but a brisk fusillade killed the three animals, which rolled over their masters.

“Dismount all, gentlemen!” cried old Coislin; “forward with pistol and sword! Abandon your horses!”

All obeyed instantly, and threw themselves in a mass upon the breach.

Meantime, De Thou, whose coolness never quitted him any more than his friendship, had not lost sight of the young Henri, and had received him in his arms when his horse fell. He helped him to rise, restored to him his sword, which he had dropped, and said to him, with the greatest calmness, notwithstanding the balls which rained on all sides:

“My friend, do I not appear very ridiculous amid all this skirmish, in my costume of Counsellor in Parliament?”

“Parbleu!” said Montresor, advancing, “here’s the Abbe, who quite justifies you.”

And, in fact, little Gondi, pushing on among the light horsemen, was shouting, at the top of his voice: “Three duels and an assault. I hope to get rid of my cassock at last!”

Saying this, he cut and thrust at a tall Spaniard.

The defence was not long. The Castilian soldiers were no match for the French officers, and not one of them had time or courage to recharge his carbine.

“Gentlemen, we will relate this to our mistresses in Paris,” said Locmaria, throwing his hat into the air; and Cinq-Mars, De Thou, Coislin, De Mouy, Londigny, officers of the red companies, and all the young noblemen, with swords in their right hands and pistols in their left, dashing, pushing, and doing each other by their eagerness as much harm as they did the enemy, finally rushed upon the platform of the bastion, as water poured from a vase, of which the opening is too small, leaps out in interrupted gushes.

Disdaining to occupy themselves with the vanquished soldiers, who cast themselves at their feet, they left them to look about the fort, without even disarming them, and began to examine their conquest, like schoolboys in vacation, laughing with all their hearts, as if they were at a pleasure-party.

A Spanish officer, enveloped in his brown cloak, watched them with a sombre air.

“What demons are these, Ambrosio?” said he to a soldier. “I never have met with any such before in France. If Louis XIII has an entire army thus composed, it is very good of him not to conquer all Europe.”

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"Oh, I do not believe they are very numerous; they must be some poor adventurers, who have nothing to lose and all to gain by pillage."

"You are right," said the officer; "I will try to persuade one of them to let me escape."

And slowly approaching, he accosted a young light-horseman, of about eighteen, who was sitting apart from his comrades upon the parapet. He had the pink-and-white complexion of a young girl; his delicate hand held an embroidered handkerchief, with which he wiped his forehead and his golden locks. He was consulting a large, round watch set with rubies, suspended from his girdle by a knot of ribbons.

The astonished Spaniard paused. Had he not seen this youth overthrow his soldiers, he would not have believed him capable of anything beyond singing a romance, reclined upon a couch. But, filled with the suggestion of Ambrosio, he thought that he might have stolen these objects of luxury in the pillage of the apartments of a woman; so, going abruptly up to him, he said:

"Hombre! I am an officer; will you restore me to liberty, that I may once more see my country?"

The young Frenchman looked at him with the gentle expression of his age, and, thinking of his own family, he said:

"Monsieur, I will present you to the Marquis de Coislin, who will, I doubt not, grant your request; is your family of Castile or of Aragon?"

"Your Coislin will ask the permission of somebody else, and will make me wait a year. I will give you four thousand ducats if you will let me escape."

That gentle face, those girlish features, became infused with the purple of fury; those blue eyes shot forth lightning; and, exclaiming, "Money to me! away, fool!" the young man gave the Spaniard a ringing box on the ear. The latter, without hesitating, drew a long poniard from his breast, and, seizing the arm of the Frenchman, thought to plunge it easily into his heart; but, nimble and vigorous, the youth caught him by the right arm, and, lifting it with force above his head, sent it back with the weapon it held upon the head of the Spaniard, who was furious with rage.

"Eh! eh! Softly, Olivier!" cried his comrades, running from all directions; "there are Spaniards enough on the ground already."

And they disarmed the hostile officer.

"What shall we do with this lunatic?" said one.

"I should not like to have him for my valet-dechambre," returned another.

“He deserves to be hanged,” said a third; “but, faith, gentlemen, we don’t know how to hang. Let us send him to that battalion of Swiss which is now passing across the plain.”

And the calm and sombre Spaniard, enveloping himself anew in his cloak, began the march of his own accord, followed by Ambrosio, to join the battalion, pushed by the shoulders and urged on by five or six of these young madcaps.

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Meantime, the first troop of the besiegers, astonished at their success, had followed it out to the end; Cinq-Mars, so advised by the aged Coislin, had made with him the circuit of the bastion, and found to their vexation that it was completely separated from the city, and that they could not follow up their advantage. They, therefore, returned slowly to the platform, talking by the way, to rejoin De Thou and the Abbe de Gondi, whom they found laughing with the young light-horsemen.

"We have Religion and justice with us, gentlemen; we could not fail to triumph."

"No doubt, for they fought as hard as we."

There was silence at the approach of Cinq-Mars, and they remained for an instant whispering and asking his name; then all surrounded him, and took his hand with delight.

"Gentlemen, you are right," said their old captain; "he is, as our fathers used to say, the best doer of the day. He is a volunteer, who is to be presented today to the King by the Cardinal."

"By the Cardinal! We will present him ourselves. Ah, do not let him be a Cardinalist; he is too good a fellow for that!" exclaimed all the young men, with vivacity.

"Monsieur, I will undertake to disgust you with him," said Olivier d'Entraigues, approaching Cinq-Mars, "for I have been his page. Rather serve in the red companies; come, you will have good comrades there."

The old Marquis saved Cinq-Mars the embarrassment of replying, by ordering the trumpets to sound and rally his brilliant companies. The cannon was no longer heard, and a soldier announced that the King and the Cardinal were traversing the lines to examine the results of the day. He made all the horses pass through the breach, which was tolerably wide, and ranged the two companies of cavalry in battle array, upon a spot where it seemed impossible that any but infantry could penetrate.

CHAPTER X

THE RECOMPENSE

Cardinal Richelieu had said to himself, "To soften the first paroxysm of the royal grief, to open a source of emotions which shall turn from its sorrow this wavering soul, let this city be besieged; I consent. Let Louis go; I will allow him to strike a few poor soldiers with the blows which he wishes, but dares not, to inflict upon me. Let his anger drown itself in this obscure blood; I agree. But this caprice of glory shall not derange my fixed designs; this city shall not fall yet. It shall not become French forever until two years have past; it shall come into my nets only on the day upon which I have fixed in my own

mind. Thunder, bombs, and cannons; meditate upon your operations, skilful captains; hasten, young warriors. I shall silence your noise, I shall dissipate your projects, and make your efforts abortive; all shall end in vain smoke, for I shall conduct in order to mislead you.”

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This is the substance of what passed in the bald head of the Cardinal before the attack of which we have witnessed a part. He was stationed on horseback, upon one of the mountains of Salces, north of the city; from this point he could see the plain of Roussillon before him, sloping to the Mediterranean. Perpignan, with its ramparts of brick, its bastions, its citadel, and its spire, formed upon this plain an oval and sombre mass on its broad and verdant meadows; the vast mountains surrounded it, and the valley, like an enormous bow curved from north to south, while, stretching its white line in the east, the sea looked like its silver cord. On his right rose that immense mountain called the Canigou, whose sides send forth two rivers into the plain below. The French line extended to the foot of this western barrier. A crowd of generals and of great lords were on horseback behind the minister, but at twenty paces' distance and profoundly silent.

Cardinal Richelieu had at first followed slowly the line of operations, but had later returned and stationed himself upon this height, whence his eye and his thought hovered over the destinies of besiegers and besieged. The whole army had its eyes upon him, and could see him from every point. All looked upon him as their immediate chief, and awaited his gesture before they acted. France had bent beneath his yoke a long time; and admiration of him shielded all his actions to which another would have been often subjected. At this moment, for instance, no one thought of smiling, or even of feeling surprised, that the cuirass should clothe the priest; and the severity of his character and aspect suppressed every thought of ironical comparisons or injurious conjectures. This day the Cardinal appeared in a costume entirely martial: he wore a reddish-brown coat, embroidered with gold, a water-colored cuirass, a sword at his side, pistols at his saddle-bow, and he had a plumed hat; but this he seldom put on his head, which was still covered with the red cap. Two pages were behind him; one carried his gauntlets, the other his casque, and the captain of his guards was at his side.

As the King had recently named him generalissimo of his troops, it was to him that the generals sent for their orders; but he, knowing only too well the secret motives of his master's present anger, affected to refer to that Prince all who sought a decision from his own mouth. It happened as he had foreseen; for he regulated and calculated the movements of that heart as those of a watch, and could have told with precision through what sensations it had passed. Louis XIII came and placed himself at his side; but he came as a pupil, forced to acknowledge that his master is in the right. His air was haughty and dissatisfied, his language brusque and dry. The Cardinal remained impassible. It was remarked that the King, in consulting him, employed the words of command, thus reconciling his weakness and his power of place, his irresolution and his pride, his ignorance and his pretensions, while his minister dictated laws to him in a tone of the most profound obedience.

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"I will have them attack immediately, Cardinal," said the Prince on coming up; "that is to say," he added, with a careless air, "when all your preparations are made, and you have fixed upon the hour with our generals."

"Sire, if I might venture to express my judgment, I should be glad did your Majesty think proper to begin the attack in a quarter of an hour, for that will give time enough to advance the third line."

"Yes, yes; you are right, Monsieur le Cardinal! I think so, too. I will go and give my orders myself; I wish to do everything myself. Schomberg, Schomberg! in a quarter of an hour I wish to hear the signal-gun; I command it."

And Schomberg, taking the command of the right wing, gave the order, and the signal was made.

The batteries, arranged long since by the Marechal de la Meilleraie, began to batter a breach, but slowly, because the artillerymen felt that they had been directed to attack two impregnable points; and because, with their experience, and above all with the common sense and quick perception of French soldiers, any one of them could at once have indicated the point against which the attack should have been directed. The King was surprised at the slowness of the firing.

"La Meilleraie," said he, impatiently, "these batteries do not play well; your cannoneers are asleep."

The principal artillery officers were present as well as the Marechal; but no one answered a syllable. They had looked toward the Cardinal, who remained as immovable as an equestrian statue, and they imitated his example. The answer must have been that the fault was not with the soldiers, but with him who had ordered this false disposition of the batteries; and this was Richelieu himself, who, pretending to believe them more useful in that position, had stopped the remarks of the chiefs.

The King, astonished at this silence, and, fearing that he had committed some gross military blunder by his question, blushed slightly, and, approaching the group of princes who had accompanied him, said, in order to reassure himself:

"D'Angouleme, Beaufort, this is very tiresome, is it not? We stand here like mummies."

Charles de Valois drew near and said:

"It seems to me, Sire, that they are not employing here the machines of the engineer Pompee-Targon."

"Parbleu!" said the Duc de Beaufort, regarding Richelieu fixedly, "that is because we were more eager to take Rochelle than Perpignan at the time that Italian came. Here



we have not an engine ready, not a mine, not a petard beneath these walls; and the Marechal de la Meilleraie told me this morning that he had proposed to bring some with which to open the breach. It was neither the Castillet, nor the six great bastions which surround it, nor the half-moon, we should have attacked. If we go on in this way, the great stone arm of the citadel will show us its fist a long time yet."

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The Cardinal, still motionless, said not a single word; he only made a sign to Fabert, who left the group in attendance, and ranged his horse behind that of Richelieu, close to the captain of his guards.

The Duc de la Rochefoucauld, drawing near the King, said:

"I believe, Sire, that our inactivity makes the enemy insolent, for look! here is a numerous sally, directing itself straight toward your Majesty; and the regiments of Biron and De Ponts fall back after firing."

"Well!" said the King, drawing his sword, "let us charge and force those villains back again. Bring on the cavalry with me, D'Angouleme. Where is it, Cardinal?"

"Behind that hill, Sire, there are in column six regiments of dragoons, and the carabineers of La Roque; below you are my men-at-arms and my light horse, whom I pray your Majesty to employ, for those of your Majesty's guard are ill guided by the Marquis de Coislin, who is ever too zealous. Joseph, go tell him to return."

He whispered to the Capuchin, who had accompanied him, huddled up in military attire, which he wore awkwardly, and who immediately advanced into the plain.

In the mean time, the compact columns of the old Spanish infantry issued from the gate of Notre-Dame like a dark and moving forest, while from another gate proceeded the heavy cavalry, which drew up on the plain. The French army, in battle array at the foot of the hill where the King stood, behind fortifications of earth, behind redoubts and fascines of turf, perceived with alarm the men-at-arms and the light horse pressed between these two forces, ten times their superior in numbers.

"Sound the charge!" cried Louis XIII; "or my old Coislin is lost."

And he descended the hill, with all his suite as ardent as himself; but before he reached the plain and was at the head of his musketeers, the two companies had taken their course, dashing off with the rapidity of lightning, and to the cry of "Vive le Roi!" They fell upon the long column of the enemy's cavalry like two vultures upon a serpent; and, making a large and bloody gap, they passed beyond, and rallied behind the Spanish bastion, leaving the enemy's cavalry so astonished that they thought only of re-forming their own ranks, and not of pursuing.

The French army uttered a burst of applause; the King paused in amazement. He looked around him, and saw a burning desire for attack in all eyes; the valor of his race shone in his own. He paused yet another instant in suspense, listening, intoxicated, to the roar of the cannon, inhaling the odor of the powder; he seemed to receive another life, and to become once more a Bourbon. All who looked on him felt as if they were

commanded by another man, when, raising his sword and his eyes toward the sun, he cried:

“Follow me, brave friends! here I am King of France!”

His cavalry, deploying, dashed off with an ardor which devoured space, and, raising billows of dust from the ground, which trembled beneath them, they were in an instant mingled with the Spanish cavalry, and both were swallowed up in an immense and fluctuating cloud.

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"Now! now!" cried the Cardinal, in a voice of thunder, from his elevation, "now remove the guns from their useless position! Fabert, give your orders; let them be all directed upon the infantry which slowly approaches to surround the King. Haste! save the King!"

Immediately the Cardinal's suite, until then sitting erect as so many statues, were in motion. The generals gave their orders; the aides-de-camp galloped off into the plain, where, leaping over the ditches, barriers, and palisades, they arrived at their destination as soon as the thought that directed them and the glance that followed them.

Suddenly the few and interrupted flashes which had shone from the discouraged batteries became a continual and immense flame, leaving no room for the smoke, which rose to the sky in an infinite number of light and floating wreaths; the volleys of cannon, which had seemed like far and feeble echoes, changed into a formidable thunder whose roll was as rapid as that of drums beating the charge; while from three opposite points large red flashes from fiery mouths fell upon the dark columns which issued from the besieged city.

Meantime, without changing his position, but with ardent eyes and imperative gestures, Richelieu ceased not to multiply his orders, casting upon those who received them a look which implied a sentence of death if he was not instantly obeyed.

"The King has overthrown the cavalry; but the foot still resist. Our batteries have only killed, they have not conquered. Forward with three regiments of infantry instantly, Gassion, La Meilleraie, and Lesdiguieres! Take the enemy's columns in flank. Order the rest of the army to cease from the attack, and to remain motionless throughout the whole line. Bring paper! I will write myself to Schomberg."

A page alighted and advanced, holding a pencil and paper. The minister, supported by four men of his suite, also alighted, but with difficulty, uttering a cry, wrested from him by pain; but he conquered it by an effort, and seated himself upon the carriage of a cannon. The page presented his shoulder as a desk; and the Cardinal hastily penned that order which contemporary manuscripts have transmitted to us, and which might well be imitated by the diplomatists of our day, who are, it seems, more desirous to maintain themselves in perfect balance between two ideas than to seek those combinations which decide the destinies of the world, regarding the clear and obvious dictates of true genius as beneath their profound subtlety.

"M. le Marechal, do not risk anything, and reflect before you attack. When you are thus told that the King desires you not to risk anything, you are not to understand that his Majesty forbids you to fight at all; but his intention is that you do not engage in a general battle unless it be with a notable hope of gain from the advantage which a favorable situation may present, the responsibility

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of the battle naturally falling upon you.”

These orders given, the old minister, still seated upon the gun-carriage, his arms resting upon the touch-hole, and his chin upon his arms, in the attitude of one who adjusts and points a cannon, continued in silence to watch the battle, like an old wolf, which, sated with victims and torpid with age, contemplates in the plain the ravages of a lion among a herd of cattle, which he himself dares not attack. From time to time his eye brightens; the smell of blood rejoices him, and he laps his burning tongue over his toothless jaw.

On that day, it was remarked by his servants—or, in other words, by all surrounding him—that from the time of his rising until night he took no nourishment, and so fixed all the application of his soul on the events which he had to conduct that he triumphed over his physical pains, seeming, by forgetting, to have destroyed them. It was this power of attention, this continual presence of mind, that raised him almost to genius. He would have attained it quite, had he not lacked native elevation of soul and generous sensibility of heart.

Everything happened upon the field of battle as he had wished, fortune attending him there as well as in the cabinet. Louis XIII claimed with eager hand the victory which his minister had procured for him; he had contributed himself, however, only that grandeur which consists in personal valor.

The cannon had ceased to roar when the broken columns of infantry fell back into Perpignan; the remainder had met the same fate, was already within the walls, and on the plain no living man was to be seen, save the glittering squadrons of the King, who followed him, forming ranks as they went.

He returned at a slow walk, and contemplated with satisfaction the battlefield swept clear of enemies; he passed haughtily under the very fire of the Spanish guns, which, whether from lack of skill, or by a secret agreement with the Prime Minister, or from very shame to kill a king of France, only sent after him a few balls, which, passing two feet above his head, fell in front of the lines, and merely served to increase the royal reputation for courage.

At every step, however, that he took toward the spot where Richelieu awaited him, the King's countenance changed and visibly fell; he lost all the flush of combat; the noble sweat of triumph dried upon his brow. As he approached, his usual pallor returned to his face, as if having the right to sit alone on a royal head; his look lost its fleeting fire, and at last, when he joined the Cardinal, a profound melancholy entirely possessed him. He found the minister as he had left him, on horseback; the latter, still coldly respectful, bowed, and after a few words of compliment, placed himself near Louis to traverse the lines and examine the results of the day, while the princes and great lords, riding at some distance before and behind, formed a crowd around them.

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The wily minister was careful not to say a word or to make a gesture that could suggest the idea that he had had the slightest share in the events of the day; and it was remarkable that of all those who came to hand in their reports, there was not one who did not seem to divine his thoughts, and exercise care not to compromise his occult power by open obedience. All reports were made to the King. The Cardinal then traversed, by the side of the Prince, the right of the camp, which had not been under his view from the height where he had remained; and he saw with satisfaction that Schomberg, who knew him well, had acted precisely as his master had directed, bringing into action only a few of the light troops, and fighting just enough not to incur reproach for inaction, and not enough to obtain any distinct result. This line of conduct charmed the minister, and did not displease the King, whose vanity cherished the idea of having been the sole conqueror that day. He even wished to persuade himself, and to have it supposed, that all the efforts of Schomberg had been fruitless, saying to him that he was not angry with him, that he had himself just had proof that the enemy before him was less despicable than had been supposed.

“To show you that you have lost nothing in our estimation,” he added, “we name you a knight of our order, and we give you public and private access to our person.”

The Cardinal affectionately pressed his hand as he passed him, and the Marechal, astonished at this deluge of favors, followed the Prince with his bent head, like a culprit, recalling, to console himself, all the brilliant actions of his career which had remained unnoticed, and mentally attributing to them these unmerited rewards to reconcile them to his conscience.

The King was about to retrace his steps, when the Due de Beaufort, with an astonished air, exclaimed:

“But, Sire, have I still the powder in my eyes, or have I been sun-struck? It appears to me that I see upon yonder bastion several cavaliers in red uniforms who greatly resemble your light horse whom we thought to be killed.”

The Cardinal knitted his brows.

“Impossible, Monsieur,” he said; “the imprudence of Monsieur de Coislin has destroyed his Majesty’s men-at-arms and those cavaliers. It is for that reason I ventured just now to say to the King that if the useless corps were suppressed, it might be very advantageous from a military point of view.”

“Pardieu! your Eminence will pardon me,” answered the Duc de Beaufort; “but I do not deceive myself, and there are seven or eight of them driving prisoners before them.”

“Well! let us go to the point,” said the King; “if I find my old Coislin there I shall be very glad.”

With great caution, the horses of the King and his suite passed across the marsh, and with infinite astonishment their riders saw on the ramparts the two red companies in battle array as on parade.



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"Vive Dieu!" cried Louis; "I think that not one of them is missing! Well, Marquis, you keep your word—you take walls on horseback."

"In my opinion, this point was ill chosen," said Richelieu, with disdain; "it in no way advances the taking of Perpignan, and must have cost many lives."

"Faith, you are right," said the King, for the first time since the intelligence of the Queen's death addressing the Cardinal without dryness; "I regret the blood which must have been spilled here."

"Only two of own young men have been wounded in the attack, Sire," said old Coislin; "and we have gained new companions-in-arms, in the volunteers who guided us."

"Who are they?" said the Prince.

"Three of them have modestly retired, Sire; but the youngest, whom you see, was the first who proposed the assault, and the first to venture his person in making it. The two companies claim the honor of presenting him to your Majesty."

Cinq-Mars, who was on horseback behind the old captain, took off his hat and showed his pale face, his large, dark eyes, and his long, chestnut hair.

"Those features remind me of some one," said the King; "what say you, Cardinal?"

The latter, who had already cast a penetrating glance at the newcomer, replied:

"Unless I am mistaken, this young man is—"

"Henri d'Effiat," said the volunteer, bowing.

"Sire, it is the same whom I had announced to your Majesty, and who was to have been presented to you by me; the second son of the Marechal."

"Ah!" said Louis, warmly, "I am glad to see the son of my old friend presented by this bastion. It is a suitable introduction, my boy, for one bearing your name. You will follow us to the camp, where we have much to say to you. But what! you here, Monsieur de Thou? Whom have you come to judge?"

"Sire," answered Coislin, "he has condemned to death, without judging, sundry Spaniards, for he was the second to enter the place."

"I struck no one, Monsieur," interrupted De Thou reddening; "it is not my business. Herein I have no merit; I merely accompanied my friend, Monsieur de Cinq-Mars."

“We approve your modesty as well as your bravery, and we shall not forget this. Cardinal, is there not some presidency vacant?”

Richelieu did not like De Thou. And as the sources of his dislike were always mysterious, it was difficult to guess the cause of this animosity; it revealed itself in a cruel word that escaped him. The motive was a passage in the history of the President De Thou—the father of the young man now in question—wherein he stigmatized, in the eyes of posterity, a granduncle of the Cardinal, an apostate monk, sullied with every human vice.

Richelieu, bending to Joseph’s ear, whispered:

“You see that man; his father put my name into his history. Well, I will put his into mine.” And, truly enough, he subsequently wrote it in blood. At this moment, to avoid answering the King, he feigned not to have heard his question, and to be wholly intent upon the merit of Cinq-Mars and the desire to see him well placed at court.

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"I promised you beforehand to make him a captain in my guards," said the Prince; "let him be nominated to-morrow. I would know more of him, and raise him to a higher fortune, if he pleases me. Let us now retire; the sun has set, and we are far from our army. Tell my two good companies to follow us."

The minister, after repeating the order, omitting the implied praise, placed himself on the King's right hand, and the whole court quitted the bastion, now confided to the care of the Swiss, and returned to the camp.

The two red companies defiled slowly through the breach which they had effected with such promptitude; their countenances were grave and silent.

Cinq-Mars went up to his friend.

"These are heroes but ill recompensed," said he; "not a favor, not a compliment."

"I, on the other hand," said the simple De Thou "I, who came here against my will—receive one. Such are courts, such is life; but above us is the true judge, whom men can not blind."

"This will not prevent us from meeting death tomorrow, if necessary," said the young Olivier, laughing.

CHAPTER XI

THE BLUNDERS

In order to appear before the King, Cinq-Mars had been compelled to mount the charger of one of the light horse, wounded in the affair, having lost his own at the foot of the rampart. As the two companies were marching out, he felt some one touch his shoulder, and, turning round, saw old Grandchamp leading a very beautiful gray horse.

"Will Monsieur le Marquis mount a horse of his own?" said he. "I have put on the saddle and housings of velvet embroidered in gold that remained in the trench. Alas, when I think that a Spaniard might have taken it, or even a Frenchman! For just now there are so many people who take all they find, as if it were their own; and then, as the proverb says, 'What falls in the ditch is for the soldier.' They might also have taken the four hundred gold crowns that Monsieur le Marquis, be it said without reproach, forgot to take out of the holsters. And the pistols! Oh, what pistols! I bought them in Germany; and here they are as good as ever, and with their locks perfect. It was quite enough to kill the poor little black horse, that was born in England as sure as I was at Tours in Touraine, without also exposing these valuables to pass into the hands of the enemy."

While making this lamentation, the worthy man finished saddling the gray horse. The column was long enough filing out to give him time to pay scrupulous attention to the length of the stirrups and of the bands, all the while continuing his harangue.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur, for being somewhat slow about this; but I sprained my arm slightly in lifting Monsieur de Thou, who himself raised Monsieur le Marquis during the grand scuffle."

"How camest thou there at all, stupid?" said Cinq-Mars. "That is not thy business. I told thee to remain in the camp."

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“Oh, as to remaining in the camp, that is out of the question. I can’t stay there; when I hear a musket-shot, I should be ill did I not see the flash. As for my business, that is to take care of your horses, and you are on them. Monsieur, think you I should not have saved, had I been able, the life of the poor black horse down there in the trench? Ah, how I loved him!—a horse that gained three races in his time—a time too short for those who loved him as I loved him! He never would take his corn but from his dear Grandchamp; and then he would caress me with his head. The end of my left ear that he carried away one day—poor fellow!—proves it, for it was not out of ill-will he bit it off; quite the contrary. You should have heard how he neighed with rage when any one else came near him; that was the reason why he broke Jean’s leg. Good creature, I loved him so!

“When he fell I held him on one side with one hand and M. de Locmaria with the other. I thought at first that both he and that gentleman would recover; but unhappily only one of them returned to life, and that was he whom I least knew. You seem to be laughing at what I say about your horse, Monsieur; you forget that in times of war the horse is the soul of the cavalier. Yes, Monsieur, his soul; for what is it that intimidates the infantry? It is the horse! It certainly is not the man, who, once seated, is little more than a bundle of hay. Who is it that performs the fine deeds that men admire? The horse. There are times when his master, who a moment before would rather have been far away, finds himself victorious and rewarded for his horse’s valor, while the poor beast gets nothing but blows. Who is it gains the prize in the race? The horse, that sups hardly better than usual, while the master pockets the gold, and is envied by his friends and admired by all the lords as if he had run himself. Who is it that hunts the roebuck, yet puts but a morsel in his own mouth? Again, the horse; sometimes the horse is even eaten himself, poor animal! I remember in a campaign with Monsieur le Marechal, it happened that— But what is the matter, Monsieur, you grow pale?”

“Bind up my leg with something—a handkerchief, a strap, or what you will. I feel a burning pain there; I know not what.”

“Your boot is cut, Monsieur. It may be some ball; however, lead is the friend of man.”

“It is no friend of mine, at all events.”

“Ah, who loves, chastens! Lead must not be ill spoken of! What is that—”

While occupied in binding his master’s leg below the knee, the worthy Grandchamp was about to hold forth in praise of lead as absurdly as he had in praise of the horse, when he was forced, as well as Cinq-Mars, to hear a warm and clamorous dispute among some Swiss soldiers who had remained behind the other troops. They were talking with much gesticulation, and seemed busied with two men among a group of about thirty soldiers.

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D'Effiat, still holding out his leg to his servant, and leaning on the saddle of his horse, tried, by listening attentively, to understand the subject of the colloquy; but he knew nothing of German, and could not comprehend the dispute. Grandchamp, who, still holding the boot, had also been listening very seriously, suddenly burst into loud laughter, holding his sides in a manner not usual with him.

"Ha, ha, ha! Monsieur, here are two sergeants disputing which they ought to hang of the two Spaniards there; for your red comrades did not take the trouble to tell them. One of the Swiss says that it's the officer, the other that it's the soldier; a third has just made a proposition for meeting the difficulty."

"And what does he say?"

"He suggests that they hang them both."

"Stop! stop!" cried Cinq-Mars to the soldiers, attempting to walk; but his leg would not support him.

"Put me on my horse, Grandchamp."

"Monsieur, you forget your wound."

"Do as I command, and then mount thyself."

The old servant grumblingly obeyed, and then galloped off, in fulfilment of another imperative order, to stop the Swiss, who were just about to hang their two prisoners to a tree, or to let them hang themselves; for the officer, with the sang-froid of his nation, had himself passed the running noose of a rope around his own neck, and, without being told, had ascended a small ladder placed against the tree, in order to tie the other end of the rope to one of its branches. The soldier, with the same calm indifference, was looking on at the Swiss disputing around him, while holding the ladder.

Cinq-Mars arrived in time to save them, gave his name to the Swiss sergeant, and, employing Grandchamp as interpreter, said that the two prisoners were his, and that he would take them to his tent; that he was a captain in the guards, and would be responsible for them. The German, ever exact in discipline, made no reply; the only resistance was on the part of the prisoner. The officer, still on the top of the ladder, turned round, and speaking thence as from a pulpit, said, with a sardonic laugh:

"I should much like to know what you do here? Who told you I wished to live?"

"I do not ask to know anything about that," said Cinq-Mars; "it matters not to me what becomes of you afterward. All I propose now is to prevent an act which seems to me unjust and cruel. You may kill yourself afterward, if you like."



"Well said," returned the ferocious Spaniard; "you please me. I thought at first you meant to affect the generous in order to oblige me to be grateful, which is a thing I detest. Well, I consent to come down; but I shall hate you as much as ever, for you are a Frenchman. Nor do I thank you, for you only discharge a debt you owe me, since it was I who this morning kept you from being shot by this young soldier while he was taking aim at you; and he is a man who never missed a chamois in the mountains of Leon."

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"Be it as you will," said Cinq-Mars; "come down."

It was his character ever to assume with others the mien they wore toward him; and the rudeness of the Spaniard made him as hard as iron toward him.

"A proud rascal that, Monsieur," said Grandchamp; "in your place Monsieur le Marechal would certainly have left him on his ladder. Come, Louis, Etienne, Germain, escort Monsieur's prisoners—a fine acquisition, truly! If they bring you any luck, I shall be very much surprised."

Cinq-Mars, suffering from the motion of his horse, rode only at the pace of his prisoners on foot, and was accordingly at a distance behind the red companies, who followed close upon the King. He meditated on his way what it could be that the Prince desired to say to him. A ray of hope presented to his mind the figure of Marie de Mantua in the distance; and for a moment his thoughts were calmed. But all his future lay in that brief sentence—"to please the King"; and he began to reflect upon all the bitterness in which his task might involve him.

At that moment he saw approaching his friend, De Thou, who, anxious at his remaining behind, had sought him in the plain, eager to aid him if necessary.

"It is late, my friend; night approaches. You have delayed long; I feared for you. Whom have you here? What has detained you? The King will soon be asking for you."

Such were the rapid inquiries of the young counsellor, whose anxiety, more than the battle itself, had made him lose his accustomed serenity.

"I was slightly wounded; I bring a prisoner, and I was thinking of the King. What can he want me for, my friend? What must I do if he proposes to place me about his person? I must please him; and at this thought—shall I own it?—I am tempted to fly. But I trust that I shall not have that fatal honor. 'To please,' how humiliating the word! 'to obey' quite the opposite! A soldier runs the chance of death, and there's an end. But in what base compliances, what sacrifices of himself, what compositions with his conscience, what degradation of his own thought, may not a courtier be involved! Ah, De Thou, my dear De Thou! I am not made for the court; I feel it, though I have seen it but for a moment. There is in my temperament a certain savageness, which education has polished only on the surface. At a distance, I thought myself adapted to live in this all-powerful world; I even desired it, led by a cherished hope of my heart. But I shuddered at the first step; I shuddered at the mere sight of the Cardinal. The recollection of the last of his crimes, at which I was present, kept me from addressing him. He horrifies me; I never can endure to be near him. The King's favor, too, has that about it which dismays me, as if I knew it would be fatal to me."

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"I am glad to perceive this apprehension in you; it may be most salutary," said De Thou, as they rode on. "You are about to enter into contact with power. Before, you did not even conceive it; now you will touch it with your very hand. You will see what it is, and what hand hurls the lightning. Heaven grant that that lightning may never strike you! You will probably be present in those councils which regulate the destiny of nations; you will see, you will perchance originate, those caprices whence are born sanguinary wars, conquests, and treaties; you will hold in your hand the drop of water which swells into mighty torrents. It is only from high places that men can judge of human affairs; you must look from the mountaintop ere you can appreciate the littleness of those things which from below appear to us great."

"Ah, were I on those heights, I should at least learn the lesson you speak of; but this Cardinal, this man to whom I must be under obligation, this man whom I know too well by his works—what will he be to me?"

"A friend, a protector, no doubt," answered De Thou.

"Death were a thousand times preferable to his friendship! I hate his whole being, even his very name; he spills the blood of men with the cross of the Redeemer!"

"What horrors are you saying, my friend? You will ruin yourself if you reveal your sentiments respecting the Cardinal to the King."

"Never mind; in the midst of these tortuous ways, I desire to take a new one, the right line. My whole opinion, the opinion of a just man, shall be unveiled to the King himself, if he interrogate me, even should it cost me my head. I have at last seen this King, who has been described to me as so weak; I have seen him, and his aspect has touched me to the heart in spite of myself. Certainly, he is very unfortunate, but he can not be cruel; he will listen to the truth."

"Yes; but he will not dare to make it triumph," answered the sage De Thou. "Beware of this warmth of heart, which often draws you by sudden and dangerous movements. Do not attack a colossus like Richelieu without having measured him."

"That is just like my tutor, the Abbe Quillet. My dear and prudent friend, neither the one nor the other of you know me; you do not know how weary I am of myself, and whither I have cast my gaze. I must mount or die."

"What! already ambitious?" exclaimed De Thou, with extreme surprise.

His friend inclined his head upon his hands, abandoning the reins of his horse, and did not answer.

"What! has this selfish passion of a riper age obtained possession of you at twenty, Henri? Ambition is the saddest of all hopes."

“And yet it possesses me entirely at present, for I see only by means of it, and by it my whole heart is penetrated.”

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“Ah, Cinq-Mars, I no longer recognize you! how different you were formerly! I do not conceal from you that you appear to me to have degenerated. In those walks of our childhood, when the life, and, above all, the death of Socrates, caused tears of admiration and envy to flow from our eyes; when, raising ourselves to the ideal of the highest virtue, we wished that those illustrious sorrows, those sublime misfortunes, which create great men, might in the future come upon us; when we constructed for ourselves imaginary occasions of sacrifices and devotion—if the voice of a man had pronounced, between us two, the single world, ‘ambition,’ we should have believed that we were touching a serpent.”

De Thou spoke with the heat of enthusiasm and of reproach. Cinq-Mars went on without answering, and still with his face in his hands. After an instant of silence he removed them, and allowed his eyes to be seen, full of generous tears. He pressed the hand of his friend warmly, and said to him, with a penetrating accent:

“Monsieur de Thou, you have recalled to me the most beautiful thoughts of my earliest youth. Do not believe that I have fallen; I am consumed by a secret hope which I can not confide even to you. I despise, as much as you, the ambition which will seem to possess me. All the world will believe in it; but what do I care for the world? As for you, noble friend, promise me that you will not cease to esteem me, whatever you may see me do. I swear that my thoughts are as pure as heaven itself!”

“Well,” said De Thou, “I swear by heaven that I believe you blindly; you give me back my life!”

They shook hands again with effusion of heart, and then perceived that they had arrived almost before the tent of the King.

Day was nearly over; but one might have believed that a softer day was rising, for the moon issued from the sea in all her splendor. The transparent sky of the south showed not a single cloud, and it seemed like a veil of pale blue sown with silver spangles; the air, still hot, was agitated only by the rare passage of breezes from the Mediterranean; and all sounds had ceased upon the earth. The fatigued army reposed beneath their tents, the line of which was marked by the fires, and the besieged city seemed oppressed by the same slumber; upon its ramparts nothing was to be seen but the arms of the sentinels, which shone in the rays of the moon, or the wandering fire of the night-rounds. Nothing was to be heard but the gloomy and prolonged cries of its guards, who warned one another not to sleep.

It was only around the King that all things waked, but at a great distance from him. This Prince had dismissed all his suite; he walked alone before his tent, and, pausing sometimes to contemplate the beauty of the heavens, he appeared plunged in melancholy meditation. No one dared to interrupt him; and those of the nobility who had remained in the royal quarters had gathered about the Cardinal, who, at twenty

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paces from the King, was seated upon a little hillock of turf, fashioned into a seat by the soldiers. There he wiped his pale forehead, fatigued with the cares of the day and with the unaccustomed weight of a suit of armor; he bade adieu, in a few hurried but always attentive and polite words, to those who came to salute him as they retired. No one was near him now except Joseph, who was talking with Laubardemont. The Cardinal was looking at the King, to see whether, before reentering, this Prince would not speak to him, when the sound of the horses of Cinq-Mars was heard. The Cardinal's guards questioned him, and allowed him to advance without followers, and only with De Thou.

"You are come too late, young man, to speak with the King," said the Cardinal-Duke with a sharp voice. "One can not make his Majesty wait."

The two friends were about to retire, when the voice of Louis XIII himself made itself heard. This Prince was at that moment in one of those false positions which constituted the misfortune of his whole life. Profoundly irritated against his minister, but not concealing from himself that he owed the success of the day to him, desiring, moreover, to announce to him his intention to quit the army and to raise the siege of Perpignan, he was torn between the desire of speaking to the Cardinal and the fear lest his anger might be weakened. The minister, upon his part, dared not be the first to speak, being uncertain as to the thoughts which occupied his master, and fearing to choose his time ill, but yet not able to decide upon retiring. Both found themselves precisely in the position of two lovers who have quarrelled and desire to have an explanation, when the King, seized with joy the first opportunity of extricating himself. The chance was fatal to the minister. See upon what trifles depend those destinies which are called great.

"Is it not Monsieur de Cinq-Mars?" said the King, in a loud voice. "Let him approach; I am waiting for him."

Young D'Effiat approached on horseback, and at some paces from the King desired to set foot to earth; but hardly had his leg touched the ground when he dropped upon his knees.

"Pardon, Sire!" said he, "I believe that I am wounded;" and the blood issued violently from his boot.

De Thou had seen him fall, and had approached to sustain him. Richelieu seized this opportunity of advancing also, with dissembled eagerness.

"Remove this spectacle from the eyes of the King," said he. "You see very well that this young man is dying."

“Not at all,” said Louis, himself supporting him; “a king of France knows how to see a man die, and has no fear of the blood which flows for him. This young man interests me. Let him be carried into my tent, and let my doctors attend him. If his wound is not serious, he shall come with me to Paris, for the siege is suspended, Monsieur le Cardinal. Such is my desire; other affairs call me to the centre of the kingdom. I will leave you here to command in my absence. This is what I desired to say to you.”

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With these words the King went abruptly into his tent, preceded by his pages and his officers, carrying flambeaux.

The royal pavilion was closed, and Cinq-Mars was borne in by De Thou and his people, while the Duc de Richelieu, motionless and stupefied, still regarded the spot where this scene had passed. He appeared thunder-struck, and incapable of seeing or hearing those who observed him.

Laubardemont, still intimidated by his ill reception of the preceding day, dared not speak a word to him, and Joseph hardly recognized in him his former master. For an instant he regretted having given himself to him, and fancied that his star was waning; but, reflecting that he was hated by all men and had no resource save in Richelieu, he seized him by the arm, and, shaking him roughly, said to him in a low voice, but harshly:

“Come, come, Monseigneur, you are chickenhearted; come with us.”

And, appearing to sustain him by the elbow, but in fact drawing him in spite of himself, with the aid of Laubardemont, he made him enter his tent, as a schoolmaster forces a schoolboy to rest, fearing the effects of the evening mist upon him.

The prematurely aged man slowly obeyed the wishes of his two parasites, and the purple of the pavilion dropped upon him.

CHAPTER XII

THE NIGHT-WATCH

O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight,
Cold, fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What do I fear? Myself?
I love myself!

Shakespeare.

Hardly was the Cardinal in his tent before he dropped, armed and cuirassed, into a great armchair; and there, holding his handkerchief to his mouth with a fixed gaze, he remained in this attitude, letting his two dark confidants wonder whether contemplation or annihilation maintained him in it. He was deadly pale, and a cold sweat streamed upon his brow. In wiping it with a sudden movement, he threw behind him his red cap, the only ecclesiastical sign which remained upon him, and again rested with his mouth upon his hands. The Capuchin on one side, and the sombre magistrate on the other,

considered him in silence, and seemed, with their brown and black costumes like the priest and the notary of a dying man.

The friar, drawing from the depth of his chest a voice that seemed better suited to repeat the service of the dead than to administer consolation, spoke first:

"If Monseigneur will recall my counsels given at Narbonne, he will confess that I had a just presentiment of the troubles which this young man would one day cause him."

The magistrate continued:

"I have learned from the old deaf abbe who dined at the house of the Marechale d'Effiat, and who heard all, that this young Cinq-Mars exhibited more energy than one would have imagined, and that he attempted to rescue the Marechal de Bassompierre. I have still by me the detailed report of the deaf man, who played his part very well. His Eminence the Cardinal must be sufficiently convinced by it."

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"I have told Monseigneur," resumed Joseph—for these two ferocious Seyds alternated their discourse like the shepherds of Virgil—"I have told him that it would be well to get rid of this young D'Effiat, and that I would charge myself with the business, if such were his good pleasure. It would be easy to destroy him in the opinion of the King."

"It would be safer to make him die of his wound," answered Laubardemont; "if his Eminence would have the goodness to command me, I know intimately the assistant-physician, who cured me of a blow on the forehead, and is now attending to him. He is a prudent man, entirely devoted to Monseigneur the Cardinal-Duke, and whose affairs have been somewhat embarrassed by gambling."

"I believe," replied Joseph, with an air of modesty, mingled with a touch of bitterness, "that if his Excellency proposed to employ any one in this useful project, it should be his accustomed negotiator, who has had some success in the past."

"I fancy that I could enumerate some signal instances," answered Laubardemont, "and very recent ones, of which the difficulty was great."

"Ah, no doubt," said the father, with a bow and an air of consideration and politeness, "your most bold and skilfully executed commission was the trial of Urbain Grandier, the magician. But, with Heaven's assistance, one may be enabled to do things quite as worthy and bold. It is not without merit, for instance," added he, dropping his eyes like a young girl, "to have extirpated vigorously a royal Bourbon branch."

"It was not very difficult," answered the magistrate, with bitterness, "to select a soldier from the guards to kill the Comte de Soissons; but to preside, to judge—"

"And to execute one's self," interrupted the heated Capuchin, "is certainly less difficult than to educate a man from infancy in the thought of accomplishing great things with discretion, and to bear all tortures, if necessary, for the love of heaven, rather than reveal the name of those who have armed him with their justice, or to die courageously upon the body of him that he has struck, as did one who was commissioned by me. He uttered no cry at the blow of the sword of Riquemont, the equerry of the Prince. He died like a saint; he was my pupil."

"To give orders is somewhat different from running risk one's self."

"And did I risk nothing at the siege of Rochelle?"

"Of being drowned in a sewer, no doubt," said Laubardemont.

"And you," said Joseph, "has your danger been that of catching your fingers in instruments of torture? And all this because the Abbess of the Ursulines is your niece."



“It was a good thing for your brothers of Saint Francis, who held the hammers; but I—I was struck in the forehead by this same Cinq-Mars, who was leading an enraged multitude.”

“Are you quite sure of that?” cried Joseph, delighted. “Did he dare to act thus against the commands of the King?” The joy which this discovery gave him made him forget his anger.

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"Fools!" exclaimed the Cardinal, suddenly breaking his long silence, and taking from his lips his handkerchief stained with blood. "I would punish your angry dispute had it not taught me many secrets of infamy on your part. You have exceeded my orders; I commanded no torture, Laubardemont. That is your second fault. You cause me to be hated for nothing; that was useless. But you, Joseph, do not neglect the details of this disturbance in which Cinq-Mars was engaged; it may be of use in the end."

"I have all the names and descriptions," said the secret judge, eagerly, bending his tall form and thin, olive-colored visage, wrinkled with a servile smile, down to the armchair.

"It is well! it is well!" said the minister, pushing him back; "but that is not the question yet. You, Joseph, be in Paris before this young upstart, who will become a favorite, I am certain. Become his friend; make him of my party or destroy him. Let him serve me or fall. But, above all, send me every day safe persons to give me verbal accounts. I will have no more writing for the future. I am much displeased with you, Joseph. What a miserable courier you chose to send from Cologne! He could not understand me. He saw the King too soon, and here we are still in disgrace in consequence. You have just missed ruining me entirely. Go and observe what is about to be done in Paris. A conspiracy will soon be hatched against me; but it will be the last. I remain here in order to let them all act more freely. Go, both of you, and send me my valet after the lapse of two hours; I wish now to be alone."

The steps of the two men were still to be heard as Richelieu, with eyes fixed upon the entrance to the tent, pursued them with his irritated glance.

"Wretches!" he exclaimed, when he was alone, "go and accomplish some more secret work, and afterward I will crush you, in pure instruments of my power. The King will soon succumb beneath the slow malady which consumes him. I shall then be regent; I shall be King of France myself; I shall no longer have to dread the caprices of his weakness. I will destroy the haughty races of this country. I will be alone above them all. Europe shall tremble."

Here the blood, which again filled his mouth, obliged him to apply his handkerchief to it once more.

"Ah, what do I say? Unhappy victim that I am! Here am I, death-stricken! My dissolution is near; my blood flows, and my spirit desires to labor still. Why? For whom? Is it for glory? That is an empty word. Is it for men? I despise them. For whom, then, since I shall die, perhaps, in two or three years? Is it for God? What a name! I have not walked with Him! He has seen all—"

Here he let his head fall upon his breast, and his eyes met the great cross of gold which was suspended from his neck. He could not help throwing himself back in his chair; but

it followed him. He took it; and considering it with fixed and devouring looks, he said in a low voice:

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“Terrible sign! thou followest me! Shall I find thee elsewhere—divinity and suffering? What am I? What have I done?”

For the first time a singular and unknown terror penetrated him. He trembled, at once frozen and scorched by an invincible shudder. He dared not lift his eyes, fearing to meet some terrible vision. He dared not call, fearing to hear the sound of his own voice. He remained profoundly plunged in meditations on eternity, so terrible for him, and he murmured the following kind of prayer:

“Great God, if Thou hearest me, judge me then, but do not isolate me in judging me! Look upon me, surrounded by the men of my generation; consider the immense work I had undertaken! Was not an enormous lever wanted to bestir those masses; and if this lever in falling crushes some useless wretches, am I very culpable? I seem wicked to men; but Thou, Supreme judge, dost thou regard me thus?”

“No; Thou knowest it is boundless power which makes creature culpable against creature. It is not Armand de Richelieu who destroys; it is the Prime-Minister. It is not for his personal injuries; it is to carry out a system. But a system—what is this word? Is it permitted me to play thus with men, to regard them as numbers for working out a thought, which perhaps is false? I overturn the framework of the throne. What if, without knowing it, I sap its foundations and hasten its fall! Yes, my borrowed power has seduced me. O labyrinth! O weakness of human thought! Simple faith, why did I quit thy path? Why am I not a simple priest? If I dared to break with man and give myself to God, the ladder of Jacob would again descend in my dreams.”

At this moment his ear was struck by a great noise outside—laughter of soldiers, ferocious shouts and oaths, mingled with words which were a long time sustained by a weak yet clear voice; one would have said it was the voice of an angel interrupted by the laughter of demons. He rose and opened a sort of linen window, worked in the side of his square tent. A singular spectacle presented itself to his view; he remained some instants contemplating it, attentive to the conversation which was going on.

“Listen, listen, La Valeur!” said one soldier to another. “See, she begins again to speak and to sing!”

“Put her in the middle of the circle, between us and the fire.”

“You do not know her! You do not know her!” said another. “But here is Grand-Ferre, who says that he knows her.”

“Yes, I tell you I know her; and, by Saint Peter of Loudun, I will swear that I have seen her in my village, when I had leave of absence; and it was upon an occasion at which one shuddered, but concerning which one dares not talk, especially to a Cardinalist like you.”

“Eh! and pray why dare not one speak of it, you great simpleton?” said an old soldier, twisting up his moustache.

“It is not spoken of because it burns the tongue. Do you understand that?”

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"No, I don't understand it."

"Well, nor I neither; but certain citizens told it to me."

Here a general laugh interrupted him.

"Ha, ha, ha! is he a fool?" said one. "He listens to what the townsfolk tell him."

"Ah, well! if you listen to their gabble, you have time to lose," said another.

"You do not know, then, what my mother said, greenhorn?" said the eldest, gravely dropping his eyes with a solemn air, to compel attention.

"Eh! how can you think that I know it, La Pipe? Your mother must have died of old age before my grandfather came into the world."

"Well, greenhorn, I will tell you! You shall know, first of all, that my mother was a respectable Bohemian, as much attached to the regiment of carabineers of La Roque as my dog Canon there. She carried brandy round her neck in a barrel, and drank better than the best of us. She had fourteen husbands, all soldiers, who died upon the field of battle."

"Ha! that was a woman!" interrupted the soldiers, full of respect.

"And never once in her life did she speak to a townsman, unless it was to say to him on coming to her lodging, 'Light my candle and warm my soup.'"

"Well, and what was it that your mother said to you?"

"If you are in such a hurry, you shall not know, greenhorn. She said habitually in her talk, 'A soldier is better than a dog; but a dog is better than a bourgeois.'"

"Bravo! bravo! that was well said!" cried the soldier, filled with enthusiasm at these fine words.

"That," said Grand-Ferre, "does not prove that the citizens who made the remark to me that it burned the tongue were in the right; besides, they were not altogether citizens, for they had swords, and they were grieved at a cure being burned, and so was I."

"Eh! what was it to you that they burned your cure, great simpleton?" said a sergeant, leaning upon the fork of his arquebus; "after him another would come. You might have taken one of our generals in his stead, who are all cures at present; for me, I am a Royalist, and I say it frankly."

“Hold your tongue!” cried La Pipe; “let the girl speak. It is these dogs of Royalists who always disturb us in our amusements.”

“What say you?” answered Grand-Ferre. “Do you even know what it is to be a Royalist?”

“Yes,” said La Pipe; “I know you all very well. Go, you are for the old self-called princes of the peace, together with the wranglers against the Cardinal and the gabelle. Am I right or not?”

“No, old red-stocking. A Royalist is one who is for the King; that’s what it is. And as my father was the King’s valet, I am for the King, you see; and I have no liking for the red-stockings, I can tell you.”

“Ah, you call me red-stocking, eh?” answered the old soldier. “You shall give me satisfaction to-morrow morning. If you had made war in the Valteline, you would not talk like that; and if you had seen his Eminence marching upon the dike at Rochelle, with the old Marquis de Spinola, while volleys of cannonshot were sent after him, you would have nothing to say about red-stockings.”

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"Come, let us amuse ourselves, instead of quarrelling," said the other soldiers.

The men who conversed thus were standing round a great fire, which illuminated them more than the moon, beautiful as it was; and in the centre of the group was the object of their gathering and their cries. The Cardinal perceived a young woman arrayed in black and covered with a long, white veil. Her feet were bare; a thick cord clasped her elegant figure; a long rosary fell from her neck almost to her feet, and her hands, delicate and white as ivory, turned its beads and made them pass rapidly beneath her fingers. The soldiers, with a barbarous joy, amused themselves with laying little brands in her way to burn her naked feet. The oldest took the smoking match of his arquebus, and, approaching it to the edge of her robe, said in a hoarse voice:

"Come, madcap, tell me your history, or I will fill you with powder and blow you up like a mine; take care, for I have already played that trick to others besides you, in the old wars of the Huguenots. Come, sing."

The young woman, looking at him gravely, made no reply, but lowered her veil.

"You don't manage her well," said Grand-Ferre, with a drunken laugh; "you will make her cry. You don't know the fine language of the court; let me speak to her." And, touching her on the chin, "My little heart," he said, "if you will please, my sweet, to resume the little story you told just now to these gentlemen, I will pray you to travel with me upon the river Du Tendre, as the great ladies of Paris say, and to take a glass of brandy with your faithful chevalier, who met you formerly at Loudun, when you played a comedy in order to burn a poor devil."

The young woman crossed her arms, and, looking around her with an imperious air, cried:

"Withdraw, in the name of the God of armies; withdraw, impious men! There is nothing in common between us. I do not understand your tongue, nor you mine. Go, sell your blood to the princes of the earth at so many oboles a day, and leave me to accomplish my mission! Conduct me to the Cardinal."

A coarse laugh interrupted her.

"Do you think," said a carabineer of Maurevert, "that his Eminence the Generalissimo will receive you with your feet naked? Go and wash them."

"The Lord has said, 'Jerusalem, lift thy robe, and pass the rivers of water,'" she answered, her arms still crossed. "Let me be conducted to the Cardinal."

Richelieu cried in a loud voice, "Bring the woman to me, and let her alone!"

All were silent; they conducted her to the minister.



“Why,” said she, beholding him—“why bring me before an armed man?”

They left her alone with him without answering.

The Cardinal looked at her with a suspicious air. “Madame,” said he, “what are you doing in the camp at this hour? And if your mind is not disordered, why these naked feet?”

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"It is a vow; it is a vow," answered the young woman, with an air of impatience, seating herself beside him abruptly. "I have also made a vow not to eat until I have found the man I seek."

"My sister," said the Cardinal, astonished and softened, looking closely at her, "God does not exact such rigors from a weak body, and particularly from one of your age, for you seem very young."

"Young! oh, yes, I was very young a few days ago; but I have since passed two existences at least, so much have I thought and suffered. Look on my countenance."

And she discovered a face of perfect beauty. Black and very regular eyes gave life to it; but in their absence one might have thought her features were those of a phantom, she was so pale. Her lips were blue and quivering; and a strong shudder made her teeth chatter.

"You are ill, my sister," said the minister, touched, taking her hand, which he felt to be burning hot. A sort of habit of inquiring concerning his own health, and that of others, made him touch the pulse of her emaciated arm; he felt that the arteries were swollen by the beatings of a terrible fever.

"Alas!" he continued, with more of interest, "you have killed yourself with rigors beyond human strength! I have always blamed them, and especially at a tender age. What, then, has induced you to do this? Is it to confide it to me that you are come? Speak calmly, and be sure of succor."

"Confide in men!" answered the young woman; "oh, no, never! All have deceived me. I will confide myself to no one, not even to Monsieur Cinq-Mars, although he must soon die."

"What!" said Richelieu, contracting his brows, but with a bitter laugh,— "what! do you know this young man? Has he been the cause of your misfortune?"

"Oh, no! He is very good, and hates wickedness; that is what will ruin him. Besides," said she, suddenly assuming a harsh and savage air, "men are weak, and there are things which women must accomplish. When there were no more valiant men in Israel, Deborah arose."

"Ah! how came you with all this fine learning?" continued the Cardinal, still holding her hand.

"Oh, I can't explain that!" answered she, with a touching air of naivete and a very gentle voice; "you would not understand me. It is the Devil who has taught me all, and who has destroyed me."

“Ah, my child! it is always he who destroys us; but he instructs us ill,” said Richelieu, with an air of paternal protection and an increasing pity. “What have been your faults? Tell them to me; I am very powerful.”

“Ah,” said she, with a look of doubt, “you have much influence over warriors, brave men and generals! Beneath your cuirass must beat a noble heart; you are an old General who knows nothing of the tricks of crime.”

Richelieu smiled; this mistake flattered him.

“I heard you ask for the Cardinal; do you desire to see him? Did you come here to seek him?”

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The girl drew back and placed a finger upon her forehead.

"I had forgotten it," said she; "you have talked to me too much. I had overlooked this idea, and yet it is an important one; it is for that that I have condemned myself to the hunger which is killing me. I must accomplish it, or I shall die first. Ah," said she, putting her hand beneath her robe in her bosom, whence she appeared to take something, "behold it! this idea—"

She suddenly blushed, and her eyes widened extraordinarily. She continued, bending to the ear of the Cardinal:

"I will tell you; listen! Urbain Grandier, my lover Urbain, told me this night that it was Richelieu who had been the cause of his death. I took a knife from an inn, and I come here to kill him; tell me where he is."

The Cardinal, surprised and terrified, recoiled with horror. He dared not call his guards, fearing the cries of this woman and her accusations; nevertheless, a transport of this madness might be fatal to him.

"This frightful history will pursue me everywhere!" cried he, looking fixedly at her, and thinking within himself of the course he should take.

They remained in silence, face to face, in the same attitude, like two wrestlers who contemplate before attacking each other, or like the pointer and his victim petrified by the power of a look.

In the mean time, Laubardemont and Joseph had gone forth together; and ere separating they talked for a moment before the tent of the Cardinal, because they were eager mutually to deceive each other. Their hatred had acquired new force by their recent quarrel; and each had resolved to ruin his rival in the mind of his master. The judge then began the dialogue, which each of them had prepared, taking the arm of the other as by one and the same movement.

"Ah, reverend father! how you have afflicted me by seeming to take in ill part the trifling pleasantries which I said to you just now."

"Heavens, no! my dear Monsieur, I am far from that. Charity, where would be charity? I have sometimes a holy warmth in conversation, for the good of the State and of Monseigneur, to whom I am entirely devoted."

"Ah, who knows it better than I, reverend father? But render me justice; you also know how completely I am attached to his Eminence the Cardinal, to whom I owe all. Alas! I have employed too much zeal in serving him, since he reproaches me with it."

“Reassure yourself,” said Joseph; “he bears no ill-will toward you. I know him well; he can appreciate one’s actions in favor of one’s family. He, too, is a very good relative.”

“Yes, there it is,” answered Laubardemont; “consider my condition. My niece would have been totally ruined at her convent had Urbain triumphed; you feel that as well as I do, particularly as she did not quite comprehend us, and acted the child when she was compelled to appear.”

“Is it possible? In full audience! What you tell me indeed makes me feel for you. How painful it must have been!”

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"More so than you can imagine. She forgot, in her madness, all that she had been told, committed a thousand blunders in Latin, which we patched up as well as we could; and she even caused an unpleasant scene on the day of the trial, very unpleasant for me and the judges—there were swoons and shrieks. Ah, I swear that I would have scolded her well had I not been forced to quit precipitately that, little town of Loudun. But, you see, it is natural enough that I am attached to her. She is my nearest relative; for my son has turned out ill, and no one knows what has become of him during the last four years. Poor little Jeanne de Belfiel! I made her a nun, and then abbess, in order to preserve all for that scamp. Had I foreseen his conduct, I should have retained her for the world."

"She is said to have great beauty," answered Joseph; "that is a precious gift for a family. She might have been presented at court, and the King—Ah! ah! Mademoiselle de la Fayette—eh! eh!—Mademoiselle d'Hautefort—you understand; it may be even possible to think of it yet."

"Ah, that is like you, Monseigneur! for we know that you have been nominated to the cardinalate; how good you are to remember the most devoted of your friends!"

Laubardemont was yet talking to Joseph when they found themselves at the end of the line of the camp, which led to the quarter of the volunteers.

"May God and his Holy Mother protect you during my absence!" said Joseph, stopping. "To-morrow I depart for Paris; and as I shall have frequent business with this young Cinq-Mars, I shall first go to see him, and learn news of his wound."

"Had I been listened to," said Laubardemont, "you would not now have had this trouble."

"Alas, you are right!" answered Joseph, with a profound sigh, and raising his eyes to heaven; "but the Cardinal is no longer the same man. He will not take advantage of good ideas; he will ruin us if he goes on thus."

And, making a low bow to the judge, the Capuchin took the road which he had indicated to him.

Laubardemont followed him for some time with his eyes, and, when he was quite sure of the route which he had taken, he returned, or, rather, ran back to the tent of the minister. "The Cardinal dismisses him, he tells me; that shows that he is tired of him. I know secrets which will ruin him. I will add that he is gone to pay court to the future favorite. I will replace this monk in the favor of the minister. The moment is propitious. It is midnight; he will be alone for an hour and a half yet. Let me run."

He arrived at the tent of the guards, which was before the pavilion.

“Monseigneur gives audience to some one,” said the captain, hesitating; “you can not enter.”

“Never mind; you saw me leave an hour ago, and things are passing of which I must give an account.”

“Come in, Laubardemont,” cried the minister; “come in quickly, and alone.”

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He entered. The Cardinal, still seated, held the two hands of the nun in one of his, and with the other he imposed silence upon his stupefied agent, who remained motionless, not yet seeing the face of this woman. She spoke volubly, and the strange things she said contrasted horribly with the sweetness of her voice. Richelieu seemed moved.

"Yes, I will stab him with a knife. It is the knife which the demon Behirith gave me at the inn; but it is the nail of Sisera. It has a handle of ivory, you see; and I have wept much over it. Is it not singular, my good General? I will turn it in the throat of him who killed my friend, as he himself told me to do; and afterward I will burn the body. There is like for like, the punishment which God permitted to Adam. You have an astonished air, my brave general; but you would be much more so, were I to repeat to you his song—the song which he sang to me again last night, at the hour of the funeral-pyre—you understand?—the hour when it rains, the hour when my hand burns as now. He said to me: 'They are much deceived, the magistrates, the red judges. I have eleven demons at my command; and I shall come to see you when the clock strikes, under a canopy of purple velvet, with torches—torches of resin to give us light—' Ah, that is beautiful! Listen, listen to what he sings!"

And she sang to the air of *De Profundis*.

"Is it not singular, my good General?" said she, when she had finished; "and I—I answer him every evening."

"Then he speaks as spirits and prophets speak. He says: 'Woe, woe to him who has shed blood! Are the judges of the earth gods? No, they are men who grow old and suffer, and yet they dare to say aloud, Let that man die! The penalty of death, the pain of death—who has given to man the right of imposing it on man? Is the number two? One would be an assassin, look you! But count well, one, two, three. Behold, they are wise and just, these grave and salaried criminals! O crime, the horror of Heaven! If you looked upon them from above as I look upon them, you would be yet paler than I am. Flesh destroys flesh! That which lives by blood sheds blood coldly and without anger, like a God with power to create!'"

The cries which the unhappy girl uttered, as she rapidly spoke these words, terrified Richelieu and Laubardemont so much that they still remained motionless. The delirium and the fever continued to transport her.

"Did the judges tremble?" said Urbain Grandier to me. 'Did they tremble at deceiving themselves?' They work the work of the just. The question! They bind his limbs with ropes to make him speak. His skin cracks, tears away, and rolls up like a parchment; his nerves are naked, red, and glittering; his bones crack; the marrow spurts out. But the judges sleep! they dream of flowers and spring. 'How hot the grand chamber is!' says one, awaking; 'this man has not chosen to speak! Is the torture finished?' And pitiful at last, he dooms him to death—death, the sole fear of the living! death, the

unknown world! He sends before him a furious soul which will wait for him. Oh! has he never seen the vision of vengeance? Has he never seen before falling asleep the flayed prevaricator?"

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Already weakened by fever, fatigue, and grief, the Cardinal, seized with horror and pity, exclaimed:

“Ah, for the love of God, let this terrible scene have an end! Take away this woman; she is mad!”

The frantic creature turned, and suddenly uttering loud cries, “Ah, the judge! the judge! the judge!” she said, recognizing Laubardemont.

The latter, clasping his hands and trembling before the Cardinal, said with terror:

“Alas, Monseigneur, pardon me! she is my niece, who has lost her reason. I was not aware of this misfortune, or she would have been shut up long ago. Jeanne! Jeanne! come, Madame, to your knees! ask forgiveness of Monseigneur the Cardinal-duc.”

“It is Richelieu!” she cried; and astonishment seemed wholly to paralyze this young and unhappy beauty. The flush which had animated her at first gave place to a deadly pallor, her cries to a motionless silence, her wandering looks to a frightful fixedness of her large eyes, which constantly followed the agitated minister.

“Take away this unfortunate child quickly,” said he; “she is dying, and so am I. So many horrors pursue me since that sentence that I believe all hell is loosed upon me.”

He rose as he spoke; Jeanne de Belfiel, still silent and stupefied, with haggard eyes, open mouth, and head bent forward, yet remained beneath the shock of her double surprise, which seemed to have extinguished the rest of her reason and her strength. At the movement of the Cardinal, she shuddered to find herself between him and Laubardemont, looked by turns at one and the other, let the knife which she held fall from her hand, and retired slowly toward the opening of the tent, covering herself completely with her veil, and looking wildly and with terror behind her upon her uncle who followed, like an affrighted lamb, which already feels at its back the burning breath of the wolf about to seize it.

Thus they both went forth; and hardly had they reached the open air, when the furious judge caught the hands of his victim, tied them with a handkerchief, and easily led her, for she uttered no cry, not even a sigh, but followed him with her head still drooping upon her bosom, and as if plunged in profound somnambulism.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPANIARD

Meantime, a scene of different nature was passing in the tent of Cinq-Mars; the words of the King, the first balm to his wounds, had been followed by the anxious care of the



surgeons of the court. A spent ball, easily extracted, had been the only cause of his accident. He was allowed to travel and all was ready. The invalid had received up to midnight friendly or interested visits; among the first were those of little Gondi and of Fontrailles, who were also preparing to quit Perpignan for Paris. The ex-page, Olivier d'Entraigues, joined with them in complimenting the fortunate volunteer, whom the King seemed to have distinguished. The habitual coldness of the Prince toward all who surrounded him having caused those who knew of them to regard the few words he had spoken as assured signs of high favor, all came to congratulate him.

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At length, released from visitors, he lay upon his camp-bed. De Thou sat by his side, holding his hand, and Grandchamp at his feet, still grumbling at the numerous interruptions that had fatigued his wounded master. Cinq-Mars himself tasted one of those moments of calm and hope, which so refresh the soul as well as the body. His free hand secretly pressed the gold cross that hung next to his heart, the beloved donor of which he was so soon to behold. Outwardly, he listened with kindly looks to the counsels of the young magistrate; but his inward thoughts were all turned toward the object of his journey—the object, also, of his life. The grave De Thou went on in a calm, gentle voice:

“I shall soon follow you to Paris. I am happier than you at seeing the King take you there with him. You are right in looking upon it as the beginning of a friendship which must be turned to profit. I have reflected deeply on the secret causes of your ambition, and I think I have divined your heart. Yes; that feeling of love for France, which made it beat in your earliest youth, must have gained greater strength. You would be near the King in order to serve your country, in order to put in action those golden dreams of your early years. The thought is a vast one, and worthy of you! I admire you; I bow before you. To approach the monarch with the chivalrous devotion of our fathers, with a heart full of candor, and prepared for any sacrifice; to receive the confidences of his soul; to pour into his those of his subjects; to soften the sorrows of the King by telling him the confidence his people have in him; to cure the wounds of the people by laying them open to its master, and by the intervention of your favor thus to reestablish that intercourse of love between the father and his children which for eighteen years has been interrupted by a man whose heart is marble; for this noble enterprise, to expose yourself to all the horrors of his vengeance and, what is even worse, to brave all the perfidious calumnies which pursue the favorite to the very steps of the throne—this dream was worthy of you.

“Pursue it, my friend,” De Thou continued. “Never become discouraged. Speak loudly to the King of the merit and misfortunes of his most illustrious friends who are trampled on. Tell him fearlessly that his old nobility have never conspired against him; and that from the young Montmorency to the amiable Comte de Soissons, all have opposed the minister, and never the monarch. Tell him that the old families of France were born with his race; that in striking them he affects the whole nation; and that, should he destroy them, his own race will suffer, that it will stand alone exposed to the blast of time and events, as an old oak trembling and exposed to the wind of the plain, when the forest which surrounded and supported it has been destroyed. Yes!” cried De Thou, growing animated, “this aim is a fine and noble one. Go on in your course with

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a resolute step; expel even that secret shame, that shyness, which a noble soul experiences before it can resolve upon flattering—upon paying what the world calls its court. Alas, kings are accustomed to these continual expressions of false admiration for them! Look upon them as a new language which must be learned—a language hitherto foreign to your lips, but which, believe me, may be nobly spoken, and which may express high and generous thoughts.”

During this warm discourse of his friend, Cinq-Mars could not refrain from a sudden blush; and he turned his head on his pillow toward the tent, so that his face might not be seen. De Thou stopped:

“What is the matter, Henri? You do not answer. Am I deceived?”

Cinq-Mars gave a deep sigh and remained silent.

“Is not your heart affected by these ideas which I thought would have transported it?”

The wounded man looked more calmly at his friend and said:

“I thought, my dear De Thou, that you would not interrogate me further, and that you were willing to repose a blind confidence in me. What evil genius has moved you thus to sound my soul? I am not a stranger to these ideas which possess you. Who told you that I had not conceived them? Who told you that I had not formed the firm resolution of prosecuting them infinitely farther in action than you have put them in words? Love for France, virtuous hatred of the ambition which oppresses and shatters her ancient institutions with the axe of the executioner, the firm belief that virtue may be as skilful as crime,—these are my gods as much as yours. But when you see a man kneeling in a church, do you ask him what saint or what angel protects him and receives his prayer? What matters it to you, provided that he pray at the foot of the altars that you adore—provided that, if called upon, he fall a martyr at the foot of those 'altars? When our forefathers journeyed with naked feet toward the Holy Sepulchre, with pilgrims' staves in their hands, did men inquire the secret vow which led them to the Holy Land? They struck, they died; and men, perhaps God himself, asked no more. The pious captain who led them never stripped their bodies to see whether the red cross and haircloth concealed any other mysterious symbol; and in heaven, doubtless, they were not judged with any greater rigor for having aided the strength of their resolutions upon earth by some hope permitted to a Christian—some second and secret thought, more human, and nearer the mortal heart.”

De Thou smiled and slightly blushed, lowering his eyes.



“My friend,” he answered, gravely; “this excitement may be injurious to you. Let us not continue this subject; let us not mingle God and heaven in our discourse. It is not well; and draw the coverings over your shoulder, for the night is cold. I promise you,” he added, covering his young invalid with a maternal care—“I promise not to offend you again with my counsels.”

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“And I,” cried Cinq-Mars, despite the interdiction to speak, “swear to you by this gold cross you see, and by the Holy Mary, to die rather than renounce the plan that you first traced out! You may one day, perhaps, be forced to pray me to stop; but then it will be too late.”

“Very well!” repeated the counsellor, “now sleep; if you do not stop, I will go on with you, wherever you lead me.”

And, taking a prayer-book from his pocket, he began to read attentively; in a short time he looked at Cinq-Mars, who was still awake. He made a sign to Grandchamp to put the lamp out of sight of the invalid; but this new care succeeded no better. The latter, with his eyes still open, tossed restlessly on his narrow bed.

“Come, you are not calm,” said De Thou, smiling; “I will read to you some pious passage which will put your mind in repose. Ah, my friend, it is here that true repose is to be found; it is in this consolatory book, for, open it where you will, you will always see, on the one hand, man in the only condition that suits his weakness—prayer, and the uncertainty as to his destiny—and, on the other, God himself speaking to him of his infirmities! What a glorious and heavenly spectacle! What a sublime bond between heaven and earth! Life, death, and eternity are there; open it at random.”

“Yes!” said Cinq-Mars, rising with a vivacity which had something boyish in it; “you shall read to me, but let me open the book. You know the old superstition of our country—when the mass-book is opened with a sword, the first page on the left contains the destiny of him who reads, and the first person who enters after he has read is powerfully to influence the reader’s future fate.”

“What childishness! But be it as you will. Here is your sword; insert the point. Let us see.”

“Let me read myself,” said Cinq-Mars, taking one side of the book. Old Grandchamp gravely advanced his tawny face and his gray hair to the foot of the bed to listen. His master read, stopped at the first phrase, but with a smile, perhaps slightly forced, he went on to the end.

“I. Now it was in the city of Milan that they appeared.

“II. The high-priest said to them, ‘Bow down and adore the gods.’

“III. And the people were silent, looking at their faces, which appeared as the faces of angels.

“IV. But Gervais, taking the hand of Protais, cried, looking to heaven, and filled with the Holy Ghost:

“V. Oh, my brother! I see the Son of man smiling upon us; let me die first.

“VI. For if I see thy blood, I fear I shall shed tears unworthy of the Lord our God.

“VII. Then Protas answered him in these words:

“VIII. My brother, it is just that I should perish after thee, for I am older, and have more strength to see thee suffer.

“IX. But the senators and people ground their teeth at them.

“X. And the soldiers having struck them, their heads fell together on the same stone.

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"XI. Now it was in this same place that the blessed Saint Ambroise found the ashes of the two martyrs which gave sight to the blind."

"Well," said Cinq-Mars, looking at his friend when he had finished, "what do you say to that?"

"God's will be done! but we should not scrutinize it."

"Nor put off our designs for a child's play," said D'Effiat impatiently, and wrapping himself in a cloak which was thrown over him. "Remember the lines we formerly so frequently quoted, 'Justum et tenacem Propositi viruna'; these iron words are stamped upon my brain. Yes; let the universe crumble around me, its wreck shall carry me away still resolute."

"Let us not compare the thoughts of man with those of Heaven; and let us be submissive," said De Thou, gravely.

"Amen!" said old Grandchamp, whose eyes had filled with tears, which he hastily brushed away.

"What hast thou to do with it, old soldier? Thou weepest," said his master.

"Amen!" said a voice, in a nasal tone, at the entrance of the tent.

"Parbleu, Monsieur! rather put that question to his Gray Eminence, who comes to visit you," answered the faithful servant, pointing to Joseph, who advanced with his arms crossed, making a salutation with a frowning air.

"Ah, it will be he, then!" murmured Cinq-Mars.

"Perhaps I come inopportunist," said Joseph, soothingly.

"Perhaps very opportunist," said Henri d'Effiat, smiling, with a glance at De Thou. "What can bring you here, Father, at one o'clock in the morning? It should be some good work."

Joseph saw he was ill-received; and as he had always sundry reproaches to make himself with reference to all persons whom he addressed, and as many resources in his mind for getting out of the difficulty, he fancied that they had discovered the object of his visit, and felt that he should not select a moment of ill humor for preparing the way to friendship. Therefore, seating himself near the bed, he said, coldly:

"I come, Monsieur, to speak to you on the part of the Cardinal-Generalissimo, of the two Spanish prisoners you have made; he desires to have information concerning them as



soon as possible. I am to see and question them. But I did not suppose you were still awake; I merely wished to receive them from your people.”

After a forced interchange of politeness, they ordered into the tent the two prisoners, whom Cinq-Mars had almost forgotten.

They appeared—the one, young and displaying an animated and rather wild countenance, was the soldier; the other, concealing his form under a brown cloak, and his gloomy features, which had something ambiguous in their expression, under his broad-brimmed hat, which he did not remove, was the officer. He spoke first:

“Why do you make me leave my straw and my sleep? Is it to deliver me or hang me?”

“Neither,” said Joseph.



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"What have I to do with thee, man with the long beard? I did not see thee at the breach."

It took some time after this amiable exordium to make the stranger understand the right a Capuchin had to interrogate him.

"Well," he said, "what dost thou want?"

"I would know your name and your country."

"I shall not tell my name; and as for my country, I have the air of a Spaniard, but perhaps am not one, for a Spaniard never acknowledges his country."

Father Joseph, turning toward the two friends, said: "Unless I deceive myself, I have heard his voice somewhere. This man speaks French without an accent; but it seems he wishes to give us enigmas, as in the East."

"The East? that is it," said the prisoner. "A Spaniard is a man from the East; he is a Catholic Turk; his blood either flags or boils; he is lazy or indefatigable; indolence makes him a slave, ardor a tyrant; immovable in his ignorance, ingenious in his superstition, he needs only a religious book and a tyrannical master; he obeys the law of the pyre; he commands by that of the poniard. At night he falls asleep in his bloodthirsty misery, nurses fanaticism, and awakes to crime. Who is this gentleman? Is it the Spaniard or the Turk? Guess! Ah! you seem to think that I have wit, because I light upon analogy."

"Truly, gentlemen, you do me honor; and yet the idea may be carried much further, if desired. If I pass to the physical order, for example, may I not say to you, This man has long and serious features, a black and almond-shaped eye, rugged brows, a sad and mobile mouth, tawny, meagre, and wrinkled cheeks; his head is shaved, and he covers it with a black handkerchief in the form of a turban; he passes the whole day lying or standing under a burning sun, without motion, without utterance, smoking a pipe that intoxicates him. Is this a Turk or a Spaniard? Are you satisfied, gentlemen? Truly, it would seem so; you laugh, and at what do you laugh? I, who have presented this idea to you—I have not laughed; see, my countenance is sad. Ah! perhaps it is because the gloomy prisoner has suddenly become a gossip, and talks rapidly. That is nothing! I might tell you other things, and render you some service, my worthy friends.

"If I should relate anecdotes, for example; if I told you I knew a priest who ordered the death of some heretics before saying mass, and who, furious at being interrupted at the altar during the holy sacrifice, cried to those who asked for his orders, 'Kill them all! kill them all!'—should you all laugh, gentlemen? No, not all! This gentleman here, for instance, would bite his lips and his beard. Oh! it is true he might answer that he did wisely, and that they were wrong to interrupt his unsullied prayer. But if I added that he concealed himself for an hour behind the curtain of your tent, Monsieur de Cinq-Mars, to

listen while you talked, and that he came to betray you, and not to get me, what would he say? Now, gentlemen, are you satisfied? May I retire after this display?"

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The prisoner had uttered this with the rapidity of a quack vending his wares, and in so loud a voice that Joseph was quite confounded. He arose indignantly at last, and, addressing himself to Cinq-Mars, said:

“How can you suffer a prisoner who should have been hanged to speak to you thus, Monsieur?”

The Spaniard, without deigning to notice him any further, leaned toward D’Effiat, and whispered in his ear:

“I can be of no further use to you; give me my liberty. I might ere this have taken it; but I would not do so without your consent. Give it me, or have me killed.”

“Go, if you will!” said Cinq-Mars to him. “I assure you I shall be very glad;” and he told his people to retire with the soldier, whom he wished to keep in his service.

This was the affair of a moment. No one remained any longer in the tent with the two friends, except the abashed Joseph and the Spaniard. The latter, taking off his hat, showed a French but savage countenance. He laughed, and seemed to respire more air into his broad chest.

“Yes, I am a Frenchman,” he said to Joseph. “But I hate France, because she gave birth to my father, who is a monster, and to me, who have become one, and who once struck him. I hate her inhabitants, because they have robbed me of my whole fortune at play, and because I have robbed them and killed them. I have been two years in Spain in order to kill more Frenchmen; but now I hate Spain still more. No one will know the reason why. Adieu! I must live henceforth without a nation; all men are my enemies. Go on, Joseph, and you will soon be as good as I. Yes, you have seen me once before,” he continued, violently striking him in the breast and throwing him down. “I am Jacques de Laubardemont, the son of your worthy friend.”

With these words, quickly leaving the tent, he disappeared like an apparition. De Thou and the servants, who ran to the entrance, saw him, with two bounds, spring over a surprised and disarmed soldier, and run toward the mountains with the swiftness of a deer, despite various musket-shots. Joseph took advantage of the disorder to slip away, stammering a few words of politeness, and left the two friends laughing at his adventure and his disappointment, as two schoolboys laugh at seeing the spectacles of their pedagogue fall off. At last they prepared to seek a rest of which they both stood in need, and which they soon found—the wounded man in his bed, and the young counsellor in his chair.

As for the Capuchin, he walked toward his tent, meditating how he should turn all this so as to take the greatest possible revenge, when he met Laubardemont dragging the

young mad-woman by her two hands. They recounted to each other their mutual and horrible adventures.

Joseph had no small pleasure in turning the poniard in the wound of his friend's heart, by telling him of the fate of his son.

"You are not exactly happy in your domestic relations," he added. "I advise you to shut up your niece and hang your son, if you are fortunate enough to find him."

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Laubardemont replied with a hideous laugh:

“As for this idiot here, I am going to give her to an ex-secret judge, at present a smuggler in the Pyrenees at Oleron. He can do what he pleases with her—make her a servant in his posada, for instance. I care not, so that my lord never hears of her.”

Jeanne de Belfiel, her head hanging down, gave no sign of sensibility. Every glimmer of reason was extinguished in her; one word alone remained upon her lips, and this she continually pronounced.

“The judge! the judge! the judge!” she murmured, and was silent.

Her uncle and Joseph threw her, almost like a sack of corn, on one of the horses which were led up by two servants. Laubardemont mounted another, and prepared to leave the camp, wishing to get into the mountains before day.

“A good journey to you!” he said to Joseph. “Execute your business well in Paris. I commend to you Orestes and Pylades.”

“A good journey to you!” answered the other. “I commend to you Cassandra and OEdipus.”

“Oh! he has neither killed his father nor married his mother.”

“But he is on the high-road to those little pleasantries.”

“Adieu, my reverend Father!”

“Adieu, my venerable friend!”

Then each added aloud, but in suppressed tones:

“Adieu, assassin of the gray robe! During thy absence I shall have the ear of the Cardinal.”

“Adieu, villain in the red robe! Go thyself and destroy thy cursed family. Finish shedding that portion of thy blood that is in others’ veins. That share which remains in thee, I will take charge of. Ha! a well-employed night!”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Ambition is the saddest of all hopes
Assume with others the mien they wore toward him
Men are weak, and there are things which women must accomplish

CINQ MARS

By Alfred de vigny

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RIOT

“Thus with imagin’d wing our swift scene flies,
In motion of no less celerity
Than that of thought,”

exclaims the immortal Shakespeare in the chorus of one of his tragedies.

“Suppose that you have seen The well-appointed king Embark his royalty; and his brave
fleet With silken streamers the young Phoebus fanning. behold, And follow.”

With this poetic movement he traverses time and space, and transports at will the
attentive assembly to the theatre of his sublime scenes.

We shall avail ourselves of the same privilege, though without the same genius. No
more than he shall we seat ourselves upon the tripod of the unities, but merely casting
our eyes upon Paris and the old dark palace of the Louvre, we will at once pass over
the space of two hundred leagues and the period of two years.

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Two years! what changes may they not have upon men, upon their families, and, above all, in that great and so troublous family of nations, whose long alliances a single day suffices to destroy, whose wars are ended by a birth, whose peace is broken by a death! We ourselves have beheld kings returning to their dwelling on a spring day; that same day a vessel sailed for a voyage of two years. The navigator returned. The kings were seated upon their thrones; nothing seemed to have taken place in his absence, and yet God had deprived those kings of a hundred days of their reign.

But nothing was changed for France in 1642, the epoch to which we turn, except her fears and her hopes. The future alone had changed its aspect. Before again beholding our personages, we must contemplate at large the state of the kingdom.

The powerful unity of the monarchy was rendered still more imposing by the misfortunes of the neighboring States. The revolutions in England, and those in Spain and Portugal, rendered the peace which France enjoyed still more admired. Strafford and Olivares, overthrown or defeated, aggrandized the immovable Richelieu.

Six formidable armies, reposing upon their triumphant weapons, served as a rampart to the kingdom. Those of the north, in league with Sweden, had put the Imperialists to flight, still pursued by the spirit of Gustavus Adolphus, those on the frontiers of Italy had in Piedmont received the keys of the towns which had been defended by Prince Thomas; and those which strengthened the chain of the Pyrenees held in check revolted Catalonia, and chafed before Perpignan, which they were not allowed to take. The interior was not happy, but tranquil. An invisible genius seemed to have maintained this calm, for the King, mortally sick, languished at St. Germain with a young favorite; and the Cardinal was, they said, dying at Narbonne. Some deaths, however, betrayed that he yet lived; and at intervals, men falling as if struck by a poisonous blast recalled to mind the invisible power.

St.-Preuil, one of Richelieu's enemies, had just laid his "iron head" upon the scaffold without shame or fear, as he himself said on mounting it.

Meantime, France seemed to govern herself, for the prince and the minister had been separated a long time; and of these two sick men, who hated each other, one never had held the reins of State, the other no longer showed his power—he was no longer named in the public acts; he appeared no longer in the government, and seemed effaced everywhere; he slept, like the spider surrounded by his webs.

If some events and some revolutions had taken place during these two years, it must have been in hearts; it must have been some of those occult changes from which, in monarchies without firm foundation, terrible overthrows and long and bloody dissensions arise.

To enlighten ourselves, let us glance at the old black building of the unfinished Louvre, and listen to the conversation of those who inhabited it and those who surrounded it.

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It was the month of December; a rigorous winter had afflicted Paris, where the misery and inquietude of the people were extreme. However, curiosity was still alive, and they were eager for the spectacles given by the court. Their poverty weighed less heavily upon them while they contemplated the agitations of the rich. Their tears were less bitter on beholding the struggles of power; and the blood of the nobles which reddened their streets, and seemed the only blood worthy of being shed, made them bless their own obscurity. Already had tumultuous scenes and conspicuous assassinations proved the monarch's weakness, the absence and approaching end of the minister, and, as a kind of prologue to the bloody comedy of the Fronde, sharpened the malice and even fired the passions of the Parisians. This confusion was not displeasing to them. Indifferent to the causes of the quarrels which were abstruse for them, they were not so with regard to individuals, and already began to regard the party chiefs with affection or hatred, not on account of the interest which they supposed them to take in the welfare of their class, but simply because as actors they pleased or displeased.

One night, especially, pistol and gun-shots had been heard frequently in the city; the numerous patrols of the Swiss and the body-guards had even been attacked, and had met with some barricades in the tortuous streets of the Ile Notre-Dame; carts chained to the posts, and laden with barrels, prevented the cavaliers from advancing, and some musket-shots had wounded several men and horses. However, the town still slept, except the quarter which surrounded the Louvre, which was at this time inhabited by the Queen and M. le Duc d'Orleans. There everything announced a nocturnal expedition of a very serious nature.

It was two o'clock in the morning. It was freezing, and the darkness was intense, when a numerous assemblage stopped upon the quay, which was then hardly paved, and slowly and by degrees occupied the sandy ground that sloped down to the Seine. This troop was composed of about two hundred men; they were wrapped in large cloaks, raised by the long Spanish swords which they wore. Walking to and fro without preserving any order, they seemed to wait for events rather than to seek them. Many seated themselves, with their arms folded, upon the loose stones of the newly begun parapet; they preserved perfect silence. However, after a few minutes passed in this manner, a man, who appeared to come out of one of the vaulted doors of the Louvre, approached slowly, holding a dark-lantern, the light from which he turned upon the features of each individual, and which he blew out after finding the man he sought among them. He spoke to him in a whisper, taking him by the hand:

"Well, Olivier, what did Monsieur le Grand say to you?"

[The master of the horse, Cinq-Mars, was thus named by abbreviation.
This name will often occur in the course of the recital.]

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Does all go well?"

"Yes, I saw him yesterday at Saint-Germain. The old cat is very ill at Narbonne; he is going 'ad patres'. But we must manage our affairs shrewdly, for it is not the first time that he has played the torpid. Have you people enough for this evening, my dear Fontrailles?"

"Be easy; Montresor is coming with a hundred of Monsieur's gentlemen. You will recognize him; he will be disguised as a master-mason, with a rule in his hand. But, above all, do not forget the passwords. Do you know them all well, you and your friends?"

"Yes, all except the Abbe de Gondi, who has not yet arrived; but 'Dieu me pardonne', I think he is there himself! Who the devil would have known him?"

And here a little man without a cassock, dressed as a soldier of the French guards, and wearing a very black false moustache, slipped between them. He danced about with a joyous air, and rubbed his hands.

"Vive Dieu! all goes on well, my friend. Fiesco could not do better;" and rising upon his toes to tap Olivier upon the shoulder, he continued:

"Do you know that for a man who has just quitted the rank of pages, you don't manage badly, Sire Olivier d'Entraigues? and you will be among our illustrious men if we find a Plutarch. All is well organized; you arrive at the very moment, neither too soon nor too late, like a true party chief. Fontrailles, this young man will get on, I prophesy. But we must make haste; in two hours we shall have some of the archbishops of Paris, my, uncle's parishioners. I have instructed them well; and they will cry, 'Long live Monsieur! Long live the Regency! No more of the Cardinal!' like madmen. They are good devotees, thanks to me, who have stirred them up. The King is very ill. Oh, all goes well, very well! I come from Saint-Germain. I have seen our friend Cinq-Mars; he is good, very good, still firm as a rock. Ah, that is what I call a man! How he has played with them with his careless and melancholy air! He is master of the court at present. The King, they say, is going to make him duke and peer. It is much talked of; but he still hesitates. We must decide that by our movement this evening. The will of the people! He must do the will of the people; we will make him hear it. It will be the death of Richelieu, you'll see. It is, above all, hatred of him which is to predominate in the cries, for that is the essential thing. That will at last decide our Gaston, who is still uncertain, is he not?"

"And how can he be anything else?" said Fontrailles. "If he were to take a resolution to-day in our favor it would be unfortunate."

"Why so?"

“Because we should be sure that to-morrow morning he would be against us.”

“Never mind,” replied the Abbe; “the Queen is firm.”

“And she has heart also,” said Olivier; “that gives me some hope for Cinq-Mars, who, it seems to me, has sometimes dared to frown when he looked at her.”

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"Child that you are, how little do you yet know of the court! Nothing can sustain him but the hand of the King, who loves him as a son; and as for the Queen, if her heart beats, it is for the past and not for the future. But these trifles are not to the purpose. Tell me, dear friend, are you sure of your young Advocate whom I see roaming about there? Is he all right?"

"Perfectly; he is an excellent Royalist. He would throw the Cardinal into the river in an instant. Besides, it is Fournier of Loudun; that is saying everything."

"Well, well, this is the kind of men we like. But take care of yourselves, Messieurs; some one comes from the Rue Saint-Honore."

"Who goes there?" cried the foremost of the troop to some men who were advancing. "Royalists or Cardinalists?"

"Gaston and Le Grand," replied the newcomers, in low tones.

"It is Montresor and Monsieur's people," said Fontrailles. "We may soon begin."

"Yes, 'par la corbleu'!" said the newcomer, "for the Cardinalists will pass at three o'clock. Some one told us so just now."

"Where are they going?" said Fontrailles.

"There are more than two hundred of them to escort Monsieur de Chavigny, who is going to see the old cat at Narbonne, they say. They thought it safer to pass by the Louvre."

"Well, we will give him a velvet paw!" said the Abbe.

As he finished saying this, a noise of carriages and horses was heard. Several men in cloaks rolled an enormous stone into the middle of the street. The foremost cavaliers passed rapidly through the crowd, pistols in hand, suspecting that something unusual was going on; but the postilion, who drove the horses of the first carriage, ran upon the stone and fell.

"Whose carriage is this which thus crushes foot-passengers?" cried the cloakmen, all at once. "It is tyrannical. It can be no other than a friend of the Cardinal de la Rochelle."

[During the long siege of La Rochelle, this name was given to Cardinal Richelieu, to ridicule his obstinacy in commanding as General-in-Chief, and claiming for himself the merit of taking that town.]

"It is one who fears not the friends of the little Le Grand," exclaimed a voice from the open door, from which a man threw himself upon a horse.

“Drive these Cardinalists into the river!” cried a shrill, piercing voice.

This was a signal for the pistol-shots which were furiously exchanged on every side, and which lighted up this tumultuous and sombre scene. The clashing of swords and trampling of horses did not prevent the cries from being heard on one side: “Down with the minister! Long live the King! Long live Monsieur and Monsieur le Grand! Down with the red-stockings!” On the other: “Long live his Eminence! Long live the great Cardinal! Death to the factious! Long live the King!” For the name of the King presided over every hatred, as over every affection, at this strange time.

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The men on foot had succeeded, however, in placing the two carriages across the quay so as to make a rampart against Chavigny's horses, and from this, between the wheels, through the doors and springs, overwhelmed them with pistol-shots, and dismounted many. The tumult was frightful, but suddenly the gates of the Louvre were thrown open, and two squadrons of the body-guard came out at a trot. Most of them carried torches in their hands to light themselves and those they were about to attack. The scene changed. As the guards reached each of the men on foot, the latter was seen to stop, remove his hat, make himself known, and name himself; and the guards withdrew, sometimes saluting him, and sometimes shaking him by the hand. This succor to Chavigny's carriages was then almost useless, and only served to augment the confusion. The body-guards, as if to satisfy their consciences, rushed through the throng of duellists, saying:

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, be moderate!"

But when two gentlemen had decidedly crossed swords, and were in active conflict, the guard who beheld them stopped to judge the fight, and sometimes even to favor the one who he thought was of his opinion, for this body, like all France, had their Royalists and their Cardinalists.

The windows of the Louvre were lighted one after another, and many women's heads were seen behind the little lozenge-shaped panes, attentively watching the combat.

Numerous Swiss patrols came out with flambeaux.

These soldiers were easily distinguished by an odd uniform. The right sleeve was striped blue and red, and the silk stocking of the right leg was red; the left side was striped with blue, red, and white, and the stocking was white and red. It had, no doubt, been hoped in the royal chateau that this foreign troop would disperse the crowd, but they were mistaken. These impassible soldiers coldly and exactly executed, without going beyond, the orders they had received, circulating symmetrically among the armed groups, which they divided for a moment, returning before the gate with perfect precision, and resuming their ranks as on parade, without informing themselves whether the enemies among whom they had passed had rejoined or not.

But the noise, for a moment appeased, became general by reason of personal disputes. In every direction challenges, insults, and imprecations were heard. It seemed as if nothing but the destruction of one of the two parties could put an end to the combat, when loud cries, or rather frightful howls, raised the tumult to its highest pitch. The Abbe de Gondi, dragging a cavalier by his cloak to pull him down, exclaimed:

"Here are my people! Fontrailles, now you will see something worth while! Look! look already who they run! It is really charming."

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And he abandoned his hold, and mounted upon a stone to contemplate the manoeuvres of his troops, crossing his arms with the importance of a General of an army. Day was beginning to break, and from the end of the Ile St.-Louis a crowd of men, women, and children of the lowest dregs of the people was seen rapidly advancing, casting toward heaven and the Louvre strange vociferations. Girls carried long swords; children dragged great halberds and pikes of the time of the League; old women in rags pulled by cords old carts full of rusty and broken arms; workmen of every trade, the greater number drunk, followed, armed with clubs, forks, lances, shovels, torches, stakes, crooks, levers, sabres, and spits. They sang and howled alternately, counterfeiting with atrocious yells the cries of a cat, and carrying as a flag one of these animals suspended from a pole and wrapped in a red rag, thus representing the Cardinal, whose taste for cats was generally known. Public criers rushed about, red and breathless, throwing on the pavement and sticking up on the parapets, the posts, the walls of the houses, and even on the palace, long satires in short stanzas upon the personages of the time. Butcher-boys and scullions, carrying large cutlasses, beat the charge upon saucepans, and dragged in the mud a newly slaughtered pig, with the red cap of a chorister on its head. Young and vigorous men, dressed as women, and painted with a coarse vermilion, were yelling, "We are mothers of families ruined by Richelieu! Death to the Cardinal!" They carried in their arms figures of straw that looked like children, which they threw into the river.

When this disgusting mob overran the quays with its thousands of imps, it produced a strange effect upon the combatants, and entirely contrary to that expected by their patron. The enemies on both sides lowered their arms and separated. Those of Monsieur and Cinq-Mars were revolted at seeing themselves succored by such auxiliaries, and, themselves aiding the Cardinal's gentlemen to remount their horses and to gain their carriages, and their valets to convey the wounded to them, gave their adversaries personal rendezvous to terminate their quarrel upon a ground more secret and more worthy of them. Ashamed of the superiority of numbers and the ignoble troops which they seemed to command, foreseeing, perhaps, for the first time the fearful consequences of their political machinations, and what was the scum they were stirring up, they withdrew, drawing their large hats over their eyes, throwing their cloaks over their shoulders, and avoiding the daylight.

"You have spoiled all, my dear Abbe, with this mob," said Fontrailles, stamping his foot, to Gondi, who was already sufficiently nonplussed; "your good uncle has fine parishioners!"

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"It is not my fault," replied Gondi, in a sullen tone; "these idiots came an hour too late. Had they arrived in the night, they would not have been seen, which spoils the effect somewhat, to speak the truth (for I grant that daylight is detrimental to them), and we would only have heard the voice of the people 'Vox populi, vox Dei'. Nevertheless, no great harm has been done. They will by their numbers give us the means of escaping without being known, and, after all, our task is ended; we did not wish the death of the sinner. Chavigny and his men are worthy fellows, whom I love; if he is only slightly wounded, so much the better. Adieu; I am going to see Monsieur de Bouillon, who has arrived from Italy."

"Olivier," said Fontrailles, "go at once to Saint-Germain with Fournier and Ambrosio; I will go and give an account to Monsieur, with Montresor."

All separated, and disgust accomplished, with these highborn men, what force could not bring about.

Thus ended this fray, likely to bring forth great misfortunes. No one was killed in it. The cavaliers, having gained a few scratches and lost a few purses, resumed their route by the side of the carriages along the by-streets; the others escaped, one by one, through the populace they had attracted. The miserable wretches who composed it, deprived of the chief of the troops, still remained two hours, yelling and screaming until the effect of their wine was gone, and the cold had extinguished at once the fire of their blood and that of their enthusiasm. At the windows of the houses, on the quay of the city, and along the walls, the thoughtful and genuine people of Paris watched with a sorrowful air and in mournful silence these preludes of disorder; while the various bodies of merchants, dressed in black and preceded by their provosts, walked slowly and courageously through the populace toward the Palais de justice, where the parliament was to assemble, to make complaint of these terrible nocturnal scenes.

The apartments of Gaston d'Orleans were in great confusion. This Prince occupied the wing of the Louvre parallel with the Tuileries; and his windows looked into the court on one side, and on the other over a mass of little houses and narrow streets which almost entirely covered the place. He had risen precipitately, awakened suddenly by the report of the firearms, had thrust his feet into large square-toed slippers with high heels, and, wrapped in a large silk dressing-gown, covered with golden ornaments embroidered in relief, walked to and fro in his bedroom, sending every minute a fresh lackey to see what was going on, and ordering them immediately to go for the Abbe de la Riviere, his general counsellor; but he was unfortunately out of Paris. At every pistol-shot this timid Prince rushed to the windows, without seeing anything but some flambeaux, which were carried quickly along. It was in vain he was told that the cries he heard were in his favor; he did not cease to walk up and down the apartments, in the greatest disorder-his long black hair dishevelled, and his blue eyes open and enlarged by disquiet and terror. He was still thus when Montresor and Fontrailles at length arrived and found him beating his breast, and repeating a thousand times, "Mea culpa, mea culpa!"

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"You have come at last!" he exclaimed from a distance, running to meet them. "Come! quick! What is going on? What are they doing there? Who are these assassins? What are these cries?"

"They cry, 'Long live Monsieur!'"

Gaston, without appearing to hear, and holding the door of his chamber open for an instant, that his voice might reach the galleries in which were the people of his household, continued to cry with all his strength, gesticulating violently:

"I know nothing of all this, and I have authorized nothing. I will not hear anything! I will not know anything! I will never enter into any project! These are rioters who make all this noise; do not speak to me of them, if you wish to be well received here. I am the enemy of no man; I detest such scenes!"

Fontrailles, who knew the man with whom he had to deal, said nothing, but entered with his friend, that Monsieur might have time to discharge his first fury; and when all was said, and the door carefully shut, he began to speak:

"Monseigneur," said he, "we come to ask you a thousand pardons for the impertinence of these people, who will persist in crying out that they desire the death of your enemy, and that they would even wish to make you regent should we have the misfortune to lose his Majesty. Yes, the people are always frank in their discourse; but they are so numerous that all our efforts could not restrain them. It was truly a cry from the heart—an explosion of love, which reason could not restrain, and which escaped all bounds."

"But what has happened, then?" interrupted Gaston, somewhat calmed. "What have they been doing these four hours that I have heard them?"

"That love," said Montresor, coldly, "as Monsieur de Fontrailles had the honor of telling you, so escaped all rule and bounds that we ourselves were carried away by it, and felt seized with that enthusiasm which always transports us at the mere name of Monsieur, and which leads us on to things which we had not premeditated."

"But what, then, have you done?" said the Prince.

"Those things," replied Fontrailles, "of which Monsieur de Montresor had the honor to speak to Monsieur are precisely those which I foresaw here yesterday evening, when I had the honor of conversing with you."

"That is not the question," interrupted Gaston. "You cannot say that I have ordered or authorized anything. I meddle with nothing; I know nothing of government."



“I admit,” continued Fontrailles, “that your Highness ordered nothing, but you permitted me to tell you that I foresaw that this night would be a troubled one about two o’clock, and I hoped that your astonishment would not have been too great.”

The Prince, recovering himself little by little, and seeing that he did not alarm the two champions, having also upon his conscience and reading in their eyes the recollection of the consent which he had given them the evening before, sat down upon the side of his bed, crossed his arms, and, looking at them with the air of a judge, again said in a commanding tone:

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"But what, then, have you done?"

"Why, hardly anything, Monseigneur," said Fontrailles. "Chance led us to meet in the crowd some of our friends who had a quarrel with Monsieur de Chavigny's coachman, who was driving over them. A few hot words ensued and rough gestures, and a few scratches, which kept Monsieur de Chavigny waiting, and that is all."

"Absolutely all," repeated Montresor.

"What, all?" exclaimed Gaston, much moved, and tramping about the chamber. "And is it, then, nothing to stop the carriage of a friend of the Cardinal-Duke? I do not like such scenes. I have already told you so. I do not hate the Cardinal; he is certainly a great politician, a very great politician. You have compromised me horribly; it is known that Montresor is with me. If he has been recognized, they will say that I sent him."

"Chance," said Montresor, "threw in my way this peasant's dress, which Monsieur may see under my cloak, and which, for that reason, I preferred to any other."

Gaston breathed again.

"You are sure, then, that you have not been recognized. You understand, my dear friend, how painful it would be to me. You must admit yourself—"

"Sure of it!" exclaimed the Prince's gentleman. "I would stake my head and my share in Paradise that no one has seen my features or called my by my name."

"Well," continued Gaston, again seating himself on his bed, and assuming a calmer air, in which even a slight satisfaction was visible, "tell me, then, what has happened."

Fontrailles took upon himself the recital, in which, as we may suppose, the populace played a great part and Monsieur's people none, and in his peroration he said:

"From our windows even, Monseigneur, respectable mothers of families might have been seen, driven by despair, throwing their children into the Seine, cursing Richelieu."

"Ah, it is dreadful!" exclaimed the Prince, indignant, or feigning to be so, and to believe in these excesses. "Is it, then, true that he is so generally detested? But we must allow that he deserves it. What! his ambition and avarice have, then, reduced to this extremity the good inhabitants of Paris, whom I love so much."

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the orator. "And it is not Paris alone, it is all France, which, with us, entreats you to decide upon delivering her from this tyrant. All is ready; nothing is wanting but a sign from your august head to annihilate this pygmy, who has attempted to assault the royal house itself."



“Alas! Heaven is my witness that I myself forgive him!” answered Gaston, raising up his eyes. “But I can no longer bear the cries of the people. Yes, I will help them; that is to say,” continued the Prince, “so that my dignity is not compromised, and that my name does not appear in the matter.”

“Well, but it is precisely that which we want,” exclaimed Fontrailles, a little more at his ease.

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"See, Monseigneur, there are already some names to put after yours, who will not fear to sign. I will tell you them immediately, if you wish it."

"But—but," said the Duc d'Orleans, timidly, "do you know that it is a conspiracy which you propose to me so coolly?"

"Fie, Monseigneur, men of honor like us! a conspiracy! Oh! not at all; a league at the utmost, a slight combination to give a direction to the unanimous wish of the nation and the court—that is all."

"But that is not so clear, for, after all, this affair will be neither general nor public; therefore, it is a conspiracy. You will not avow that you are concerned in it."

"I, Monseigneur! Excuse me to all the world, since the kingdom is already in it, and I am of the kingdom. And who would not sign his name after that of Messieurs de Bouillon and Cinq-Mars?"

"After, perhaps, not before," said Gaston, fixing his eyes upon Fontrailles more keenly than he had expected.

The latter hesitated a moment.

"Well, then, what would Monseigneur do should I tell him the names after which he could sign his?"

"Ha! ha! this is amusing," answered the Prince, laughing; "know you not that above mine there are not many? I see but one."

"And if there be one, will Monseigneur promise to sign that of Gaston beneath it?"

"Ah, parbleu! with all my heart. I risk nothing there, for I see none but that of the King, who surely is not of the party."

"Well, from this moment permit us," said Montresor, "to take you at your word, and deign at present to consent to two things only: to see Monsieur de Bouillon in the Queen's apartments, and Monsieur the master of the horse at the King's palace."

"Agreed!" said Monsieur, gayly, tapping Montresor on the shoulder. "I will to-day wait on my sister-in-law at her toilette, and I will invite my brother to hunt the stag with me at Chambord."

The two friends asked nothing further, and were themselves surprised at their work. They never had seen so much resolution in their chief. Accordingly, fearing to lead him to a topic which might divert him from the path he had adopted, they hastened to turn

the conversation upon other subjects, and retired in delight, leaving as their last words in his ear that they relied upon his keeping his promise.

CHAPTER XV

THE ALCOVE

While a prince was thus reassured with difficulty by those who surrounded him, and allowed them to see a terror which might have proved contagious, a princess more exposed to accidents, more isolated by the indifference of her husband, weaker by nature and by the timidity which is the result of the absence of happiness, on her side set the example of the calmest courage and the most pious resignation, and tranquillized her terrified suite; this was the Queen. Having slept hardly

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an hour, she heard shrill cries behind the doors and the thick tapestries of her chamber. She ordered her women to open the door, and the Duchesse de Chevreuse, in her night attire, and wrapped in a great cloak, fell, nearly fainting, at the foot of her bed, followed by four of her ladies-in-waiting and three of the women of the bed-chamber. Her delicate feet were bare, and bleeding from a wound she had received in running.

She cried, weeping like a child, that a pistol-shot had broken her shutters and her window-panes, and had wounded her; she entreated the Queen to send her into exile, where she would be more tranquil than in a country where they wished to assassinate her because she was the friend of her Majesty.

Her hair was in great disorder, and fell to her feet. It was her chief beauty; and the young Queen thought that this toilette was less the result of chance than might have been imagined.

"Well, my dear, what has happened?" she said to her with sang-froid. "You look like a Magdalen, but in her youth, and before she repented. It is probable that if they wish to harm any one here it is I; calm yourself."

"No, Madame! save me, protect me! it is Richelieu who pursues me, I am sure!"

The sound of pistols, which was then heard more distinctly, convinced the Queen that the terrors of Madame de Chevreuse were not vain.

"Come and dress me, Madame de Motteville!" cried she. But that lady had completely lost her self-possession, and, opening one of those immense ebony coffers which then answered the purpose of wardrobes, took from it a casket of the Princess's diamonds to save it, and did not listen to her. The other women had seen on a window the reflection of torches, and, imagining that the palace was on fire, threw jewels, laces, golden vases, and even the china, into sheets which they intended to lower into the street. At this moment Madame de Guemenee arrived, a little more dressed than the Duchesse de Chevreuse, but taking events still more tragically. Her terror inspired the Queen with a slight degree of fear, because of the ceremonious and placid character she was known to possess. She entered without curtsying, pale as a spectre, and said with volubility:

"Madame, it is time to make our confession. The Louvre is attacked, and all the populace are arriving from the city, I have been told."

Terror silenced and rendered motionless all the persons present.

“We shall die!” exclaimed the Duchesse de Chevreuse, still on her knees. “Ah, my God! why did I leave England? Yes, let us confess. I confess aloud. I have loved—I have been loved by—”

“Well,” said the Queen, “I do not undertake to hear your confession to the end. That would not perhaps be the least of my dangers, of which, however, you think little.”

The coolness of Anne of Austria, and this last severe observation, however, restored a little calm to this beautiful personage, who rose in confusion, and perceiving the disordered state of her toilet, went to repair it as she best could in a closet near by.

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"Dona Stefania," said the Queen to one of her women, the only Spaniard whom she had retained, "go seek the captain of the guards. It is time that I should see men at last, and hear something reasonable."

She said this in Spanish, and the mystery of this order, spoken in a tongue which the ladies did not understand, restored those in the chamber to their senses.

The waiting-woman was telling her beads, but she rose from the corner of the alcove in which she had sought refuge, and hastened to obey her mistress.

The signs of revolt and the evidences of terror became meantime more distinct. In the great court of the Louvre was heard the trampling of the horses of the guards, the orders of the chiefs, the rolling of the Queen's carriages, which were being prepared, should it be necessary to fly. The rattling of the iron chains dragged along the pavement to form barricades in case of an attack, hurried steps in the corridor, the clash of arms, the confused cries of the people, which rose and fell, went and came again, like the noise of the waves and the winds. The door once more opened, and this time it was to admit a very charming person.

"I expected you, dear Marie," said the Queen, extending her arms to the Duchesse de Mantua. "You have been more courageous than any of us; you are attired fit to be seen by all the court."

"I was not in bed, fortunately," replied the young Princesse de Gonzaga, casting down her eyes. "I saw all these people from the windows. O Madame, Madame, fly! I implore you to escape by the secret stairway, and let us remain in your place. They might take one of us for the Queen." And she added, with tears, "I have heard cries of death. Fly, Madame! I have no throne to lose. You are the daughter, the wife, and the mother of kings. Save yourself, and leave us here!"

"You have more to lose than I, 'm'amaie', in beauty, youth, and, I hope, in happiness," said the Queen, with a gracious smile, giving the Duchess her beautiful hands to kiss. "Remain in my alcove and welcome; but we will both remain there. The only service I accept from you, my sweet child, is to bring to my bed that little golden casket which my poor Motteville has left on the ground, and which contains all that I hold most precious."

Then, as she took it, she whispered in Marie's ear:

"Should any misfortune happen to me, swear that you will throw it into the Seine."

"I will obey you, Madame, as my benefactress and my second mother," Marie answered, weeping.

The sound of the conflict redoubled on the quays, and the windows reflected the flash of the firearms, of which they heard the explosion. The captain of the guards and the captain of the Swiss sent for orders from the Queen through Dona Stefania.

“I permit them to enter,” said the Queen. “Stand aside, ladies. I am a man in a moment like this; and I ought to be so.” Then, raising the bed-curtains, she continued, addressing the two officers:

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"Gentlemen, first remember that you answer with your heads for the life of the princes, my children. You know that, Monsieur de Guitaut?"

"I sleep across their doorway, Madame; but this disturbance does not threaten either them or your Majesty."

"Very well; do not think of me until after them," interrupted the Queen, "and protect indiscriminately all who are threatened. You also hear me, Monsieur de Bassompierre; you are a gentleman. Forget that your uncle is yet in the Bastille, and do your duty by the grandsons of the dead King, his friend."

He was a young man, with a frank, open countenance.

"Your Majesty," said he, with a slight German accent, "may see that I have forgotten my family, and not yours." And he displayed his left hand despoiled of two fingers, which had just been cut off. "I have still another hand," said he, bowing and withdrawing with Guitaut.

The Queen, much moved, rose immediately, and, despite the prayers of the Princesse de Guemenee, the tears of Marie de Gonzaga, and the cries of Madame de Chevreuse, insisted upon placing herself at the window, and half opened it, leaning upon the shoulder of the Duchesse de Mantua.

"What do I hear?" she said. "They are crying, 'Long live the King! Long live the Queen!'"

The people, imagining they recognized her, redoubled their cries at this moment, and shouted louder than ever, "Down with the Cardinal! Long live Monsieur le Grand!"

Marie shuddered.

"What is the matter with you?" said the Queen, observing her. But as she did not answer, and trembled in every limb, this good and gentle Princess appeared not to perceive it; and, paying the greatest attention to the cries and movements of the populace, she even exaggerated an inquietude which she had not felt since the first name had reached her ear. An hour later, when they came to tell her that the crowd only awaited a sign from her hand to withdraw, she waved it graciously, and with an air of satisfaction. But this joy was far from being complete, for her heart was still troubled by many things, and, above all, by the presentiment of the regency. The more she leaned forward to show herself, the more she beheld the revolting scenes which the increasing light revealed. Terror took possession of her soul as it became necessary to appear calm and confiding; and her heart was saddened at the very gayety of her words and countenance. Exposed to all eyes, she felt herself a mere woman, and shuddered in looking at that people whom she would soon perhaps be called upon to govern, and

who already took upon themselves to demand the death of ministers, and to call upon their Queen to appear before them.

She saluted them.

A hundred and fifty years later that salute was repeated by another princess, like herself of Austrian blood, and Queen of France. The monarchy without foundation, such as Richelieu made it, was born and died between these two salutes.

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The Princess at last closed her windows, and hastened to dismiss her timid suite. The thick curtains fell again over the barred windows; and the room was no longer lighted by a day which was odious to her. Large white wax flambeaux burned in candelabra, in the form of golden arms, which stand out from the framed and flowered tapestries with which the walls were hung. She remained alone with Marie de Mantua; and reentering with her the enclosure which was formed by the royal balustrade, she fell upon her bed, fatigued by her courage and her smiles, and burst into tears, leaning her head upon her pillow. Marie, on her knees upon a velvet footstool, held one of her hands in both hers, and without daring to speak first, leaned her head tremblingly upon it; for until that moment, tears never had been seen in the Queen's eyes.

They remained thus for some minutes. The Princess, then raising herself up by a painful effort, spoke:

"Do not afflict yourself, my child; let me weep. It is such a relief to one who reigns! If you pray to God for me, ask Him to grant me sufficient strength not to hate the enemy who pursues me everywhere, and who will destroy the royal family of France and the monarchy by his boundless ambition. I recognize him in all that has taken place; I see him in this tumultuous revolt."

"What, Madame! is he not at Narbonne?—for it is the Cardinal of whom you speak, no doubt; and have you not heard that these cries were for you, and against him?"

"Yes, 'm'amie', he is three hundred leagues away from us, but his fatal genius keeps guard at the door. If these cries have been heard, it is because he has allowed them; if these men were assembled, it is because they have not yet reached the hour which he has destined for their destruction. Believe me, I know him; and I have dearly paid for the knowledge of that dark soul. It has cost me all the power of my rank, the pleasures of my age, the affection of my family and even the heart of my husband. He has isolated me from the whole world. He now confines me within a barrier of honors and respect; and formerly he dared, to the scandal of all France, to bring an accusation against myself. They examined my papers, they interrogated me, they made me sign myself guilty, and ask the King's pardon for a fault of which I was ignorant; and I owed to the devotion, and the perhaps eternal imprisonment of a faithful servant,

[His name was Laporte. Neither the fear of torture nor the hope of the Cardinal's reward could draw from him one word of the Queen's secrets.]

the preservation of this casket which you have saved for me. I read in your looks that you think me too fearful; but do not deceive yourself, as all the court now does. Be sure, my dear child, that this man is everywhere, and that he knows even our thoughts."

“What, Madame! does he know all that these men have cried under your windows, and the names of those who sent them?”

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"Yes; no doubt he knows it, or has foreseen it. He permits it; he authorizes it, to compromise me in the King's eyes, and keep him forever separated from me. He would complete my humiliation."

"But the King has not loved him for two years; he loves another."

The Queen smiled; she gazed some time in silence upon the pure and open features of the beautiful Marie, and her look, full of candor, which was languidly raised toward her. She smoothed back the black curls which shaded her noble forehead, and seemed to rest her eyes and her soul in looking at the charming innocence displayed upon so lovely a face. She kissed her cheek, and resumed:

"You do not suspect, my poor child, a sad truth. It is that the King loves no one, and that those who appear the most in favor will be the soonest abandoned by him, and thrown to him who engulfs and devours all."

"Ah, mon Dieu! what is this you tell me?"

"Do you know how many he has destroyed?" continued the Queen, in a low voice, and looking into her eyes as if to read in them all her thoughts, and to make her own penetrate there. "Do you know the end of his favorites? Have you been told of the exile of Baradas; of that of Saint-Simon; of the convent of Mademoiselle de la Fayette, the shame of Madame d'Hautfort, the death of Chalais? All have fallen before an order from Richelieu to his master. Without this favor, which you mistake for friendship, their lives would have been peaceful. But this favor is mortal; it is a poison. Look at this tapestry, which represents Semele. The favorites of Louis XIII resemble that woman; his attachment devours like this fire, which dazzles and consumes her."

But the young Duchess was no longer in a condition to listen to the Queen. She continued to fix her large, dark eyes upon her, dimmed by a veil of tears; her hands trembled in those of Anne of Austria, and her lips quivered with convulsive agitation.

"I am very cruel, am I not, Marie?" continued the Queen, in an extremely sweet voice, and caressing her like a child from whom one would draw an avowal. "Oh, yes; no doubt I am very wicked! Your heart is full; you can not bear it, my child. Come, tell me; how do matters stand with you and Monsieur de Cinq-Mars?"

At this word grief found a vent, and, still on her knees at the Queen's feet, Marie in her turn shed upon the bosom of the good Princess a deluge of tears, with childish sobs and so violent an agitation of her head and her beautiful shoulders that it seemed as if her heart would break. The Queen waited a long time for the end of this first emotion, rocking her in her arms as if to appease her grief, frequently repeating, "My child, my child, do not afflict yourself thus!"



“Ah, Madame!” she exclaimed, “I have been guilty toward you; but I did not reckon upon that heart. I have done wrong, and I shall perhaps be punished severely for it. But, alas! how shall I venture to confess to you, Madame? It was not so much to open my heart to you that was difficult; it was to avow to you that I had need to read there myself.”

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The Queen reflected a moment, laying her finger upon her lips. "You are right," she then replied; "you are quite right. Marie, it is always the first word which is the most difficult to say; and that difficulty often destroys us. But it must be so; and without this rule one would be often wanting in dignity. Ah, how difficult it is to reign! To-day I would descend into your heart, but I come too late to do you good."

Marie de Mantua hung her head without making any reply.

"Must I encourage you to speak?" said the Queen. "Must I remind you that I have almost adopted you for my eldest daughter? that after seeking to unite you with the King's brother, I prepared for you the throne of Poland? Must I do more, Marie? Yes, I must, I will. If afterward you do not open your whole heart to me, I have misjudged you. Open this golden casket; here is the key. Open it fearlessly; do not tremble as I do."

The Duchesse de Mantua obeyed with hesitation, and beheld in this little chased coffer a knife of rude form, the handle of which was of iron, and the blade very rusty. It lay upon some letters carefully folded, upon which was the name of Buckingham. She would have lifted them; Anne of Austria stopped her.

"Seek nothing further," she said; "that is all the treasure of the Queen. And it is a treasure; for it is the blood of a man who lives no longer, but who lived for me. He was the most beautiful, the bravest, the most illustrious of the nobles of Europe. He covered himself with the diamonds of the English crown to please me. He raised up a fierce war and armed fleets, which he himself commanded, that he might have the happiness of once fighting him who was my husband. He traversed the seas to gather a flower upon which I had trodden, and ran the risk of death to kiss and bathe with his tears the foot of this bed in the presence of two of my ladies-in-waiting. Shall I say more? Yes, I will say it to you—I loved him! I love him still in the past more than I could love him in the present. He never knew it, never divined it. This face, these eyes, were marble toward him, while my heart burned and was breaking with grief; but I was the Queen of France!" Here Anne of Austria forcibly grasped Marie's arm. "Dare now to complain," she continued, "if you have not yet ventured to speak to me of your love, and dare now to be silent when I have told you these things!"

"Ah, yes, Madame, I shall dare to confide my grief to you, since you are to me—"

"A friend, a woman!" interrupted the Queen. "I was a woman in my terror, which put you in possession of a secret unknown to the whole world. I am a woman by a love which survives the man I loved. Speak; tell me! It is now time."

"It is too late, on the contrary," replied Marie, with a forced smile. "Monsieur de Cinq-Mars and I are united forever."



“Forever!” exclaimed the Queen. “Can you mean it? And your rank, your name, your future—is all lost? Do you reserve this despair for your brother, the Duc de Bethel, and all the Gonzagas?”

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“For more than four years I have thought of it. I am resolved; and for ten days we have been affianced.”

“Affianced!” exclaimed the Queen, clasping her hands. “You have been deceived, Marie. Who would have dared this without the King’s order? It is an intrigue which I will know. I am sure that you have been misled and deceived.”

Marie hesitated a moment, and then said:

“Nothing is more simple, Madame, than our attachment. I inhabited, you know, the old chateau of Chaumont, with the Marechale d’Effiat, the mother of Monsieur de Cinq-Mars. I had retired there to mourn the death of my father; and it soon happened that Monsieur de Cinq-Mars had to deplore the loss of his. In this numerous afflicted family, I saw his grief only, which was as profound as mine. All that he said, I had already thought, and when we spoke of our afflictions we found them wholly alike. As I had been the first to suffer, I was better acquainted with sorrow than he; and I endeavored to console him by telling him all that I had suffered, so that in pitying me he forgot himself. This was the beginning of our love, which, as you see, had its birth, as it were, between two tombs.”

“God grant, my sweet, that it may have a happy termination!” said the Queen.

“I hope so, Madame, since you pray for me,” continued Marie. “Besides, everything now smiles upon me; but at that time I was very miserable. The news arrived one day at the chateau that the Cardinal had called Monsieur de Cinq-Mars to the army. It seemed to me that I was again deprived of one of my relatives; and yet we were strangers. But Monsieur de Bassompierre spoke without ceasing of battles and death. I retired every evening in grief, and I wept during the night. I thought at first that my tears flowed for the past, but I soon perceived that it was for the future; and I felt that they could not be the same tears, since I wished to conceal them. Some time passed in the expectation of his departure. I saw him every day; and I pitied him for having to depart, because he repeated to me every instant that he would have wished to live eternally as he then did, in his own country and with us. He was thus without ambition until the day of his departure, because he knew not whether he was—whether he was—I dare not say it to your Majesty—”

Marie blushed, cast down her humid eyes, and smiled.

“Well!” said the Queen, “whether he was beloved,—is it not so?”

“And in the evening, Madame, he left, ambitious.”

“That is evident, certainly. He left,” said Anne of Austria, somewhat relieved; “but he has been back two years, and you have seen him?”



“Seldom, Madame,” said the young Duchess, proudly; “and always in the presence of the priest, before whom I have promised to be the wife of no other than Cinq-Mars.”

“Is it really, then, a marriage? Have you dared to do it? I shall inquire. But, Heaven, what faults! how many faults in the few words I have heard! Let me reflect upon them.”

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And, speaking aloud to herself, the Queen continued, her eyes and head bent in the attitude of reflection:

“Reproaches are useless and cruel if the evil is done. The past is no longer ours; let us think of the future. Cinq-Mars is brave, able, and even profound in his ideas. I have observed that he has done much in two years, and I now see that it was for Marie. He comports himself well; he is worthy of her in my eyes, but not so in the eyes of Europe. He must rise yet higher. The Princesse de Mantua can not, may not, marry less than a prince. He must become one. By myself I can do nothing; I am not the Queen, I am the neglected wife of the King. There is only the Cardinal, the eternal Cardinal, and he is his enemy; and perhaps this disturbance—”

“Alas! it is the beginning of war between them. I saw it at once.”

“He is lost then!” exclaimed the Queen, embracing Marie. “Pardon me, my child, for thus afflicting you; but in times like these we must see all and say all. Yes, he is lost if he does not himself overthrow this wicked man—for the King will not renounce him; force alone—”

“He will overthrow him, Madame. He will do it, if you will assist him. You are the divinity of France. Oh, I conjure you, protect the angel against the demon! It is your cause, that of your royal family, that of all your nation.”

The Queen smiled.

“It is, above all, your cause, my child; and it is as such that I will embrace it to the utmost extent of my power. That is not great, as I have told you; but such as it is, I lend it to you entirely, provided, however, that this angel does not stoop to commit mortal sins,” added she, with a meaning look. “I heard his name pronounced this night by voices most unworthy of him.”

“Oh, Madame, I would swear that he knows nothing of it!”

“Ah, my child, do not speak of State affairs. You are not yet learned enough in them. Let me sleep, if I can, before the hour of my toilette. My eyes are burning, and yours also, perhaps.”

Saying these words, the amiable Queen laid her head upon the pillow which covered the casket, and soon Marie saw her fall asleep through sheer fatigue. She then rose, and, seating herself in a great, tapestried, square armchair, clasped her hands upon her knees, and began to reflect upon her painful situation. Consoled by the aspect of her gentle protectress, she often raised her eyes to watch her slumber, and sent her in secret all the blessings which love showers upon those who protect it, sometimes

kissing the curls of her blond hair, as if by this kiss she could convey to her soul all the ideas favorable to the thought ever present to her mind.

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The Queen's slumber was prolonged, while Marie thought and wept. However, she remembered that at ten o'clock she must appear at the royal toilette before all the court. She resolved to cast aside reflection, to dry her tears, and she took a thick folio volume placed upon a table inlaid with enamel and medallions; it was the 'Astree' of M. d'Urfe—a work 'de belle galanterie' adored by the fair prudes of the court. The unsophisticated and straightforward mind of Marie could not enter into these pastoral loves. She was too simple to understand the 'bergeres du Lignon', too clever to be pleased at their discourse, and too impassioned to feel their tenderness. However, the great popularity of the romance so far influenced her that she sought to compel herself to take an interest in it; and, accusing herself internally every time that she felt the ennui which exhaled from the pages of the book, she ran through it with impatience to find something to please and transport her. An engraving arrested her attention. It represented the shepherdess Astree with high-heeled shoes, a corset, and an immense farthingale, standing on tiptoe to watch floating down the river the tender Celadon, drowning himself in despair at having, been somewhat coldly received in the morning. Without explaining to herself the reason of the taste and accumulated fallacies of this picture, she sought, in turning over the pages, something which could fix her attention; she saw the word "Druid."

"Ah! here is a great character," said she. "I shall no doubt read of one of those mysterious sacrificers of whom Britain, I am told, still preserves the monuments; but I shall see him sacrificing men. That would be a spectacle of horror; however, let us read it."

Saying this, Marie read with repugnance, knitting her brows, and nearly trembling, the following:

"The Druid Adamas delicately called the shepherds Pimandre, Ligdamont, and Clidamant, newly arrived from Calais. 'This adventure can not terminate,' said he, 'but by the extremity of love. The soul, when it loves, transforms itself into the object beloved; it is to represent this that my agreeable enchantments will show you in this fountain the nymph Sylvia, whom you all three love. The high-priest Amasis is about to come from Montbrison, and will explain to you the delicacy of this idea. Go, then, gentle shepherds! If your desires are well regulated, they will not cause you any torments; and if they are not so, you will be punished by swoonings similar to those of Celadon, and the shepherdess Galatea, whom the inconstant Hercules abandoned in the mountains of Auvergne, and who gave her name to the tender country of the Gauls; or you will be stoned by the shepherdesses of Lignon, as was the ferocious Amidor. The great nymph of this cave has made an enchantment.'"

The enchantment of the great nymph was complete on the Princess, who had hardly sufficient strength to

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find out with a trembling hand, toward the end of the book, that the Druid Adamas was an ingenious allegory, representing the Lieutenant-General of Montbrison, of the family of the Papons. Her weary eyes closed, and the great book slipped from her lap to the cushion of velvet upon which her feet were placed, and where the beautiful Astree and the gallant Celadon reposed luxuriously, less immovable than Marie de Mantua, vanquished by them and by profound slumber.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONFUSION

This same morning, the various events of which we have seen in the apartments of Gaston d'Orleans and of the Queen, the calm and silence of study reigned in a modest cabinet of a large house near the Palais de justice. A bronze lamp, of a gothic shape, struggling with the coming day, threw its red light upon a mass of papers and books which covered a large table; it lighted the bust of L'Hopital, that of Montaigne the essayist, the President de Thou, and of King Louis XIII.

A fireplace sufficiently large for a man to enter and sit there was occupied by a large fire burning upon enormous andirons. Upon one of these was placed the foot of the studious De Thou, who, already risen, examined with attention the new works of Descartes and Grotius. He was writing upon his knee his notes upon these books of philosophy and politics, which were then the general subjects of conversation; but at this moment the 'Meditations Metaphysiques' absorbed all his attention. The philosopher of Touraine enchanted the young counsellor. Often, in his enthusiasm, he struck the book, uttering exclamations of admiration; sometimes he took a sphere placed near him, and, turning it with his fingers, abandoned himself to the most profound reveries of science; then, led by them to a still greater elevation of mind, he would suddenly throw himself upon his knees before a crucifix, placed upon the chimney-piece, because at the limits of the human mind he had found God. At other times he buried himself in his great armchair, so as to be nearly sitting upon his shoulders, and, placing his two hands upon his eyes, followed in his head the trace of the reasoning of Rene Descartes, from this idea of the first meditation:

"Suppose that we are asleep, and that all these particularities—that is, that we open our eyes, move our heads, spread our arms—are nothing but false illusions."

to this sublime conclusion of the third:



“Only one thing remains to be said; it is that like the idea of myself, that of God is born and produced with me from the time I was created. And certainly it should not be thought strange that God, in creating me, should have implanted in me this idea, to be, as it were, the mark of the workman impressed upon his work.”

These thoughts entirely occupied the mind of the young counsellor, when a loud noise was heard under the

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windows. He thought that some house on fire excited these prolonged cries, and hastened to look toward the wing of the building occupied by his mother and sisters; but all appeared to sleep there, and the chimneys did not even send forth any smoke, to attest that its inhabitants were even awake. He blessed Heaven for it; and, running to another window, he saw the people, whose exploits we have witnessed, hastening toward the narrow streets which led to the quay.

After examining this rabble of women and children, the ridiculous flag which led them, and the rude disguises of the men: "It is some popular fete or some carnival comedy," said he; and again returning to the corner of the fire, he placed a large almanac upon the table, and carefully sought in it what saint was honored that day. He looked in the column of the month of December; and, finding at the fourth day of this month the name of *Ste.-Barbe*, he remembered that he had seen several small cannons and barrels pass, and, perfectly satisfied with the explanation which he had given himself, he hastened to drive away the interruption which had called off his attention, and resumed his quiet studies, rising only to take a book from the shelves of his library, and, after reading in it a phrase, a line, or only a word, he threw it from him upon his table or on the floor, covered in this way with books or papers which he would not trouble himself to return to their places, lest he should break the thread of his reveries.

Suddenly the door was hastily opened, and a name was announced which he had distinguished among those at the bar—a man whom his connections with the magistracy had made personally known to him.

"And by what chance, at five o'clock in the morning, do I see Monsieur Fournier?" he cried. "Are there some unfortunates to defend, some families to be supported by the fruits of his talent, some error to dissipate in us, some virtue to awaken in our hearts? for these are of his accustomed works. You come, perhaps, to inform me of some fresh humiliation of our parliament. Alas! the secret chambers of the Arsenal are more powerful than the ancient magistracy of Clovis. The parliament is on its knees; all is lost, unless it is soon filled with men like yourself."

"Monsieur, I do not merit your praise," said the Advocate, entering, accompanied by a grave and aged man, enveloped like himself in a large cloak. "I deserve, on the contrary, your censure; and I am almost a penitent, as is Monsieur le Comte du Lude, whom you see here. We come to ask an asylum for the day."

"An asylum! and against whom?" said De Thou, making them sit down.

"Against the lowest people in Paris, who wish to have us for chiefs, and from whom we fly. It is odious; the sight, the smell, the ear, and the touch, above all, are too severely wounded by it," said M. du Lude, with a comical gravity. "It is too much!"

“Ah! too much, you say?” said De Thou, very much astonished, but not willing to show it.

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"Yes," answered the Advocate; "really, between ourselves, Monsieur le Grand goes too far."

"Yes, he pushes things too fast. He will render all our projects abortive," added his companion.

"Ah! and you say he goes too far?" replied M. de Thou, rubbing his chin, more and more surprised.

Three months had passed since his friend Cinq-Mars had been to see him; and he, without feeling much disquieted about it—knowing that he was at St.-Germain in high favor, and never quitting the King—was far removed from the news of the court. Absorbed in his grave studies, he never heard of public events till they were forced upon his attention. He knew nothing of current life until the last moment, and often amused his intimate friends by his naive astonishment—the more so that from a little worldly vanity he desired to have it appear as if he were fully acquainted with the course of events, and tried to conceal the surprise he experienced at every fresh intelligence. He was now in this situation, and to this vanity was added the feeling of friendship; he would not have it supposed that Cinq-Mars had been negligent toward him, and, for his friend's honor even, would appear to be aware of his projects.

"You know very well how we stand now," continued the Advocate.

"Yes, of course. Well?"

"Intimate as you are with him, you can not be ignorant that all has been organizing for a year past."

"Certainly, all has been organizing; but proceed."

"You will admit with us that Monsieur le Grand is wrong?"

"Ah, that is as it may be; but explain yourself. I shall see."

"Well, you know upon what we had agreed at the last conference of which he informed you?"

"Ah! that is to say—pardon me, I perceive it almost; but set me a little upon the track."

"It is useless; you no doubt remember what he himself recommended us to do at Marion de Lorme's?"

"To add no one to our list," said M. du Lude.

“Ah, yes, yes! I understand,” said De Thou; “that appears reasonable, very reasonable, truly.”

“Well,” continued Fournier, “he himself has infringed this agreement; for this morning, besides the ragamuffins whom that ferret the Abbe de Gondi brought to us, there was some vagabond captain, who during the night struck with sword and poniard gentlemen of both parties, crying out at the top of his voice, ‘A moi, D’Aubijoux! You gained three thousand ducats from me; here are three sword-thrusts for you. ‘A moi’, La Chapelle! I will have ten drops of your blood in exchange for my ten pistoles!’ and I myself saw him attack these gentlemen and many more of both sides, loyally enough, it is true—for he struck them only in front and on their guard—but with great success, and with a most revolting impartiality.”

“Yes, Monsieur, and I was about to tell him my opinion,” interposed De Lude, “when I saw him escape through the crowd like a squirrel, laughing greatly with some suspicious looking men with dark, swarthy faces; I do not doubt, however, that Monsieur de Cinq-Mars sent him, for he gave orders to that Ambrosio whom you must know—that Spanish prisoner, that rascal whom he has taken for a servant. In faith, I am disgusted with all this; and I was not born to mingle with this canaille.”

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"This, Monsieur," replied Fournier, "is very different from the affair at Loudun. There the people only rose, without actually revolting; it was the sensible and estimable part of the populace, indignant at an assassination, and not heated by wine and money. It was a cry raised against an executioner—a cry of which one could honorably be the organ—and not these howlings of factious hypocrisy, of a mass of unknown people, the dregs of the mud and sewers of Paris. I confess that I am very tired of what I see; and I have come to entreat you to speak about it to Monsieur le Grand."

De Thou was very much embarrassed during this conversation, and sought in vain to understand what Cinq-Mars could have to do with the people, who appeared to him merely merrymaking; on the other hand, he persisted in not owning his ignorance. It was, however, complete; for the last time he had seen his friend, he had spoken only of the King's horses and stables, of hawking, and of the importance of the King's huntsmen in the affairs of the State, which did not seem to announce vast projects in which the people could take a part. He at last timidly ventured to say:

"Messieurs, I promise to do your commission; meanwhile, I offer you my table and beds as long as you please. But to give my advice in this matter is very difficult. By the way, it was not the fete of Sainte-Barbe I saw this morning?"

"The Sainte-Barbe!" said Fournier.

"The Sainte-Barbe!" echoed Du Lude. "They burned powder."

"Oh, yes, yes! that is what Monsieur de Thou means," said Fournier, laughing; "very good, very good indeed! Yes, I think to-day is Sainte-Barbe."

De Thou was now altogether confused and reduced to silence; as for the others, seeing that they did not understand him, nor he them, they had recourse to silence.

They were sitting thus mute, when the door opened to admit the old tutor of Cinq-Mars, the Abbe Quillet, who entered, limping slightly. He looked very gloomy, retaining none of his former gayety in his air or language; but his look was still animated, and his speech energetic.

"Pardon me, my dear De Thou, that I so early disturb you in your occupations; it is strange, is it not, in a gouty invalid? Ah, time advances; two years ago I did not limp. I was, on the contrary, nimble enough at the time of my journey to Italy; but then fear gives legs as well as wings."

Then, retiring into the recess of a window, he signed De Thou to come to him.

"I need hardly remind you, my friend, who are in their secrets, that I affianced them a fortnight ago, as they have told you."

“Ah, indeed! Whom?” exclaimed poor De Thou, fallen from the Charybdis into the Scylla of astonishment.

“Come, come, don’t affect surprise; you know very well whom,” continued the Abbe. “But, faith, I fear I have been too complaisant with them, though these two children are really interesting in their love. I fear for him more than for her; I doubt not he is acting very foolishly, judging from the disturbance this morning. We must consult together about it.”

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"But," said De Thou, very gravely, "upon my honor, I do not know what you mean. Who is acting foolishly?"

"Now, my dear Monsieur, will you still play the mysterious with me? It is really insulting," said the worthy man, beginning to be angry.

"No, indeed, I mean it not; whom have you affianced?"

"Again! fie, Monsieur!"

"And what was the disturbance this morning?"

"You are laughing at me! I take my leave," said the Abbe, rising.

"I vow that I understand not a word of all that has been told me to-day. Do you mean Monsieur de Cinq-Mars?"

"Very well, Monsieur, very well! you treat me as a Cardinalist; very well, we part," said the Abbe Quillet, now altogether furious. And he snatched up his crutch and quitted the room hastily, without listening to De Thou, who followed him to his carriage, seeking to pacify him, but without effect, because he did not wish to name his friend upon the stairs in the hearing of his servants, and could not explain the matter otherwise. He had the annoyance of seeing the old Abbe depart, still in a passion; he called out to him amicably, "Tomorrow," as the coachman drove off, but got no answer.

It was, however, not uselessly that he had descended to the foot of the stairs, for he saw thence hideous groups of the mob returning from the Louvre, and was thus better able to judge of the importance of their movements in the morning; he heard rude voices exclaiming, as in triumph:

"She showed herself, however, the little Queen!" "Long live the good Duc de Bouillon, who is coming to us! He has a hundred thousand men with him, all on rafts on the Seine. The old Cardinal de la Rochelle is dead! Long live the King! Long live Monsieur le Grand!"

The cries redoubled at the arrival of a carriage and four, with the royal livery, which stopped at the counsellor's door, and in which De Thou recognized the equipage of Cinq-Mars; Ambrosio alighted to open the ample curtains, which the carriages of that period had for doors. The people threw themselves between the carriage-steps and the door of the house, so that Cinq-Mars had an absolute struggle ere he could get out and disengage himself from the market-women, who sought to embrace him, crying:

"Here you are, then, my sweet, my dear! Here you are, my pet! Ah, how handsome he is, the love, with his big collar! Isn't he worth more than the other fellow with the white moustache? Come, my son, bring us out some good wine this morning."



Henri d'Effiat pressed, blushing deeply the while, his friend's hand,—who hastened to have his doors closed.

"This popular favor is a cup one must drink," said he, as they ascended the stairs.

"It appears to me," replied De Thou, gravely, "that you drink it even to the very dregs."

"I will explain all this clamorous affair to you," answered Cinq-Mars, somewhat embarrassed. "At present, if you love me, dress yourself to accompany me to the Queen's toilette."

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"I promised you blind adherence," said the counsellor; "but truly I can not keep my eyes shut much longer if—"

"Once again, I will give you a full explanation as we return from the Queen. But make haste; it is nearly ten o'clock."

"Well, I will go with you," replied De Thou, conducting him into his cabinet, where were the Comte du Lude and Fournier, while he himself passed into his dressing-room.

CHAPTER XVII

TOILETTE

The carriage of the Grand Equerry was rolling rapidly toward the Louvre, when, closing the curtain, he took his friend's hand, and said to him with emotion:

"Dear De Thou, I have kept great secrets in my heart, and, believe me, they have weighed heavily there; but two fears impelled me to silence—that of your danger, and—shall I say it?—that of your counsels."

"Yet well you know," replied De Thou, "that I despise the first; and I deemed that you did not despise the second."

"No, but I feared, and still fear them. I would not be stopped. Do not speak, my friend; not a word, I conjure you, before you have heard and seen all that is about to take place. I will return with you to your house on quitting the Louvre; there I will listen to you, and thence I shall depart to continue my work, for nothing will shake my resolve, I warn you. I have just said so to the gentlemen at your house."

In his accent Cinq-Mars had nothing of the brusqueness which clothed his words. His voice was conciliatory, his look gentle, amiable, affectionate, his air as tranquil as it was determined. There was no indication of the slightest effort at control. De Thou remarked it, and sighed.

Alighting from the carriage with him, De Thou followed him up the great staircase of the Louvre. When they entered the Queen's apartment, announced by two ushers dressed in black and bearing ebony rods, she was seated at her toilette. This was a table of black wood, inlaid with tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, and brass, in an infinity of designs of very bad taste, but which give to all furniture an air of grandeur which we still admire in it. A mirror, rounded at the top, which the ladies of our time would consider small and insignificant, stood in the middle of the table, whereon were scattered jewels and necklaces.



Anne of Austria, seated before it in a large armchair of crimson velvet, with long gold fringe, was as motionless and grave as on her throne, while Dona Stefania and Madame de Motteville, on either side, lightly touched her beautiful blond hair with a comb, as if finishing the Queen's coiffure, which, however, was already perfectly arranged and decorated with pearls. Her long tresses, though light, were exquisitely glossy, manifesting that to the touch they must be fine and soft as silk. The daylight fell without a shade upon her forehead, which had no reason to dread the

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test, itself reflecting an almost equal light from its surpassing fairness, which the Queen was pleased thus to display. Her blue eyes, blended with green, were large and regular, and her vermilion mouth had that underlip of the princesses of Austria, somewhat prominent and slightly cleft, in the form of a cherry, which may still be marked in all the female portraits of this time, whose painters seemed to have aimed at imitating the Queen's mouth, in order to please the women of her suite, whose desire was, no doubt, to resemble her.

The black dress then adopted by the court, and of which the form was even fixed by an edict, set off the ivory of her arms, bare to the elbow, and ornamented with a profusion of lace, which flowed from her loose sleeves. Large pearls hung in her ears and from her girdle. Such was the appearance of the Queen at this moment. At her feet, upon two velvet cushions, a boy of four years old was playing with a little cannon, which he was assiduously breaking in pieces. This was the Dauphin, afterward Louis XIV. The Duchesse Marie de Mantua was seated on her right hand upon a stool. The Princesse de Guemenee, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, and Mademoiselle de Montbazou, Mesdemoiselles de Guise, de Rohan, and de Vendome, all beautiful and brilliant with youth, were behind her, standing. In the recess of a window, Monsieur, his hat under his arm, was talking in a low voice with a man, stout, with a red face and a steady and daring eye. This was the Duc de Bouillon. An officer about twenty-five years of age, well-formed, and of agreeable presence, had just given several papers to the Prince, which the Duc de Bouillon appeared to be explaining to him.

De Thou, after having saluted the Queen, who said a few words to him, approached the Princesse de Guemenee, and conversed with her in an undertone, with an air of affectionate intimacy, but all the while intent upon his friend's interest. Secretly trembling lest he should have confided his destiny to a being less worthy of him than he wished, he examined the Princess Marie with the scrupulous attention, the scrutinizing eye of a mother examining the woman whom her son has selected for his bride—for he thought that Marie could not be altogether a stranger to the enterprise of Cinq-Mars. He saw with dissatisfaction that her dress, which was extremely elegant, appeared to inspire her with more vanity than became her on such an occasion. She was incessantly rearranging upon her forehead and her hair the rubies which ornamented her head, and which scarcely equalled the brilliancy and animated color of her complexion. She looked frequently at Cinq-Mars; but it was rather the look of coquetry than that of love, and her eyes often glanced toward the mirror on the toilette, in which she watched the symmetry of her beauty. These observations of the counsellor began to persuade him that he was mistaken in suspecting her to be the aim of Cinq-Mars, especially when he saw that she seemed to have a pleasure in sitting at the Queen's side, while the duchesses stood behind her, and that she often looked haughtily at them.

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"In that heart of nineteen," said he, "love, were there love, would reign alone and above all to-day. It is not she!"

The Queen made an almost imperceptible movement of the head to Madame de Guemenee. After the two friends had spoken a moment with each person present, and at this sign, all the ladies, except Marie de Mantua, making profound courtesies, quitted the apartment without speaking, as if by previous arrangement. The Queen, then herself turning her chair, said to Monsieur:

"My brother, I beg you will come and sit down by me. We will consult upon what I have already told you. The Princesse Marie will not be in the way. I begged her to remain. We have no interruption to fear."

The Queen seemed more at ease in her manner and language; and no longer preserving her severe and ceremonious immobility, she signed to the other persons present to approach her.

Gaston d'Orleans, somewhat alarmed at this solemn opening, came carelessly, sat down on her right hand, and said with a half-smile and a negligent air, playing with his ruff and the chain of the Saint Esprit which hung from his neck:

"I think, Madame, that we shall fatigue the ears of so young a personage by a long conference. She would rather hear us speak of dances, and of marriage, of an elector, or of the King of Poland, for example."

Marie assumed a disdainful air; Cinq-Mars frowned.

"Pardon me," replied the Queen, looking at her; "I assure you the politics of the present time interest her much. Do not seek to escape us, my brother," added she, smiling. "I have you to-day! It is the least we can do to listen to Monsieur de Bouillon."

The latter approached, holding by the hand the young officer of whom we have spoken.

"I must first," said he, "present to your Majesty the Baron de Beauvau, who has just arrived from Spain."

"From Spain?" said the Queen, with emotion. "There is courage in that; you have seen my family?"

"He will speak to you of them, and of the Count-Duke of Olivares. As to courage, it is not the first time he has shown it. He commanded the cuirassiers of the Comte de Soissons."

"How? so young, sir! You must be fond of political wars."

“On the contrary, your Majesty will pardon me,” replied he, “for I served with the princes of the peace.”

Anne of Austria smiled at this jeu-de-mot. The Duc de Bouillon, seizing the moment to bring forward the grand question he had in view, quitted Cinq-Mars, to whom he had just given his hand with an air of the most zealous friendship, and approaching the Queen with him, “It is miraculous, Madame,” said he, “that this period still contains in its bosom some noble characters, such as these;” and he pointed to the master of the horse, to young Beauvau, and to De Thou. “It is only in them that we can place our hope for the future. Such men are indeed very rare now, for the great leveller has swung a long scythe over France.”

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"Is it of Time you speak," said the Queen, "or of a real personage?"

"Too real, too living, too long living, Madame!" replied the Duke, becoming more animated; "but his measureless ambition, his colossal selfishness can no longer be endured. All those who have noble hearts are indignant at this yoke; and at this moment, more than ever, we see misfortunes threatening us in the future. It must be said, Madame—yes, it is no longer time to blind ourselves to the truth, or to conceal it—the King's illness is serious. The moment for thinking and resolving has arrived, for the time to act is not far distant."

The severe and abrupt tone of M. de Bouillon did not surprise Anne of Austria; but she had always seen him more calm, and was, therefore, somewhat alarmed by the disquietude he betrayed. Quitting accordingly the tone of pleasantry which she had at first adopted, she said:

"How! what fear you, and what would you do?"

"I fear nothing for myself, Madame, for the army of Italy or Sedan will always secure my safety; but I fear for you, and perhaps for the princes, your sons."

"For my children, Monsieur le Duc, for the sons of France? Do you hear him, my brother, and do you not appear astonished?"

The Queen was deeply agitated.

"No, Madame," said Gaston d'Orleans, calmly; "you know that I am accustomed to persecution. I am prepared to expect anything from that man. He is master; we must be resigned."

"He master!" exclaimed the Queen. "And from whom does he derive his powers, if not from the King? And after the King, what hand will sustain him? Can you tell me? Who will prevent him from again returning to nothing? Will it be you or I?"

"It will be himself," interrupted M. de Bouillon, "for he seeks to be named regent; and I know that at this moment he contemplates taking your children from you, and requiring the King to confide them to his care."

"Take them from me!" cried the mother, involuntarily seizing the Dauphin, and taking him in her arms.

The child, standing between the Queen's knees, looked at the men who surrounded him with a gravity very singular for his age, and, seeing his mother in tears, placed his hand upon the little sword he wore.

“Ah, Monseigneur,” said the Duc de Bouillon, bending half down to address to him what he intended for the Princess, “it is not against us that you must draw your sword, but against him who is undermining your throne. He prepares an empire for you, no doubt. You will have an absolute sceptre; but he has scattered the fasces which indicated it. Those fasces were your ancient nobility, whom he has decimated. When you are king, you will be a great king. I foresee it; but you will have subjects only, and no friends, for friendship exists only in independence and a kind of equality which takes its rise in force. Your ancestors had their peers; you will not have yours. May God aid you then, Monseigneur, for man may not do it without institutions! Be great; but above all, around you, a great man, let there be others as strong, so that if the one stumbles, the whole monarchy may not fall.”

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The Duc de Bouillon had a warmth of expression and a confidence of manner which captivated those who heard him. His valor, his keen perception in the field, the profundity of his political views, his knowledge of the affairs of Europe, his reflective and decided character, all rendered him one of the most capable and imposing men of his time-the only one, indeed, whom the Cardinal-Duc really feared. The Queen always listened to him with confidence, and allowed him to acquire a sort of empire over her. She was now more deeply moved than ever.

"Ah, would to God," she exclaimed, "that my son's mind was ripe for your counsels, and his arm strong enough to profit by them! Until that time, however, I will listen, I will act for him. It is I who should be, and it is I who shall be, regent. I will not resign this right save with life. If we must make war, we will make it; for I will do everything but submit to the shame and terror of yielding up the future Louis XIV to this crowned subject. Yes," she went on, coloring and closely pressing the young Dauphin's arm, "yes, my brother, and you gentlemen, counsel me! Speak! how do we stand? Must I depart? Speak openly. As a woman, as a wife, I could have wept over so mournful a position; but now see, as a mother, I do not weep. I am ready to give you orders if it is necessary."

Never had Anne of Austria looked so beautiful as at this moment; and the enthusiasm she manifested electrified all those present, who needed but a word from her mouth to speak. The Duc de Bouillon cast a glance at Monsieur, which decided him.

"Ma foi!" said he, with deliberation, "if you give orders, my sister, I will be the captain of your guards, on my honor, for I too am weary of the vexations occasioned me by this knave. He continues to persecute me, seeks to break off my marriage, and still keeps my friends in the Bastille, or has them assassinated from time to time; and besides, I am indignant," said he, recollecting himself and assuming a more solemn air, "I am indignant at the misery of the people."

"My brother," returned the Princess, energetically, "I take you at your word, for with you, one must do so; and I hope that together we shall be strong enough for the purpose. Do only as Monsieur le Comte de Soissons did, but survive your victory. Side with me, as you did with Monsieur de Montmorency, but leap the ditch."

Gaston felt the point of this. He called to mind the well-known incident when the unfortunate rebel of Castelnaudary leaped almost alone a large ditch, and found on the other side seventeen wounds, a prison, and death in the sight of Monsieur, who remained motionless with his army. In the rapidity of the Queen's enunciation he had not time to examine whether she had employed this expression proverbially or with a direct reference; but at all events, he decided not to notice it, and was indeed prevented from doing so by the Queen, who continued, looking at Cinq-Mars:

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“But, above all, no panic-terror! Let us know exactly where we are, Monsieur le Grand. You have just left the King. Is there fear with you?”

D’Effiat had not ceased to observe Marie de Mantua, whose expressive countenance exhibited to him all her ideas far more rapidly and more surely than words. He read there the desire that he should speak—the desire that he should confirm the Prince and the Queen. An impatient movement of her foot conveyed to him her will that the thing should be accomplished, the conspiracy arranged. His face became pale and more pensive; he pondered for a moment, realizing that his destiny was contained in that hour. De Thou looked at him and trembled, for he knew him well. He would fain have said one word to him, only one word; but Cinq-Mars had already raised his head. He spoke:

“I do not think, Madame, that the King is so ill as you suppose. God will long preserve to us this Prince. I hope so; I am even sure of it. He suffers, it is true, suffers much; but it is his soul more peculiarly that is sick, and of an evil which nothing can cure—of an evil which one would not wish to one’s greatest enemy, and which would gain him the pity of the whole world if it were known. The end of his misery—that is to say, of his life—will not be granted him for a long time. His languor is entirely moral. There is in his heart a great revolution going on; he would accomplish it, and can not.

“The King has felt for many long years growing within him the seeds of a just hatred against a man to whom he thinks he owes gratitude, and it is this internal combat between his natural goodness and his anger that devours him. Every year that has passed has deposited at his feet, on one side, the great works of this man, and on the other, his crimes. It is the last which now weigh down the balance. The King sees them and is indignant; he would punish, but all at once he stops and weeps. If you could witness him thus, Madame, you would pity him. I have seen him seize the pen which was to sign his exile, dip it into the ink with a bold hand, and use it—for what?—to congratulate him on some recent success. He at once applauds himself for his goodness as a Christian, curses himself for his weakness as a sovereign judge, despises himself as a king. He seeks refuge in prayer, and plunges into meditation upon the future; then he rises terrified because he has seen in thought the tortures which this man merits, and how deeply no one knows better than he. You should hear him in these moments accuse himself of criminal weakness, and exclaim that he himself should be punished for not having known how to punish. One would say that there are spirits which order him to strike, for his arms are raised as he sleeps. In a word, Madame, the storm murmurs in his heart, but burns none but himself. The thunderbolts are chained.”

“Well, then, let us loose them!” exclaimed the Duc de Bouillon.

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"He who touches them may die of the contact," said Monsieur.

"But what a noble devotion!" cried the Queen.

"How I should admire the hero!" said Marie, in a half-whisper.

"I will do it," answered Cinq-Mars.

"We will do it," said M. de Thou, in his ear.

Young Beauvau had approached the Duc de Bouillon.

"Monsieur," said he, "do you forget what follows?"

"No, 'pardieu'! I do not forget it," replied the latter, in a low voice; then, addressing the Queen, "Madame," said he, "accept the offer of Monsieur le Grand. He is more in a position to sway the King than either you or I; but hold yourself prepared, for the Cardinal is too wary to be caught sleeping. I do not believe in his illness. I have no faith in the silence and immobility of which he has sought to persuade us these two years past. I would not believe in his death even, unless I had myself thrown his head into the sea, like that of the giant in Ariosto. Hold yourself ready to meet all contingencies, and let us, meanwhile, hasten our operations. I have shown my plans to Monsieur just now; I will give you a summary of them. I offer you Sedan, Madame, for yourself, and for Messeigneurs, your sons. The army of Italy is mine; I will recall it if necessary. Monsieur le Grand is master of half the camp of Perpignan. All the old Huguenots of La Rochelle and the South are ready to come to him at the first nod. All has been organized for a year past, by my care, to meet events."

"I should not hesitate," said the Queen, "to place myself in your hands, to save my children, if any misfortune should happen to the King. But in this general plan you forget Paris."

"It is ours on every side; the people by the archbishop, without his suspecting it, and by Monsieur de Beaufort, who is its king; the troops by your guards and those of Monsieur, who shall be chief in command, if he please."

"I! I! oh, that positively can not be! I have not enough people, and I must have a retreat stronger than Sedan," said Gaston.

"It suffices for the Queen," replied M. de Bouillon.

"Ah, that may be! but my sister does not risk so much as a man who draws the sword. Do you know that these are bold measures you propose?"

"What, even if we have the King on our side?" asked Anne of Austria.

“Yes, Madame, yes; we do not know how long that may last. We must make ourselves sure; and I do nothing without the treaty with Spain.”

“Do nothing, then,” said the Queen, coloring deeply; “for certainly I will never hear that spoken of.”

“And yet, Madame, it were more prudent, and Monsieur is right,” said the Duc de Bouillon; “for the Count-Duke of San Lucra offers us seventeen thousand men, tried troops, and five hundred thousand crowns in ready money.”

“What!” exclaimed the Queen, with astonishment, “have you dared to proceed so far without my consent? already treaties with foreigners!”

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"Foreigners, my sister! could we imagine that a princess of Spain would use that word?" said Gaston.

Anne of Austria rose, taking the Dauphin by the hand; and, leaning upon Marie: "Yes, sir," she said, "I am a Spaniard; but I am the grand-daughter of Charles V, and I know that a queen's country is where her throne is. I leave you, gentlemen; proceed without me. I know nothing of the matter for the future."

She advanced some steps, but seeing Marie pale and bathed in tears, she returned.

"I will, however, solemnly promise you inviolable secrecy; but nothing more."

All were mentally disconcerted, except the Duc de Bouillon, who, not willing to lose the advantages he had gained, said to the Queen, bowing respectfully:

"We are grateful for this promise, Madame, and we ask no more, persuaded that after the first success you will be entirely with us."

Not wishing to engage in a war of words, the Queen courtesied somewhat less coldly, and quitted the apartment with Marie, who cast upon Cinq-Mars one of those looks which comprehend at once all the emotions of the soul. He seemed to read in her beautiful eyes the eternal and mournful devotion of a woman who has given herself up forever; and he felt that if he had once thought of withdrawing from his enterprise, he should now have considered himself the basest of men.

As soon as the two princesses had disappeared, "There, there! I told you so, Bouillon, you offended the Queen," said Monsieur; "you went too far. You can not certainly accuse me of having been hesitating this morning. I have, on the contrary, shown more resolution than I ought to have done."

"I am full of joy and gratitude toward her Majesty," said M. de Bouillon, with a triumphant air; "we are sure of the future. What will you do now, Monsieur de Cinq-Mars?"

"I have told you, Monsieur; I draw not back, whatever the consequences. I will see the King; I will run every risk to obtain his assent."

"And the treaty with Spain?"

"Yes, I—"

De Thou seized Cinq-Mars by the arm, and, advancing suddenly, said, with a solemn air:

"We have decided that it shall be only signed after the interview with the King; for should his Majesty's just severity toward the Cardinal dispense with it, we have thought it better not to expose ourselves to the discovery of so dangerous a treaty."

M. de Bouillon frowned.

"If I did not know Monsieur de Thou," said he, "I should have regarded this as a defection; but from him—"

"Monsieur," replied the counsellor, "I think I may engage myself, on my honor, to do all that Monsieur le Grand does; we are inseparable."

Cinq-Mars looked at his friend, and was astonished to see upon his mild countenance the expression of sombre despair; he was so struck with it that he had not the courage to gainsay him.

"He is right, gentlemen," he said with a cold but kindly smile; "the King will perhaps spare us much trouble. We may do good things with him. For the rest, Monseigneur, and you, Monsieur le Duc," he added with immovable firmness, "fear not that I shall ever draw back. I have burned all the bridges behind me. I must advance; the Cardinal's power shall fall, or my head."

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"It is strange, very strange!" said Monsieur; "I see that every one here is farther advanced in the conspiracy than I imagined."

"Not so, Monsieur," said the Duc de Bouillon; "we prepared only that which you might please to accept. Observe that there is nothing in writing. You have but to speak, and nothing exists or ever has existed; according to your order, the whole thing shall be a dream or a volcano."

"Well, well, I am content, if it must be so," said Gaston; "let us occupy ourselves with more agreeable topics. Thank God, we have a little time before us! I confess I wish that it were all over. I am not fitted for violent emotions; they affect my health," he added, taking M. de Beauvau's arm. "Tell us if the Spanish women are still pretty, young man. It is said you are a great gallant among them. 'Tudieu'! I'm sure you've got yourself talked of there. They tell me the women wear enormous petticoats. Well, I am not at all against that; they make the foot look smaller and prettier. I'm sure the wife of Don Louis de Haro is not handsomer than Madame de Guemenee, is she? Come, be frank; I'm told she looks like a nun. Ah! you do not answer; you are embarrassed. She has then taken your fancy; or you fear to offend our friend Monsieur de Thou in comparing her with the beautiful Guemenee. Well, let's talk of the customs; the King has a charming dwarf I'm told, and they put him in a pie. He is a fortunate man, that King of Spain! I don't know another equally so. And the Queen, she is still served on bended knee, is she not? Ah! that is a good custom; we have lost it. It is very unfortunate—more unfortunate than may be supposed."

And Gaston d'Orleans had the confidence to speak in this tone nearly half an hour, with a young man whose serious character was not at all adapted to such conversation, and who, still occupied with the importance of the scene he had just witnessed and the great interests which had been discussed, made no answer to this torrent of idle words. He looked at the Duc de Bouillon with an astonished air, as if to ask him whether this was really the man whom they were going to place at the head of the most audacious enterprise that had ever been launched; while the Prince, without appearing to perceive that he remained unanswered, replied to himself, speaking with volubility, as he drew him gradually out of the room. He feared that one of the gentlemen present might recommence the terrible conversation about the treaty; but none desired to do so, unless it were the Duc de Bouillon, who, however, preserved an angry silence. As for Cinq-Mars, he had been led away by De Thou, under cover of the chattering of Monsieur, who took care not to appear to notice their departure.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:



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A queen's country is where her throne is
All that he said, I had already thought
Always the first word which is the most difficult to say
Dare now to be silent when I have told you these things
Daylight is detrimental to them
Friendship exists only in independence and a kind of equality
I have burned all the bridges behind me
In pitying me he forgot himself
In times like these we must see all and say all
Reproaches are useless and cruel if the evil is done
Should be punished for not having known how to punish
Tears for the future
The great leveller has swung a long scythe over France
The most in favor will be the soonest abandoned by him
This popular favor is a cup one must drink
This was the Dauphin, afterward Louis XIV

CINQ MARS

By Alfred de vigny

BOOK 5.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECRET

De Thou had reached home with his friend; his doors were carefully shut, and orders given to admit no one, and to excuse him to the refugees for allowing them to depart without seeing them again; and as yet the two friends had not spoken to each other.

The counsellor had thrown himself into his armchair in deep meditation. Cinq-Mars, leaning against the lofty chimneypiece, awaited with a serious and sorrowful air the termination of this silence. At length De Thou, looking fixedly at him and crossing his arms, said in a hollow and melancholy voice:

"This, then, is the goal you have reached! These, the consequences of your ambition! You are about to banish, perhaps slay, a man, and to bring then, a foreign army into France; I am, then, to see you an assassin and a traitor to your country! By what tortuous paths have you arrived thus far? By what stages have you descended so low?"

“Any other than yourself would not speak thus to me twice,” said Cinq-Mars, coldly; “but I know you, and I like this explanation. I desired it, and sought it. You shall see my entire soul. I had at first another thought, a better one perhaps, more worthy of our friendship, more worthy of friendship—friendship, the second thing upon earth.”

He raised his eyes to heaven as he spoke, as if he there sought the divinity.

“Yes, it would have been better. I intended to have said nothing to you on the subject. It was a painful task to keep silence; but hitherto I have succeeded. I wished to have conducted the whole enterprise without you; to show you only the finished work. I wished to keep you beyond the circle of my danger; but shall I confess my weakness? I feared to die, if I have to die, misjudged by you. I can well sustain the idea of the world’s malediction, but not of yours; but this has decided me upon avowing all to you.”

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"What! and but for this thought, you would have had the courage to conceal yourself forever from me? Ah, dear Henri, what have I done that you should take this care of my life? By what fault have I deserved to survive you, if you die? You have had the strength of mind to hoodwink me for two whole years; you have never shown me aught of your life but its flowers; you have never entered my solitude but with a joyous countenance, and each time with a fresh favor. Ah, you must be very guilty or very virtuous!"

"Do not seek in my soul more than therein lies. Yes, I have deceived you; and that fact was the only peace and joy I had in the world. Forgive me for having stolen these moments from my destiny, so brilliant, alas! I was happy in the happiness you supposed me to enjoy; I made you happy in that dream, and I am only guilty in that I am now about to destroy it, and to show myself as I was and am. Listen: I shall not detain you long; the story of an impassioned heart is ever simple. Once before, I remember, in my tent when I was wounded, my secret nearly escaped me; it would have been happy, perhaps, had it done so. Yet what would counsel have availed me? I should not have followed it. In a word, 'tis Marie de Mantua whom I love."

"How! she who is to be Queen of Poland?"

"If she is ever queen, it can only be after my death. But listen: for her I became a courtier; for her I have almost reigned in France; for her I am about to fall—perhaps to die."

"Die! fall! when I have been reproaching your triumph! when I have wept over the sadness of your victory!"

"Ah! you know me but ill, if you suppose that I shall be the dupe of Fortune, when she smiles upon me; if you suppose that I have not pierced to the bottom of my destiny! I struggle against it, but 'tis the stronger I feel it. I have undertaken a task beyond human power; and I shall fail in it."

"Why, then, not stop? What is the use of intellect in the business of the world?"

"None; unless, indeed, it be to tell us the cause of our fall, and to enable us to foresee the day on which we shall fall. I can not now recede. When a man is confronted with such an enemy as Richelieu, he must overcome him or be crushed by him. Tomorrow I shall strike the last blow; did I not just now, in your presence, engage to do so?"

"And it is that very engagement that I would oppose. What confidence have you in those to whom you thus abandon your life? Have you not read their secret thoughts?"

"I know them all; I have read their hopes through their feigned rage; I know that they tremble while they threaten. I know that even now they are ready to make their peace



by giving me up; but it is my part to sustain them and to decide the King. I must do it, for Marie is my betrothed, and my death is written at Narbonne. It is voluntarily, it is with full knowledge of my fate, that I have thus placed myself between the block and supreme happiness.

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That happiness I must tear from the hands of Fortune, or die on that scaffold. At this instant I experience the joy of having broken down all doubt. What! blush you not at having thought me ambitious from a base egoism, like this Cardinal—ambitious from a puerile desire for a power which is never satisfied? I am ambitious, but it is because I love. Yes, I love; in that word all is comprised. But I accuse you unjustly. You have embellished my secret intentions; you have imparted to me noble designs (I remember them), high political conceptions. They are brilliant, they are grand, doubtless; but—shall I say it to you?—such vague projects for the perfecting of corrupt societies seem to me to crawl far below the devotion of love. When the whole soul vibrates with that one thought, it has no room for the nice calculation of general interests; the topmost heights of earth are far beneath heaven.”

De Thou shook his head.

“What can I answer?” he said. “I do not understand you; your reasoning unreasons you. You hunt a shadow.”

“Nay,” continued Cinq-Mars; “far from destroying my strength, this inward fire has developed it. I have calculated everything. Slow steps have led me to the end which I am about to attain. Marie drew me by the hand; could I retreat? I would not have done it though a world faced me. Hitherto, all has gone well; but an invisible barrier arrests me. This barrier must be broken; it is Richelieu. But now in your presence I undertook to do this; but perhaps I was too hasty. I now think I was so. Let him rejoice; he expected me. Doubtless he foresaw that it would be the youngest whose patience would first fail. If he played on this calculation, he played well. Yet but for the love that has urged me on, I should have been stronger than he, and by just means.”

Then a sudden change came over the face of Cinq-Mars. He turned pale and red twice; and the veins of his forehead rose like blue lines drawn by an invisible hand.

“Yes,” he added, rising, and clasping together his hands with a force which indicated the violent despair centred in his heart, “all the torments with which love can tear its victims I have felt in my breast. This timid girl, for whom I would shake empires, for whom I have suffered all, even the favor of a prince, who perhaps has not felt all I have done for her, can not yet be mine. She is mine before God, yet I am estranged from her; nay, I must hear daily discussed before me which of the thrones of Europe will best suit her, in conversations wherein I may not even raise my voice to give an opinion, and in which they scorn as mate for her princes of the blood royal, who yet have precedence far before me. I must conceal myself like a culprit to hear through a grating the voice of her who is my wife; in public I must bow before her—her husband, yet her servant! ’Tis too much; I can not live thus. I must take the last step, whether it elevate me or hurl me down.”

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"And for your personal happiness you would overthrow a State?"

"The happiness of the State is one with mine. I secure that undoubtedly in destroying the tyrant of the King. The horror with which this man inspires me has passed into my very blood. When I was first on my way to him, I encountered in my journey his greatest crime. He is the genius of evil for the unhappy King! I will exorcise him. I might have become the genius of good for Louis XIII. It was one of the thoughts of Marie, her most cherished thought. But I do not think I shall triumph in the uneasy soul of the Prince."

"Upon what do you rely, then?" said De Thou.

"Upon the cast of a die. If his will can but once last for a few hours, I have gained. 'Tis a last calculation on which my destiny hangs."

"And that of your Marie!"

"Could you suppose it?" said Cinq-Mars, impetuously. "No, no! If he abandons me, I sign the treaty with Spain, and then-war!"

"Ah, horror!" exclaimed the counsellor. "What, a war! a civil war, and a foreign alliance!"

"Ay, 'tis a crime," said Cinq-Mars, coldly; "but have I asked you to participate in it?"

"Cruel, ungrateful man!" replied his friend; "can you speak to me thus? Know you not, have I not proved to you, that friendship holds the place of every passion in my heart? Can I survive the least of your misfortunes, far less your death. Still, let me influence you not to strike France. Oh, my friend! my only friend! I implore you on my knees, let us not thus be parricides; let us not assassinate our country! I say us, because I will never separate myself from your actions. Preserve to me my self-esteem, for which I have labored so long; sully not my life and my death, which are both yours."

De Thou had fallen at the feet of his friend, who, unable to preserve his affected coldness, threw himself into his arms, as he raised him, and, pressing him to his heart, said in a stifled voice:

"Why love me thus? What have you done, friend? Why love me? You who are wise, pure, and virtuous; you who are not led away by an insensate passion and the desire for vengeance; you whose soul is nourished only by religion and science—why love me? What has my friendship given you but anxiety and pain? Must it now heap dangers on you? Separate yourself from me; we are no longer of the same nature. You see courts have corrupted me. I have no longer openness, no longer goodness. I meditate the ruin of a man; I can deceive a friend. Forget me, scorn me. I am not worthy of one of your thoughts; how should I be worthy of your perils?"



“By swearing to me not to betray the King and France,” answered De Thou. “Know you that the preservation of your country is at stake; that if you yield to Spain our fortifications, she will never return them to us; that your name will be a byword with posterity; that French mothers will curse it when they shall be forced to teach their children a foreign language—know you all this? Come.”

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And he drew him toward the bust of Louis XIII.

“Swear before him (he is your friend also), swear never to sign this infamous treaty.”

Cinq-Mars lowered his eyes, but with dogged tenacity answered, although blushing as he did so:

“I have said it; if they force me to it, I will sign.”

De Thou turned pale, and let fall his hand. He took two turns in his room, his arms crossed, in inexpressible anguish. At last he advanced solemnly toward the bust of his father, and opened a large book standing at its foot; he turned to a page already marked, and read aloud:

“I think, therefore, that M. de Ligneboeuf was justly condemned to death by the Parliament of Rouen, for not having revealed the conspiracy of Catteville against the State.”

Then keeping the book respectfully opened in his hand, and contemplating the image of the President de Thou, whose Memoirs he held, he continued:

“Yes, my father, you thought well.... I shall be a criminal, I shall merit death; but can I do otherwise? I will not denounce this traitor, because that also would be treason; and he is my friend, and he is unhappy.”

Then, advancing toward Cinq-Mars, and again taking his hand, he said:

“I do much for you in acting thus; but expect nothing further from me, Monsieur, if you sign this treaty.”

Cinq-Mars was moved to the heart's core by this scene, for he felt all that his friend must suffer in casting him off. Checking, however, the tears which were rising to his smarting lids, and embracing De Thou tenderly, he exclaimed:

“Ah, De Thou, I find you still perfect. Yes, you do me a service in alienating yourself from me, for if your lot had been linked to mine, I should not have dared to dispose of my life. I should have hesitated to sacrifice it in case of need; but now I shall assuredly do so. And I repeat to you, if they force me, I shall sign the treaty with Spain.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE HUNTING PARTY



Meanwhile the illness of Louis XIII threw France into the apprehension which unsettled States ever feel on the approach of the death of princes. Although Richelieu was the hub of the monarchy, he reigned only in the name of Louis, though enveloped with the splendor of the name which he had assumed. Absolute as he was over his master, Richelieu still feared him; and this fear reassured the nation against his ambitious desires, to which the King himself was the fixed barrier. But this prince dead, what would the imperious minister do? Where would a man stop who had already dared so much? Accustomed to wield the sceptre, who would prevent him from still holding it, and from subscribing his name alone to laws which he alone would dictate? These fears agitated all minds. The people in vain looked throughout the kingdom for those pillars of the nobility, at the feet of whom

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they had been wont to find shelter in political storms. They now only saw their recent tombs. Parliament was dumb; and men felt that nothing could be opposed to the monstrous growth of the Cardinal's usurping power. No one was entirely deceived by the affected sufferings of the minister. None was touched with that feigned agony which had too often deceived the public hope; and distance nowhere prevented the weight of the dreaded 'parvenu' from being felt.

The love of the people soon revived toward the son of Henri IV. They hastened to the churches; they prayed, and even wept. Unfortunate princes are always loved. The melancholy of Louis, and his mysterious sorrow interested all France; still living, they already regretted him, as if each man desired to be the depositary of his troubles ere he carried away with him the grand mystery of what is suffered by men placed so high that they can see nothing before them but their tomb.

The King, wishing to reassure the whole nation, announced the temporary reestablishment of his health, and ordered the court to prepare for a grand hunting party to be given at Chambord—a royal domain, whither his brother, the Duc d'Orleans, prayed him to return.

This beautiful abode was the favorite retreat of Louis, doubtless because, in harmony with his feelings, it combined grandeur with sadness. He often passed whole months there, without seeing any one whatsoever, incessantly reading and re-reading mysterious papers, writing unknown documents, which he locked up in an iron coffer, of which he alone had the key. He sometimes delighted in being served by a single domestic, and thus so to forget himself by the absence of his suite as to live for many days together like a poor man or an exiled citizen, loving to figure to himself misery or persecution, in order the better to enjoy royalty afterward. Another time he would be in a more entire solitude; and having forbidden any human creature to approach him, clothed in the habit of a monk, he would shut himself up in the vaulted chapel. There, reading the life of Charles V, he would imagine himself at St. Just, and chant over himself that mass for the dead which brought death upon the head of the Spanish monarch.

But in the midst of these very chants and meditations his feeble mind was pursued and distracted by contrary images. Never did life and the world appear to him more fair than in such times of solitude among the tombs. Between his eyes and the page which he endeavored to read passed brilliant processions, victorious armies, or nations transported with love. He saw himself powerful, combating, triumphant, adored; and if a ray of the sun through the large windows fell upon him, suddenly rising from the foot of the altar, he felt himself carried away by a thirst for daylight and the open air, which led him from his gloomy retreat. But returned to real life, he found there once more disgust

and ennui, for the first men he met recalled his power to his recollection by their homage.

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It was then that he believed in friendship, and summoned it to his side; but scarcely was he certain of its possession than unconquerable scruples suddenly seized upon his soul-scruples concerning a too powerful attachment to the creature, turning him from the Creator, and frequently inward reproaches for removing himself too much from the affairs of the State. The object of his momentary affection then seemed to him a despotic being, whose power drew him from his duties; but, unfortunately for his favorites, he had not the strength of mind outwardly to manifest toward them the resentment he felt, and thus to warn them of their danger, but, continuing to caress them, he added by this constraint fuel to the secret fire of his heart, and was impelled to an absolute hatred of them. There were moments when he was capable of taking any measures against them.

Cinq-Mars knew perfectly the weakness of that mind, which could not keep firmly in any path, and the weakness of a heart which could neither wholly love nor wholly hate. Thus, the position of favorite, the envy of all France, the object of jealousy even on the part of the great minister, was so precarious and so painful that, but for his love, he would have burst his golden chains with greater joy than a galley-slave feels when he sees the last ring that for two long years he has been filing with a steel spring concealed in his mouth, fall to the earth. This impatience to meet the fate he saw so near hastened the explosion of that patiently prepared mine, as he had declared to his friend; but his situation was that of a man who, placed by the side of the book of life, should see hovering over it the hand which is to indite his damnation or his salvation. He set out with Louis to Chambord, resolved to take the first opportunity favorable to his design. It soon presented itself.

The very morning of the day appointed for the chase, the King sent word to him that he was waiting for him on the Escalier du Lys. It may not, perhaps, be out of place to speak of this astonishing construction.

Four leagues from Blois, and one league from the Loire, in a small and deep valley, between marshy swamps and a forest of large holm-oaks, far from any highroad, the traveller suddenly comes upon a royal, nay, a magic castle. It might be said that, compelled by some wonderful lamp, a genie of the East had carried it off during one of the "thousand and one nights," and had brought it from the country of the sun to hide it in the land of fogs and mist, for the dwelling of the mistress of a handsome prince.

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Hidden like a treasure; with its blue domes, its elegant minarets rising from thick walls or shooting into the air, its long terraces overlooking the wood, its light spires bending with the wind, its terraces everywhere rising over its colonnades, one might there imagine one's self in the kingdom of Bagdad or of Cashmir, did not the blackened walls, with their covering of moss and ivy, and the pallid and melancholy hue of the sky, denote a rainy climate. It was indeed a genius who raised this building; but he came from Italy, and his name was Primaticcio. It was indeed a handsome prince whose amours were concealed in it; but he was a king, and he bore the name of Francois I. His salamander still spouts fire everywhere about it. It sparkles in a thousand places on the arched roofs, and multiplies the flames there like the stars of heaven; it supports the capitals with burning crowns; it colors the windows with its fires; it meanders up and down the secret staircases, and everywhere seems to devour with its flaming glances the triple crescent of a mysterious Diane—that Diane de Poitiers, twice a goddess and twice adored in these voluptuous woods.

The base of this strange monument is like the monument itself, full of elegance and mystery; there is a double staircase, which rises in two interwoven spirals from the most remote foundations of the edifice up to the highest points, and ends in a lantern or small lattice-work cabinet, surmounted by a colossal fleur-de-lys, visible from a great distance. Two men may ascend it at the same moment, without seeing each other.

This staircase alone seems like a little isolated temple. Like our churches, it is sustained and protected by the arcades of its thin, light, transparent, openwork wings. One would think the docile stone had given itself to the finger of the architect; it seems, so to speak, kneaded according to the slightest caprice of his imagination. One can hardly conceive how the plans were traced, in what terms the orders were explained to the workmen. The whole thing appears a transient thought, a brilliant revery that at once assumed a durable form—the realization of a dream.

Cinq-Mars was slowly ascending the broad stairs which led him to the King's presence, and stopping longer at each step, in proportion as he approached him, either from disgust at the idea of seeing the Prince whose daily complaints he had to hear, or thinking of what he was about to do, when the sound of a guitar struck his ear. He recognized the beloved instrument of Louis and his sad, feeble, and trembling voice faintly reechoing from the vaulted ceiling. Louis seemed trying one of those romances which he was wont to compose, and several times repeated an incomplete strain with a trembling hand. The words could scarcely be distinguished; all that Cinq-Mars heard were a few such as 'Abandon, ennui de monde, et belle flamme.

The young favorite shrugged his shoulders as he listened.

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"What new chagrin moves thee?" he said. "Come, let me again attempt to read that chilled heart which thinks it needs something."

He entered the narrow cabinet.

Clothed in black, half reclining on a couch, his elbows resting upon pillows, the Prince was languidly touching the chords of his guitar; he ceased this when he saw the grand ecuyer enter, and, raising his large eyes to him with an air of reproach, swayed his head to and fro for a long time without speaking. Then in a plaintive but emphatic tone, he said:

"What do I hear, Cinq-Mars? What do I hear of your conduct? How much you do pain me by forgetting all my counsels! You have formed a guilty intrigue; was it from you I was to expect such things—you whom I so loved for your piety and virtue?"

Full of his political projects, Cinq-Mars thought himself discovered, and could not help a momentary anxiety; but, perfectly master of himself, he answered without hesitation:

"Yes, Sire; and I was about to declare it to you, for I am accustomed to open my soul to you."

"Declare it to me!" exclaimed the King, turning red and white, as under the shivering of a fever; "and you dare to contaminate my ears with these horrible avowals, Monsieur, and to speak so calmly of your disorder! Go! you deserve to be condemned to the galley, like Rondin; it is a crime of high treason you have committed in your want of faith toward me. I had rather you were a coiner, like the Marquis de Coucy, or at the head of the Croquants, than do as you have done; you dishonor your family, and the memory of the marechal your father."

Cinq-Mars, deeming himself wholly lost, put the best face he could upon the matter, and said with an air of resignation:

"Well, then, Sire, send me to be judged and put to death; but spare me your reproaches."

"Do you insult me, you petty country-squire?" answered Louis. "I know very well that you have not incurred the penalty of death in the eyes of men; but it is at the tribunal of God, Monsieur, that you will be judged."

"Heavens, Sire!" replied the impetuous young man, whom the insulting phrase of the King had offended, "why do you not allow me to return to the province you so much despise, as I have sought to do a hundred times? I will go there. I can not support the life I lead with you; an angel could not bear it. Once more, let me be judged if I am guilty, or allow me to return to Touraine. It is you who have ruined me in attaching me to your person. If you have caused me to conceive lofty hopes, which you afterward

overthrew, is that my fault? Wherefore have you made me grand ecuyer, if I was not to rise higher? In a word, am I your friend or not? and, if I am, why may I not be duke, peer, or even constable, as well as Monsieur de Luynes, whom you loved so much because he trained falcons for you? Why am I not admitted to the council? I could speak as well as any of the old ruffs there; I have new ideas, and a better arm to serve you. It is your Cardinal who has prevented you from summoning me there. And it is because he keeps you from me that I detest him," continued Cinq-Mars, clinching his fist, as if Richelieu stood before him; "yes, I would kill him with my own hand, if need were."

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D'Effiat's eyes were inflamed with anger; he stamped his foot as he spoke, and turned his back to the King, like a sulky child, leaning against one of the columns of the cupola.

Louis, who recoiled before all resolution, and who was always terrified by the irreparable, took his hand.

O weakness of power! O caprices of the human heart! it was by this childish impetuosity, these very defects of his age, that this young man governed the King of France as effectually as did the first politician of the time. This Prince believed, and with some show of reason, that a character so hasty must be sincere; and even his fiery rage did not anger him. It did not apply to the real subject of his reproaches, and he could well pardon him for hating the Cardinal. The very idea of his favorite's jealousy of the minister pleased him, because it indicated attachment; and all he dreaded was his indifference. Cinq-Mars knew this, and had desired to make it a means of escape, preparing the King to regard all that he had done as child's play, as the consequence of his friendship for him; but the danger was not so great, and he breathed freely when the Prince said to him:

"The Cardinal is not in question here. I love him no more than you do; but it is with your scandalous conduct I reproach you, and which I shall have much difficulty to pardon in you. What, Monsieur! I learn that instead of devoting yourself to the pious exercises to which I have accustomed you, when I fancy you are at your Salut or your Angelus—you are off from Saint Germain, and go to pass a portion of the night—with whom? Dare I speak of it without sin? With a woman lost in reputation, who can have no relations with you but such as are pernicious to the safety of your soul, and who receives free-thinkers at her house—in a word, Marion de Lorme. What have you to say? Speak."

Leaving his hand in that of the King, but still leaning against the column, Cinq-Mars answered:

"Is it then so culpable to leave grave occupations for others more serious still? If I go to the house of Marion de Lorme, it is to hear the conversation of the learned men who assemble there. Nothing is more harmless than these meetings. Readings are given there which, it is true, sometimes extend far into the night, but which commonly tend to exalt the soul, so far from corrupting it. Besides, you have never commanded me to account to you for all that I do; I should have informed you of this long ago if you had desired it."

"Ah, Cinq-Mars, Cinq-Mars! where is your confidence? Do you feel no need of it? It is the first condition of a perfect friendship, such as ours ought to be, such as my heart requires."



The voice of Louis became more affectionate, and the favorite, looking at him over his shoulder, assumed an air less angry, but still simply ennuye, and resigned to listening to him.

“How often have you deceived me!” continued the King; “can I trust myself to you? Are they not fops and gallants whom you meet at the house of this woman? Do not courtesans go there?”

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“Heavens! no, Sire; I often go there with one of my friends—a gentleman of Touraine, named Rene Descartes.”

“Descartes! I know that name! Yes, he is an officer who distinguished himself at the siege of Rochelle, and who dabbles in writing; he has a good reputation for piety, but he is connected with Desbarreaux, who is a free-thinker. I am sure that you must mix with many persons who are not fit company for you, many young men without family, without birth. Come, tell me whom saw you last there?”

“Truly, I can scarcely remember their names,” said Cinq-Mars, looking at the ceiling; “sometimes I do not even ask them. There was, in the first place, a certain Monsieur—Monsieur Groot, or Grotius, a Hollander.”

“I know him, a friend of Barneveldt; I pay him a pension. I liked him well enough; but the Card—but I was told that he was a high Calvinist.”

“I also saw an Englishman, named John Milton; he is a young man just come from Italy, and is returning to London. He scarcely speaks at all.”

“I don’t know him—not at all; but I’m sure he’s some other Calvinist. And the Frenchmen, who were they?”

“The young man who wrote Cinna, and who has been thrice rejected at the Academie Francaise; he was angry that Du Royer occupied his place there. He is called Corneille.”

“Well,” said the King, folding his arms, and looking at him with an air of triumph and reproach, “I ask you who are these people? Is it in such a circle that you ought to be seen?”

Cinq-Mars was confounded at this observation, which hurt his self-pride, and, approaching the King, he said:

“You are right, Sire; but there can be no harm in passing an hour or two in listening to good conversation. Besides, many courtiers go there, such as the Duc de Bouillon, Monsieur d’Aubijoux, the Comte de Brion, the Cardinal de la Vallette, Messieurs de Montresor, Fontrailles; men illustrious in the sciences, as Mairet, Colletet, Desmarets, author of Araine; Faret, Doujat, Charpentier, who wrote the Cyropedie; Giry, Besons, and Baro, the continuer of Astree—all academicians.”

“Ah! now, indeed, here are men of real merit,” said Louis; “there is nothing to be said against them. One can not but gain from their society. Theirs are settled reputations; they’re men of weight. Come, let us make up; shake hands, child. I permit you to go there sometimes, but do not deceive me any more; you see I know all. Look at this.”

So saying, the King took from a great iron chest set against the wall enormous packets of paper scribbled over with very fine writing. Upon one was written, Baradas, upon another, D’Hautefort, upon a third, La Fayette, and finally, Cinq-Mars. He stopped at the latter, and continued:

“See how many times you have deceived me! These are the continual faults of which I have myself kept a register during the two years I have known you; I have written out our conversations day by day. Sit down.”

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Cinq-Mars obeyed with a sigh, and had the patience for two long hours to listen to a summary of what his master had had the patience to write during the course of two years. He yawned many times during the reading, as no doubt we should all do, were it needful to report this dialogue, which was found in perfect order, with his will, at the death of the King. We shall only say that he finished thus:

“In fine, hear what you did on the seventh of December, three days ago. I was speaking to you of the flight of the hawk, and of the knowledge of hunting, in which you are deficient. I said to you, on the authority of *La Chasse Royale*, a work of King Charles IX, that after the hunter has accustomed his dog to follow a beast, he must consider him as of himself desirous of returning to the wood, and the dog must not be rebuked or struck in order to make him follow the track well; and that in order to teach a dog to set well, creatures that are not game must not be allowed to pass or run, nor must any scents be missed, without putting his nose to them.

“Hear what you replied to me (and in a tone of ill-humor—mind that!) ‘Ma foi! Sire, give me rather regiments to conduct than birds and dogs. I am sure that people would laugh at you and me if they knew how we occupy ourselves.’ And on the eighth—wait, yes, on the eighth—while we were singing vespers together in my chambers, you threw your book angrily into the fire, which was an impiety; and afterward you told me that you had let it drop—a sin, a mortal sin. See, I have written below, lie, underlined. People never deceive me, I assure you.”

“But, Sire—”

“Wait a moment! wait a moment! In the evening you told me the Cardinal had burned a man unjustly, and out of personal hatred.”

“And I repeat it, and maintain it, and will prove it, Sire. It is the greatest crime of all of that man whom you hesitate to disgrace, and who renders you unhappy. I myself saw all, heard, all, at Loudun. Urbain Grandier was assassinated, rather than tried. Hold, Sire, since you have there all those memoranda in your own hand, merely reperuse the proofs which I then gave you of it.”

Louis, seeking the page indicated, and going back to the journey from Perpignan to Paris, read the whole narrative with attention, exclaiming:

“What horrors! How is it that I have forgotten all this? This man fascinates me; that’s certain. You are my true friend, Cinq-Mars. What horrors! My reign will be stained by them. What! he prevented the letters of all the nobility and notables of the district from reaching me! Burn, burn alive! without proofs! for revenge! A man, a people have invoked my name in vain; a family curses me! Oh, how unhappy are kings!”

And the Prince, as he concluded, threw aside his papers and wept.

“Ah, Sire, those are blessed tears that you weep!” exclaimed Cinq-Mars, with sincere admiration. “Would that all France were here with me! She would be astonished at this spectacle, and would scarcely believe it.”

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"Astonished! France, then, does not know me?"

"No, Sire," said D'Effiat, frankly; "no one knows you. And I myself, with the rest of the world, at times accuse you of coldness and indifference."

"Of coldness, when I am dying with sorrow! Of coldness, when I have immolated myself to their interests! Ungrateful nation! I have sacrificed all to it, even pride, even the happiness of guiding it myself, because I feared on its account for my fluctuating life. I have given my sceptre to be borne by a man I hate, because I believed his hand to be stronger than my own. I have endured the ill he has done to myself, thinking that he did good to my people. I have hidden my own tears to dry theirs; and I see that my sacrifice has been even greater than I thought it, for they have not perceived it. They have believed me incapable because I was kind, and without power because I mistrusted my own. But, no matter! God sees and knows me!"

"Ah, Sire, show yourself to France such as you are; reassume your usurped power. France will do for your love what she would never do from fear. Return to life, and reascend the throne."

"No, no; my life is well-nigh finished, my dear friend. I am no longer capable of the labor of supreme command."

"Ah, Sire, this persuasion alone destroys your vigor. It is time that men should cease to confound power with crime, and call this union genius. Let your voice be heard proclaiming to the world that the reign of virtue is about to begin with your own; and hence forth those enemies whom vice has so much difficulty in suppressing will fall before a word uttered from your heart. No one has as yet calculated all that the good faith of a king of France may do for his people—that people who are drawn so instantaneously to ward all that is good and beautiful, by their imagination and warmth of soul, and who are always ready with every kind of devotion. The King, your father, led us with a smile. What would not one of your tears do?"

During this address the King, very much surprised, frequently reddened, hemmed, and gave signs of great embarrassment, as always happened when any attempt was made to bring him to a decision. He also felt the approach of a conversation of too high an order, which the timidity of his soul forbade him to venture upon; and repeatedly putting his hand to his chest, knitting his brows as if suffering violent pain, he endeavored to relieve himself by the apparent attack of illness from the embarrassment of answering. But, either from passion, or from a resolution to strike the crowning blow, Cinq-Mars went on calmly and with a solemnity that awed Louis, who, forced into his last intrenchments, at length said:

"But, Cinq-Mars, how can I rid myself of a minister who for eighteen years past has surrounded me with his creatures?"

“He is not so very powerful,” replied the grand ecuyer; “and his friends will be his most sure enemies if you but make a sign of your head. The ancient league of the princes of peace still exists, Sire, and it is only the respect due to the choice of your Majesty that prevents it from manifesting itself.”

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"Ah, mon Dieu! thou mayst tell them not to stop on my account. I would not restrain them; they surely do not accuse me of being a Cardinalist. If my brother will give me the means of replacing Richelieu, I will adopt them with all my heart."

"I believe, Sire, that he will to-day speak to you of Monsieur le Duc de Bouillon. All the Royalists demand him."

"I don't dislike him," said the King, arranging his pillows; "I don't dislike him at all, although he is somewhat factious. We are relatives. Knowest thou, *chez ami*"—and he placed on this favorite expression more emphasis than usual—"knowest thou that he is descended in direct line from Saint Louis, by Charlotte de Bourbon, daughter of the Duc de Montpensier? Knowest thou that seven princes of the blood royal have been united to his house; and eight daughters of his family, one of whom was a queen, have been married to princes of the blood royal? Oh, I don't at all dislike him! I have never said so, never!"

"Well, Sire," said Cinq-Mars, with confidence, "Monsieur and he will explain to you during the hunt how all is prepared, who are the men that may be put in the place of his creatures, who the field-m Marshals and the colonels who may be depended upon against Fabert and the Cardinalists of Perpignan. You will see that the minister has very few for him."

"The Queen, Monsieur, the nobility, and the parliaments are on our side; and the thing is done from the moment that your Majesty is not opposed to it. It has been proposed to get rid of the Cardinal as the Marechal d'Ancre was got rid of, who deserved it less than he."

"As Concini?" said the King. "Oh, no, it must not be. I positively can not consent to it. He is a priest and a cardinal. We shall be excommunicated. But if there be any other means, I am very willing. Thou mayest speak of it to thy friends; and I on my side will think of the matter."

The word once spoken, the King gave himself up to his resentment, as if he had satisfied it, as if the blow were already struck. Cinq-Mars was vexed to see this, for he feared that his anger thus vented might not be of long duration. However, he put faith in his last words, especially when, after numberless complaints, Louis added:

"And would you believe that though now for two years I have mourned my mother, ever since that day when he so cruelly mocked me before my whole court by asking for her recall when he knew she was dead—ever since that day I have been trying in vain to get them to bury her in France with my fathers? He has exiled even her ashes."

At this moment Cinq-Mars thought he heard a sound on the staircase; the King reddened.



“Go,” he said; “go! Make haste and prepare for the hunt! Thou wilt ride next to my carriage. Go quickly! I desire it; go!”

And he himself pushed Cinq-Mars toward the entrance by which he had come.

The favorite went out; but his master’s anxiety had not escaped him.

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He slowly descended, and tried to divine the cause of it in his mind, when he thought he heard the sound of feet ascending the other staircase. He stopped; they stopped. He re-ascended; they seemed to him to descend. He knew that nothing could be seen between the interstices of the architecture; and he quitted the place, impatient and very uneasy, and determined to remain at the door of the entrance to see who should come out. But he had scarcely raised the tapestry which veiled the entrance to the guardroom than he was surrounded by a crowd of courtiers who had been awaiting him, and was fain to proceed to the work of issuing the orders connected with his post, or to receive respects, communications, solicitations, presentations, recommendations, embraces—to observe that infinitude of relations which surround a favorite, and which require constant and sustained attention, for any absence of mind might cause great misfortunes. He thus almost forgot the trifling circumstance which had made him uneasy, and which he thought might after all have only been a freak of the imagination. Giving himself up to the sweets of a kind of continual apotheosis, he mounted his horse in the great courtyard, attended by noble pages, and surrounded by brilliant gentlemen.

Monsieur soon arrived, followed by his people; and in an hour the King appeared, pale, languishing, and supported by four men. Cinq-Mars, dismounting, assisted him into a kind of small and very low carriage, called a brouette, and the horses of which, very docile and quiet ones, the King himself drove. The prickers on foot at the doors held the dogs in leash; and at the sound of the horn scores of young nobles mounted, and all set out to the place of meeting.

It was a farm called L'Ormage that the King had fixed upon; and the court, accustomed to his ways, followed the many roads of the park, while the King slowly followed an isolated path, having at his side the grand ecuyer and four persons whom he had signed to approach him.

The aspect of this pleasure party was sinister. The approach of winter had stripped well-nigh all the leaves from the great oaks in the park, whose dark branches now stood up against a gray sky, like branches of funereal candelabra. A light fog seemed to indicate rain; through the melancholy boughs of the thinned wood the heavy carriages of the court were seen slowly passing on, filled with women, uniformly dressed in black, and obliged to await the result of a chase which they did not witness. The distant hounds gave tongue, and the horn was sometimes faintly heard like a sigh. A cold, cutting wind compelled every man to don cloaks, and some of the women, putting over their faces a veil or mask of black velvet to keep themselves from the air which the curtains of their carriages did not intercept (for there were no glasses at that time), seemed to wear what is called a domino. All was languishing and sad. The only relief was that ever and anon groups of young men in the excitement of the chase flew down the avenue like the wind, cheering on the dogs or sounding their horns. Then all again became silent, as after the discharge of fireworks the sky appears darker than before.

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In a path, parallel with that followed by the King, were several courtiers enveloped in their cloaks. Appearing little intent upon the stag, they rode step for step with the King's brouette, and never lost sight of him. They conversed in low tones.

"Excellent! Fontrailles, excellent! victory! The King takes his arm every moment. See how he smiles upon him! See! Monsieur le Grand dismounts and gets into the brouette by his side. Come, come, the old fox is done at last!"

"Ah, that's nothing! Did you not see how the King shook hands with Monsieur? He's made a sign to you, Montresor. Look, Gondi!"

"Look, indeed! That's very easy to say; but I don't see with my own eyes. I have only those of faith, and yours. Well, what are they doing now? I wish to Heaven I were not so near-sighted! Tell me, what are they doing?"

Montresor answered, "The King bends his ear toward the Duc de Bouillon, who is speaking to him; he speaks again! he gesticulates! he does not cease! Oh, he'll be minister!"

"He will be minister!" said Fontrailles.

"He will be minister!" echoed the Comte du Lude.

"Oh, no doubt of it!" said Montresor.

"I hope he'll give me a regiment, and I'll marry my cousin," cried Olivier d'Entraigues, with boyish vivacity.

The Abbe de Gondi sneered, and, looking up at the sky, began to sing to a hunting tune.

"Les etourneaux ont le vent bon,
Ton ton, ton ton, ton taine, ton ton—"

"I think, gentlemen, you are more short-sighted than I, or else miracles will come to pass in the year of grace 1642; for Monsieur de Bouillon is no nearer being Prime-Minister, though the King do embrace him, than I. He has good qualities, but he will not do; his qualities are not various enough. However, I have much respect for his great and singularly foolish town of Sedan, which is a fine shelter in case of need."

Montresor and the rest were too attentive to every gesture of the Prince to answer him; and they continued:

"See, Monsieur le Grand takes the reins, and is driving."

The Abbe replied with the same air:

“Si vous conduisez ma brouette,
Ne versez pas, beau postillon,
Ton ton, ton ton, ton taine, ton ton.”

“Ah, Abbe, your songs will drive me mad!” said Fontrailles. “You’ve got airs ready for every event in life.”

“I will also find you events which shall go to all the airs,” answered Gondi.

“Faith, the air of these pleases me!” said Fontrailles, in an under voice. “I shall not be obliged by Monsieur to carry his confounded treaty to Madrid, and I am not sorry for it; it is a somewhat touchy commission. The Pyrenees are not so easily passed as may be supposed; the Cardinal is on the road.”

“Ha! Ha!” cried Montresor.

“Ha! Ha!” said Olivier.

“Well, what is the matter with you? ah, ah!” asked Gondi. “What have you discovered that is so great?”

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"Why, the King has again shaken hands with Monsieur. Thank Heaven, gentlemen, we're rid of the Cardinal! The old boar is hunted down. Who will stick the knife into him? He must be thrown into the sea."

"That's too good for him," said Olivier; "he must be tried."

"Certainly," said the Abbe; "and we sha'n't want for charges against an insolent fellow who has dared to discharge a page, shall we?" Then, curbing his horse, and letting Olivier and Montresor pass on, he leaned toward M. du Lude, who was talking with two other serious personages, and said:

"In truth, I am tempted to let my valet-de-chambre into the secret; never was a conspiracy treated so lightly. Great enterprises require mystery. This would be an admirable one if some trouble were taken with it. 'Tis in itself a finer one than I have ever read of in history. There is stuff enough in it to upset three kingdoms, if necessary, and the blockheads will spoil all. It is really a pity. I should be very sorry. I've a taste for affairs of this kind; and in this one in particular I feel a special interest. There is grandeur about it, as can not be denied. Do you not think so, D'Aubijoux, Montmort?"

While he was speaking, several large and heavy carriages, with six and four horses, followed the same path at two hundred paces behind these gentlemen; the curtains were open on the left side through which to see the King. In the first was the Queen; she was alone at the back, clothed in black and veiled. On the box was the Marechale d'Effiat; and at the feet of the Queen was the Princesse Marie. Seated on one side on a stool, her robe and her feet hung out of the carriage, and were supported by a gilt step—for, as we have already observed, there were then no doors to the coaches. She also tried to see through the trees the movements of the King, and often leaned back, annoyed by the passing of the Prince-Palatine and his suite.

This northern Prince was sent by the King of Poland, apparently on a political negotiation, but in reality, to induce the Duchesse de Mantua to espouse the old King Uladislav vi; and he displayed at the court of France all the luxury of his own, then called at Paris "barbarian and Scythian," and so far justified these names by strange eastern costumes. The Palatine of Posnania was very handsome, and wore, in common with the people of his suite, a long, thick beard. His head, shaved like that of a Turk, was covered with a furred cap. He had a short vest, enriched with diamonds and rubies; his horse was painted red, and amply plumed. He was attended by a company of Polish guards in red and yellow uniforms, wearing large cloaks with long sleeves, which hung negligently from the shoulder. The Polish lords who escorted him were dressed in gold and silver brocade; and behind their shaved heads floated a single lock of hair, which gave them an Asiatic and Tartar aspect, as unknown at the court of Louis XIII as that of the Moscovites. The women thought all this rather savage and alarming.

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Marie de Mantua was importuned with the profound salutations and Oriental elegancies of this foreigner and his suite. Whenever he passed before her, he thought himself called upon to address a compliment to her in broken French, awkwardly made up of a few words about hope and royalty. She found no other means to rid herself of him than by repeatedly putting her handkerchief to her nose, and saying aloud to the Queen:

"In truth, Madame, these gentlemen have an odor about them that makes one quite ill."

"It will be desirable to strengthen your nerves and accustom yourself to it," answered Anne of Austria, somewhat dryly.

Then, fearing she had hurt her feelings, she continued gayly:

"You will become used to them, as we have done; and you know that in respect to odors I am rather fastidious. Monsieur Mazarin told me, the other day, that my punishment in purgatory will consist in breathing ill scents and sleeping in Russian cloth."

Yet the Queen was very grave, and soon subsided into silence. Burying herself in her carriage, enveloped in her mantle, and apparently taking no interest in what was passing around her, she yielded to the motion of the carriage. Marie, still occupied with the King, talked in a low voice with the Marechale d'Effiat; each sought to give the other hopes which neither felt, and sought to deceive each other out of love.

"Madame, I congratulate you; Monsieur le Grand is seated with the King. Never has he been so highly distinguished," said Marie.

Then she was silent for a long time, and the carriage rolled mournfully over the dead, dry leaves.

"Yes, I see it with joy; the King is so good!" answered the Marechale.

And she sighed deeply.

A long and sad silence again followed; each looked at the other and mutually found their eyes full of tears. They dared not speak again; and Marie, drooping her head, saw nothing but the brown, damp earth scattered by the wheels. A melancholy revery occupied her mind; and although she had before her the spectacle of the first court of Europe at the feet of him she loved, everything inspired her with fear, and dark presentiments involuntarily agitated her.

Suddenly a horse passed by her like the wind; she raised her eyes, and had just time to see the features of Cinq-Mars. He did not look at her; he was pale as a corpse, and his eyes were hidden under his knitted brows and the shadows of his lowered hat. She followed him with trembling eyes; she saw him stop in the midst of the group of cavaliers who preceded the carriages, and who received him with their hats off.



A moment after he went into the wood with one of them, looking at her from the distance, and following her with his eyes until the carriage had passed; then he seemed to give the man a roll of papers, and disappeared. The mist which was falling prevented her from seeing him any more. It was, indeed, one of those fogs so frequent on the banks of the Loire.

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The sun looked at first like a small blood-red moon, enveloped in a tattered shroud, and within half an hour was concealed under so thick a cloud that Marie could scarcely distinguish the foremost horses of the carriage, while the men who passed at the distance of a few paces looked like grizzly shadows. This icy vapor turned to a penetrating rain and at the same time a cloud of fetid odor. The Queen made the beautiful Princess sit beside her; and they turned toward Chambord quickly and in silence. They soon heard the horns recalling the scattered hounds; the huntsmen passed rapidly by the carriage, seeking their way through the fog, and calling to each other. Marie saw only now and then the head of a horse, or a dark body half issuing from the gloomy vapor of the woods, and tried in vain to distinguish any words. At length her heart beat; there was a call for M. de Cinq-Mars.

"The King asks for Monsieur le Grand," was repeated about; "where can Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer be gone to?"

A voice, passing near, said, "He has just lost himself."

These simple words made her shudder, for her afflicted spirit gave them the most sinister meaning. The terrible thought pursued her to the chateau and into her apartments, wherein she hastened to shut herself. She soon heard the noise of the entry of the King and of Monsieur, then, in the forest, some shots whose flash was unseen. She in vain looked at the narrow windows; they seemed covered on the outside with a white cloth that shut out the light.

Meanwhile, at the extremity of the forest, toward Montfauult, there had lost themselves two cavaliers, wearied with seeking the way to the chateau in the monotonous similarity of the trees and paths; they were about to stop near a pond, when eight or nine men, springing from the thickets, rushed upon them, and before they had time to draw, hung to their legs and arms and to the bridles of their horses in such a manner as to hold them fixed. At the same time a hoarse voice cried in the fog:

"Are you Royalists or Cardinalists? Cry, 'Vive le Grand!' or you are dead men!"

"Scoundrels," answered the first cavalier, trying to open the holsters of his pistols, "I will have you hanged for abusing my name."

"Dios es el Senor!" cried the same voice.

All the men immediately released their hold, and ran into the wood; a burst of savage laughter was heard, and a man approached Cinq-Mars.

"Amigo, do you not recognize me? 'Tis but a joke of Jacques, the Spanish captain."

Fontrailles approached, and said in a low voice to the grand ecuyer:

“Monsieur, this is an enterprising fellow; I would advise you to employ him. We must neglect no chance.”

“Listen to me,” said Jacques de Laubardemont, “and answer at once. I am not a phrase-maker, like my father. I bear in mind that you have done me some good offices; and lately again, you have been useful to me, as you always are, without knowing it, for I have somewhat repaired my fortune in your little insurrections. If you will, I can render you an important service; I command a few brave men.”

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"What service?" asked Cinq-Mars. "We will see."

"I commence by a piece of information. This morning while you descended the King's staircase on one side, Father Joseph ascended the other."

"Ha! this, then, is the secret of his sudden and inexplicable change! Can it be? A king of France! and to allow us to confide all our secrets to him."

"Well! is that all? Do you say nothing? You know I have an old account to settle with the Capuchin."

"What's that to me?" and he hung down his head, absorbed in a profound revery.

"It matters a great deal to you, since you have only to speak the word, and I will rid you of him before thirty-six hours from this time, though he is now very near Paris. We might even add the Cardinal, if you wish."

"Leave me; I will use no poniards," said Cinq-Mars.

"Ah! I understand you," replied Jacques. "You are right; you would prefer our despatching him with the sword. This is just. He is worth it; 'tis a distinction due to him. It were undoubtedly more suitable for great lords to take charge of the Cardinal; and that he who despatches his Eminence should be in a fair way to be a marechal. For myself, I am not proud; one must not be proud, whatever one's merit in one's profession. I must not touch the Cardinal; he's a morsel for a king!"

"Nor any others," said the grand ecuyer.

"Oh, let us have the Capuchin!" said Captain Jacques, urgently.

"You are wrong if you refuse this office," said Fontrailles; "such things occur every day. Vitry began with Concini; and he was made a marechal. You see men extremely well at court who have killed their enemies with their own hands in the streets of Paris, and you hesitate to rid yourself of a villain! Richelieu has his agents; you must have yours. I can not understand your scruples."

"Do not torment him," said Jacques, abruptly; "I understand it. I thought as he does when I was a boy, before reason came. I would not have killed even a monk; but let me speak to him." Then, turning toward Cinq-Mars, "Listen: when men conspire, they seek the death or at least the downfall of some one, eh?"

And he paused.

"Now in that case, we are out with God, and in with the Devil, eh?"



"Secundo, as they say at the Sorbonne; it's no worse when one is damned, to be so for much than for little, eh?"

"Ergo, it is indifferent whether a thousand or one be killed. I defy you to answer that."

"Nothing could be better argued, Doctor-dagger," said Fontrailles, half-laughing, "I see you will be a good travelling-companion. You shall go with me to Spain if you like."

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"I know you are going to take the treaty there," answered Jacques; "and I will guide you through the Pyrenees by roads unknown to man. But I shall be horribly vexed to go away without having wrung the neck of that old he-goat, whom we leave behind, like a knight in the midst of a game of chess. Once more Monsieur," he continued with an air of pious earnestness, "if you have any religion in you, refuse no longer; recollect the words of our theological fathers, Hurtado de Mendoza and Sanchez, who have proved that a man may secretly kill his enemies, since by this means he avoids two sins—that of exposing his life, and that of fighting a duel. It is in accordance with this grand consolatory principle that I have always acted."

"Go, go!" said Cinq-Mars, in a voice thick with rage; "I have other things to think of."

"Of what more important?" said Fontrailles; "this might be a great weight in the balance of our destinies."

"I am thinking how much the heart of a king weighs in it," said Cinq-Mars.

"You terrify me," replied the gentleman; "we can not go so far as that!"

"Nor do I think what you suppose, Monsieur," continued D'Effiat, in a severe tone. "I was merely reflecting how kings complain when a subject betrays them. Well, war! war! civil war, foreign war, let your fires be kindled! since I hold the match, I will apply it to the mine. Perish the State! perish twenty kingdoms, if necessary! No ordinary calamities suffice when the King betrays the subject. Listen to me."

And he took Fontrailles a few steps aside.

"I only charged you to prepare our retreat and succors, in case of abandonment on the part of the King. Just now I foresaw this abandonment in his forced manifestation of friendship; and I decided upon your setting out when he finished his conversation by announcing his departure for Perpignan. I feared Narbonne; I now see that he is going there to deliver himself up a prisoner to the Cardinal. Go at once. I add to the letters I have given you the treaty here; it is in fictitious names, but here is the counterpart, signed by Monsieur, by the Duc de Bouillon, and by me. The Count-Duke of Olivares desires nothing further. There are blanks for the Duc d'Orleans, which you will fill up as you please. Go; in a month I shall expect you at Perpignan. I will have Sedan opened to the seventeen thousand Spaniards from Flanders."

Then, advancing toward the adventurer, who awaited him, he said:

"For you, brave fellow, since you desire to aid me, I charge you with escorting this gentleman to Madrid; you will be largely recompensed."

Jacques, twisting his moustache, replied:

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"Ah, you do not then scorn to employ me! you exhibit your judgment and taste. Do you know that the great Queen Christina of Sweden has asked for me, and wished to have me with her as her confidential man. She was brought up to the sound of the cannon by the 'Lion of the North,' Gustavus Adolphus, her father. She loves the smell of powder and brave men; but I would not serve her, because she is a Huguenot, and I have fixed principles, from which I never swerve. 'Par exemple', I swear to you by Saint Jacques to guide Monsieur through the passes of the Pyrenees to Oleron as surely as through these woods, and to defend him against the Devil, if need be, as well as your papers, which we will bring you back without blot or tear. As for recompense, I want none. I always find it in the action itself. Besides, I do not receive money, for I am a gentleman. The Laubardemonts are a very ancient and very good family."

"Adieu, then, noble Monsieur," said Cinq-Mars; "go!"

After having pressed the hand of Fontrailles, he sighed and disappeared in the wood, on his return to the chateau of Chambord.

CHAPTER XX

THE READING

Shortly after the events just narrated, at the corner of the Palais-Royal, at a small and pretty house, numerous carriages were seen to draw up, and a door, reached by three steps, frequently to open. The neighbors often came to their windows to complain of the noise made at so late an hour of the night, despite the fear of robbers; and the patrol often stopped in surprise, and passed on only when they saw at each carriage ten or twelve footmen, armed with staves and carrying torches. A young gentleman, followed by three lackeys, entered and asked for Mademoiselle de Lorme. He wore a long rapier, ornamented with pink ribbon. Enormous bows of the same color on his high-heeled shoes almost entirely concealed his feet, which after the fashion of the day he turned very much out. He frequently twisted a small curling moustache, and before entering combed his small pointed beard. There was but one exclamation when he was announced.

"Here he is at last!" cried a young and rich voice. "He has made us wait long enough for him, the dear Desbarreaux. Come, take a seat! place yourself at this table and read."

The speaker was a woman of about four-and-twenty, tall and handsome, notwithstanding her somewhat woolly black hair and her dark olive complexion. There was something masculine in her manner, which she seemed to derive from her circle, composed entirely of men. She took their arm unceremoniously, as she spoke to them, with a freedom which she communicated to them. Her conversation was animated rather than joyous. It often excited laughter around her; but it was by dint of intellect

that she created gayety (if we may so express it), for her countenance, impassioned as it was, seemed incapable of bending into a smile, and her large blue eyes, under her jet-black hair, gave her at first rather a strange appearance.

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Desbarreaux kissed her hand with a gallant and chivalrous air. He then, talking to her all the time, walked round the large room, where were assembled nearly thirty persons—some seated in the large arm chairs, others standing in the vast chimney-place, others conversing in the embrasures of the windows under the heavy curtains. Some of them were obscure men, now illustrious; others illustrious men, now obscure for posterity. Thus, among the latter, he profoundly saluted *mm.* d'Aubijoux, de Brion, de Montmort, and other very brilliant gentlemen, who were there as judges; tenderly, and with an air of esteem, pressed the hands of *mm.* Monteruel, de Sirmond, de Malleville, Baro, Gombauld, and other learned men, almost all called great men in the annals of the Academy of which they were the founders—itsself called sometimes the Academic des Beaux Esprits, but really the Academic Francaise. But M. Desbarreaux gave but a mere patronizing nod to young Corneille, who was talking in a corner with a foreigner, and with a young man whom he presented to the mistress of the house by the name of M. Poquelin, son of the 'valet-de-chambre tapissier du roi'. The foreigner was Milton; the young man was Moliere.

Before the reading expected from the young Sybarite, a great contest arose between him and other poets and prose writers of the time. They spoke to each other with great volubility and animation a language incomprehensible to any one who should suddenly have come among them without being initiated, eagerly pressing each other's hands with affectionate compliments and infinite allusions to their works.

"Ah, here you are, illustrious Baro!" cried the newcomer. "I have read your last sixain. Ah, what a sixain! how full of the gallant and the tendre?"

"What is that you say of the tendre?" interrupted Marion de Lorme; "have you ever seen that country? You stopped at the village of Grand-Esprit, and at that of Jolis-Vers, but you have been no farther. If Monsieur le Gouverneur de Notre Dame de la Garde will please to show us his new chart, I will tell you where you are."

Scudery arose with a vainglorious and pedantic air; and, unrolling upon the table a sort of geographical chart tied with blue ribbons, he himself showed the lines of red ink which he had traced upon it.

"This is the finest piece of Clelie," he said. "This chart is generally found very gallant; but 'tis merely a slight ebullition of playful wit, to please our little literary cabale. However, as there are strange people in the world, it is possible that all who see it may not have minds sufficiently well turned to understand it. This is the road which must be followed to go from Nouvelle-Amitie to Tendre; and observe, gentlemen, that as we say Cumae-on-the-Ionian-Sea, Cuma;-on-the-Tyrrhean-Sea, we shall say Tendre-sur-Inclination, Tendre-sur-Estime, and Tendre-sur-Reconnaissance. We must begin by inhabiting the village of Grand-Coeur, Generosity, Exactitude, and Petits-Soins."

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“Ah! how very pretty!” interposed Desbarreaux. “See the villages marked out; here is Petits-Soins, Billet-Galant, then Billet-Doux!”

“Oh! ’tis ingenious in the highest degree!” cried Vaugelas, Colletet, and the rest.

“And observe,” continued the author, inflated with this success, “that it is necessary to pass through Complaisance and Sensibility; and that if we do not take this road, we run the risk of losing our way to Tiedeur, Oubli, and of falling into the Lake of Indifference.”

“Delicious! delicious! ‘gallant au supreme!’” cried the auditors; “never was greater genius!”

“Well, Madame,” resumed Scudery, “I now declare it in your house: this work, printed under my name, is by my sister—she who translated ‘Sappho’ so agreeably.” And without being asked, he recited in a declamatory tone verses ending thus:

L’Amour est un mal agreable
Don’t mon coeur ne saurait guerir;
Mais quand il serait guerissable,
Il est bien plus doux d’en mourir.

“How! had that Greek so much wit? I can not believe it,” exclaimed Marion de Lorme; “how superior Mademoiselle de Scudery is to her! That idea is wholly hers; she must unquestionably put these charming verses into ‘Clelie’. They will figure well in that Roman history.”

“Admirable, perfect!” cried all the savans; “Horatius, Aruns, and the amiable Porsenna are such gallant lovers.”

They were all bending over the “carte de Tendre,” and their fingers crossed in following the windings of the amorous rivers. The young Poquelin ventured to raise a timid voice and his melancholy but acute glance, and said:

“What purpose does this serve? Is it to give happiness or pleasure? Monsieur seems to me not singularly happy, and I do not feel very gay.”

The only reply he got was a general look of contempt; he consoled himself by meditating, ‘Les Precieuses Ridicules’.

Desbarreaux prepared to read a pious sonnet, which he was penitent for having composed in an illness; he seemed to be ashamed of having thought for a moment upon God at the sight of his lightning, and blushed at the weakness. The mistress of the house stopped him.



“It is not yet time to read your beautiful verses; you would be interrupted. We expect Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer and other gentlemen; it would be actual murder to allow a great mind to speak during this noise and confusion. But here is a young Englishman who has just come from Italy, and is on his return to London. They tell me he has composed a poem—I don’t know what; but he’ll repeat some verses of it. Many of you gentlemen of the Academy know English; and for the rest he has had the passages he is going to read translated by an ex-secretary of the Duke of Buckingham, and here are copies in French on this table.”

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So saying, she took them and distributed them among her erudite visitors. The company seated themselves, and were silent. It took some time to persuade the young foreigner to speak or to quit the recess of the window, where he seemed to have come to a very good understanding with Corneille. He at last advanced to an armchair placed near the table; he seemed of feeble health, and fell into, rather than seated himself in, the chair. He rested his elbow on the table, and with his hand covered his large and beautiful eyes, which were half closed, and reddened with nightwatches or tears. He repeated his fragments from memory. His doubting auditors looked at him haughtily, or at least patronizingly; others carelessly glanced over the translation of his verses.

His voice, at first suppressed, grew clearer by the very flow of his harmonious recital; the breath of poetic inspiration soon elevated him to himself; and his look, raised to heaven, became sublime as that of the young evangelist, conceived by Raffaello, for the light still shone on it. He narrated in his verses the first disobedience of man, and invoked the Holy Spirit, who prefers before all other temples a pure and simple heart, who knows all, and who was present at the birth of time.

This opening was received with a profound silence; and a slight murmur arose after the enunciation of the last idea. He heard not; he saw only through a cloud; he was in the world of his own creation. He continued.

He spoke of the infernal spirit, bound in avenging fire by adamantine chains, lying vanquished nine times the space that measures night and day to mortal men; of the darkness visible of the eternal prisons and the burning ocean where the fallen angels float. Then, his voice, now powerful, began the address of the fallen angel. "Art thou," he said, "he who in the happy realms of light, clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine myriads? From what height fallen? What though the field be lost, all is not lost! Unconquerable will and study of revenge, immortal hate and courage never to submit nor yield—what is else not to be overcome."

Here a lackey in a loud voice announced *mm. de Montresor and d'Entraigues*. They saluted, exchanged a few words, deranged the chairs, and then settled down. The auditors availed themselves of the interruption to institute a dozen private conversations; scarcely anything was heard but expressions of censure, and imputations of bad taste. Even some men of merit, dulled by a particular habit of thinking, cried out that they did not understand it; that it was above their comprehension (not thinking how truly they spoke); and from this feigned humility gained themselves a compliment, and for the poet an impertinent remark—a double advantage. Some voices even pronounced the word "profanation."

The poet, interrupted, put his head between his hands and his elbows on the table, that he might not hear the noise either of praise or censure. Three men only approached him, an officer, Poquelin, and Corneille; the latter whispered to Milton:

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"I would advise you to change the picture; your hearers are not on a level with this."

The officer pressed the hand of the English poet and said to him:

"I admire you with all my soul."

The astonished Englishman looked at him, and saw an intellectual, impassioned, and sickly countenance.

He bowed, and collected himself, in order to proceed. His voice took a gentle tone and a soft accent; he spoke of the chaste happiness of the two first of human beings. He described their majestic nakedness, the ingenuous command of their looks, their walk among lions and tigers, which gambolled at their feet; he spoke of the purity of their morning prayer, of their enchanting smile, the playful tenderness of their youth, and their enamored conversation, so painful to the Prince of Darkness.

Gentle tears quite involuntarily made humid the eyes of the beautiful Marion de Lorme. Nature had taken possession of her heart, despite her head; poetry filled it with grave and religious thoughts, from which the intoxication of pleasure had ever diverted her. The idea of virtuous love appeared to her for the first time in all its beauty; and she seemed as if struck with a magic wand, and changed into a pale and beautiful statue.

Corneille, his young friend, and the officer, were full of a silent admiration which they dared not express, for raised voices drowned that of the surprised poet.

"I can't stand this!" cried Desbarreaux. "It is of an insipidity to make one sick."

"And what absence of grace, gallantry, and the belle flamme!" said Scudery, coldly.

"Ah, how different from our immortal D'Urfe!" said Baro, the continuator.

"Where is the 'Ariane,' where the 'Astrea?'" cried, with a groan, Godeau, the annotator.

The whole assembly well-nigh made these obliging remarks, though uttered so as only to be heard by the poet as a murmur of uncertain import. He understood, however, that he produced no enthusiasm, and collected himself to touch another chord of his lyre.

At this moment the Counsellor de Thou was announced, who, modestly saluting the company, glided silently behind the author near Corneille, Poquelin, and the young officer. Milton resumed his strain.

He recounted the arrival of a celestial guest in the garden of Eden, like a second Aurora in mid-day, shaking the plumes of his divine wings, that filled the air with heavenly fragrance, who recounted to man the history of heaven, the revolt of Lucifer, clothed in an armor of diamonds, raised on a car brilliant as the sun, guarded by glittering

cherubim, and marching against the Eternal. But Emmanuel appears on the living chariot of the Lord; and his two thousand thunderbolts hurled down to hell, with awful noise, the accursed army confounded.

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At this the company arose; and all was interrupted, for religious scruples became leagued with false taste. Nothing was heard but exclamations which obliged the mistress of the house to rise also, and endeavor to conceal them from the author. This was not difficult, for he was entirely absorbed in the elevation of his thoughts. His genius at this moment had nothing in common with the earth; and when he once more opened his eyes on those who surrounded him, he saw near him four admirers, whose voices were better heard than those of the assembly.

Corneille said to him:

"Listen. If you aim at present glory, do not expect it from so fine a work. Pure poetry is appreciated by but few souls. For the common run of men, it must be closely allied with the almost physical interest of the drama. I had been tempted to make a poem of 'Polyeuctes'; but I shall cut down this subject, abridge it of the heavens, and it shall be only a tragedy."

"What matters to me the glory of the moment?" answered Milton. "I think not of success. I sing because I feel myself a poet. I go whither inspiration leads me. Its path is ever the right one. If these verses were not to be read till a century after my death, I should write them just the same."

"I admire them before they are written," said the young officer. "I see in them the God whose innate image I have found in my heart."

"Who is it speaks thus kindly to me?" asked the poet.

"I am Rene Descartes," replied the soldier, gently.

"How, sir!" cried De Thou. "Are you so happy as to be related to the author of the *Princeps*?"

"I am the author of that work," replied Rene.

"You, sir!—but—still—pardon me—but—are you not a military man?" stammered out the counsellor, in amazement.

"Well, what has the habit of the body to do with the thought? Yes, I wear the sword. I was at the siege of Rochelle. I love the profession of arms because it keeps the soul in a region of noble ideas by the continual feeling of the sacrifice of life; yet it does not occupy the whole man. He can not always apply his thoughts to it. Peace lulls them. Moreover, one has also to fear seeing them suddenly interrupted by an obscure blow or an absurd and untimely accident. And if a man be killed in the execution of his plan, posterity preserves an idea of the plan which he himself had not, and which may be wholly postpostorous; and this is the evil side of the profession for a man of letters."



De Thou smiled with pleasure at the simple language of this superior man—this man whom he so admired, and in his admiration loved. He pressed the hand of the young sage of Touraine, and drew him into an adjoining cabinet with Corneille, Milton, and Moliere, and with them enjoyed one of those conversations which make us regard as lost the time which precedes them and the time which is to follow them.

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For two hours they had enchanted one another with their discourse, when the sound of music, of guitars and flutes playing minuets, sarabands, allemandes, and the Spanish dances which the young Queen had brought into fashion, the continual passing of groups of young ladies and their joyous laughter, all announced that the ball had commenced. A very young and beautiful person, holding a large fan as it were a sceptre, and surrounded by ten young men, entered their retired chamber with her brilliant court, which she ruled like a queen, and entirely put to the rout the studious conversers.

“Adieu, gentlemen!” said De Thou. “I make way for Mademoiselle de l’Enclos and her musketeers.”

“Really, gentlemen,” said the youthful Ninon, “we seem to frighten you. Have I disturbed you? You have all the air of conspirators.”

“We are perhaps more so than these gentlemen, although we dance,” said Olivier d’Entraigues, who led her.

“Ah! your conspiracy is against me, Monsieur le Page!” said Ninon, looking the while at another light-horseman, and abandoning her remaining arm to a third, the other gallants seeking to place themselves in the way of her flying ceillades, for she distributed her glances brilliant as the rays of the sun dancing over the moving waters.

De Thou stole away without any one thinking of stopping him, and was descending the great staircase, when he met the little Abbe de Gondi, red, hot, and out of breath, who stopped him with an animated and joyous air.

“How now! whither go you? Let the foreigners and savans go. You are one of us. I am somewhat late; but our beautiful Aspasia will pardon me. Why are you going? Is it all over?”

“Why, it seems so. When the dancing begins, the reading is done.”

“The reading, yes; but the oaths?” said the Abbe, in a low voice.

“What oaths?” asked De Thou.

“Is not Monsieur le Grand come?”

“I expected to see him; but I suppose he has not come, or else he has gone.”

“No, no! come with me,” said the bare-brained Abbe. “You are one of us. Parbleu! it is impossible to do without you; come!”

De Thou, unwilling to refuse, and thus appear to disown his friends, even for parties of pleasure which annoyed him, followed De Gondi, who passed through two cabinets, and descended a small private staircase. At each step he took, he heard more distinctly the voices of an assemblage of men. Gondi opened the door. An unexpected spectacle met his view.

The chamber he was entering, lighted by a mysterious glimmer, seemed the asylum of the most voluptuous rendezvous. On one side was a gilt bed, with a canopy of tapestry ornamented with feathers, and covered with lace and ornaments. The furniture, shining with gold, was of grayish silk, richly embroidered. Velvet cushions were at the foot of each armchair, upon a thick carpet. Small mirrors, connected

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with one another by ornaments of silver, seemed an entire glass, itself a perfection then unknown, and everywhere multiplied their glittering faces. No sound from without could penetrate this throne of delight; but the persons assembled there seemed far remote from the thoughts which it was calculated to give rise to. A number of men, whom he recognized as courtiers, or soldiers of rank, crowded the entrance of this chamber and an adjoining apartment of larger dimensions. All were intent upon that which was passing in the centre of the first room. Here, ten young men, standing, and holding in their hands their drawn swords, the points of which were lowered toward the ground, were ranged round a table. Their faces, turned to Cinq-Mars, announced that they had just taken an oath to him. The grand ecuyer stood by himself before the fireplace, his arms folded with an air of all-absorbing reflection. Standing near him, Marion de Lorme, grave and collected, seemed to have presented these gentlemen to him.

When Cinq-Mars perceived his friend, he rushed toward the door, casting a terrible glance at Gondi, and seizing De Thou by both arms, stopped him on the last step.

"What do you here?" he said, in a stifled voice.

"Who brought you here? What would you with me? You are lost if you enter."

"What do you yourself here? What do I see in this house?"

"The consequences of that you wot of. Go; this air is poisoned for all who are here."

"It is too late; they have seen me. What would they say if I were to withdraw? I should discourage them; you would be lost."

This dialogue had passed in low and hurried tones; at the last word, De Thou, pushing aside his friend, entered, and with a firm step crossed the apartment to the fireplace.

Cinq-Mars, trembling with rage, resumed his place, hung his head, collected himself, and soon raising a more calm countenance, continued a discourse which the entrance of his friend had interrupted:

"Be then with us, gentlemen; there is no longer any need for so much mystery. Remember that when a strong mind embraces an idea, it must follow it to all its consequences. Your courage will have a wider field than that of a court intrigue. Thank me; instead of a conspiracy, I give you a war. Monsieur de Bouillon has departed to place himself at the head of his army of Italy; in two days, and before the king, I quit Paris for Perpignan. Come all of you thither; the Royalists of the army await us."

Here he threw around him calm and confident looks; he saw gleams of joy and enthusiasm in the eyes of all who surrounded him. Before allowing his own heart to be

possessed by the contagious emotion which precedes great enterprises, he desired still more firmly to assure himself of them, and said with a grave air:

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“Yes, war, gentlemen; think of it, open war. Rochelle and Navarre are arousing their Protestants; the army of Italy will enter on one side; the king’s brother will join us on the other. The man we combat will be surrounded, vanquished, crushed. The parliaments will march in our rear, bearing their petitions to the King, a weapon as powerful as our swords; and after the victory we will throw ourselves at the feet of Louis XIII, our master, that he may pardon us for having delivered him from a cruel and ambitious man, and hastened his own resolution.”

Here, again glancing around him, he saw increasing confidence in the looks and attitudes of his accomplices.

“How!” he continued, crossing his arms, and yet restraining with an effort his own emotion; “you do not recoil before this resolution, which would appear a revolt to any other men! Do you not think that I have abused the powers you have vested in me? I have carried matters very far; but there are times when kings would be served, as it were in spite of themselves. All is arranged, as you know. Sedan will open its gates to us; and we are sure of Spain. Twelve thousand veteran troops will enter Paris with us. No place, however, will be given up to the foreigner; they will all have a French garrison, and be taken in the name of the King.”

“Long live the King! long live the Union! the new Union, the Holy League!” cried the assembly.

“It has come, then!” cried Cinq-Mars, with enthusiasm; “it has come—the most glorious day of my life. Oh, youth, youth, from century to century called frivolous and improvident! of what will men now accuse thee, when they behold conceived, ripened, and ready for execution, under a chief of twenty-two, the most vast, the most just, the most beneficial of enterprises? My friends, what is a great life but a thought of youth executed by mature age? Youth looks fixedly into the future with its eagle glance, traces there a broad plan, lays the foundation stone; and all that our entire existence afterward can do is to approximate to that first design. Oh, when can great projects arise, if not when the heart beats vigorously in the breast? The mind is not sufficient; it is but an instrument.”

A fresh outburst of joy had followed these words, when an old man with a white beard stood forward from the throng.

“Bah!” said Gondi, in a low voice, “here’s the old Chevalier de Guise going to dote, and damp us.”

And truly enough, the old man, pressing the hand of Cinq-Mars, said slowly and with difficulty, having placed himself near him:



“Yes, my son, and you, my children, I see with joy that my old friend Bassompierre is about to be delivered by you, and that you are about to avenge the Comte de Soissons and the young Montmorency. But it is expedient for youth, all ardent as it is, to listen to those who have seen much. I have witnessed the League, my children, and I tell you that you can not now, as then, take the title of the Holy League, the Holy Union, the Protectors of Saint Peter, or Pillars of the Church, because I see that you reckon on the support of the Huguenots; nor can you put upon your great seal of green wax an empty throne, since it is occupied by a king.”

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"You may say by two," interrupted Gondi, laughing.

"It is, however, of great importance," continued old Guise, amid the tumultuous young men, "to take a name to which the people may attach themselves; that of War for the Public Welfare has been made use of; Princes of Peace only lately. It is necessary to find one."

"Well, the War of the King," said Cinq-Mars.

"Ay, the War of the King!" cried Gondi and all the young men.

"Moreover," continued the old seigneur, "it is essential to gain the approval of the theological faculty of the Sorbonne, which heretofore sanctioned even the 'hautgourdiens' and the 'sorgueurs',—[Names of the leaguers.]—and to put in force its second proposition—that it is permitted to the people to disobey the magistrates, and to hang them."

"Eh, Chevalier!" exclaimed Gondi; "this is not the question. Let Monsieur le Grand speak; we are thinking no more of the Sorbonne at present than of your Saint Jacques Clement."

There was a laugh, and Cinq-Mars went on:

"I wished, gentlemen, to conceal nothing from you as to the projects of Monsieur, those of the Duke de Bouillon, or my own, for it is just that a man who stakes his life should know at what game; but I have placed before you the least fortunate chances, and I have not detailed our strength, for there is not one of you but knows the secret of it. Is it to you, Messieurs de Montresor and de Saint-Thibal, I need tell the treasures that Monsieur places at our disposal? Is it to you, Monsieur d'Aignou, Monsieur de Mouy, that I need tell how many gentlemen are eager to join your companies of men-at-arms and light-horse, to fight the Cardinalists; how many in Touraine and in Auvergne, where lay the lands of the House of D'Effiat, and whence will march two thousand seigneurs, with their vassals?

"Baron de Beauvau, shall I recall the zeal and valor of the cuirassiers whom you brought to the unhappy Comte de Soissons, whose cause was ours, and whom you saw assassinated in the midst of his triumph by him whom with you he had defeated? Shall I tell these gentlemen of the joy of the Count-Duke of Olivares at the news of our intentions, and the letters of the Cardinal-Infanta to the Duke de Bouillon? Shall I speak of Paris to the Abbe de Gondi, to D'Entraigues, and to you, gentlemen, who are daily witnesses of her misery, of her indignation, and her desire to break forth? While all foreign nations demand peace, which the Cardinal de Richelieu still destroys by his want of faith (as he has done in violating the treaty of Ratisbon), all orders of the State

groan under his violence, and dread that colossal ambition which aspires to no less than the temporal and even spiritual throne of France.”

A murmur of approbation interrupted Cinq-Mars. There was then silence for a moment; and they heard the sound of wind instruments, and the measured tread of the dancers.

This noise caused a momentary diversion and a smile in the younger portion of the assembly.

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Cinq-Mars profited by this; and raising his eyes, "Pleasures of youth," he cried—"love, music, joyous dances—why do you not alone occupy our leisure hours? Why are not you our sole ambition? What resentment may we not justly feel that we have to make our cries of indignation heard above our bursts of joy, our formidable secrets in the asylum of love, and our oaths of war and death amid the intoxication of and of life!"

"Curses on him who saddens the youth of a people! When wrinkles furrow the brow of the young men, we may confidently say that the finger of a tyrant has hollowed them out. The other troubles of youth give it despair and not consternation. Watch those sad and mournful students pass day after day with pale foreheads, slow steps, and half-suppressed voices. One would think they fear to live or to advance a step toward the future. What is there then in France? A man too many."

"Yes," he continued; "for two years I have watched the insidious and profound progress of his ambition. His strange practices, his secret commissions, his judicial assassinations are known to you. Princes, peers, marechals—all have been crushed by him. There is not a family in France but can show some sad trace of his passage. If he regards us all as enemies to his authority, it is because he would have in France none but his own house, which twenty years ago held only one of the smallest fiefs of Poitou.

"The humiliated parliament has no longer any voice. The presidents of Nismes, Novion, and Bellievre have revealed to you their courageous but fruitless resistance to the condemnation to death of the Duke de la Vallette.

"The presidents and councils of sovereign courts have been imprisoned, banished, suspended—a thing before unheard of—because they have raised their voices for the king or for the public.

"The highest offices of justice, who fill them? Infamous and corrupt men, who suck the blood and gold of the country. Paris and the maritime towns taxed; the rural districts ruined and laid waste by the soldiers and other agents of the Cardinal; the peasants reduced to feed on animals killed by the plague or famine, or saving themselves by self-banishment—such is the work of this new justice. His worthy agents have even coined money with the effigy of the Cardinal-Duke. Here are some of his royal pieces."

The grand ecuyey threw upon the table a score of gold doubloons whereon Richelieu was represented. A fresh murmur of hatred toward the Cardinal arose in the apartment.

"And think you the clergy are less trampled on and less discontented? No. Bishops have been tried against the laws of the State and in contempt of the respect due to their sacred persons. We have seen, in consequence, Algerine corsairs commanded by an archbishop. Men of the lowest condition have been elevated to the cardinalate. The minister himself, devouring the most sacred things, has had himself elected general of the orders of Citeaux, Cluny, and Premontre, throwing into prison the monks who

refused him their votes. Jesuits, Carmelites, Cordeliers, Augustins, Dominicans, have been forced to elect general vicars in France, in order no longer to communicate at Rome with their true superiors, because he would be patriarch in France, and head of the Gallican Church.”

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"He's a schismatic! a monster!" cried several voices.

"His progress, then, is apparent, gentlemen. He is ready to seize both temporal and spiritual power. He has little by little fortified himself against the King in the strongest towns of France—seized the mouths of the principal rivers, the best ports of the ocean, the salt-pits, and all the securities of the kingdom. It is the King, then, whom we must deliver from this oppression. 'Le roi et la paix!' shall be our cry. The rest must be left to Providence."

Cinq-Mars greatly astonished the assembly, and De Thou himself, by this address. No one had ever before heard him speak so long together, not even in fireside conversation; and he had never by a single word shown the least aptitude for understanding public affairs. He had, on the contrary, affected the greatest indifference on the subject, even in the eyes of those whom he was molding to his projects, merely manifesting a virtuous indignation at the violence of the minister, but affecting not to put forward any of his own ideas, in order not to suggest personal ambition as the aim of his labors. The confidence given to him rested on his favor with the king and his personal bravery. The surprise of all present was therefore such as to cause a momentary silence. It was soon broken by all the transports of Frenchmen, young or old, when fighting of whatever kind is held out to them.

Among those who came forward to press the hand of the young party leader, the Abbe de Gondi jumped about like a kid.

"I have already enrolled my regiment!" he cried. "I have some superb fellows!" Then, addressing Marion de Lorme, "Parbleu! Mademoiselle, I will wear your colors—your gray ribbon, and your order of the Allumette. The device is charming—

'Nous ne brullons que pour bruller les autres.'

And I wish you could see all the fine things we shall do if we are fortunate enough to come to blows."

The fair Marion, who did not like him, began to talk over his head to M. de Thou—a mortification which always exasperated the little Abbe, who abruptly left her, walking as tall as he could, and scornfully twisting his moustache.

All at once a sudden silence took possession of the assembly. A rolled paper had struck the ceiling and fallen at the feet of Cinq-Mars. He picked it up and unrolled it, after having looked eagerly around him. He sought in vain to divine whence it came; all those who advanced had only astonishment and intense curiosity depicted in their faces.

"Here is my name wrongly written," he said coldly.



“A *Cinq* MARCS,

CENTURIE *de Nostradamus*.

Quand bonnet rouge passera par la fenetre,
A quarante onces on coupera tete,
Et tout finira.”

[This punning prediction was made public three months before the,
conspiracy.]

“There is a traitor among us, gentlemen,” he said, throwing away the paper. “But no matter. We are not men to be frightened by his sanguinary jests.”

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"We must find the traitor out, and throw him through the window," said the young men.

Still, a disagreeable sensation had come over the assembly. They now only spoke in whispers, and each regarded his neighbor with distrust. Some withdrew; the meeting grew thinner. Marion de Lorme repeated to every one that she would dismiss her servants, who alone could be suspected. Despite her efforts a coldness reigned throughout the apartment. The first sentences of Cinq-Mars' address, too, had left some uncertainty as to the intentions of the King; and this untimely candor had somewhat shaken a few of the less determined conspirators.

Gondi pointed this out to Cinq-Mars.

"Hark ye!" he said in a low voice. "Believe me, I have carefully studied conspiracies and assemblages; there are certain purely mechanical means which it is necessary to adopt. Follow my advice here; I know a good deal of this sort of thing. They want something more. Give them a little contradiction; that always succeeds in France. You will quite make them alive again. Seem not to wish to retain them against their will, and they will remain."

The grand ecuyer approved of the suggestion, and advancing toward those whom he knew to be most deeply compromised, said:

"For the rest, gentlemen, I do not wish to force any one to follow me. Plenty of brave men await us at Perpignan, and all France is with us. If any one desires to secure himself a retreat, let him speak. We will give him the means of placing himself in safety at once."

Not one would hear of this proposition; and the movement it occasioned produced a renewal of the oaths of hatred against the minister.

Cinq-Mars, however, proceeded to put the question individually to some of the persons present, in the election of whom he showed much judgment; for he ended with Montresor, who cried that he would pass his sword through his body if he had for a moment entertained such an idea, and with Gondi, who, rising fiercely on his heels, exclaimed:

"Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer, my retreat is the archbishopric of Paris and L'Ile Notre-Dame. I'll make it a place strong enough to keep me from being taken."

"And yours?" he said to De Thou.

"At your side," murmured De Thou, lowering his eyes, unwilling to give importance to his resolution by the directness of his look.

"You will have it so? Well, I accept," said Cinq-Mars; "and my sacrifice herein, dear friend, is greater than yours." Then turning toward the assembly:

"Gentlemen, I see in you the last men of France, for after the Montmorencys and the Soissons, you alone dare lift a head free and worthy of our old liberty. If Richelieu triumph, the ancient bases of the monarchy will crumble with us. The court will reign alone, in the place of the parliaments, the old barriers, and at the same time the powerful supports of the royal authority. Let us be conquerors, and France will owe to us the preservation of her ancient manners and her time-honored guarantees. And now, gentlemen, it were a pity to spoil the ball on this account. You hear the music. The ladies await you. Let us go and dance."



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"The Cardinal shall pay the fiddlers," added Gondi.

The young men applauded with a laugh; and all reascended to the ballroom as lightly as they would have gone to the battlefield.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CONFESSIONAL

It was on the day following the assembly that had taken place in the house of Marion de Lorme. A thick snow covered the roofs of Paris and settled in its large gutters and streets, where it arose in gray heaps, furrowed by the wheels of carriages.

It was eight o'clock, and the night was dark. The tumult of the city was silent on account of the thick carpet the winter had spread for it, and which deadened the sound of the wheels over the stones, and of the feet of men and horses. In a narrow street that winds round the old church of St. Eustache, a man, enveloped in his cloak, slowly walked up and down, constantly watching for the appearance of some one. He often seated himself upon one of the posts of the church, sheltering himself from the falling snow under one of the statues of saints which jutted out from the roof of the building, stretching over the narrow path like birds of prey, which, about to make a stoop, have folded their wings. Often, too, the old man, opening his cloak, beat his arms against his breast to warm himself, or blew upon his fingers, ill protected from the cold by a pair of buff gloves reaching nearly to the elbow. At last he saw a slight shadow gliding along the wall.

"Ah, Santa Maria! what villainous countries are these of the North!" said a woman's voice, trembling. "Ah, the duchy of Mantua! would I were back there again, Grandchamp!"

"Pshaw! don't speak so loud," said the old domestic, abruptly. "The walls of Paris have Cardinalist ears, and more especially the walls of the churches. Has your mistress entered? My master awaits her at the door."

"Yes, yes; she has gone in."

"Be silent," said Grandchamp. "The sound of the clock is cracked. That's a bad sign."

"That clock has sounded the hour of a rendezvous."

"For me, it sounds like a passing-bell. But be silent, Laure; here are three cloaks passing."

They allowed three men to pass. Grandchamp followed them, made sure of the road they took, and returned to his seat, sighing deeply.

“The snow is cold, Laure, and I am old. Monsieur le Grand might have chosen another of his men to keep watch for him while he’s making love. It’s all very well for you to carry love-letters and ribbons and portraits and such trash, but for me, I ought to be treated with more consideration. Monsieur le Marechal would not have done so. Old domestics give respectability to a house, and should be themselves respected.”

“Has your master arrived long, ‘caro amico’?”

“Eh, cara, cayo! leave me in peace. We had both been freezing for an hour when you came. I should have had time to smoke three Turkish pipes. Attend to your business, and go and look to the other doors of the church, and see that no suspicious person is prowling about. Since there are but two vedettes, they must beat about well.”



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"Ah, what a thing it is to have no one to whom to say a friendly word when it is so cold! and my poor mistress! to come on foot all the way from the Hotel de Nevers. Ah, amore! qui regna amore!"

"Come, Italian, wheel about, I tell thee. Let me hear no more of thy musical tongue."

"Ah, Santa Maria! What a harsh voice, dear Grandchamp! You were much more amiable at Chaumont, in Turena, when you talked to me of 'miei occhi neri.'"

"Hold thy tongue, prattler! Once more, thy Italian is only good for buffoons and rope-dancers, or to accompany the learned dogs."

"Ah, Italia mia! Grandchamp, listen to me, and you shall hear the language of the gods. If you were a gallant man, like him who wrote this for a Laure like me!"

And she began to hum:

Lieti fiori a felici, e ben nate erbe
Che Madonna pensando premer sole;
Piaggia ch'ascolti su dolci parole
E del bel piede alcun vestigio serbe.

The old soldier was but little used to the voice of a young girl; and in general when a woman spoke to him, the tone he assumed in answering always fluctuated between an awkward compliment and an ebullition of temper. But on this occasion he appeared moved by the Italian song, and twisted his moustache, which was always with him a sign of embarrassment and distress. He even omitted a rough sound something like a laugh, and said:

"Pretty enough, 'mordieu!' that recalls to my mind the siege of Casal; but be silent, little one. I have not yet heard the Abbe Quillet come. This troubles me. He ought to have been here before our two young people; and for some time past—"

Laure, who was afraid of being sent alone to the Place St. Eustache, answered that she was quite sure he had gone in, and continued:

"Ombrose selve, ove'percote il sole
Che vi fa co'suoi raggi alte a superbe."

"Hum!" said the worthy old soldier, grumbling. "I have my feet in the snow, and a gutter runs down on my head, and there's death at my heart; and you sing to me of violets, of the sun, and of grass, and of love. Be silent!"

And, retiring farther in the recess of the church, he leaned his gray head upon his hands, pensive and motionless. Laure dared not again speak to him.

While her waiting-woman had gone to find Grandchamp, the young and trembling Marie with a timid hand had pushed open the folding-door of the church.

She there found Cinq-Mars standing, disguised, and anxiously awaiting her. As soon as she recognized him, she advanced with rapid steps into the church, holding her velvet mask over her face, and hastened to take refuge in a confessional, while Henri carefully closed the door of the church by which she had entered. He made sure that it could not be opened on the outside, and then followed his betrothed to kneel within the place of penitence. Arrived an hour before her,

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with his old valet, he had found this open—a certain and understood sign that the Abbe Quillet, his tutor, awaited him at the accustomed place. His care to prevent any surprise had made him remain himself to guard the entrance until the arrival of Marie. Delighted as he was at the punctuality of the good Abbe, he would still scarcely leave his post to thank him. He was a second father to him in all but authority; and he acted toward the good priest without much ceremony.

The old parish church of St. Eustache was dark. Besides the perpetual lamp, there were only four flambeaux of yellow wax, which, attached above the fonts against the principal pillars, cast a red glimmer upon the blue and black marble of the empty church. The light scarcely penetrated the deep niches of the aisles of the sacred building. In one of the chapels—the darkest of them—was the confessional, of which we have before spoken, whose high iron grating and thick double planks left visible only the small dome and the wooden cross. Here, on either side, knelt Cinq-Mars and Marie de Mantua. They could scarcely see each other, but found that the Abbe Quillet, seated between them, was there awaiting them. They could see through the little grating the shadow of his hood. Henri d'Effiat approached slowly; he was regulating, as it were, the remainder of his destiny. It was not before his king that he was about to appear, but before a more powerful sovereign, before her for whom he had undertaken his immense work. He was about to test her faith; and he trembled.

He trembled still more when his young betrothed knelt opposite to him; he trembled, because at the sight of this angel he could not help feeling all the happiness he might lose. He dared not speak first, and remained for an instant contemplating her head in the shade, that young head upon which rested all his hopes. Despite his love, whenever he looked upon her he could not refrain from a kind of dread at having undertaken so much for a girl, whose passion was but a feeble reflection of his own, and who perhaps would not appreciate all the sacrifices he had made for her—bending the firm character of his mind to the compliances of a courtier, condemning it to the intrigues and sufferings of ambition, abandoning it to profound combinations, to criminal meditations, to the gloomy labors of a conspirator.

Hitherto, in their secret interviews, she had always received each fresh intelligence of his progress with the transports of pleasure of a child, but without appreciating the labors of each of these so arduous steps that lead to honors, and always asking him with naivete when he would be Constable, and when they should marry, as if she were asking him when he would come to the Caroussel, or whether the weather was fine. Hitherto, he had smiled at these questions and this ignorance, pardonable at eighteen, in a girl born to a throne and accustomed to a grandeur natural to her, which she found around her on her entrance into

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life; but now he made more serious reflections upon this character. And when, but just quitting the imposing assembly of conspirators, representatives of all the orders of the kingdom, his ear, wherein still resounded the masculine voices that had sworn to undertake a vast war, was struck with the first words of her for whom that war was commenced, he feared for the first time lest this naivete should be in reality simple levity, not coming from the heart. He resolved to sound it.

"Oh, heavens! how I tremble, Henri!" she said as she entered the confessional; "you make me come without guards, without a coach. I always tremble lest I should be seen by my people coming out of the Hotel de Nevers. How much longer must I yet conceal myself like a criminal? The Queen was very angry when I avowed the matter to her; and whenever she speaks to me of it, 'tis with her severe air that you know, and which always makes me weep. Oh, I am terribly afraid!"

She was silent; Cinq-Mars replied only with a deep sigh.

"How! you do not speak to me!" she said.

"Are these, then, all your terrors?" asked Cinq-Mars, bitterly.

"Can I have greater? Oh, 'mon ami', in what a tone, with what a voice, do you address me! Are you angry because I came too late?"

"Too soon, Madame, much too soon, for the things you are to hear—for I see you are far from prepared for them."

Marie, affected at the gloomy and bitter tone of his voice, began to weep.

"Alas, what have I done," she said, "that you should call me Madame, and treat me thus harshly?"

"Be tranquil," replied Cinq-Mars, but with irony in his tone. "'Tis not, indeed, you who are guilty; but I—I alone; not toward you, but for you."

"Have you done wrong, then? Have you ordered the death of any one? Oh, no, I am sure you have not, you are so good!"

"What!" said Cinq-Mars, "are you as nothing in my designs? Did I misconstrue your thoughts when you looked at me in the Queen's boudoir? Can I no longer read in your eyes? Was the fire which animated them that of a love for Richelieu? That admiration which you promised to him who should dare to say all to the King, where is it? Is it all a falsehood?"

Marie burst into tears.

“You still speak to me with bitterness,” she said; “I have not deserved it. Do you suppose, because I speak not of this fearful conspiracy, that I have forgotten it? Do you not see me miserable at the thought? Must you see my tears? Behold them; I shed enough in secret. Henri, believe that if I have avoided this terrible subject in our last interviews, it is from the fear of learning too much. Have I any other thought that that of your dangers? Do I not know that it is for me you incur them? Alas! if you fight for me, have I not also to sustain attacks no less cruel? Happier than I, you have only to combat hatred, while I struggle against friendship. The Cardinal will oppose to you men and weapons; but the Queen, the gentle Anne of Austria, employs only tender advice, caresses, sometimes tears.”

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"Touching and invincible constraint to make you accept a throne," said Cinq-Mars, bitterly. "I well conceive you must need some efforts to resist such seductions; but first, Madame, I must release you from your vows."

"Alas, great Heaven! what is there, then, against us?"

"There is God above us, and against us," replied Henri, in a severe tone; "the King has deceived me."

There was an agitated movement on the part of the Abbe.

Marie exclaimed, "I foresaw it; this is the misfortune I dreamed and dreamed of! It is I who caused it?"

"He deceived me, as he pressed my hand," continued Cinq-Mars; "he betrayed me by the villain Joseph, whom an offer has been made to me to poniard."

The Abbe gave a start of horror which half opened the door of the confessional.

"O father, fear nothing," said Henri d'Effiat; "your pupil will never strike such blows. Those I prepare will be heard from afar, and the broad day will light them up; but there remains a duty—a sacred duty—for me to fulfil. Behold your son sacrifice himself before you! Alas! I have not lived long in the sight of happiness, and I am about, perhaps, to destroy it by your hand, that consecrated it."

As he spoke, he opened the light grating which separated him from his old tutor; the latter, still observing an extraordinary silence, passed his hood over his forehead.

"Restore this nuptial ring to the Duchesse de Mantua," said Cinq-Mars, in a tone less firm; "I can not keep it unless she give it me a second time, for I am not the same whom she promised to espouse."

The priest hastily seized the ring, and passed it through the opposite grating; this mark of indifference astonished Cinq-Mars.

"What! Father," he said, "are you also changed?"

Marie wept no longer; but, raising her angelic voice, which awakened a faint echo along the aisles of the church, as the softest sigh of the organ, she said, returning the ring to Cinq-Mars:

"O dearest, be not angry! I comprehend you not. Can we break asunder what God has just united, and can I leave you, when I know you are unhappy? If the King no longer loves you, at least you may be assured he will not harm you, since he has not harmed the Cardinal, whom he never loved. Do you think yourself undone, because he is



perhaps unwilling to separate from his old servant? Well, let us await the return of his friendship; forget these conspirators, who affright me. If they give up hope, I shall thank Heaven, for then I shall no longer tremble for you. Why needlessly afflict ourselves? The Queen loves us, and we are both very young; let us wait. The future is beautiful, since we are united and sure of ourselves. Tell me what the King said to you at Chambord. I followed you long with my eyes. Heavens! how sad to me was that hunting party!"



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"He has betrayed me, I tell you," answered Cinq-Mars. "Yet who could have believed it, that saw him press our hands, turning from his brother to me, and to the Duc de Bouillon, making himself acquainted with the minutest details of the conspiracy, of the very day on which Richelieu was to be arrested at Lyons, fixing himself the place of his exile (our party desired his death, but the recollection of my father made me ask his life). The King said that he himself would direct the whole affair at Perpignan; yet just before, Joseph, that foul spy, had issued from out of the cabinet du Lys. O Marie! shall I own it? at the moment I heard this, my very soul was tossed. I doubted everything; it seemed to me that the centre of the world was unhinged when I found truth quit the heart of the King. I saw our whole edifice crumble to the ground; another hour, and the conspiracy would vanish away, and I should lose you forever. One means remained; I employed it."

"What means?" said Marie.

"The treaty with Spain was in my hand; I signed it."

"Ah, heavens! destroy it."

"It is gone."

"Who bears it?"

"Fontrailles."

"Recall him."

"He will, ere this, have passed the defiles of Oleron," said Cinq-Mars, rising up. "All is ready at Madrid, all at Sedan. Armies await me, Marie—armies! Richelieu is in the midst of them. He totters; it needs but one blow to overthrow him, and you are mine forever—forever the wife of the triumphant Cinq-Mars."

"Of Cinq-Mars the rebel," she said, sighing.

"Well, have it so, the rebel; but no longer the favorite. Rebel, criminal, worthy of the scaffold, I know it," cried the impassioned youth, falling on his knees; "but a rebel for love, a rebel for you, whom my sword will at last achieve for me."

"Alas, a sword imbrued in the blood of your country! Is it not a poniard?"

"Pause! for pity, pause, Marie! Let kings abandon me, let warriors forsake me, I shall only be the more firm; but a word from you will vanquish me, and once again the time for reflection will be passed from me. Yes, I am a criminal; and that is why I still hesitate to think myself worthy of you. Abandon me, Marie; take back the ring."

"I can not," she said; "for I am your wife, whatever you be."

"You hear her, father!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars, transported with happiness; "bless this second union, the work of devotion, even more beautiful than that of love. Let her be mine while I live."

Without answering, the Abbe opened the door of the confessional and had quitted the church ere Cinq-Mars had time to rise and follow him.

"Where are you going? What is the matter?" he cried.

But no one answered.

"Do not call out, in the name of Heaven!" said Marie, "or I am lost; he has doubtless heard some one in the church."

But D'Effiat, agitated, and without answering her, rushed forth, and sought his late tutor through the church, but in vain. Drawing his sword, he proceeded to the entrance which Grandchamp had to guard; he called him and listened.

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"Now let him go," said a voice at the corner of the street; and at the same moment was heard the galloping of horses.

"Grandchamp, wilt thou answer?" cried Cinq-Mars.

"Help, Henri, my dear boy!" exclaimed the voice of the Abbe Quillet.

"Whence come you? You endanger me," said the grand ecuyer, approaching him.

But he saw that his poor tutor, without a hat in the falling snow, was in a most deplorable condition.

"They stopped me, and they robbed me," he cried. "The villains, the assassins! they prevented me from calling out; they stopped my mouth with a handkerchief."

At this noise, Grandchamp at length came, rubbing his eyes, like one just awakened. Laure, terrified, ran into the church to her mistress; all hastily followed her to reassure Marie, and then surrounded the old Abbe.

"The villains! they bound my hands, as you see. There were more than twenty of them; they took from me the key of the side door of the church."

"How! just now?" said Cinq-Mars; "and why did you quit us?"

"Quit you! why, they have kept me there two hours."

"Two hours!" cried Henri, terrified.

"Ah, miserable old man that I am!" said Grandchamp; "I have slept while my master was in danger. It is the first time."

"You were not with us, then, in the confessional?" continued Cinq-Mars, anxiously, while Marie tremblingly pressed against his arm.

"What!" said the Abbe, "did you not see the rascal to whom they gave my key?"

"No! whom?" cried all at once.

"Father Joseph," answered the good priest.

"Fly! you are lost!" cried Marie.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

They have believed me incapable because I was kind
They tremble while they threaten

CINQ MARS

By Alfred de vigny

BOOK 6

CHAPTER XXII

THE STORM

'Blow, blow, thou winter wind;
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.
Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly.
Most friendship is feigning; most loving mere folly.'

Shakespeare.

Amid that long and superb chain of the Pyrenees which forms the embattled isthmus of the peninsula, in the centre of those blue pyramids, covered in gradation with snow, forests, and downs, there opens a narrow defile, a path cut in the dried-up bed of a perpendicular torrent; it circulates among rocks, glides under bridges of frozen snow, twines along the edges of inundated precipices to scale the adjacent mountains of Urdoz and Oleron, and at last rising over their unequal ridges, turns their nebulous peak into a new country which has also its mountains and its depths, and, quitting France, descends into Spain. Never has the hoof of the mule left its trace in these windings; man himself can with difficulty stand upright there, even with the hempen boots which can not slip, and the hook of the pikestaff to force into the crevices of the rocks.

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In the fine summer months the 'pastour', in his brown cape, and his black long-bearded ram lead hither flocks, whose flowing wool sweeps the turf. Nothing is heard in these rugged places but the sound of the large bells which the sheep carry, and whose irregular tinklings produce unexpected harmonies, casual gamuts, which astonish the traveller and delight the savage and silent shepherd. But when the long month of September comes, a shroud of snow spreads itself from the peak of the mountains down to their base, respecting only this deeply excavated path, a few gorges open by torrents, and some rocks of granite, which stretch out their fantastical forms, like the bones of a buried world.

It is then that light troops of chamois make their appearance, with their twisted horns extending over their backs, spring from rock to rock as if driven before the wind, and take possession of their aerial desert. Flights of ravens and crows incessantly wheel round and round in the gulfs and natural wells which they transform into dark dovecots, while the brown bear, followed by her shaggy family, who sport and tumble around her in the snow, slowly descends from their retreat invaded by the frost. But these are neither the most savage nor the most cruel inhabitants that winter brings into these mountains; the daring smuggler raises for himself a dwelling of wood on the very boundary of nature and of politics. There unknown treaties, secret exchanges, are made between the two Navarres, amid fogs and winds.

It was in this narrow path on the frontiers of France that, about two months after the scenes we have witnessed in Paris, two travellers, coming from Spain, stopped at midnight, fatigued and dismayed. They heard musket-shots in the mountain.

"The scoundrels! how they have pursued us!" said one of them. "I can go no farther; but for you I should have been taken."

"And you will be taken still, as well as that infernal paper, if you lose your time in words; there is another volley on the rock of Saint Pierre-de-L'Aigle. Up there, they suppose we have gone in the direction of the Limacon; but, below, they will see the contrary. Descend; it is doubtless a patrol hunting smugglers. Descend."

"But how? I can not see."

"Never mind, descend. Take my arm."

"Hold me; my boots slip," said the first traveller, stamping on the edge of the rock to make sure of the solidity of the ground before trusting himself upon it.

"Go on; go on!" said the other, pushing him. "There's one of the rascals passing over our heads."

And, in fact, the shadow of a man, armed with a long gun, was reflected on the snow. The two adventurers stood motionless. The man passed on. They continued their descent.

“They will take us,” said the one who was supporting the other. “They have turned us. Give me your confounded parchment. I wear the dress of a smuggler, and I can pass for one seeking an asylum among them; but you would have no resource with your laced dress.”

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"You are right," said his companion; and, resting his foot against the edge of the rock, and reclining on the slope, he gave him a roll of hollow wood.

A gun was fired, and a ball buried itself, hissing, in the snow at their feet.

"Marked!" said the first. "Roll down. If you are not dead when you get to the bottom, take the road you see before you. On the left of the hollow is Santa Maria. But turn to the right; cross Oleron; and you are on the road to Pau and are saved. Go; roll down."

As he spoke, he pushed his comrade, and without condescending to look after him, and himself neither ascending nor descending, followed the flank of the mountain horizontally, hanging on by rocks, branches, and even by plants, with the strength and energy of a wild-cat, and soon found himself on firm ground before a small wooden hut, through which a light was visible. The adventurer went all around it, like a hungry wolf round a sheepfold, and, applying his eye to one of the openings, apparently saw what determined him, for without further hesitation he pushed the tottering door, which was not even fastened by a latch. The whole but shook with the blow he had given it. He then saw that it was divided into two cabins by a partition. A large flambeau of yellow wax lighted the first. There, a young girl, pale and fearfully thin, was crouched in a corner on the damp floor, just where the melted snow ran under the planks of the cottage. Very long black hair, entangled and covered with dust, fell in disorder over her coarse brown dress; the red hood of the Pyrenees covered her head and shoulders. Her eyes were cast down; and she was spinning with a small distaff attached to her waist. The entry of a man did not appear to move her in the least.

"Ha! La moza,—[girl]—get up and give me something to drink. I am tired and thirsty."

The young girl did not answer, and, without raising her eyes, continued to spin assiduously.

"Dost hear?" said the stranger, thrusting her with his foot. "Go and tell thy master that a friend wishes to see him; but first give me some drink. I shall sleep here."

She answered, in a hoarse voice, still spinning:

"I drink the snow that melts on the rock, or the green scum that floats on the water of the swamp. But when I have spun well, they give me water from the iron spring. When I sleep, the cold lizards crawl over my face; but when I have well cleaned a mule, they throw me hay. The hay is warm; the hay is good and warm. I put it under my marble feet."

"What tale art thou telling me?" said Jacques. "I spoke not of thee."

She continued:



“They make me hold a man while they kill him. Oh, what blood I have had on my hands! God forgive them!—if that be possible. They make me hold his head, and the bucket filled with crimson water. O Heaven!—I, who was the bride of God! They throw their bodies into the abyss of snow; but the vulture finds them; he lines his nest with their hair. I now see thee full of life; I shall see thee bloody, pale, and dead.”

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The adventurer, shrugging his shoulders, began to whistle as he passed the second door. Within he found the man he had seen through the chinks of the cabin. He wore the blue berret cap of the Basques on one side, and, enveloped in an ample cloak, seated on the pack-saddle of a mule, and bending over a large brazier, smoked a cigar, and from time to time drank from a leather bottle at his side. The light of the brazier showed his full yellow face, as well as the chamber, in which mule-saddles were ranged round the byasero as seats. He raised his head without altering his position.

"Oh, oh! is it thou, Jacques?" he said. "Is it thou? Although 'tis four years since I saw thee, I recognize thee. Thou art not changed, brigand! There 'tis still, thy great knave's face. Sit down there, and take a drink."

"Yes, here I am. But how the devil camest thou here? I thought thou wert a judge, Houmain!"

"And I thought thou wert a Spanish captain, Jacques!"

"Ah! I was so for a time, and then a prisoner. But I got out of the thing very snugly, and have taken again to the old trade, the free life, the good smuggling work."

"Viva! viva! Jaleo!"—[A common Spanish oath.]—cried Houmain. "We brave fellows can turn our hands to everything. Thou camest by the other passes, I suppose, for I have not seen thee since I returned to the trade."

"Yes, yes; I have passed where thou wilt never pass," said Jacques.

"And what hast got?"

"A new merchandise. My mules will come tomorrow."

"Silk sashes, cigars, or linen?"

"Thou wilt know in time, amigo," said the ruffian. "Give me the skin. I'm thirsty."

"Here, drink. It's true Valdepenas! We're so jolly here, we bandoleros! Ay! jaleo! jaleo! come, drink; our friends are coming."

"What friends?" said Jacques, dropping the horn.

"Don't be uneasy, but drink. I'll tell thee all about it presently, and then we'll sing the Andalusian Tirana."—[A kind of ballad.]

The adventurer took the horn, and assumed an appearance of ease.

"And who's that great she-devil I saw out there?" he said. "She seems half dead."



“Oh, no! she’s only mad. Drink; I’ll tell thee all about her.”

And taking from his red sash a long poniard denticulated on each side like a saw, Houmain used it to stir up the fire, and said with vast gravity:

“Thou must know first, if thou dost not know it already, that down below there [he pointed toward France] the old wolf Richelieu carries all before him.”

“Ah, ah!” said Jacques.

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"Yes; they call him the king of the King. Thou knowest? There is, however, a young man almost as strong as he, and whom they call Monsieur le Grand. This young fellow commands almost the whole army of Perpignan at this moment. He arrived there a month ago; but the old fox is still at Narbonne—a very cunning fox, indeed. As to the King, he is sometimes this, sometimes that [as he spoke, Houmain turned his hand outward and inward], between zist and zest; but while he is determining, I am for zist—that is to say, I'm a Cardinalist. I've been regularly doing business for my lord since the first job he gave me, three years ago. I'll tell thee about it. He wanted some men of firmness and spirit for a little expedition, and sent for me to be judge-Advocate."

"Ah! a very pretty post, I've heard."

"Yes, 'tis a trade like ours, where they sell cord instead of thread; but it is less honest, for they kill men oftener. But 'tis also more profitable; everything has its price."

"Very properly so," said Jacques.

"Behold me, then, in a red robe. I helped to give a yellow one and brimstone to a fine fellow, who was cure at Loudun, and who had got into a convent of nuns, like a wolf in a fold; and a fine thing he made of it."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's very droll!" laughed Jacques. "Drink," said Houmain. "Yes, Jago, I saw him after the affair, reduced to a little black heap like this charcoal. See, this charcoal at the end of my poniard. What things we are! That's just what we shall all come to when we go to the Devil."

"Oh, none of these pleasantries!" said the other, very gravely. "You know that I am religious."

"Well, I don't say no; it may be so," said Houmain, in the same tone. "There's Richelieu, a Cardinal! But, no matter. Thou must know, then, as I was Advocate-General, I advocated—"

"Ah, thou art quite a wit!"

"Yes, a little. But, as I was saying, I advocated into my own pocket five hundred piastres, for Armand Duplessis pays his people well, and there's nothing to be said against that, except that the money's not his own; but that's the way with us all. I determined to invest this money in our old trade; and I returned here. Business goes on well. There is sentence of death out against us; and our goods, of course, sell for half as much again as before."

"What's that?" exclaimed Jacques; "lightning at this time of year?"

“Yes, the storms are beginning; we’ve had two already. We are in the clouds. Dost hear the roll of the thunder? But this is nothing; come, drink. ’Tis almost one in the morning; we’ll finish the skin and the night together. As I was telling thee, I made acquaintance with our president—a great scoundrel called Laubardemont. Dost know him?”

“Yes, a little,” said Jacques; “he’s a regular miser. But never mind that; go on.”

“Well, as we had nothing to conceal from one another, I told him of my little commercial plans, and asked him, when any good jobs presented themselves, to think of his judicial comrade; and I’ve had no cause to complain of him.”

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“Ah!” said Jacques, “and what has he done?”

“Why, first, two years ago, he himself brought, me, on horseback behind him, his niece that thou’st seen out there.”

“His niece!” cried Jacques, rising; “and thou treat’st her like a slave! Demonio!”

“Drink,” said Houmain, quietly stirring the brazier with his poniard; “he himself desired it should be so. Sit down.”

Jacques did so.

“I don’t think,” continued the smuggler, “that he’d even be sorry to know that she was—dost understand?—to hear she was under the snow rather than above it; but he would not put her there himself, because he’s a good relative, as he himself said.”

“And as I know,” said Jacques; “but go on.”

“Thou mayst suppose that a man like him, who lives at court, does not like to have a mad niece in his house. The thing is self-evident; if I’d continued to play my part of the man of the robe, I should have done the same in a similar case. But here, as you perceive, we don’t care much for appearances; and I’ve taken her for a servant. She has shown more good sense than I expected, although she has rarely ever spoken more than a single word, and at first came the delicate over us. Now she rubs down a mule like a groom. She has had a slight fever for the last few days; but ’twill pass off one way or the other. But, I say, don’t tell Laubardemont that she still lives; he’d think ’twas for the sake of economy I’ve kept her for a servant.”

“How! is he here?” cried Jacques.

“Drink!” replied the phlegmatic Houmain, who himself set the example most assiduously, and began to half shut his eyes with a languishing air. “’Tis the second transaction I’ve had with this Laubardemont—or demon, or whatever the name is; but ’tis a good devil of a demon, at all events. I love him as I do my eyes; and I will drink his health out of this bottle of Jurangon here. ’Tis the wine of a jolly fellow, the late King Henry. How happy we are here!—Spain on the right hand, France on the left; the wine-skin on one side, the bottle on the other! The bottle! I’ve left all for the bottle!”

As he spoke, he knocked off the neck of a bottle of white wine. After taking a long draught, he continued, while the stranger closely watched him:

“Yes, he’s here; and his feet must be rather cold, for he’s been waiting about the mountains ever since sunset, with his guards and our comrades. Thou knowest our bandoleros, the true contrabandistas?”

“Ah! and what do they hunt?” said Jacques.

“Ah, that’s the joke!” answered the drunkard. “’Tis to arrest two rascals, who want to bring here sixty thousand Spanish soldiers in paper in their pocket. You don’t, perhaps, quite understand me, ‘croquant’. Well, ’tis as I tell thee—in their own pockets.”

“Ay, ay! I understand,” said Jacques, loosening his poniard in his sash, and looking at the door.

“Very well, devil’s-skin, let’s sing the Tirana. Take the bottle, throw away the cigar, and sing.”

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With these words the drunken host began to sing in Spanish, interrupting his song with bumpers, which he threw down his throat, leaning back for the greater ease, while Jacques, still seated, looked at him gloomily by the light of the brazier, and meditated what he should do.

A flash of lightning entered the small window, and filled the room with a sulphurous odor. A fearful clap immediately followed; the cabin shook; and a beam fell outside.

“Hallo, the house!” cried the drunken man; “the Devil’s among us; and our friends are not come!”

“Sing!” said Jacques, drawing the pack upon which he was close to that of Houmain.

The latter drank to encourage himself, and then continued to sing.

As he ended, he felt his seat totter, and fell backward; Jacques, thus freed from him, sprang toward the door, when it opened, and his head struck against the cold, pale face of the mad-woman. He recoiled.

“The judge!” she said, as she entered; and she fell prostrate on the cold ground.

Jacques had already passed one foot over her; but another face appeared, livid and surprised—that of a very tall man, enveloped in a cloak covered with snow. He again recoiled, and laughed a laugh of terror and rage. It was Laubardemont, followed by armed men; they looked at one another.

“Ah, com-r-a-d-e, yo-a ra-a-scal!” hiccuped Houmain, rising with difficulty; “thou’rt a Royalist.”

But when he saw these two men, who seemed petrified by each other, he became silent, as conscious of his intoxication; and he reeled forward to raise up the madwoman, who was still lying between the judge and the Captain. The former spoke first.

“Are you not he we have been pursuing?”

“It is he!” said the armed men, with one voice; “the other has escaped.”

Jacques receded to the split planks that formed the tottering wall of the hut; enveloping himself in his cloak, like a bear forced against a tree by the hounds, and, wishing to gain a moment’s respite for reflection, he said, firmly:

“The first who passes that brazier and the body of that girl is a dead man.”



And he drew a long poniard from his cloak. At this moment Houmain, kneeling, turned the head of the girl. Her eyes were closed; he drew her toward the brazier, which lighted up her face.

“Ah, heavens!” cried Laubardemont, forgetting himself in his fright; “Jeanne again!”

“Be calm, my lo-lord,” said Houmain, trying to open the eyelids, which closed again, and to raise her head, which fell back again like wet linen; “be, be—calm! Do-n’t ex-cite yourself; she’s dead, decidedly.”

Jacques put his foot on the body as on a barrier, and, looking with a ferocious laugh in the face of Laubardemont, said to him in a low voice:

“Let me pass, and I will not compromise thee, courtier; I will not tell that she was thy niece, and that I am thy son.”

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Laubardemont collected himself, looked at his men, who pressed around him with advanced carabines; and, signing them to retire a few steps, he answered in a very low voice:

"Give me the treaty, and thou shalt pass."

"Here it is, in my girdle; touch it, and I will call you my father aloud. What will thy master say?"

"Give it me, and I will spare thy life."

"Let me pass, and I will pardon thy having given me that life."

"Still the same, brigand?"

"Ay, assassin."

"What matters to thee that boy conspirator?" asked the judge.

"What matters to thee that old man who reigns?" answered the other.

"Give me that paper; I've sworn to have it."

"Leave it with me; I've sworn to carry it back."

"What can be thy oath and thy God?" demanded Laubardemont.

"And thine?" replied Jacques. "Is't the crucifix of red-hot iron?"

Here Houmain, rising between them, laughing and staggering, said to the judge, slapping him on the shoulder.

"You are a long time coming to an understanding, friend; do-on't you know him of old? He's a very good fellow."

"I? no!" cried Laubardemont, aloud; "I never saw him before."

At this moment, Jacques, who was protected by the drunkard and the smallness of the crowded chamber, sprang violently against the weak planks that formed the wall, and by a blow of his heel knocked two of them out, and passed through the space thus created. The whole side of the cabin was broken; it tottered, and the wind rushed in.

"Hallo! Demonio! Santo Demonio! where art going?" cried the smuggler; "thou art breaking my house down, and on the side of the ravine, too."



All cautiously approached, tore away the planks that remained, and leaned over the abyss. They contemplated a strange spectacle. The storm raged in all its fury; and it was a storm of the Pyrenees. Enormous flashes of lightning came all at once from all parts of the horizon, and their fires succeeded so quickly that there seemed no interval; they appeared to be a continuous flash. It was but rarely the flaming vault would suddenly become obscure; and it then instantly resumed its glare. It was not the light that seemed strange on this night, but the darkness.

The tall thin peaks and whitened rocks stood out from the red background like blocks of marble on a cupola of burning brass, and resembled, amid the snows, the wonders of a volcano; the waters gushed from them like flames; the snow poured down like dazzling lava.

In this moving mass a man was seen struggling, whose efforts only involved him deeper and deeper in the whirling and liquid gulf; his knees were already buried. In vain he clasped his arms round an enormous pyramidal and transparent icicle, which reflected the lightning like a rock of crystal; the icicle itself was melting at its base, and slowly bending over the declivity of the rock. Under the covering of snow, masses of granite were heard striking against each other, as they descended into the vast depths below. Yet they could still save him; a space of scarcely four feet separated him from Laubardemont.



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"I sink!" he cried; "hold out to me something, and thou shalt have the treaty."

"Give it me, and I will reach thee this musket," said the judge.

"There it is," replied the ruffian, "since the Devil is for Richelieu!" and taking one hand from the hold of his slippery support, he threw a roll of wood into the cabin.

Laubardemont rushed back upon the treaty like a wolf on his prey. Jacques in vain held out his arm; he slowly glided away with the enormous thawing block turned upon him, and was silently buried in the snow.

"Ah, villain," were his last words, "thou hast deceived me! but thou didst not take the treaty from me. I gave it thee, Father!" and he disappeared wholly under the thick white bed of snow. Nothing was seen in his place but the glittering flakes which the lightning had ploughed up, as it became extinguished in them; nothing was—heard but the rolling of the thunder and the dash of the water against the rocks, for the men in the half-ruined cabin, grouped round a corpse and a villain, were silent, tongue-tied with horror, and fearing lest God himself should send a thunderbolt upon them.

CHAPTER XXIII

ABSENCE

L'absence est le plus grand des maux,
Non pas pour vous, cruelle!

La Fontaine.

Who has not found a charm in watching the clouds of heaven as they float along? Who has not envied them the freedom of their journeyings through the air, whether rolled in great masses by the wind, and colored by the sun, they advance peacefully, like fleets of dark ships with gilt prows, or sprinkled in light groups, they glide quickly on, airy and elongated, like birds of passage, transparent as vast opals detached from the treasury of the heavens, or glittering with whiteness, like snows from the mountains carried on the wings of the winds? Man is a slow traveller who envies those rapid journeyers; less rapid than his imagination, they have yet seen in a single day all the places he loves, in remembrance or in hope,—those that have witnessed his happiness or his misery, and those so beautiful countries unknown to us, where we expect to find everything at once. Doubtless there is not a spot on the whole earth, a wild rock, an arid plain, over which we pass with indifference, that has not been consecrated in the life of some man, and is not painted in his remembrance; for, like battered vessels, before meeting inevitable wreck, we leave some fragment of ourselves on every rock.

Whither go the dark-blue clouds of that storm of the Pyrenees? It is the wind of Africa which drives them before it with a fiery breath. They fly; they roll over one another,

growlingly throwing out lightning before them, as their torches, and leaving suspended behind them a long train of rain, like a vaporous robe. Freed by an effort from the rocky defiles that for a moment had arrested their course, they irrigate, in Bearn, the picturesque patrimony of Henri IV; in Guienne, the conquests of Charles VII; in Saintogne, Poitou, and Touraine, those of Charles V and of Philip Augustus; and at last, slackening their pace above the old domain of Hugh Capet, halt murmuring on the towers of St. Germain.

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"O Madame!" exclaimed Marie de Mantua to the Queen, "do you see this storm coming up from the south?"

"You often look in that direction, 'ma chere'," answered Anne of Austria, leaning on the balcony.

"It is the direction of the sun, Madame."

"And of tempests, you see," said the Queen. "Trust in my friendship, my child; these clouds can bring no happiness to you. I would rather see you turn your eyes toward Poland. See the fine people you might command."

At this moment, to avoid the rain, which began to fall, the Prince-Palatine passed rapidly under the windows of the Queen, with a numerous suite of young Poles on horseback. Their Turkish vests, with buttons of diamonds, emeralds, and rubies; their green and gray cloaks; the lofty plumes of their horses, and their adventurous air-gave them a singular eclat to which the court had easily become accustomed. They paused for a moment, and the Prince made two salutes, while the light animal he rode passed gracefully sideways, keeping his front toward the princesses; prancing and snorting, he shook his mane, and seemed to salute by putting his head between his legs. The whole suite repeated the evolution as they passed. The Princesse Marie had at first shrunk back, lest they should see her tears; but the brilliant and flattering spectacle made her return to the balcony, and she could not help exclaiming:

"How gracefully the Palatine rides that beautiful horse! he seems scarce conscious of it."

The Queen smiled, and said:

"He is conscious about her who might be his queen tomorrow, if she would but make a sign of the head, and let but one glance from her great black almond-shaped eyes be turned on that throne, instead of always receiving these poor foreigners with poutings, as now."

And Anne of Austria kissed the cheek of Marie, who could not refrain from smiling also; but she instantly sunk her head, reproaching herself, and resumed her sadness, which seemed gliding from her. She even needed once more to contemplate the great clouds that hung over the chateau.

"Poor child," continued the Queen, "thou dost all thou canst to be very faithful, and to keep thyself in the melancholy of thy romance. Thou art making thyself ill with weeping when thou shouldst be asleep, and with not eating. Thou passest the night in revery and in writing; but I warn thee, thou wilt get nothing by it, except making thyself thin and

less beautiful, and the not being a queen. Thy Cinq-Mars is an ambitious youth, who has lost himself.”

Seeing Marie conceal her head in her handkerchief to weep, Anne of Austria for a moment reentered her chamber, leaving Marie in the balcony, and feigned to be looking for some jewels at her toilet-table; she soon returned, slowly and gravely, to the window. Marie was more calm, and was gazing sorrowfully at the landscape before her, the hills in the distance, and the storm gradually spreading itself.

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The Queen resumed in a more serious tone:

“God has been more merciful to you than your imprudence perhaps deserved, Marie. He has saved you from great danger. You were willing to make great sacrifices, but fortunately they have not been accomplished as you expected. Innocence has saved you from love. You are as one who, thinking she has swallowed a deadly poison, has in reality drunk only pure and harmless water.”

“Ah, Madame, what mean you? Am I not unhappy enough already?”

“Do not interrupt me,” said the Queen; “you will, ere long, see your present position with different eyes. I will not accuse you of ingratitude toward the Cardinal; I have too many reasons for not liking him. I myself witnessed the rise of the conspiracy. Still, you should remember, ‘ma chere’, that he was the only person in France who, against the opinion of the Queen-mother and of the court, insisted upon war with the duchy of Mantua, which he recovered from the empire and from Spain, and returned to the Duc de Nevers, your father. Here, in this very chateau of Saint-Germain, was signed the treaty which deposed the Duke of Guastalla.—[The 19th of May, 1632.]—You were then very young; they must, however, have told you of it. Yet here, through love alone (I am willing to believe, with yourself, that it is so), a young man of two-and-twenty is ready to get him assassinated.”

“O Madame, he is incapable of such a deed. I swear to you that he has refused to adopt it.”

“I have begged you, Marie, to let me speak. I know that he is generous and loyal. I am willing to believe that, contrary to the custom of our times, he would not go so far as to kill an old man, as did the Chevalier de Guise. But can he prevent his assassination, if his troops make him prisoner? This we can not say, any more than he. God alone knows the future. It is, at all events, certain that it is for you he attacks him, and, to overthrow him, is preparing civil war, which perhaps is bursting forth at the very moment that we speak—a war without success. Whichever way it turns, it can only effect evil, for Monsieur is going to abandon the conspiracy.”

“How, Madame?”

“Listen to me. I tell you I am certain of it; I need not explain myself further. What will the grand ecuyer do? The King, as he rightly anticipated, has gone to consult the Cardinal. To consult him is to yield to him; but the treaty of Spain is signed. If it be discovered, what can Monsieur de Cinq-Mars do? Do not tremble thus. We will save him; we will save his life, I promise you. There is yet time, I hope.”

“Ah, Madame, you hope! I am lost!” cried Marie, half fainting.

"Let us sit down," said the Queen; and, placing herself near Marie, at the entrance to the chamber, she continued:

"Doubtless Monsieur will treat for all the conspirators in treating for himself; but exile will be the least punishment, perpetual exile. Behold, then, the Duchesse de Nevers and Mantua, the Princesse Marie de Gonzaga, the wife of Monsieur Henri d'Effiat, Marquis de Cinq-Mars, exiled!"

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"Well, Madame, I will follow him into exile. It is my duty; I am his wife!" exclaimed Marie, sobbing. "I would I knew he were already banished and in safety."

"Dreams of eighteen!" said the Queen, supporting Marie. "Awake, child, awake! you must. I deny not the good qualities of Monsieur de Cinq-Mars. He has a lofty character, a vast mind, and great courage; but he may no longer be aught for you, and, fortunately, you are not his wife, or even his betrothed."

"I am his, Madame-his alone."

"But without the benediction," replied Anne of Austria; "in a word, without marriage. No priest would have dared—not even your own; he told me so. Be silent!" she added, putting her two beautiful hands on Marie's lips. "Be silent! You would say that God heard your vow; that you can not live without him; that your destinies are inseparable from his; that death alone can break your union? The phrases of your age, delicious chimeras of a moment, at which one day you will smile, happy at not having to lament them all your life. Of the many and brilliant women you see around me at court, there is not one but at your age had some beautiful dream of love, like this of yours, who did not form those ties, which they believed indissoluble, and who did not in secret take eternal oaths. Well, these dreams are vanished, these knots broken, these oaths forgotten; and yet you see them happy women and mothers. Surrounded by the honors of their rank, they laugh and dance every night. I again divine what you would say—they loved not as you love, eh? You deceive yourself, my dear child; they loved as much, and wept no less.

"And here I must make you acquainted with that great mystery which constitutes your despair, since you are ignorant of the malady that devours you. We have a twofold existence, 'm'amie': our internal life, that of our feelings powerfully works within us, while the external life dominates despite ourselves. We are never independent of men, more especially in an elevated condition. Alone, we think ourselves mistresses of our destiny; but the entrance of two or three people fastens on all our chains, by recalling our rank and our retinue. Nay; shut yourself up and abandon yourself to all the daring and extraordinary resolutions that the passions may raise up in you, to the marvellous sacrifices they may suggest to you. A lackey coming and asking your orders will at once break the charm and bring you back to your real life. It is this contest between your projects and your position which destroys you. You are invariably angry with yourself; you bitterly reproach yourself."

Marie turned away her head.

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“Yes, you believe yourself criminal. Pardon yourself, Marie; all men are beings so relative and so dependent one upon another that I know not whether the great retreats of the world that we sometimes see are not made for the world itself. Despair has its pursuits, and solitude its coquetry. It is said that the gloomiest hermits can not refrain from inquiring what men say of them. This need of public opinion is beneficial, in that it combats, almost always victoriously, that which is irregular in our imagination, and comes to the aid of duties which we too easily forget. One experiences (you will feel it, I hope) in returning to one’s proper lot, after the sacrifice of that which had diverted the reason, the satisfaction of an exile returning to his family, of a sick person at sight of the sun after a night afflicted with frightful dreams.

“It is this feeling of a being returned, as it were, to its natural state that creates the calm which you see in many eyes that have also had their tears—for there are few women who have not known tears such as yours. You would think yourself perjured if you renounced Cinq-Mars! But nothing binds you; you have more than acquitted yourself toward him by refusing for more than two years past the royal hands offered you. And, after all, what has he done, this impassioned lover? He has elevated himself to reach you; but may not the ambition which here seems to you to have aided love have made use of that love? This young man seems to me too profound, too calm in his political stratagems, too independent in his vast resolutions, in his colossal enterprises, for me to believe him solely occupied by his tenderness. If you have been but a means instead of an end, what would you say?”

“I would still love him,” answered Marie. “While he lives, I am his.”

“And while I live,” said the Queen, with firmness, “I will oppose the alliance.”

At these last words the rain and hail fell violently on the balcony. The Queen took advantage of the circumstance abruptly to leave the room and pass into that where the Duchesse de Chevreuse, Mazarin, Madame de Guemenee, and the Prince-Palatine had been awaiting her for a short time. The Queen walked up to them. Marie placed herself in the shade of a curtain in order to conceal the redness of her eyes. She was at first unwilling to take part in the sprightly conversation; but some words of it attracted her attention. The Queen was showing to the Princesse de Guemenee diamonds she had just received from Paris.

“As for this crown, it does not belong to me. The King had it prepared for the future Queen of Poland. Who that is to be, we know not.” Then turning toward the Prince-Palatine, “We saw you pass, Prince. Whom were you going to visit?”

“Mademoiselle la Duchesse de Rohan,” answered the Pole.

The insinuating Mazarin, who availed himself of every opportunity to worm out secrets, and to make himself necessary by forced confidences, said, approaching the Queen:

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"That comes very apropos, just as we were speaking of the crown of Poland."

Marie, who was listening, could not hear this, and said to Madame de Guemenee, who was at her side:

"Is Monsieur de Chabot, then, King of Poland?"

The Queen heard that, and was delighted at this touch of pride. In order to develop its germ, she affected an approving attention to the conversation that ensued.

The Princesse de Guemenee exclaimed:

"Can you conceive such a marriage? We really can't get it out of our heads. This same Mademoiselle de Rohan, whom we have seen so haughty, after having refused the Comte de Soissons, the Duc de Weimar, and the Duc de Nemours, to marry Monsieur de Chabot, a simple gentleman! 'Tis really a sad pity! What are we coming to? 'Tis impossible to say what it will all end in."

"What! can it be true? Love at court! a real love affair! Can it be believed?"

All this time the Queen continued opening and shutting and playing with the new crown.

"Diamonds suit only black hair," she said. "Let us see. Let me put it on you, Marie. Why, it suits her to admiration!"

"One would suppose it had been made for Madame la Princesse," said the Cardinal.

"I would give the last drop of my blood for it to remain on that brow," said the Prince-Palatine.

Marie, through the tears that were still on her cheek, gave an infantine and involuntary smile, like a ray of sunshine through rain. Then, suddenly blushing deeply, she hastily took refuge in her apartments.

All present laughed. The Queen followed her with her eyes, smiled, presented her hand for the Polish ambassador to kiss, and retired to write a letter.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WORK

One night, before Perpignan, a very unusual event took place. It was ten o'clock; and all were asleep. The slow and almost suspended operations of the siege had rendered the camp and the town inactive. The Spaniards troubled themselves little about the

French, all communication toward Catalonia being open as in time of peace; and in the French army men's minds were agitated with that secret anxiety which precedes great events.

Yet all was calm; no sound was heard but that of the measured tread of the sentries. Nothing was seen in the dark night but the red light of the matches of their guns, always smoking, when suddenly the trumpets of the musketeers, of the light-horse, and of the men-at-arms sounded almost simultaneously, "boot and saddle," and "to horse." All the sentinels cried to arms; and the sergeants, with flambeaux, went from tent to tent, along pike in their hands, to waken the soldiers, range them in lines, and count them. Some files marched in gloomy silence along the streets of the camp, and took their position in battle array. The sound of the mounted squadrons announced that the heavy cavalry were making the same dispositions. After half an hour of movement the noise ceased, the torches were extinguished, and all again became calm, but the army was on foot.

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One of the last tents of the camp shone within as a star with flambeaux. On approaching this little white and transparent pyramid, we might have distinguished the shadows of two men reflected on the canvas as they walked to and fro within. Outside several men on horseback were in attendance; inside were De Thou and Cinq-Mars.

To see the pious and wise De Thou thus up and armed at this hour, you might have taken him for one of the chiefs of the revolt. But a closer examination of his serious countenance and mournful expression immediately showed that he blamed it, and allowed himself to be led into it and endangered by it from an extraordinary resolution which aided him to surmount the horror he had of the enterprise itself. From the day when Henri d'Effiat had opened his heart and confided to him its whole secret, he had seen clearly that all remonstrance was vain with a young man so powerfully resolved.

De Thou had even understood what M. de Cinq-Mars had not told him, and had seen in the secret union of his friend with the Princesse Marie, one of those ties of love whose mysterious and frequent faults, voluptuous and involuntary derelictions, could not be too soon purified by public benediction. He had comprehended that punishment, impossible to be supported long by a lover, the adored master of that young girl, and who was condemned daily to appear before her as a stranger, to receive political disclosures of marriages they were preparing for her. The day when he received his entire confession, he had done all in his power to prevent Cinq-Mars going so far in his projects as the foreign alliance. He had evoked the gravest recollections and the best feelings, without any other result than rendering the invincible resolution of his friend more rude toward him. Cinq-Mars, it will be recollected, had said to him harshly, "Well, did I ask you to take part in this conspiracy?" And he had desired only to promise not to denounce it; and he had collected all his power against friendship to say, "Expect nothing further from me if you sign this treaty." Yet Cinq-Mars had signed the treaty; and De Thou was still there with him.

The habit of familiarly discussing the projects of his friend had perhaps rendered them less odious to him. His contempt for the vices of the Prime-Minister; his indignation at the servitude of the parliaments to which his family belonged, and at the corruption of justice; the powerful names, and more especially the noble characters of the men who directed the enterprise—all had contributed to soften down his first painful impression. Having once promised secrecy to M. de Cinq-Mars, he considered himself as in a position to accept in detail all the secondary disclosures; and since the fortuitous event which had compromised him with the conspirators at the house of Marion de Lorme, he considered himself united to them by honor, and engaged to an inviolable secrecy. Since that time he had seen Monsieur, the Duc de Bouillon, and Fontrailles; they had become accustomed to speak before him without constraint, and he to hear them.

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The dangers which threatened his friend now drew him into their vortex like an invincible magnet. His conscience accused him; but he followed Cinq-Mars wherever he went without even, from excess of delicacy, hazarding a single expression which might resemble a personal fear. He had tacitly given up his life, and would have deemed it unworthy of both to manifest a desire to regain it.

The master of the horse was in his cuirass; he was armed, and wore large boots. An enormous pistol, with a lighted match, was placed upon his table between two flambeaux. A heavy watch in a brass case lay near the pistol. De Thou, wrapped in a black cloak, sat motionless with folded arms. Cinq-Mars paced backward and forward, his arms crossed behind his back, from time to time looking at the hand of the watch, too sluggish in his eyes. He opened the tent, looked up to the heavens, and returned.

"I do not see my star there," said he; "but no matter. She is here in my heart."

"The night is dark," said De Thou.

"Say rather that the time draws nigh. It advances, my friend; it advances. Twenty minutes more, and all will be accomplished. The army only waits the report of this pistol to begin."

De Thou held in his hand an ivory crucifix, and looking first at the cross, and then toward heaven, "Now," said he, "is the hour to complete the sacrifice. I repent not; but oh, how bitter is the cup of sin to my lips! I had vowed my days to innocence and to the works of the soul, and here I am about to commit a crime, and to draw the sword."

But forcibly seizing the hand of Cinq-Mars, "It is for you, for you!" he added with the enthusiasm of a blindly devoted heart. "I rejoice in my errors if they turn to your glory. I see but your happiness in my fault. Forgive me if I have returned for a moment to the habitual thought of my whole life."

Cinq-Mars looked steadfastly at him; and a tear stole slowly down his cheek.

"Virtuous friend," said he, "may your fault fall only on my head! But let us hope that God, who pardons those who love, will be for us; for we are criminal—I through love, you through friendship."

Then suddenly looking at the watch, he took the long pistol in his hand, and gazed at the smoking match with a fierce air. His long hair fell over his face like the mane of a young lion.

"Do not consume," said he; "burn slowly. Thou art about to light a flame which the waves of ocean can not extinguish. The flame will soon light half Europe; it may perhaps reach the wood of thrones. Burn slowly, precious flame! The winds which fan



thee are violent and fearful; they are love and hatred. Reserve thyself! Thy explosion will be heard afar, and will find echoes in the peasant's hut and the king's palace.

"Burn, burn, poor flame! Thou art to me a sceptre and a thunderbolt!"

De Thou, still holding his ivory crucifix in his hand, said in a low voice:

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"Lord, pardon us the blood that will be shed! We combat the wicked and the impious." Then, raising his voice, "My friend, the cause of virtue will triumph," he said; "it alone will triumph. God has ordained that the guilty treaty should not reach us; that which constituted the crime is no doubt destroyed. We shall fight without the foreigners, and perhaps we shall not fight at all. God will change the heart of the king."

"'Tis the hour! 'tis the hour!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars, his eyes fixed upon the watch with a kind of savage joy; "four minutes more, and the Cardinalists in the camp will be crushed! We shall march upon Narbonne! He is there! Give me the pistol!"

At these words he hastily opened the tent, and took up the match.

"A courier from Paris! an express from court!" cried a voice outside, as a man, heated with hard riding and overcome with fatigue, threw himself from his horse, entered, and presented a letter to Cinq-Mars.

"From the Queen, Monseigneur," he said. Cinq-Mars turned pale, and read as follows:

M. De Cinq-Mars: I write this letter to entreat and conjure you to restore to her duties our well-beloved adopted daughter and friend, the Princesse Marie de Gonzaga, whom your affection alone turns from the throne of Poland, which has been offered to her. I have sounded her heart. She is very young, and I have good reason to believe that she would accept the crown with less effort and less grief than you may perhaps imagine. It is for her you have undertaken a war which will put to fire and sword my beautiful and beloved France. I supplicate and implore you to act as a gentleman, and nobly to release the Duchesse de Mantua from the promises she may have made you. Thus restore repose to her soul, and peace to our beloved country.

The Queen, who will throw herself at your feet if need be,

Anne.

Cinq-Mars calmly replaced the pistol upon the table; his first impulse had been to turn its muzzle upon himself. However, he laid it down, and snatching a pencil, wrote on the back of the letter;

Madame: Marie de Gonzaga, being my wife, can not be Queen of Poland until after my death. I die.

Cinq-Mars.

Then, as if he would not allow himself time for a moment's reflection, he forced the letter into the hands of the courier.

“To horse! to horse!” cried he, in a furious tone. “If you remain another instant, you are a dead man!”

He saw him gallop off, and reentered the tent. Alone with his friend, he remained an instant standing, but pale, his eyes fixed, and looking on the ground like a madman. He felt himself totter.

“De Thou!” he cried.

“What would you, my friend, my dear friend? I am with you. You have acted grandly, most grandly, sublimely!”

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"De Thou!" he cried again, in a hollow voice, and fell with his face to the ground, like an uprooted tree.

Violent tempests assume different aspects, according to the climates in which they take place. Those which have spread over a terrible space in northern countries assemble into one single cloud under the torrid zone—the more formidable, that they leave the horizon in all its purity, and that the furious waves still reflect the azure of heaven while tinged with the blood of man. It is the same with great passions. They assume strange aspects according to our characters; but how terrible are they in vigorous hearts, which have preserved their force under the veil of social forms? When youth and despair embrace, we know not to what fury they may rise, or what may be their sudden resignation; we know not whether the volcano will burst the mountain or become suddenly extinguished within its entrails.

De Thou, in alarm, raised his friend. The blood gushed from his nostrils and ears; he would have thought him dead, but .for the torrents of tears which flowed from his eyes. They were the only sign of life. Suddenly he opened his lids, looked around him, and by an extraordinary energy resumed his senses and the power of his will.

"I am in the presence of men," said he; "I must finish with them. My friend, it is half-past eleven; the hour for the signal has passed. Give, in my name, the order to return to quarters. It was a false alarm, which I will myself explain this evening."

De Thou had already perceived the importance of this order; he went out and returned immediately.

He found Cinq-Mars seated, calm, and endeavoring to cleanse the blood from his face.

"De Thou," said he, looking fixedly at him, "retire; you disturb me."

"I leave you not," answered the latter.

"Fly, I tell you! the Pyrenees are not far distant. I can not speak much longer, even to you; but if you remain with me, you will die. I give you warning."

"I remain," repeated De Thou.

"May God preserve you, then!" answered Cinq-Mars, "for I can do nothing more; the moment has passed. I leave you here. Call Fontrailles and all the confederates: distribute these passports among them. Let them fly immediately; tell them all has failed, but that I thank them. For you, once again I say, fly with them, I entreat you; but whatever you do, follow me not—follow me not, for your life! I swear to you not to do violence to myself!"

With these words, shaking his friend's hand without looking at him, he rushed from the tent.

Meantime, some leagues thence another conversation was taking place. At Narbonne, in the same cabinet in which we formerly beheld Richelieu regulating with Joseph the interests of the State, were still seated the same men, nearly as we have described them. The minister, however, had grown much older in three years of suffering; and the Capuchin was as much terrified with the result of his expedition as his master appeared tranquil.

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The Cardinal, seated in his armchair, his legs bound and encased with furs and warm clothing, had upon his knees three kittens, which gambolled upon his scarlet robe. Every now and then he took one of them and placed it upon the others, to continue their sport. He smiled as he watched them. On his feet lay their mother, looking like an enormous animated muff.

Joseph, seated near him, was going over the account of all he had heard in the confessional. Pale even now, at the danger he had run of being discovered, or of being murdered by Jacques, he concluded thus:

"In short, your Eminence, I can not help feeling agitated to my heart's core when I reflect upon the dangers which have, and still do, threaten you. Assassins offer themselves to poniard you. I beheld in France the whole court against you, one half of the army, and two provinces. Abroad, Spain and Portugal are ready to furnish troops. Everywhere there are snares or battles, poniards or cannon."

The Cardinal yawned three times, without discontinuing his amusement, and then said:

"A cat is a very fine animal. It is a drawing-room tiger. What suppleness, what extraordinary finesse! Here is this little yellow one pretending to sleep, in order that the tortoise-shell one may not notice it, but fall upon its brother; and this one, how it tears the other! See how it sticks its claws into its side! It would kill and eat it, I fully believe, if it were the stronger. It is very amusing. What pretty animals!"

He coughed and sneezed for some time; then he continued:

"Messire Joseph, I sent word to you not to speak to me of business until after my supper. . . I have an appetite now, and it is not yet my hour. Chicot, my doctor, recommends regularity, and I feel my usual pain in my side. This is how I shall spend the evening," he added, looking at the clock. "At nine, we will settle the affairs of Monsieur le Grand. At ten, I shall be carried round the garden to take the air by moonlight. Then I shall sleep for an hour or two. At midnight the King will be here; and at four o'clock you may return to receive the various orders for arrests, condemnations, or any others I may have to give you, for the provinces, Paris, or the armies of his Majesty."

Richelieu said all this in the same tone of voice, with a uniform enunciation, affected only by the weakness of his chest and the loss of several teeth.

It was seven in the evening. The Capuchin withdrew. The Cardinal supped with the greatest tranquillity; and when the clock struck half-past eight, he sent for Joseph, and said to him, when he was seated:

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"This, then, is all they have been able to do against me during more than two years. They are poor creatures, truly! The Duc de Bouillon, whom I thought possessed some ability, has forfeited all claim to my opinion. I have watched him closely; and I ask you, has he taken one step worthy of a true statesman? The King, Monsieur, and the rest, have only shown their teeth against me, and without depriving me of one single man. The young Cinq-Mars is the only man among them who has any consecutiveness of ideas. All that he has done has been done surprisingly well. I must do him justice; he had good qualities. I should have made him my pupil, had it not been for his obstinate character. But he has here charged me 'a l'outrance, and must take the consequences. I am sorry for him. I have left them to float about in open water for the last two years. I shall now draw the net."

"It is time, Monseigneur," said Joseph, who often trembled involuntarily as he spoke. "Do you bear in mind that from Perpignan to Narbonne the way is short? Do you know that if your army here is powerful, your own troops are weak and uncertain; that the young nobles are furious; and that the King is not sure?"

The Cardinal looked at the clock.

"It is only half-past eight, Joseph. I have already told you that I will not talk about this affair until nine. Meantime, as justice must be done, you will write what I shall dictate, for my memory serves me well. There are still some objectionable persons left, I see by my notes—four of the judges of Urbain Grandier. He was a rare genius, that Urbain Grandier," he added, with a malicious expression. Joseph bit his lips. "All the other judges have died miserably. As to Houmain, he shall be hanged as a smuggler by and by. We may leave him alone for the present. But there is that horrible Lactantius, who lives peacefully, Barre, and Mignon. Take a pen, and write to the Bishop of Poitiers,

"Monseigneur: It is his Majesty's pleasure that Fathers Mignon and Barre be superseded in their cures, and sent with the shortest possible delay to the town of Lyons, with Father Lactantius, Capuchin, to be tried before a special tribunal, charged with criminal intentions against the State."

Joseph wrote as coolly as a Turk strikes off a head at a sign from his master. The Cardinal said to him, while signing the letter:

"I will let you know how I wish them to disappear, for it is important to efface all traces of that affair. Providence has served me well. In removing these men, I complete its work. That is all that posterity shall know of the affair."

And he read to the Capuchin that page of his memoirs in which he recounts the possession and sorceries of the magician.—[Collect. des Memoires xxviii. 189.]—During this slow process, Joseph could not help looking at the clock.

“You are anxious to come to Monsieur le Grand,” said the Cardinal at last. “Well, then, to please you, let us begin.”

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"Do you think I have not my reasons for being tranquil? You think that I have allowed these poor conspirators to go too far. No, no! Here are some little papers that would reassure you, did you know their contents. First, in this hollow stick is the treaty with Spain, seized at Oleron. I am well satisfied with Laubardemont; he is an able man."

The fire of ferocious jealousy sparkled under the thick eyebrows of the monk.

"Ah, Monseigneur," said he, "you know not from whom he seized it. He certainly suffered him to die, and in that respect we can not complain, for he was the agent of the conspiracy; but it was his son."

"Say you the truth?" cried the Cardinal, in a severe tone. "Yes, for you dare not lie to me. How knew you this?"

"From his attendants, Monsiegnur. Here are their reports. They will testify to them."

The Cardinal having examined these papers, said:

"We will employ him once more to try our conspirators, and then you shall do as you like with him. I give him to you."

Joseph joyfully pocketed his precious denunciations, and continued:

"Your Eminence speaks of trying men who are still armed and on horseback."

"They are not all so. Read this letter from Monsieur to Chavigny. He asks for pardon. He dared not address me the first day, and his prayers rose no higher than the knees of one of my servants.

To M. de Chavigny:

M. De Chavigny: Although I believe that you are little satisfied with me (and in truth you have reason to be dissatisfied), I do not the less entreat you to endeavor my reconciliation with his Eminence, and rely for this upon the true love you bear me, and which, I believe, is greater than your anger. You know how much I require to be relieved from the danger I am in. You have already twice stood my friend with his Eminence. I swear to you this shall be the last time I give you such an employment.

Gaston D'ORLEANS.

"But the next day he took courage, and sent this to myself,

To his Excellency the Cardinal-Duc:



My cousin: This ungrateful M. le Grand is the most guilty man in the world to have displeased you. The favors he received from his Majesty have always made me doubtful of him and his artifices. For you, my cousin, I retain my whole esteem. I am truly repentant at having again been wanting in the fidelity I owe to my Lord the King, and I call God to witness the sincerity with which I shall be for the rest of my life your most faithful friend, with the same devotion that I am, my cousin, your affectionate cousin,

Gaston.

and the third to the King. His project choked him; he could not keep it down. But I am not so easily satisfied. I must have a free and full confession, or I will expel him from the kingdom. I have written to him this morning.

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[*Monsieur*: Since God wills that men should have recourse to a frank and entire confession to be absolved of their faults in this world, I indicate to you the steps you must take to be delivered from this danger. Your Highness has commenced well; you must continue. This is all I can say to you.]

“As to the magnificent and powerful Due de Bouillon, sovereign lord of Sedan and general-in-chief of the armies in Italy, he has just been arrested by his officers in the midst of his soldiers, concealed in a truss of straw. There remain, therefore, only our two young neighbors. They imagine they have the camp wholly at their orders, while they really have only the red troops. All the rest, being Monsieur’s men, will not act, and my troops will arrest them. However, I have permitted them to appear to obey. If they give the signal at half-past eleven, they will be arrested at the first step. If not, the King will give them up to me this evening. Do not open your eyes so wide. He will give them up to me, I repeat, this night, between midnight and one o’clock. You see that all has been done without you, Joseph. We can dispense with you very well; and truly, all this time, I do not see that we have received any great service from you. You grow negligent.”

“Ah, Monseigneur! did you but know the trouble I have had to discover the route of the bearers of the treaty! I only learned it by risking my life between these young people.”

The Cardinal laughed contemptuously, leaning back in his chair.

“Thou must have been very ridiculous and very fearful in that box, Joseph; I dare say it was the first time in thy life thou ever heardst love spoken of. Dost thou like the language, Father Joseph? Tell me, dost thou clearly understand it? I doubt whether thou hast formed a very refined idea of it.”

Richelieu, his arms crossed, looked at his discomfited Capuchin with infinite delight, and continued in the scornfully familiar tone of a grand seigneur, which he sometimes assumed, pleasing himself with putting forth the noblest expressions through the most impure lips:

“Come, now, Joseph, give me a definition of love according to thy idea. What can it be—for thou seest it exists out of romances. This worthy youngster undertook these little conspiracies through love. Thou heardst it thyself with throe unworthy ears. Come, what is love? For my part, I know nothing about it.”

The monk was astounded, and looked upon the ground with the stupid eye of some base animal. After long consideration, he replied in a drawling and nasal voice:

“It must be a kind of malignant fever which leads the brain astray; but in truth, Monseigneur, I have never reflected on it until this moment. I have always been embarrassed in speaking to a woman. I wish women could be omitted from society

altogether; for I do not see what use they are, unless it be to disclose secrets, like the little Duchess or Marion de Lorme, whom I can not too strongly recommend to your Eminence. She thought of everything, and herself threw our little prophecy among the conspirators with great address. We have not been without the marvellous this time. As in the siege of Hesdin, all we have to do is to find a window through which you may pass on the day of the execution.”

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[In 1638, Prince Thomas having raised the siege of Hesdin, the Cardinal was much vexed at it. A nun of the convent of Mount Calvary had said that the victory would be to the King and Father Joseph, thus wishing it to be believed that Heaven protected the minister.—Memoires pour l'histoire du Cardinal de Richelieu.]

"This is another of your absurdities, sir," said the Cardinal; "you will make me as ridiculous as yourself, if you go on so; I am too powerful to need the assistance of Heaven. Do not let that happen again. Occupy yourself only with the people I consign to you. I traced your part before. When the master of the horse is taken, you will see him tried and executed at Lyons. I will not be known in this. This affair is beneath me; it is a stone under my feet, upon which I ought not to have bestowed so much attention."

Joseph was silent; he could not understand this man, who, surrounded on every side by armed enemies, spoke of the future as of a present over which he had the entire control, and of the present as a past which he no longer feared. He knew not whether to look upon him as a madman or a prophet, above or below the standard of human nature.

His astonishment was redoubled when Chavigny hastily entered, and nearly falling, in his heavy boots, over the Cardinal's footstool, exclaimed in great agitation:

"Sir, one of your servants has just arrived from Perpignan; and he has beheld the camp in an uproar, and your enemies in the saddle."

"They will soon dismount, sir," replied Richelieu, replacing his footstool. "You appear to have lost your equanimity."

"But—but, Monseigneur, must we not warn Monsieur de Fabert?"

"Let him sleep, and go to bed yourself; and you also, Joseph."

"Monseigneur, another strange event has occurred—the King has arrived."

"Indeed, that is extraordinary," said the minister, looking at his watch. "I did not expect him these two hours. Retire, both of you."

A heavy trampling and the clattering of arms announced the arrival of the Prince; the folding-doors were thrown open; the guards in the Cardinal's service struck the ground thrice with their pikes; and the King appeared.

He entered, supporting himself with a cane on one side, and on the other leaning upon the shoulder of his confessor, Father Sirmond, who withdrew, and left him with the Cardinal; the latter rose with difficulty, but could not advance a step to meet the King, because his legs were bandaged and enveloped. He made a sign that they should assist the King to a seat near the fire, facing himself. Louis XIII fell into an armchair



furnished with pillows, asked for and drank a glass of cordial, prepared to strengthen him against the frequent fainting-fits caused by his malady of languor, signed to all to leave the room, and, alone with Richelieu, he said in a languid voice:

“I am departing, my dear Cardinal; I feel that I shall soon return to God. I become weaker from day to day; neither the summer nor the southern air has restored my strength.”

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"I shall precede your Majesty," replied the minister. "You see that death has already conquered my limbs; but while I have a head to think and a hand to write, I shall be at the service of your Majesty."

"And I am sure it was your intention to add, 'a heart to love me.'"

"Can your Majesty doubt it?" answered the Cardinal, frowning, and biting his lips impatiently at this speech.

"Sometimes I doubt it," replied the King. "Listen: I wish to speak openly to you, and to complain of you to yourself. There are two things which have been upon my conscience these three years. I have never mentioned them to you; but I reproached you secretly; and could anything have induced me to consent to any proposals contrary to your interest, it would be this recollection."

There was in this speech that frankness natural to weak minds, who seek by thus making their ruler uneasy, to compensate for the harm they dare not do him, and revenge their subjection by a childish controversy.

Richelieu perceived by these words that he had run a great risk; but he saw at the same time the necessity of venting all his spleen, and, to facilitate the explosion of these important avowals, he accumulated all the professions he thought most calculated to provoke the King.

"No, no!" his Majesty at length exclaimed, "I shall believe nothing until you have explained those two things, which are always in my thoughts, which were lately mentioned to me, and which I can justify by no reasoning. I mean the trial of Urbain Grandier, of which I was never well informed, and the reason for the hatred you bore to my unfortunate mother, even to her very ashes."

"Is this all, Sire?" said Richelieu. "Are these my only faults? They are easily explained. The first it was necessary to conceal from your Majesty because of its horrible and disgusting details of scandal. There was certainly an art employed, which can not be looked upon as guilty, in concealing, under the title of 'magic,' crimes the very names of which are revolting to modesty, the recital of which would have revealed dangerous mysteries to the innocent; this was a holy deceit practised to hide these impurities from the eyes of the people."

"Enough, enough, Cardinal," said Louis XIII, turning away his head, and looking downward, while a blush covered his face; "I can not hear more. I understand you; these explanations would disgust me. I approve your motives; 'tis well. I had not been told that; they had concealed these dreadful vices from me. Are you assured of the proofs of these crimes?"



"I have them all in my possession, Sire; and as to the glorious Queen, Marie de Medicis, I am surprised that your Majesty can forget how much I was attached to her. Yes, I do not fear to acknowledge it; it is to her I owe my elevation. She was the first who deigned to notice the Bishop of Luton, then only twenty-two years of age, to place me near her. What have I not suffered when she compelled me to oppose her in your Majesty's interest! But this sacrifice was made for you. I never had, and never shall have, to regret it."

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"'Tis well for you, but for me!" said the King, bitterly.

"Ah, Sire," exclaimed the Cardinal, "did not the Son of God himself set you an example? It is by the model of every perfection that we regulate our counsels; and if the monument due to the precious remains of your mother is not yet raised, Heaven is my witness that the works were retarded through the fear of afflicting your heart by bringing back the recollection of her death. But blessed be the day in which I have been permitted to speak to you on the subject! I myself shall say the first mass at Saint-Denis, when we shall see her deposited there, if Providence allows me the strength."

The countenance of the King assumed a more affable yet still cold expression; and the Cardinal, thinking that he could go no farther that evening in persuasion, suddenly resolved to make a more powerful move, and to attack the enemy in front. Still keeping his eyes firmly fixed upon the King, he said, coldly:

"And was it for this you consented to my death?"

"Me!" said the King. "You have been deceived; I have indeed heard of a conspiracy, and I wished to speak to you about it; but I have commanded nothing against you."

"The conspirators do not say so, Sire; but I am bound to believe your Majesty, and I am glad for your sake that men were deceived. But what advice were you about to condescend to give me?"

"I—I wished to tell you frankly, and between ourselves, that you will do well to beware of Monsieur—"

"Ah, Sire, I can not now heed it; for here is a letter which he has just sent to me for you. He seems to have been guilty even toward your Majesty."

The King read in astonishment:

Monseigneur: I am much grieved at having once more failed in the fidelity which I owe to your Majesty. I humbly entreat you to allow me to ask a thousand pardons, with the assurances of my submission and repentance.

Your very humble servant,
Gaston.

"What does this mean?" cried Louis; "dare they arm against me also?"

"Also!" muttered the Cardinal, biting his lips; "yes, Sire, also; and this makes me believe, to a certain degree, this little packet of papers."

While speaking, he drew a roll of parchment from a piece of hollowed elder, and opened it before the eyes of the King.

“This is simply a treaty with Spain, which I think does not bear the signature of your Majesty. You may see the twenty articles all in due form. Everything is here arranged—the place of safety, the number of troops, the supplies of men and money.”

“The traitors!” cried the King, in great agitation; “they must be seized. My brother renounces them and repents; but do not fail to arrest the Duc de Bouillon.”

“It shall be done, Sire.”

“That will be difficult, in the middle of the army in Italy.”

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"I will answer with my head for his arrest, Sire; but is there not another name to be added?"

"Who—what—Cinq-Mars?" inquired the King, hesitating.

"Exactly so, Sire," answered the Cardinal.

"I see—but—I think—we might—"

"Hear me!" exclaimed Richelieu, in a voice of thunder; "all must be settled to-day. Your favorite is mounted at the head of his party; choose between him and me. Yield up the boy to the man, or the man to the boy; there is no alternative."

"And what will you do if I consent?" said the King.

"I will have his head and that of his friend."

"Never! it is impossible!" replied the King, with horror, as he relapsed into the same state of irresolution he evinced when with Cinq-Mars against Richelieu. "He is my friend as well as you; my heart bleeds at the idea of his death. Why can you not both agree? Why this division? It is that which has led him to this. You have between you brought me to the brink of despair; you have made me the most miserable of men."

Louis hid his head in his hands while speaking, and perhaps he shed tears; but the inflexible minister kept his eyes upon him as if watching his prey, and without remorse, without giving the King time for reflection—on the contrary, profiting by this emotion to speak yet longer.

"And is it thus," he continued, in a harsh and cold voice, "that you remember the commandments of God communicated to you by the mouth of your confessor? You told me one day that the Church expressly commanded you to reveal to your prime minister all that you might hear against him; yet I have never heard from you of my intended death! It was necessary that more faithful friends should apprise me of this conspiracy; that the guilty themselves through the mercy of Providence should themselves make the avowal of their fault. One only, the most guilty, yet the least of all, still resists, and it is he who has conducted the whole; it is he who would deliver France into the power of the foreigner, who would overthrow in one single day my labors of twenty years. He would call up the Huguenots of the south, invite to arms all orders of the State, revive crushed pretensions, and, in fact, renew the League which was put down by your father. It is that—do not deceive yourself—it is that which raises so many heads against you. Are you prepared for the combat? If so, where are your arms?"

The King, quite overwhelmed, made no reply; he still covered his face with his hands. The stony-hearted Cardinal crossed his arms and continued:



"I fear that you imagine it is for myself I speak. Do you really think that I do not know my own powers, and that I fear such an adversary? Really, I know not what prevents me from letting you act for yourself—from transferring the immense burden of State affairs to the shoulders of this youth. You may imagine that during the twenty years I have been acquainted with your court, I have

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not forgotten to assure myself a retreat where, in spite of you, I could now go to live the six months which perhaps remain to me of life. It would be a curious employment for me to watch the progress of such a reign. What answer would you return, for instance, when all the inferior potentates, regaining their station, no longer kept in subjection by me, shall come in your brother's name to say to you, as they dared to say to Henri IV on his throne: 'Divide with us all the hereditary governments and sovereignties, and we shall be content.'—[Memoires de Sully, 1595.]—You will doubtless accede to their request; and it is the least you can do for those who will have delivered you from Richelieu. It will, perhaps, be fortunate, for to govern the Ile-de-France, which they will no doubt allow you as the original domain, your new minister will not require many secretaries."

While speaking thus, he furiously pushed the huge table, which nearly filled the room, and was laden with papers and numerous portfolios.

Louis was aroused from his apathetic meditation by the excessive audacity of this discourse. He raised his head, and seemed to have instantly formed one resolution for fear he should adopt another.

"Well, sir," said he, "my answer is that I will reign alone."

"Be it so!" replied Richelieu. "But I ought to give you notice that affairs are at present somewhat complicated. This is the hour when I generally commence my ordinary avocations."

"I will act in your place," said Louis. "I will open the portfolios and issue my commands."

"Try, then," said Richelieu. "I shall retire; and if anything causes you to hesitate, you can send for me."

He rang a bell. In the same instant, and as if they had awaited the signal, four vigorous footmen entered, and carried him and his chair into another apartment, for we have before remarked that he was unable to walk. While passing through the chambers where the secretaries were at work, he called out in a loud voice:

"You will receive his Majesty's commands."

The King remained alone, strong in his new resolution, and, proud in having once resisted, he became anxious immediately to plunge into political business. He walked around the immense table, and beheld as many portfolios as they then counted empires, kingdoms, and States in Europe. He opened one and found it divided into sections equalling in number the subdivisions of the country to which it related. All was in order, but in alarming order for him, because each note only referred to the very

essence of the business it alluded to, and related only to the exact point of its then relations with France. These laconic notes proved as enigmatic to Louis, as did the letters in cipher which covered the table. Here all was confusion. An edict of banishment and expropriation of the Huguenots of La Rochelle was mingled with treaties with Gustavus Adolphus and the Huguenots of the north

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against the empire. Notes on General Bannier and Wallenstein, the Duc de Weimar, and Jean de Witt were mingled with extracts from letters taken from the casket of the Queen, the list of the necklaces and jewels they contained, and the double interpretation which might be put upon every phrase of her notes. Upon the margin of one of these letters was written: "For four lines in a man's handwriting he might be criminally tried." Farther on were scattered denunciations against the Huguenots; the republican plans they had drawn up; the division of France into departments under the annual dictatorship of a chief. The seal of this projected State was affixed to it, representing an angel leaning upon a cross, and holding in his hand a Bible, which he raised to his forehead. By the side was a document which contained a list of those cardinals the pope had selected the same day as the Bishop of Luron (Richelieu). Among them was to be found the Marquis de Bedemar, ambassador and conspirator at Venice.

Louis XIII exhausted his powers in vain over the details of another period, seeking unsuccessfully for any documents which might allude to the present conspiracy, to enable him to perceive its true meaning, and all that had been attempted against him, when a diminutive man, of an olive complexion, who stooped much, entered the cabinet with a measured step. This was a Secretary of State named Desnoyers. He advanced, bowing.

"May I be permitted to address your Majesty on the affairs of Portugal?" said he.

"And consequently of Spain?" said Louis. "Portugal is a province of Spain."

"Of Portugal," reiterated Desnoyers. "Here is the manifesto we have this moment received." And he read, "Don John, by the grace of God, King of Portugal and of Algarves, kingdoms on this side of Africa, lord over Guinea, by conquest, navigation, and trade with Arabia, Persia, and the Indies—"

"What is all that?" said the King. "Who talks in this manner?"

"The Duke of Braganza, King of Portugal, crowned already some time by a man whom they call Pinto. Scarcely has he ascended the throne than he offers assistance to the revolted Catalonians."

"Has Catalonia also revolted? The King, Philip IV, no longer has the Count-Duke for his Prime-Minister?"

"Just the contrary, Sire. It is on this very account. Here is the declaration of the States-General of Catalonia to his Catholic Majesty, signifying that the whole country will take up arms against his sacrilegious and excommunicated troops. The King of Portugal—"

“Say the Duke of Braganza!” replied Louis. “I recognize no rebels.”

“The Duke of Braganza, then,” coldly repeated the Secretary of State, “sends his nephew, Don Ignacio de Mascarenas, to the principality of Catalonia, to seize the protection (and it may be the sovereignty) of that country, which he would add to that he has just reconquered. Your Majesty’s troops are before Perpignan—”

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"Well, and what of that?" said Louis.

"The Catalonians are more disposed toward France than toward Portugal, and there is still time to deprive the King of the Duke of Portugal, I should say—of this protectorship."

"What! I assist rebels! You dare—"

"Such was the intention of his Eminence," continued the Secretary of State. "Spain and France are nearly at open war, and Monsieur d'Olivares has not hesitated to offer the assistance of his Catholic Majesty to the Huguenots."

"Very good. I will consider it," said the King. "Leave me."

"Sire, the States-General of Catalonia are in a dilemma. The troops from Aragon march against them."

"We shall see. I will come to a decision in a quarter of an hour," answered Louis XIII.

The little Secretary of State left the apartment discontented and discouraged. In his place Chavigny immediately appeared, holding a portfolio, on which were emblazoned the arms of England. "Sire," said he, "I have to request your Majesty's commands upon the affairs of England. The Parliamentarians, commanded by the Earl of Essex, have raised the siege of Gloucester. Prince Rupert has at Newbury fought a disastrous battle, and of little profit to his Britannic Majesty. The Parliament is prolonged. All the principal cities take part with it, together with all the seaports and the Presbyterian population. King Charles I implores assistance, which the Queen can no longer obtain from Holland."

"Troops must be sent to my brother of England," said Louis; but he wanted to look over the preceding papers, and casting his eyes over the notes of the Cardinal, he found that under a former request of the King of England he had written with his own hand:

"We must consider some time and wait. The Commons are strong. King Charles reckons upon the Scots; they will sell him."

"We must be cautious. A warlike man has been over to see Vincennes, and he has said that 'princes ought never to be struck, except on the head.'"

The Cardinal had added "remarkable," but he had erased this word and substituted "formidable." Again, beneath:

"This man rules Fairfax. He plays an inspired part. He will be a great man—assistance refused—money lost."

The King then said, "No, no! do nothing hastily. I shall wait."

"But, Sire," said Chavigny, "events pass rapidly. If the courier be delayed, the King's destruction may happen a year sooner."

"Have they advanced so far?" asked Louis.

"In the camp of the Independents they preach up the republic with the Bible in their hands. In that of the Royalists, they dispute for precedence, and amuse themselves."

"But one turn of good fortune may save everything?"

"The Stuarts are not fortunate, Sire," answered Chavigny, respectfully, but in a tone which left ample room for consideration.

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"Leave me," said the King, with some displeasure.

The State-Secretary slowly retired.

It was then that Louis XIII beheld himself as he really was, and was terrified at the nothingness he found in himself. He at first stared at the mass of papers which surrounded him, passing from one to the other, finding dangers on every side, and finding them still greater with the remedies he invented. He rose; and changing his place, he bent over, or rather threw himself upon, a geographical map of Europe. There he found all his fears concentrated. In the north, the south, the very centre of the kingdom, revolutions appeared to him like so many Eumenides. In every country he thought he saw a volcano ready to burst forth. He imagined he heard cries of distress from kings, who appealed to him for help, and the furious shouts of the populace. He fancied he felt the territory of France trembling and crumbling beneath his feet. His feeble and fatigued sight failed him. His weak head was attacked by vertigo, which threw all his blood back upon his heart.

"Richelieu!" he cried, in a stifled voice, while he rang a bell; "summon the Cardinal immediately."

And he swooned in an armchair.

When the King opened his eyes, revived by salts and potent essences which had been applied to his lips and temples, he for one instant beheld himself surrounded by pages, who withdrew as soon as he opened his eyes, and he was once more left alone with the Cardinal. The impassible minister had had his chair placed by that of the King, as a physician would seat himself by the bedside of his patient, and fixed his sparkling and scrutinizing eyes upon the pale countenance of Louis. As soon as his victim could hear him, he renewed his fearful discourse in a hollow voice:

"You have recalled me. What would you with me?"

Louis, who was reclining on the pillow, half opened his eyes, fixed them upon Richelieu, and hastily closed them again. That bony head, armed with two flaming eyes, and terminating in a pointed and grizzly beard, the cap and vestments of the color of blood and flames,—all appeared to him like an infernal spirit.

"You must reign," he said, in a languid voice.

"But will you give me up Cinq-Mars and De Thou?" again urged the implacable minister, bending forward to read in the dull eyes of the Prince, as an avaricious heir follows up, even to the tomb, the last glimpses of the will of a dying relative.

"You must reign," repeated the King, turning away his head.



“Sign then,” said Richelieu; “the contents of this are, ‘This is my command—to take them, dead or alive.’”

Louis, whose head still reclined on the raised back of the chair, suffered his hand to fall upon the fatal paper, and signed it. “For pity’s sake, leave me; I am dying!” he said.

“That is not yet all,” continued he whom men call the great politician. “I place no reliance on you; I must first have some guarantee and assurance. Sign this paper, and I will leave you:

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"When the King shall go to visit the Cardinal, the guards of the latter shall remain under arms; and when the Cardinal shall visit the King, the guards of the Cardinal shall share the same post with those of his Majesty.

"Again:

"His Majesty undertakes to place the two princes, his sons, in the Cardinal's hands, as hostages of the good faith of his attachment."

"My children!" exclaimed Louis, raising his head, "dare you?"

"Would you rather that I should retire?" said Richelieu.

The King again signed.

"Is all finished now?" he inquired, with a deep sigh.

All was not finished; one other grief was still in reserve for him. The door was suddenly opened, and Cinq-Mars entered. It was the Cardinal who trembled now.

"What would you here, sir?" said he, seizing the bell to ring for assistance.

The master of the horse was as pale as the King, and without condescending to answer Richelieu, he advanced steadily toward Louis XIII, who looked at him with the air of a man who has just received a sentence of death.

"You would, Sire, find it difficult to have me arrested, for I have twenty thousand men under my command," said Henri d'Effiat, in a sweet and subdued voice.

"Alas, Cinq-Mars!" replied the King, sadly; "is it thou who hast been guilty of these crimes?"

"Yes, Sire; and I also bring you my sword, for no doubt you came here to surrender me," said he, unbuckling his sword, and laying it at the feet of the King, who fixed his eyes upon the floor without making any reply.

Cinq-Mars smiled sadly, but not bitterly, for he no longer belonged to this earth. Then, looking contemptuously at Richelieu, "I surrender because I wish to die, but I am not conquered."

The Cardinal clenched his fist with passion; but he restrained his fury. "Who are your accomplices?" he demanded. Cinq-Mars looked steadfastly at Louis, and half opened his lips to speak. The King bent down his head, and felt at that moment a torture unknown to all other men.

"I have none," said Cinq-Mars, pitying the King; and he slowly left the apartment. He stopped in the first gallery. Fabert and all the gentlemen rose on seeing him. He walked up to the commander, and said:

"Sir, order these gentlemen to arrest me!"

They looked at each other, without daring to approach him.

"Yes, sir, I am your prisoner; yes, gentlemen, I am without my sword, and I repeat to you that I am the King's prisoner."

"I do not understand what I see," said the General; "there are two of you who surrender, and I have no instruction to arrest any one."

"Two!" said Cinq-Mars; "the other is doubtless De Thou. Alas! I recognize him by this devotion."

"And had I not also guessed your intention?" exclaimed the latter, coming forward, and throwing himself into his arms.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE PRISONERS

Amongst those old chateaux of which France is every year deprived regretfully, as of flowers from her crown, there was one of a grim and savage appearance upon the left bank of the Saline. It looked like a formidable sentinel placed at one of the gates of Lyons, and derived its name from an enormous rock, known as Pierre-Encise, which terminates in a peak—a sort of natural pyramid, the summit of which overhanging the river in former times, they say, joined the rocks which may still be seen on the opposite bank, forming the natural arch of a bridge; but time, the waters, and the hand of man have left nothing standing but the ancient mass of granite which formed the pedestal of the now destroyed fortress.

The archbishops of Lyons, as the temporal lords of the city, had built and formerly resided in this castle. It afterward became a fortress, and during the reign of Louis XIII a State prison. One colossal tower, where the daylight could only penetrate through three long loopholes, commanded the edifice, and some irregular buildings surrounded it with their massive walls, whose lines and angles followed the form of the immense and perpendicular rock.

It was here that the Cardinal, jealous of his prey, determined to imprison his young enemies, and to conduct them himself.

Allowing Louis to precede him to Paris, he removed his captives from Narbonne, dragging them in his train to ornament his last triumph, and embarking on the Rhone at Tarascon, nearly, at the mouth of the river, as if to prolong the pleasure of revenge which men have dared to call that of the gods, displayed to the eyes of the spectators on both sides of the river the luxury of his hatred; he slowly proceeded on his course up the river in barges with gilded oars and emblazoned with his armorial bearings, reclining in the first and followed by his two victims in the second, which was fastened to his own by a long chain.

Often in the evening, when the heat of the day was passed, the awnings of the two boats were removed, and in the one Richelieu might be seen, pale, and seated in the stern; in that which followed, the two young prisoners, calm and collected, supported each other, watching the passage of the rapid stream. Formerly the soldiers of Caesar, who encamped on the same shores, would have thought they beheld the inflexible boatman of the infernal regions conducting the friendly shades of Castor and Pollux. Christians dared not even reflect, or see a priest leading his two enemies to the scaffold; it was the first minister who passed.

Thus he went on his way until he left his victims under guard at the identical city in which the late conspirators had doomed him to perish. Thus he loved to defy Fate herself, and to plant a trophy on the very spot which had been selected for his tomb.

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"He was borne," says an ancient manuscript journal of this year, "along the river Rhone in a boat in which a wooden chamber had been constructed, lined with crimson fluted velvet, the flooring of which was of gold. The same boat contained an antechamber decorated in the same manner. The prow and stern of the boat were occupied by soldiers and guards, wearing scarlet coats embroidered with gold, silver, and silk; and many lords of note. His Eminence occupied a bed hung with purple taffetas. Monseigneur the Cardinal Bigni, and Messeigneurs the Bishops of Nantes and Chartres, were there, with many abbés and gentlemen in other boats. Preceding his vessel, a boat sounded the passages, and another boat followed, filled with arquebusiers and officers to command them. When they approached any isle, they sent soldiers to inspect it, to discover whether it was occupied by any suspicious persons; and, not meeting any, they guarded the shore until two boats which followed had passed. They were filled with the nobility and well-armed soldiers." "Afterward came the boat of his Eminence, to the stern of which was attached a little boat, which conveyed *mm. de Thou* and *Cinq-Mars*, guarded by an officer of the King's guard and twelve guards from the regiment of his Eminence. Three vessels, containing the clothes and plate of his Eminence, with several gentlemen and soldiers, followed the boats. "Two companies of light-horsemen followed the banks of the Rhone in Dauphin, and as many on the Languedoc and Vivarais side, and a noble regiment of foot, who preceded his Eminence in the towns which he was to enter, or in which he was to sleep. It was pleasant to listen to the trumpets, which, played in Dauphine, were answered by those in Vivarais, and repeated by the echoes of our rocks. It seemed as if all were trying which could play best."—[See Notes.]

In the middle of a night of the month of September, while everything appeared to slumber in the impregnable tower which contained the prisoners, the door of their outer chamber turned noiselessly on its hinges, and a man appeared on the threshold, clad in a brown robe confined round his waist by a cord. His feet were encased in sandals, and his hand grasped a large bunch of keys; it was Joseph. He looked cautiously round without advancing, and contemplated in silence the apartment occupied by the master of the horse. Thick carpets covered the floor, and large and splendid hangings concealed the walls of the prison; a bed hung with red damask was prepared, but it was unoccupied. Seated near a high chimney in a large armchair, attired in a long gray robe, similar in form to that of a priest, his head bent down, and his eyes fixed upon a little cross of gold by the flickering light of a lamp, he was absorbed in so deep a meditation that the Capuchin had leisure to approach him closely, and confront the prisoner before he perceived him. Suddenly, however, *Cinq-Mars* raised his head and exclaimed, "Wretch, what do you here?"

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"Young man, you are violent," answered the mysterious intruder, in a low voice. "Two months' imprisonment ought to have been enough to calm you. I come to tell you things of great importance. Listen to me! I have thought much of you; and I do not hate you so much as you imagine. The moments are precious. I will tell you all in a few words: in two hours you will be interrogated, tried, and condemned to death with your friend. It can not be otherwise, for all will be finished the same day."

"I know it," answered Cinq-Mars; "and I am prepared."

"Well, then, I can still release you from this affair. I have reflected deeply, as I told you; and I am here to make a proposal which can but give you satisfaction. The Cardinal has but six months to live. Let us not be mysterious; we must speak openly. You see where I have brought you to serve him; and you can judge by that the point to which I would conduct him to serve you. If you wish it, we can cut short the six months of his life which still remain. The King loves you, and will recall you with joy when he finds you still live. You may long live, and be powerful and happy, if you will protect me, and make me cardinal."

Astonishment deprived the young prisoner of speech. He could not understand such language, and seemed to be unable to descend to it from his higher meditations. All that he could say was:

"Your benefactor, Richelieu?"

The Capuchin smiled, and, drawing nearer, continued in an undertone:

"Policy admits of no benefits; it contains nothing but interest. A man employed by a minister is no more bound to be grateful than a horse whose rider prefers him to others. My pace has been convenient to him; so much the better. Now it is my interest to throw him from the saddle. Yes, this man loves none but himself. I now see that he has deceived me by continually retarding my elevation; but once again, I possess the sure means for your escape in silence. I am the master here. I will remove the men in whom he trusts, and replace them by others whom he has condemned to die, and who are near at hand confined in the northern tower—the Tour des Oubliettes, which overhangs the river. His creatures will occupy their places. I will recommend a physician—an empyric who is devoted to me—to the illustrious Cardinal, who has been given over by the most scientific in Paris. If you will unite with me, he shall convey to him a universal and eternal remedy."

"Away!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars. "Leave me, thou infernal monk! No, thou art like no other man! Thou glidest with a noiseless and furtive step through the darkness; thou traversest the walls to preside at secret crimes; thou placest thyself between the hearts of lovers to separate them eternally. Who art thou? Thou resemblest a tormented spirit of the damned!"



“Romantic boy!” answered Joseph; “you would have possessed high attainments had it not been for your false notions. There is perhaps neither damnation nor soul. If the dead returned to complain of their fate, I should have a thousand around me; and I have never seen any, even in my dreams.”

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"Monster!" muttered Cinq-Mars.

"Words again!" said Joseph; "there is neither monster nor virtuous man. You and De Thou, who pride yourselves on what you call virtue—you have failed in causing the death of perhaps a hundred thousand men—at once and in the broad daylight—for no end, while Richelieu and I have caused the death of far fewer, one by one, and by night, to found a great power. Would you remain pure and virtuous, you must not interfere with other men; or, rather, it is more reasonable to see that which is, and to say with me, it is possible that there is no such thing as a soul. We are the sons of chance; but relative to other men, we have passions which we must satisfy."

"I breathe again!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars; "he believes not in God!"

Joseph continued:

"Richelieu, you, and I were born ambitious; it followed, then, that everything must be sacrificed to this idea."

"Wretched man, do not compare me to thyself!"

"It is the plain truth, nevertheless," replied the Capuchin; "only you now see that our system was better than yours."

"Miserable wretch, it was for love—"

"No, no! it was not that; here are mere words again. You have perhaps imagined it was so; but it was for your own advancement. I have heard you speak to the young girl. You thought but of yourselves; you do not love each other. She thought but of her rank, and you of your ambition. One loves in order to hear one's self called perfect, and to be adored; it is still the same egoism."

"Cruel serpent!" cried Cinq-Mars; "is it not enough that thou hast caused our deaths? Why dost thou come here to cast thy venom upon the life thou hast taken from us? What demon has suggested to thee thy horrible analysis of hearts?"

"Hatred of everything which is superior to myself," replied Joseph, with a low and hollow laugh, "and the desire to crush those I hate under my feet, have made me ambitious and ingenious in finding the weakness of your dreams."

"Just Heaven, dost thou hear him?" exclaimed Cinq-Mars, rising and extending his arms upward.

The solitude of his prison; the pious conversations of his friend; and, above all, the presence of death, which, like the light of an unknown star, paints in other colors the objects we are accustomed to see; meditations on eternity; and (shall we say it?) the



great efforts he had made to change his heartrending regrets into immortal hopes, and to direct to God all that power of love which had led him astray upon earth—all this combined had worked a strange revolution in him; and like those ears of corn which ripen suddenly on receiving one ray from the sun, his soul had acquired light, exalted by the mysterious influence of death.

“Just Heaven!” he repeated, “if this wretch and his master are human, can I also be a man? Behold, O God, behold two distinct ambitions—the one egoistical and bloody, the other devoted and unstained; theirs roused by hatred, and ours inspired by love. Look down, O Lord, judge, and pardon! Pardon, for we have greatly erred in walking but for a single day in the same paths which, on earth, possess but one name to whatever end it may tend!”

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Joseph interrupted him harshly, stamping his foot on the ground:

“When you have finished your prayer,” said he, “you will perhaps inform me whether you will assist me; and I will instantly—”

“Never, impure wretch, never!” said Henri d’Effiat. “I will never unite with you in an assassination. I refused to do so when powerful, and upon yourself.”

“You were wrong; you would have been master now.”

“And what happiness should I find in my power when shared as it must be by a woman who does not understand me; who loved me feebly, and prefers a crown?”

“Inconceivable folly!” said the Capuchin, laughing.

“All with her; nothing without her—that was my desire.”

“It is from obstinacy and vanity that you persist; it is impossible,” replied Joseph. “It is not in nature.”

“Thou who wouldst deny the spirit of self-sacrifice,” answered Cinq-Mars; “dost thou understand that of my friend?”

“It does not exist; he follows you because—”

Here the Capuchin, slightly embarrassed, reflected an instant.

“Because—because—he has formed you; you are his work; he is attached to you by the self-love of an author. He was accustomed to lecture you; and he felt that he should not find another pupil so docile to listen to and applaud him. Constant habit has persuaded him that his life was bound to yours; it is something of that kind. He will accompany you mechanically. Besides, all is not yet finished; we shall see the end and the examination. He will certainly deny all knowledge of the conspiracy.”

“He will not deny it!” exclaimed Cinq-Mars, impetuously.

“He knew it, then? You confess it,” said Joseph, triumphantly; “you have not said as much before.”

“O Heaven, what have I done!” gasped Cinq-Mars, hiding his face.

“Calm yourself; he is saved, notwithstanding this avowal, if you accept my offer.”

D’Effiat remained silent for a short time.

The Capuchin continued:

“Save your friend. The King's favor awaits you, and perhaps the love which has erred for a moment.”

“Man, or whatever else thou art, if thou hast in thee anything resembling a heart,” answered the prisoner, “save him! He is the purest of created beings; but convey him far away while yet he sleeps, for should he awake, thy endeavors would be vain.”

“What good will that do me?” said the Capuchin, laughing. “It is you and your favor that I want.”

The impetuous Cinq-Mars rose, and, seizing Joseph by the arm, eying him with a terrible look, said:

“I degraded him in interceding with thee for him.” He continued, raising the tapestry which separated his apartment from that of his friend, “Come, and doubt, if thou canst, devotion and the immortality of the soul. Compare the uneasiness and misery of thy triumph with the calmness of our defeat, the meanness of thy reign with the grandeur of our captivity, thy sanguinary vigils to the slumbers of the just.”

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A solitary lamp threw its light on De Thou. The young man was kneeling on a cushion, surmounted by a large ebony crucifix. He seemed to have fallen asleep while praying. His head, inclining backward, was still raised toward the cross. His pale lips wore a calm and divine smile.

"Holy Father, how he sleeps!" exclaimed the astonished Capuchin, thoughtlessly uniting to his frightful discourse the sacred name he every day pronounced. He suddenly retired some paces, as if dazzled by a heavenly vision.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" he said, shaking his head, and passing his hand rapidly over his face. "All this is childishness. It would overcome me if I reflected on it. These ideas may serve as opium to produce a calm. But that is not the question; say yes or no."

"No," said Cinq-Mars, pushing him to the door by the shoulder. "I will not accept life; and I do not regret having compromised De Thou, for he would not have bought his life at the price of an assassination. And when he yielded at Narbonne, it was not that he might escape at Lyons."

"Then wake him, for here come the judges," said the furious Capuchin, in a sharp, piercing voice.

Lighted by flambeaux, and preceded by a detachment of the Scotch guards, fourteen judges entered, wrapped in long robes, and whose features were not easily distinguished. They seated themselves in silence on the right and left of the huge chamber. They were the judges delegated by the Cardinal to judge this sad and solemn affair—all true men to the Cardinal Richelieu, and in his confidence, who from Tarascon had chosen and instructed them. He had the Chancellor Seguier brought to Lyons, to avoid, as he stated in the instructions he sent by Chavigny to the King Louis XIII—"to avoid all the delays which would take place if he were not present. M. de Mayillac," he adds, "was at Nantes for the trial of Chulais, M. de Chateau-Neuf at Toulouse, superintending the death of M. de Montmorency, and M. de Bellievre at Paris, conducting the trial of M. de Biron. The authority and intelligence of these gentlemen in forms of justice are indispensable."

The Chancellor arrived with all speed. But at this moment he was informed that he was not to appear, for fear that he might be influenced by the memory of his ancient friendship for the prisoner, whom he only saw *tete-a-tete*. The commissioners and himself had previously and rapidly received the cowardly depositions of the Duc d'Orleans, at Villefranche, in Beaujolais, and then at Vivey,—[House which belonged to an Abbe d'Esnay, brother of M. de Villeroy, called Montresor.] two miles from Lyons, where this wretched prince had received orders to go, begging forgiveness, and trembling, although surrounded by his followers, whom from very pity he had been allowed to retain, carefully watched, however, by the French and Swiss guards. The Cardinal had dictated to him his part and answers word for word; and in consideration of



this docility, they had exempted him in form from the painful task of confronting *mm.* de Cinq-Mars and De Thou. The chancellor and commissioners had also prepared M. de Bouillon, and, strong with their preliminary work, they visited in all their strength the two young criminals whom they had determined not to save.

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History has only handed down to us the names of the State counsellors who accompanied Pierre Seguiet, but not those of the other commissioners, of whom it is only mentioned that there were six from the parliament of Grenoble, and two presidents. The counsellor, or reporter of the State, Laubardemont, who had directed them in all, was at their head. Joseph often whispered to them with the most studied politeness, glancing at Laubardemont with a ferocious sneer.

It was arranged that an armchair should serve as a bar; and all were silent in expectation of the prisoner's answer.

He spoke in a soft and clear voice:

"Say to Monsieur le Chancelier that I have the right of appeal to the parliament of Paris, and to object to my judges, because two of them are my declared enemies, and at their head one of my friends, Monsieur de Seguiet himself, whom I maintained in his charge.

"But I will spare you much trouble, gentlemen, by pleading guilty to the whole charge of conspiracy, arranged and conducted by myself alone. It is my wish to die. I have nothing to add for myself; but if you would be just, you will not harm the life of him whom the King has pronounced to be the most honest man in France, and who dies for my sake alone."

"Summon him," said Laubardemont.

Two guards entered the apartment of De Thou, and led him forth. He advanced, and bowed gravely, while an angelical smile played upon his lips. Embracing Cinq-Mars, "Here at last is our day of glory," said he. "We are about to gain heaven and eternal happiness."

"We understand," said Laubardemont, "we have been given to understand by Monsieur de Cinq-Mars himself, that you were acquainted with this conspiracy?"

De Thou answered instantly, and without hesitation. A half-smile was still on his lips, and his eyes cast down.

"Gentlemen, I have passed my life in studying human laws, and I know that the testimony of one accused person can not condemn another. I can also repeat what I said before, that I should not have been believed had I denounced the King's brother without proof. You perceive, then, that my life and death entirely rest with myself. I have, however, well weighed the one and the other. I have clearly foreseen that whatever life I may hereafter lead, it could not but be most unhappy after the loss of Monsieur de Cinq-Mars. I therefore acknowledge and confess that I was aware of his conspiracy. I did my utmost to prevent it, to deter him from it. He believed me to be his

only and faithful friend, and I would not betray him. Therefore, I condemn myself by the very laws which were set forth by my father, who, I hope, forgives me.”

At these words, the two friends precipitated themselves into each other’s arms.

Cinq-Mars exclaimed:

“My friend, my friend, how bitterly I regret that I have caused your death! Twice I have betrayed you; but you shall know in what manner.”

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But De Thou, embracing and consoling his friend, answered, raising his eyes from the ground:

“Ah, happy are we to end our days in this manner! Humanly speaking, I might complain of you; but God knows how much I love you. What have we done to merit the grace of martyrdom, and the happiness of dying together?”

The judges were not prepared for this mildness, and looked at each other with surprise.

“If they would only give me a good partisan,” muttered a hoarse voice (it was Grandchamp, who had crept into the room, and whose eyes were red with fury), “I would soon rid Monseigneur of all these black-looking fellows.” Two men with halberds immediately placed themselves silently at his side. He said no more, and to compose himself retired to a window which overlooked the river, whose tranquil waters the sun had not yet lighted with its beams, and appeared to pay no attention to what was passing in the room.

However, Laubardemont, fearing that the judges might be touched with compassion, said in a loud voice:

“In pursuance of the order of Monseigneur the Cardinal, these two men will be put to the rack; that is to say, to the ordinary and extraordinary question.”

Indignation forced Cinq-Mars again to assume his natural character; crossing his arms, he made two steps toward Laubardemont and Joseph, which alarmed them. The former involuntarily placed his hand to his forehead.

“Are we at Loudun?” exclaimed the prisoner; but De Thou, advancing, took his hand and held it. Cinq-Mars was silent, then continued in a calm voice, looking steadfastly at the judges:

“Messieurs, this measure appears to me rather harsh; a man of my age and rank ought not to be subjected to these formalities. I have confessed all, and I will confess it all again. I willingly and gladly accept death; it is not from souls like ours that secrets can be wrung by bodily suffering. We are prisoners by our own free will, and at the time chosen by us. We have confessed enough for you to condemn us to death; you shall know nothing more. We have obtained what we wanted.”

“What are you doing, my friend?” interrupted De Thou. “He is mistaken, gentlemen, we do not refuse this martyrdom which God offers us; we demand it.”

“But,” said Cinq-Mars, “do you need such infamous tortures to obtain salvation—you who are already a martyr, a voluntary martyr to friendship? Gentlemen, it is I alone who possess important secrets; it is the chief of a conspiracy who knows all. Put me alone to the torture if we must be treated like the worst of malefactors.”

“For the sake of charity,” added De Thou, “deprive me not of equal suffering with my friend; I have not followed him so far, to abandon him at this dreadful moment, and not to use every effort to accompany him to heaven.”

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During this debate, another was going forward between Laubardemont and Joseph. The latter, fearing that torments would induce him to disclose the secret of his recent proposition, advised that they should not be resorted to; the other, not thinking his triumph complete by death alone, absolutely insisted on their being applied. The judges surrounded and listened to these secret agents of the Prime-Minister; however, many circumstances having caused them to suspect that the influence of the Capuchin was more powerful than that of the judge, they took part with him, and decided for mercy, when he finished by these words uttered in a low voice:

“I know their secrets. There is no necessity to force them from their lips, because they are useless, and relate to too high circumstances. Monsieur le Grand has no one to denounce but the King, and the other the Queen. It is better that we should remain ignorant. Besides, they will not confess. I know them; they will be silent—the one from pride, the other through piety. Let them alone. The torture will wound them; they will be disfigured and unable to walk. That will spoil the whole ceremony; they must be kept to appear.”

This last observation prevailed. The judges retired to deliberate with the chancellor. While departing, Joseph whispered to Laubardemont:

“I have provided you with enough pleasure here; you will still have that of deliberating, and then you shall go and examine three men who are confined in the northern tower.”

These were the three judges who had condemned Urbain Grandier.

As he spoke, he laughed heartily, and was the last to leave the room, pushing the astonished master of requests before him.

The sombre tribunal had scarcely disappeared when Grandchamp, relieved from his two guards, hastened toward his master, and, seizing his hand, said:

“In the name of Heaven, come to the terrace, Monseigneur! I have something to show you; in the name of your mother, come!”

But at that moment the chamber door was opened, and the old Abbe Quillet appeared.

“My children! my dear children!” exclaimed the old man, weeping bitterly. “Alas! why was I only permitted to enter to-day? Dear Henri, your mother, your brother, your sister, are concealed here.”

“Be quiet, Monsieur l'Abbe!” said Grandchamp; “do come to the terrace, Monseigneur.”

But the old priest still detained and embraced his pupil.

“We hope,” said he; “we hope for mercy.”

“I shall refuse it,” said Cinq-Mars.

“We hope for nothing but the mercy of God,” added De Thou.

“Silence!” said Grandchamp, “the judges are returning.”

And the door opened again to admit the dismal procession, from which Joseph and Laubardemont were missing.

“Gentlemen,” exclaimed the good Abbe, addressing the commissioners, “I am happy to tell you that I have just arrived from Paris, and that no one doubts but that all the conspirators will be pardoned. I have had an interview at her Majesty’s apartments with Monsieur himself; and as to the Duc de Bouillon, his examination is not unfav—”

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"Silence!" cried M. de Seyton, the lieutenant of the Scotch guards; and the commissioners entered and again arranged themselves in the apartment.

M. de Thou, hearing them summon the criminal recorder of the presidial of Lyons to pronounce the sentence, involuntarily launched out in one of those transports of religious joy which are never displayed but by the martyrs and saints at the approach of death; and, advancing toward this man, he exclaimed:

"Quam speciosi pedes evangelizantium pacem, evangelizantium bona!"

Then, taking the hand of Cinq-Mars, he knelt down bareheaded to receive the sentence, as was the custom. D'Effiat remained standing; and they dared not compel him to kneel. The sentence was pronounced in these words:

"The Attorney-General, prosecutor on the part of the State, on a charge of high treason; and Messire Henri d'Effiat de Cinq-Mars, master of the horse, aged twenty-two, and Francois Auguste de Thou, aged thirty-five, of the King's privy council, prisoners in the chateau of Pierre-Encise, at Lyons, accused and defendants on the other part: "Considered, the special trial commenced by the aforesaid attorney-general against the said D'Effiat and De Thou; informations, interrogations, confessions, denegations, and confrontations, and authenticated copies of the treaty with Spain, it is considered in the delegated chamber: "That he who conspires against the person of the ministers of princes is considered by the ancient laws and constitutions of the emperors to be guilty of high treason; (2) that the third ordinance of the King Louis XI renders any one liable to the punishment of death who does not reveal a conspiracy against the State.

"The commissioners deputed by his Majesty have declared the said D'Effiat and De Thou guilty and convicted of the crime of high treason:

"The said D'Effiat, for the conspiracies and enterprises, league, and treaties, formed by him with the foreigner against the State;

"And the said De Thou, for having a thorough knowledge of this conspiracy.

"In reparation of which crimes they have deprived them of all honors and dignities, and condemned them to be deprived of their heads on a scaffold, which is for this purpose erected in the Place des Terreaux, in this city."It is further declared that all and each of their possessions, real and personal, be confiscated to the King, and that those which they hold from the crown do pass immediately to it again of the aforesaid goods, sixty thousand livres being devoted to pious uses."

After the sentence was pronounced, M. de Thou exclaimed in a loud voice:

“God be blessed! God be praised!”

“I have never feared death,” said Cinq-Mars, coldly.

Then, according to the forms prescribed, M. Seyton, the lieutenant of the Scotch guards, an old man upward of sixty years of age, declared with emotion that he placed the prisoners in the hands of the Sieur Thome, provost of the merchants of Lyons; he then took leave of them, followed by the whole of the body-guard, silently, and in tears.

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"Weep not," said Cinq-Mars; "tears are useless. Rather pray for us; and be assured that I do not fear death."

He shook them by the hand, and De Thou embraced them; after which they left the apartment, their eyes filled with tears, and hiding their faces in their cloaks.

"Barbarians!" exclaimed the Abbe Quillet; "to find arms against them, one must search the whole arsenal of tyrants. Why did they admit me at this moment?"

"As a confessor, Monsieur," whispered one of the commissioners; "for no stranger has entered this place these two months."

As soon as the huge gates of the prison were closed, and the outside gratings lowered, "To the terrace, in the name of Heaven!" again exclaimed Grandchamp. And he drew his master and De Thou thither.

The old preceptor followed them, weeping.

"What do you want with us in a moment like this?" said Cinq-Mars, with indulgent gravity.

"Look at the chains of the town," said the faithful servant.

The rising sun had hardly tinged the sky. In the horizon a line of vivid yellow was visible, upon which the mountain's rough blue outlines were boldly traced; the waves of the Saline, and the chains of the town hanging from one bank to the other, were still veiled by a light vapor, which also rose from Lyons and concealed the roofs of the houses from the eye of the spectator. The first tints of the morning light had as yet colored only the most elevated points of the magnificent landscape. In the city the steeples of the Hotel de Ville and St. Nizier, and on the surrounding hills the monasteries of the Carmelites and Ste.-Marie, and the entire fortress of Pierre-Encise were gilded with the fires of the coming day. The joyful peals from the churches were heard, the peaceful matins from the convent and village bells. The walls of the prison were alone silent.

"Well," said Cinq-Mars, "what are we to see the beauty of the plains, the richness of the city, or the calm peacefulness of these villages? Ah, my friend, in every place there are to be found passions and griefs, like those which have brought us here."

The old Abbe and Grandchamp leaned over the parapet, watching the bank of the river.

"The fog is so thick, we can see nothing yet," said the Abbe.

"How slowly our last sun appears!" said De Thou.



"Do you not see low down there, at the foot of the rocks, on the opposite bank, a small white house, between the Halincourt gate and the Boulevard Saint Jean?" asked the Abbe.

"I see nothing," answered Cinq-Mars, "but a mass of dreary wall."

"Hark!" said the Abbe; "some one speaks near us!"

In fact, a confused, low, and inexplicable murmur was heard in a little turret, the back of which rested upon the platform of the terrace. As it was scarcely larger than a pigeon-house, the prisoners had not until now observed it.

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"Are they already coming to fetch us?" said Cinq-Mars.

"Bah! bah!" answered Grandchamp, "do not make yourself uneasy; it is the Tour des Oubliettes. I have prowled round the fort for two months, and I have seen men fall from there into the water at least once a week. Let us think of our affair. I see a light down there."

An invincible curiosity, however, led the two prisoners to look at the turret, in spite of the horror of their own situation. It advanced to the extremity of the rock, over a gulf of foaming green water of great depth. A wheel of a mill long deserted was seen turning with great rapidity. Three distinct sounds were now heard, like those of a drawbridge suddenly lowered and raised to its former position by a recoil or spring striking against the stone walls; and three times a black substance was seen to fall into the water with a splash.

"Mercy! can these be men?" exclaimed the Abbe, crossing himself.

"I thought I saw brown robes turning in the air," said Grandchamp; "they are the Cardinal's friends."

A horrible cry was heard from the tower, accompanied by an impious oath. The heavy trap groaned for the fourth time. The green water received with a loud noise a burden which cracked the enormous wheel of the mill; one of its large spokes was torn away, and a man entangled in its beams appeared above the foam, which he colored with his blood. He rose twice, and sank beneath the waters, shrieking violently; it was Laubardemont.

Cinq-Mars drew back in horror.

"There is a Providence," said Grandchamp; "Urbain Grandier summoned him in three years. But come, come! the time is precious! Do not remain motionless. Be it he, I am not surprised, for those wretches devour each other. But let us endeavor to deprive them of their choicest morsel. Vive Dieu! I see the signal! We are saved! All is ready; run to this side, Monsieur l'Abbe! See the white handkerchief at the window! our friends are prepared."

The Abbe seized the hands of both his friends, and drew them to that side of the terrace toward which they had at first looked. "Listen to me, both of you," said he. "You must know that none of the conspirators has profited by the retreat you secured for them. They have all hastened to Lyons, disguised, and in great number; they have distributed sufficient gold in the city to secure them from being betrayed; they are resolved to make an attempt to deliver you. The time chosen is that when they are conducting you to the scaffold; the signal is your hat, which you will place on your head when they are to commence."

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The worthy Abbe, half weeping, half smiling hopefully, related that upon the arrest of his pupil he had hastened to Paris; that such secrecy enveloped all the Cardinal's actions that none there knew the place in which the master of the horse was detained. Many said that he was banished; and when the reconciliation between Monsieur and the Duc de Bouillon and the King was known, men no longer doubted that the life of the other was assured, and ceased to speak of this affair, which, not having been executed, compromised few persons. They had even in some measure rejoiced in Paris to see the town of Sedan and its territory added to the kingdom in exchange for the letters of abolition granted to the Duke, acknowledged innocent in common with Monsieur; so that the result of all the arrangements had been to excite admiration of the Cardinal's ability, and of his clemency toward the conspirators, who, it was said, had contemplated his death. They even spread the report that he had facilitated the escape of Cinq-Mars and De Thou, occupying himself generously with their retreat to a foreign land, after having bravely caused them to be arrested in the midst of the camp of Perpignan.

At this part of the narrative, Cinq-Mars could not avoid forgetting his resignation, and clasping his friend's hand, "Arrested!" he exclaimed. "Must we renounce even the honor of having voluntarily surrendered ourselves? Must we sacrifice all, even the opinion of posterity?"

"There is vanity again," replied De Thou, placing his fingers on his lips. "But hush! let us hear the Abbe to the end."

The tutor, not doubting that the calmness which these two young men exhibited arose from the joy they felt in finding their escape assured, and seeing that the sun had hardly yet dispersed the morning mists, yielded himself without restraint to the involuntary pleasure which old men always feel in recounting new events, even though they afflict the hearers. He related all his fruitless endeavors to discover his pupil's retreat, unknown to the court and the town, where none, indeed, dared to pronounce the name of Cinq-Mars in the most secret asylums. He had only heard of the imprisonment at Pierre-Encise from the Queen herself, who had deigned to send for him, and charge him to inform the Marechale d'Effiat and all the conspirators that they might make a desperate effort to deliver their young chief. Anne of Austria had even ventured to send many of the gentlemen of Auvergne and Touraine to Lyons to assist in their last attempt.

"The good Queen!" said he; "she wept greatly when I saw her, and said that she would give all she possessed to save you. She reproached herself deeply for some letter, I know not what. She spoke of the welfare of France, but did not explain herself. She said that she admired you, and conjured you to save yourself, if it were only through pity for her, whom you would otherwise consign to everlasting remorse."

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"Said she nothing else?" interrupted De Thou, supporting Cinq-Mars, who grew visibly paler.

"Nothing more," said the old man.

"And no one else spoke of me?" inquired the master of the horse.

"No one," said the Abbe.

"If she had but written to me!" murmured Henri.

"Remember, my father, that you were sent here as a confessor," said De Thou.

Here old Grandchamp, who had been kneeling before Cinq-Mars, and dragging him by his clothes to the other side of the terrace, exclaimed in a broken voice:

"Monseigneur—my master—my good master—do you see them? Look there—'tis they! 'tis they—all of them!"

"Who, my old friend?" asked his master.

"Who? Great Heaven! look at that window! Do you not recognize them? Your mother, your sisters, and your brother."

And the day, now fairly broken, showed him in the distance several women waving their handkerchiefs; and there, dressed all in black, stretching out her arms toward the prison, sustained by those about her, Cinq-Mars recognized his mother, with his family, and his strength failed him for a moment. He leaned his head upon his friend's breast and wept.

"How many times must I, then, die?" he murmured; then, with a gesture, returning from the top of the tower the salutations of his family, "Let us descend quickly, my father!" he said to the old Abbe. "You will tell me at the tribunal of penitence, and before God, whether the remainder of my life is worth my shedding more blood to preserve it."

It was there that Cinq-Mars confessed to God what he alone and Marie de Mantua knew of their secret and unfortunate love. "He gave to his confessor," says Father Daniel, "a portrait of a noble lady, set in diamonds, which were to be sold, and the money employed in pious works."

M. de Thou, after having confessed, wrote a letter;—[See the copy of this letter to Madame la Princesse de Guemenee, in the notes at the end of the volume.]—after which (according to the account given by his confessor) he said, "This is the last thought I will bestow upon this world; let us depart for heaven!" and walking up and down the room with long strides, he recited aloud the psalm, 'Miserere mei, Deus', with an

incredible ardor of spirit, his whole frame trembling so violently it seemed as if he did not touch the earth, and that the soul was about to make its exit from his body. The guards were mute at this spectacle, which made them all shudder with respect and horror.

Meanwhile, all was calm in the city of Lyons, when to the great astonishment of its inhabitants, they beheld the entrance through all its gates of troops of infantry and cavalry, which they knew were encamped at a great distance. The French and the Swiss guards, the regiment of Pompadours, the men-at-arms of Maurevert, and the carabineers of La Roque, all defiled in silence. The cavalry, with their muskets on the pommel of the saddle, silently drew up round the chateau of Pierre-Encise; the infantry formed a line upon the banks of the Saone from the gate of the fortress to the Place des Terreaux. It was the usual spot for execution.

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“Four companies of the bourgeois of Lyons, called ‘pennonage’, of which about eleven or twelve hundred men, were ranged [says the journal of Montresor] in the midst of the Place des Terreaux, so as to enclose a space of about eighty paces each way, into which they admitted no one but those who were absolutely necessary.” In the centre of this space was raised a scaffold about seven feet high and nine feet square, in the midst of which, somewhat forward, was placed a stake three feet in height, in front of which was a block half a foot high, so that the principal face of the scaffold looked toward the shambles of the Terreaux, by the side of the Saone. Against the scaffold was placed a short ladder of eight rounds, in the direction of the Dames de St. Pierre.”

Nothing had transpired in the town as to the name of the prisoners. The inaccessible walls of the fortress let none enter or leave but at night, and the deep dungeons had sometimes confined father and son for years together, four feet apart from each other, without their even being aware of the vicinity. The surprise was extreme at these striking preparations, and the crowd collected, not knowing whether for a fete or for an execution.

This same secrecy which the agents of the minister had strictly preserved was also carefully adhered to by the conspirators, for their heads depended on it.

Montresor, Fontrailles, the Baron de Beauvau, Olivier d’Entraigues, Gondi, the Comte du Lude, and the Advocate Fournier, disguised as soldiers, workmen, and morris-dancers, armed with poniards under their clothes, had dispersed amid the crowd more than five hundred gentlemen and domestics, disguised like themselves. Horses were ready on the road to Italy, and boats upon the Rhone had been previously engaged. The young Marquis d’Effiat, elder brother of Cinq-Mars, dressed as a Carthusian, traversed the crowd, without ceasing, between the Place des Terreaux and the little house in which his mother and sister were concealed with the Presidente de Pontac, the sister of the unfortunate De Thou. He reassured them, gave them from time to time a ray of hope, and returned to the conspirators to satisfy himself that each was prepared for action.

Each soldier forming the line had at his side a man ready to poniard him.

The vast crowd, heaped together behind the line of guards, pushed them forward, passed their lines, and made them lose ground. Ambrosio, the Spanish servant whom Cinq-Mars had saved, had taken charge of the captain of the pikemen, and, disguised as a Catalonian musician, had commenced a dispute with him, pretending to be determined not to cease playing the hurdy-gurdy.

Every one was at his post.

The Abbe de Gondi, Olivier d’Entraigues, and the Marquis d’Effiat were in the midst of a group of fish-women and oyster-wenches, who were disputing and bawling, abusing

one of their number younger and more timid than her masculine companions. The brother of Cinq-Mars approached to listen to their quarrel.

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"And why," said she to the others, "would you have Jean le Roux, who is an honest man, cut off the heads of two Christians, because he is a butcher by trade? So long as I am his wife, I'll not allow it. I'd rather—"

"Well, you are wrong!" replied her companions. "What is't to thee whether the meat he cuts is eaten or not eaten? Why, thou'lt have a hundred crowns to dress thy three children all in new clothes. Thou'rt lucky to be the wife of a butcher. Profit, then, 'ma mignonne', by what God sends thee by the favor of his Eminence."

"Let me alone!" answered the first speaker. "I'll not accept it. I've seen these fine young gentlemen at the windows. They look as mild as lambs."

"Well! and are not thy lambs and calves killed?" said Femme le Bon. "What fortune falls to this little woman! What a pity! especially when it is from the reverend Capuchin!"

"How horrible is the gayety of the people!" said Olivier d'Entraigues, unguardedly. All the women heard him, and began to murmur against him.

"Of the people!" said they; "and whence comes this little bricklayer with his plastered clothes?"

"Ah!" interrupted another, "dost not see that 'tis some gentleman in disguise? Look at his white hands! He never worked a square; 'tis some little dandy conspirator. I've a great mind to go and fetch the captain of the watch to arrest him."

The Abbe de Gondi felt all the danger of this situation, and throwing himself with an air of anger upon Olivier, and assuming the manners of a joiner, whose costume and apron he had adopted, he exclaimed, seizing him by the collar:

"You're just right. 'Tis a little rascal that never works! These two years that my father's apprenticed him, he has done nothing but comb his hair to please the girls. Come, get home with you!"

And, striking him with his rule, he drove him through the crowd, and returned to place himself on another part of the line. After having well reprimanded the thoughtless page, he asked him for the letter which he said he had to give to M. de Cinq-Mars when he should have escaped. Olivier had carried it in his pocket for two months. He gave it him. "It is from one prisoner to another," said he, "for the Chevalier de jars, on leaving the Bastille, sent it me from one of his companions in captivity."

"Ma foi!" said Gondi, "there may be some important secret in it for our friends. I'll open it. You ought to have thought of it before. Ah, bah! it is from old Bassompierre. Let us read it.

My dear child: I learn from the depths of the Bastille, where I still remain, that you are conspiring against the tyrant Richelieu, who does not cease to humiliate our good old nobility and the parliaments, and to sap the foundations of the edifice upon which the State reposes. I hear that the nobles are taxed and condemned by petty judges, contrary to the privileges of their condition, forced to the arriere-ban, despite the ancient customs.”

“Ah! the old dotard!” interrupted the page, laughing immoderately.

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"Not so foolish as you imagine, only he is a little behindhand for our affair."

"I can not but approve this generous project, and I pray you give me to wot all your proceedings—"

"Ah! the old language of the last reign!" said Olivier. "He can't say 'Make me acquainted with your proceedings,' as we now say."

"Let me read, for Heaven's sake!" said the Abbe; "a hundred years hence they'll laugh at our phrases." He continued:

"I can counsel you, notwithstanding my great age, in relating to you what happened to me in 1560."

"Ah, faith! I've not time to waste in reading it all. Let us see the end."

"When I remember my dining at the house of Madame la Marechale d'Effiat, your mother, and ask myself what has become of all the guests, I am really afflicted. My poor Puy-Laurens has died at Vincennes, of grief at being forgotten by Monsieur in his prison; De Launay killed in a duel, and I am grieved at it, for although I was little satisfied with my arrest, he did it with courtesy, and I have always thought him a gentleman. As for me, I am under lock and key until the death of M. le Cardinal. Ah, my child! we were thirteen at table. We must not laugh at old superstitions. Thank God that you are the only one to whom evil has not arrived!"

"There again!" said Olivier, laughing heartily; and this time the Abbe de Gondi could not maintain his gravity, despite all his efforts.

They tore the useless letter to pieces, that it might not prolong the detention of the old marechal, should it be found, and drew near the Place des Terreaux and the line of guards, whom they were to attack when the signal of the hat should be given by the young prisoner.

They beheld with satisfaction all their friends at their posts, and ready "to play with their knives," to use their own expression. The people, pressing around them, favored them without being aware of it. There came near the Abbe a troop of young ladies dressed in white and veiled. They were going to church to communicate; and the nuns who conducted them, thinking, like most of the people, that the preparations were intended to do honor to some great personage, allowed them to mount upon some large hewn stones, collected behind the soldiers. There they grouped themselves with the grace natural to their age, like twenty beautiful statues upon a single pedestal. One would have taken them for those vestals whom antiquity invited to the sanguinary shows of the gladiators. They whispered to each other, looking around them, laughing and blushing together like children.

The Abbe de Gondi saw with impatience that Olivier was again forgetting his character of conspirator and his costume of a bricklayer in ogling these girls, and assuming a mien too elegant, an attitude too refined, for the position in life he was supposed to occupy. He already began to approach them, turning his hair with his fingers, when Fontrailles and Montresor fortunately arrived in the dress of Swiss soldiers. A group of gentlemen, disguised as sailors, followed them with iron-shod staves in their hands. There was a paleness on their faces which announced no good.



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"Stop here!" said one of them to his suite; "this is the place."

The sombre air and the silence of these spectators contrasted with the gay and anxious looks of the girls, and their childish exclamations.

"Ah, the fine procession!" they cried; "there are at least five hundred men with cuirasses and red uniforms, upon fine horses. They've got yellow feathers in their large hats."

"They are strangers—Catalonians," said a French guard.

"Whom are they conducting here? Ah, here is a fine gilt coach! but there's no one in it."

"Ah! I see three men on foot; where are they going?"

"To death!" said Fontrailles, in a deep, stern voice which silenced all around. Nothing was heard but the slow tramp of the horses, which suddenly stopped, from one of those delays that happen in all processions. They then beheld a painful and singular spectacle. An old man with a tonsured head walked with difficulty, sobbing violently, supported by two young men of interesting and engaging appearance, who held one of each other's hands behind his bent shoulders, while with the other each held one of his arms. The one on the left was dressed in black; he was grave, and his eyes were cast down. The other, much younger, was attired in a striking dress. A pourpoint of Holland cloth, adorned with broad gold lace, and with large embroidered sleeves, covered him from the neck to the waist, somewhat in the fashion of a woman's corset; the rest of his vestments were in black velvet, embroidered with silver palms. Gray boots with red heels, to which were attached golden spurs; a scarlet cloak with gold buttons—all set off to advantage his elegant and graceful figure. He bowed right and left with a melancholy smile.

An old servant, with white moustache, and beard, followed with his head bent down, leading two chargers, richly comparisond. The young ladies were silent; but they could not restrain their sobs.

"It is, then, that poor old man whom they are leading to the scaffold," they exclaimed; "and his children are supporting him."

"Upon your knees, ladies," said a man, "and pray for him!"

"On your knees," cried Gondi, "and let us pray that God will deliver him!"

All the conspirators repeated, "On your knees! on your knees!" and set the example to the people, who imitated them in silence.

"We can see his movements better now," said Gondi, in a whisper to Montresor. "Stand up; what is he doing?"

“He has stopped, and is speaking on our side, saluting us; I think he has recognized us.”

Every house, window, wall, roof, and raised platform that looked upon the place was filled with persons of every age and condition.

The most profound silence prevailed throughout the immense multitude. One might have heard the wings of a gnat, the breath of the slightest wind, the passage of the grains of dust which it raised; yet the air was calm, the sun brilliant, the sky blue. The people listened attentively. They were close to the Place des Terreaux; they heard the blows of the hammer upon the planks, then the voice of Cinq-Mars.

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A young Carthusian thrust his pale face between two guards. All the conspirators rose above the kneeling people. Every one put his hand to his belt or in his bosom, approaching close to the soldier whom he was to poniard.

"What is he doing?" asked the Carthusian. "Has he his hat upon his head?"

"He throws his hat upon the ground far from him," calmly answered the arquebusier.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FETE

"Mon Dieu! quest-ce que ce monde!"

Dernieres paroles de M. Cinq-Mars

The same day that the melancholy procession took place at Lyons, and during the scenes we have just witnessed, a magnificent fete was given at Paris with all the luxury and bad taste of the time. The powerful Cardinal had determined to fill the first two towns in France with his pomp. The Cardinal's return was the occasion on which this fete was announced, as given to the King and all his court.

Master of the French empire by force, the Cardinal desired to be master of French opinion by seduction; and, weary of dominating, hoped to please. The tragedy of "Mirame" was to be represented in a hall constructed expressly for this great day, which raised the expenses of this entertainment, says Pelisson, to three hundred thousand crowns.

The entire guard of the Prime-Minister were under arms; his four companies of musketeers and gens d'armes were ranged in a line upon the vast staircases and at the entrance of the long galleries of the Palais-Cardinal. This brilliant pandemonium, where the mortal sins have a temple on each floor, belonged that day to pride alone, which occupied it from top to bottom. Upon each step was placed one of the arquebusiers of the Cardinal's guard, holding a torch in one hand and a long carbine in the other. The crowd of his gentlemen circulated between these living candelabra, while in the large garden, surrounded by huge chestnut-trees, now replaced by a range of archers, two companies of mounted light-horse, their muskets in their hands, were ready to obey the first order or the first fear of their master.

The Cardinal, carried and followed by his thirty-eight pages, took his seat in his box hung with purple, facing that in which the King was half reclining behind the green curtains which preserved him from the glare of the flambeaux. The whole court filled the boxes, and rose when the King appeared. The orchestra commenced a brilliant overture, and the pit was thrown open to all the men of the town and the army who

presented themselves. Three impetuous waves of spectators rushed in and filled it in an instant. They were standing, and so thickly pressed together that the movement of a single arm sufficed to cause in the crowd a movement similar to the waving of a field of corn. There was one man whose head thus described a large circle, as that of a compass, without his feet quitting the spot to which they were fixed; and some young men were carried out fainting.

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The minister, contrary to custom, advanced his skeleton head out of his box, and saluted the assembly with an air which was meant to be gracious. This grimace obtained an acknowledgment only from the boxes; the pit was silent. Richelieu had wished to show that he did not fear the public judgment upon his work, and had given orders to admit without distinction all who should present themselves. He began to repent of this, but too late. The impartial assembly was as cold at the tragedie-pastorale itself. In vain did the theatrical bergeres, covered with jewels, raised upon red heels, with crooks ornamented with ribbons and garlands of flowers upon their robes, which were stuck out with farthingale's, die of love in tirades of two hundred verses; in vain did the 'amants parfaits' starve themselves in solitary caves, deploring their death in emphatic tones, and fastening to their hair ribbons of the favorite color of their mistress; in vain did the ladies of the court exhibit signs of perfect ecstasy, leaning over the edges of their boxes, and even attempt a few fainting-fits—the silent pit gave no other sign of life than the perpetual shaking of black heads with long hair.

The Cardinal bit his lips and played the abstracted during the first and second acts; the silence in which the third and fourth passed off so wounded his paternal heart that he had himself raised half out of the balcony, and in this uncomfortable and ridiculous position signed to the court to remark the finest passages, and himself gave the signal for applause. It was acted upon from some of the boxes, but the impassible pit was more silent than ever; leaving the affair entirely between the stage and the upper regions, they obstinately remained neuter. The master of Europe and France then cast a furious look at this handful of men who dared not to admire his work, feeling in his heart the wish of Nero, and thought for a moment how happy he should be if all those men had but one head.

Suddenly this black and before silent mass became animated, and endless rounds of applause burst forth, to the great astonishment of the boxes, and above all, of the minister. He bent forward and bowed gratefully, but drew back on perceiving that the clapping of hands interrupted the actors every time they wished to proceed. The King had the curtains of his box, until then closed, opened, to see what excited so much enthusiasm. The whole court leaned forward from their boxes, and perceived among the spectators on the stage a young man, humbly dressed, who had just seated himself there with difficulty. Every look was fixed upon him. He appeared utterly embarrassed by this, and sought to cover himself with his little black cloak—far too short for the purpose. "Le Cid! le Cid!" cried the pit, incessantly applauding.

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"Terrified, Corneille escaped behind the scenes, and all was again silent. The Cardinal, beside himself with fury, had his curtain closed, and was carried into his galleries, where was performed another scene, prepared long before by the care of Joseph, who had tutored the attendants upon the point before quitting Paris. Cardinal Mazarin exclaimed that it would be quicker to pass his Eminence through a long glazed window, which was only two feet from the ground, and led from his box to the apartments; and it opened and the page passed his armchair through it. Hereupon a hundred voices rose to proclaim the accomplishment of the grand prophecy of Nostradamus. They said:

"The bonnet rouge!—that's Monseigneur; 'quarante onces!'—that's Cinq-Mars; 'tout finira!'—that's De Thou. What a providential incident! His Eminence reigns over the future as over the present."

He advanced thus upon his ambulatory throne through the long and splendid galleries, listening to this delicious murmur of a new flattery; but insensible to the hum of voices which deified his genius, he would have given all their praises for one word, one single gesture of that immovable and inflexible public, even had that word been a cry of hatred; for clamor can be stifled, but how avenge one's self on silence? The people can be prevented from striking, but who can prevent their waiting? Pursued by the troublesome phantom of public opinion, the gloomy minister only thought himself in safety when he reached the interior of his palace amid his flattering courtiers, whose adorations soon made him forget that a miserable pit had dared not to admire him. He had himself placed like a king in the midst of his vast apartments, and, looking around him, attentively counted the powerful and submissive men who surrounded him.

Counting them, he admired himself. The chiefs of the great families, the princes of the Church, the presidents of all the parliaments, the governors of the provinces, the marshals and generals-in-chief of the armies, the nuncio, the ambassadors of all the kingdoms, the deputies and senators of the republics, were motionless, submissive, and ranged around him, as if awaiting his orders. There was no longer a look to brave his look, no longer a word to raise itself against his will, not a project that men dared to form in the most secret recesses of the heart, not a thought which did not proceed from his. Mute Europe listened to him by its representatives. From time to time he raise an imperious voice, and threw a self-satisfied word to this pompous circle, as a man who throws a copper coin among a crowd of beggars. Then might be distinguished, by the pride which lit up his looks and the joy visible in his countenance, the prince who had received such a favor.

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Transformed into another man, he seemed to have made a step in the hierarchy of power, so surrounded with unlooked-for adorations and sudden caresses was the fortunate courtier, whose obscure happiness the Cardinal did not even perceive. The King's brother and the Duc de Bouillon stood in the crowd, whence the minister did not deign to withdraw them. Only he ostentatiously said that it would be well to dismantle a few fortresses, spoke at length of the necessity of pavements and quays at Paris, and said in two words to Turenne that he might perhaps be sent to the army in Italy, to seek his baton as marechal from Prince Thomas.

While Richelieu thus played with the great and small things of Europe, amid his noisy fete, the Queen was informed at the Louvre that the time was come for her to proceed to the Cardinal's palace, where the King awaited her after the tragedy. The serious Anne of Austria did not witness any play; but she could not refuse her presence at the fete of the Prime-Minister. She was in her oratory, ready to depart, and covered with pearls, her favorite ornament; standing opposite a large glass with Marie de Mantua, she was arranging more to her satisfaction one or two details of the young Duchess's toilette, who, dressed in a long pink robe, was herself contemplating with attention, though with somewhat of ennui and a little sullenness, the ensemble of her appearance.

She saw her own work in Marie, and, more troubled, thought with deep apprehension of the moment when this transient calm would cease, despite the profound knowledge she had of the feeling but frivolous character of Marie. Since the conversation at St.-Germain (the fatal letter), she had not quitted the young Princess, and had bestowed all her care to lead her mind to the path which she had traced out for her, for the most decided feature in the character of Anne of Austria was an invincible obstinacy in her calculations, to which she would fain have subjected all events and all passions with a geometrical exactitude. There is no doubt that to this positive and immovable mind we must attribute all the misfortunes of her regency. The sombre reply of Cinq-Mars; his arrest; his trial—all had been concealed from the Princesse Marie, whose first fault, it is true, had been a movement of self-love and a momentary forgetfulness.

However, the Queen by nature was good-hearted, and had bitterly repented her precipitation in writing words so decisive, and whose consequences had been so serious; and all her endeavors had been applied to mitigate the results. In reflecting upon her conduct in reference to the happiness of France, she applauded herself for having thus, at one stroke, stifled the germ of a civil war which would have shaken the State to its very foundations. But when she approached her young friend and gazed on that charming being whose happiness she was thus destroying in its bloom, and reflected that an old man upon a throne, even, would not recompense her for the eternal loss she was about to sustain; when she thought of the entire devotion, the total abnegation of himself, she had witnessed in a young man of twenty-two, of so lofty a character, and almost master of the kingdom—she pitied Marie, and admired from her very soul the man whom she had judged so ill.

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She would at least have desired to explain his worth to her whom he had loved so deeply, and who as yet knew him not; but she still hoped that the conspirators assembled at Lyons would be able to save him, and once knowing him to be in a foreign land she could tell all to her dear Marie.

As to the latter, she had at first feared war. But surrounded by the Queen's people, who had let nothing reach her ear but news dictated by this Princess, she knew, or thought she knew, that the conspiracy had not taken place; that the King and the Cardinal had returned to Paris nearly at the same time; that Monsieur, relapsed for a while, had reappeared at court; that the Duc de Bouillon, on ceding Sedan, had also been restored to favor; and that if the 'grand ecuyer' had not yet appeared, the reason was the more decided animosity of the Cardinal toward him, and the greater part he had taken in the conspiracy. But common sense and natural justice clearly said that having acted under the order of the King's brother, his pardon ought to follow that of this Prince.

All then, had calmed the first uneasiness of her heart, while nothing had softened the kind of proud resentment she felt against Cinq-Mars, so indifferent as not to inform her of the place of his retreat, known to the Queen and the whole court, while, she said to herself, she had thought but of him. Besides, for two months the balls and fetes had so rapidly succeeded each other, and so many mysterious duties had commanded her presence, that she had for reflection and regret scarce more than the time of her toilette, at which she was generally almost alone. Every evening she regularly commenced the general reflection upon the ingratitude and inconstancy of men—a profound and novel thought, which never fails to occupy the head of a young person in the time of first love—but sleep never permitted her to finish the reflection; and the fatigue of dancing closed her large black eyes ere her ideas had found time to classify themselves in her memory, or to present her with any distinct images of the past.

In the morning she was always surrounded by the young princesses of the court, and ere she well had time to dress had to present herself in the Queen's apartment, where awaited her the eternal, but now less disagreeable homage of the Prince-Palatine. The Poles had had time to learn at the court of France that mysterious reserve, that eloquent silence which so pleases the women, because it enhances the importance of things always secret, and elevates those whom they respect, so as to preclude the idea of exhibiting suffering in their presence. Marie was regarded as promised to King Uladislav; and she herself—we must confess it—had so well accustomed herself to this idea that the throne of Poland occupied by another queen would have appeared to her a monstrous thing. She did not look forward with pleasure to the period of ascending it, but had, however, taken possession of the homage which was rendered her beforehand. Thus, without avowing it even to herself, she greatly exaggerated the supposed offences of Cinq-Mars, which the Queen had expounded to her at St. Germain.

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"You are as fresh as the roses in this bouquet," said the Queen. "Come, 'ma chere', are you ready? What means this pouting air? Come, let me fasten this earring. Do you not like these toys, eh? Will you have another set of ornaments?"

"Oh, no, Madame. I think that I ought not to decorate myself at all, for no one knows better than yourself how unhappy I am. Men are very cruel toward us!

"I have reflected on what you said, and all is now clear to me. Yes, it is quite true that he did not love me, for had he loved me he would have renounced an enterprise that gave me so much uneasiness. I told him, I remember, indeed, which was very decided," she added, with an important and even solemn air, "that he would be a rebel—yes, Madame, a rebel. I told him so at Saint-Eustache. But I see that your Majesty was right. I am very unfortunate! He had more ambition than love." Here a tear of pique escaped from her eyes, and rolled quickly down her cheek, as a pearl upon a rose.

"Yes, it is certain," she continued, fastening her bracelets; "and the greatest proof is that in the two months he has renounced his enterprise—you told me that you had saved him—he has not let me know the place of his retreat, while I during that time have been weeping, have been imploring all your power in his favor; have sought but a word that might inform me of his proceedings. I have thought but of him; and even now I refuse every day the throne of Poland, because I wish to prove to the end that I am constant, that you yourself can not make me disloyal to my attachment, far more serious than his, and that we are of higher worth than the men. But, however, I think I may attend this fete, since it is not a ball."

"Yes, yes, my dear child! come, come!" said the Queen, desirous of putting an end to this childish talk, which afflicted her all the more that it was herself who had encouraged it. "Come, you will see the union that prevails between the princes and the Cardinal, and we shall perhaps hear some good news." They departed.

When the two princesses entered the long galleries of the Palais-Cardinal, they were received and coldly saluted by the King and the minister, who, closely surrounded by silent courtiers, were playing at chess upon a small low table. All the ladies who entered with the Queen or followed her, spread through the apartments; and soon soft music sounded in one of the saloons—a gentle accompaniment to the thousand private conversations carried on round the play tables.

Near the Queen passed, saluting her, a young newly married couple—the happy Chabot and the beautiful Duchesse de Rohan. They seemed to shun the crowd, and to seek apart a moment to speak to each other of themselves. Every one received them with a smile and looked after them with envy. Their happiness was expressed as strongly in the countenances of others as in their own.

Marie followed them with her eyes. "Still they are happy," she whispered to the Queen, remembering the censure which in her hearing had been thrown upon the match.

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But without answering, Anne of Austria, fearful that in the crowd some inconsiderate expression might inform her young friend of the mournful event so interesting to her, placed herself with Marie behind the King. Monsieur, the Prince-Palatine, and the Duc de Bouillon came to speak to her with a gay and lively air. The second, however, casting upon Marie a severe and scrutinizing glance, said to her:

“Madame la Princesse, you are most surprisingly beautiful and gay this evening.”

She was confused at these words, and at seeing the speaker walk away with a sombre air. She addressed herself to the Duc d’Orleans, who did not answer, and seemed not to hear her. Marie looked at the Queen, and thought she remarked paleness and disquiet on her features. Meantime, no one ventured to approach the minister, who was deliberately meditating his moves. Mazarin alone, leaning over his chair, followed all the strokes with a servile attention, giving gestures of admiration every time that the Cardinal played. Application to the game seemed to have dissipated for a moment the cloud that usually shaded the minister’s brow. He had just advanced a tower, which placed Louis’s king in that false position which is called “stalemate,”—a situation in which the ebony king, without being personally attacked, can neither advance nor retire in any direction. The Cardinal, raising his eyes, looked at his adversary and smiled with one corner of his mouth, not being able to avoid a secret analogy. Then, observing the dim eyes and dying countenance of the Prince, he whispered to Mazarin:

“Faith, I think he’ll go before me. He is greatly changed.”

At the same time he himself was seized with a long and violent cough, accompanied internally with the sharp, deep pain he so often felt in the side. At the sinister warning he put a handkerchief to his mouth, which he withdrew covered with blood. To hide it, he threw it under the table, and looked around him with a stern smile, as if to forbid observation. Louis XIII, perfectly insensible, did not make the least movement, beyond arranging his men for another game with a skeleton and trembling hand. There two dying men seemed to be throwing lots which should depart first.

At this moment a clock struck the hour of midnight. The King raised his head.

“Ah, ah!” he said; “this morning at twelve Monsieur le Grand had a disagreeable time of it.”

A piercing shriek was uttered behind him. He shuddered, and threw himself forward, upsetting the table. Marie de Mantua lay senseless in the arms of the Queen, who, weeping bitterly, said in the King’s ear:

“Ah, Sire, your axe has a double edge.”

She then bestowed all her cares and maternal kisses upon the young Princess, who, surrounded by all the ladies of the court, only came to herself to burst into a torrent of tears. As soon as she opened her eyes, "Alas! yes, my child," said Anne of Austria. "My poor girl, you are Queen of Poland."

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It has often happened that the same event which causes tears to flow in the palace of kings has spread joy without, for the people ever suppose that happiness reigns at festivals. There were five days' rejoicings for the return of the minister, and every evening under the windows of the Palais-Cardinal and those of the Louvre pressed the people of Paris. The late disturbances had given them a taste for public movements. They rushed from one street to another with a curiosity at times insulting and hostile, sometimes walking in silent procession, sometimes sending forth loud peals of laughter or prolonged yells, of which no one understood the meaning. Bands of young men fought in the streets and danced in rounds in the squares, as if manifesting some secret hope of pleasure and some insensate joy, grievous to the upright heart.

It was remarkable that profound silence prevailed exactly in those places where the minister had ordered rejoicings, and that the people passed disdainfully before the illuminated facade of his palace. If some voices were raised, it was to read aloud in a sneering tone the legends and inscriptions with which the idiot flattery of some obscure writers had surrounded the portraits of the minister. One of these pictures was guarded by arquebusiers, who, however, could not preserve it from the stones which were thrown at it from a distance by unseen hands. It represented the Cardinal-Generalissimo wearing a casque surrounded by laurels. Above it was inscribed:

“Grand Duc: c’est justement que la France t’honore;
Ainsi que le dieu Mars dans Paris on t’adore.”

These fine phrases did not persuade the people that they were happy. They no more adored the Cardinal than they did the god Mars, but they accepted his fetes because they served as a covering for disorder. All Paris was in an uproar. Men with long beards, carrying torches, measures of wine, and two drinking-cups, which they knocked together with a great noise, went along, arm in arm, shouting in chorus with rude voices an old round of the League:

“Reprenons la danse;
Allons, c’est assez.
Le printemps commence;
Les rois sont passes.”Prenons quelque treve;
Nous sommes lasses.
Les rois de la feve
Nous ont harasses.

“Allons, Jean du Mayne,
Les rois sont passes.

“Les rois de la feve
Nous ont harasses.

Allons, Jean du Mayne,
Les rois sont passes.”

The frightful bands who howled forth these words traversed the Quais and the Pont-Neuf, squeezing against the high houses, which then covered the latter, the peaceful citizens who were led there by simple curiosity. Two young men, wrapped in cloaks, thus thrown one against the other, recognized each other by the light of a torch placed at the foot of the statue of Henri IV, which had been lately raised.

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"What! still at Paris?" said Corneille to Milton. "I thought you were in London."

"Hear you the people, Monsieur? Do you hear them? What is this ominous chorus,
'Les rois sont passes'?"

"That is nothing, Monsieur. Listen to their conversation."

"The parliament is dead," said one of the men; "the nobles are dead. Let us dance; we are the masters. The old Cardinal is dying. There is no longer any but the King and ourselves."

"Do you hear that drunken wretch, Monsieur?" asked Corneille. "All our epoch is in those words of his."

"What! is this the work of the minister who is called great among you, and even by other nations? I do not understand him."

"I will explain the matter to you presently," answered Corneille. "But first listen to the concluding part of this letter, which I received to-day. Draw near this light under the statue of the late King. We are alone. The crowd has passed. Listen!

"It was by one of those unforeseen circumstances which prevent the accomplishment of the noblest enterprises that we were not able to save *mm.* de Cinq-Mars and De Thou. We might have foreseen that, prepared for death by long meditation, they would themselves refuse our aid; but this idea did not occur to any of us. In the precipitation of our measures, we also committed the fault of dispersing ourselves too much in the crowd, so that we could not take a sudden resolution. I was unfortunately stationed near the scaffold; and I saw our unfortunate friends advance to the foot of it, supporting the poor Abbe Quillet, who was destined to behold the death of the pupil whose birth he had witnessed. He sobbed aloud, and had strength enough only to kiss the hands of the two friends. We all advanced, ready to throw ourselves upon the guards at the announced signal; but I saw with grief M. de Cinq-Mars cast his hat from him with an air of disdain. Our movement had been observed, and the Catalonian guard was doubled round the scaffold. I could see no more; but I heard much weeping around me. After the three usual blasts of the trumpet, the recorder of Lyons, on horseback at a little distance from the scaffold, read the sentence of death, to which neither of the prisoners listened. M. de Thou said to M. de Cinq-Mars:

"Well, dear friend, which shall die first? Do you remember Saint-Gervais and Saint-Protais?"

"Which you think best," answered Cinq-Mars.

"The second confessor, addressing M. de Thou, said, 'You are the elder.'

"'True,' said M. de Thou; and, turning to M. le Grand, 'You are the most generous; you will show me the way to the glory of heaven.'

"'Alas!' said Cinq-Mars; 'I have opened to you that of the precipice; but let us meet death nobly, and we shall revel in the glory and happiness of heaven!'

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“Hereupon he embraced him, and ascended the scaffold with surprising address and agility. He walked round the scaffold, and contemplated the whole of the great assembly with a calm countenance, which betrayed no sign of fear, and a serious and graceful manner. He then went round once more, saluting the people on every side, without appearing to recognize any of us, with a majestic and charming expression of face; he then knelt down, raising his eyes to heaven, adoring God, and recommending himself to Him. As he embraced the crucifix, the father confessor called to the people to pray for him; and M. le Grand, opening his arms, still holding his crucifix, made the same request to the people. Then he readily knelt before the block, holding the stake, placed his neck upon it, and asked the confessor, ‘Father, is this right?’ Then, while they were cutting off his hair, he raised his eyes to heaven, and said, sighing:

“My God, what is this world? My God, I offer thee my death as a satisfaction for my sins!’

“‘What are you waiting for? What are you doing there?’ he said to the executioner, who had not yet taken his axe from an old bag he had brought with him. His confessor, approaching, gave him a medallion; and he, with an incredible tranquillity of mind, begged the father to hold the crucifix before his eyes, which he would not allow to be bound. I saw the two trembling hands of the Abbe Quillet, who raised the crucifix. At this moment a voice, as clear and pure as that of an angel, commenced the ‘Ave, maris stella’. In the universal silence I recognized the voice of M. de Thou, who was at the foot of the scaffold; the people repeated the sacred strain. M. de Cinq-Mars clung more tightly to the stake; and I saw a raised axe, made like the English axes. A terrible cry of the people from the Place, the windows, and the towers told me that it had fallen, and that the head had rolled to the ground. I had happily strength enough left to think of his soul, and to commence a prayer for him.” I mingled it with that which I heard pronounced aloud by our unfortunate and pious friend De Thou. I rose and saw him spring upon the scaffold with such promptitude that he might almost have been said to fly. The father and he recited a psalm; he uttered it with the ardor of a seraphim, as if his soul had borne his body to heaven. Then, kneeling down, he kissed the blood of Cinq-Mars as that of a martyr, and became himself a greater martyr. I do not know whether God was pleased to grant him this last favor; but I saw with horror that the executioner, terrified no doubt at the first blow he had given, struck him upon the top of his head, whither the unfortunate young man raised his hand; the people sent forth a long groan, and advanced against the executioner. The poor wretch, terrified still more, struck him another blow, which only cut the skin and threw him upon the scaffold,

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where the executioner rolled upon him to despatch him. A strange event terrified the people as much as the horrible spectacle. M. de Cinq-Mars' old servant held his horse as at a military funeral; he had stopped at the foot of the scaffold, and like a man paralyzed, watched his master to the end, then suddenly, as if struck by the same axe, fell dead under the blow which had taken off his master's head. "I write these sad details in haste, on board a Genoese galley, into which Fontrailles, Gondi, Entraigues, Beauvau, Du Lude, myself, and others of the chief conspirators have retired. We are going to England to await until time shall deliver France from the tyrant whom we could not destroy. I abandon forever the service of the base Prince who betrayed us.

"Montresor"

"Such," continued Corneille, "has been the fate of these two young men whom you lately saw so powerful. Their last sigh was that of the ancient monarchy. Nothing more than a court can reign here henceforth; the nobles and the senates are destroyed."

"And this is your pretended great man!" said Milton. "What has he sought to do? He would, then, create republics for future ages, since he destroys the basis of your monarchy?"

"Look not so far," answered Corneille; "he only seeks to reign until the end of his life. He has worked for the present and not for the future; he has continued the work of Louis XI; and neither one nor the other knew what they were doing."

The Englishman smiled.

"I thought," he said, "that true genius followed another path. This man has shaken all that he ought to have supported, and they admire him! I pity your nation."

"Pity it not!" exclaimed Corneille, warmly; "a man passes away, but a people is renewed. This people, Monsieur, is gifted with an immortal energy, which nothing can destroy; its imagination often leads it astray, but superior reason will ever ultimately master its disorders."

The two young and already great men walked, as they conversed, upon the space which separates the statue of Henri IV from the Place Dauphine; they stopped a moment in the centre of this Place.

"Yes, Monsieur," continued Corneille, "I see every evening with what rapidity a noble thought finds its echo in French hearts; and every evening I retire happy at the sight. Gratitude prostrates the poor people before this statue of a good king! Who knows what other monument another passion may raise near this? Who can say how far the love of

glory will lead our people? Who knows that in the place where we now are, there may not be raised a pyramid taken from the East?"

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"These are the secrets of the future," said Milton. "I, like yourself, admire your impassioned nation; but I fear them for themselves. I do not well understand them; and I do not recognize their wisdom when I see them lavishing their admiration upon men such as he who now rules you. The love of power is very puerile; and this man is devoured by it, without having force enough to seize it wholly. By an utter absurdity, he is a tyrant under a master. Thus has this colossus, never firmly balanced, been all but overthrown by the finger of a boy. Does that indicate genius? No, no! when genius condescends to quit the lofty regions of its true home for a human passion, at least, it should grasp that passion in its entirety. Since Richelieu only aimed at power, why did he not, if he was a genius, make himself absolute master of power? I am going to see a man who is not yet known, and whom I see swayed by this miserable ambition; but I think that he will go farther. His name is Cromwell!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A cat is a very fine animal. It is a drawing-room tiger
But how avenge one's self on silence?
Deny the spirit of self-sacrifice
Hatred of everything which is superior to myself
Hermits can not refrain from inquiring what men say of them
Princes ought never to be struck, except on the head
These ideas may serve as opium to produce a calm
They loved not as you love, eh?

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire Cinq Mars:

A cat is a very fine animal. It is a drawing-room tiger
A queen's country is where her throne is
Adopted fact is always better composed than the real one
Advantage that a calm temper gives one over men
All that he said, I had already thought
Always the first word which is the most difficult to say
Ambition is the saddest of all hopes
Art is the chosen truth
Artificialities of style of that period
Artistic Truth, more lofty than the True
As Homer says, "smiling under tears"
Assume with others the mien they wore toward him
But how avenge one's self on silence?
Dare now to be silent when I have told you these things
Daylight is detrimental to them
Deny the spirit of self-sacrifice
Difference which I find between Truth in art and the True in fac
Doubt, the greatest misery of love



Friendship exists only in independence and a kind of equality
Happy is he who does not outlive his youth
Hatred of everything which is superior to myself
He did not blush to be a man, and he spoke to men with force
Hermits can not refrain from inquiring what men say of them
History too was a work of art
I have burned all the bridges behind me

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In pitying me he forgot himself
In every age we laugh at the costume of our fathers
In times like these we must see all and say all
It is not now what it used to be
It is too true that virtue also has its blush
Lofty ideal of woman and of love
Men are weak, and there are things which women must accomplish
Money is not a common thing between gentlemen like you and me
Monsieur, I know that I have lived too long
Neither idealist nor realist
Never interfered in what did not concern him
No writer had more dislike of mere pedantry
Offices will end by rendering great names vile
Princes ought never to be struck, except on the head
Princesses ceded like a town, and must not even weep
Principle that art implied selection
Recommended a scrupulous observance of nature
Remedy infallible against the plague and against reserve
Reproaches are useless and cruel if the evil is done
Should be punished for not having known how to punish
So strongly does force impose upon men
Tears for the future
The great leveller has swung a long scythe over France
The most in favor will be the soonest abandoned by him
The usual remarks prompted by imbecility on such occasions
These ideas may serve as opium to produce a calm
They tremble while they threaten
They have believed me incapable because I was kind
They loved not as you love, eh?
This popular favor is a cup one must drink
This was the Dauphin, afterward Louis XIV
True talent paints life rather than the living
Truth, I here venture to distinguish from that of the True
Urbain Grandier
What use is the memory of facts, if not to serve as an example
Woman is more bitter than death, and her arms are like chains
Yes, we are in the way here

THE ABBE CONSTANTIN

By *Ludovic Halevy*

With a Preface by E. *Legouve*, of the French Academy

LUDOVIC HALEVY

Ludovic Halevy was born in Paris, January 1, 1834. His father was Leon Halevy, the celebrated author; his grandfather, Fromenthal, the eminent composer. Ludovic was destined for the civil service, and, after finishing his studies, entered successively the Department of State (1852); the Algerian Department (1858), and later on became editorial secretary of the Corps Legislatif (1860). When his patron, the Duc de Morny, died in 1865, Halevy resigned, giving up a lucrative position for the uncertain profession of a playwright: At this period he devoted himself exclusively to the theatre.

He had already written plays as early as 1856, and had also tried his hand at fiction, but did not meet with very great success. Toward 1860, however, he became acquainted with Henri Meilhac, and with him formed a kind of literary union, lasting for almost twenty years, when Halevy rather abruptly abandoned the theatre and became a writer of fiction.

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We have seen such kinds of co-partnerships, for instance, in Beaumont and Fletcher; more recently in the beautiful French tales of Erckmann-Chatrian, and still later in the English novels of Besant and Rice.

Some say it was a fortunate event for Meilhac; others assert that Halevy reaped a great profit by the union. Be this as it may, a great number of plays—drama, comedy, farce, opera, operetta and ballet—were jointly produced, as is shown by the title-pages of two score or more of their pieces. When Ludovic Halevy was a candidate for L'Academie—he entered that glorious body in 1884—the question was ventilated by Pailleron: “What was the author’s literary relation in his union with Meilhac?” It was answered by M. Sarcey, who criticised the character and quality of the work achieved. Public opinion has a long time since brought in quite another verdict in the case.

Halevy’s cooperation endowed the plays of Meilhac with a fuller ethical richness—tempered them, so to speak, and made them real, for it can not be denied that Meilhac was inclined to extravagance.

Halevy’s novels are remarkable for the elegance of literary style, tenderness of spirit and keenness of observation. He excels in ironical sketches. He has often been compared to Eugene Sue, but his touch is lighter than Sue’s, and his humor less unctuous. Most of his little sketches, originally written for *La Vie Parisienne*, were collected in his ‘Monsieur et Madame Cardinal’ (1873); and ‘Les Petites Cardinal’, (1880). They are not intended ‘*virginibus puerisque*’, and the author’s attitude is that of a half-pitying, half-contemptuous moralist, yet the virility of his criticism has brought him immortality.

Personal recollections of the great war are to be found in ‘L’Invasion’ (1872); and ‘Notes et Souvenirs’, 1871-1872 (1889). Most extraordinary, however, was the success of ‘L’Abbe Constantin’ (1882), crowned by the Academy, which has gone through no less than one hundred and fifty editions up to 1904, and ranks as one of the greatest successes of contemporaneous literature. It is, indeed, his ‘*chef-d’oeuvre*’, very delicate, earnest, and at the same time ironical, a most entrancing family story. It was then that the doors of the French Academy opened wide before Halevy. ‘L’Abbe Constantin’ was adapted for the stage by Cremieux and Decourcelle (Le Gymnase, 1882). Further notable novels are: ‘Criquelette, Deux Mariages, Un Grand Mariage, Un Mariage d’Amour’, all in 1883; ‘Princesse, Les Trois Coups de Foudre, Mon Camarade Moussard’, all in 1884; and the romances, ‘Karikari (1892), and Mariette (1893)’. Since that time, I think, Halevy has not published anything of importance.

E. Legouve
de l’Academie Francaise.

THE ABBE CONSTANTIN

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

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THE SALE OF LONGUEVAL

With a step still valiant and firm, an old priest walked along the dusty road in the full rays of a brilliant sun. For more than thirty years the Abbe Constantin had been Cure of the little village which slept there in the plain, on the banks of a slender stream called La Lizotte. The Abbe Constantin was walking by the wall which surrounded the park of the castle of Longueval; at last he reached the entrance-gate, which rested high and massive on two ancient pillars of stone, embrowned and gnawed by time. The Cure stopped, and mournfully regarded two immense blue posters fixed on the pillars.

The posters announced that on Wednesday, May 18, 1881, at one o'clock P.M., would take place, before the Civil Tribunal of Souvigny, the sale of the domain of Longueval, divided into four lots:

1. The castle of Longueval, its dependencies, fine pieces of water, extensive offices, park of 150 hectares in extent, completely surrounded by a wall, and traversed by the little river Lizotte. Valued at 600,000 francs.
2. The farm of Blanche-Couronne, 300 hectares, valued at 500,000 francs.
3. The farm of La Rozeraie, 250 hectares, valued at 400,000 francs.
4. The woods and forests of La Mionne, containing 450 hectares, valued at 550,000 francs.

And these four amounts, added together at the foot of the bill, gave the respectable sum of 2,050,000 francs.

Then they were really going to dismember this magnificent domain, which, escaping all mutilation, had for more than two centuries always been transmitted intact from father to son in the family of Longueval. The placards also announced that after the temporary division into four lots, it would be possible to unite them again, and offer for sale the entire domain; but it was a very large morsel, and, to all appearance, no purchaser would present himself.

The Marquise de Longueval had died six months before; in 1873 she had lost her only son, Robert de Longueval; the three heirs were the grandchildren of the Marquise: Pierre, Helene, and Camille. It had been found necessary to offer the domain for sale, as Helene and Camille were minors. Pierre, a young man of three-and-twenty, had lived rather fast, was already half-ruined, and could not hope to redeem Longueval.

It was mid-day. In an hour it would have a new master, this old castle of Longueval; and this master, who would he be? What woman would take the place of the old Marquise in the chimney-corner of the grand salon, all adorned with ancient tapestry?—the old Marquise, the friend of the old priest. It was she who had restored the church; it was

she who had established and furnished a complete dispensary at the vicarage under the care of Pauline, the Cure's servant; it was she who, twice a week, in her great barouche, all crowded with little children's clothes and thick woolen petticoats, came to fetch the Abbe Constantin to make with him what she called 'la chasse aux pauvres'.

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The old priest continued his walk, musing over all this; then he thought, too—the greatest saints have their little weaknesses—he thought, too, of the beloved habits of thirty years thus rudely interrupted. Every Thursday and every Sunday he had dined at the castle. How he had been petted, coaxed, indulged! Little Camille—she was eight years old—would come and sit on his knee and say to him:

“You know, Monsieur le Cure, it is in your church that I mean to be married, and grandmamma will send such heaps of flowers to fill, quite fill the church—more than for the month of Mary. It will be like a large garden—all white, all white, all white!”

The month of Mary! It was then the month of Mary. Formerly, at this season, the altar disappeared under the flowers brought from the conservatories of Longueval. None this year were on the altar, except a few bouquets of lily-of-the-valley and white lilac in gilded china vases. Formerly, every Sunday at high mass, and every evening during the month of Mary, Mademoiselle Hebert, the reader to Madame de Longueval, played the little harmonium given by the Marquise. Now the poor harmonium, reduced to silence, no longer accompanied the voices of the choir or the children’s hymns. Mademoiselle Marbeau, the postmistress, would, with all her heart, have taken the place of Mademoiselle Hebert, but she dared not, though she was a little musical! She was afraid of being remarked as of the clerical party, and denounced by the Mayor, who was a Freethinker. That might have been injurious to her interests, and prevented her promotion.

He had nearly reached the end of the wall of the park—that park of which every corner was known to the old priest. The road now followed the banks of the Lizotte, and on the other side of the little stream stretched the fields belonging to the two farms; then, still farther off, rose the dark woods of La Mionne.

Divided! The domain was going to be divided! The heart of the poor priest was rent by this bitter thought. All that for thirty years had been inseparable, indivisible to him. It was a little his own, his very own, his estate, this great property. He felt at home on the lands of Longueval. It had happened more than once that he had stopped complacently before an immense cornfield, plucked an ear, removed the husk, and said to himself:

“Come! the grain is fine, firm, and sound. This year we shall have a good harvest!”

And with a joyous heart he would continue his way through his fields, his meadows, his pastures; in short, by every chord of his heart, by every tie of his life, by all his habits, his memories, he clung to this domain whose last hour had come.

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The Abbe perceived in the distance the farm of Blanche-Couronne; its red-tiled roofs showed distinctly against the verdure of the forest. There, again, the Cure was at home. Bernard, the farmer of the Marquise, was his friend; and when the old priest was delayed in his visits to the poor and sick, when the sun was sinking below the horizon, and the Abbe began to feel a little fatigued in his limbs, and a sensation of exhaustion in his stomach, he stopped and supped with Bernard, regaled himself with a savory stew and potatoes, and emptied his pitcher of cider; then, after supper, the farmer harnessed his old black mare to his cart, and took the vicar back to Longueval. The whole distance they chatted and quarrelled. The Abbe reproached the farmer with not going to mass, and the latter replied:

"The wife and the girls go for me. You know very well, Monsieur le Cure, that is how it is with us. The women have enough religion for the men. They will open the gates of paradise for us."

And he added maliciously, while giving a touch of the whip to his old black mare:

"If there is one!"

The Cure sprang from his seat.

"What! if there is one! Of a certainty there is one."

"Then you will be there, Monsieur le Cure. You say that is not certain, and I say it is. You will be there, you will be there, at the gate, on the watch for your parishioners, and still busy with their little affairs; and you will say to St. Peter—for it is St. Peter, isn't it, who keeps the keys of paradise?"

"Yes, it is St. Peter."

"Well, you will say to him, to St. Peter, if he wants to shut the door in my face under the pretense that I did not go to mass—you will say to him: 'Bah! let him in all the same. It is Bernard, one of the farmers of Madame la Marquise, an honest man. He was common councilman, and he voted for the maintenance of the sisters when they were going to be expelled from the village school.' That will touch St. Peter, who will answer: 'Well, well, you may pass, Bernard, but it is only to please Monsieur le Cure.' For you will be Monsieur le Cure up there, and Cure of Longueval, too, for paradise itself would be dull for you if you must give up being Cure of Longueval."

Cure of Longueval! Yes, all his life he had been nothing but Cure of Longueval, had never dreamed of anything else, had never wished to be anything else. Three or four times excellent livings, with one or two curates, had been offered to him, but he had always refused them. He loved his little church, his little village, his little vicarage. There he had it all to himself, saw to everything himself; calm, tranquil, he went and

came, summer and winter, in sunshine or storm, in wind or rain. His frame became hardened by fatigue and exposure, but his soul remained gentle, tender, and pure.

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He lived in his vicarage, which was only a larger laborer's cottage, separated from the church by the churchyard. When the Cure mounted the ladder to train his pear and peach trees, over the top of the wall he perceived the graves over which he had said the last prayer, and cast the first spadeful of earth. Then, while continuing his work, he said in his heart a little prayer for the repose of those among his dead whose fate disturbed him, and who might be still detained in purgatory. He had a tranquil and childlike faith.

But among these graves there was one which, oftener than all the others, received his visits and his prayers. It was the tomb of his old friend Dr. Reynaud, who had died in his arms in 1871, and under what circumstances! The doctor had been like Bernard; he never went to mass or to confession; but he was so good, so charitable, so compassionate to the suffering. This was the cause of the Cure's great anxiety, of his great solicitude. His friend Reynaud, where was he? Where was he? Then he called to mind the noble life of the country doctor, all made up of courage and self-denial; he recalled his death, above all his death, and said to himself:

"In paradise; he can be nowhere but in paradise. The good God may have sent him to purgatory just for form's sake—but he must have delivered him after five minutes."

All this passed through the mind of the old man, as he continued his walk toward Souvigny. He was going to the town, to the solicitor of the Marquise, to inquire the result of the sale; to learn who were to be the new masters of the castle of Longueval. The Abbe had still about a mile to walk before reaching the first houses of Souvigny, and was passing the park of Lavardens when he heard, above his head, voices calling to him:

"Monsieur le Cure, Monsieur le Cure."

At this spot adjoining the wall, a long alley of limetrees bordered the terrace, and the Abbe, raising his head, perceived Madame de Lavardens, and her son Paul.

"Where are you going, Monsieur le Cure?" asked the Countess.

"To Souvigny, to the Tribunal, to learn—"

"Stay here—Monsieur de Larnac is coming after the sale to tell me the result."

The Abbe Constantin joined them on the terrace.

Gertrude de Lannilis, Countess de Lavardens, had been very unfortunate. At eighteen she had been guilty of a folly, the only one of her life, but that one—irreparable. She had married for love, in a burst of enthusiasm and exaltation, M. de Lavardens, one of the most fascinating and brilliant men of his time. He did not love her, and only married her from necessity; he had devoured his patrimonial fortune to the very last farthing, and

for two or three years had supported himself by various expedients. Mademoiselle de Lannilis knew all that, and had no illusions on these points, but she said to herself:

“I will love him so much, that he will end by loving me.”

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Hence all her misfortunes. Her existence might have been tolerable, if she had not loved her husband so much; but she loved him too much. She had only succeeded in wearying him by her importunities and tenderness. He returned to his former life, which had been most irregular. Fifteen years had passed thus, in a long martyrdom, supported by Madame de Lavardens with all the appearance of passive resignation. Nothing ever could distract her from, or cure her of, the love which was destroying her.

M. de Lavardens died in 1869; he left a son fourteen years of age, in whom were already visible all the defects and all the good qualities of his father. Without being seriously affected, the fortune of Madame de Lavardens was slightly compromised, slightly diminished. Madame de Lavardens sold her mansion in Paris, retired to the country, where she lived with strict economy, and devoted herself to the education of her son.

But here again grief and disappointment awaited her. Paul de Lavardens was intelligent, amiable, and affectionate, but thoroughly rebellious against any constraint, and any species of work. He drove to despair three or four tutors who vainly endeavored to force something serious into his head, went up to the military college of Saint-Cyr, failed at the examination, and began to devour in Paris, with all the haste and folly possible, 200,000 or 300,000 francs.

That done, he enlisted in the first regiment of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, had in the very beginning of his military career the good fortune to make one of an expeditionary column sent into the Sahara, distinguished himself, soon became quartermaster, and at the end of three years was about to be appointed sub-lieutenant, when he was captivated by a young person who played the 'Fille de Madame Angot', at the theatre in Algiers.

Paul had finished his time, he quitted the service, and went to Paris with his charmer . . . then it was a dancer . . . then it was an actress . . . then a circus-rider. He tried life in every form. He led the brilliant and miserable existence of the unoccupied.

But it was only three or four months that he passed in Paris each year. His mother made him an allowance Of 30,000 francs, and had declared to him that never, while she lived, should he have another penny before his marriage. He knew his mother, he knew he must consider her words as serious. Thus, wishing to make a good figure in Paris, and lead a merry life, he spent his 30,000 francs in three months, and then docilely returned to Lavardens, where he was "out at grass." He spent his time hunting, fishing, and riding with the officers of the artillery regiment quartered at Souvigny. The little provincial milliners and grisettes replaced, without rendering him obvious of, the little singers and actresses of Paris. By searching for them, one may still find grisettes in country towns, and Paul de Lavardens sought assiduously.

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As soon as the Cure had reached Madame de Lavardens, she said: "Without waiting for Monsieur de Larnac, I can tell you the names of the purchasers of the domain of Longueval. I am quite easy on the subject, and have no doubt of the success of our plan. In order to avoid any foolish disputes, we have agreed among ourselves, that is, among our neighbors, Monsieur de Larnac, Monsieur Gallard, a great Parisian banker, and myself. Monsieur de Larnac will have La Mionne, Monsieur Gallard the castle and Blanche-Couronne, and La Rozeriaie. I know you, Monsieur le Cure, you will be anxious about your poor, but comfort yourself. These Gallards are rich and will give you plenty of money."

At this moment a cloud of dust appeared on the road, from it emerged a carriage.

"Here comes Monsieur de Larnac!" cried Paul, "I know his ponies!"

All three hurriedly descended from the terrace and returned to the castle. They arrived there just as M. de Larnac's carriage drove up to the entrance.

"Well?" asked Madame de Lavardens.

"Well!" replied M. de Larnac, "we have nothing."

"What? Nothing?" cried Madame de Lavardens, very pale and agitated.

"Nothing, nothing; absolutely nothing—the one or the other of us."

And M. de Larnac springing from his carriage, related what had taken place at the sale before the Tribunal of Souvigny.

"At first," he said, "everything went upon wheels. The castle went to Monsieur Gallard for 650,000 francs. No competitor—a raise of fifty francs had been sufficient. On the other hand, there was a little battle for Blanche-Couronne. The bids rose from 500,000 francs to 520,000 francs, and again Monsieur Gallard was victorious. Another and more animated battle for La Rozeriaie; at last it was knocked down to you, Madame, for 455,000 francs I got the forest of La Mionne without opposition at a rise of 100 francs. All seemed over, those present had risen, our solicitors were surrounded with persons asking the names of the purchasers."

"Monsieur Brazier, the judge intrusted with the sale, desired silence, and the bailiff of the court offered the four lots together for 2,150,000 or 2,160,000 francs, I don't remember which. A murmur passed through the assembly. 'No one will bid' was heard on all sides. But little Gibert, the solicitor, who was seated in the first row, and till then had given no sign of life, rose and said calmly, 'I have a purchaser for the four lots together at 2,200,000 francs.' This was like a thunderbolt. A tremendous clamor arose, followed by a dead silence. The hall was filled with farmers and laborers from the neighborhood. Two million francs! So much money for the land threw them into a sort



of respectful stupor. However, Monsieur Gallard, bending toward Sandrier, the solicitor who had bid for him, whispered something in his ear. The struggle began between Gibert and Sandrier. The bids rose to 2,500,000 francs. Monsieur Gallard hesitated for a moment—decided—continued up to 3,000,000. Then he stopped and the whole went to Gibert. Every one rushed on him, they surrounded—they crushed him: ‘The name, the name of the purchaser?’ ‘It is an American,’ replied Gibert, ‘Mrs. Scott.’”

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"Mrs. Scott!" cried Paul de Lavardens.

"You know her?" asked Madame de Lavardens.

"Do I know her?—do I—not at all. But I was at a ball at her house six weeks ago."

"At a ball at her house! and you don't know her! What sort of woman is she, then?"

"Charming, delightful, ideal, a miracle!"

"And is there a Mr. Scott?"

"Certainly, a tall, fair man. He was at his ball. They pointed him out to me. He bowed at random right and left. He was not much amused, I will answer for it. He looked at us as if he were thinking, 'Who are all these people? What are they doing at my house?' We went to see Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival, her sister. And certainly it was well worth the trouble."

"These Scotts," said Madame de Lavardens, addressing M. de Larnac, "do you know who they are?"

"Yes, Madame, I know. Mr. Scott is an American, possessing a colossal fortune, who settled himself in Paris last year. As soon as their name was mentioned, I understood that the victory had never been doubtful. Gallard was beaten beforehand. The Scotts began by buying a house in Paris for 2,000,000 francs, it is near the Parc Monceau."

"Yes, Rue Murillo," said Paul; "I tell you I went to a ball there. It was—"

"Let Monsieur de Larnac speak. You can tell us presently about the ball at Mrs. Scott's."

"Well, now, imagine my Americans established in Paris," continued M. de Larnac, "and the showers of gold begun. In the orthodox parvenu style they amuse themselves with throwing handfuls of gold out of window. Their great wealth is quite recent, they say; ten years ago Mrs. Scott begged in the streets of New York."

"Begged!"

"They say so. Then she married this Scott, the son of a New York banker, and all at once a successful lawsuit put into their hands not millions, but tens of millions. Somewhere in America they have a silver mine, but a genuine mine, a real mine—a mine with silver in it. Ah! we shall see what luxury will reign at Longueval! We shall all look like paupers beside them! It is said that they have 100,000 francs a day to spend."

"Such are our neighbors!" cried Madame de Lavardens. "An adventuress! and that is the least of it—a heretic, Monsieur l'Abbe, a Protestant!"

A heretic! a Protestant! Poor Cure; it was indeed that of which he had immediately thought on hearing the words, "An American, Mrs. Scott." The new chatelaine of Longueval would not go to mass. What did it matter to him that she had been a beggar? What did it matter to him if she possessed tens and tens of millions? She was not a Catholic. He would never again baptize children born at Longueval, and the chapel in the castle, where he had so often said mass, would be transformed into a Protestant oratory, which would echo only the frigid utterances of a Calvinistic or Lutheran pastor.

Every one was distressed, disappointed, overwhelmed; but in the midst of the general depression Paul stood radiant.

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"A charming heretic at all events," said he, "or rather two charming heretics. You should see the two sisters on horseback in the Bois, with two little grooms behind them not higher than that."

"Come, Paul, tell us all you know. Describe the ball of which you speak. How did you happen to go to a ball at these Americans?"

"By the greatest chance. My Aunt Valentine was at home that night; I looked in about ten o'clock. Well, Aunt Valentine's Wednesdays are not exactly scenes of wild enjoyment, I give you my word! I had been there about twenty minutes when I caught sight of Roger de Puymartin escaping furtively. I caught him in the hall and said:

"'We will go home together.'

"'Oh! I am not going home.'

"'Where are you going?'

"'To the ball.'

"'Where?'

"'At Mrs. Scott's. Will you come?'

"'But I have not been invited.'

"'Neither have I'

"'What! not invited?'

"'No. I am going with one of my friends.'

"'And does your friend know them?'

"'Scarcely; but enough to introduce us. Come along; you will see Mrs. Scott.'

"'Oh! I have seen her on horseback in the Bois.'

"'But she does not wear a low gown on horseback; you have not seen her shoulders, and they are shoulders which ought to be seen. There is nothing better in Paris at this moment.'

"And I went to the ball, and I saw Mrs. Scott's red hair, and I saw Mrs. Scott's white shoulders, and I hope to see them again when there are balls at Longueval."

"Paul!" said Madame de Lavardens, pointing to the Abbe.

“Oh! Monsieur l’Abbe, I beg a thousand pardons. Have I said anything? It seems to me—”

The poor old priest had heard nothing; his thoughts were elsewhere. Already he saw, in the village streets, the Protestant pastor from the castle stopping before each house, and slipping under the doors little evangelical pamphlets.

Continuing his account, Paul launched into an enthusiastic description of the mansion, which was a marvel—

“Of bad taste and ostentation,” interrupted Madame de Lavardens.

“Not at all, mother, not at all; nothing startling, nothing loud. It is admirably furnished, everything done with elegance and originality. An incomparable conservatory, flooded with electric light; the buffet was placed in the conservatory under a vine laden with grapes, which one could gather by handfuls, and in the month of April! The accessories of the cotillon cost, it appears, more than 400,000 francs. Ornaments, ‘bon-bonnières’, delicious trifles, and we were begged to accept them. For my part I took nothing, but there were many who made no scruple. That evening Puymartin told me Mrs. Scott’s history, but it was not at all like Monsieur de Larnac’s story. Roger said that, when quite little, Mrs. Scott had been stolen from her family by some acrobats, and that her father had found her in a travelling circus, riding on barebacked horses and jumping through paper hoops.”

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"A circus-rider!" cried Madame de Lavardens, "I should have preferred the beggar."

"And while Roger was telling me this Family Herald romance, I saw approaching from the end of a gallery a wonderful cloud of lace and satin; it surrounded this rider from a wandering circus, and I admired those shoulders, those dazzling shoulders, on which undulated a necklace of diamonds as big as the stopper of a decanter. They say that the Minister of Finance had sold secretly to Mrs. Scott half the crown diamonds, and that was how, the month before, he had been able to show a surplus of 1,500,000 francs in the budget. Add to all this that the lady had a remarkably good air, and that the little acrobat seemed perfectly at home in the midst of all this splendor."

Paul was going so far that his mother was obliged to stop him. Before M. de Larnac, who was excessively annoyed and disappointed, he showed too plainly his delight at the prospect of having this marvellous American for a near neighbor.

The Abbe Constantin was preparing to return to Longueval, but Paul, seeing him ready to start, said:

"No! no! Monsieur le Cure, you must not think of walking back to Longueval in the heat of the day. Allow me to drive you home. I am really grieved to see you so cast down, and will try my best to amuse you. Oh! if you were ten times a saint I would make you laugh at my stories."

And half an hour after, the two—the Cure and Paul—drove side by side in the direction of the village. Paul talked, talked, talked. His mother was not there to check or moderate his transports, and his joy was overflowing.

"Now, look here, Monsieur l'Abbe, you are wrong to take things in this tragic manner. Stay, look at my little mare, how well she trots! what good action she has! You have not seen her before? What do you think I paid for her? Four hundred francs. I discovered her a fortnight ago, between the shafts of a market gardener's cart. She is a treasure. I assure you she can do sixteen miles an hour, and keep one's hands full all the time. Just see how she pulls. Come, tot-tot-tot! You are not in a hurry, Monsieur l'Abbe, I hope. Let us return through the wood; the fresh air will do you good. Oh! Monsieur l'Abbe, if you only knew what a regard I have for you, and respect, too. I did not talk too much nonsense before you just now, did I? I should be so sorry—"

"No, my child, I heard nothing."

"Well, we will take the longest way round."

After having turned to the left in the wood, Paul resumed his communications.

"I was saying, Monsieur l'Abbe," he went on, "that you are wrong to take things so seriously. Shall I tell you what I think? This is a very fortunate affair."

“Very fortunate?”

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"Yes, very fortunate. I would rather see the Scotts at Longueval than the Gallards. Did you not hear Monsieur de Larnac reproach these Americans with spending their money foolishly. It is never foolish to spend money. The folly lies in keeping it. Your poor for I am perfectly sure that it is your poor of whom you are thinking—your poor have made a good thing of it to-day. That is my opinion. The religion? Well, they will not go to mass, and that will be a grief to you, that is only natural; but they will send you money, plenty of money, and you will take it, and you will be quite right in doing so. You will see that you will not say no. There will be gold raining over the whole place; a movement, a bustle, carriages with four horses, postilions, powdered footmen, paper chases, hunting parties, balls, fireworks, and here in this very spot I shall perhaps find Paris again before long. I shall see once more the two riders, and the two little grooms of whom I was speaking just now. If you only knew how well those two sisters look on horseback! One morning I went right round the Bois de Boulogne behind them; I fancy I can see them still. They had high hats, and little black veils drawn very tightly over their faces, and long riding-habits made in the princess form, with a single seam right down the back; and a woman must be awfully well made to wear a riding-habit like that, because you see, Monsieur l'Abbe, with a habit of that cut no deception is possible."

For some moments the Cure had not been listening to Paul's discourse. They had entered a long, perfectly straight avenue, and at the end of this avenue the Cure saw a horseman galloping along.

"Look," said the Cure to Paul, "your eyes are better than mine. Is not that Jean?"

"Yes, it is Jean. I know his gray mare."

Paul loved horses, and before looking at the rider looked at the horse. It was indeed Jean, who, when he saw in the distance the Cure and Paul de Lavardens, waved in the air his kepi adorned with two golden stripes. Jean was lieutenant in the regiment of artillery quartered at Souvigny.

Some moments after he stopped by the little carriage, and, addressing the Cure, said:

"I have just been to your house, 'mon parrain'. Pauline told me that you had gone to Souvigny about the sale. Well, who has bought the castle?"

"An American, Mrs. Scott."

"And Blanche-Couronne?"

"The same, Mrs. Scott."

"And La Rozeraie?"

"Mrs. Scott again."

“And the forest? Mrs. Scott again?”

“You have said it,” replied Paul, “and I know Mrs. Scott, and I can promise you that there will be something going on at Longueval. I will introduce you. Only it is distressing to Monsieur l’Abbe because she is an American—a Protestant.”

“Ah! that is true,” said Jean, sympathizingly. “However, we will talk about it to-morrow. I am going to dine with you, godfather; I have warned Pauline of my visit; no time to stop to-day. I am on duty, and must be in quarters at three o’clock.”

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“Stables?” asked Paul.

“Yes. Good-by, Paul. To-morrow, godfather.”

The lieutenant galloped away. Paul de Lavardens gave his little horse her head.

“What a capital fellow Jean is!” said Paul.

“Oh, yes, indeed!”

“There is no one on earth better than Jean.”

“No, no one.”

The Cure turned round to take another look at Jean, who was almost lost in the depths of the forest.

“Oh, yes, there is you, Monsieur le Cure.”

“No, not me! not me!”

“Well, Monsieur l’Abbe, shall I tell you what I think? I think there is no one better than you two—you and Jean. That is the truth, if I must tell you. Oh! what a splendid place for a trot! I shall let Niniche go; I call her Niniche.”

With the point of his whip Paul caressed the flank of Niniche, who started off at full speed, and Paul, delighted, cried:

“Just look at her action, Monsieur l’Abbe! just look at her action! So regular—just like clockwork. Lean over and look.”

To please Paul de Lavardens the Abbe Constantin did lean over and look at Niniche’s action, but the old priest’s thoughts were far away.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW CHATELAINE

This sub-lieutenant of artillery was called Jean Reynaud. He was the son of a country doctor who slept in the churchyard of Longueval.

In 1846, when the Abbe’ Constantin took possession of his little living, the grandfather of Jean was residing in a pleasant cottage on the road to Souvigny, between the picturesque old castles of Longueval and Lavardens.

Marcel, the son of that Dr. Reynaud, was finishing his medical studies in Paris. He possessed great industry, and an elevation of sentiment and mind extremely rare. He passed his examinations with great distinction, and had decided to fix his abode in Paris and tempt fortune there, and everything seemed to promise him the most prosperous and brilliant career, when, in 1852, he received the news of his father's death—he had been struck down by a fit of apoplexy. Marcel hurried to Longueval, overwhelmed with grief, for he adored his father. He spent a month with his mother, and then spoke of the necessity of returning to Paris.

"That is true," said his mother; "you must go."

"What! I must go! We must go, you mean. Do you think that I would leave you here alone? I shall take you with me."

"To live in Paris; to leave the place where I was born, where your father lived, where he died? I could never do it, my child, never! Go alone; your life, your future, are there. I know you; I know that you will never forget me, that you will come and see me often, very often."

"No, mother," he answered; "I shall stay here."

And he stayed.

His hopes, his ambitions, all in one moment vanished. He saw only one thing—duty—the duty of not abandoning his aged mother. In duty, simply accepted and simply discharged, he found happiness. After all, it is only thus that one does find happiness.

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Marcel bowed with courage and good grace to his new existence. He continued his father's life, entering the groove at the very spot where he had left it. He devoted himself without regret to the obscure career of a country doctor. His father had left him a little land and a little money; he lived in the most simple manner possible, and one half of his life belonged to the poor, from whom he would never receive a penny.

This was his only luxury.

He found in his way a young girl, charming, penniless, and alone in the world. He married her. This was in 1855, and the following year brought to Dr. Reynaud a great sorrow and a great joy—the death of his old mother and the birth of his son Jean.

At an interval of six weeks, the Abby Constantin recited the prayers for the dead over the grave of the grandmother, and was present in the position of godfather at the baptism of the grandson.

In consequence of constantly meeting at the bedside of the suffering and dying, the priest and the doctor had been strongly attracted to each other. They instinctively felt that they belonged to the same family, the same race—the race of the tender, the just, and the benevolent.

Year followed year—calm, peaceful, fully occupied in labor and duty. Jean was no longer an infant. His father gave him his first lessons in reading and writing, the priest his first lessons in Latin. Jean was intelligent and industrious. He made so much progress that the two professors—particularly the Cure—found themselves at the end of a few years rather cast into the shade by their pupil. It was at this moment that the Countess, after the death of her husband, came to settle at Lavardens. She brought with her a tutor for her son Paul, a very nice, but very lazy little fellow. The two children were of the same age; they had known each other from their earliest years.

Madame de Lavardens had a great regard for Dr. Reynaud, and one day she made him the following proposal:

“Send Jean to me every morning,” said she, “I will send him home in the evening. Paul's tutor is a very accomplished man; he will make the children work together. It will be rendering me a real service. Jean will set Paul a good example.”

Things were thus arranged, and the little bourgeois set the little nobleman a most excellent example of industry and application, but this excellent example was not followed.

The war broke out. On November 14th, at seven o'clock in the morning, the mobiles of Souvigny assembled in the great square of the town; their chaplain was the Abbe

Constantin, their surgeon-major, Dr. Reynaud. The same idea had come at the same moment to both; the priest was sixty-two, the doctor fifty.

When they started, the battalion followed the road which led through Longueval, and which passed before the doctor's house. Madame Reynaud and Jean were waiting by the roadside. The child threw himself into his father's arms.

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"Take me, too, papa! take me, too!"

Madame Reynaud wept. The doctor held them both in a long embrace, then he continued his way.

A hundred steps farther the road made a sharp curve. The doctor turned, cast one long look at his wife and child—the last; he was never to see them again.

On January 8, 1871, the mobiles of Souvigny attacked the village of Villersexel, occupied by the Prussians, who had barricaded themselves. The firing began. A mobile who marched in the front rank received a ball in the chest and fell. There was a short moment of trouble and hesitation.

"Forward! forward!" shouted the officers.

The men passed over the body of their comrade, and under a hail of bullets entered the town.

Dr. Reynaud and the Abbe Constantin marched with the troops; they stopped by the wounded man; the blood was rushing in floods from his mouth.

"There is nothing to be done," said the doctor. "He is dying; he belongs to you."

The priest knelt down by the dying man, and the doctor rose to go toward the village. He had not taken ten steps when he stopped, beat the air with both hands, and fell all at once to the ground. The priest ran to him; he was dead—killed on the spot by a bullet through the temples. That evening the village was ours, and the next day they placed in the cemetery of Villersexel the body of Dr. Reynaud.

Two months later the Abbe Constantin took back to Longueval the coffin of his friend, and behind the coffin, when it was carried from the church, walked an orphan. Jean had also lost his mother. At the news of her husband's death, Madame Reynaud had remained for twenty-four hours petrified, crushed, without a word or a tear; then fever had seized her, then delirium, and after a fortnight, death.

Jean was alone in the world; he was fourteen years old. Of that family, where for more than a century all had been good and honest, there remained only a child kneeling beside a grave; but he, too, promised to be what his father and grandfather before him had been—good, and honest, and true.

There are families like that in France, and many of them, more than one ventures to say. Our poor country is in many respects calumniated by certain novelists, who draw exaggerated and distorted pictures of it. It is true the history of good people is often monotonous or painful. This story is a proof of it.

The grief of Jean was the grief of a man. He remained long sad and silent. The evening of his father's funeral the Abbe Constantin took him home to the vicarage. The day had been rainy and cold. Jean was sitting by the fireside; the priest was reading his breviary opposite him. Old Pauline came and went, arranging her affairs.

An hour passed without a word, when Jean, raising his head, said:

"Godfather, did my father leave me any money?"

This question was so extraordinary that the old priest, stupefied, could scarcely believe that he heard aright.



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"You ask if your father—"

"I asked if my father left me some money?"

"Yes; he must have left you some."

"A good deal, don't you think? I have often heard people say that my father was rich. Tell me about how much he has left me!"

"But I don't know. You ask—"

The poor old man felt his heart rent in twain. Such a question at such a moment! Yet he thought he knew the boy's heart, and in that heart there should not be room for such thoughts.

"Pray, dear godfather, tell me," continued Jean, gently. "I will explain to you afterward why I ask that."

"Well, they say your father had 200,000 or 300,000 francs."

"And is that much?"

"Yes, it is a great deal."

"And it is all mine?"

"Yes, it is all yours."

"Oh! I am glad, because, you know, the day that my father was killed in the war, the Prussians killed, at the same time, the son of a poor woman in Longueval—old Clemence, you know; and they killed, too, the brother of Rosalie, with whom I used to play when I was quite little. Well, since I am rich and they are poor, I will divide with Clemence and Rosalie the money my father has left me."

On hearing these words the Cure rose, took Jean by both hands, and drew him into his arms. The white head rested on the fair one. Two large tears escaped from the eyes of the old priest, rolled slowly down his cheeks, and were lost in the furrows of his face.

However, the Cure was obliged to explain to Jean that, though he was his father's heir, he had not the right of disposing of his heritage as he would. There would be a family council, and a guardian would be appointed.

"You, no doubt, godfather?"

“No, not I, my child; a priest has not the right of exercising the functions of a guardian. They will, I think, choose Monsieur Lenient, the lawyer in Souvigny, who was one of your father’s best friends. You can speak to him and tell him what you wish.”

M. Lenient was eventually appointed guardian, and Jean urged his wishes so eagerly and touchingly that the lawyer consented to deduct from the income a sum of 2,400 francs, which, every year till Jean came of age, was divided between old Clemence and little Rosalie.

Under these circumstances, Madame de Lavardens was perfect. She went to the Abbe and said:

“Give Jean to me, give him to me entirely till he has finished his studies. I will bring him back to you every year during the holidays. It is not I who am rendering you a service; it is a service which I ask of you. I cannot imagine any greater good fortune for my son than to have Jean for a companion. I must resign myself to leaving Lavardens for a time. Paul is bent upon being a soldier and going up to Saint-Cyr. It is only in Paris that I can obtain the necessary masters. I will take the two children there; they will study together under my own eyes like brothers, and I will make no difference between them; of that you may be sure.”



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It was difficult to refuse such an offer. The old Cure would have dearly liked to keep Jean with him, and his heart was torn at the thought of this separation, but what was for the child's real interest? That was the only question to be considered; the rest was nothing. They summoned Jean.

"My child," said Madame de Lavardens to him, "will you come and live with Paul and me for some years? I will take you both to Paris."

"You are very kind, Madame, but I should have liked so much to stay here."

He looked at the Cure, who turned away his eyes.

"Why must we go?" he continued. "Why must you take Paul and me away?"

"Because it is only in Paris that you can have all the advantages necessary to complete your studies. Paul will prepare for his examination at Saint-Cyr. You know he wishes to be a soldier."

"So do I, Madame. I wish to be one, too."

"You a soldier!" exclaimed the Cure; "but you know that was not at all your father's idea. In my presence, he has often spoken of your future, your career. You were to be a doctor, and, like him, doctor at Longueval, and, like him, devote yourself to the sick and poor. Jean, my child, do you remember?"

"I remember, I remember."

"Well, then, Jean, you must do as your father wished; it is your duty, Jean; it is your duty. You must go to Paris. You would like to stay here, I understand that well, and I should like it, too; but it can not be. You must go to Paris, and work, work hard. Not that I am anxious about that; you are your father's true son. You will be an honest and laborious man. One can not well be the one without the other. And some day, in your father's house, in the place where he has done so much good, the poor people of the country round will find another Doctor Reynaud, to whom they may look for help. And I—if by chance I am still in this world—when that day comes, I shall be so happy! But I am wrong to speak of myself; I ought not, I do not count. It is of your father that you must think. I repeat it, Jean, it was his dearest wish. You can not have forgotten it."

"No, I have not forgotten; but if my father sees me, and hears me, I am certain that he understands and forgives me, for it is on his account."

"On his account?"

“Yes. When I heard that he was dead, and when I heard how he died, all at once, without any need of reflection, I said to myself that I would be a soldier, and I will be a soldier! Godfather, and you, Madame, I beg you not to prevent me.”

The child burst into tears—a perfect flood of passionate tears. The Countess and the Abbe soothed him with gentle words.

“Yes—yes—it is settled,” they said; “anything that you wish, all that you wish.”

Both had the same thought—leave it to time; Jean is only a child; he will change his mind.

In this, both were mistaken; Jean did not change his mind. In the month of September, 1876, Paul de Lavardens was rejected at Saint-Cyr, and Jean Reynaud passed eleventh at the Ecole Polytechnique. The day when the list of the candidates who had passed was published, he wrote to the Abbe Constantin:

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"I have passed, and passed too well, for I wish to go into the army, and not the civil service; however, if I keep my place in the school, that will be the business of one of my comrades; he will have my chance."

It happened so in the end. Jean Reynaud did better than keep his place; the pass-list showed his name seventh, but instead of entering 'l'Ecole des Ponts et Chaussees', he entered the military college at Fontainebleau in 1878.

He was then just twenty-one; he was of age, master of his fortune, and the first act of the new administration was a great, a very great piece of extravagance.

He bought for old Clemence and little Rosalie two shares in Government stock of 1,500 francs each. That cost him 70,000 francs, almost the sum that Paul de Lavardens, in his first year of liberty in Paris, spent for Mademoiselle Lise Bruyere, of the Palais Royal Theatre.

Two years later Jean passed first at the examination, and left Fontainebleau with the right of choosing among the vacant places. There was one in the regiment quartered at Souvigny, and Souvigny was three miles from Longueval. Jean asked for this, and obtained it.

Thus Jean Reynaud, lieutenant in the ninth regiment of artillery, came in the month of October, 1880, to take possession of the house that had been his father's; thus he found himself once more in the place where his childhood had passed, and where every one had kept green the memory of the life and death of his father; thus the Abbe Constantin was not denied the happiness of once again having near him the son of his old friend, and, if the truth must be told, he no longer wished that Jean had become a doctor.

When the old Cure left his church after saying mass, when he saw coming along the road a great cloud of dust, when he felt the earth tremble under the rumbling cannon, he would stop, and, like a child, amuse himself with seeing the regiment pass, but to him the regiment was—Jean. It was this robust and manly cavalier, in whose face, as in an open book, one read uprightness, courage, and goodness.

The moment Jean perceived the Cure, he would put his horse to a gallop, and go to have a little chat with his godfather. The horse would turn his head toward the Cure, for he knew very well there was always a piece of sugar for him in the pocket of that old black soutane—rusty and worn—the morning soutane. The Abbe Constantin had a beautiful new one, of which he took great care, to wear in society—when he went into society.

The trumpets of the regiment sounded as they passed through the village, and all eyes sought Jean—"little Jean"-for to the old people of Longueval he was still little Jean.

Certain wrinkled, broken-down, old peasants had never been able to break themselves of the habit of saluting him when he passed with, "Bonjour, gamin, ca va bien?"

He was six feet high, this gamin, and Jean never crossed the village without perceiving at one window the old furrowed parchment skin of Clemence, and at another the smiling countenance of Rosalie. The latter had married during the previous year; Jean had given her away, and joyously on the wedding-night had he danced with the girls of Longueval.

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Such was the lieutenant of artillery, who, on Saturday, May 28, 1881, at half-past four in the afternoon, sprang from his horse before the door of the vicarage of Longueval. He entered the gate, the horse obediently followed, and went by himself into a little shed in the yard. Pauline was at the kitchen window; Jean approached and kissed her heartily on both cheeks.

"Good-evening, Pauline. Is all well?"

"Very well. I am busy preparing your dinner; would you like to know what you are going to have? potato soup, a leg of mutton, and a custard."

"That is excellent; I shall enjoy everything, for I am dying of hunger."

"And a salad; I had forgotten it; you can help me cut it directly. Dinner will be at half-past six exactly, for at half-past seven Monsieur le Cure has his service for the month of Mary."

"Where is my godfather?"

"You will find him in the garden. He is very sad on account of this sale of yesterday."

"Yes, I know, I know."

"It will cheer him a little to see you; he is always so happy when you are here. Take care; Loulou is going to eat the climbing roses. How hot he is!"

"I came the long way by the wood, and rode very fast."

Jean captured Loulou, who was directing his steps toward the climbing roses. He unsaddled him, fastened him in the little shed, rubbed him down with a great handful of straw, after which he entered the house, relieved himself of his sword and kepi, replaced the latter by an old straw hat, value sixpence, and then went to look for his godfather in the garden.

The poor Abbe was indeed sad; he had scarcely closed an eye all night—he who generally slept so easily, so quietly, the sound sleep of a child. His soul was wrung. Longueval in the hands of a foreigner, of a heretic, of an adventuress!

Jean repeated what Paul had said the evening before.

"You will have money, plenty of money, for your poor."

"Money! money! Yes, my poor will not lose, perhaps they will even gain by it; but I must go and ask for this money, and in the salon, instead of my old and dear friend, I shall find this red-haired American. It seems that she has red hair! I will certainly go for the

sake of my poor—I will go—and she will give me the money, but she will give me nothing but money; the Marquise gave me something else—her life and her heart. Every week we went together to visit the sick and the poor; she knew all the sufferings and the miseries of the country round, and when the gout nailed me to my easy-chair she made the rounds alone, and as well, or better than I.”

Pauline interrupted this conversation. She carried an immense earthenware salad-dish, on which bloomed, violent and startling, enormous red flowers.

“Here I am,” said Pauline, “I am going to cut the salad. Jean, would you like lettuce or endive?”

“Endive,” said Jean, gayly. “It is a long time since I have had any endive.”

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"Well, you shall have some to-night. Stay, take the dish."

Pauline began to cut the endive, and Jean bent down to receive the leaves in the great salad dish. The Cure looked on.

At this moment a sound of little bells was heard. A carriage was approaching; one heard the jangling and creaking of its wheels. The Cure's little garden was only separated from the road by a low hedge, in the middle of which was a little trellised gate.

All three looked out, and saw driving down the road a hired carriage of most primitive construction, drawn by two great white horses, and driven by an old coachman in a blouse. Beside this old coachman was seated a tall footman in livery, of the most severe and correct demeanor. In the carriage were two young women, dressed both alike in very elegant, but very simple, travelling costumes.

When the carriage was opposite the gate the coachman stopped his horses, and addressing the Abbe:

"Monsieur le Cure," said he, "these ladies wish to speak to you."

Then, turning toward the ladies:

"This is Monsieur le Cure of Longueval."

The Abbe Constantin approached and opened the little gate. The travellers alighted. Their looks rested, not without astonishment, on the young officer, who stood there, a little embarrassed, with his straw hat in one hand, and his salad dish, all overflowing with endive, in the other.

The visitors entered the garden, and the elder—she seemed about twenty-five—addressing the Abbe Constantin, said to him, with a little foreign accent, very original and very peculiar:

"I am obliged to introduce myself—Mrs. Scott; I am Mrs. Scott! It was I who bought the castle and farms and all the rest here at the sale yesterday. I hope that I do not disturb you, and that you can spare me five minutes." Then, pointing to her travelling companion, "Miss Bettina Percival, my sister; you guessed it, I am sure. We are very much alike, are we not? Ah! Bettina, we have left our bags in the carriage, and we shall want them directly."

"I will get them."

And as Miss Percival prepared to go for the two little bags, Jean said to her:



“Pray allow me.”

“I am really very sorry to give you so much trouble. The servant will give them to you; they are on the front seat.”

She had the same accent as her sister, the same large eyes—black, laughing, and gay—and the same hair, not red, but fair, with golden shades, where daintily danced the light of the sun. She bowed to Jean with a pretty little smile, and he, having returned to Pauline the salad dish full of endive, went to look for the two little bags. Meanwhile—much agitated, sorely disturbed—the Abbe Constantin introduced into his vicarage the new Chatelaine of Longueval.

CHAPTER III

DELIGHTFUL SURPRISES

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This vicarage of Longueval was far from being a palace. The same apartment on the ground floor served for dining and drawing-room, communicating directly with the kitchen by a door, which stood always wide open. This room was furnished in the most scanty manner; two old arm chairs, six straw chairs, a sideboard, a round table. Pauline had already laid the cloth for the dinner of the Abbe and Jean.

Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival went and came, examining the domestic arrangements of the Cure with a sort of childish wonder.

"But the garden, the house, everything is charming," said Mrs. Scott.

They both boldly penetrated into the kitchen; the Abbe Constantin followed them, scared, bewildered, stupefied at the suddenness and resolution of this American invasion.

Old Pauline, with an anxious and gloomy air, examined the two foreigners.

"There they are, then," she said to herself, "these Protestants, these accursed heretics!"

"I must compliment you," said Bettina; "it is so beautifully kept. Look, Susie, is not the vicarage altogether exactly what you wished?"

"And so is the Cure," rejoined Mrs. Scott. "Yes, Monsieur le Cure, if you will permit me to say so, you do not know how happy it makes me to find you just what you are. In the railway carriage what did I say to you, Bettina? And again just now, when we were driving here?"

"My sister said to me, Monsieur le Cure, that what she desired above everything was a priest, not young, or melancholy, or severe; but one with white hair and a kind and gentle manner. And that is exactly what you are, Monsieur le Cure, exactly. No, we could not have been more fortunate. Excuse me for speaking to you in this manner; the Parisians know how to make pretty phrases, but I do not, and in speaking French I should often be quite at a loss if I did not say everything in a simple and childish way, as it comes into my head. In a word, I am satisfied, quite satisfied, and I hope that you, too, Monsieur le Cure, will be as satisfied with your new parishioners."

"My parishioners!" exclaimed the Cure, all at once recovering speech, movement, life, everything which for some moments had completely abandoned him. "My parishioners! Pardon me, Madame, Mademoiselle, I am so agitated. You will be—you are Catholics?"

"Certainly we are Catholics."

"Catholics! Catholics!" repeated the Cure.

"Catholics! Catholics!" echoed old Pauline.

Mrs. Scott looked from the Cure to Pauline, from Pauline to the Cure, much surprised that a single word should produce such an effect, and, to complete the tableau, Jean appeared carrying the two little travelling bags.

The Cure and Pauline saluted him with the same words:

“Catholics! Catholics!”

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"Ah! I begin to understand," said Mrs. Scott, laughing. "It is our name, our country; you must have thought that we were Protestants. Not at all. Our mother was a Canadian, French and Catholic by descent; that is why my sister and I both speak French, with an accent, it is true, and with certain American idioms, but yet in such a manner as to be able to express nearly all we want to say. My husband is a Protestant, but he allows me complete liberty, and my two children are Catholics. That is why, Monsieur l'Abbe, we wished to come and see you the very first day."

"That is one reason," continued Bettina, "but there is also another; but for that reason we shall want our little bags."

"Here they are," said Jean.

While the two little bags passed from the hands of the officer to those of Mrs. Scott and Bettina, the Cure introduced Jean to the two Americans, but his agitation was so great that the introduction was not made strictly according to rule. The Cure only forgot one thing, it is true, but that was a thing tolerably essential in an introduction—the family name of Jean.

"It is Jean," said he, "my godson, lieutenant of artillery, now quartered at Souvigny. He is one of the family."

Jean made two deep bows, the Americans two little ones, after which they foraged in their bags, from which each drew a 'rouleau' of 1,000 francs, daintily inclosed in green sheaths of serpent-skin, clasped with gold.

"I have brought you this for your poor," said Mrs. Scott.

"And I have brought this," said Bettina.

"And besides that, Monsieur le Cure, I am going to give you five hundred francs a month," said Mrs. Scott.

"And I will do like my sister."

Delicately they slipped their offerings into the right and left hands of the Cure, who, looking at each hand alternately, said:

"What are these little things? They are very heavy; there must be money in them. Yes, but how much, how much?"

The Abbe Constantin was seventy-two, and much money had passed through his hands, but this money had come to him in small sums, and the idea of such an offering as this had never entered his head. Two thousand francs! Never had he had so much in his possession—no, not even one thousand. He stammered:

“I am very grateful to you, Madame; you are very good, Mademoiselle—”

But after all he could not thank them enough, and Jean thought it necessary to come to his assistance.

“They have given you two thousand francs!”

And then, full of warmest gratitude; the Cure cried:

“Two thousand francs! Two thousand francs for my poor!”

Pauline suddenly reappeared.

“Here, Pauline,” said the Cure, “put away this money, and take care—”

Old Pauline filled many positions in this simple household: cook, maid-of-all-work, treasurer, dispenser. Her hands received with a respectful tremble these two little ‘rouleaux’ which represented so much misery alleviated, so much suffering relieved.

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"One thousand francs a month! But there will be no poor left in the country."

"That is just what I wish. I am rich, very rich, and so is my sister; she is even richer than I am, because a young girl has not so many expenses, while I—Ah! well, I spend all that I can—all that I can. When one has a great deal of money, too much, more than one feels to be just, tell me, Monsieur le Cure, is there any other way of obtaining pardon than to keep one's hands open, and give, give, give, all one can, and as usefully as one can? Besides, you can give me something in return;" and, turning to Pauline, "Will you be so kind as to give me a glass of water? No, nothing else; a glass of cold water; I am dying of thirst."

"And I," said Bettina, laughing, while Pauline ran to fetch the water, "I am dying of something else—of hunger, to tell the truth. Monsieur le Cure—I know that I am going to be dreadfully intrusive; I see your cloth is laid—could you not invite us to dinner?"

"Bettina!" said Mrs. Scott.

"Let me alone, Susie, let me alone. Won't you, Monsieur le Cure? I am sure you will."

But he could find no reply. The old Cure hardly knew where he was. They had taken his vicarage by storm; they were Catholics; they had promised him one thousand francs a month, and now they wanted to dine with him. Ah! that was the last stroke. Terror seized him at the thought of having to do the honors of his leg of mutton and his custard to these two absurdly rich Americans. He murmured:

"Dine!—you would like to dine here?"

Jean thought he must interpose again. "It would be a great pleasure to my godfather," said he, "if you would kindly stay. But I know what disturbs him. We were going to dine together, just the two of us, and you must not expect a feast. You will be very indulgent?"

"Yes, yes, very indulgent," replied Bettina; then, addressing her sister, "Come, Susie, you must not be cross, because I have been a little—you know it is my way to be a little—Let us stay, will you? It will do us good to pass a quiet hour here, after such a day as we have had! On the railway, in the carriage, in the heat, in the dust; we had such a horrid luncheon, in such a horrid hotel. We were to have returned to the same hotel at seven o'clock to dine, and then take the train back to Paris, but dinner here will be really much nicer. You won't say no? Ah! how good you are, Susie!"

She embraced her sister fondly; then turning toward the Cure:

"If you only knew, Monsieur le Cure, how good she is!"

"Bettina! Bettina!"

“Come,” said Jean, “quick, Pauline, two more plates; I will help you.”

“And so will I,” said Bettina, “I will help, too. Oh! do let me; it will be so amusing. Monsieur le Cure, you will let me do a little as if I were at home?”

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In a moment she had taken off her mantle, and Jean could admire, in all its exquisite perfection, a figure marvellous for suppleness and grace. Miss Percival then removed her hat, but with a little too much haste, for this was the signal for a charming catastrophe. A whole avalanche descended in torrents, in long cascades, over Bettina's shoulders. She was standing before a window flooded by the rays of the sun, and this golden light, falling full on this golden hair, formed a delicious frame for the sparkling beauty of the young girl. Confused and blushing, Bettina was obliged to call her sister to her aid, and Mrs. Scott had much trouble in introducing order into this disorder.

When this disaster was at length repaired, nothing could prevent Bettina from rushing on plates, knives, and forks.

"Oh, indeed," said she to Jean, "I know very well how to lay the cloth. Ask my sister. Tell him, Susie, when I was a little girl in New York, I used to lay the cloth very well, didn't I?"

"Very well, indeed," said Mrs. Scott.

And then, while begging the Cure to excuse Bettina's want of thought, she, too, took off her hat and mantle, so that Jean had again the very agreeable spectacle of a charming figure and beautiful hair; but, to Jean's great regret, the catastrophe had not a second representation.

In a few minutes Mrs. Scott, Miss Percival, the Cure, and Jean were seated round the little vicarage table; then, thanks partly to the impromptu and original nature of the entertainment, partly to the good-humor and perhaps slightly audacious gayety of Bettina, the conversation took a turn of the frankest and most cordial familiarity.

"Now, Monsieur le Cure," said Bettina, "you shall see if I did not speak the truth when I said I was dying of hunger. I never was so glad to sit down to dinner. This is such a delightful finish to our day. Both my sister and I are perfectly happy now we have this castle, and these farms, and the forest."

"And then," said Mrs. Scott, "to have all that in such an extraordinary and unexpected manner. We were so taken by surprise."

"You may indeed say so, Susie. You must know, Monsieur l'Abbe, that yesterday was my sister's birthday. But first, pardon me, Monsieur—Jean, is it not?"

"Yes, Miss Percival, Monsieur Jean."

"Well, Monsieur Jean, a little more of that excellent soup, if you please."

The Abbe was beginning to recover a little, but he was still too agitated to perform the duties of a host. It was Jean who had undertaken the management of his godfather's

little dinner. He filled the plate of the charming American, who fixed upon him the glance of two large eyes, in which sparkled frankness, daring, and gayety. The eyes of Jean, meanwhile, repaid Miss Percival in the same coin. It was scarcely three quarters of an hour since the young American and the young officer had made acquaintance in the Cure's garden, yet both felt already perfectly at ease with each other, full of confidence, almost like old friends.

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"I told you, Monsieur l'Abbe," continued Bettina, "that yesterday was my sister's birthday. A week ago my brother-in-law was obliged to return to America, but at starting he said to my sister, 'I shall not be with you on your birthday, but you will hear from me.' So, yesterday, presents and bouquets arrived from all quarters, but from my brother-in-law, up to five o'clock, nothing—nothing. We were just starting for a ride in the Bois, and 'a propos' of riding"—she stopped, and looking curiously at Jean's great dusty boots—"Monsieur Jean, you have spurs on."

"Yes, Miss Percival."

"Then you are in the cavalry?"

"I am in the artillery, and that, you know, is cavalry."

"And your regiment is quartered?"—

"Quite near here."

"Then you will be able to ride with us?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"That is settled. Let me see; where was I?"

"You do not know at all where you are, Bettina, and you are telling these gentlemen things which can not interest them."

"Oh! I beg your pardon," said the Cure. "The sale of this estate is the only subject of conversation in the neighborhood just now, and Miss Percival's account interests me very much."

"You see, Susie, my account interests Monsieur le Cure very much; then I shall continue. We went for our ride, we returned at seven o'clock—nothing. We dined, and just when we were leaving the table a telegram from America arrived. It contained only a few lines:

"'I have ordered the purchase to-day, for you and in your name, of the castle and lands of Longueval, near Souvigny, on the Northern Railway line.'

"Then we both burst into a fit of wild laughter at the thought."

"No, no, Bettina; you calumniate us both. Our first thought was one of very sincere gratitude, for both my sister and I are very fond of the country. My husband knows that we had longed to have an estate in France. For six months he had been looking out,

and found nothing. At last he discovered this one, and, without telling us, ordered it to be bought for my birthday. It was a delicate attention.”

“Yes, Susie, you are right, but after the little fit of gratitude, we had a great one of gayety.”

“Yes, I confess it. When we realized that we had suddenly become possessed of a castle, without knowing in the least where it was, what it was like, or how much it had cost, it seemed so like a fairy-tale. Well, for five good minutes we laughed with all our hearts, then we seized the map of France, and succeeded in discovering Souvigny. When he had finished with the map it was the turn of the railway guide, and this morning, by the ten o'clock express, we arrived at Souvigny.

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"We have passed the whole day in visiting the castle, the farms, the woods, the stables. We are delighted with what we have seen. Only, Monsieur le Cure, there is one thing about which I feel curious. I know that the place was sold yesterday; but I have not dared to ask either agent or farmer who accompanied me in my walk—for my ignorance would have seemed too absurd—I have not dared to ask how much it cost. In the telegram my husband does not mention the sum. Since I am so delighted with the place, the price is only a detail, but still I should like to know it. Tell me, Monsieur le Cure, do you know what it cost?"

"An enormous price," replied the Cure, "for many hopes and many ambitions were excited about Longueval."

"An enormous price! You frighten me. How much exactly?"

"Three millions!"

"Is that all? Is that all?" cried Mrs. Scott. "The castle, the farms, the forest, all for three millions?"

"But that is nothing," said Bettina. "That delicious little stream which wanders through the park is alone worth three millions."

"And you said just now, Monsieur le Cure, that there were several persons who disputed the purchase with us?"

"Yes, Mrs. Scott."

"And, after the sale, was my name mentioned among these persons?"

"Certainly it was."

"And when my name was mentioned was there no one there who spoke of me? Yes, yes, your silence is a sufficient answer; they did speak of me. Well, Monsieur le Cure, I am now serious, very serious. I beg you as a favor to tell me what was said."

"But," replied the poor Cure, who felt himself upon burning coals, "they spoke of your large fortune."

"Yes, of course, they would be obliged to speak of that, and no doubt they said that I was very rich, but had not been rich long—that I was a parvenu. Very well, but that is not all; they must have said something else."

"No, indeed; I have heard nothing else."

“Oh, Monsieur le Cure, that is what you may call a white lie, and it is making you very unhappy, because naturally you are the soul of truth; but if I torment you thus it is because I have the greatest interest in knowing what was said.”

“You are right,” interrupted Jean, “you are right. They said you were one of the most elegant, the most brilliant, and the—”

“And one of the prettiest women in Paris. With a little indulgence they might say that; but that is not all yet—there is something else.”

“Oh! I assure you—”

“Yes, there is something else, and I should like to hear it this very moment, and I should like the information to be very frank and very exact. It seems to me that I am in a lucky vein to-day, and I feel as if you were both a little inclined to be my friends, and that you will be so entirely some day. Well, tell me if I am right in supposing that should false and absurd stories be told about me you will help me to contradict them.”

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"Yes!" replied Jean, "you are right in believing that."

"Well, then, it is to you that I address myself. You are a soldier, and courage is part of your profession. Promise me to be brave. Will you promise me?"

"What do you understand by being brave?"

"Promise, promise—without explanations, without conditions."

"Well, I promise."

"You will then reply frankly, 'Yes' or 'No,' to questions?"

"I will."

"Did they say that I had begged in the streets of New York?"

"Yes, they said so."

"Did they say I had been a rider in a travelling circus?"

"Yes; they said that, too."

"Very well; that is plain speaking. Now remark first that in all this there is nothing that one might not acknowledge if it were true; but it is not true, and have I not the right of denying it? My history—I will tell it you in a few words. I am going to pass a part of my life in this place, and I desire that all should know who I am and whence I come. To begin, then. Poor! Yes, I have been, and very poor. Eight years ago my father died, and was soon followed by my mother. I was then eighteen, and Bettina nine. We were alone in the world, encumbered with heavy debts and a great lawsuit. My father's last words had been, 'Susie, never, never compromise. Millions, my children, you will have millions.' He embraced us both; soon delirium seized him, and he died repeating, 'Millions; millions!' The next morning a lawyer appeared, who offered to pay all our debts, and to give us besides ten thousand dollars, if we would give up all our claims. I refused. It was then that for several months we were very poor."

"And it was then," said Bettina, "that I used to lay the cloth."

"I spent my life among the solicitors of New York, but no one would take up my case; everywhere I received the same reply: 'Your cause is very doubtful; you have rich and formidable adversaries; you need money, large sums of money, to bring such a case to a conclusion, and you have nothing. They offer to pay your debts, and to give you ten thousand dollars besides. Accept it, and sell your case.' But my father's last words rang in my ears, and I would not. Poverty, however, might soon have forced me to,



when one day I made another attempt on one of my father's old friends, a banker in New York, Mr. William Scott. He was not alone; a young man was sitting in his office.

"‘You may speak freely,’ said Mr. Scott; ‘it is my son Richard.’

"I looked at the young man, he looked at me, and we recognized each other.

"‘Susie!’

"‘Richard!’"

"Formerly, as children, we had often played together and were great friends. Seven or eight years before this meeting he had been sent to Europe to finish his education. We shook hands; his father made me sit down, and asked what had brought me. He listened to my tale; and replied:

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“You would require twenty or thirty thousand dollars. No one would lend you such a sum upon the uncertain chances of a very complicated lawsuit. If you are in difficulties; if you need assistance—’

“It is not that, father. That is not what Miss Percival asks.’

“I know that very well, but what she asks is impossible.’

“He rose to let me out. Then the sense of my helplessness overpowered me for the first time since my father’s death. I burst into a violent flood of tears. An hour later Richard Scott was with me.

“‘Susie,’ he said, ‘promise to accept what I am going to offer.’

“I promised him.

“‘Well,’ said he, ‘on the single condition that my father shall know nothing about it, I place at your disposal the necessary sum.’

“‘But then you ought to know what the lawsuit is—what it is worth.’

“‘I do not know a single word about it, and I do not wish to. Besides, you have promised to accept it; you can not withdraw now.’

“I accepted. Three months after the case was ours. All this vast property became beyond dispute the property of Bettina and me. The other side offered to buy it of us for five million dollars. I consulted Richard.

“‘Refuse it and wait,’ said he; ‘if they offer you such a sum it is because the property is worth double.’

“‘However, I must return you your money; I owe you a great deal.’

“‘Oh! as for that there is no hurry; I am very easy about it; my money is quite safe now.’

“‘But I should like to pay you at once. I have a horror of debt! Perhaps there is another way without selling the property. Richard, will you be my husband?’

“Yes, Monsieur le Cure, yes,” said Mrs. Scott, laughing, “it is thus that I threw myself at my husband’s head. It is I who asked his hand. But really I was obliged to act thus. Never, never, would he have spoken; I had become too rich, and as it was me he loved, and not my money, he was becoming terribly afraid of me. That is the history of my marriage. As to the history of my fortune, it can be told in a few words. There were indeed millions in those wide lands of Colorado; they discovered there abundant mines of silver, and from those mines we draw every year an income which is beyond reason,



but we have agreed—my husband, my sister, and myself—to give a very large share of this income to the poor. You see, Monsieur le Cure, it is because we have known very hard times that you will always find us ready to help those who are, as we have been ourselves, involved in the difficulties and sorrows of life. And now, Monsieur Jean, will you forgive me this long discourse, and offer me a little of that cream, which looks so very good?”

This cream was Pauline’s custard, and while Jean was serving Mrs. Scott:



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"I have not yet finished," she continued. "You ought to know what gave rise to these extravagant stories. A year ago, when we settled in Paris, we considered it our duty on our arrival to give a certain sum to the poor. Who was it spoke of that? None of us, certainly, but the thing was told in a newspaper, with the amount. Immediately two young reporters hastened to subject Mr. Scott to a little examination on his past history; they wished to give a sketch of our career in the—what do you call them?—society papers. Mr. Scott is sometimes a little hasty; he was so on this occasion, and dismissed these gentlemen rather brusquely, without telling them anything. So, as they did not know our real history, they invented one, and certainly displayed a very lively imagination. First they related how I had begged in the snow in New York; the next day appeared a still more sensational article, which made me a rider in a circus in Philadelphia. You have some very funny papers in France; so have we in America, for the matter of that."

During the last five minutes, Pauline had been making desperate signs to the Cure, who persisted in not understanding them, till at last the poor woman, calling up all her courage, said:

"Monsieur le Cure, it is a quarter past seven."

"A quarter past seven! Ladies, I must beg you to excuse me. This evening I have the special service for the month of Mary."

"The month of Mary? And will the service begin directly?"

"Yes, directly."

"And when does our train start for Paris?"

"At half past nine," replied Jean.

"Susie, can we not go to church first?"

"Yes, we will go," replied Mrs. Scott; "but before we separate, Monsieur le Cure, I have one favor to ask you. I should like very much, the first time I dine at Longueval, that you would dine with me, and you, too, Monsieur Jean, just us four alone like to-day. Oh! do not refuse my invitation; it is given with all my heart."

"And accepted as heartily," replied Jean.

"I will write and tell you the day, and it shall be as soon as possible. You call that having a housewarming, don't you? Well, we shall have the house-warming all to ourselves."

Meanwhile, Pauline had drawn Miss Percival into a corner of the room, and was talking to her with great animation. The conversation ended with these words:

“You will be there?” said Bettina, “and you will tell me the exact moment?”

“I will tell you, but take care. Here is Monsieur le Cure; he must not suspect anything.”

The two sisters, the Cure, and Jean left the house. To go to the church they were obliged to cross the churchyard. The evening was delicious. Slowly, silently, under the rays of the setting sun, the four walked down a long avenue.

On their way was the monument to Dr. Reynaud, very simple, but which, by its fine proportions, showed distinctly among the other tombs.

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Mrs. Scott and Bettina stopped, struck with this inscription carved on the stone:

“Here lies Dr. Marcel Reynaud, Surgeon-Major of the Souvigny Mobiles; killed January 8, 1871, at the Battle of Villersexel. Pray for him.”

When they had read it, the Cure, pointing to Jean, said:

“It was his father!”

The two sisters drew near the tomb, and with bent heads remained there for some minutes, pensive, touched, contemplative. Then both turned, and at the same moment, by the same impulse, offered their hands to Jean; then continued their walk to the church. Their first prayer at Longueval had been for the father of Jean.

The Cure went to put on his surplice and stole. Jean conducted Mrs. Scott to the seat which belonged to the masters of Longueval.

Pauline had gone on before. She was waiting for Miss Percival in the shadow behind one of the pillars. By a steep and narrow staircase, she led Bettina to the gallery, and placed her before the harmonium.

Preceded by two little chorister boys, the old Cure left the vestry, and at the moment when he knelt on the steps of the altar:

“Now! Mademoiselle,” said Pauline, whose heart beat with impatience. “Poor, dear man, how pleased he will be.”

When he heard the sound of the music rise, soft as a murmur, and spread through the little church, the Abbe Constantin was filled with such emotion, such joy, that the tears came to his eyes. He could not remember having wept since the day when Jean had said that he wished to share all that he possessed with the mother and sister of those who had fallen by his father’s side under the Prussian bullets.

To bring tears to the eyes of the old priest, a little American had been brought across the seas to play a reverie of Chopin in the little church of Longueval.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

Ancient pillars of stone, embrowned and gnawed by time
And they are shoulders which ought to be seen
But she will give me nothing but money
Duty, simply accepted and simply discharged
God may have sent him to purgatory just for form’s sake
He led the brilliant and miserable existence of the unoccupied
If there is one! (a paradise)



Never foolish to spend money. The folly lies in keeping it
Often been compared to Eugene Sue, but his touch is lighter
One half of his life belonged to the poor
Succeeded in wearying him by her importunities and tenderness
The history of good people is often monotonous or painful
The women have enough religion for the men

THE ABBE CONSTANTIN

By Ludovic Halevy

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER IV

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A RIOT OF CHARITY

The next day, at half-past five in the morning, the bugle-call rang through the barrack-yard at Souvigny. Jean mounted his horse, and took his place with his division. By the end of May all the recruits in the army are sufficiently instructed to be capable of sharing in the general evolutions. Almost every day manoeuvres of the mounted artillery are executed on the parade-ground. Jean loved his profession; he was in the habit of inspecting carefully the grooming and harness of the horses, the equipment and carriage of his men. This morning, however, he bestowed but scant attention on all the little details of his duty.

One problem agitated, tormented him, and left him always undecided, and this problem was one of those the solution of which is not given at the Ecole Polytechnique. Jean could find no convincing reply to this question: Which of the two sisters is the prettier?

At the butts, during the first part of the manoeuvre, each battery worked on its own account, under the orders of the captain; but he often relinquished the place to one of his lieutenants, in order to accustom them to the management of six field-pieces. It happened on this day that the command was intrusted to the hands of Jean. To the great surprise of the Captain, in whose estimation his Lieutenant held the first rank as a well-trained, smart, and capable officer, everything went wrong. The Captain was obliged to interfere; he addressed a little reprimand to Jean, which terminated in these words:

"I can not understand it at all. What is the matter with you this morning? It is the first time such a thing has happened with you."

It was also the first time that Jean had seen anything at the butts at Souvigny but cannon, ammunition wagons, horses, or gunners.

In the clouds of dust raised by the wheels of the wagons and the hoofs of the horses Jean beheld, not the second mounted battery of the 9th Regiment of artillery, but the distinct images of two Americans with black eyes and golden hair; and, at the moment when he listened respectfully to the well-merited lecture from his Captain, he was in the act of saying to himself:

"The prettier is Mrs. Scott!"

Every morning the exercise is divided into two parts by a little interval of ten minutes. The officers gathered together and talked; Jean remained apart, alone with his recollections of the previous evening. His thoughts obstinately gathered round the vicarage of Longueval.

"Yes! the more charming of the two sisters is Mrs. Scott; Miss Percival is only a child."



He saw again Mrs. Scott at the Cure's little table. He heard her story told with such frankness, such freedom. The harmony of that very peculiar, very fascinating voice, still enchanted his ear. He was again in the church; she was there before him, bending over her prie-Dieu, her pretty head resting in her two little hands; then the music arose, and far off, in the dusk, Jean perceived the fine and delicate profile of Bettina.

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“A child—is she only a child?”

The trumpets sounded, the practice was resumed; this time, fortunately, no command, no responsibility. The four batteries executed their evolutions together; this immense mass of men, horses, and carriages, deployed in every direction, now drawn out in a long line, again collected into a compact group. All stopped at the same instant along the whole extent of the ground; the gunners sprang from their horses, ran to their pieces, detached each from its team, which went off at a trot and prepared to fire with amazing rapidity. Then the horses returned, the men re-attached their pieces; sprang quickly to saddle, and the regiment started at full gallop across the field.

Very gently in the thoughts of Jean Bettina regained her advantage over Mrs. Scott. She appeared to him smiling and blushing amid the sunlit clouds of her floating hair. Monsieur Jean, she had called him, Monsieur Jean, and never had his name sounded so sweet. And that last pressure of the hand on taking leave, before entering the carriage. Had not Miss Percival given him a more cordial clasp than Mrs. Scott had done? Yes, positively a little more.

“I was mistaken,” thought Jean; “the prettier is Miss Percival.”

The day’s work was finished; the pieces were ranged regularly in line one behind the other; they defiled rapidly, with a horrible clatter, and in a cloud of dust. When Jean, sword in hand, passed before his Colonel, the images of the two sisters were so confused and intermingled in his recollection that they melted the one in the other, and became in some measure the image of one and the same person. Any parallel became impossible between them, thanks to this singular confusion of the two points of comparison. Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival remained thus inseparable in the thoughts of Jean until the day when it was granted to him to see them again. The impression of that meeting was not effaced; it was always there, persistent, and very sweet, till Jean began to feel disturbed.

“Is it possible”—so ran his meditations—“is it possible that I have been guilty of the folly of falling in love madly at first sight? No; one might fall in love with a woman, but not with two women at once.”

That thought reassured him. He was very young, this great fellow of four-and-twenty; never had love entered fully into his heart. Love! He knew very little about it, except from books, and he had read but few of them. But he was no angel; he could find plenty of attractions in the grisettes of Souvigny, and when they would allow him to tell them that they were charming, he was quite ready to do so, but it had never entered his head to regard as love those passing fancies, which only caused the slightest and most superficial disturbance in his heart.

Paul de Lavardens had marvellous powers of enthusiasm and idealization. His heart sheltered always two or three grandes passions, which lived there in perfect harmony. Paul had been so clever as to discover, in this little town of 15,000 souls, numbers of pretty girls, all made to be adored. He always believed himself the discoverer of America, when, in fact, he had done nothing but follow in the track of other navigators.

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The world-Jean had scarcely encountered it. He had allowed himself to be dragged by Paul, a dozen times, perhaps, to soirees or balls at the great houses of the neighborhood. He had invariably returned thoroughly bored, and had concluded that these pleasures were not made for him. His tastes were simple, serious. He loved solitude, work, long walks, open space, horses, and books. He was rather savage—a son of the soil. He loved his village, and all the old friends of his childhood. A quadrille in a drawing-room caused him unspeakable terror; but every year, at the festival of the patron saint of Longueval, he danced gayly with the young girls and farmers' daughters of the neighborhood.

If he had seen Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival at home in Paris, in all the splendor of their luxury, in all the perfection of their costly surroundings, he would have looked at them from afar, with curiosity, as exquisite works of art. Then he would have returned home, and would have slept, as usual, the most peaceful slumber in the world.

Yes, but it was not thus that the thing had come to pass, and hence his excitement, hence his disturbance. These two women had shown themselves before him in the midst of a circle with which he was familiar, and which had been, if only for this reason, singularly favorable to them. Simple, good, frank, cordial, such they had shown themselves the very first day, and delightfully pretty into the bargain—a fact which is never insignificant. Jean fell at once under the charm; he was there still!

At the moment when he dismounted in the barrack-yard, at nine o'clock, the old priest began his campaign joyously. Since the previous evening the Abbe's head had been on fire; Jean had not slept much, but he had not slept at all. He had risen very early, and with closed doors, alone with Pauline, he had counted and recounted his money, spreading out his one hundred Louis-d'or, gloating over them like a miser, and like a miser finding exquisite pleasure in handling his hoard. All that was his! for him! that is to say, for the poor.

"Do not be too lavish, Monsieur le Cure," said Pauline; "be economical. I think that if you distribute to-day one hundred francs—"

"That is not enough, Pauline. I shall only have one such day in my life, but one I will have. How much do you think I shall give to-day?"

"How much, Monsieur le Cure?"

"One thousand francs!"

"One thousand francs!"

"Yes. We are millionaires now; we possess all the treasures of America, and you talk about economy? Not to-day, at all events; indeed, I have no right to think of it."

After saying mass at nine o'clock he set out and showered gold along his way. All had a share—the poor who acknowledged their poverty and those who concealed it. Each alms was accompanied by the same little discourse:

“This comes from the new owners of the Longueval—two American ladies, Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival. Remember their names, and pray for them.”

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Then he made off without waiting for thanks, across the fields, through the woods, from hamlet to hamlet, from cottage to cottage—on, on, on. A sort of intoxication mounted to his brain. Everywhere were cries of joy and astonishment. All these louis-d'or fell, as if by a miracle, into the poor hands accustomed to receive little pieces of silver. The Curb was guilty of follies, actual follies. He was out of bounds; he did not recognize himself; he had lost all control over himself; he even gave to those who did not expect anything.

He met Claude Rigal, the old sergeant, who had left one of his arms at Sebastopol. He was growing gray—nay, white; for time passes, and the soldiers of the Crimea will soon be old men.

“Here!” said the Cure, “I have twenty francs for you.”

“Twenty francs? But I never asked for anything; I don’t want anything; I have my pension.”

His pension! Seven hundred francs!

“But listen; it will be something to buy you cigars. It comes from America.”

And then followed the Abbe’s little speech about the masters of Longueval.

He went to a poor woman whose son had gone to Tunis.

“Well, how is your son getting on?”

“Not so bad, Monsieur le Cure; I had a letter from him yesterday. He does not complain; he is very well; only he says there are no Kroomirs. Poor boy! I have been saving for a month, and I think I shall soon be able to send him ten francs.”

“You shall send him thirty francs. Take this.”

“Thirty francs! Monsieur le Cure, you give me thirty francs?”

“Yes, that is for you.”

“For my boy?”

“For your boy. But listen; you must know from whom it comes, and you must take care to tell your son when you write to him.”

Again the little speech about the new owners of Longueval, and again the adjuration to remember them in their prayers. At six o’clock he returned home, exhausted with fatigue, but with his soul filled with joy.

“I have given away all,” he cried, as soon as he saw Pauline, “all! all! all!”

He dined, and then went in the evening to perform the usual service for the month of Mary. But this time, the harmonium was silent; Miss Percival was no longer there.

The little organist of the evening before was at that moment much perplexed. On two couches in her dressing-room were spread two frocks—a white and a blue. Bettina was meditating which of these two frocks she would wear to the opera that evening. After long hesitation she fixed on the blue. At half-past nine the two sisters ascended the grand staircase at the opera-house. Just as they entered their box the curtain rose on the second scene of the second act of *Aida*, that containing the ballet and march.

Two young men, Roger de Puymartin and Louis de Martillet, were seated in the front of a stage-box. The young ladies of the corps de ballet had not yet appeared, and these gentlemen, having no occupation, were amusing themselves with looking about the house. The appearance of Miss Percival made a strong impression upon both.

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"Ah! ah!" said Puymartin, "there she is, the little golden nugget!"

"She is perfectly dazzling this evening, this little golden nugget," continued Martillet. "Look at her, at the line of her neck, the fall of her shoulders—still a young girl, and already a woman."

"Yes, she is charming, and tolerably well off into the bargain."

"Fifteen millions of her own, and the silver mine is still productive."

"Berulle told me twenty-five millions, and he is very well up in American affairs."

"Twenty-five millions! A pretty haul for Romanelli!"

"What? Romanelli!"

"Report says that that will be a match; that it is already settled."

"A match may be arranged, but with Montessan, not with Romanelli. Ah! at last! Here is the ballet."

They ceased to talk. The ballet in Aida lasts only five minutes, and for those five minutes they had come. Consequently they must be enjoyed respectfully, religiously, for there is that peculiarity among a number of the habitués of the opera, that they chatter like magpies when they ought to be silent, to listen, and that they observe the most absolute silence when they might be allowed to speak, while looking on.

The trumpets of Aida had given their last heroic 'fanfare' in honor of Rhadames before the great sphinxes under the green foliage of the palm-trees, the dancers advanced, the light trembling on their spangled robes, and took possession of the stage.

With much attention and pleasure Mrs. Scott followed the evolutions of the ballet, but Bettina had suddenly become thoughtful, on perceiving in a box, on the other side of the house, a tall, dark young man. Miss Percival talked to herself, and said:

"What shall I do? What shall I decide on? Must I marry him, that handsome, tall fellow over there, who is watching me, for it is I that he is looking at? He will come into our box directly this act is over, and then I have only to say, 'I have decided; there is my hand; I will be your wife,' and then all would be settled! I should be Princess! Princess Romanelli! Princess Bettina! Bettina Romanelli! The names go well together; they sound very pretty. Would it amuse me to be a princess? Yes—and no! Among all the young men in Paris, who, during the last year, have run after my money, this Prince Romanelli is the one who pleases me best. One of these days I must make up my mind to marry. I think he loves me. Yes, but the question is, do I love him? No, I don't think I do, and I should so much like to love—so much, so much!"

At the precise moment when these reflections were passing through Bettina's pretty head, Jean, alone in his study, seated before his desk with a great book under the shade of his lamp, looked through, and took notes of, the campaigns of Turenne. He had been directed to give a course of instruction to the non-commissioned officers of the regiment, and was prudently preparing his lesson for the next day.

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But in the midst of his notes—Nordlingen, 1645; les Dunes, 1658; Mulhausen and Turckheim, 1674-1675—he suddenly perceived (Jean did not draw very badly) a sketch, a woman's portrait, which all at once appeared under his pen. What was she doing there, in the middle of Turenne's victories, this pretty little woman? And then who was she—Mrs. Scott or Miss Percival? How could he tell? They resembled each other so much; and, laboriously, Jean returned to the history of the campaigns of Turenne.

And at the same moment, the Abbe Constantin, on his knees before his little wooden bedstead, called down, with all the strength of his soul, the blessings of Heaven on the two women through whose bounty he had passed such a sweet and happy day. He prayed God to bless Mrs. Scott in her children, and to give to Miss Percival a husband after her own heart.

CHAPTER V

THE FAIR AMERICANS

Formerly Paris belonged to the Parisians, and that at no very remote period—thirty or forty years ago. At that epoch the French were the masters of Paris, as the English are the masters of London, the Spaniards of Madrid, and the Russians of St. Petersburg. Those times are no more. Other countries still have their frontiers; there are now none to France. Paris has become an immense Babel, a universal and international city. Foreigners do not only come to visit Paris; they come there to live. At the present day we have in Paris a Russian colony, a Spanish colony, a Levantine colony, an American colony. The foreigners have already conquered from us the greater part of the Champs-Elysees and the Boulevard Malesherbes; they advance, they extend their outworks; we retreat, pressed back by the invaders; we are obliged to expatriate ourselves. We have begun to found Parisian colonies in the plains of Passy, in the plain of Monceau, in quarters which formerly were not Paris at all, and which are not quite even now. Among the foreign colonies, the richest, the most populous, the most brilliant, is the American colony. There is a moment when an American feels himself rich enough, a Frenchman never. The American then stops, draws breath, and while still husbanding the capital, no longer spares the income. He knows how to spend, the Frenchman knows only how to save.

The Frenchman has only one real luxury—his revolutions. Prudently and wisely he reserves himself for them, knowing well that they will cost France dear, but that, at the same time, they will furnish the opportunity for advantageous investments. The Frenchman says to himself:

“Let us hoard! let us hoard! let us hoard! Some of these mornings there will be a revolution, which will make the 5 per cents. fall 50 or 60 francs. I will buy then. Since revolutions are inevitable, let us try at least to make them profitable.”

They are always talking about the people who are ruined by revolutions, but perhaps the number of those enriched by revolutions is still greater.

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The Americans experience the attraction of Paris very strongly. There is no town in the world where it is easier or more agreeable to spend a great deal of money. For many reasons, both of race and origin, this attraction exercised over Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival a very remarkable power.

The most French of our colonies is Canada, which is no longer ours. The recollection of their first home has been preserved faithfully and tenderly in the hearts of the emigrants to Montreal and Quebec. Susie Percival had received from her mother an entirely French education, and she had brought up her sister in the same love of our country. The two sisters felt themselves Frenchwomen; still better, Parisians. As soon as the avalanche of dollars had descended upon them, the same desire seized them both—to come and live in Paris. They demanded France as if it had been their fatherland. Mr. Scott made some opposition.

“If I go away from here,” he said, “your incomes will suffer.”

“What does that matter?” replied Susie. “We are rich—too rich. Do let us go. We shall be so happy, so delighted!”

Mr. Scott allowed himself to be persuaded, and, at the beginning of January, 1880, Susie wrote the following letter to her friend, Katie Norton, who had lived in Paris for some years:

“Victory! It is decided! Richard has consented. I shall arrive in April, and become a Frenchwoman again. You offered to undertake all the preparations for our settlement in Paris. I am horribly presuming—I accept! When I arrive in Paris, I should like to be able to enjoy Paris, and not be obliged to lose my first month in running after upholsterers, coach-builders, horse-dealers. I should like, on arriving at the railway station, to find awaiting me my carriage, my coachman, my horses. That very day I should like you to dine with me at my home. Hire or buy a mansion, engage the servants, choose the horses, the carriages, the liveries. I depend entirely upon you. As long as the liveries are blue, that is the only point. This line is added at the request of Bettina.

“We shall bring only seven persons with us. Richard will have his valet, Bettina and I two ladies’ maids; then there are the two governesses for the children, and, besides these, two boys, Toby and Bobby, who ride to perfection. We should never find in Paris such a perfect pair.

“Everything else, people and things, we shall leave in New York. No, not quite everything; I had for gotten four little ponies, four little gems, black as ink. We have not the heart to leave them; we shall drive them in a phaeton; it is delightful. Both Bettina and I drive four-in-hand very well. Ladies can drive four-in-hand in the Bois very early in the morning; can’t they? Here it is quite possible. Above all, my dear Katie, do not

consider money. Be as extravagant as you like, that is all I ask.” The same day that Mrs. Norton received this letter witnessed the failure

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of a certain Garneville. He was a great speculator who had been on a false scent. Stocks had fallen just when he had expected a rise. This Garneville had, six weeks before, installed himself in a brand-new house, which had no other fault than a too startling magnificence. Mrs. Norton signed an agreement—100,000 francs a year, with the option of buying house and furniture for 2,000,000 during the first year of possession. A famous upholsterer undertook to correct and subdue the exaggerated splendor of a loud and gorgeous luxury. That done, Mrs. Scott's friend had the good fortune to lay her hand on two of those eminent artists without whom the routine of a great house can neither be established nor carried on. The first, a chef of the first rank, who had just left an ancient mansion of the Faubourg St. Germain, to his great regret, for he had aristocratic inclinations.

"Never," said he to Mrs. Norton, "never would I have left the service of Madame la Duchesse if she had kept up her establishment on the same footing as formerly; but Madame la Duchesse has four children—two sons who have run through a good deal, and two daughters who will soon be of an age to marry; they must have their dowries. Therefore, Madame la Duchesse is obliged to draw in a little, and the house is no longer important enough for me."

This distinguished character, of course, made his conditions. Though excessive, they did not alarm Mrs. Norton, who knew that he was a man of the most serious merit; but he, before deciding, asked permission to telegraph to New York. He wished to make certain inquiries. The reply was favorable; he accepted.

The second great artist was a stud-groom of the rarest and highest capacity, who was just about to retire after having made his fortune. He consented, however, to organize the stables for Mrs. Scott. It was thoroughly understood that he should have every liberty in purchasing the horses, that he should wear no livery, that he should choose the coachmen, the grooms, and everyone connected with the stables; that he should never have less than fifteen horses in the stables, that no bargain should be made with the coach-builder or saddler without his intervention, and that he should never mount the box, except early in the morning, in plain clothes, to give lessons in driving to the ladies and children, if necessary.

The cook took possession of his stores, and the stud-groom of his stables. Everything else was only a question of money, and with regard to this Mrs. Norton made full use of her extensive powers. She acted in conformity with the instructions she had received. In the short space of two months she performed prodigies, and that is how, when, on the 15th of April, 1880, Mr. Scott, Susie, and Bettina alighted from the mail train from Havre, at half-past four in the afternoon, they found Mrs. Norton at the station of St. Lazare, who said:

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“Your caleche is there in the yard; behind it is a landau for the children; and behind the landau is an omnibus for the servants. The three carriages bear your monogram, are driven by your coachman, and drawn by your horses. Your address is 24 Rue Murillo, and here is the menu of your dinner to-night. You invited me two months ago; I accept, and will even take the liberty of bringing a dozen friends with me. I shall furnish everything, even the guests. But do not be alarmed; you know them all; they are mutual friends, and this evening we shall be able to judge of the merits of your cook.”

The first Parisian who had the honor and pleasure of paying homage to the beauty of Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival was a little Marmiton fifteen years old, who stood there in his white clothes, his wicker basket on his head, at the moment when Mrs. Scott's carriage, entangled in the multitude of vehicles, slowly worked its way out of the station. The little cook stopped short on the pavement, opened wide his eyes, looked at the two sisters with amazement, and boldly cast full in their faces the single word:

“Mazette!”

When Madame Recamier saw her first wrinkles, and first gray hairs, she said to a friend:

“Ah! my dear, there are no more illusions left for me! From the day when I saw that the little chimney-sweeps no longer turned round in the street to look at me, I understood that all was over.”

The opinion of the confectioners' boys is, in similar cases, of equal value with the opinion of the little chimney-sweeps. All was not over for Susie and Bettina; on the contrary, all was only beginning.

Five minutes later, Mrs. Scott's carriage was ascending the Boulevard Haussmann to the slow and measured trot of a pair of admirable horses. Paris counted two Parisians the more.

The success of Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival was immediate, decisive, like a flash of lightning. The beauties of Paris are not classed and catalogued like the beauties of London; they do not publish their portraits in the illustrated papers, or allow their photographs to be sold at the stationers. However, there is always a little staff, consisting of a score of women, who represent the grace, and charm, and beauty of Paris, which women, after ten or twelve years' service, pass into the reserve, just like the old generals. Susie and Bettina immediately became part of this little staff. It was an affair of four-and-twenty hours—of less than four-and-twenty hours, for all passed between eight in the morning and midnight, the day after their arrival in Paris.

Imagine a sort of little ‘feerie’, in three acts, of which the success increases from tableau to tableau:



1st. A ride at ten in the morning in the Bois, with the two marvellous grooms imported from America.

2d. A walk at six o'clock in the Allee des Acacias.

3d. An appearance at the opera at ten in the evening in Mrs. Norton's box.

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The two novelties were immediately remarked, and appreciated as they deserved to be, by the thirty or forty persons who constitute a sort of mysterious tribunal, and who, in the name of all Paris, pass sentence beyond appeal. These thirty or forty persons have, from time to time, the fancy to declare “delicious” some woman who is manifestly ugly. That is enough; she is “delicious” from that moment.

The beauty of the two sisters was unquestionable. In the morning, it was their grace, their elegance, their distinction that attracted universal admiration; in the afternoon, it was declared that their walk had the freedom and ease of two young goddesses; in the evening, there was but one cry of rapture at the ideal perfection of their shoulders. From that moment, all Paris had for the two sisters the eyes of the little pastry-cook of the Rue d'Amsterdam; all Paris repeated his ‘Mazette’, though naturally with the variations and developments imposed by the usages of the world.

Mrs. Scott's drawing-room immediately became the fashion. The habitues of three or four great American houses transferred themselves to the Scotts, who had three hundred persons at their first Wednesday. Their circle increased; there was a little of everything to be found in their set—Americans, Spaniards, Italians, Hungarians, Russians, and even Parisians.

When she had related her history to the Abbe Constantin, Mrs. Scott had not told all—one never does tell all. In a word, she was a coquette. Mr. Scott had the most perfect confidence in his wife, and left her entire liberty. He appeared very little; he was an honorable man, who felt a vague embarrassment at having made such a marriage, at having married so much money.

Having a taste for business, he had great pleasure in devoting himself entirely to the administering of the two immense fortunes which were in his hands, in continually increasing them, and in saying every year to his wife and sister-in-law:

“You are still richer than you were last year!”

Not content with watching with much prudence and ability over the interests which he had left in America, he launched in France into large speculations, and was as successful in Paris as he had been in New York. In order to make money, the first thing is to have no need of it.

They made love to Mrs. Scott to an enormous extent; they made love to her in French, in Italian, in English, in Spanish; for she knew those four languages, and there is one advantage that foreigners have over our poor Parisians, who usually know only their mother tongue, and have not the resource of international passions.

Naturally, Mrs. Scott did not drive her adorers from her presence. She had ten, twenty, thirty at a time.



No one could boast of any preference; to all she opposed the same amiable, laughing, joyous resistance. It was clear to all that the game amused her, and that she did not for a moment take it seriously. Mr. Scott never felt a moment's anxiety, and he was perfectly right. More, he enjoyed his wife's successes; he was happy in seeing her happy. He loved her dearly—a little more than she loved him. She loved him very much, and that was all. There is a great difference between dearly and very much when these two adverbs are placed after the verb to love.

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As to Bettina, around her was a maddening whirl, an orgy of adulation. Such fortune! Such beauty! Miss Percival arrived in Paris on the 15th of April; a fortnight had not passed before the offers of marriage began to pour upon her. In the course of that first year, she might, had she wished it, have been married thirty-four times, and to what a variety of suitors!

They asked her hand for a young exile, who, under certain circumstances, might be called to ascend a throne—a very small one, it is true, but a throne nevertheless.

They asked her hand for a young duke, who would make a great figure at Court when France—as was inevitable—should recognize her errors, and bow down before her legitimate masters.

They asked her hand for a young prince, who would have a place on the steps of the throne when France—as was inevitable—should again knit together the chain of the Napoleonic traditions.

They asked her hand for a young Republican deputy, who had just made a most brilliant debut in the Chamber, and for whom the future reserved the most splendid destiny, for the Republic was now established in France on the most indestructible basis.

They asked her hand for a young Spaniard of the purest lineage, and she was given to understand that the 'contrat' would be signed in the palace of a queen, who does not live far from the Arc de Triomphe. Besides, one can find her address in the 'Almanach Bottin', for at the present day, there are queens who have their address in Bottin between an attorney and a druggist; it is only the kings of France who no longer live in France.

They asked her hand for the son of a peer of England, and for the son of a member of the highest Viennese aristocracy; for the son of a Parisian banker, and for the son of a Russian ambassador; for a Hungarian count, and for an Italian prince; and also for various excellent young men who were nothing and had nothing—neither name nor fortune; but Bettina had granted them a waltz, and, believing themselves irresistible, they hoped that they had caused a flutter of that little heart.

But up to the present moment nothing had touched that little heart, and the reply had been the same to all "No! no!" again "No!" always "No!"

Some days after that performance of Aida, the two sisters had a rather long conversation on this great, this eternal question of marriage. A certain name had been pronounced by Mrs. Scott which had provoked on the part of Miss Percival the most decided and most energetic refusal, and Susie had laughingly said to her sister:

"But, Bettina, you will be obliged to end by marrying."



“Yes, certainly, but I should be so sorry to marry without love. It seems to me that before I could resolve to do such a thing I must be in danger of dying an old maid, and I am not yet that.”

“No, not yet.”

“Let us wait, let us wait.”

“Let us wait. But among all these lovers whom you have been dragging after you for the last year, there have been some very nice, very amiable, and it is really a little strange if none of them—”

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"None, my Susie, none, absolutely none. Why should I not tell you the truth? Is it their fault? Have they gone unskilfully to work? Could they, in managing better, have found the way to my heart? or is the fault in me? Is it perhaps, that the way to my heart is a steep, rocky, inaccessible way, by which no one will ever pass? Am I a horrid little creature, and, cold, and condemned never to love?"

"I do not think so."

"Neither do I, but up to the present time that is my history. No, I have never felt anything which resembled love. You are laughing, and I can guess why. You are saying to yourself, 'A little girl like that pretending to know what love is!' You are right; I do not know, but I have a pretty good idea. To love—is it not to prefer to all in the world one certain person?"

"Yes; it is really that."

"Is it not never to weary of seeing that person, or of hearing him? Is it not to cease to live when he is not there, and to immediately begin to revive when he reappears?"

"Oh, but this is romantic love."

"Well, that is the love of which I dream, and that is the love which does not come—not at all till now; and yet that person preferred by me to all and everything does exist. Do you know who it is?"

"No, I do not know; I do not know, but I have a little suspicion."

"Yes, it is you, my dearest, and it is perhaps you, naughty sister, who makes me so insensible and cruel on this point. I love you too much; you fill my heart; you have occupied it entirely; there is no room for any one else. Prefer any one to you! Love any one more than you! That will never, never be!"

"Oh, yes, it will."

"Oh, no. Love differently, perhaps, but more—no. He must not count upon that, this gentleman whom I expect, and who does not arrive."

"Do not be afraid, my Betty, there is room in your heart for all whom you should love—for your husband, for your children, and that without your old sister losing anything. The heart is very little, but it is also very large."

Bettina tenderly embraced her sister; then, resting her head coaxingly on Susie's shoulder, she said:

"If, however, you are tired of keeping me with you, if you are in a hurry to get rid of me, do you know what I will do? I will put the names of two of these gentlemen in a basket, and draw lots. There are two who at the last extremity would not be absolutely disagreeable."

"Which two?"

"Guess."

"Prince Romanelli."

"For one! And the other?"

"Monsieur de Montessan."

"Those are the two! It is just that. Those two would be acceptable, but only acceptable, and that is not enough."

This is why Bettina awaited with extreme impatience the day when she should leave Paris, and take up their abode in Longueval. She was a little tired of so much pleasure, so much success, so many offers of marriage. The whirlpool of Parisian gayety had seized her on her arrival, and would not let her go, not for one hour of halt or rest. She felt the need of being given up to herself for a few days, to herself alone, to consult and question herself at her leisure, in the complete solitude of the country-in a word, to belong to herself again.

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Was not Bettina all sprightly and joyous when, on the 14th of June, they took the train for Longueval? As soon as she was alone in a coupe with her sister:

“Ah!” she cried, “how happy I am! Let us breathe a little, quite alone, you and me, for a few days. The Nortons and Turners do not come till the 25th, do they?”

“No, not till the 25th.”

“We will pass our lives riding or driving in the woods, in the fields. Ten days of liberty! And during those ten days no more lovers, no more lovers! And all those lovers, with what are they in love, with me or my money? That is the mystery, the unfathomable mystery.”

The engine whistled; the train put itself slowly into motion. A wild idea entered Bettina’s head. She leaned out of the window and cried, accompanying her words with a little wave of the hand:

“Good-by, my lovers, good-by.”

Then she threw herself suddenly into a corner of the coupe with a hearty burst of laughter.

“Oh, Susie, Susie!”

“What is the matter?”

“A man with a red flag in his hand; he saw me, and he looked so astonished.”

“You are so irrational!”

“Yes, it is true, to have called out of the window like that, but not to be happy at thinking that we are going to live alone, ‘en garçons’.”

“Alone! alone! Not exactly that. To begin with, we shall have two people to dinner to-night.”

“Ah! that is true. But those two people, I shall not be at all sorry to see them again. Yes, I shall be well pleased to see the old Cure again, but especially the young officer.”

“What! especially?”

“Certainly; because what the lawyer from Souvigny told us the other day is so touching, and what that great artilleryman did when he was quite little was so good, so good, that this evening I shall seek for an opportunity of telling him what I think of it, and I shall find one.”

Then Bettina, abruptly changing the course of the conversation, continued:

“Did they send the telegram yesterday to Edwards about the ponies?”

“Yes, yesterday before dinner.”

“Oh, you will let me drive them up to the house. It will be such fun to go through the town, and to drive up at full speed into the court in front of the entrance. Tell me, will you?”

“Yes, certainly, you shall drive the ponies.”

“Oh, how nice of you, Susie!”

Edwards was the stud-groom. He had arrived at Longueval three days before. He deigned to come himself—to meet Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival. He brought the phaeton drawn by the four black ponies. He was waiting at the station. The passage of the ponies through the principal street of the town had made a sensation. The population rushed out of their houses, and asked eagerly:

“What is it? What can it be?”

Some ventured the opinion:

“It is, perhaps, a travelling circus.”

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But exclamations arose on all sides:

“You did not notice the style of it—the carriage and the harness shining like gold, and the little horses with their white rosettes on each side of the head.”

The crowd collected around the station, and those who were curious learned that they were going to witness the arrival of the new owners of Longueval. They were slightly disenchanted when the two sisters appeared, very pretty, but in very simple travelling costumes.

These good people had almost expected the apparition of two princesses out of fairy tales, clad in silk and brocade, sparkling with rubies and diamonds. But they opened wide their eyes when they saw Bettina walk slowly round the four ponies, caressing one after another lightly with her hand, and examining all the details of the team with the air of a connoisseur.

Having made her inspection, Bettina, without the least hurry, drew off her long Swedish gloves, and replaced them by a pair of dog-skin which she took from the pocket of the carriage apron. Then she slipped on to the box in the place of Edwards, receiving from him the reins and whip with extreme dexterity, without allowing the already excited horses to perceive that they had changed hands.

Mrs. Scott seated herself beside her sister. The ponies pranced, curveted, and threatened to rear.

“Be very careful, miss,” said Edwards; “the ponies are very fresh to-day.”

“Do not be afraid,” replied Bettina. “I know them.”

Miss Percival had a hand at once very firm, very light, and very just. She held in the ponies for a few moments, forcing them to keep their own places; then, waving the long thong of her whip round the leaders, she started her little team at once, with incomparable skill, and left the station with an air of triumph, in the midst of a long murmur of astonishment and admiration.

The trot of the black ponies rang on the little oval paving-stones of Souvigny. Bettina held them well together until she had left the town, but as soon as she saw before her a clear mile and a half of highroad-almost on a dead level-she let them gradually increase their speed, till they went like the wind.

“Oh! how happy I am, Susie!” cried she; “and we shall trot and gallop all alone on these roads. Susie, would you like to drive? It is such a delight when one can let them go at full speed. They are so spirited and so gentle. Come, take the reins.”

“No; keep them. It is a greater pleasure to me to see you happy.”

“Oh, as to that, I am perfectly happy. I do like so much to drive four-in-hand with plenty of space before me. At Paris, even in the morning, I did not dare to any longer. They looked at me so, it annoyed me. But here—no one! no one! no one!”

At the moment when Bettina, already a little intoxicated with the bracing air and liberty, gave forth triumphantly these three exclamations, “No one! no one! no one!” a rider appeared, walking his horse in the direction of the carriage. It was Paul de Lavardens. He had been watching for more than an hour for the pleasure of seeing the Americans pass.

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"You are mistaken," said Susie to Bettina; "there is some one."

"A peasant; they don't count; they won't ask me to marry them."

"It is not a peasant at all. Look!"

Paul de Lavardens, while passing the carriage, made the two sisters a highly correct bow, from which one at once scented the Parisian.

The ponies were going at such a rate that the meeting was over like a flash of lightning.

Bettina cried:

"Who is that gentleman who has just bowed to us?"

"I had scarcely time to see, but I seemed to recognize him."

"You recognized him?"

"Yes, and I would wager that I have seen him at our house this winter."

"Heavens! if it should be one of the thirty-four! Is all that going to begin again?"

CHAPTER VI

A LITTLE DINNER FOR FOUR

That same day, at half-past seven, Jean went to fetch the Cure, and the two walked together up to the house. During the last month a perfect army of workmen had taken possession of Longueval; all the inns in the village were making their fortunes.

Enormous furniture wagons brought cargoes of furniture and decorations from Paris. Forty-eight hours before the arrival of Mrs. Scott, Mademoiselle Marbeau, the postmistress, and Madame Lormier, the mayoress, had wormed themselves into the castle, and the account they gave of the interior turned every one's head. The old furniture had disappeared, banished to the attics; one moved among a perfect accumulation of wonders. And the stables! and the coach-houses! A special train had brought from Paris, under the high superintendence of Edwards, a dozen carriages—and such carriages! Twenty horses—and such horses!

The Abbe Constantin thought that he knew what luxury was. Once a year he dined with his bishop, Monseigneur Faubert, a rich and amiable prelate, who entertained rather largely. The Cure, till now, had, thought that there was nothing in the world more

sumptuous than the Episcopal palace of Souvigny, or the castles of Lavardens and Longueval.

He began to understand, from what he was told of the new splendors of Longueval, that the luxury of the great houses of the present day must surpass to a singular degree the sober and severe luxury of the great houses of former times.

As soon as the Cure and Jean had entered the avenue in the park, which led to the house:

“Look! Jean,” said the Cure; “what a change! All this part of the park used to be quite neglected, and now all the paths are gravelled and raked. I shall not be able to feel myself at home as I used to do: it will be too grand. I shall not find again my old brown velvet easy-chair, in which I so often fell asleep after dinner, and if I fall asleep this evening what will become of me? You will think of it, Jean, and if you see that I begin to forget myself, you will come behind me and pinch my arm gently, won’t you? You promise me?”

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"Certainly, certainly, I promise you."

Jean paid but slight attention to the conversation of the Cure. He felt extremely impatient to see Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival again, but this impatience was mingled with very keen anxiety. Would he find them in the great salon at Longueval the same as he had seen them in the little dining-room at the vicarage? Perhaps, instead of those two women, so perfectly simple and familiar, amusing themselves with this little improvised dinner, and who, the very first day, had treated him with so much grace and cordiality, would he find two pretty dolls-worldly, elegant, cold, and correct? Would his first impression be effaced? Would it disappear? or, on the contrary, would the impression in his heart become still sweeter and deeper?

They ascended the six steps at the entrance, and were received in the hall by two tall footmen with the most dignified and imposing air. This hall had formerly been a vast, frigid apartment, with bare stone walls. These walls were now covered with admirable tapestry, representing mythological subjects. The Cure dared scarcely glance at this tapestry; it was enough for him to perceive that the goddesses who wandered through these shades wore costumes of antique simplicity.

One of the footmen opened wide the folding-doors of the salon. It was there that one had generally found the old Marquise, on the right of the high chimney-piece, and on the left had stood the brown velvet easy-chair.

No brown easy-chair now! That old relic of the Empire, which was the basis of the arrangement of the salon, had been replaced by a marvellous specimen of tapestry of the end of the last century. Then a crowd of little easy-chairs, and ottomans of all forms and all colors, were scattered here and there with an appearance of disorder which was the perfection of art.

As soon as Mrs. Scott saw the Cure and Jean enter, she rose, and going to meet them, said:

"How kind of you to come, Monsieur le Cure, and you, too, Monsieur Jean. How pleased I am to see you, my first, my only friends down here!"

Jean breathed again. It was the same woman.

"Will you allow me," added Mrs. Scott, "to introduce my children to you? Harry and Bella, come here."

Harry was a very pretty little boy of six, and Bella a very charming little girl, five years old. They had their mother's large, dark eyes, and her golden hair.

After the Cure had kissed the two children, Harry, who was looking with admiration at Jean's uniform, said to his mother:

“And the soldier, mamma, must we kiss him, too?”

“If you like,” replied Mrs. Scott, “and if he will allow it.”

A moment after, the two children were installed upon Jean’s knees, and overwhelming him with questions.

“Are you an officer?”

“Yes, I am an officer.”

“What in?”

“In the artillery.”

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"The artillery! Oh, you are one of the men who fire the cannon. Oh, how I should like to be quite near when they fire the cannon!"

"Will you take us some day when they fire the cannon? Tell me, will you?"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Scott chatted with the Cure, and Jean, while replying to the children's questions, looked at Mrs. Scott. She wore a white muslin frock, but the muslin disappeared under a complete avalanche of little flounces of Valenciennes. The dress was cut out in front in a large square, her arms were bare to the elbow, a large bouquet of red roses at the opening of her dress, a red rose fixed in her hair, with a diamond 'agraffe'—nothing more.

Mrs. Scott suddenly perceived that the children had taken entire possession of Jean, and exclaimed:

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Harry, Bella!"

"Oh, pray let them stay with me."

"I am so sorry to keep you waiting for dinner; my sister is not down yet. Oh! here she is!"

Bettina entered. The same frock of white muslin, the same delicate mass of lace, the same red roses, the same grace, the same beauty, and the same smiling, amiable, candid manner.

"How do you do, Monsieur le Cure? I am delighted to see you. Have you pardoned my dreadful intrusion of the other day?"

Then, turning toward Jean and offering him her hand:

"How do you do, Monsieur—Monsieur—Oh! I can not remember your name, and yet we seem to be already old friends, Monsieur—"

"Jean Reynaud."

"Jean Reynaud, that is it. How do you do, Monsieur Reynaud? I warn you faithfully that when we really are old friends—that is to say, in about a week—I shall call you Monsieur Jean. It is a pretty name, Jean."

Up to the moment when Bettina appeared Jean had said to himself:

"Mrs. Scott is the prettier!"

When he felt Bettina's little hand slip into his arm, and when she turned toward him her delicious face, he said:

"Miss Percival is the prettier!"

But his perplexities gathered round him again when he was seated between the two sisters. If he looked to the right, love threatened him from that direction, and if he looked to the left, the danger removed immediately, and passed to the left.

Conversation began, easy, animated, confidential. The two sisters were charmed; they had already walked in the park; they promised themselves a long ride in the forest tomorrow. Riding was their passion, their madness. It was also Jean's passion, so that after a quarter of an hour they begged him to join them the next day. There was no one who knew the country round better than he did; it was his native place. He should be so happy to do the honors of it, and to show them numbers of delightful little spots which, without him, they would never discover.

"Do you ride every day?" asked Bettina.

"Every day and sometimes twice. In the morning on duty, and in the evening I am ride for my own pleasure."

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"Early in the morning?"

"At half-past five."

"At half-past five every morning?"

"Yes, except Sunday."

"Then you get up—"

"At half-past four."

"And is it light?"

"Oh, just now, broad daylight."

"To get up at half-past four is admirable; we often finish our day just when yours is beginning. And are you fond of your profession?"

"Very. It is an excellent thing to have one's life plain before one, with exact and definite duties."

"And yet," said Mrs. Scott, "not to be one's own master—to be always obliged to obey."

"That is perhaps what suits me best; there is nothing easier than to obey, and then to learn to obey is the only way of learning to command."

"Ah! since you say so, it must be true."

"Yes, no doubt," added the Cure; "but he does not tell you that he is the most distinguished officer in his regiment, that—"

"Oh! pray do not."

The Cure, in spite of the resistance of Jean, was about to launch into a panegyric on his godson, when Bettina, interposing, said:

"It is unnecessary, Monsieur le Cure, do not say anything, we know already all that you would tell us, we have been so indiscreet as to make inquiries about Monsieur—oh, I was just going to say Monsieur Jean—about Monsieur Reynaud. Well, the information we received was excellent!"

"I am curious to know," said Jean.

"Nothing! nothing! you shall know nothing. I do not wish to make you blush, and you would be obliged to blush."

Then turning toward the Cure, "And about you, too, Monsieur l'Abbe, we have had some information. It appears that you are a saint."

"Oh! as to that, it is perfectly true," cried Jean.

It was the Cure this time who cut short the eloquence of Jean. Dinner was almost over. The old priest had not got through this dinner without experiencing many emotions. They had repeatedly presented to him complicated and scientific constructions upon which he had only ventured with a trembling hand. He was afraid of seeing the whole crumble beneath his touch; the trembling castles of jelly, the pyramids of truffles, the fortresses of cream, the bastions of pastry, the rocks of ice. Otherwise the Abbe Constantin dined with an excellent appetite, and did not recoil before two or three glasses of champagne. He was no foe to good cheer; perfection is not of this world; and if gormandizing were, as they say, a cardinal sin, how many good priests would be damned!

Coffee was served on the terrace in front of the house; in the distance was heard the harsh voice of the old village clock striking nine. Woods and fields were slumbering; the avenues in the park showed only as long, undulating, and undecided lines. The moon slowly rose over the tops of the great trees.

Bettina took a box of cigars from the table. "Do you smoke?" said she.

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"Yes, Miss Percival."

"Take one, Monsieur Jean. It can't be helped. I have said it. Take one—but no, listen to me first."

And speaking in a low voice, while offering him the box of cigars:

"It is getting dark, now you may blush at your ease. I will tell you what I did not say at dinner. An old lawyer in Souvigny, who was your guardian, came to see my sister in Paris, about the payment for the place; he told us what you did after your father's death, when you were only a child, what you did for that poor mother, and for that poor young girl. Both my sister and I were much touched by it."

"Yes," continued Mrs. Scott, "and that is why we have received you to-day with so much pleasure. We should not have given such a reception to every one, of that you may be sure. Well, now take your cigar, my sister is waiting."

Jean could not find a word in reply. Bettina stood there with the box of cigars in her two hands, her eyes fixed frankly on the countenance of Jean. At the moment, she tasted a true and keen pleasure which may be expressed by this phrase:

"It seems to me that I see before me a man of honor."

"And now," said Mrs. Scott, "let us sit here and enjoy this delicious night; take your coffee, smoke—"

"And do not let us talk, Susie, do not let us talk. This great silence of the country, after the great noise and bustle of Paris, is delightful! Let us sit here without speaking; let us look at the sky, the moon, and the stars."

All four, with much pleasure, carried out this little programme. Susie and Bettina, calm, reposeful, absolutely separated from their existence of yesterday, already felt a tenderness for the place which had just received them, and was going to keep them. Jean was less tranquil; the words of Miss Percival had caused him profound emotion, his heart had not yet quite regained its regular throb.

But the happiest of all was the Abbe Constantin.

This little episode which had caused Jean's modesty such a rude, yet sweet trial, had brought him exquisite joy, the Abbe bore his godson such affection. The most tender father never loved more warmly the dearest of his children. When the old Cure looked at the young officer, he often said to himself:

"Heaven has been too kind; I am a priest, and I have a son!"



The Abbe sank into a very agreeable reverie; he felt himself at home, he felt himself too much at home; by degrees his ideas became hazy and confused, reverie became drowsiness, drowsiness became slumber, the disaster was soon complete, irreparable; the Cure slept, and slept profoundly. This marvellous dinner, and the two or three glasses of champagne may have had something to do with the catastrophe.

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Jean perceived nothing; he had forgotten the promise made to his godfather. And why had he forgotten it? Because Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival had thought proper to put their feet on the footstools, placed in front of their great wicker garden-chairs filled with cushions; then they had thrown themselves lazily back in their chairs, and their muslin skirts had become raised a little, a very little, but yet enough to display four little feet, the lines of which showed very distinctly and clearly beneath two pretty clouds of white lace. Jean looked at these little feet, and asked himself this question:

"Which are the smaller?"

While he was trying to solve this problem, Bettina, all at once, said to him in a low voice:

"Monsieur Jean! Monsieur Jean!"

"Miss Percival?"

"Look at the Cure, he is asleep."

"Oh! it is my fault."

"How your fault?" asked Mrs. Scott, also in a low voice.

"Yes; my godfather rises at daybreak, and goes to bed very early; he told me to be sure and prevent his falling asleep; when Madame de Longueval was here he very often had a nap after dinner. You have shown him so much kindness that he has fallen back into his old habits."

"And he is perfectly right," said Bettina, "do not make a noise, do not wake him."

"You are too good, Miss Percival, but the air is getting a little fresh."

"Ah! that is true, he might catch cold. Stay, I will go and fetch a wrap for him."

"I think, Miss Percival, it would be better to try and wake him skilfully, so that he should not suspect that you had seen him asleep."

"Let me do it," said Bettina. "Susie, let us sing together, very softly at first, then we will raise our voices little by little, let us sing."

"Willingly, but what shall we sing?"

"Let us sing, 'Quelque chose d'enfantin,' the words are suitable."

Susie and Bettina began to sing:

If I had but two little wings,
And were a little feathery bird,

Their sweet and penetrating voices had an exquisite sonority in that profound silence. The Abbe heard nothing, did not move. Charmed with this little concert, Jean said to himself:

“Heaven grant that my godfather may not wake too soon!”

The voices became clearer and louder:

But in my sleep to you I fly,
I’m always with you in my sleep.

Yet the Abbe did not stir.

“How he sleeps,” said Susie, “it is a crime to wake him.”

“But we must; louder, Susie, louder.”

Susie and Bettina both gave free scope to the power of their voices.

Sleep stays not, though a monarch bids,
So I love to wake ere break of day.

The Cure woke with a start. After a short moment of anxiety he breathed again. Evidently no one had noticed that he had been asleep. He collected himself, stretched himself prudently, slowly, he was saved!

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A quarter of an hour later the two sisters accompanied the Cure and Jean to the little gate of the park, which opened into the village a few yards from the vicarage; they had nearly reached the gate when Bettina said all at once to Jean:

“Ah! all this time I have had a question to ask you. This morning when we arrived, we met on the way a slight young man, with a fair mustache, he was riding a black horse, and bowed to us as we passed.”

“It was Paul de Lavardens, one of my friends; he has already had the honor of being introduced to you, but rather vaguely, and his ambition is to be presented again.”

“Well, you shall bring him one of these days,” said Mrs. Scott.

“After the 25th!” cried Bettina. “Not before! not before! No one till then; till then we will see no one but you, Monsieur Jean. But you, it is very extraordinary, and I don’t quite know how it has happened, you don’t seem anybody to us. The compliment is perhaps not very well turned, but do not make a mistake, it is a compliment. I intended to be excessively amiable in speaking to you thus.”

“And so you are, Miss Percival.”

“So much the better if I have been so fortunate as to make myself understood. Good-by, Monsieur Jean—till tomorrow!”

Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival returned slowly toward the castle.

“And now, Susie,” said Bettina, “scold me well, I expect it, I have deserved it.”

“Scold you! Why?”

“You are going to say, I am sure, that I have been too familiar with that young man.”

“No, I shall not say that. From the first day that young man has made the most favorable impression upon me; he inspires me with perfect confidence.”

“And so he does me.”

“I am persuaded that it would be well for us both to try to make a friend of him.”

“With all my heart, as far as I am concerned, so much the more as I have seen many young men since we have lived in France. Oh! yes, I have, indeed! Well! this is the first, positively the first, in whose eyes I have not clearly read, ‘Oh, how glad I should be to marry the millions of that little person!’ That was written in the eyes of all the others, but not in his eyes. Now, here we are at home again. Good-night, Susie—to-morrow.”

Mrs. Scott went to see and kiss her sleeping children.

Bettina remained long, leaning on the balustrade of her balcony.

“It seems to me,” said she, “that I am going to be very fond of this place.”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Believing themselves irresistible
Frenchman has only one real luxury—his revolutions
Great difference between dearly and very much
Had not told all—one never does tell all
In order to make money, the first thing is to have no need of it
To learn to obey is the only way of learning to command



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THE ABBE CONSTANTIN

By Ludovic Halevy

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER VII

CONFIDENCES

The next morning, on returning from drill, Jean found Paul de Lavardens waiting for him at the barracks; he scarcely allowed him time to dismount, and the moment he had him alone:

"Quick," said he, "describe your, dinner-party of yesterday. I saw them myself in the morning; the little one was driving four ponies, and with an amount of audacity! I bowed to them; did they mention me? Did they recognize me? When will you take me to Longueval? Answer me."

"Answer? Yes. But which question first?"

"The last."

"When shall I take you to Longueval?"

"Yes."

"Well, in ten days; they don't want to see any one just now."

"Then you are not going back to Longueval for ten days?"

"Oh, I shall go back to-day at four o'clock. But I don't count, you know. Jean Reynaud, the Cure's godson. That is why I have penetrated so easily into the confidence of these two charming women. I have presented myself under the patronage and with the guarantee of the Church. And then they have discovered that I could render them little services. I know the country very well, and they will make use of me as a guide. In a word, I am nobody; while you, Count Paul de Lavardens, you are somebody; so fear nothing, your turn will come with the fetes and balls. Then you will be resplendent in all your glory, and I shall return very humbly into my obscurity."

"You may laugh at me as much as you like; it is none the less true that during those ten days you will steal a march upon me—upon me!"

“How upon you?”

“Now, Jean, do you want to make me believe that you are not already in love with one of these two women? Is it possible? So much beauty, so much luxury. Luxury to that degree upsets me. Those black ponies with their white rosettes! I dreamed of them last night, and that little-Bettina, is it not?”

“Yes, Bettina.”

“Bettina—Countess Bettina de Lavardens! Doesn’t that sound well enough! and what a perfect husband she would have in me! To be the husband of a woman possessing boundless wealth, that is my destiny. It is not so easy as one may suppose. I have already run through something, and—if my mother had not stopped me! but I am quite ready to begin again. Oh, how happy that girl would be with me! I would create around her the existence of a fairy queen. In all her luxury she would feel the taste, the art, and the skill of her husband. I would pass my life in adoring her, in displaying her beauty, in petting her, in bearing her triumphant through the world. I would study her beauty in order to give it the frame that best suited it. ‘If he were not there,’ she would say, ‘I should not be so beautiful, so dazzling.’ I should know not only how to love her, but how to amuse her. She would have something for her money, she would have love and pleasure. Come, Jean, do a good action, take me to Mrs. Scott’s to-day.”

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"I cannot, I assure you."

"Well, then, in ten days; but I give you fair notice, I shall install myself at Longueval, and shall not move. In the first place it would please my mother; she is still a little prejudiced against the Americans. She says that she shall arrange not to see them, but I know my mother. Some day, when I shall go home in the evening and tell her: 'Mother, I have won the heart of a charming little person who is burdened with a capital of twenty millions—they exaggerate when they talk of hundreds of millions. You know these are the correct figures, and they are enough for me. That evening, then, my mother will be delighted, because, in her heart, what is it she desires for me? What all good mothers desire for their sons—a good marriage, or a discreet liaison with some one in society. At Longueval I find these two essentials, and I will accommodate myself very willingly to either. You will have the kindness to warn me in ten days—you will let me know which of the two you abandon to me, Mrs. Scott or Miss Percival?"

"You are mad, you are quite mad! I do not, I never shall think—"

"Listen, Jean. You are wisdom personified; you may say and do as you like, but remember what I say to you, Jean, you will fall in love in that house."

"I do not believe it," replied Jean, laughing.

"But I am absolutely sure of it. Good-by. I leave you to your duties."

That morning Jean was perfectly sincere. He had slept very well the previous night; the second interview with the two sisters had, as if by enchantment, dissipated the slight trouble which had agitated his soul after the first meeting. He prepared to meet them again with much pleasure, but also with much tranquillity; there was too much money in that house to permit the love of a poor devil like Jean to find place honestly there.

Friendship was another affair; with all his heart he wished, and with all his strength he sought, to establish himself peacefully in the esteem and regard of the sisters. He would try not to remark too much the beauty of Susie and Bettina; he would try not to forget himself as he had done the previous evening, in the contemplation of the four little feet resting on their footstools. They had said, very frankly, very cordially, to him: "You shall be our friend." That was all he desired—to be their friend—and that he would be.

During the ten days that followed, all conduced to the success of this enterprise. Susie, Bettina, the Cure, and Jean led the same life in the closest and most cordial intimacy.

Jean did not seek to analyze his feelings. He felt for these two women an equal affection; he was perfectly happy, perfectly tranquil. Then he was not in love, for love and tranquillity seldom dwell at peace in the same heart.

Jean, however, saw approach, with a little anxiety and sadness, the day which would bring to Longueval the Turners, and the Nortons, and the whole force of the American colony. The day came too soon.

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On Friday, the 24th of June, at four o'clock, Jean arrived at the castle. Bettina received him alone, looking quite vexed.

"How annoying it is," said she, "my sister is not well; a little headache, nothing of consequence, it will be gone by tomorrow; but I dare not ride with you alone. In America I might; but here, it would not do, would it?"

"Certainly not," replied Jean.

"I must send you back, and I am so sorry."

"And so am I—I am very sorry to be obliged to go, and to lose this last day, which I had hoped to pass with you. However, since it must be, I will come tomorrow to inquire after your sister."

"She will see you herself, to-morrow; I repeat it is nothing serious. But do not run away in such a hurry, pray; will you not spare me a little quarter of an hour's conversation? I want to speak to you; sit down there, and now listen to me well. My sister and I had intended this evening, after dinner, to blockade you into a little corner of the drawing-room, and then she meant to tell you what I am going to try to say for us both."

"But I am a little nervous. Do not laugh; it is a very serious matter. We wish to thank you for having been, ever since our arrival here, so good to us both."

"Oh, Miss Percival, pray, it is I who—"

"Oh, do not interrupt me, you will quite confuse me. I do not know how to get through with it. I maintain, besides, that the thanks are due from us, not from you. We arrived here two strangers. We have been fortunate enough immediately to find friends. Yes, friends. You have taken us by the hand, you have led us to our farmers, to our keepers; while your godfather took us to his poor—and everywhere you were so much beloved that from their confidence in you, they began, on your recommendation, to like us a little. You are adored about here; do you know that?"

"I was born here—all these good people have known me from my infancy, and are grateful to me for what my grandfather and father did for them; and then I am of their race, the race of the peasants; my great-grandfather was a laborer at Bargecourt, a village two miles from here."

"Oh! oh! you appear very proud of that!"

"Neither proud nor ashamed."

"I beg your pardon, you made a little movement of pride. Well, I can tell you that my mother's great-grandfather was a farmer in Brittany. He went to Canada at the end of

the last century, when Canada was still French. And you love very much this place where you were born?"

"Very much. Perhaps I shall soon be obliged to leave it."

"Why?"

"When I get promotion, I shall have to exchange into another regiment, and I shall wander from garrison to garrison; but certainly, when I am an old commandant or old colonel, on half-pay, I shall come back, and live and die here, in the little house that was my father's."

"Always quite alone?"



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"Why quite alone? I certainly hope not."

"You intend to marry?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You are trying to marry?"

"No; one may think of marrying, but one ought not to try to marry."

"And yet there are people who do try. Come, I can answer for that, and you even; people have wished to marry you."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh! I know all your little affairs so well; you are what they call a good match, and I repeat it, they have wished to marry you."

"Who told you that?"

"Monsieur le Cure."

"Then he was very wrong," said Jean, with a certain sharpness.

"No, no, he was not wrong. If any one has been to blame it is I. I soon discovered that your godfather was never so happy as when he was speaking of you. So when I was alone with him during our walks, to please him I talked of you, and he related your history to me. You are well off; you are very well off; from Government you receive every month two hundred and thirteen francs and some centimes; am I correct?"

"Yes," said Jean, deciding to bear with a good grace his share in the Cure's indiscretions.

"You have eight thousand francs' income?"

"Nearly, not quite."

"Add to that your house, which is worth thirty thousand francs. You are in an excellent position, and people have asked your hand."

"Asked my hand! No, no."

"They have, they have, twice, and you have refused two very good marriages, two very good fortunes, if you prefer it—it is the same thing for so many people. Two hundred thousand francs in the one, three hundred thousand in the other case. It appears that these fortunes are enormous for the country! Yet you have refused! Tell me why."

“Well, it concerned two charming young girls.”

“That is understood. One always says that.”

“But whom I scarcely knew. They forced me—for I did resist—they forced me to spend two or three evenings with them last winter.”

“And then?”

“Then—I don’t quite know how to explain it to you. I did not feel the slightest touch of embarrassment, emotion, anxiety, or disturbance—”

“In fact,” said Bettina, resolutely, “not the least suspicion of love.”

“No, not the least, and I returned quite calmly to my bachelor den, for I think it is better not to marry than to marry without love.”

“And I think so, too.”

She looked at him, he looked at her, and suddenly, to the great surprise of both, they found nothing more to say, nothing at all.

At this moment Harry and Bella rushed into the room, with cries of joy.

“Monsieur Jean! Are you there? Come and see our ponies!”

“Ah!” said Bettina, her voice a little uncertain, “Edwards has just come back from Paris, and has brought two microscopic ponies for the children. Let us go to see them, shall we?”

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They went to see the ponies, which were indeed worthy to figure in the stables of the King of Lilliput.

CHAPTER VIII

ANOTHER MARTYR TO MILLIONS

Three weeks have glided by; another day and Jean will be obliged to leave with his regiment for the artillery practice. He will lead the life of a soldier. Ten days' march on the highroad going and returning, and ten days in the camp at Cercottes in the forest of Orleans. The regiment will return to Souvigny on the 10th of August.

Jean is no longer tranquil; Jean is no longer happy. He sees approach with impatience, and at the same time with terror, the moment of his departure. With impatience—for he suffers an absolute martyrdom, he longs to escape from it; with terror—for to pass twenty days without seeing her, without speaking to her, without her in a word—what will become of him? Her! It is Bettina; he adores her!

Since when? Since the first day, since that meeting in the month of May in the Cure's garden. That is the truth; but Jean struggles against and resists that truth. He believes that he has only loved Bettina since the day when the two chatted gayly, amicably, in the little drawing-room. She was sitting on the blue couch near the widow, and, while talking, amused herself with repairing the disorder of the dress of a Japanese princess, one of Bella's dolls, which she had left on a chair, and which Bettina had mechanically taken up.

Why had the fancy come to Miss Percival to talk to him of those two young girls whom he might have married? The question of itself was not at all embarrassing to him. He had replied that, if he had not then felt any taste for marriage, it was because his interviews with these two girls had not caused him any emotion or any agitation. He had smiled in speaking thus, but a few minutes after he smiled no more. This emotion, this agitation, he had suddenly learned to know them. Jean did not deceive himself; he acknowledged the depth of the wound; it had penetrated to his very heart's core.

Jean, however, did not abandon himself to this emotion. He said to himself:

"Yes, it is serious, very serious, but I shall recover from it."

He sought an excuse for his madness; he laid the blame on circumstances. For ten days this delightful girl had been too much with him, too much with him alone! How could he resist such a temptation? He was intoxicated with her charm, with her grace and beauty. But the next day a troop of visitors would arrive at Longueval, and there would be an end of this dangerous intimacy. He would have courage; he would keep at a distance; he would lose himself in the crowd, would see Bettina less often and less



familiarly. To see her no more was a thought he could not support! He wished to remain Bettina's friend, since he could be nothing but her friend; for there was another thought which scarcely entered the mind of Jean. This thought did not appear extravagant to him; it appeared monstrous. In the whole world there was not a more honorable man than Jean, and he felt for Bettina's money horror, positively horror.

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From the 25th of June the crowd had been in possession of Longueval. Mrs. Norton arrived with her son, Daniel Norton; and Mrs. Turner with her son, Philip Turner. Both of them, the young Philip and the young Daniel, formed a part of the famous brotherhood of the thirty-four. They were old friends, Bettina had treated them as such, and had declared to them, with perfect frankness, that they were losing their time. However, they were not discouraged, and formed the centre of a little court which was always very eager and assiduous around Bettina.

Paul de Lavardens had made his appearance on this scene, and had very rapidly become everybody's friend. He had received the brilliant and complicated education of a young man destined for pleasure. As soon as it was a question only of amusement, riding, croquet, lawn-tennis, polo, dancing, charades, and theatricals, he was ready for everything. He excelled in everything. His superiority was evident, unquestionable. Paul became, in a short time, by general consent, the director and organizer of the fetes at Longueval.

Bettina had not a moment of hesitation. Jean introduced Paul de Lavardens, and the latter had scarcely concluded the customary little compliment when Miss Percival, leaning toward her sister, whispered in her ear:

"The thirty-fifth!"

However, she received Paul very kindly, so kindly that for several days he had the weakness to misunderstand her. He believed that it was his personal graces which had obtained for him this very flattering and cordial reception. It was a great mistake. Paul de Lavardens had been introduced by Jean; he was the friend of Jean. In Bettina's eyes, therein lay all his merit.

Mrs. Scott's castle was open house; people were not invited for one evening only, but for every evening, and Paul, with enthusiasm, came every evening! His dream was at last realized; he had, found Paris at Longueval.

But Paul was neither blind nor a fool. No doubt he was, on Miss Percival's part, the object of very particular attention and favor. It pleased her to talk long, very long, alone with him. But what was the eternal, the inexhaustible subject of their conversations? Jean, again Jean, and always Jean!

Paul was thoughtless, dissipated, frivolous, but he became in earnest when Jean was in question; he knew how to appreciate him, he knew how to love him. Nothing to him was sweeter, nothing was easier, than to say of the friend of his childhood all the good that he thought of him, and as he saw that Bettina listened with great pleasure, Paul gave free rein to his eloquence.



Only—and he was quite right—Paul wished one evening to reap the benefit of his chivalrous conduct. He had just been talking for a quarter of an hour with Bettina. The conversation finished, he went to look for Jean at the other end of the drawing-room, and said to him:

“You left the field open to me, and I have made a bold stroke for Miss Percival.”

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"Well, you have no reason to be discontented with the result of the enterprise. You are the best friends in the world."

"Yes, certainly, pretty well, but not quite satisfactory. There is nothing more amiable or more charming than Miss Percival, and really it is very good of me to acknowledge it; for, between ourselves, she makes me play an ungrateful and ridiculous role, a role which is quite unsuited to my age. I am, you will admit, of the lover's age, and not of that of the confidant."

"Of the confidant!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, of the confidant! That is my occupation in this house. You were looking at us just now. Oh, I have very good eyes; you were looking at us. Well, do you know what we were talking about? Of you, my dear fellow, of you, of you again, of nothing but you. And it is the same thing every evening; there is no end to the questions:

"'You were brought up together? You took lessons together from the Abbe Constantin?'

"'Will he soon be Captain? And then?'

"'Commandant.'

"'And then?'

"'Colonel, *etc.*, *etc.*, *etc.*'

"Ah! I can tell you, my friend Jean, if you liked, you might dream a very delicious dream."

Jean was annoyed, almost angry. Paul was much astonished at this sudden attack of irritability.

"What is the matter? Have I said anything—"

"I beg your pardon; I was wrong. But how could you take such an absurd idea into your head?"

"Absurd! I don't see it. I have entertained the absurd idea on my own account."

"Ah! you—"

"Why 'Ah! you?' If I have had it you may have it; you are better worth it than I am."

"Paul, I entreat you!"

Jean's discomfort was evident.

"We will not speak of it again; we will not speak of it again. What I wanted to say, in short, is that Miss Percival perhaps thinks I am agreeable; but as to considering me seriously, that little person will never commit such a folly. I must fall back upon Mrs. Scott, but without much confidence. You see, Jean, I shall amuse myself in this house, but I shall make nothing out of it."

Paul de Lavardens did fall back upon Mrs. Scott, but the next day was surprised to stumble upon Jean, who had taken to placing himself very regularly in Mrs. Scott's particular circle, for like Bettina she had also her little court. But what Jean sought there was a protection, a shelter, a refuge.

The day of that memorable conversation on marriage without love, Bettina had also, for the first time, felt suddenly awake in her that necessity of loving which sleeps, but not very profoundly, in the hearts of all young girls. The sensation had been the same, at the same moment, in the soul of Bettina and the soul of Jean. He, terrified, had cast it violently from him. She, on the contrary, had yielded, in all the simplicity of her perfect innocence, to this flood of emotion and of tenderness.

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She had waited for love. Could this be love? The man who was to be her thought, her life, her soul—could this be he—this Jean? Why not? She knew him better than she knew all those who, during the past year, had haunted her for her fortune, and in what she knew of him there was nothing to discourage the love of a good girl. Far from it!

Both of them did well; both of them were in the way of duty and of truth—she, in yielding; he, in resisting; she, in not thinking for a moment of the obscurity of Jean; he, in recoiling before her mountain of wealth as he would have recoiled before a crime; she, in thinking that she had no right to parley with love; he, in thinking he had no right to parley with honor.

This is why, in proportion as Bettina showed herself more tender, and abandoned herself with more frankness to the first call of love—this is why Jean became, day by day, more gloomy and more restless. He was not only afraid of loving; he was afraid of being loved.

He ought to have remained away; he should not have come near her. He had tried; he could not; the temptation was too strong; it carried him away; so he came. She would come to him, her hands extended, a smile on her lips, and her heart in her eyes. Everything in her said:

“Let us try to love each other, and if we can love, we will!”

Fear seized him. Those two hands which offered themselves to the pressure of his hands, he hardly dared touch them. He tried to escape those eyes which, tender and smiling, anxious and curious, tried to meet his eyes. He trembled before the necessity of speaking to Bettina, before the necessity of listening to her.

It was then that Jean took refuge with Mrs. Scott, and it was then that Mrs. Scott gathered those uncertain, agitated, troubled words which were not addressed to her, and which she took for herself, nevertheless. It would have been difficult not to be mistaken.

For of these still vague and confused sentiments which agitated her, Bettina had as yet said nothing. She guarded and caressed the secret of her budding love, as a miser guards and caresses the first coins of his treasure. The day when she should see clearly into her own heart; the day that she should be sure that she loved—ah! she would speak that day, and how happy she should be to tell all to Susie!

Mrs. Scott had ended by attributing to herself this melancholy of Jean, which, day by day, took a more marked character. She was flattered by it—a woman is never displeased at thinking herself beloved—and vexed at the same time. She held Jean in great esteem, in great affection; but she was greatly distressed at the thought that if he were sad and unhappy, it was because of her.

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Susie was, besides, conscious of her own innocence. With others she had sometimes been coquettish, very coquettish. To torment them a little, was that such a great crime? They had nothing to do, they were good-for-nothing, it occupied them while it amused her. It helped them to pass their time, and it helped her, too. But Susie had not to reproach herself for having flirted with Jean. She recognized his merit and his superiority; he was worth more than the others, he was a man to suffer seriously, and that was what Mrs. Scott did not wish. Already, two or three times, she had been on the point of speaking to him very seriously, very affectionately, but she had reflected Jean was going away for three weeks; on his return, if it were still necessary, she would read him a lecture, and would act in such a manner that love should not come and foolishly interfere in their friendship.

So Jean was to go the next day. Bettina had insisted that he should spend this last day at Longueval, and dine at the house. Jean had refused, alleging that he had much to do the night before his departure.

He arrived in the evening, about half-past ten; he came on foot. Several times on the way he had been inclined to return.

"If I had courage enough," he said to himself, "I would not see her again. I shall leave to-morrow, and return no more to Souvigny while she is there. My resolution is taken, and taken forever."

But he continued his way, he would see her again—for the last time.

As soon as he entered the drawing-room, Bettina hastened to him.

"It is you at last! How late you are!"

"I have been very busy."

"And you are going to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Early?"

"At five in the morning."

"You will go by the road which runs by the wall of the park, and goes through the village?"

"Yes, that is the way we shall go."

"Why so early in the morning? I would have gone out on the terrace to see you pass, and to wish you good-by."

Bettina detained for a moment Jean's burning hand in hers. He drew it mournfully away, with an effort.

"I must go and speak to your sister," said he.

"Directly, she has not seen you, there are a dozen persons round her. Come and sit here a little while, near me."

He was obliged to seat himself beside her.

"We are going away, too," said she.

"You!"

"Yes. An hour ago, we received a telegram from my brother-in-law, which has caused us great joy. We did not expect him for a month, but he is coming back in a fortnight. He will embark the day after to-morrow at New York, on board the Labrador. We are going to meet him at Havre. We shall also start the day after to-morrow; we are going to take the children, it will do them a great deal of good to spend a few days at the seaside. How pleased my brother-in-law will be to know you—he knows you already, we have spoken of you in all our letters. I am sure you and Mr. Scott will get on extremely well together, he is so good. How long shall you stay away?"

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"Three weeks."

"Three weeks in a camp?"

"Yes, Miss Percival, in the camp of Cercottes."

"In the middle of the forest of Orleans. I made your godfather explain all about it to me this morning. Of course I am delighted to go to meet my brother-in-law; but at the same time, I am a little sorry to leave here, for I should have gone every morning to pay a little visit to Monsieur l'Abbe. He would have given me news of you. Perhaps, in about ten days, you will write to my sister—a little note of three or four lines—it will not take much of your time—just to tell her how you are, and that you do not forget us."

"Oh, as to forgetting you, as to losing the remembrance of your extreme kindness, your goodness, never, Miss Percival, never!"

His voice trembled, he was afraid of his own emotion, he rose.

"I assure you, Miss Percival, I must go and speak to your sister. She is looking at me. She must be astonished."

He crossed the room, Bettina followed him with her eyes.

Mrs. Norton had just placed herself at the piano to play a waltz for the young people.

Paul de Lavardens approached Miss Percival.

"Will you do me the honor, Miss Percival?"

"I believe I have just promised this dance to Monsieur Jean," she replied.

"Well, if not to him, will you give it to me?"

"That is understood."

Bettina walked toward Jean, who had seated himself near Mrs. Scott.

"I have just told a dreadful story," said she. "Monsieur de Lavardens has asked me for this dance, and I replied that I had promised it to you. You would like it, wouldn't you?"

To hold her in his arms, to breathe the perfume of her hair—Jean felt his courage could not support this ordeal, he dared not accept.

"I regret extremely I can not, I am not well tonight; I persisted in coming because I would not leave without wishing you good-by, but dance, no, it is impossible!"

Mrs. Norton began the prelude of the waltz.

“Well,” said Paul, coming up quite joyful, “who is it to be, he or I?”

“You,” she said, sadly, without removing her eyes from Jean.

She was much disturbed, and replied without knowing well what she said. She immediately regretted having accepted, she would have liked to stay there, near him. But it was too late, Paul took her hand and led her away.

Jean rose; he looked at the two, Bettina and Paul, a haze floated before his eyes, he suffered cruelly.

“There is only one thing I can do,” thought he, “profit by this waltz, and go. To-morrow I will write a few lines to Mrs. Scott to excuse myself.”

He gained the door, he looked no more at Bettina; had he looked, he would have stayed.

But Bettina looked at him; and all at once she said to Paul:

“Thank you very much, but I am a little tired, let us stop, please. You will excuse me, will you not?”

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Paul offered his arm.

“No, thank you,” said she.

The door was just closing, Jean was no longer there. Bettina ran across the room. Paul remained alone, much surprised, understanding nothing of what had passed.

Jean was already at the hall-door, when he heard some one call—“Monsieur Jean! Monsieur Jean!”

He stopped and turned. She was near him.

“You are going without wishing me good-by?”

“I beg your pardon, I am very tired.”

“Then you must not walk home, the weather is threatening,” she extended her hand out-of-doors, “it is raining already.”

“Come and have a cup of tea in the little drawing-room, and I will tell them to drive you home,” and turning toward one of the footmen, “tell them to send a carriage round directly.”

“No, Miss Percival, pray, the open air will revive me. I must walk, let me go.”

“Go, then, but you have no greatcoat, take something to wrap yourself in.”

“I shall not be cold—while you with that open dress—I shall go to oblige you to go in.” And without even offering his hand, he ran quickly down the steps.

“If I touch her hand,” he thought, “I am lost, my secret will escape me.”

His secret! He did not know that Bettina read his heart like an open book.

When Jean had descended the steps, he hesitated one short moment, these words were upon his lips:

“I love you, I adore you, and that is why I will see you no more!”

But he did not utter these words, he fled away and was soon lost in the darkness.

Bettina remained there against the brilliant background made by the light from the hall. Great drops of rain, driven by the wind, swept across her bare shoulders and made her shiver; she took no notice, she distinctly heard her heart beat.

"I knew very well that he loved me," she thought, "but now I am very sure, that I, too—oh! yes! I, too!—"

All at once, in one of the great mirrors in the hall door, she saw the reflection of the two footmen who stood there motionless, near the oak table in the hall. Bettina heard bursts of laughter and the strains of the waltz; she stopped. She wished to be alone, completely alone, and addressing one of the servants, she said:

"Go and tell your mistress that I am very tired, and have gone to my own room."

Annie, her maid, had fallen asleep, in an easy-chair. She sent her away. She would undress herself. She let herself sink on a couch, she was oppressed with delicious emotion.

The door of her room opened, it was Mrs. Scott.

"You are not well, Bettina?"

"Oh, Susie, is it you, my Susie? how nice of you to come. Sit here, close to me, quite close to me."

She hid herself like a child in the arms of her sister, caressing with her burning brow Susie's fresh shoulders. Then she suddenly burst into sobs, great sobs, which stifled, suffocated her.

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"Bettina, my darling, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing! it is nothing, it is joy—joy!"

"Joy?"

"Yes, yes, wait—let me cry a little, it will do me so much good. But do not be frightened, do not be frightened."

Beneath her sister's caress, Bettina grew calm, soothed.

"It is over, I am better now, and I can talk to you. It is about Jean."

"Jean! You call him Jean?"

"Yes, I call him Jean. Have you not noticed for some time that he was dull and looked quite melancholy?"

"Yes, I have."

"When he came, he went and posted himself near you, and stayed there, silent, absorbed to such a degree, that for several days I asked myself—pardon me for speaking to you with such frankness, it is my way, you know—I asked myself if it were not you whom he loved, Susie; you are so charming, it would have been so natural! But no, it was not you, it was I!"

"You?"

"Yes, I. Listen, he scarcely dared to look at me, he avoided me, he fled from me, he was afraid of me, evidently afraid. Now, in justice, am I a person to inspire fear? I am sure I am not!"

"Certainly not!"

"Ah! it was not I of whom he was afraid, it was my money, my horrid money! This money which attracts all the others and tempts them so much, this money terrifies him, drives him desperate, because he is not like the others, because he—"

"My child, take care, perhaps you are mistaken."

"Oh, no, I am not mistaken! Just now, at the door, when he was going away, he said some words to me. These words were nothing. But if you had seen his distress in spite of all his efforts to control it! Susie, dear Susie, by the affection which I bear you, and God knows how great is that affection, this is my conviction, my absolute conviction—if, instead of being Miss Percival, I had been a poor little girl without a penny Jean would



then have taken my hand, and have told me that he loved me, and if he had spoken to me thus, do you know what I should have replied?"

"That you loved him, too?"

"Yes; and that is why I am so happy. With me it is a fixed idea that I must adore the man who will be my husband. Well! I don't say that I adore Jean, no, not yet; but still it is beginning, Susie, and it is beginning so sweetly."

"Bettina, it really makes me uneasy to see you in this state of excitement. I do not deny that Monsieur Reynaud is much attached to you—"

"Oh, more than that, more than that!"

"Loves you, if you like; yes, you are right, you are quite right. He loves you; and are you not worthy, my darling, of all the love that one can bear you? As to Jean—it is progressing decidedly, here am I also calling him Jean—well! you know what I think of him. I rank him very, very high. But in spite of that, is he really a suitable husband for you?"

"Yes, if I love him."

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"I am trying to talk sensibly to you, and you, on the contrary—Understand me, Bettina; I have an experience of the world which you can not have. Since our arrival in Paris, we have been launched into a very brilliant, very animated, very aristocratic society. You might have been already, if you had liked, marchioness or princess."

"Yes, but I did not like."

"It would not matter to you to be called Madame Reynaud?"

"Not in the least, if I love him."

"Ah! you return always to—"

"Because that is the true question. There is no other. Now I will be sensible in my turn. This question—I grant that this is not quite settled, and that I have, perhaps, allowed myself to be too easily persuaded. You see how sensible I am. Jean is going away tomorrow, I shall not see him again for three weeks. During these three weeks I shall have ample time to question myself, to examine myself, in a word, to know my own mind. Under my giddy manner, I am serious and thoughtful, you know that?"

"Oh, yes, I know it."

"Well, I will make this petition to you, as I would have addressed it to our mother had she been here. If, in three weeks, I say to you, 'Susie, I am certain that I love him,' will you allow me to go to him, myself, quite alone, and ask him if he will have me for his wife? That is what you did with Richard. Tell me, Susie, will you allow me?"

"Yes, I will allow you."

Bettina embraced her sister, and murmured these words in her ear:

"Thank you, mamma."

"Mamma, mamma! It was thus that you used to call me when you were a child, when we were alone in the world together, when I used to undress you in our poor room in New York, when I held you in my arms, when I laid you in your little bed, when I sang you to sleep. And since then, Bettina, I have had only one desire in the world, your happiness. That is why I beg you to reflect well. Do not answer me, do not let us talk any more of that. I wish to leave you very calm, very tranquil. You have sent away Annie, would you like me to be your little mamma again tonight, to undress you, and put you to bed as I used to do?"

"Yes, I should like it very much."

"And when you are in bed, you promise me to be very good?"

"As good as an angel."

"You will do your best to go to sleep?"

"My very best."

"Very quietly, without thinking of anything?"

"Very quietly, without thinking of anything."

"Very well, then."

Ten minutes after, Bettina's pretty head rested gently amid embroideries and lace. Susie said to her sister:

"I am going down to those people who bore me dreadfully this evening. Before going to my own room, I shall come back and see if you are asleep. Do not speak. Go to sleep."

She went away. Bettina remained alone; she tried to keep her word; she endeavored to go to sleep, but only half-succeeded. She fell into a half-slumber which left her floating between dream and reality. She had promised to think of nothing, and yet she thought of him, always of him, of nothing but him, vaguely, confusedly.

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How long a time passed thus she could not tell.

All at once it seemed to her that some one was walking in her room; she half-opened her eyes, and thought she recognized her sister. In a very sleepy voice she said to her:

“You know I love him.”

“Hush! go to sleep.”

“I am asleep! I am asleep!”

At last she did fall sound asleep, less profoundly, however, than usual, for about four o'clock in the morning she was suddenly awakened by a noise, which, the night before, would not have disturbed her slumber. The rain fell in torrents, and beat against her window.

“Oh, it is raining!” she thought. “He will get wet.”

That was her first thought. She rose, crossed the room barefooted, half-opened the shutters. The day had broke, gray and lowering; the clouds were heavy with rain, the wind blew tempestuously, and drove the rain in gusts before it.

Bettina did not go back to bed, she felt it would be quite impossible to sleep again. She put on a dressing-gown, and remained at the window; she watched the falling rain. Since he positively must go, she would have liked the weather to be fine; she would have liked bright sunshine to have cheered his first day's march.

When she came to Longueval a month ago, Bettina did not know what this meant. But she knew it now. A day's march for the artillery is twenty or thirty miles, with an hour's halt for luncheon. It was the Abbe Constantin who had taught her that; when going their rounds in the morning among the poor, Bettina overwhelmed the Cure with questions on military affairs, and particularly on the artillery.

Twenty or thirty miles under this pouring rain! Poor Jean! Bettina thought of young Turner, young Norton, of Paul de Lavardens, who would sleep calmly till ten in the morning, while Jean was exposed to this deluge.

Paul de Lavardens!

This name awoke in her a painful memory, the memory of that waltz the evening before. To have danced like that, while Jean was so obviously in trouble! That waltz took the proportions of a crime in her eyes; it was a horrible thing that she had done.

And then, had she not been wanting in courage and frankness in that last interview with Jean? He neither could nor dared say anything; but she might have shown more

tenderness, more expansiveness. Sad and suffering as he was, she should never have allowed him to go back on foot. She ought to have detained him at any price. Her imagination tormented and excited her; Jean must have carried away with him the impression that she was a bad little creature, heartless and pitiless. And in half-an-hour he was going away, away for three weeks. Ah! if she could by any means—but there is a way! The regiment must pass along the wall of the park, under the terrace.

Bettina was seized with a wild desire to see Jean pass; he would understand well, if he saw her at such an hour, that she had come to beg his pardon for her cruelty of the previous evening. Yes, she would go! But she had promised to Susie to be as good as an angel, and to do what she was going to do, was that being as good as an angel? She would make up for it by acknowledging all to Susie when she came in again, and Susie would forgive her.

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She would go! She had made up her mind. Only how should she dress herself? She had nothing at hand but a muslin dressing-gown, little high-heeled slippers, and blue satin shoes. She might wake her maid. Oh, never would she dare to do that, and time pressed; a quarter to five! the regiment would start at five o'clock.

She might, perhaps, manage with the muslin dressing-gown, and the satin shoes; in the hall, she might find her hat, her little sabots which she wore in the garden, and the large tartan cloak for driving in wet weather. She half-opened her door with infinite precautions. Everything slept in the house; she crept along the corridor, she descended the staircase.

If only the little sabots are there in their place; that is her great anxiety. There they are! She slips them on over her satin shoes, she wraps herself in her great mantle.

She hears that the rain has redoubled in violence. She notices one of those large umbrellas which the footmen use on the box in wet weather; she seizes it; she is ready; but when she is ready to go, she sees that the hall-door is fastened by a great iron bar. She tries to raise it; but the bolt holds fast, resists all her efforts, and the great clock in the hall slowly strikes five. He is starting at that moment.

She will see him! she will see him! Her will is excited by these obstacles. She makes a great effort; the bar yields, slips back in the groove. But Bettina has made a long scratch on her hand, from which issues a slender stream of blood. Bettina twists her handkerchief round her hand, takes her great umbrella, turns the key in the lock; and opens the door.

At last she is out of the house!

The weather is frightful. The wind and the rain rage together. It takes five or six minutes to reach the terrace which looks over the road. Bettina darts forward courageously; her head bent, hidden under her immense umbrella, she has taken a few steps. All at once, furious, mad, blinding, a sudden squall bursts upon Bettina, buries her in her mantle, drives her along, lifts her almost from the ground, turns the umbrella violently inside out; that is nothing, the disaster is not yet complete.

Bettina has lost one of her little sabots; they were not practical sabots; they were only pretty little things for fine weather, and at this moment, when Bettina struggles against the tempest with her blue satin shoe half buried in the wet gravel, at this moment the wind bears to her the distant echo of a blast of trumpets. It is the regiment starting!

Bettina makes a desperate effort, abandons her umbrella, finds her little sabot, fastens it on as well as she can, and starts off running, with a deluge descending on her head.



At last, she is in the wood, the trees protect her a little. Another blast, nearer this time. Bettina fancies she hears the rolling of the gun-carriages. She makes a last effort, there is the terrace, she is there just in time.

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Twenty yards off she perceived the white horses of the trumpeters, and along the road caught glimpses, vaguely appearing through the fog, of the long line of guns and wagons.

She sheltered herself under one of the old limes which bordered the terrace. She watched, she waited. He is there among that confused mass of riders. Will she be able to recognize him? And he, will he see her? Will any chance make him turn his head that way?

Bettina knows that he is Lieutenant in the second battery of his regiment; she knows that a battery is composed of six guns, and six ammunition wagons. Of course it is the Abbe Constantin who has taught her that. Thus she must allow the first battery to pass, that is to say, count six guns, six wagons, and then—he will be there.

There he is at last, wrapped in his great cloak, and it is he who sees, who recognizes her first. A few moments before, he had recalled to his mind a long walk which he had taken with her one evening, when night was falling, on that terrace. He raised his eyes, and the very spot where he remembered having seen her, was the spot where he found her again. He bowed, and, bareheaded in the rain, turning round in his saddle, as long as he could see her, he looked at her. He said again to himself what he had said the previous evening:

“It is for the last time.”

With a charming gesture of both hands, she returned his farewell, and this gesture, repeated many times, brought her hands so near, so near her lips, that one might have fancied—

“Ah!” she thought, “if, after that, he does not understand that I love him, and does not forgive me my money!”

CHAPTER IX

THE REWARD OF TENDER COURAGE

It was the 20th of August, the day which should bring Jean back to Longueval.

Bettina awoke very early, rose, and ran immediately to the window. The evening before, the sky had looked threatening, heavy with clouds. Bettina slept but little, and all night prayed that it might not rain the next day.

In the early morning a dense fog enveloped the park of Longueval, the trees of which were hidden from view, as by a curtain. But gradually the rays of the sun dissipated the mist, the trees became vaguely discernible through the vapor; then, suddenly, the sun

shone brilliantly, flooding with light the park, and the fields beyond; and the lake, where the black swans were disporting themselves in the radiant light, appeared as bright as a sheet of polished metal.

The weather was going to be beautiful. Bettina was a little superstitious. The sunshine gives her good hope and good courage. "The day begins well, so it will finish well."

Mr. Scott had come home several days before. Susie, Betting, and the children waited on the quay at Havre for the arrival of his steamer.

They exchanged many tender embraces; then, Richard, addressing his sister-in-law, said, laughingly:

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"Well, when is the wedding to be?"

"What wedding?"

"Yours."

"My wedding?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And to whom am I about to be married?"

"To Monsieur Jean Reynaud."

"Ah! Susie has written to you?"

"Susie? Not at all. Susie has not said a word. It is you, Bettina, who have written to me. For the last two months, all your letters have been occupied with this young officer."

"All my letters?"

"Yes, and you have written to me oftener and more at length than usual. I do not complain of that, but I do ask when you are going to present me with a brother-in-law?"

He spoke jestingly, but Bettina replied:

"Soon, I hope."

Mr. Scott perceived that the affair was serious. When returning in the carriage, Bettina asked Mr. Scott if he had kept her letters.

"Certainly," he replied.

She read them again. It was indeed only with "Jean" that all these letters have been filled. She found therein related, down to the most trifling details, their first meeting. There was the portrait of Jean in the vicarage garden, with his straw hat and his earthenware salad-dish—and then it was again Monsieur Jean, always Monsieur Jean. She discovered that she had loved him much longer than she had suspected. At last it was the 10th of August. Luncheon was just over, and Harry and Bella were impatient. They knew that between one and two o'clock the regiment must pass through the village. They had been promised that they should be taken to see the soldiers pass, and for them, as well as for Bettina, the return of the 9th Artillery was a great event.

"Aunt Betty," said Bella, "Aunt Betty, come with us."

"Yes, do come," said Harry, "do come, we shall see our friend Jean, on his big gray horse."

Bettina resisted, refused—and yet how great was the temptation. But no, she would not go, she would not see Jean again till the evening, when she would give him that decisive explanation for which she had been preparing herself for the last three weeks. The children went away with their governesses. Bettina, Susie, and Richard went to sit in the park, quite close to the castle, and as soon as they were established there:

"Susie," said Bettina, "I am going to remind you today of your promise; you remember what passed between us the night of his departure; we settled that if, on the day of his return, I could say to you, 'Susie, I am sure that I love him,' we settled that you would allow me to speak frankly to him, and ask him if he would have me for his wife."

"Yes, I did promise you. But are you very sure?"

"Absolutely—and now the time has come to redeem your promise. I warn you that I intend to bring him to this very place," she added, smiling, "to this seat; and to use almost the same language to him that you formerly used to Richard. You were successful, Susie, you are perfectly happy, and I—that is what I wish to be."

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"Richard, Susie has told you about Monsieur Reynaud."

"Yes, and she has told me that there is no man of whom she has a higher opinion, but —"

"But she has told you that for me it would be a rather quiet, rather commonplace marriage. Oh, naughty sister! Will you believe it, Richard, that I can not get this fear out of her head? She does not understand that, before everything, I wish to love and be loved; will you believe it, Richard, that only last week she laid a horrible trap for me? You know that there exists a certain Prince Romanelli."

"Yes, I know you might have been a princess."

"That would not have been immensely difficult, I believe. Well, one day I was so foolish as to say to Susie, that, in extremity, I might accept the Prince Romanelli. Now, just imagine what she did. The Turners were at Trouville, Susie had arranged a little plot. We lunched with the Prince, but the result was disastrous. Accept him! The two hours that I passed with him, I passed in asking myself how I could have said such a thing. No, Richard; no, Susie; I will be neither princess, nor marchioness, nor countess. My wish is to be Madame Jean Reynaud; if, however, Monsieur Jean Reynaud will agree to it, and that is by no means certain."

The regiment entered the village, and suddenly military music burst martial and joyous across the space. All three remained silent, it was the regiment, it was Jean who passed; the sound became fainter, died away, and Bettina continued:

"No, that is not certain. He loves me, however, and much, but without knowing well what I am; I think that I deserve to be loved differently; I think that I should not cause him so much terror, so much fear, if he knew me better, and that is why I ask you to permit me to speak to him this evening freely, from my heart."

"We will allow you," replied Richard, "you shall speak to him freely, for we know, both of us, Bettina, that you will never do anything that is not noble and generous."

"At least, I shall try."

The children ran up to them; they had seen Jean, he was quite white with dust, he said good-morning to them.

"Only," added Bella, "he is not very nice, he did not stop to talk to us; usually he stops, but this time he wouldn't."

"Yes, he would," replied Harry, "for at first he seemed as if he were going to—and then he would not, he went away."

“Well, he didn’t stop, and it is so nice to talk to a soldier, especially when he is on horseback.”

“It is not that only, it is that we are very fond of Monsieur Jean; if you knew, papa, how kind he is, and how nicely he plays with us.”

“And what beautiful drawings he makes. Harry, you remember that great Punch who was so funny, with his stick, you know?”

“And the dog, there was the little dog, too, as in the show.”

The two children went away talking of their friend Jean.

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"Decidedly," said Mr. Scott, "every one likes him in this house."

"And you will be like every one else when you know him," replied Bettina.

The regiment broke into a trot along the highroad, after leaving the village. There was the terrace where Bettina had been the other morning. Jean said to himself:

"Supposing she should be there."

He dreaded and hoped it at the same time. He raised his head, he looked, she was not there.

He had not seen her again, he would not see her again, for a long-time at least. He would start that very evening at six o'clock for Paris; one of the personages in the War Office was interested in him; he would try to get exchanged into another regiment.

Alone at Cercottes, Jean had had time to reflect deeply, and that was the result of his reflections. He could not, he must not, be Bettina Percival's husband.

The men dismounted at the barracks, Jean took leave of his Colonel, his comrades; all was over. He was free, he could go.

But he did not go; he looked around him. How happy he was three months ago, when he rode out of that great yard amid the noise of the cannon rolling over the pavement of Souvigny; but how sadly he should ride away to-day! Formerly his life was there; where would it be hereafter?

He returned, went to his own room, and wrote to Mrs. Scott; he told her that his duties obliged him to leave immediately, he could not dine at the castle, and begged Mrs. Scott to remember him to Miss Bettina. Bettina, ah! what trouble it cost him to write that name. He closed his letter; he would send it directly.

He made his preparations for departure; then he went to wish his godfather farewell. That is what cost him most; he must speak to him only of a short absence.

He opened one of the drawers of his bureau to take out some money. The first thing that met his eyes was a little note on bluish paper; it was the only note which he had ever received from her.

"Will you have the kindness to give to the servant the book of which you spoke yesterday evening. Perhaps it will be a little serious for me, but yet I should like to try to read it. We shall see you to-night; come as early as possible." It was signed "Bettina."

Jean read and re-read these few lines, but soon he could read them no longer, his eyes were dim.

"It is all that is left me of her," he thought.

At the same moment the Abbe Constantin was tete-a-tete with old Pauline, they were making up their accounts. The financial situation was admirable; more than 2,000 francs in hand! And the wishes of Susie and Bettina were accomplished, there were no more poor in the neighborhood. His old servant, Pauline, had even occasional scruples of conscience.

"You see, Monsieur le Cure," said she, "perhaps we give them a little too much. Then it will be spread about in other parishes that here they can always find charity. And do you know what will happen then, one of these days? Poor people will come and settle in Longueval."

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The Cure gave fifty francs to Pauline. She went to take them to a poor man who had broken his arm a few days before, by falling from the top of a hay-cart.

The Abbe Constantin remained alone in the vicarage. He was rather anxious. He had watched for the passing of the regiment; but Jean only stopped for a moment, he looked sad. For some time, the Abbe had noticed that Jean had no longer the flow of good-humor and gayety he once possessed.

The Cure did not disturb himself too much about it, believing it to be one of those little youthful troubles which did not concern a poor old priest. But, on this occasion, Jean's disturbance was very perceptible.

"I will come back directly," he said to the Cure, "I want to speak to you."

He turned abruptly away. The Abbe Constantin had not even had time to give Loulou his piece of sugar, or rather his pieces of sugar, for he had put five or six in his pocket, considering that Loulou had well deserved this feast by ten long days' march, and a score of nights passed under the open sky.

Besides, since Mrs. Scott had lived at Longueval, Loulou had very often had several pieces of sugar; the Abbe Constantin had become extravagant, prodigal; he felt himself a millionaire, the sugar for Loulou was one of his follies. One day, even, he had been on the point of addressing to Loulou his everlasting little speech:

"This comes from the new mistresses of Longueval; pray for them to-night."

It was three o'clock when Jean arrived at the vicarage, and the Cure said, immediately:

"You told me that you wanted to speak to me; what is it about?"

"About something, my dear godfather, which will surprise you, will grieve you—"

"Grieve me!"

"Yes, and which grieves me, too—I have come to bid you farewell."

"Farewell! you are going away?"

"Yes, I am going away."

"When?"

"To-day, in two hours."

"In two hours? But, my dear boy, you were going to dine at the castle to-night."

"I have just written to Mrs. Scott to excuse me. I am positively obliged to go."

"Directly?"

"Directly."

"And where are you going?"

"To Paris."

"To Paris! Why this sudden determination?"

"Not so very sudden! I have thought about it for a long time."

"And you have said nothing about it to me! Jean, something has happened. You are a man, and I have no longer the right to treat you as a child; but you know how much I love you; if you have vexations, troubles, why not tell them to me? I could perhaps advise you. Jean, why go to Paris?"

"I did not wish to tell you, it will give you pain; but you have the right to know. I am going to Paris to ask to be exchanged into another regiment."

"Into another regiment! To leave Souvigny!"

"Yes, that is just it; I must leave Souvigny for a short time, for a little while only; but to leave Souvigny is necessary, it is what I wish above all things."

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"And what about me, Jean, do you not think of me? A little while! A little while! But that is all that remains to me of life, a little while. And during these last days, that I owe to the grace of God, it was my happiness, yes, Jean, my happiness, to feel you here, near me, and now you are going away! Jean, wait a little patiently, it can not be for very long now for. Wait until the good God has called me to himself, wait till I shall be gone, to meet there, at his side, your father and your mother. Do not go, Jean, do not go."

"If you love me, I love you, too, and you know it well."

"Yes, I know it."

"I have just the same affection for you now that I had when I was quite little, when you took me to yourself, when you brought me up. My heart has not changed, will never change. But if duty—if honor—oblige me to go?"

"Ah, if it is duty, if it is honor, I say nothing more, Jean, that stands before all!—all!—all! I have always known you a good judge of your duty, your honor. Go, my boy, go, I ask you nothing more, I wish to know no more."

"But I wish to tell you all," cried Jean, vanquished by his emotion, "and it is better that you should know all. You will stay here, you will return to the castle, you will see her again—her!"

"See her! Who?"

"Bettina!"

"Bettina?"

"I adore her, I adore her!"

"Oh, my poor boy!"

"Pardon me for speaking to you of these things; but I tell you as I would have told my father."

"And then, I have not been able to speak of it to any one, and it stifled me; yes, it is a madness which has seized me, which has grown upon me, little by little, against my will, for you know very-well—My God! It was here that I began to love her. You know, when she came here with her sister—with the little 'rouleaux' of francs—her hair fell down—and then the evening, the month of Mary! Then I was permitted to see her freely, familiarly, and you, yourself, spoke to me constantly of her. You praised her sweetness, her goodness. How often have you told me that there was no one in the world better than she is!"



“And I thought it, and I think it still. And no one here knows her better than I do, for it is I alone who have seen her with the poor. If you only knew how tender, and how good she is! Neither wretchedness nor suffering repulse her. But, my dear boy, I am wrong to tell you all this.”

“No, no, I will see her no more, I promise you; but I like to hear you speak of her.”

“In your whole life, Jean, you will never meet a better woman, nor one who has more elevated sentiments. To such a point, that one day—she had taken me with her in an open carriage, full of toys—she was taking these toys to a poor sick little girl, and when she gave them to her, to make the poor little thing laugh, to amuse her, she talked so prettily to her that I thought of you, and I said to myself, I remember it now, ‘Ah, if she were poor!’”

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"Ah! if she were poor, but she is not."

"Oh, no! But what can you do, my poor child! If it gives you pain to see her, to live near her; above all, if it will prevent you suffering—go, go—and yet, and yet—"

The old priest became thoughtful, let his head fall between his hands, and remained silent for some moments; then he continued:

"And yet, Jean, do you know what I think? I have seen a great deal of Mademoiselle Bettina since she came to Longueval. Well—when I reflect—it did not astonish me that any one should be interested in you, for it seemed so natural—but she talked always, yes, always of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, of you, and of your father and mother; she was curious to know how you lived. She begged me to explain to her what a soldier's life was, the life of a true soldier, who loved his profession, and performed his duties conscientiously."

"It is extraordinary, since you have told me this, recollections crowd upon me, a thousand little things collect and group themselves together. They returned from Havre yesterday at three o'clock. Well! an hour after their arrival she was here. And it was of you of whom she spoke directly. She asked if you had written to me, if you had not been ill, when you would arrive, at what hour, if the regiment would pass through the village?"

"It is useless at this moment, my dear godfather," said Jean, "to recall all these memories."

"No, it is not useless. She seemed so pleased, so happy even, that she should see you again! She would make quite a fete of the dinner this evening. She would introduce you to her brother-in-law, who has come back. There is no one else in the house at this moment, not a single visitor. She insisted strongly on this point, and I remember her last words—she was there, on the threshold of the door:

"'There will be only five of us,' she said, 'you and Monsieur Jean, my sister, my brother-in-law, and myself.'"

"And then she added, laughing, 'Quite a family party.'"

"With these words she went, she almost ran away. Quite a family party! Do you know what I think, Jean? Do you know?"

"You must not think that, you must not."

“Jean, I believe that she loves you.”

“And I believe it, too.”

“You, too!”

“When I left her, three weeks ago, she was so agitated, so moved! She saw me sad and unhappy, she would not let me go. It was at the door of the castle. I was obliged to tear myself, yes, literally tear myself away. I should have spoken, burst out, told her all. After I had gone a few steps, I stopped and turned. She could no longer see me, I was lost in the darkness; but I could see her. She stood there motionless, her shoulders and arms bare, in the rain, her eyes fixed on the way by which I had gone. Perhaps I am mad to think that. Perhaps it was only a feeling of pity. But no, it was something more than pity, for do you know what she did the next morning? She came at five o’clock, in the most frightful weather, to see me pass with the regiment—and then—the way she bade me adieu—oh, my friend, my dear old friend!”

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"But then," said the poor Cure, completely bewildered, completely at a loss, "but then, I do not understand you at all. If you love her, Jean, and if she loves you?"

"But that is, above all, the reason why I must go. If it were only I, if I were certain that she has not perceived my love, certain that she has not been touched by it, I would stay, I would stay—for nothing but for the sweet joy of seeing her, and I would love her from afar, without any hope, for nothing but the happiness of loving her. But no, she has understood too well, and far from discouraging me—that is what forces me to go."

"No, I do not understand it! I know well, my poor boy, we are speaking of things in which I am no great scholar, but you are both good, young, and charming; you love her, she would love you, and you will not!"

"And her money! her money!"

"What matters her money? If it is only that, is it because of her money that you have loved her? It is rather in spite of her money. Your conscience, my son, would be quite at peace with regard to that, and that would suffice."

"No, that would not suffice. To have a good opinion of one's self is not enough; that opinion must be shared by others."

"Oh, Jean! Among all who know you, who can doubt you?"

"Who knows? And then there is another thing besides this question of money, another thing more serious and more grave. I am not the husband suited to her."

"And who could be more worthy than you?"

"The question to be considered is not my worth; we have to consider what she is and what I am, to ask what ought to be her life, and what ought to be my life."

"One day, Paul—you know he has rather a blunt way of saying things, but that very bluntness often places thoughts much more distinctly before us—Paul was speaking of her; he did not suspect anything; if he had, he is good-natured, he would not have spoken thus—well, he said to me:

"What she needs is a husband who would be entirely devoted to her, to her alone, a husband who would have no other care than to make her existence a perpetual holiday, a husband who would give himself, his whole life, in return for her money."

"You know me; such a husband I can not, I must not be. I am a soldier, and shall remain one. If the chances of my career sent me some day to a garrison in the depths of the Alps, or in some almost unknown village in Algeria, could I ask her to follow me? Could I condemn her to the life of a soldier's wife, which is in some degree the life of a

soldier himself? Think of the life which she leads now, of all that luxury, of all those pleasures!"

"Yes," said the Abbe, "that is more serious than the question of money."

"So serious that there is no hesitation possible. During the three weeks that I passed alone in the camp, I have well considered all that; I have thought of nothing else, and loving her as I do love, the reason must indeed be strong which shows me clearly my duty. I must go, I must go far, very far away, as far as possible. I shall suffer much, but I must not see her again! I must not see her again!"

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Jean sank on a chair near the fireplace. He remained there quite overpowered with his emotion. The old priest looked at him.

“To see you suffer, my poor boy! That such suffering should fall upon you! It is too cruel, too unjust!”

At that moment some one knocked gently at the door.

“Ah!” said the Cure, “do not be afraid, Jean. I will send them away.”

The Abbe went to the door, opened it, and recoiled as if before an unexpected apparition.

It was Bettina. In a moment she had seen Jean, and going direct to him:

“You!” cried she. “Oh, how glad I am!”

He rose. She took his hands, and addressing the Cure, she said:

“I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Cure, for going to him first. You, I saw yesterday, and him, not for three whole weeks, not since a certain night, when he left our house, sad and suffering.”

She still held Jean’s hands. He had neither power to make a movement nor to utter a sound.

“And now,” continued Betting, “are you better? No, not yet, I can see, still sad. Ah, I have done well to come! It was an inspiration! However, it embarrasses me a little, it embarrasses me a great deal, to find you here. You will understand why when you know what I have come to ask of your godfather.”

She relinquished his hands, and turning toward the Abbe, said:

“I have come to beg you to listen to my confession—yes, my confession. But do not go away, Monsieur Jean; I will make my confession publicly. I am quite willing to speak before you, and now I think of it, it will be better thus. Let us sit down, shall we?”

She felt herself full of confidence and daring. She burned with fever, but with that fever which, on the field of battle, gives to a soldier ardor, heroism, and disdain of danger. The emotion which made Bettina’s heart beat quicker than usual was a high and generous emotion. She said to herself:

“I will be loved! I will love! I will be happy! I will make him happy! And since he has not sufficient courage to do it, I must have it for both. I must march alone, my head high, and my heart at ease, to the conquest of our love, to the conquest of our happiness!”



From her first words Bettina had gained over the Abbe and Jean a complete ascendancy. They let her say what she liked, they let her do as she liked, they felt that the hour was supreme; they understood that what was happening would be decisive, irrevocable, but neither was in a position to foresee.

They sat down obediently, almost automatically; they waited, they listened. Alone, of the three, Bettina retained her composure. It was in a calm and even voice that she began.

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"I must tell you first, Monsieur le Cure, to set your conscience quite at rest, I must tell you that I am here with the consent of my sister and my brother-in-law. They know why I have come; they know what I am about to do. They not only know, but they approve. That is settled, is it not? Well, what brings me here is your letter, Monsieur Jean, that letter in which you tell my sister that you can not dine with us this evening, and that you are positively obliged to leave here. This letter has unsettled all my plans. I had intended, this evening—of course with the permission of my sister and brother-in-law—I had intended, after dinner, to take you into the park, to seat myself with you on a bench; I was childish enough to choose the place beforehand."

"There I should have delivered a little speech, well prepared, well studied, almost learned by heart, for since your departure I have scarcely thought of anything else; I repeat it to myself from morning to night. That is what I had proposed to do, and you understand that your letter caused me much embarrassment. I reflected a little, and thought that if I addressed my little speech to your godfather it would be almost the same as if I addressed it to you. So I have come, Monsieur le Cure, to beg you to listen to me."

"I will listen to you, Miss Percival," stammered the Abbe.

"I am rich, Monsieur le Cure, I am very rich, and to speak frankly I love my wealth very much—yes, very much. To it I owe the luxury which surrounds me, luxury which, I acknowledge—it is a confession—is by no means disagreeable to me. My excuse is that I am still very young; it will perhaps pass as I grow older, but of that I am not very sure. I have another excuse; it is, that if I love money a little for the pleasure that it procures me, I love it still more for the good which it allows me to do. I love it—selfishly, if you like—for the joy of giving, but I think that my fortune is not very badly placed in my hands. Well, Monsieur le Cure, in the same way that you have the care of souls, it seems that I have the care of money. I have always thought, 'I wish, above all things, that my husband should be worthy of sharing this great fortune. I wish to be very sure that he will make a good use of it with me while I am here, and after me, if I must leave this world first.' I thought of another thing; I thought, 'He who will be my husband must be some one I can love!' And now, Monsieur le Cure, this is where my confession really begins. There is a man, who for the last two months, has done all he can to conceal from me that he loves me; but I do not doubt that this man loves me. You do love me, Jean?"

"Yes," said Jean, in a low voice, his eyes cast down, looking like a criminal, "I do love you!"

"I knew it very well, but I wanted to hear you say it, and now I entreat you, do not utter a single word. Any words of yours would be useless, would disturb me, would prevent me from going straight to my aim, and telling you what I positively intend to say. Promise me to stay there, sitting still, without moving, without speaking. You promise me?"

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"I promise you."

Bettina, as she went on speaking, began to lose a little of her confidence, her voice trembled slightly. She continued, however, with a gayety that was a little forced:

"Monsieur le Cure, I do not blame you for what has happened, yet all this is a little your fault."

"My fault!"

"Ah! do not speak, not even you. Yes, I repeat it, your fault. I am certain that you have spoken well of me to Jean, much too well. Perhaps, without that, he would not have thought—And at the same time you have spoken very well of him to me. Not too well—no, no—but yet very well! Then, I had so much confidence in you, that I began to look at him, and examine, him with a little more attention. I began to compare him with those who, during the last year, had asked my hand. It seemed to me that he was in every respect superior to them.

"At last, it happened, on a certain day, or rather on a certain evening—three weeks ago, the evening before you left here, Jean—I discovered that I loved you. Yes, Jean, I love you! I entreat you, do not speak; stay where you are; do not come near me.

"Before I came here, I thought I had supplied myself with a good stock of courage, but you see I have no longer my fine composure of a minute ago. But I have still something to tell you, and the most important of all. Jean, listen to me well; I do not wish for a reply torn from your emotion; I know that you love me. If you marry me, I do not wish it to be only for love; I wish it to be also for reason. During the fortnight before you left here, you took so much pains to avoid me, to escape any conversation, that I have not been able to show myself to you as I am. Perhaps there are in me certain qualities which you do not suspect.

"Jean, I know what you are, I know to what I should bind myself in marrying you, and I should be for you not only the loving and tender woman, but the courageous and constant wife. I know your entire life; your godfather has related it to me. I know why you became a soldier; I know what duties, what sacrifices, the future may demand from you. Jean, do not suppose that I shall turn you from any of these duties, from any of these sacrifices. If I could be disappointed with you for anything, it would be, perhaps, for this thought—oh, you must have had it!—that I should wish you free, and quite my own, that I should ask you to abandon your career. Never! never! Understand well, I shall never ask such a thing of you.

"A young girl whom I know did that when she married, and she did wrong. I love you, and I wish you to be just what you are. It is because you live differently from, and better than, those who have before desired me for a wife, that I desire you for a husband. I



should love you less—perhaps I should not love you at all, though that would be very difficult—if you were to begin to live as all those live whom I would not have. When I can follow you, I will follow you; wherever you are will be my duty, wherever you are will be my happiness. And if the day comes when you can not take me, the day when you must go alone, well! Jean, on that day, I promise you to be brave, and not take your courage from you.

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“And now, Monsieur le Cure, it is not to him, it is to you that I am speaking; I want you to answer me, not him. Tell me, if he loves me, and feels me worthy of his love, would it be just to make me expiate so severely the fortune that I possess? Tell me, should he not agree to be my husband?”

“Jean,” said the old priest, gravely, “marry her. It is your duty, and it will be your happiness!”

Jean approached Bettina, took her in his arms, and pressed upon her brow the first kiss.

Bettina gently freed herself, and addressing the Abbe, said:

“And now, Monsieur l’Abbe, I have still one thing to ask you. I wish—I wish—”

“You wish?”

“Pray, Monsieur le Cure, embrace me, too.”

The old priest kissed her paternally on both cheeks, and then Bettina continued:

“You have often told me, Monsieur le Cure, that Jean was almost like your own son, and I shall be almost like your own daughter, shall I not? So you will have two children, that is all.”

.....

A month after, on the 12th of September, at mid-day, Bettina, in the simplest of wedding-gowns, entered the church of Longueval, while, placed behind the altar, the trumpets of the 9th Artillery rang joyously through the arches of the old church.

Nancy Turner had begged for the honor of playing the organ on this solemn occasion, for the poor little harmonium had disappeared; an organ, with resplendent pipes, rose in the gallery of the church—it was Miss Percival’s wedding present to the Abbe Constantin.

The old Cure said mass, Jean and Bettina knelt before him, he pronounced the benediction, and then remained for some moments in prayer, his arms extended, calling down, with his whole soul, the blessings of Heaven on his two children.

Then floated from the organ the same reverie of Chopin’s which Bettina had played the first time that she had entered that little village church, where was to be consecrated the happiness of her life.

And this time it was Bettina who wept.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Love and tranquillity seldom dwell at peace in the same heart
One may think of marrying, but one ought not to try to marry

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire abbe Constantin:

Ancient pillars of stone, embrowned and gnawed by time
And they are shoulders which ought to be seen
Believing themselves irresistible
But she will give me nothing but money
Duty, simply accepted and simply discharged
Frenchman has only one real luxury—his revolutions
God may have sent him to purgatory just for form's sake
Great difference between dearly and very much
Had not told all—one never does tell all
He led the brilliant

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and miserable existence of the unoccupied

If there is one! (a paradise)

In order to make money, the first thing is to have no need of it

Love and tranquillity seldom dwell at peace in the same heart

Never foolish to spend money. The folly lies in keeping it

Often been compared to Eugene Sue, but his touch is lighter

One half of his life belonged to the poor

One may think of marrying, but one ought not to try to marry

Succeeded in wearying him by her importunities and tenderness

The women have enough religion for the men

The history of good people is often monotonous or painful

To learn to obey is the only way of learning to command

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By *Francois Coppee*

With a Preface by *Jose de Heredia*, of the French Academy

FRANCOIS COPPEE

Francois Edouard Joachim Coppee was born in Paris, January 12, 1842. His father was a minor 'employe' in the French War Office; and, as the family consisted of six the parents, three daughters, and a son (the subject of this essay)—the early years of the poet were not spent in great luxury. After the father's death, the young man himself entered the governmental office with its monotonous work. In the evening he studied hard at St. Genevieve Library. He made rhymes, had them even printed (*Le Reliquaire*, 1866); but the public remained indifferent until 1869, when his comedy in verse, 'Le Passant', appeared. From this period dates the reputation of Coppee—he woke up one morning a "celebrated man."

Like many of his countrymen, he is a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, and a writer of fiction. He was elected to the French Academy in 1884. Smooth shaven, of placid figure, with pensive eyes, the hair brushed back regularly, the head of an artist, Coppee can be seen any day looking over the display of the Parisian secondhand booksellers on the Quai Malaquais; at home on the writing-desk, a page of carefully prepared manuscript, yet sometimes covered by cigarette-ashes; upon the wall, sketches by Jules Lefebvre and Jules Breton; a little in the distance, the gaunt form of his attentive sister and companion, Annette, occupied with household cares, ever fearful of disturbing him. Within this tranquil domicile can be heard the noise of the Parisian faubourg with

its thousand different dins; the bustle of the street; the clatter of a factory; the voice of the workshop; the cries of the pedlers intermingled with the chimes of the bells of a near-by convent-a confusing buzzing noise, which the author, however, seems to enjoy; for Coppee is Parisian by birth, Parisian by education, a Parisian of the Parisians.

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If as a poet we contemplate him, Coppee belongs to the group commonly called “Parnassiens”—not the Romantic School, the sentimental lyric effusion of Lamartine, Hugo, or De Musset! When the poetical lute was laid aside by the triad of 1830, it was taken up by men of quite different stamp, of even opposed tendencies. Observation of exterior matters was now greatly adhered to in poetry; it became especially descriptive and scientific; the aim of every poet was now to render most exactly, even minutely, the impressions received, or faithfully to translate into artistic language a thesis of philosophy, a discovery of science. With such a poetical doctrine, you will easily understand the importance which the “naturalistic form” henceforth assumed.

Coppee, however, is not only a maker of verses, he is an artist and a poet. Every poem seems to have sprung from a genuine inspiration. When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about, and the result is that his poetry is nearly always interesting. Moreover, he respects the limits of his art; for while his friend and contemporary, M. Sully-Prudhomme, goes astray habitually into philosophical speculation, and his immortal senior, Victor Hugo, often declaims, if one may venture to say so, in a manner which is tedious, Coppee sticks rigorously to what may be called the proper regions of poetry.

Francois Coppee is not one of those superb high priests disdainful of the throng: he is the poet of the “humble,” and in his work, ‘Les Humbles’, he paints with a sincere emotion his profound sympathy for the sorrows, the miseries, and the sacrifices of the meek. Again, in his ‘Grave des Forgerons, Le Naufrage, and L’Epave’, all poems of great extension and universal reputation, he treats of simple existences, of unknown unfortunates, and of sacrifices which the daily papers do not record. The coloring and designing are precise, even if the tone be somewhat sombre, and nobody will deny that Coppee most fully possesses the technique of French poetry.

But Francois Coppee is known to fame as a prosewriter, too. His ‘Contes en prose’ and his ‘Vingt Contes Nouveaux’ are gracefully and artistically told; scarcely one of the ‘contes’ fails to have a moral motive. The stories are short and naturally slight; some, indeed, incline rather to the essay than to the story, but each has that enthralling interest which justifies its existence. Coppee possesses preeminently the gift of presenting concrete fact rather than abstraction. A sketch, for instance, is the first tale written by him, ‘Une Idylle pendant le Seige’ (1875). In a novel we require strong characterization, great grasp of character, and the novelist should show us the human heart and intellect in full play and activity. In 1875 appeared also ‘Olivier’, followed by ‘L’Exilee’ (1876); ‘Recits et Elegies’ (1878); ‘Vingt Contes Nouveaux’ (1883); and ‘Toute une Jeunesse’, mainly an autobiography, crowned by acclaim by the Academy. ‘Le Coupable’

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was published in 1897. Finally, in 1898, appeared 'La Bonne Souffrance'. In the last-mentioned work it would seem that the poet, just recovering from a severe malady, has returned to the dogmas of the Catholic Church, wherefrom he, like so many of his contemporaries, had become estranged when a youth. The poems of 1902, 'Dans la Priere et dans la Lutte', tend to confirm the correctness of this view.

Thanks to the juvenile Sarah Bernhardt, Coppee became, as before mentioned, like Byron, celebrated in one night. This happened through the performance of 'Le Passant'.

As interludes to the plays there are "occasional" theatrical pieces, written for the fiftieth anniversary of the performance of 'Hernani' or the two-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the "Comedie Francaise." This is a wide field, indeed, which M. Coppee has cultivated to various purposes.

Take Coppee's works in their sum and totality, and the world-decree is that he is an artist, and an admirable one. He plays upon his instrument with all power and grace. But he is no mere virtuoso. There is something in him beyond the executant. Of Malibran, Alfred de Musset says, most beautifully, that she had that "voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart." Here, also, behind the skilful player on language, the deft manipulator of rhyme and rhythm, the graceful and earnest writer, one feels the beating of a human heart. One feels that he is giving us personal impressions of life and its joys and sorrows; that his imagination is powerful because it is genuinely his own; that the flowers of his fancy spring spontaneously from the soil. Nor can I regard it as aught but an added grace that the strings of his instrument should vibrate so readily to what is beautiful and unselfish and delicate in human feeling.

Jose de Heredia
de l'Academie Francaise.

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

ON THE BALCONY

As far back as Amedee Violette can remember, he sees himself in an infant's cap upon a fifth-floor balcony covered with convolvulus; the child was very small, and the balcony

seemed very large to him. Amedee had received for a birthday present a box of water-colors, with which he was sprawled out upon an old rug, earnestly intent upon his work of coloring the woodcuts in an odd volume of the 'Magasin Pittoresque', and wetting his brush from time to time in his mouth. The neighbors in the next apartment had a right to one-half of the balcony. Some one in there was playing upon the piano Marcailhou's Indiana Waltz, which was all the rage at that time. Any man, born about the year 1845, who does not feel the tears of homesickness rise to his eyes as he turns over the pages of an old number of the 'Magasin Pittoresque', or who hears some one play upon an old piano Marcailhou's Indiana Waltz, is not endowed with much sensibility.

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When the child was tired of putting the “flesh color” upon the faces of all the persons in the engravings, he got up and went to peep through the railings of the balustrade. He saw extending before him, from right to left, with a graceful curve, the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, one of the quietest streets in the Luxembourg quarter, then only half built up. The branches of the trees spread over the wooden fences, which enclosed gardens so silent and tranquil that passers by could hear the birds singing in their cages.

It was a September afternoon, with a broad expanse of pure sky across which large clouds, like mountains of silver, moved in majestic slowness.

Suddenly a soft voice called him:

“Amedee, your father will return from the office soon. We must wash your hands before we sit down to the table, my darling.”

His mother came out upon the balcony for him. His mother; his dear mother, whom he knew for so short a time! It needs an effort for him to call her to mind now, his memories are so indistinct. She was so modest and pretty, so pale, and with such charming blue eyes, always carrying her head on one side, as if the weight of her lovely chestnut hair was too heavy for her to bear, and smiling the sweet, tired smile of those who have not long to live! She made his toilette, kissed him upon his forehead, after brushing his hair. Then she laid their modest table, which was always decorated with a pretty vase of flowers. Soon the father entered. He was one of those mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them.

He tried to be gay when he entered his own house. He raised his little boy aloft with one arm, before kissing him, exclaiming, “Houp la!” A moment later he kissed his young wife and held her close to him, tenderly, as he asked, with an anxious look:

“Have you coughed much to-day?”

She always replied, hanging her head like a child who tells an untruth, “No, not very much.”

The father would then put on an old coat—the one he took off was not very new. Amedee was then seated in a high chair before his mug, and the young mother, going into the kitchen, would bring in the supper. After opening his napkin, the father would brush back behind his ear with his hand a long lock on the right side, that always fell into his eyes.

“Is there too much of a breeze this evening? you afraid to go out upon the balcony, Lucie? Put a shawl on, then,” said M. Violette, while his wife was pouring the water remaining in the carafe upon a box where some nasturtiums were growing.



“No, Paul, I am sure—take Amedee down from his chair, and let us go out upon the balcony.”

It was cool upon this high balcony. The sun had set, and now the great clouds resembled mountains of gold, and a fresh odor came up from the surrounding gardens.

“Good-evening, Monsieur Violette,” suddenly said a cordial voice. “What a fine evening!”

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It was their neighbor, M. Gerard, an engraver, who had also come to take breath upon his end of the balcony, having spent the entire day bent over his work. He was large and bald-headed, with a good-natured face, a red beard sprinkled with white hairs, and he wore a short, loose coat. As he spoke he lighted his clay pipe, the bowl of which represented Abd-el-Kader's face, very much colored, save the eyes and turban, which were of white enamel.

The engraver's wife, a dumpy little woman with merry eyes, soon joined her husband, pushing before her two little girls; one, the smaller of the two, was two years younger than Amedee; the other was ten years old, and already had a wise little air. She was the pianist who practised one hour a day Marcailhou's Indiana Waltz.

The children chattered through the trellis that divided the balcony in two parts. Louise, the elder of the girls, knew how to read, and told the two little ones very beautiful stories: Joseph sold by his brethren; Robinson Crusoe discovering the footprints of human beings.

Amedee, who now has gray hair upon his temples, can still remember the chills that ran down his back at the moment when the wolf, hidden under coverings and the grandmother's cap, said, with a gnashing of teeth, to little Red Riding Hood: "All the better to eat you with, my child."

It was almost dark then upon the terrace. It was all delightfully terrible!

During this time the two families, in their respective parts of the balcony, were talking familiarly together. The Violettes were quiet people, and preferred rather to listen to their neighbors than to talk themselves, making brief replies for politeness' sake—"Ah!" "Is it possible?" "You are right."

The Gerards liked to talk. Madame Gerard, who was a good housekeeper, discussed questions of domestic economy; telling, for example, how she had been out that day, and had seen, upon the Rue du Bac, some merino: "A very good bargain, I assure you, Madame, and very wide!" Or perhaps the engraver, who was a simple politician, after the fashion of 1848, would declare that we must accept the Republic, "Oh, not the red-hot, you know, but the true, the real one!" Or he would wish that Cavaignac had been elected President at the September balloting; although he himself was then engraving—one must live, after all—a portrait of Prince Louis Napoleon, destined for the electoral platform. M. and Madame Violette let them talk; perhaps even they did not always pay attention to the conversation. When it was dark they held each other's hands and gazed at the stars.

These lovely, cool, autumnal evenings, upon the balcony, under the starry heavens, are the most distant of all Amedee's memories. Then there was a break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out, after which he recalls many sad days.

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Winter had come, and they no longer spent their evenings upon the balcony. One could see nothing now through the windows but a dull, gray sky. Amedee's mother was ill and always remained in her bed. When he was installed near the bed, before a little table, cutting out with scissors the hussars from a sheet of Epinal, his poor mamma almost frightened him, as she leaned her elbow upon the pillow and gazed at him so long and so sadly, while her thin white hands restlessly pushed back her beautiful, disordered hair, and two red hectic spots burned under her cheekbones.

It was not she who now came to take him from his bed in the morning, but an old woman in a short jacket, who did not kiss him, and who smelled horribly of snuff.

His father, too, did not pay much attention to him now. When he returned in the evening from the office he always brought bottles and little packages from the apothecary. Sometimes he was accompanied by the physician, a large man, very much dressed and perfumed, who panted for breath after climbing the five flights of stairs. Once Amedee saw this stranger put his arms around his mother as she sat in her bed, and lay his head for a long time against her back. The child asked, "What for, mamma?"

M. Violette, more nervous than ever, and continually throwing back the rebellious lock behind his ear, would accompany the doctor to the door and stop there to talk with him. Then Amedee's mother would call to him, and he would climb upon the bed, where she would gaze at him with her bright eyes and press him to her breast, saying, in a sad tone, as if she pitied him: "My poor little Medee! My poor little Medee!" Why was it? What did it all mean?

His father would return with a forced smile which was pitiful to see.

"Well, what did the doctor say?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! You are much better. Only, my poor Lucie, we must put on another blister to-night."

Oh, how monotonous and slow these days were to the little Amedee, near the drowsy invalid, in the close room smelling of drugs, where only the old snuff-taker entered once an hour to bring a cup of tea or put charcoal upon the fire!

Sometimes their neighbor, Madame Gerard, would come to inquire after the sick lady.

"Still very feeble, my good Madame Gerard," his mother would respond. "Ah, I am beginning to get discouraged."

But Madame Gerard would not let her be despondent.

"You see, Madame Violette, it is this horrible, endless winter. It is almost March now; they are already selling boxes of primroses in little carts on the sidewalks. You will



surely be better as soon as the sun shines. If you like, I will take little Amedee back with me to play with my little girls. It will amuse the child.”

So it happened that the good neighbor kept the child every afternoon, and he became very fond of the little Gerard children.

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Four little rooms, that is all; but with a quantity of old, picturesque furniture; engravings, casts, and pictures painted by comrades were on the walls; the doors were always open, and the children could always play where they liked, chase each other through the apartments or pillage them. In the drawing-room, which had been transformed into a work-room, the artist sat upon a high stool, point in hand; the light from a curtainless window, sifting through the transparent paper, made the worthy man's skull shine as he leaned over his copper plate. He worked hard all day; with an expensive house and two girls to bring up, it was necessary. In spite of his advanced opinions, he continued to engrave his Prince Louis—"A rogue who is trying to juggle us out of a Republic." At the very most, he stopped only two or three times a day to smoke his Abu-el-Kader. Nothing distracted him from his work; not even the little ones, who, tired of playing their piece for four hands upon the piano, would organize, with Amedee, a game of hide-and-seek close by their father, behind the old Empire sofa ornamented with bronze lions' heads. But Madame Gerard, in her kitchen, where she was always cooking something good for dinner, sometimes thought they made too great an uproar. Then Maria, a real hoyden, in trying to catch her sister, would push an old armchair against a Renaissance chest and make all the Rouen crockery tremble.

"Now then, now then, children!" exclaimed Madame Gerard, from the depths of her lair, from which escaped a delicious odor of bacon. "Let your father have a little quiet, and go and play in the dining-room."

They obeyed; for there they could move chairs as they liked, build houses of them, and play at making calls. Did ever anybody have such wild ideas at five years of age as this Maria? She took the arm of Amedee, whom she called her little husband, and went to call upon her sister and show her her little child, a pasteboard doll with a large head, wrapped up in a napkin.

"As you see, Madame, it is a boy."

"What do you intend to make of him when he grows up?" asked Louise, who lent herself complacently to the play, for she was ten years old and quite a young lady, if you please.

"Why, Madame," replied Maria, gravely, "he will be a soldier."

At that moment the engraver, who had left his bench to stretch his legs a little and to light his Abd-el-Kader for the third time, came and stood at the threshold of his room. Madame Gerard, reassured as to the state of her stew, which was slowly cooking—and oh, how good it smelled in the kitchen!—entered the dining-room. Both looked at the children, so comical and so graceful, as they made their little grimaces! Then the husband glanced at his wife, and the wife at the husband, and both burst out into hearty laughter.

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There never was any laughter in the apartment of the Violettes. It was cough! cough! cough! almost to suffocation, almost to death! This gentle young woman with the heavy hair was about to die! When the beautiful starry evenings should come again, she would no longer linger on the balcony, or press her husband's hand as they gazed at the stars. Little Amedee did not understand it; but he felt a vague terror of something dreadful happening in the house. Everything alarmed him now. He was afraid of the old woman who smelled of snuff, and who, when she dressed him in the morning, looked at him with a pitying air; he was afraid of the doctor, who climbed the five flights of stairs twice a day now, and left a whiff of perfume behind him; afraid of his father, who did not go to his office any more, whose beard was often three days old, and who feverishly paced the little parlor, tossing back with a distracted gesture the lock of hair behind his ear. He was afraid of his mother, alas! of his mother, whom he had seen that evening, by the light from the night-lamp, buried in the pillows, her delicate nose and chin thrown up, and who did not seem to recognize him, in spite of her wide-open eyes, when his father took her child in his arms and leaned over her with him that he might kiss her cold forehead covered with sweat!

At last the terrible day arrived, a day that Amedee never will forget, although he was then a very small child.

What awakened him that morning was his father's embrace as he came and took him from his bed. His father's eyes were wild and bloodshot from so much crying. Why was their neighbor, M. Gerard, there so early in the morning, and with great tears rolling down his cheeks too? He kept beside M. Violette, as if watching him, and patted him upon the back affectionately, saying:

"Now then, my poor friend! Have courage, courage!"

But the poor friend had no more. He let M. Gerard take the child from him, and then his head fell like a dead person's upon the good engraver's shoulder, and he began to weep with heavy sobs that shook his whole body.

"Mamma! See mamma!" cried the little Amedee, full of terror.

Alas! he never will see her again! At the Gerards, where they carried him and the kind neighbor dressed him, they told him that his mother had gone for a long time, a very long time; that he must love his papa very much and think only of him; and other things that he could not understand and dared not ask the meaning of, but which filled him with consternation.

It was strange! The engraver and his wife busied themselves entirely with him, watching him every moment. The little ones, too, treated him in a singular, almost respectful manner. What had caused such a change? Louise did not open her piano, and when little Maria wished to take her "menagerie" from the lower part of the buffet,

Madame Gerard said sharply, as she wiped the tears from her eyes: "You must not play to-day."

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After breakfast Madame Gerard put on her hat and shawl and went out, taking Amedee with her. They got into a carriage that took them through streets that the child did not know, across a bridge in the middle of which stood a large brass horseman, with his head crowned with laurel, and stopped before a large house and entered with the crowd, where a very agile and rapid young man put some black clothes on Amedee.

On their return the child found his father seated at the dining-room table with M. Gerard, and both of them were writing addresses upon large sheets of paper bordered with black. M. Violette was not crying, but his face showed deep lines of grief, and he let his lock of hair fall over his right eye.

At the sight of little Amedee, in his black clothes, he uttered a groan, and arose, staggering like a drunken man, bursting into tears again.

Oh, no! he never will forget that day, nor the horrible next day, when Madame Gerard came and dressed him in the morning in his black clothes, while he listened to the noise of heavy feet and blows from a hammer in the next room. He suddenly remembered that he had not seen his mother since two days before.

“Mamma! I want to see mamma!”

It was necessary then to try to make him understand the truth. Madame Gerard repeated to him that he ought to be very wise and good, and try to console his father, who had much to grieve him; for his mother had gone away forever; that she was in heaven.

In heaven! heaven is very high up and far off. If his mother was in heaven, what was it that those porters dressed in black carried away in the heavy box that they knocked at every turn of the staircase? What did that solemn carriage, which he followed through all the rain, quickening his childish steps, with his little hand tightly clasped in his father's, carry away? What did they bury in that hole, from which an odor of freshly dug earth was emitted—in that hole surrounded by men in black, and from which his father turned away his head in horror? What was it that they hid in this ditch, in this garden full of crosses and stone urns, where the newly budded trees shone in the March sun after the shower, large drops of water still falling from their branches like tears?

His mother was in heaven! On the evening of that dreadful day Amedee dared not ask to “see mamma” when he was seated before his father at the table, where, for a long time, the old woman in a short jacket had placed only two plates. The poor widower, who had just wiped his eyes with his napkin, had put upon one of the plates a little meat cut up in bits for Amedee. He was very pale, and as Amedee sat in his high chair, he asked himself whether he should recognize his mother's sweet, caressing look, some day, in one of those stars that she loved to watch, seated upon the balcony on cool September nights, pressing her husband's hand in the darkness.

CHAPTER II

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SAD CHANGES

Trees are like men; there are some that have no luck. A genuinely unfortunate tree was the poor sycamore which grew in the playground of an institution for boys on the Rue de la Grande-Chaumiere, directed by M. Batifol.

Chance might just as well have made it grow upon the banks of a river, upon some pretty bluff, where it might have seen the boats pass; or, better still, upon the mall in some garrison village, where it could have had the pleasure of listening twice a week to military music. But, no! it was written in the book of fate that this unlucky sycamore should lose its bark every summer, as a serpent changes its skin, and should scatter the ground with its dead leaves at the first frost, in the playground of the Batifol institution, which was a place without any distractions.

This solitary tree, which was like any other sycamore, middle-aged and without any singularities, ought to have had the painful feeling that it served in a measure to deceive the public. In fact, upon the advertisement of the Batifol institution (Cours du lycee Henri IV. Preparation au baccalaureat et aux ecoles de l'Etat), one read these fallacious words, "There is a garden;" when in reality it was only a vulgar court graveled with stones from the river, with a paved gutter in which one could gather half a dozen of lost marbles, a broken top, and a certain number of shoe-nails, and after recreation hours still more. This solitary sycamore was supposed to justify the illusion and fiction of the garden promised in the advertisement; but as trees certainly have common sense, this one should have been conscious that it was not a garden of itself.

It was a very unjust fate for an inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody; only expanding, at one side of the gymnasium portico, in a perfect rectangle formed by a prison wall, bristling with the glass of broken bottles, and by three buildings of distressing similarity, showing, above the numerous doors on the ground floor, inscriptions which merely to read induced a yawn: Hall 1, Hall 2, Hall 3, Hall 4, Stairway A, Stairway B, Entrance to the Dormitories, Dining-room, Laboratory.

The poor sycamore was dying of ennui in this dismal place. Its only happy seasons—the recreation hours, when the court echoed with the shouts and the laughter of the boys—were spoiled for it by the sight of two or three pupils who were punished by being made to stand at the foot of its trunk. Parisian birds, who are not fastidious, rarely lighted upon the tree, and never built their nests there. It might even be imagined that this disenchanted tree, when the wind agitated its foliage, would charitably say, "Believe me! the place is good for nothing. Go and make love elsewhere!"

In the shade of this sycamore, planted under an unlucky star, the greater part of Amedee's infancy was passed.

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M. Violette was an employe of the Ministry, and was obliged to work seven hours a day, one or two hours of which were devoted to going wearily through a bundle of probably superfluous papers and documents. The rest of the time was given to other occupations as varied as they were intellectual; such as yawning, filing his nails, talking about his chiefs, groaning over the slowness of promotion, cooking a potato or a sausage in the stove for his luncheon, reading the newspaper down to the editor's signature, and advertisements in which some country cure expresses his artless gratitude at being cured at last of an obstinate disease. In recompense for this daily captivity, M. Violette received, at the end of the month, a sum exactly sufficient to secure his household soup and beef, with a few vegetables.

In order that his son might attain such a distinguished position, M. Violette's father, a watch-maker in Chartres, had sacrificed everything, and died penniless. The Silvio Pellico official, during these exasperating and tiresome hours, sometimes regretted not having simply succeeded his father. He could see himself, in imagination, in the light little shop near the cathedral, with a magnifying-glass fixed in his eye, ready to inspect some farmer's old "turnip," and suspended over his bench thirty silver and gold watches left by farmers the week before, who would profit by the next market-day to come and get them, all going together with a merry tick. It may be questioned whether a trade as low as this would have been fitting for a young man of education, a Bachelor of Arts, crammed with Greek roots and quotations, able to prove the existence of God, and to recite without hesitation the dates of the reigns of Nabonassar and of Nabopolassar. This watch-maker, this simple artisan, understood modern genius better. This modest shopkeeper acted according to the democratic law and followed the instinct of a noble and wise ambition. He made of his son—a sensible and intelligent boy—a machine to copy documents, and spend his days guessing the conundrums in the illustrated newspapers, which he read as easily as M. Ledrain would decipher the cuneiform inscriptions on an Assyrian brick. Also—an admirable result, which should rejoice the old watch-maker's shade—his son had become a gentleman, a functionary, so splendidly remunerated by the State that he was obliged to wear patches of cloth, as near like the trousers as possible, on their seat; and his poor young wife, during her life, had always been obliged, as rent-day drew near, to carry the soup-ladle and six silver covers to the pawn-shop.

At all events, M. Violette was a widower now, and being busy all day was very much embarrassed with the care of his little son. His neighbors, the Gerards, were very kind to Amedee, and continued to keep him with them all the afternoon. This state of affairs could not always continue, and M. Violette hesitated to abuse his worthy friends' kindness in that way.

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However, Amedee gave them little trouble, and Mamma Gerard loved him as if he were her own. The orphan was now inseparable from little Maria, a perfect little witch, who became prettier every day. The engraver, having found in a cupboard the old bearskin cap which he had worn as a grenadier in the National Guard, a headdress that had been suppressed since '98, gave it to the children. What a magnificent plaything it was, and how well calculated to excite their imagination! It was immediately transformed in their minds into a frightfully large and ferocious bear, which they chased through the apartment, lying in wait for it behind armchairs, striking at it with sticks, and puffing out their little cheeks with all their might to say "Boum!" imitating the report of a gun. This hunting diversion completed the destruction of the old furniture. Tranquil in the midst of the joyous uproar and disorder, the engraver was busily at work finishing off the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor, and the large bullion epaulettes of the Prince President, whom, as a suspicious republican and foreseeing the 'coup d'etat', he detested with all his heart.

"Truly, Monsieur Violette," said Mother Gerard to the employe, when he came for his little son upon his return from the office, and excused himself for the trouble that the child must give his neighbors, "truly, I assure you, he does not disturb us in the least. Wait a little before you send him to school. He is very quiet, and if Maria did not excite him so—upon my word, she is more of a boy than he—your Amedee would always be looking at the pictures. My Louise hears him read every day two pages in the Moral Tales, and yesterday he amused Gerard by telling him the story of the grateful elephant. He can go to school later—wait a little."

But M. Violette had decided to send Amedee to M. Batifol's. "Oh, yes, as a day scholar, of course! It is so convenient; not two steps' distance. This will not prevent little Amedee from seeing his friends often. He is nearly seven years old, and very backward; he hardly knows how to make his letters. One can not begin with children too soon," and much more to the same effect.

This was the reason why, one fine spring day, M. Violette was ushered into M. Batifol's office, who, the servant said, would be there directly.

M. Batifol's office was hideous. In the three bookcases which the master of the house—a snob and a greedy schoolmaster—never opened, were some of those books that one can buy upon the quays by the running yard; for example, Laharpe's Cours de Litterature, and an endless edition of Rollin, whose tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings. The cylindrical office-table, one of those masterpieces of veneered mahogany which the Faubourg St. Antoine still keeps the secret of making, was surmounted by a globe of the world.

Suddenly, through the open window, little Amedee saw the sycamore in the yard. A young blackbird, who did not know the place, came and perched for an instant only upon one of its branches.

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We may fancy the tree saying to it:

“What are you doing here? The Luxembourg is only a short distance from here, and is charming. Children are there, making mud-pies, nurses upon the seats chattering with the military, lovers promenading, holding hands. Go there, you simpleton!”

The blackbird flew away, and the university tree, once more solitary and alone, drooped its dispirited leaves. Amedee, in his confused childish desire for information, was just ready to ask why this sycamore looked so morose, when the door opened and M. Batifol appeared. The master of the school had a severe aspect, in spite of his almost indecorous name. He resembled a hippopotamus clothed in an ample black coat. He entered slowly and bowed in a dignified way to M. Violette, then seated himself in a leather armchair before his papers, and, taking off his velvet skull-cap, revealed such a voluminous round, yellow baldness that little Amedee compared it with terror to the globe on the top of his desk.

It was just the same thing! These two round balls were twins! There was even upon M. Batifol's cranium an eruption of little red pimples, grouped almost exactly like an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean.

“Whom have I the honor—?” asked the schoolmaster, in an unctuous voice, an excellent voice for proclaiming names at the distribution of prizes.

M. Violette was not a brave man. It was very foolish, but when the senior clerk called him into his office to do some work, he was always seized with a sort of stammering and shaking of the limbs. A person so imposing as M. Batifol was not calculated to give him assurance. Amedee was timid, too, like his father, and while the child, frightened by the resemblance of the sphere to M. Batifol's bald head, was already trembling, M. Violette, much agitated, was trying to think of something to say, consequently, he said nothing of any account. However, he ended by repeating almost the same things he had said to Mamma Gerard: “My son is nearly seven years old, and very backward, *etc.*”

The teacher appeared to listen to M. Violette with benevolent interest, inclining his geographical cranium every few seconds. In reality, he was observing and judging his visitors. The father's scanty overcoat, the rather pale face of the little boy, all betokened poverty. It simply meant a day scholar at thirty francs a month, nothing more. So M. Batifol shortened the “speech” that under like circumstances he addressed to his new pupils.

He would take charge of his “young friend” (thirty francs a month, that is understood, and the child will bring his own luncheon in a little basket) who would first be placed in an elementary class. Certain fathers prefer, and they have reason to do so, that their sons should be half-boarders, with a healthful and abundant repast at noon. But M.

Batifol did not insist upon it. His young friend would then be placed in the infant class, at first;

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but he would be prepared there at once, 'ab ovo', one day to receive lessons in this University of France, 'alma parens' (instruction in foreign languages not included in the ordinary price, naturally), which by daily study, competition between scholars (accomplishments, such as dancing, music, and fencing, to be paid for separately; that goes without saying) prepare children for social life, and make men and citizens of them.

M. Violette contented himself with the day school at thirty francs, and for a good reason. The affair was settled. Early the next morning Amedee would enter the "ninth preparatory."

"Give me your hand, my young friend," said the master, as father and son arose to take their leave.

Amedee reached out his hand, and M. Batifol took it in his, which was so heavy, large, and cold that the child shivered at the contact, and fancied he was touching a leg of mutton of six or seven pounds' weight, freshly killed, and sent from the butcher's.

Finally they left. Early the next morning, Amedee, provided with a little basket, in which the old snuff-taker had put a little bottle of red wine, and some sliced veal, and jam tarts, presented himself at the boarding-school, to be prepared without delay for the teaching of the 'alma parens'.

The hippopotamus clothed in black did not take off his skullcap this time, to the child's great regret, for he wished to assure himself if the degrees of latitude and longitude were checked off in squares on M. Batifol's cranium as they were on the terrestrial globe. He conducted his pupil to his class at once and presented him to the master.

"Here is a new day scholar, Monsieur Tavernier. You will find out how far advanced he is in reading and writing, if you please." M. Tavernier was a tall young man with a sallow complexion, a bachelor who, had he been living like his late father, a sergeant of the gendarmes, in a pretty house surrounded by apple trees and green grass, would not, perhaps, have had that 'papier-mache' appearance, and would not have been dressed at eight o'clock in the morning in a black coat of the kind we see hanging in the Morgue. M. Tavernier received the newcomer with a sickly smile, which disappeared as soon as M. Batifol left the room.

"Go and take your place in that empty seat there, in the third row," said M. Tavernier, in an indifferent tone.

He deigned, however, to conduct Amedee to the seat which he was to occupy. Amedee's neighbor, one of the future citizens preparing for social life—several with



patches upon their trousers—had been naughty enough to bring into class a handful of cockchafer. He was punished by a quarter of an hour's standing up, which he did soon after, sulking at the foot of the sycamore-tree in the large court.

"You will soon see what a cur he is," whispered the pupil in disgrace; as soon as the teacher had returned to his seat.

M. Tavernier struck his ruler on the edge of his chair, and, having reestablished silence, invited pupil Godard to recite his lesson.

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Pupil Godard, who was a chubby-faced fellow with sleepy eyes, rose automatically and in one single stream, like a running tap, recited, without stopping to take breath, "The Wolf and the Lamb," rolling off La Fontaine's fable like the thread from a bobbin run by steam.

"The-strongest-reason-is-always-the-best-and-we-wil
I-prove-it-at-once-a-lamb-was-quenching-his-thirst-in-a-stream-of-pure-running-water—"

Suddenly Godard was confused, he hesitated. The machine had been badly oiled. Something obstructed the bobbin.

"In-a-stream-of-pure-running-water-in-a stream—"

Then he stopped short, the tap was closed. Godard did not know his lesson, and he, too, was condemned to remain on guard under the sycamore during recess.

After pupil Godard came pupil Grosdidier; then Blanc, then Moreau (Gaston), then Moreau (Ernest), then Malepert; then another, and another, who babbled with the same intelligence and volubility, with the same piping voice, this cruel and wonderful fable. It was as irritating and monotonous as a fine rain. All the pupils in the "ninth preparatory" were disgusted for fifteen years, at least, with this most exquisite of French poems.

Little Amedee wanted to cry; he listened with stupefaction blended with fright as the scholars by turns unwound their bobbins. To think that to-morrow he must do the same! He never would be able. M. Tavernier frightened him very much, too. The yellow-complexioned usher, seated nonchalantly in his armchair, was not without pretension; in spite of his black coat with the "take-me-out-of-pawn" air, polished his nails, and only opened his mouth at times to utter a reprimand or pronounce sentence of punishment.

This was school, then! Amedee recalled the pleasant reading-lessons that the eldest of the Gerards had given him—that good Louise, so wise and serious and only ten years old, pointing out his letters to him in a picture alphabet with a knitting-needle, always so patient and kind. The child was overcome at the very first with a disgust for school, and gazed through the window which lighted the room at the noiselessly moving, large, indented leaves of the melancholy sycamore.

CHAPTER III

PAPA AND MAMMA GERARD

One, two, three years rolled by without anything very remarkable happening to the inhabitants of the fifth story.

The quarter had not changed, and it still had the appearance of a suburban faubourg. They had just erected, within gunshot of the house where the Violettes and Gerards lived, a large five-story building, upon whose roof still trembled in the wind the masons' withered bouquets. But that was all. In front of them, on the lot "For Sale," enclosed by rotten boards, where one could always see tufts of nettles and a goat tied to a stake, and upon the high wall above which by the end of April the lilacs hung in their perfumed clusters, the rains had not effaced this brutal declaration of love, scraped with a knife in the plaster: "When Melie wishes she can have me," and signed "Eugene."

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Three years had passed, and little Amedee had grown a trifle. At that time a child born in the centre of Paris—for example, in the labyrinth of infected streets about the Halles—would have grown up without having any idea of the change of seasons other than by the state of the temperature and the narrow strip of sky which he could see by raising his head. Even today certain poor children—the poor never budge from their hiding-places—learn of the arrival of winter only by the odor of roasted chestnuts; of spring, by the boxes of gilly-flowers in the fruiterer's stall; of summer, by the water-carts passing, and of autumn, by the heaps of oyster-shells at the doors of wine-shops. The broad sky, with its confused shapes of cloud architecture, the burning gold of the setting sun behind the masses of trees, the enchanting stillness of moonlight upon the river, all these grand and magnificent spectacles are for the delight of those who live in suburban quarters, or play there sometimes. The sons of people who work in buttons and jet spend their infancy playing on staircases that smell of lead, or in courts that resemble wells, and do not suspect that nature exists. At the outside they suspect that nature may exist when they see the horses on Palm Sunday decorated with bits of boxwood behind each ear. What matters it, after all, if the child has imagination? A star reflected in a gutter will reveal to him an immense nocturnal poem; and he will breathe all the intoxication of summer in the full-blown rose which the grisette from the next house lets fall from her hair.

Amedee had had the good fortune of being born in that delicious and melancholy suburb of Paris which had not yet become "Hausmannized," and was full of wild and charming nooks.

His father, the widower, could not be consoled, and tried to wear out his grief in long promenades, going out on clear evenings, holding his little boy by the hand, toward the more solitary places. They followed those fine boulevards, formerly in the suburbs, where there were giant elms, planted in the time of Louis XIV, ditches full of grass, ruined palisades, showing through their opening market-gardens where melons glistened in the rays of the setting sun. Both were silent; the father lost in reveries, Amedee absorbed in the confused dreams of a child. They went long distances, passing the Barriere d'Enfer, reaching unknown parts, which produced the same effect upon an inhabitant of Rue Montmartre as the places upon an old map of the world, marked with the mysterious words 'Mare ignotum', would upon a savant of the Middle Ages. There were many houses in this ancient suburb; curious old buildings, nearly all of one story.

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Sometimes they would pass a public-house painted in a sinister wine-color; or else a garden hedged in by acacias, at the fork of two roads, with arbors and a sign consisting of a very small windmill at the end of a pole, turning in the fresh evening breeze. It was almost country; the grass grew upon the sidewalks, springing up in the road between the broken pavements. A poppy flashed here and there upon the tops of the low walls. They met very few people; now and then some poor person, a woman in a cap dragging along a crying child, a workman burdened with his tools, a belated invalid, and sometimes in the middle of the sidewalk, in a cloud of dust, a flock of exhausted sheep, bleating desperately, and nipped in the legs by dogs hurrying them toward the abattoir. The father and son would walk straight ahead until it was dark under the trees; then they would retrace their steps, the sharp air stinging their faces. Those ancient hanging street-lamps, the tragic lanterns of the time of the Terror, were suspended at long intervals in the avenue, mingling their dismal twinkle with the pale gleams of the green twilight sky.

These sorrowful promenades with his melancholy companion would commonly end a tiresome day at Batifol's school. Amedee was now in the "seventh," and knew already that the phrase, "the will of God," could not be turned into Latin by 'bonitas divina', and that the word 'cornu' was not declinable. These long, silent hours spent at his school-desk, or beside a person absorbed in grief, might have become fatal to the child's disposition, had it not been for his good friends, the Gerards. He went to see them as often as he was able, a spare hour now and then, and most of the day on Thursdays. The engraver's house was always full of good-nature and gayety, and Amedee felt comfortable and really happy there.

The good Gerards, besides their Louise and Maria, to say nothing of Amedee, whom they looked upon as one of the family, had now taken charge of a fourth child, a little girl, named Rosine, who was precisely the same age as their youngest.

This was the way it happened. Above the Gerards, in one of the mansards upon the sixth floor, lived a printer named Combarieu, with his wife or mistress—the concierge did not know which, nor did it matter much. The woman had just deserted him, leaving a child of eight years. One could expect nothing better of a creature who, according to the concierge, fed her husband upon pork-butcher's meat, to spare herself the trouble of getting dinner, and passed the entire day with uncombed hair, in a dressing-sacque, reading novels, and telling her fortune with cards. The grocer's daughter declared she had met her one evening, at a dancing-hall, seated with a fireman before a salad-bowl full of wine, prepared in the French fashion.

During the day Combarieu, although a red-hot Republican, sent his little girl to the Sisters; but he went out every evening with a mysterious air and left the child alone. The concierge even uttered in a low voice, with the romantic admiration which that class of people have for conspirators, the terrible word "secret society," and asserted that the printer had a musket concealed under his straw bed.

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These revelations were of a nature to excite M. Gerard's sympathy in favor of his neighbor, for the coup d'état and the proclamation of the Empire had irritated him very much. Had it not been his melancholy duty to engrave, the day after the second of December—he must feed his family first of all—a Bonapartist allegory entitled, "The Uncle and the Nephew," where one saw France extending its hand to Napoleon I and Prince Louis, while soaring above the group was an eagle with spreading wings, holding in one of his claws the cross of the Legion of Honor?

One day the engraver asked his wife, as he lighted his pipe—he had given up Abd-el-Kader and smoked now a Barbes—if they ought not to interest themselves a little in the abandoned child. It needed nothing more to arouse the good woman, who had already said more than once: "What a pity!" as she saw little Rosine waiting for her father in the lodge of the concierge, asleep in a chair before the stove. She coaxed the child to play with her children. Rosine was very pretty, with bright eyes, a droll little Parisian nose, and a mass of straw-colored curly hair escaping from her cap. The little rogue let fly quite often some gutter expression, such as "Hang it!" or "Tol-derol-dol!" at which Madame Gerard would exclaim, "What do I hear, Mademoiselle?" but she was intelligent and soon corrected herself.

One Sunday morning, Combarieu, having learned of their kindness to his child, made a visit to thank them.

Very dark, with a livid complexion, all hair and beard, and trying to look like the head of Jesus Christ, in his long black blouse he embodied the type of a club conspirator, a representative of the workingmen. A Freemason, probably; a solemn drunkard, who became intoxicated oftener on big words than on native wine, and spoke in a loud, pretentious voice, gazing before him with large, stupid eyes swimming in a sort of ecstasy; his whole person made one think of a boozy preacher. He immediately inspired the engraver with respect, and dazzled him by the fascination which the audacious exert over the timid. M. Gerard thought he discerned in Combarieu one of those superior men whom a cruel fate had caused to be born among the lower class and in whom poverty had stifled genius.

Enlightened as to the artist's political preferences by the bowl of his pipe, Combarieu complacently eulogized himself. Upon his own admission he had at first been foolish enough to dream of a universal brotherhood, a holy alliance of the people. He had even written poems which he had published himself, notably an "Ode to Poland," and an "Epistle to Beranger," which latter had evoked an autograph letter from the illustrious song-writer. But he was no longer such a simpleton.

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"When one has seen what we have seen during June, and on the second of December, there is no longer any question of sentiment." Here the engraver, as a hospitable host, brought a bottle of wine and two glasses. "No, Monsieur Gerard, I thank you, I take nothing between my meals. The workingmen have been deceived too often, and at the next election we shall not let the bourgeoisie strangle the Republic." (M. Gerard had now uncorked the bottle.) "Only a finger! Enough! Enough! simply so as not to refuse you. While waiting, let us prepare ourselves. Just now the Eastern question muddles us, and behold 'Badinguet,'—[A nickname given to Napoleon III.]—with a big affair upon his hands. You have some wine here that is worth drinking. If he loses one battle he is done for. One glass more? Ah! you make me depart from my usual custom—absolutely done for. But this time we shall keep our eyes open. No half measures! We will return to the great methods of 'ninety-three—the Committee of Public Safety, the Law of Suspects, the Revolutionary Tribunal, every damned one of them! and, if it is necessary, a permanent guillotine! To your good health!"

So much energy frightened Father Gerard a little; for in spite of his Barbes pipe-bowl he was not a genuine red-hot Republican. He dared not protest, however, and blushed a little as he thought that the night before an editor had proposed to him to engrave a portrait of the new Empress, very décolleté, and showing her famous shoulders, and that he had not said No; for his daughters needed new shoes, and his wife had declared the day before that she had not a gown to put on.

So for several months he had four children—Amedee, Louise, Maria, and little Rose Combarieu—to make a racket in his apartment. Certainly they were no longer babies; they did not play at making calls nor chase the old fur hat around the room; they were more sensible, and the old furniture had a little rest. And it was time, for all the chairs were lame, two of the larger ones had lost an arm each, and the Empire sofa had lost the greater part of its hair through the rents in its dark-green velvet covering. The unfortunate square piano had had no pity shown it; more out of tune and asthmatic than ever, it was now always open, and one could read above the yellow and worn-out keyboard a once famous name—"Sebastian Erard, Manufacturer of Pianos and Harps for S.A.R. Madame la Duchesse de Berri." Not only Louise, the eldest of the Gerards—a large girl now, having been to her first communion, dressing her hair in bands, and wearing white waists—not only Louise, who had become a good musician, had made the piano submit to long tortures, but her sister Maria, and Amedee also, already played the 'Bouquet de Bal' or 'Papa, les p'tits bateaux'. Rosine, too, in her character of street urchin, knew all the popular songs, and spent entire hours in picking out the airs with one finger upon the old instrument.

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Ah! the songs of those days, the last of romanticism, the make-believe 'Orientales'; 'Odes' and 'Ballads', by the dozen; 'Comes d'Espagne et d'Italie', with their pages, turrets, chatelaines; bull-fighters, Spanish ladies; vivandieres, beguiled away from their homes under the pale of the church, "near a stream of running water, by a gay and handsome chevalier," and many other such silly things—Amedee will remember them always! They bring back to him, clearly and strongly, certain happy hours in his childhood! They make him smell again at times even the odor that pervaded the Gerards' house. A mule-driver's song will bring up before his vision the engraver working at his plate before the curtainless window on a winter's day. It snows in the streets, and large white flakes are slowly falling behind the glass; but the room, ornamented with pictures and busts, is lighted and heated by a bright coke fire. Amedee can see himself seated in a corner by the fire, learning by heart a page of the "Epitome" which he must recite the next morning at M. Batifol's. Maria and Rosine are crouched at his feet, with a box of glass beads, which they are stringing into a necklace. It was comfortable; the whole apartment smelled of the engraver's pipe, and in the dining-room, whose door is half opened, Louise is at the piano, singing, in a fresh voice, some lines where "Castilla" rhymes with "mantilla," and "Andalousie" with "jealousy," while her agile fingers played on the old instrument an accompaniment supposed to imitate bells and castanets.

Or perhaps it is a radiant morning in June, and they are in the dining-room; the balcony door is open wide, and a large hornet buzzes loudly in the vine. Louise is still at the piano; she is singing this time, and trying to reach the low tones of a dramatic romance where a Corsican child is urged on to vengeance by his father:

Tiens, prends ma carabiue!
Sur toi veillera Dieu—

This is a great day, the day when Mamma Gerard makes her gooseberry preserves. There is a large basin already full of it on the table. What a delicious odor! A perfume of roses mingled with that of warm sugar. Maria and Rosine have just slipped into the kitchen, the gourmands! But Louise is a serious person, and will not interrupt her singing for such a trifle. She continues to sing in a low voice: and at the moment when Amedee stands speechless with admiration before her, as she is scolding in a terrible tone and playing dreadful chords, to and behold! here come the children, both with pink moustaches, and licking their lips voluptuously.

Ah! these were happy hours to Amedee. They consoled him for the interminable days at M. Batifol's.

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Having passed the ninth preparatory grade, under the direction of the indolent M. Tavernier, always busy polishing his nails, like a Chinese mandarin, the child had for a professor in the eighth grade Pere Montandeuil, a poor fellow stupefied by thirty years of teaching, who secretly employed all his spare hours in composing five-act tragedies, and who, by dint of carrying to and going for his manuscripts at the Odeon, ended by marrying the stagedoor-keeper's daughter. In the seventh grade Amedee groaned under the tyranny of M. Prudhommod, a man from the country, with a smattering of Latin and a terribly violent temper, throwing at the pupils the insults of a plowboy. Now he had entered the sixth grade, under M. Bance, an unfortunate fellow about twenty years old, ugly, lame, and foolishly timid, whom M. Batifol reproached severely with not having made himself respected, and whose eyes filled with tears every morning when, upon entering the schoolroom, he was obliged to efface with a cloth a caricature of himself made by some of his pupils.

Everything in M. Batifol's school—the grotesque and miserable teachers, the ferocious and cynical pupils, the dingy, dusty, and ink-stained rooms—saddened and displeased Amedee. Although very intelligent, he was disgusted with the sort of instruction there, which was served out in portions, like soldier's rations, and would have lost courage but for his little friend, Louise Gerard, who out of sheer kindness constituted herself his school-mistress, guiding and inspiring him, and working hard at the rudiments of L'homond's Grammar and Alexandre's Dictionary, to help the child struggle with his 'De Viris'. Unfortunate indeed is he who has not had, during his infancy, a petticoat near him—the sweet influence of a woman. He will always have something coarse in his mind and hard in his heart. Without this excellent and kind Louise, Amedee would have been exposed to this danger. His mother was dead, and M. Violette, alas! was always overwhelmed with his grief, and, it must be admitted, somewhat neglected his little son.

The widower could not be consoled. Since his wife's death he had grown ten years older, and his refractory lock of hair had become perfectly white. His Lucie had been the sole joy in his commonplace and obscure life. She was so pretty, so sweet! such a good manager, dressing upon nothing, and making things seem luxurious with only one flower! M. Violette existed only on this dear and cruel souvenir, living his humble idyll over again in his mind.

He had had six years of this happiness. One of his comrades took him to pass an evening with an old friend who was captain in the Invalides. The worthy man had lost an arm at Waterloo; he was a relative of Lucie, a good-natured old fellow, amiable and lively, delighting in arranging his apartments into a sort of Bonapartist chapel and giving little entertainments with cake and punch, while Lucie's mother, a

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cousin of the captain, did the honors. M. Violette immediately observed the young girl, seated under a "Bataille des Pyramides" with two swords crossed above it, a carnation in her hair. It was in midsummer, and through the open window one could see the magnificent moonlight, which shone upon the esplanade and made the huge cannon shine. They were playing charades, and when it came Lucie's turn to be questioned among all the guests, M. Violette, to relieve her of her embarrassment, replied so awkwardly that they all exclaimed, "Now, then, that is cheating!" With what naive grace and bashful coquetry she served the tea, going from one table to another, cup in hand, followed by the one-armed captain with silver epaulets, carrying the plum-cake! In order to see her again, M. Violette paid the captain visit after visit. But the greater part of the time he saw only the old soldier, who told him of his victories and conquests, of the attack of the redoubt at Borodino, and the frightful swearing of the dashing Murat, King of Naples, as he urged the squadrons on to the rescue. At last, one beautiful Sunday in autumn, he found himself alone with the young girl in the private garden of the veteran of the Old Guard. He seated himself beside Lucie on a stone bench: he told her his love, with the profound gaze of the Little Corporal, in bronzed plaster, resting upon them; and, full of delicious confusion, she replied, "Speak to mamma," dropping her bewildered eyes and gazing at the bed of china-asters, whose boxwood border traced the form of a cross of the Legion of Honor.

And all this was effaced, lost forever! The captain was dead; Lucie's mother was dead, and Lucie herself, his beloved Lucie, was dead, after giving him six years of cloudless happiness.

Certainly, he would never marry again. Oh, never!

No woman had ever existed or ever would exist for him but his poor darling, sleeping in the Montparnasse Cemetery, whose grave he visited every Sunday with a little watering-pot concealed under his coat.

He recalled, with a shiver of disgust, how, a few months after Lucie's death, one stifling evening in July, he was seated upon a bench in the Luxembourg, listening to the drums beating a retreat under the trees, when a woman came and took a seat beside him and looked at him steadily. Surprised by her significant look, he replied, to the question that she addressed to him, timidly and at the same time boldly: "So this is the way that you take the air?" And when she ended by asking him, "Come to my house," he had followed her. But he had hardly entered when the past all came back to him, and he felt a stifled feeling of distress. Falling into a chair, he sobbed, burying his face in his hands. His grief was so violent that, by a feminine instinct of pity, the wretched creature took his head in her arms, saying, in a consoling tone, "There, cry, cry, it will do you good!" and rocked him like an infant. At last he disengaged himself from this caress, which made him ashamed of himself, and throwing what little money he had about him

upon the top of the bureau, he went away and returned to his home, where he went hastily to bed and wept to his heart's content, as he gnawed his pillow. Oh, horrible memories!

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No! never a wife, no mistress, nothing! Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him.

The widower's morning awakening was frightful above all things else—his awakening in the large bed that now had but one pillow. It was there that he had once had the exquisite pleasure of watching his dear Lucie every morning when asleep; for she did not like to get up early, and sometimes he had jokingly scolded her for it. What serenity upon this delicate, sweet face, with its closed eyes, nestling among her beautiful, disordered hair! How chaste this lovely young wife was in her unconstraint! She had thrown one of her arms outside of the covering, and the neck of her nightrobe, having slipped down, showed such a pure white shoulder and delicate neck. He leaned over the half-opened mouth, which exhaled a warm and living odor, something like the perfume of a flower, to inhale it, and a tender pride swept over him when he thought that she was his, his wife, this delicious creature who was almost a child yet, and that her heart was given to him forever. He could not resist it; he touched his young wife's lips with his own. She trembled under the kiss and opened her eyes, when the astonishment of the awakening was at once transformed into a happy smile as she met her husband's glance. Oh, blissful moment! But in spite of all, one must be sensible. He recalled that the milk-maid had left at daybreak her pot of milk at the door of their apartment; that the fire was not lighted, and that he must be at the office early, as the time for promotions was drawing near. Giving another kiss to the half-asleep Lucie, he said to her, in a coaxing tone, "Now then, Lucie, my child, it is half-past eight. Up, up with you, lazy little one!"

How could he console himself for such lost happiness? He had his son, yes—and he loved him very much—but the sight of Amedee increased M. Violette's grief; for the child grew to look more like his mother every day.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMON ABSINTHE

Three or four times a year M. Violette, accompanied by his son, paid a visit to an uncle of his deceased wife, whose heir Amedee might some day become.

M. Isidore Gaufre had founded and made successful a large house for Catholic books and pictures, to which he had added an important agency for the sale of all kinds of religious objects. This vast establishment was called, by a stroke of genius of its proprietor, "Bon Marche des Paroisses," and was famous among all the French clergy. At last it occupied the principal part of the house and all the out-buildings of an old hotel on the Rue Servandoni, constructed in the pompous and magnificent style of the latter part of the seventeenth century. He did a great business there.



All day long, priests and clerical-looking gentlemen mounted the long flight of steps that led to a spacious first floor, lighted by large, high windows surmounted by grotesque heads. There the long-bearded missionaries came to purchase their cargoes of glass beads or imitation coral rosaries, before embarking for the East, or the Gaboon, to convert the negroes and the Chinese.

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The member of the third estate, draped in a long chocolate-colored, straight frock-coat, holding a gigantic umbrella under his arm, procured, dirt cheap and by the thousand, pamphlets of religious tenets. The country curate, visiting Paris, arranged for the immediate delivery of a remonstrance, in electrotpe, Byzantine style, signing a series of long-dated bills, contracting, by zeal supplemented by some ready cash, to fulfil his liabilities, through the generosity of the faithful ones.

There, likewise, a young director of consciences came to look for some devotional work—for example, the 12mo entitled “Widows’ Tears Wiped Away,” by St. Francois de Sales—for some penitent. The representative from some deputation from a devoutly Catholic district would solicit a reduction upon a purchase of the “Twelve Stations of the Cross,” hideously daubed, which he proposed to present to the parishes which his adversaries had accused of being Voltairians. A brother of the Christian Doctrine, or a sister of St. Vincent de Paul, would bargain for catechisms for their schools. From time to time, even a prince of the church, a bishop with aristocratic mien, enveloped in an ample gown, with his hat surrounded with a green cord and golden tassels, would mysteriously shut himself up in M. Isidore Gaufre’s office for an hour; and then would be reconducted to the top of the steps by the cringing proprietor, profuse with his “Monseigneur,” and obsequiously bowing under the haughty benediction of two fingers in a violet glove.

It was certainly not from sympathy that M. Violette had kept up his relations with his wife’s uncle; for M. Gaufre, who was servilely polite to all those in whom he had an interest, was usually disdainful, sometimes even insolent, to those who were of no use to him. During his niece’s life he had troubled himself very little about her, and had given her for a wedding present only an ivory crucifix with a shell for holy water, such as he sold by the gross to be used in convents. A self-made man, having already amassed—so they said—a considerable fortune, M. Gaufre held in very low estimation this poor devil of a commonplace employe whose slow advancement was doubtless due to the fact that he was lazy and incapable. From the greeting that he received, M. Violette suspected the poor opinion that M. Gaufre had of him. If he went there in spite of his natural pride it was only on his son’s account. For M. Gaufre was rich, and he was not young. Perhaps—who could tell?—he might not forget Amedee, his nephew, in his will? It was necessary for him to see the child occasionally, and M. Violette, in pursuance of his paternal duty, condemned himself, three or four times a year, to the infliction of a visit at the “Bon Marche des Paroisses.”

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The hopes that M. Violette had formed as to his son's inheriting from M. Gaufre were very problematical; for the father, whom M. Gaufre had not been able to avoid receiving at his table occasionally, had been struck, even shocked, by the familiar and despotic tone of the old merchant's servant, a superb Normandy woman of about twenty-five years, answering to the royal name of Berenice. The impertinent ways of this robust woman betrayed her position in her master's house, as much as the diamonds that glittered in her ears. This creature would surely watch the will of her patron, a sexagenarian with an apoplectic neck, which became the color of dregs of wine after a glass of brandy.

M. Gaufre, although very practical and a churchwarden at St. Sulpice, had always had a taste for liaisons. His wife, during her life—he had been a widower for a dozen years—had been one of those unfortunate beings of whom people said, "That poor lady is to be pitied; she never can keep a servant." She had in vain taken girls from the provinces, without beauty and certified to be virtuous. One by one—a Flemish girl, an Alsatian, three Nivernaise, two from Picardy; even a young girl from Beauce, hired on account of her certificate as "the best-behaved girl in the village"—they were unsparingly devoured by the minotaur of the Rue Servandoni. All were turned out of doors, with a conscientious blow in the face, by the justly irritated spouse. When he became a widower he gave himself up to his liaisons in perfect security, but without scandal, of course, as to his passion for servants. New country-girls, wearing strange headdresses, responded favorably, in various patois, to his propositions. An Alsatian bow reigned six months; a Breton cap more than a year; but at last what must inevitably take place happened. The beautiful Berenice definitely bound with fetters of iron the old libertine. She was now all-powerful in the house, where she reigned supreme through her beauty and her talent for cooking; and as she saw her master's face grow more congested at each repast, she made her preparations for the future. Who could say but that M. Gaufre, a real devotee after all, would develop conscientious scruples some day, and end in a marriage, in extremis?

M. Violette knew all this; nevertheless it was important that Amedee should not be forgotten by his old relative, and sometimes, though rarely, he would leave his office a little earlier than usual, call for his son as he left the Batifol boarding-school, and take him to the Rue Servandoni.

The large drawing-rooms, transformed into a shop, where one could still see, upon forgotten panels, rococo shepherds offering doves to their shepherdesses, were always a new subject of surprise to little Amedee. After passing through the book-shop, where thousands of little volumes with figured gray and yellow covers crowded the shelves, and boys in ecru linen blouses were rapidly tying up bundles, one entered the jewellery

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department. There, under beautiful glass cases, sparkled all the glittering display and showy luxury of the Church, golden tabernacles where the Paschal Lamb reposed in a flaming triangle, censers with quadruple chains, stoles and chasubles, heavy with embroidery, enormous candelabra, ostensories and drinking-cups incrustated with enamel and false precious stones—before all these splendors the child, who had read the Arabian Nights, believed that he had entered Aladdin's cave, or Aboul-Cassem's pit. From this glittering array one passed, without transition, into the sombre depot of ecclesiastical vestments. Here all was black. One saw only piles of cassocks and pyramids of black hats. Two manikins, one clothed in a cardinal's purple robe, the other in episcopalian violet, threw a little color over the gloomy show.

But the large hall with painted statues amazed Amedee. They were all there, statues of all the saints in little chapels placed promiscuously upon the shelves in rows.

No more hierarchy. The Evangelist had, for a neighbor a little Jesuit saint—an upstart of yesterday. The unfortunate Fourier had at his side the Virgin Mary. The Saviour of men elbowed St. Labre. They were of plaster run into moulds, or roughly carved in wood, and were colored with paint as glaring as the red and blue of a barber's pole, and covered with vulgar gildings. Chins in the air, ecstatic eyes shining with varnish, horribly ugly and all new, they were drawn up in line like recruits at the roll-call, the mitred bishop, the martyr carrying his palm, St. Agnes embracing her lamb, St. Roch with his dog and shells, St. John the Baptist in his sheepskin, and, most ridiculous of all, poor Vincent de Paul carrying three naked children in his arms, like a midwife's advertisement.

This frightful exhibition, which was of the nature of the Tussaud Museum or a masquerade, positively frightened Amedee. He had recently been to his first communion, and was still burning with the mystical fever, but so much ugliness offended his already fastidious taste and threw him into his first doubt.

One day, about five o'clock, M. Violette and his son arrived at the "Bon Marche des Paroisses," and found Uncle Isidore in the room where the painted statues were kept, superintending—the packing of a St. Michel. The last customer of the day was just leaving, the Bishop 'in partibus' of Trebizonde, blessing M. Gauvre. The little apoplectic man, the giver of holy water, left alone with his clerks, felt under restraint no longer.

"Pay attention, you confounded idiot!" he cried to the young man just ready to lay the archangel in the shavings. "You almost broke the dragon's tail."

Then, noticing Amedee and M. Violette who had just entered:

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"Ah! It is you, Violate! Good-day! Good-day, Amedee! You come at an unlucky time. It is shipping-day with us. I am in a great hurry—Eh! Monsieur Combier, by your leave, Monsieur Combier! Do not forget the three dozen of the Apparition de la Salette in stucco for Grenoble, with twenty-five per cent. reduction upon the bill. Are you working hard, Amedee? What do you say? He was first and assisted at the feast of St. Charlemagne! So much the better!—Jules, did you send the six chandeliers and the plated pyx and the Stations of the Cross, Number Two, to the Dames du Sacre-Coeur d'Alencons? What, not yet? But the order came three days ago! You must hurry, I tell you!—You can see, Violette, I am overflowing with work—but come in here a moment."

And once more ordering his bookkeeper, a captive in his glass case, to send the officers the notes that the cure of Sourdeval had allowed to go to protest, Uncle Isidore ushered M. Violette and his son into his office.

It was an ancient room, and M. Gaufre, who aimed at the austere, had made it gloomier still by a safe, and black haircloth furniture, which looked as if taken from a vestryroom. The pretty, high, and oval apartment, with its large window, opening upon a garden, its ceiling painted in light rosy clouds, its woodwork ornamented with wreaths and quivers, still preserved some of the charm and elegance of former days. Amedee would have been amused there, had not Uncle Isidore, who had seated himself before his desk, launched at once an unkind question at M. Violette.

"By the way, have you obtained the promotion that you counted so much upon last year?"

"Unfortunately, no, Monsieur Gaufre. You know what the Administration is."

"Yes, it is slow; but you are not overwhelmed with work, however. While in a business like this—what cares, what annoyances! I sometimes envy you. You can take an hour to cut your pens. Well, what is wanted of me now?"

The head of a clerk with a pencil behind his ear, appeared through the half-open door.

"Monsieur le Superieur of Foreign Missions wishes to speak with Monsieur."

"You can see! Not one minute to myself. Another time, my dear Violette. Adieu, my little man—it is astonishing how much he grows to look like Lucie! You must come and dine with me some Sunday, without ceremony. Berenice's 'souffle au fromage' is something delicious! Let Monsieur le Superieur come in."

M. Violette took his departure, displeased at his useless visit and irritated against Uncle Isidore, who had been hardly civil.

"That man is a perfect egotist," thought he, sadly; "and that girl has him in her clutches. My poor Amedee will have nothing from him."

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Amedee himself was not interested in his uncle's fortune. He was just then a pupil in the fourth grade, which follows the same studies as at the Lycee Henri IV. Having suddenly grown tall, he was annoyed at wearing short trousers, and had already renounced all infantile games. The dangling crows which illustrated the pages of his Burnouf grammar were all dated the previous year, and he had entirely renounced feeding silkworms in his desk. Everything pointed to his not being a very practical man. Geometry disgusted him, and as for dates, he could not remember one. On holidays he liked to walk by himself through quiet streets; he read poems at the bookstalls, and lingered in the Luxembourg Gardens to see the sun set. Destined to be a dreamer and a sentimentalist—so much the worse for you, poor Amedee!

He went very often to the Gerards, but he no longer called his little friends "thou." Louise was now seventeen years old, thin, without color, and with a lank figure; decidedly far from pretty. People, in speaking of her, began to say, "She has beautiful eyes and is an excellent musician." Her sister Maria was twelve years old and a perfect little rosebud.

As to the neighbor's little girl, Rosine Combarieu, she had disappeared. One day the printer suddenly departed without saying a word to anybody, and took his child with him. The concierge said that he was concerned in some political plot, and was obliged to leave the house in the night. They believed him to be concealed in some small town.

Accordingly, Father Gerard was not angry with him for fleeing without taking leave of him. The conspirator had kept all his prestige in the eyes of the engraver, who, by a special run of ill-luck, was always engaged by a publisher of Bonapartist works, and was busy at that moment upon a portrait of the Prince Imperial, in the uniform of a corporal of the Guards, with an immense bearskin cap upon his childish head.

Father Gerard was growing old. His beard, formerly of a reddish shade, and what little hair there was remaining upon his head, had become silvery white; that wonderful white which, like a tardy recompense to red-faced persons, becomes their full-blooded faces so well. The good man felt the weight of years, as did his wife, whose flesh increased in such a troublesome way that she was forced to pant heavily when she seated herself after climbing the five flights. Father Gerard grew old, like everything that surrounded him; like the house opposite, that he had seen built, and that no longer had the air of a new building; like his curious old furniture, his mended crockery, and his engravings, yellow with age, the frames of which had turned red; like the old Erard piano, upon which Louise, an accomplished performer, now was playing a set of Beethoven's waltzes and Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words." This poor old servant now had only the shrill, trembling tones of a harmonica.

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The poor artist grew old, and he was uneasy as to the future; for he had not known how to manage like his school-friend, the intriguing Damourette, who had formerly cheated him out of the 'prix de Rome' by a favor, and who now played the gentleman at the Institute, in his embroidered coat, and received all the good orders. He, the simpleton, had saddled himself with a family, and although he had drudged like a slave he had laid nothing aside. One day he might be stricken with apoplexy and leave his widow without resources, and his two daughters without a dowry. He sometimes thought of all this as he filled his pipe, and it was not pleasant.

If M. Gerard grew gloomy as he grew older, M. Violette became mournful. He was more than forty years old now. What a decline! Does grief make the years count double? The widower was a mere wreck. His rebellious lock of hair had become a dirty gray, and always hung over his right eye, and he no longer took the trouble to toss it behind his ear. His hands trembled and he felt his memory leaving him. He grew more taciturn and silent than ever, and seemed interested in nothing, not even in his son's studies. He returned home late, ate little at dinner, and then went out again with a tottering step to pace the dark, gloomy streets. At the office, where he still did his work mechanically, he was a doomed man; he never would be elected chief assistant. "What depravity!" said one of his fellow clerks, a young man with a bright future, protected by the head of the department, who went to the races and had not his equal in imitating the "Gnouf! gnouf!" of Grassot, the actor. "A man of his age does not decline so rapidly without good cause. It is not natural!" What is it, then, that has reduced M. Violette to such a degree of dejection and wretchedness?

Alas! we must admit it. The unhappy man lacked courage, and he sought consolation in his despair, and found it in a vice.

Every evening when he left his office he went into a filthy little cafe on the Rue du Four. He would seat himself upon a bench in the back of the room, in the darkest corner, as if ashamed; and would ask in a low tone for his first glass of absinthe. His first! Yes, for he drank two, three even. He drank them in little sips, feeling slowly rise within him the cerebral rapture of the powerful liquor. Let those who are happy blame him if they will! It was there, leaning upon the marble table, looking at, without seeing her, through the pyramids of lump sugar and bowls of punch, the lady cashier with her well oiled hair reflected in the glass behind her—it was there that the inconsolable widower found forgetfulness of his trouble. It was there that for one hour he lived over again his former happiness.

For, by a phenomenon well known to drinkers of absinthe, he regulated and governed his intoxication, and it gave him the dream that he desired.

"Boy, one glass of absinthe!"

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And once more he became the young husband, who adores his dear Lucie and is adored by her.

It is winter, he is seated in the corner by the fire, and before him, sitting in the light reflected by a green lampshade upon which dark silhouettes of jockey-riders are running at full speed, his wife is busying herself with some embroidery. Every few moments they look at each other and smile, he over his book and she over her work; the lover never tired of admiring Lucie's delicate fingers. She is too pretty! Suddenly he falls at her feet, slips his arm about her waist, and gives her a long kiss; then, overcome with languor, he puts his head upon his beloved's knees and hears her say to him, in a low voice: "That is right! Go to sleep!" and her soft hands lightly stroke his hair.

"Boy, one glass of absinthe!"

They are in that beautiful field filled with flowers, near the woods in Verrieres, upon a fine June afternoon when the sun is low. She has made a magnificent bouquet of field flowers. She stops at intervals to add a cornflower, and he follows, carrying her mantle and umbrella. How beautiful is summer and how sweet it is to love! They are a little tired; for during the whole of this bright Sunday they have wandered through the meadows. It is the hour for dinner, and here is a little tavern under some lindens, where the whiteness of the napkins rivals the blossoming thickets. They choose a table and order their repast of a moustached youth. While waiting for their soup, Lucie, rosy from being out all day in the open air and silent from hunger, amuses herself in looking at the blue designs on the plates, which represented battles in Africa. What a joyous dinner! There were mushrooms in the omelet, mushrooms in the stewed kidneys, mushrooms in the filet. But so much the better! They are very fond of them. And the good wine! The dear child is almost intoxicated at dessert! She takes it into her head to squeeze a cherry-stone between her thumb and first finger and makes it pop-slap! into her husband's face! And the naughty creature laughs! But he will have his revenge—wait a little! He rises, and leaning over the table buries two fingers between her collar and her neck, and the mischievous creature draws her head down into her shoulders as far as she can, begging him, with a nervous laugh, "No, no, I beseech you!" for she is afraid of being tickled. But the best time of all is the return through the country at night, the exquisite odor of new-mown hay, the road lighted by a summer sky where the whole zodiac twinkles, and through which, like a silent stream, the Chemin de St. Jacques rolls its diamond smoke.

Tired and happy she hangs upon her husband's arm. How he loves her! It seems to him that his love for Lucie is as deep and profound as the night. "Nobody is coming let me kiss your dear mouth!" and their kisses are so pure, so sincere, and so sweet, that they ought to rejoice the stars!

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"Another glass of absinthe, boy—one more!"

And the unhappy man would forget for a few moments longer that he ought to go back to his lonely lodging, where the servant had laid the table some time before, and his little son awaited him, yawning with hunger and reading a book placed beside his plate. He forgot the horrible moment of returning, when he would try to hide his intoxicated condition under a feint of bad humor, and when he would seat himself at table without even kissing Amedee, in order that the child should not smell his breath.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out
Inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody
It was all delightfully terrible!
Mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them
Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him
Tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings
Tired smile of those who have not long to live
Trees are like men; there are some that have no luck
Voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart
When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By Francois Coppee

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER V

AMEDEE MAKES FRIENDS

Meanwhile the allegorical old fellow with the large wings and white beard, Time, had emptied his hour-glass many times; or, to speak plainer, the postman, with a few flakes of snow upon his blue cloth coat, presents himself three or four times a day at his customers' dwelling to offer in return for a trifling sum of money a calendar containing necessary information, such as the ecclesiastical computation, or the difference between the Gregorian and the Arabic Hegira; and Amedee Violette had gradually become a young man.

A young man! that is to say, a being who possesses a treasure without knowing its value, like a Central African negro who picks up one of M. Rothschild's cheque-books; a



young man ignorant of his beauty or charms, who frets because the light down upon his chin has not turned into hideous bristles, a young man who awakes every morning full of hope, and artlessly asks himself what fortunate thing will happen to him to-day; who dreams, instead of living, because he is timid and poor.

It was then that Amedee made the acquaintance of one of his comrades—he no longer went to M. Batifol's boarding-school, but was completing his studies at the Lycee Henri IV—named Maurice Roger. They soon formed an affectionate intimacy, one of those eighteen-year-old friendships which are perhaps the sweetest and most substantial in the world.

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Amedee was attracted, at first sight, by Maurice's handsome, blond, curly head, his air of frankness and superiority, and the elegant jackets that he wore with the easy, graceful manners of a gentleman. Twice a day, when they left the college, they walked together through the Luxembourg Gardens, confiding to each other their dreams and hopes, lingering in the walks, where Maurice already gazed at the grisettes in an impudent fashion, talking with the charming abandon of their age, the sincere age when one thinks aloud.

Maurice told his new friend that he was the son of an officer killed before Sebastopol, that his mother had never married again, but adored him and indulged him in all his whims. He was patiently waiting for his school-days to end, to live independently in the Latin Quarter, to study law, without being hurried, since his mother wished him to do so, and he did not wish to displease her. But he wished also to amuse himself with painting, at least as an amateur; for he was passionately fond of it. All this was said by the handsome, aristocratic young man with a happy smile, which expanded his sensual lips and nostrils; and Amedee admired him without one envious thought; feeling, with the generous warmth of youth, an entire confidence in the future and the mere joy of living. In his turn he made a confidant of Maurice, but not of everything. The poor boy could not tell anybody that he suspected his father of a secret vice, that he blushed over it, was ashamed of it, and suffered from it as much as youth can suffer. At least, honest-hearted fellow that he was, he avowed his humble origin without shame, boasted of his humble friends the Gerards, praised Louise's goodness, and spoke enthusiastically of little Maria, who was just sixteen and so pretty.

"You will take me to see them some time, will you not?" said Maurice, who listened to his friend with his natural good grace. "But first of all, you must come to dinner some day with me, and I will present you to my mother. Next Sunday, for instance. Is it agreeable?"

Amedee would have liked to refuse, for he suddenly recalled—oh! the torture and suffering of poor young men! that his Sunday coat was almost as seedy as his everyday one, that his best pair of shoes were run-over at the heels, and that the collars and cuffs on his six white shirts were ragged on the edges from too frequent washings. Then, to go to dinner in the city, what an ordeal! What must he do to be presented in a drawing-room? The very thought of it made him shiver. But Maurice invited him so cordially that he was irresistible, and Amedee accepted.

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The following Sunday, then, spruced up in his best-what could have possessed the haberdasher to induce him to buy a pair of red dog-skin gloves? He soon saw that they were too new and too startling for the rest of his costume—Amedee went up to the first floor of a fine house on the Faubourg St. Honore and rang gently at the door on the left. A young and pretty maid—one of those brunettes who have a waist that one can clasp in both hands, and a suspicion of a moustache—opened the door and ushered the young man into a drawing-room furnished in a simple but luxurious manner. Maurice was alone, standing with his back to the fire, in the attitude of master of the house. He received his friend with warm demonstrations of pleasure. Amedee's eyes were at once attracted by the portrait of a handsome lieutenant of artillery, dressed in the regimental coat, with long skirts, of 1845, and wearing a sword-belt fastened by two lion's heads. This officer, in parade costume, was painted in the midst of a desert, seated under a palm-tree.

"That is my father," said Maurice. "Do I not resemble him?"

The resemblance was really striking. The same warm, pleasant smile, and even the same blond curls. Amedee was admiring it when a voice repeated behind him, like an echo:

"Maurice resembles him, does he not?"

It was Madame Roger who had quietly entered. When Amedee saw this stately lady in mourning, with a Roman profile, and clear, white complexion, who threw such an earnest glance at her son, then at her husband's portrait, Amedee comprehended that Maurice was his mother's idol, and, moved by the sight of the widow, who would have been beautiful but for her gray hair and eyelids, red from so much weeping, he stammered a few words of thanks for the invitation to dinner.

"My son has told me," said she, "that you are the one among all his comrades that he cares for most. I know what affection you have shown him. I am the one who should thank you, Monsieur Amedee."

They seated themselves and talked; every few moments these words were spoken by Madame Roger with an accent of pride and tenderness, "My son . . . my son Maurice." Amedee realized how pleasant his friend's life must be with such a good mother, and he could not help comparing his own sad childhood, recalling above all things the lugubrious evening repasts, when, for several years now, he had buried his nose in his plate so as not to see his father's drunken eyes always fastened upon him as if to ask for his pardon.

Maurice let his mother praise him for a few moments, looking at her with a pleasant smile which became a trifle saddened. Finally he interrupted her:

“It is granted, mamma, that I am a perfect phoenix,” and he gayly embraced her.

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At this moment the pretty maid announced, "Monsieur and Mesdemoiselles Lantz," and Madame Roger arose hastily to receive the newcomers. Lieutenant-Colonel Lantz, of the Engineer Corps, was with Captain Roger when he died in the trench before Mamelon Vert; and might have been at that time pleasant to look upon, in his uniform with its black velvet breastplate; but, having been promoted some time ago to the office, he had grown aged, leaning over the plans and draughts on long tables covered with rules and compasses. With a cranium that looked like a picked bird, his gray, melancholy imperial, his stooping shoulders, which shortened still more his tightly buttoned military coat, there was nothing martial in his appearance. With his head full of whims, no fortune, and three daughters to marry, the poor Colonel, who put on only two or three times a year, for official solemnities, his uniform, which he kept in camphor, dined every Sunday night with Madame Roger, who liked this estimable man because he was her husband's best friend, and had invited him with his three little girls, who looked exactly alike, with their turned-up noses, florid complexions, and little, black, bead-like eyes, always so carefully dressed that one involuntarily compared them to three pretty cakes prepared for some wedding or festive occasion. They sat down at the table.

Madame Roger employed an excellent cook, and for the first time in his life Amedee ate a quantity of good things, even more exquisite than Mamma Gerard's little fried dishes. It was really only a very comfortable and nice dinner, but to the young man it was a revelation of unsuspected pleasures. This decorated table, this cloth that was so soft when he put his hand upon it; these dishes that excited and satisfied the appetite; these various flavored wines which, like the flowers, were fragrant—what new and agreeable sensations! They were quickly and silently waited upon by the pretty maid. Maurice, seated opposite his mother, presided over the repast with his elegant gayety. Madame Roger's pale face would light up with a smile at each of his good-natured jokes, and the three young ladies would burst into discreet little laughs, all in unison, and even the sorrowful Colonel would arouse from his torpor.

He became animated after his second glass of burgundy, and was very entertaining. He spoke of the Crimean campaign; of that chivalrous war when the officers of both armies, enemies to each other, exchanged politenesses and cigars during the suspension of arms. He told fine military anecdotes, and Madame Roger, seeing her son's face excited with enthusiasm at these heroic deeds, became gloomy at once. Maurice noticed it first.

"Take care, Colonel," said he. "You will frighten mamma, and she will imagine at once that I still wish to enter Saint-Cyr. But I assure you, little mother, you may be tranquil. Since you wish it, your respectful and obedient son will become a lawyer without clients, who will paint daubs during his spare moments. In reality, I should much prefer a horse and a sword and a squadron of hussars. But no matter! The essential thing is not to give mamma any trouble."



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This was said with so much warmth and gentleness, that Madame Roger and the Colonel exchanged softened looks; the young ladies were also moved, as much as pastry can be, and they all fixed upon Maurice their little black eyes, which had suddenly become so soft and tender that Amedee did not doubt but that they all had a sentimental feeling for Maurice, and thought him very fortunate to have the choice between three such pretty pieces for dessert.

How all loved this charming and graceful Maurice, and how well he knew how to make himself beloved!

Later, when they served the champagne, he arose, glass in hand, and delivered a burlesque toast, finding some pleasant word for all his guests. What frank gayety! what a hearty laugh went around the table! The three young ladies giggled themselves as red as peonies. A sort of joyous chuckle escaped from the Colonel's drooping moustache. Madame Roger's smile seemed to make her grow young; and Amedee noticed, in a corner of the dining-room, the pretty maid, who restrained herself no more than the others; and when she showed her teeth, that were like a young puppy's, she was charming indeed.

After the tea the Colonel, who lived at some distance, near the Military School, and who, as the weather was fine, wished to walk home and avoid the expense of a cab, left with his three marriageable daughters, and Amedee in his turn took his departure.

In the ante-chamber, the maid said to Maurice, as she helped him on with his topcoat.

"I hope that you will not come in very late this evening, Monsieur Maurice."

"What is that, Suzanne?" replied the young man, without anger, but a trifle impatiently. "I shall return at the hour that pleases me."

As he descended the stairs ahead of Amedee, he said, with a laugh

"Upon my word! she will soon make her jealousy public."

"What!" exclaimed Amedee, glad that his companion could not see his blushes.

"Well, yes! Is she not pretty? I admit it, Violette; I have not, like you, the artlessness of the flower whose name you bear. You will have to resign yourself to it; you have a very bad fellow for a friend. As to the rest, be content. I have resolved to scandalize the family roof no longer. I have finished with this bold-faced creature. You must know that she began it, and was the first to kiss me on the sly. Now, I am engaged elsewhere. Here we are outside, and here is a carriage. Here, driver! You will allow me to bid you adieu. It is only a quarter past ten. I still have time to appear at Bullier's and meet Zoe Mirilton. Until tomorrow, Violette."



Amedee returned home very much troubled. So, then, his friend was a libertine. But he made excuses for him. Had he not just seen him so charming to his mother and so respectful to the three young ladies? Maurice had allowed himself to be carried away by his youthful impetuosity, that was all! Was it for him, still pure, but tormented by the temptations and curiosity of youth, to be severe? Would he not have done as much had he dared, or if he had had the money in his pocket? To tell the truth, Amedee dreamed that very night of the pretty maid with the suspicion of a moustache.

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The next day, when Amedee paid his visit to the Gerards, all they could talk of was the evening before. Amedee spoke with the eloquence of a young man who had seen for the first time a finger-bowl at dessert.

Louise, while putting on her hat and getting her roll of music—she gave lessons now upon the piano in boarding-schools—was much interested in Madame Roger's imposing beauty. Mamma Gerard would have liked to know how the chicken-jelly was made; the old engraver listened with pleasure to the Colonel's military anecdotes; while little Maria exacted a precise description of the toilettes of the three demoiselles Lantz, and turned up her nose disdainfully at them.

"Now, then, Amedee," said the young girl, suddenly, as she looked at herself in a mirror that was covered with flyspecks, "tell me honestly, were these young ladies any prettier than I?"

"Do you see the coquette?" exclaimed Father Gerard, bursting into laughter without raising his eyes from his work. "Do people ask such questions as that, Mademoiselle?"

There was a general gayety, but Amedee blushed without knowing why. Oh! no, certainly those three young ladies in their Savoy-cake skirts and nougat waists were not as pretty as little Maria in her simple brown frock. How she improved from day to day! It seemed to Amedee as if he never had seen her before until this minute. Where had she found that supple, round waist, that mass of reddish hair which she twisted upon the top of her head, that lovely complexion, that mouth, and those eyes that smiled with the artless tenderness of young flowers?

Mamma Gerard, while laughing like the others, scolded her daughter a little for her attack of feminine vanity, and then began to talk of Madame Roger in order to change the conversation.

Amedee did not cease to praise his friend. He told how affectionate he was to his mother, how he resisted the military blood that burned in him, how graceful he was, and how, at eighteen years, he did the honor of the drawing-room and table with all the manner of a grand seigneur.

Maria listened attentively.

"You have promised to bring him here, Amedee," said the spoiled child, with a serious air. "I should like very much to see him once."

Amedee repeated his promise; but on his way to the Lycee, for his afternoon class, he recalled the incident of the pretty maid and the name of Zoe Mirilton, and, seized with some scruples, he asked himself whether he ought to introduce his friend to the young Gerard girls. At first this idea made him uneasy, then he thought that it was ridiculous.



Was not Maurice a good-hearted young man and well brought up? Had he not seen him conduct himself with tact and reserve before Colonel Lantz's daughters?

Some days later Maurice reminded him of the promised visit to the Gerards, and Amedee presented him to his old friends.

Louise was not at home; she had been going about teaching for some time to increase the family's resources, for the engraver was more red-faced than ever, and obliged to change the number of his spectacles every year, and could not do as much work as formerly.

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But the agreeable young man made a conquest of the rest of the family by his exquisite good-nature and cordial, easy manner. Respectful and simple with Madame Gerard, whom he intimidated a little, he paid very little attention to Maria and did not appear to notice that he was exciting her curiosity to the highest pitch. He modestly asked Father Gerard's advice upon his project of painting, amusing himself with the knickknacks about the apartments, picking out by instinct the best engravings and canvases of value. The good man was enchanted with Maurice and hastened to show him his private museum, forgetting all about his pipe—he was smoking at present a Garibaldi—and presented him his last engraving, where one saw—it certainly was a fatality that pursued the old republican!—the Emperor Napoleon III, at Magenta, motionless upon his horse in the centre of a square of grenadiers, cut down by grape and canister.

Maurice's visit was short, and as Amedee had thought a great deal about little Maria for several days, he asked his friend, as he conducted him a part of the way:

"What did you think of her?"

Maurice simply replied, "Delicious!" and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER VI

DREAMS OF LOVE

Solemn moment approached for the two friends. They were to take their examinations for graduation. Upon the days when M. Violette—they now called him at the office "Father Violette," he had grown so aged and decrepit—was not too much "consoled" in the cafe in the Rue du Four, and when he was less silent and gloomy than usual, he would say to his son, after the soup:

"Do you know, Amedee, I shall not be easy in my mind until you have received your degree. Say what they may, it leads to everything."

To everything indeed! M. Violette had a college friend upon whom all the good marks had been showered, who, having been successively schoolmaster, journalist, theatrical critic, a boarder in Mazas prison, insurance agent, director of an athletic ring—he quoted Homer in his harangue—at present pushed back the curtains at the entrance to the Ambigu, and waited for his soup at the barracks gate, holding out an old tomato-can to be filled.

But M. Violette had no cause to fear! Amedee received his degree on the same day with his friend Maurice, and both passed honorably. A little old man with a head like a baboon—the scientific examiner—tried to make Amedee flounder on the subject of nitrogen, but he passed all the same. One can hope for everything nowadays.

But what could Amedee hope for first? M. Violette thought of it when he was not at his station at the Rue du Four. What could he hope for? Nothing very great.

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Probably he could enter the ministry as an auxiliary. One hundred francs a month, and the gratuities, would not be bad for a beginner! M. Violette recalled his endless years in the office, and all the trouble he had taken to guess a famous rebus that was celebrated for never having been solved. Was Amedee to spend his youth deciphering enigmas? M. Violette hoped for a more independent career for his son, if it were possible. Commerce, for example! Yes! there was a future in commerce. As a proof of it there was the grocer opposite him, a simpleton who probably did not put the screws on enough and had just hanged himself rather than go into bankruptcy. M. Violette would gladly see his son in business. If he could begin with M. Gaufre? Why not? The young man might become in the end his uncle's partner and make his fortune. M. Violette spoke of it to Amedee.

"Shall we go to see your uncle Sunday morning?"

The idea of selling chasubles and Stations of the Cross did not greatly please Amedee, who had concealed in his drawer a little book full of sonnets, and had in his mind the plan of a romantic drama wherein one would say "Good heavens!" and "My lord!" But first of all, he must please his father. He was glad to observe that for some time M. Violette had interested himself more in him, and had resisted his baneful habit somewhat. The young man offered no resistance. The next day at noon he presented himself at the Rue Servandoni, accompanied by his father.

The "dealer in pious goods" received them with great good-humor. He had just come from high mass and was about to sit down at the table. He even invited them to follow his example and taste of his stewed kidneys, one of Berenice's triumphs, who served the dinner with her hands loaded with rings. The Violettes had dined, and the father made known his desire.

"Yes," said Uncle Isidore, "Amedee might enter the house. Only you know, Violette, it will be another education to be learned over again. He must begin at the very beginning and follow the regular course. Oh! the boy will not be badly treated! He may take his meals with us, is not that so, Berenice? At first he would be obliged to run about a little, as I did when I came from the province to work in the shop and tie up parcels."

M. Violette looked at his son and saw that he was blushing with shame. The poor man understood his mistake. What good to have dazzled M. Patin before the whole University by reciting, without hesitation, three verses of Aristophanes, only to become a drudge and a packer? Well! so Amedee would yawn over green boxes and guess at enigmas in the Illustration. It had to be so.

They took leave of Uncle Isidore.

"We will reflect over it, Monsieur Gaufre, and will come to see you again."

But Berenice had hardly shut the door upon them when M. Violette said to his son:

“Nothing is to be expected of that old egotist. Tomorrow we will go to see the chief of my department, I have spoken of you to him, at all events.”

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He was a good sort of fellow, this M. Courtet, who was head clerk, though too conceited and starched up, certainly. His red rosette, as large as a fifty-cent piece, made one's eyes blink, and he certainly was very imprudent to stand so long backed up to the fireplace with limbs spread apart, for it seemed that he must surely burn the seat of his trousers. But no matter, he has stomach enough. He has noticed M. Violette's pitiful decline—"a poor devil who never will live to be promoted." Having it in his power to distribute positions, M. Courtet had reserved a position for Amedee. In eight days the young man would be nominated an auxiliary employe at fifteen hundred francs a year. It is promised and done.

Ugh! the sickening heat from the stove! the disgusting odor of musty papers! However, Amedee had nothing to complain of; they might have given him figures to balance for five hours at a time. He owed it to M. Courtet's kindness, that he was put at once into the correspondence room. He studied the formulas, and soon became skilful in official politeness. He now knew the delicate shades which exist between "yours respectfully" and "most respectfully yours;" and he measured the abyss which separates an "agreeable" and "homage."

To sum it all up, Amedee was bored, but he was not unhappy; for he had time to dream.

He went the longest way to the office in the morning, while seeking to make "amour" rhyme with "jour" without producing an insipid thing; or else he thought of the third act of his drama after the style of 1830, and the grand love scene which should take place at the foot of the Montfaucon gallows. In the evening he went to the Gerards, and they seated themselves around—the lamp which stood on the dining-room table, the father reading his journal, the women sewing. He chatted with Maria, who answered him the greater part of the time without raising her eyes, because she suspected, the coquette! that he admired her beautiful, drooping lids.

Amedee composed his first sonnets in her honor, and he adored her, of course, but he was also in love with the Lantz young ladies, whom he saw sometimes at Madame Roger's, and who each wore Sunday evenings roses in her hair, which made them resemble those pantheons in sponge-cake that pastry-cooks put in their windows on fete days.

If Amedee had been presented to twelve thousand maidens successively, they would have inspired twelve thousand wishes. There was the servant of the family on the first floor, whose side-glance troubled him as he met her on the staircase; and his heart sank every time he turned the handle of the door of a shop in the Rue Bonaparte, where an insidious clerk always forced him to choose ox-colored kid gloves, which he detested. It must not be forgotten that Amedee was very young, and was in love with love.

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He was so extremely timid that he never had had the audacity to tell the girl at the glove counter that he preferred bronze-green gloves, nor the boldness to show Maria Gerard his poems composed in her honor, in which he now always put the plural “amours,” so as to make it rhyme with “toujours,” which was an improvement. He never had dared to reply to the glance of the little maid on the second floor; and he was very wrong to be embarrassed, for one morning, as he passed the butcher’s shop, he saw the butcher’s foreman put his arm about the girl’s waist and whisper a love speech over a fine sirloin roast.

Sometimes, in going or coming from the office, Amedee would go to see his friend Maurice, who had obtained from Madame Roger permission to install himself in the Latin Quarter so as to be near the law school.

In a very low-studded first-floor room in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, Amedee perceived through a cloud of tobacco-smoke the elegant Maurice in a scarlet jacket lying upon a large divan. Everything was rich and voluptuous, heavy carpets, handsomely bound volumes of poems, an open piano, and an odor of perfumery mingled with that of cigarettes. Upon the velvet-covered mantel Mademoiselle Irma, the favorite of the master of the apartment, had left the last fashionable novel, marking, with one of her hairpins, where she had left off reading. Amedee spent a delightful hour there. Maurice always greeted him with his joyful, kind manner, in which one hardly minded the slight shade of patronage. He walked up and down his room, expanding his finely moulded chest, lighting and throwing away his cigarettes, seating himself for two minutes at the piano and playing one of Chopin’s sad strains, opening a book and reading a page, showing his albums to his friend, making him repeat some of his poems, applauding him and touching lightly upon different subjects, and charming Amedee more and more by his grace and manners.

However, Amedee could not enjoy his friend much, as he rarely found him alone. Every few moments—the key was in the door—Maurice’s comrades, young pleasure-seekers like himself, but more vulgar, not having his gentlemanly bearing and manners, would come to talk with him of some projected scheme or to remind him of some appointment for the evening.

Often, some one of them, with his hat upon his head, would dash off a polka, after placing his lighted cigar upon the edge of the piano. These fast fellows frightened Amedee a little, as he had the misfortune to be fastidious.

After these visitors had left, Maurice would ask his friend to dinner, but the door would open again, and Mademoiselle Irma, in her furs and small veil—a comical little face—would enter quickly and throw her arms about Amedee’s neck, kissing him, while rumpling his hair with her gloved hands.

“Bravo! we will all three dine together.”

No! Amedee is afraid of Mademoiselle Irma, who has already thrown her mantle upon the sofa and crowned the bronze Venus de Milo with her otter toque. The young man excuses himself, he is expected at home.

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"Timid fellow, go!" said Maurice to him, as he conducted him to the door, laughing.

What longings! What dreams! They made up all of poor Amedee's life. Sometimes they were sad, for he suffered in seeing his father indulge himself more and more in his vice. No woman loved him, and he never had one louis in his pocket for pleasure or liberty. But he did not complain. His life was noble and happy! He smiled with pleasure as he thought of his good friends; his heart beat in great throbs as he thought of love; he wept with rapture over beautiful verses. The spectacle of life, through hope and the ideal, seemed to him transfigured. Happy Amedee! He was not yet twenty years old!

CHAPTER VII

A GENTLE COUNSELLOR

One sombre, misty, winter morning, as Amedee lingered in his bed, his father entered, bringing him a letter that the wife of the concierge had just brought up. The letter was from Maurice, inviting his friend to dinner that evening at seven o'clock at Foyots, to meet some of his former companions at the Lycee Henri IV.

"Will you excuse me for not dining with you this evening, papa?" said Amedee, joyfully. "Maurice Roger entertains us at a restaurant."

The young man's gayety left him suddenly when he looked at his father, who had seated himself on the side of the bed. He had become almost frightful to look at; old before his time, livid of complexion, his eyes bloodshot, the rebellious lock of hair straggling over his right temple. Nothing was more heartbreaking than his senile smile when he placed his bony trembling hands upon his thighs. Amedee, who knew, alas, why his father had reached such a pass, felt his heart moved with pity and shame.

"Are you suffering to-day?" asked the young man. "Would you prefer that we should dine together as usual? I will send word to Maurice. Nothing is easier."

"No, my child, no!" replied M. Violette, in a hollow tone. "Go and amuse yourself with your friends. I know perfectly well that the life you lead with me is too monotonous. Go and amuse yourself, it will please me—only there is an idea that troubles me more than usual—and I want to confide it to you."

"What is it then, dear papa?"

"Amedee, last March your mother had been dead fifteen years. You hardly knew her. She was the sweetest and best of creatures, and all that I can wish you is, that you may meet such a woman, make her your companion for life, and be more fortunate than I, my poor Amedee, and keep her always. During these frightful years since your mother's death I have suffered, do you see? suffered horribly, and I have never, never

been consoled. If I have lived—if I have had the strength to live, in spite of all, it was only for you and in remembrance of her. I think I have nearly finished my task. You are a young man, intelligent and honest, and you

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have now an employment which will give you your bread. However, I often ask myself—oh, very often—whether I have fulfilled my duty toward you. Ah! do not protest,” added the unhappy man, whom Amedee had clasped in his arms. “No, my poor child, I have not loved you sufficiently; grief has filled too large a place in my heart; above all, during these last few years I have not been with you enough. I have sought solitude. You understand me, Amedee, I can not tell you more,” he said, with a sob. “There are some parts of my life that you must ignore, and if it grieves you to know what I have become during that time, you must never think of it; forget it. I beg of you, my child, do not judge me severely. And one of these days, if I die—ah! we must expect it—the burden of my grief is too heavy for me to bear, it crushes me! Well, my child, if I die, promise me to be indulgent to my memory, and when you think of your father only say: ‘He was very unhappy!’”

Amedee shed tears upon his father’s shoulder, who softly stroked his son’s beautiful hair with his trembling hands.

“My father, my good father!” sobbed Amedee, “I love and respect you with all my heart. I will dress myself quickly and we will go to the office together; we will return the same way and dine like a pair of good friends. I beg of you, do not ask me to leave you to-day!”

But M. Violette suddenly arose as if he had formed some resolution.

“No, Amedee,” said he, firmly. “I have said what I had to say to you, and you will remember it. That is sufficient. Go and amuse yourself this evening with your friends. Sadness is dangerous at your age. As for myself, I shall go to dine with Pere Bastide, who has just received his pension, and has invited me more than twenty times to come and see his little house at Grand Montrouge. It is understood; I wish it. Now then, wipe your eyes and kiss me.”

Having tenderly embraced his son, M. Violette left the room. Amedee could hear him in the vestibule take down his hat and cane, open and close the door, and go down the stairs with a heavy step. A quarter of an hour after, as the young man was crossing the Luxembourg to go to the office, he met Louise Gerard with her roll of music in her hand, going to give some lessons in the city. He walked a few steps beside her, and the worthy girl noticed his red eyes and disturbed countenance.

“What is the matter with you, Amedee?” she inquired, anxiously.

“Louise,” he replied, “do you not think that my father has changed very much in the last few months?”

She stopped and looked at him with eyes shining with compassion.

“Very much changed, my poor Amedee. You would not believe me if I told you that I had not remarked it. But whatever may be the cause—how shall I say it?—that has affected your father’s health, you should think of only one thing, my friend; that is, that he has been tender and devoted to you; that he became a widower very young and he did not remarry; that he has endured, in order to devote himself to his only child, long years of solitude and unhappy memories. You must think of that, Amedee, and that only.”

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"I never shall forget it, Louise, never fear; my heart is full of gratitude. This morning, even, he was so affectionate and kind to me—but his health is ruined; he is now a weak old man. Soon—I not only fear it, but I am certain of it—soon he will be incapable of work. I can see his poor hands tremble now. He will not even have a right to a pension. If he could not continue to work in the office he could hardly obtain a meagre relief, and that by favor only. And for long years I can only hope for an insufficient salary. Oh! to think that the catastrophe draws near, that one of these days he may fall ill and become infirm, perhaps, and that we shall be almost needy and I shall be unable to surround him with care in his old age. That is what makes me tremble!"

They walked along side by side upon the moist, soft ground of the large garden, under the leafless trees, where hung a slight penetrating mist which made them shiver under their wraps.

"Amedee," said she, looking at the young man with a serious gentleness, "I have known you from a child, and I am the elder. I am twenty-two; that makes me almost an old maid, Amedee, and gives me the right to scold you a little. You lack confidence in life, my friend, and it is wrong at your age. Do you think I do not see that my father has aged very much, that his eyesight fails, that we are much more cramped in circumstances in the house than formerly? Are we any the more sad? Mamma makes fewer little dishes and I teach in Paris, that is all. We live nearly the same as before, and our dear Maria—she is the pet of us all, the joy and pride of the house—well, our Maria, all the same, has from time to time a new frock or a pretty hat. I have no experience, but it seems to me that in order to feel really unhappy I must have nobody to love—that is the only privation worth the trouble of noticing. Do you know that I have just had one of the greatest pleasures of my life? I noticed that papa did not smoke as much as usual, in order to be economical, poor man! Fortunately I found a new pupil at Batignolles, and as soon as I had the first month's pay in my pocket I bought a large package of tobacco and put it beside his work. One must never complain so long as one is fortunate enough to keep those one loves. I know the secret grief that troubles you regarding your father; but think what he has suffered, that he loves you, that you are his only consolation. And when you have gloomy thoughts, come and see your old friends, Amedee. They will try to warm your heart at the fireside of their friendship, and to give you some of their courage, the courage of poor people which is composed of a little indifference and a little resignation."

They had reached the Florentine Terrace, where stand the marble statues of queens and ladies, and on the other side of the balustrade, ornamented with large vases, they could see through the mist the reservoir with its two swans, the solitary gravel walks, the empty grass-plots of a pale green, surrounded by the skeletons of lilac-trees, and the facade of the old palace, whose clock-hands pointed to ten.

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"Let us hasten," said Louise, after a glance at the dial. "Escort me as far as the Odeon omnibus. I am a little late."

As he walked by her side he looked at her. Alas! Poor Louise was not pretty, in spite of her large eyes, so loving but not coquettish. She wore a close, ugly hat, a mantle drawn tightly about her shoulders, colored gloves, and heavy walking-shoes. Yes, she was a perfect picture of a "two francs an hour" music-teacher. What a good, brave girl! With what an overflowing heart she had spoken of her family! It was to earn tobacco for her father and a new frock for her pretty sister that she left thus, so early in the misty morning, and rode in public conveyances, or tramped through the streets of Paris in the mud. The sight of her, more than what she said, gave the weak and melancholy Amedee courage and desire for manly resolutions.

"My dear Louise," said he, with emotion, "I am very fortunate to have such a friend as you, and for so many years! Do you remember when we used to have our hunts after the bearskin cap when we were children?"

They had just left the garden and found themselves behind the Odeon. Two tired-out omnibus horses, of a yellowish-white, and showing their ribs, were rubbing their noses against each other like a caress; then the horse on the left raised his head and placed it in a friendly way upon the other's mane. Louise pointed to the two animals and said to Amedee, smilingly:

"Their fate is hard, is it not? No matter! they are good friends, and that is enough to help them endure it."

Then, shaking hands with Amedee, she climbed lightly up into the carriage.

All that day at the office Amedee was uneasy about his father, and about four o'clock, a little before the time for his departure, he went to M. Violette's office. There they told him that his father had just left, saying that he would dine at Grand Montrouge with an old friend; and Amedee, a trifle reassured, decided to rejoin his friend Maurice at the Foyot restaurant.

CHAPTER VIII

BUTTERFLIES AND GRASSHOPPERS

Amedee was the first to arrive at the rendezvous. He had hardly pronounced Maurice Roger's name when a voice like a cannon bellowed out, "Now then! the yellow parlor!" and he was conducted into a room where a dazzling table was laid by a young man, with a Yankee goatee and whiskers, and the agility of a prestidigitateur. This frisky person relieved Amedee at once of his hat and coat, and left him alone in the room, radiant with lighted candles.

Evidently it was to be a banquet. Piled up in the centre of the table was a large dish of crayfish, and at each plate—there were five—were groups of large and small glasses.

Maurice came in almost immediately, accompanied by his other guests, three young men dressed in the latest fashion, whom Amedee did not at first recognize as his former comrades, who once wore wrinkled stockings and seedy coats, and wore out with him the seats of their trousers on the benches of the Lycee Henri IV.

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After the greetings, "What! is it you?" "Do you remember me?" and a shaking of hands, they all seated themselves around the table.

What! is that little dumpy fellow with the turned-up nose, straight as an arrow and with such a satisfied air, Gorju, who wanted to be an actor? He is one now, or nearly so, since he studies with Regnier at the Conservatoire. A make-believe actor, he puts on airs, and in the three minutes that he has been in the room he has looked at his retrousse nose and his coarse face, made to be seen from a distance, ten times in the mirror. His first care is to inform Amedee that he has renounced his name Gorju, which was an impossible one for the theatre, and has taken that of Jocquelet. Then, without losing a moment, he refers to his "talents," "charms," and "physique."

Who is this handsome fellow with such neat side-whiskers, whose finely cut features suggest an intaglio head, and who has just placed a lawyer's heavy portfolio upon the sofa? It is Arthur Papillon, the distinguished Latin scholar who wished to organize a debating society at the Lycee, and to divide the rhetoric class into groups and sub-groups like a parliament. "What have you been doing, Papillon?" Papillon had studied law, and was secretary of the Patru Conference, of course.

Amedee immediately recognized the third guest.

"What! Gustave!" exclaimed he, joyously.

Yes! Gustave, the former "dunce," the one they had called "Good-luck" because his father had made an immense fortune in guano. Not one bit changed was Gustave! The same deep-set eyes and greenish complexion. But what style! English from the tips of his pointed shoes to the horseshoe scarfpin in his necktie. One would say that he was a horse-jockey dressed in his Sunday best. What was this comical Gustave doing now? Nothing. His father has made two hundred thousand pounds' income dabbling in certain things, and Gustave is getting acquainted with that is all—which means to wake up every morning toward noon, with a bitter mouth caused from the last night's supper, and to be surprised every morning at dawn at the baccarat table, after spending five hours saying "Bac!" in a stifled, hollow voice. Gustave understands life, and, taking into consideration his countenance like a death's-head, it may lead him to make the acquaintance of something entirely different. But who thinks of death at his age? Gustave wishes to know life, and when a fit of coughing interrupts him in one of his idiotic bursts of laughter, his comrades at the Gateux Club tell him that he has swallowed the wrong way. Wretched Gustave, so be it!

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Meanwhile the boy with the juggler's motions appeared with the soup, and made exactly the same gestures when he uncovered the tureen as Robert Houdin would have made, and one was surprised not to see a bunch of flowers or a live rabbit fly out. But no! it was simply soup, and the guests attacked it vigorously and in silence. After the Rhine wine all tongues were unloosened, and as soon as they had eaten the Normandy sole—oh! what glorious appetites at twenty years of age!—the five young men all talked at once. What a racket! Exclamations crossed one another like rockets. Gustave, forcing his weak voice, boasted of the performances of a “stepper” that he had tried that morning in the Allee des Cavaliers. He would have been much better off had he stayed in his bed and taken cod-liver oil. Maurice called out to the boy to uncork the Chateau-Leoville. Amedee, having spoken of his drama to the comedian Gorju, called Jocquelet, that person, speaking in his bugle-like voice that came through his bugle-shaped nose, set himself up at once as a man of experience, giving his advice, and quoting, with admiration, Talma's famous speech to a dramatic poet: “Above all, no fine verses!” Arthur Papillon, who was destined for the courts, thought it an excellent time to lord it over the tumult of the assembly himself, and bleated out a speech of Jules Favre that he had heard the night before in the legislative assembly.

The timid Amedee was defeated at the start in this melee of conversation. Maurice also kept silent, with a slightly disdainful smile under his golden moustache, and an attack of coughing soon disabled Gustave. Alone, like two ships in line who let out, turn by turn, their volleys, the lawyer and the actor continued their cannonading. Arthur Papillon, who belonged to the Liberal opposition and wished that the Imperial government should come around to “a pacific and regular movement of parliamentary institutions,” was listened to for a time, and explained, in a clear, full voice the last article in the ‘*Courrier du Dimanche*’. But, bursting out in his terrible voice, which seemed like all of Gideon's trumpets blowing at once, the comedian took up the offensive, and victoriously declared a hundred foolish things—saying, for example, that the part of Alceste should be made a comic one; making fun of Shakespeare and Hugo, exalting Scribe, and in spite of his profile and hooked nose, which should have opened the doors of the Theatre-Francais and given him an equal share for life in its benefits, he affirmed that he intended to play lovers' parts, and that he meant to assume the responsibility of making “sympathetic” the role of Nero, in Britannicus.

This would have become terribly tiresome, but for the entrance upon the scene of some truffled partridges, which the juggler carved and distributed in less time than it would take to shuffle a pack of cards. He even served the very worst part of the bird to the simple Amedee, as he would force him to choose the nine of spades. Then he poured out the chambertin, and once more all heads became excited, and the conversation fell, as was inevitable, upon the subject of women.

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Jocquelet began it, by speaking the name of one of the prettiest actresses in Paris. He knew them all and described them exactly, detailing their beauties like a slave-dealer.

“So little Lucille Prunelle is a friend of the great Moncontour—”

“Pardon me,” interrupted Gustave, who was looking badly, “she has already left him for Cerfbeer the banker.”

“I say she has not.”

“I say that she has.”

They would have quarrelled if Maurice, with his affable, bantering air, had not attacked Arthur Papillon on the subject of his love-affairs; for the young advocate drank many cups of Orleanist tea, going even into the same drawing-rooms as Beule and Prevost-Paradol, and accompanying political ladies to the receptions at the Academie Francaise.

“That is where you must make havoc, you rascal!”

But Papillon defends himself with conceited smiles and meaning looks. According to him—and he puts his two thumbs into the armholes of his vest—the ambitious must be chaste.

“Abstineo venere,” said he, lowering his eyes in a comical manner, for he did not fear Latin quotations. However, he declared himself very hard to please in that matter; he dreamed of an Egeria, a superior mind. What he did not tell them was, that a dressmaker’s little errand-girl, with whom he had tried to converse as he left the law-school, had surveyed him from head to foot and threatened him with the police.

Upon some new joke of Maurice’s, the lawyer gave his amorous programme in the following terms:

“Understand me, a woman must be as intelligent as Hypatia, and have the sensibility of Heloise; the smile of a Joconde, and the limbs of an Antiope; and, even then, if she had not the throat of a Venus de Medicis, I should not love her.”

Without going quite so far, the actor showed himself none the less exacting. According to his ideas, Deborah, the tragedienne at the Odeon—a Greek statue!—had too large hands, and the fascinating Blanche Pompon at the Varietes was a mere wax doll.

Gustave, after all, was the one who is most intractable; excited by the Bordeaux wine—a glass of mineral water would be best for him—he proclaimed that the most beautiful creature was agreeable to him only for one day; that it was a matter of principle, and that he had never made but one exception, in favor of the illustrious dancer at the

Casino Cadet, Nina l'Auvergnate, because she was so comical! "Oh! my friends, she is so droll, she is enough to kill one!"

"To kill one!" Yes! my dear Monsieur Gustave, that is what will happen to you one of these fine mornings, if you do not decide to lead a more reasonable life—and on the condition that you pass your winters in the South, also!

Poor Amedee was in torture; all his illusions—desires and sentiments blended—were cruelly wounded. Then, he had just discovered a deplorable faculty; a new cause for being unhappy. The sight of this foolishness made him suffer. How these coarse young men lied! Gustave seemed to him a genuine idiot, Arthur Papillon a pedant, and as to Jocquelet, he was as unbearable as a large fly buzzing between the glass and the curtain of a nervous man's room. Fortunately, Maurice made a little diversion by bursting into a laugh.



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"Well, my friends, you are all simpletons," he exclaimed. "I am not like you, thank fortune! I do not sputter over my soup. Long life to women! Yes, all of them, pretty and otherwise! For, upon my word, there are no ugly ones. I do not notice that Miss Keepsake has feet like the English, and I forget the barmaid's ruddy complexion, if she is attractive otherwise. Now do not talk in this stupid fashion, but do as I do; nibble all the apples while you have teeth. Do you know the reason why, at the moment that I am talking to the lady of the house, I notice the nose of the pretty waitress who brings in a letter on a salver? Do you know the reason why, just as I am leaving Cydalize's house, who has put a rose in my buttonhole, that I turn my head at the passing of Margoton, who is returning from the market with a basket upon her arm? It is because it is one other of my children. One other! that is a great word! Yes, one thousand and three. Don Juan was right. I feel his blood coursing in my veins. And now the boy shall uncork some champagne, shall he not? to drink to the health of love!"

Maurice was cynical, but this exposition of his philosophy served a good purpose all the same. Everybody applauded him. The prestidigitateur, who moved about the table like a schoolboy in a monkey-house, drew the cork from a bottle of Roederer—it was astonishing that fireworks did not dart out of it—and good-humor was restored. It reigned noisily until the end of the repast, when the effect was spoiled by that fool of a Gustave. He insisted upon drinking three glasses of kummel—why had they not poured in maple sirup?—and, imagining that Jocquelet looked at him askance, he suddenly manifested the intention of cutting his head open with the carafe. The comedian, who was very pale, recalled all the scenes of provocation that he had seen in the theatre; he stiffened in his chair, swelled out his chest, and stammered, "At your orders!" trying to "play the situation." But it was useless.

Gustave, restrained by Maurice and Amedee, and as drunk as a Pole, responded to his friend's objurgations by a torrent of tears, and fell under the table, breaking some of the dishes.

"Now, then, we must take the baby home," said Maurice, signing to the boy. In the twinkling of an eye the human rag called Gustave was lifted into a chair, clothed in his topcoat and hat, dressed and spruced up, pushed down the spiral staircase, and landed in a cab. Then the prestidigitateur returned and performed his last trick by making the plate disappear upon which Maurice had thrown some money to pay the bill.

It was not far from eleven o'clock when the comrades shook hands, in a thick fog, in which the gaslights looked like the orange pedlers' paper lanterns. Ugh! how damp it was!

"Good-by."

"I will see you again soon."

“Good-night to the ladies.”

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Arthur Papillon was in evening dress and white cravat, his customary attire every evening, and still had time to show himself in a political salon on the left side, where he met Moichod, the author of that famous *Histoire de Napoleon*, in which he proves that Napoleon was only a mediocre general, and that all his battles were gained by his lieutenants. Jocquelet wished to go to the Odeon and hear, for the tenth time, the fifth act of a piece of the common-sense school, in which the hero, after haranguing against money for four acts in badly rhymed verse, ends by marrying the young heiress, to the great satisfaction of the bourgeois. As to Maurice, before he went to rejoin Mademoiselle Irma at the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, he walked part of the way with Amedee.

"These comrades of ours are a little stupid, aren't they?" said he to his friend.

"I must say that they almost disgust me," replied the young man. "Their brutal way of speaking of women and love wounded me, and you too, Maurice. So much the worse! I will be honest; you, who are so refined and proud, tell me that you did not mean what you said—that you made a pretence of vice just to please the others. It is not possible that you are content simply to gratify your appetite and make yourself a slave to your passions. You ought to have a higher ideal. Your conscience must reproach you."

Maurice brusquely interrupted this tirade, laughing in advance at what he was about to say.

"My conscience? Oh, tender and artless Violette; Oh, modest wood-flower! Conscience, my poor friend, is like a Suede glove, you can wear it soiled. Adieu! We will talk of this another day, when Mademoiselle Irma is not waiting for me."

Amedee walked on alone, shivering in the mist, weary and sad, to the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs.

No! it could not be true. There must be another love than that known to these brutes. There were other women besides the light creatures they had spoken of. His thoughts reverted to the companion of his childhood, to the pretty little Maria, and again he sees her sewing near the family lamp, and talking with him without raising her eyes, while he admires her beautiful, drooping lashes. He is amazed to think that this delicious child's presence has never given him the slightest uneasiness; that he has never thought of any other happiness than that of being near her. Why should not a love like that he has dreamed of some day spring up in her own heart? Have they not grown up together? Is he not the only young man that she knows intimately? What happiness to become her fiancée! Yes, it was thus that one should love! Hereafter he would flee from all temptations; he would pass all his evenings with the Gerards; he would keep as near as possible to his dear Maria, content to hear her speak, to see her smile; and he would wait with a heart full of tenderness for the moment when she would consent to become

his wife. Oh! the exquisite union of two chaste beings! the adorable kiss of two innocent mouths! Did such happiness really exist?

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This beautiful dream warmed the young man's heart, and he reached his home joyous and happy. He gave a vigorous pull to the bell, climbed quickly up the long flights of stairs and opened the door to their apartment. But what was this? His father must have come home very late, for a stream of light shines under the door of his sleeping-room.

"Poor man!" thought Amedee, recalling the scene of the morning. "He may be ill. Let us see."

He had hardly opened the door, when he drew back uttering a shriek of horror and distress. By the light of a candle that burned upon the mantel, Amedee had caught sight of his father extended upon the floor, his shirt disordered and covered with blood, holding in his clenched right hand the razor with which he had cut his throat.

Yes! the union of two loving hearts had at last taken place. Their love was happiness on earth; but if one of the two dies the other can never be consoled while life lasts.

M. Violette never was consoled.

CHAPTER IX

THORNS OF JEALOUSY

Now Amedee had no family. The day after his father's death he had a violent rupture with M. Isidore Gaufre. Under the pretext that a suicide horrified him, he allowed his niece's husband to be carried to the cemetery in a sixth-class hearse, and did not honor with his presence the funeral, which was even prohibited from using the parish road. But the saintly man was not deterred from swallowing for his dinner that same day, while thundering against the progress of materialism, tripe cooked after the Caen fashion, one of Berenice's weekly works of art.

Amedee had now no family, and his friends were dispersed. As a reward for passing his examinations in law, Madame Roger took her son with her on a trip to Italy, and they had just left France together.

As to the poor Gerards, just one month after M. Violette's death, the old engraver died suddenly, of apoplexy, at his work; and on that day there were not fifty francs in the house. Around the open grave where they lowered the obscure and honest artist, there was only a group of three women, in black, who were weeping, and Amedee in mourning for his father, with a dozen of Gerard's old comrades, whose romantic heads had become gray. The family was obliged to sell at once, in order to get a little money, what remained of proof-sheets in the boxes, some small paintings, old presents from artist friends who had become celebrated, and the last of the ruined knickknacks—indeed, all that constituted the charm of the house. Then, in order that her eldest daughter might not be so far from the boarding-school where she was employed as

teacher of music, Madame Gerard went to live in the Rue St.-Pierre, in Montmartre, where they found a little cheap, first-floor apartment, with a garden as large as one's hand.

Now that he was reduced to his one hundred and twenty-five francs, Amedee was obliged to leave his too expensive apartment in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and to sell the greater part of his family furniture. He kept only his books and enough to furnish his little room, perched under the roof of an old house in the Faubourg St.-Jacques.

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It was far from Montmartre, so he could not see his friends as often as he would have liked, those friends whom grief in common had made dearer than ever to him. One single consolation remained for him—literary work. He threw himself into it blindly, deadening his sorrow with the fruitful and wonderful opiate of poetry and dreams. However, he had now begun to make headway, feeling that he had some thing new to say. He had long ago thrown into the fire his first poems, awkward imitations of favorite authors, also his drama after the style of 1830, where the two lovers sang a duet at the foot of the scaffold. He returned to truth and simplicity by the longest way, the schoolboy's road. Taste and inclination both induced him to express simply and honestly what he saw before him; to express, so far as he could, the humble ideal of the poor people with whom he had lived in the melancholy Parisian suburbs where his infancy was passed; in a word, to paint from nature. He tried, feeling that he could succeed; and in those days lived the most beautiful and perfect hours of his life—those in which the artist, already master of his instrument, having still the abundance and vivacity of youthful sensations, writes the first words that he knows to be good, and writes them with entire disinterestedness, not even thinking that others will see them; working for himself alone and for the sole joy of putting in visible form and spreading abroad his ideas, his thoughts—all his heart. Those moments of pure enthusiasm and perfect happiness he never could know again, even after he had nibbled at the savory food of success and had experienced the feverish desire for glory. Delicious hours they were, and sacred, too, such as can only be compared to the divine intoxication of first love.

Amedee worked courageously during the winter months that followed his father's death. He arose at six o'clock in the morning, lighted his lamp and the little stove which heated his room, and, walking up and down, leaning over his page, the poet would vigorously begin his struggle with fancies, ideas, and words. At nine o'clock he would go out and breakfast at a neighboring creamery; after which he would go to his office. There, his tiresome papers once written, he had two or three hours of leisure, which he employed in reading and taking notes from the volumes borrowed by him every morning at a reading-room on the Rue Rorer-Collard; for he had already learned that one leaves college almost ignorant, having, at best, only learned how to study. He left the office at nightfall and reached his room through the Boulevard des Invalides, and Montparnasse, which at this time was still planted with venerable elms; sometimes the lamplighter would be ahead of him, making the large gas-jets shoot out under the leafless old trees. This walk, that Amedee imposed upon himself for health's sake, would bring him, about six o'clock, a workman's appetite for his dinner,—in the little creamery

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situated in front of Val-de-Grace, where he had formed the habit of going. Then he would return to his garret, and relight his stove and lamp, and work until midnight. This ardent, continuous effort, this will-tension kept in his mind the warmth, animation, and excitement indispensable for poetical production. His mind expanded rapidly, ready to receive the germs that were blown to him by the mysterious winds of inspiration. At times he was astonished to see his pen fill the sheet so rapidly that he would stop, filled with pride at having thus reduced to obedience words and rhythms, and would ask himself what supernatural power had permitted him to arm these divine wild birds.

On Sundays, he had his meals brought him by the concierge, working all day and not going out until nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, to dine with Mamma Gerard. It was the only distraction that he allowed himself, or rather the only recompense that he permitted himself. He walked halfway across Paris to buy a cake in the Rue Fontaine for their dessert; then he climbed without fatigue, thanks to his young legs, to the top of Montmartre, lighted by swinging lamps, where one could almost believe one's self in the distant corner of some province. They would be waiting for him to serve the soup, and the young man would seat himself between the widow and the two orphans.

Alas, how hard these poor ladies' lives had become! Damourette, a member of the Institute, remembered that he had once joked in the studios with Gerard, and obtained a small annual pension for the widow; but it was charity—hardly enough to pay the rent. Fortunately Louise, who already looked like an old maid at twenty-three, going about the city all day with her roll of music under her black shawl, had many pupils, and more than twenty houses had well-nigh become uninhabitable through her exertions with little girls, whose red hands made an unendurable racket with their chromatic scales. Louise's earnings constituted the surest part of their revenue. What a strange paradox is the social life in large cities, where Weber's Last Waltz will bring the price of a four-pound loaf of bread, and one pays the grocer with the proceeds of Boccherini's Minuet!

In spite of all, they had hard work to make both ends meet at the Gerards. The pretty Maria wished to make herself useful and aid her mother and sister. She had always shown great taste for drawing, and her father used to give her lessons in pastel. Now she went to the Louvre to work, and tried to copy the Chardins and Latours. She went there alone. It was a little imprudent, she was so pretty; but Louise had no time to go with her, and her mother had to be at home to attend to the housework and cooking. Maria's appearance had already excited the hearts of several young daubers. There were several cases of persistent sadness and loss of appetite in Flandrin's studio; and two of Signol's pupils, who were surprised hovering about the young

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artist, were hated secretly as rivals; certain projects of duels, after the American fashion, were profoundly considered. To say that Maria was not a little flattered to see all these admirers turn timidly and respectfully toward her; to pretend that she took off her hat and hung it on one corner of her easel because the heat from the furnace gave her neuralgia and not to show her beautiful hair, would be as much of a lie as a politician's promise. However, the little darling was very serious, or at least tried to be. She worked conscientiously and made some progress. Her last copy of the portrait of that Marquise who holds a pug dog in her lap, with a ribbon about his neck, was not very bad. This copy procured a piece of good luck for the young artist.

Pere Issacar, a bric-a-brac merchant on the Quay Voltairean—an old-fashioned Jew with a filthy overcoat, the very sight of which made one long to tear it off—approached Maria one day, just as she was about to sketch a rose in the Marquise's powdered wig, and after raising a hat greasy enough to make the soup for a whole regiment, said to her:

“Matemoiselle, would you make me von dozen vamily bordraits?”

The young girl did not at first understand his abominable language, but at last he made her comprehend.

Every thing is bought nowadays, even rank, provided, of course, that one has a purse sufficiently well filled. Nothing is simpler! In return for a little money you can procure at the Vatican—second corridor on your right, third door at the left—a brand-new title of Roman Count. A heraldic agency—see advertisement—will plant and make grow at your will a genealogical tree, under whose shade you can give a country breakfast to twenty-five people. You buy a castle with port-holes—port-holes are necessary—in a corner of some reactionary province. You call upon the lords of the surrounding castles with a gold fleur-de-lys in your cravat. You pose as an enraged Legitimist and ferocious Clerical. You give dinners and hunting parties, and the game is won. I will wager that your son will marry into a Faubourg St.-Germain family, a family which descends authentically from the Crusaders.

In order to execute this agreeable buffoonery, you must not forget certain accessories—particularly portraits of your ancestors. They should ornament the castle walls where you regale the country nobles. One must use tact in the selection of this family gallery. There must be no exaggeration. Do not look too high. Do not claim as a founder of your race a knight in armor hideously painted, upon wood, with his coat of arms in one corner of the panel. Bear in mind the date of chivalry. Be satisfied with the head of a dynasty whose gray beard hangs over a well-crimped ruff. I saw a very good example of that kind the other day on the Place Royale. A dog was just showing his disrespect

for it as I passed. You can obtain an ancestor like this in the outskirts of the city for fifteen

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francs, if you haggle a little. Or you need not give yourself so much trouble. Apply to a specialist, Pere Issacar, for instance. He will procure magnificent ancestors for you; not dear either! If you will consent to descend to simple magistrates, the price will be insignificant. Chief justices are dirt cheap. Naturally, if you wish to be of the military profession, to have eminent clergy among your antecedents, the price increases. Pere Issacar is the only one who can give you, at a reasonable rate, ermine-draped bishops, or a colonel with a Louis XIV wig, and, if you wish it, a blue ribbon and a breast-plate under his red coat. What produces a good effect in a series of family portraits is a series of pastels. What would you say to a goggle-eyed abbe, or an old lady indecently décolletée, or a captain of dragoons wearing a tigerskin cap (it is ten francs more if he has the cross of St. Louis)? Pere Issacar knows his business, and always has in reserve thirty of these portraits in charming frames of the period, made expressly for him in the Faubourg St.-Antoine, and which have all been buried fifteen days and riddled with shot, in order to have the musty appearance and indispensable worm holes.

You can understand now why the estimable Jew, in passing through the Louvre for his weekly promenade, took an interest in little Maria copying the charming Marquise de Latour. He was just at this time short of powdered marquises, and they are always very much in demand. He begged the young woman to take her copy home and make twelve more of it, varying, only the color of the dress and some particular detail in each portrait. Thus, instead of the pug dog, marquise No. 2 would hold a King Charles spaniel, No. 2 a monkey, No. 3 a bonbon box, No. 4 a fan. The face could remain the same. All marquises looked alike to Pere Issacar; he only exacted that they should all be provided with two black patches, one under the right eye, the other on the left shoulder. This he insisted upon, for the patch, in his eyes, was a symbol of the eighteenth century.

Pere Issacar was a fair man and promised to furnish frames, paper, and pastels, and to pay the young girl fifteen francs for each marquise. What was better yet, he promised, if he was pleased with the first work, to order of the young artist a dozen canonesses of Remiremont and a half-dozen of royal gendarmes.

I wish you could have seen those ladies when Maria went home to tell the good news. Louise had just returned from distributing semiquavers in the city; her eyes and poor Mother Gerard's were filled with tears of joy.

"What, my darling," said the mother, embracing her child, "are you going to trouble yourself about our necessities of life, too?"

"Do you see this little sister?" said Louise, laughing cordially. "She is going to earn a pile of money as large as she is herself. Do you know that I am jealous—I, with my piano and my displeasing profession? Good-luck to pastel! It is not noisy, it will not

annoy the neighbors, and when you are old you can say, 'I never have played for anybody.'"

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But Maria did not wish them to joke. They had always treated her like a doll, a spoiled child, who only knew how to curl her hair and tumble her frocks. Well, they should see!

When Amedee arrived on Sunday with his cake, they told him over several times the whole story, with a hundred details, and showed him the two marquises that Maria had already finished, who wore patches as large as wafers.

She appeared that day more attractive and charming than ever to the young man, and it was then that he conceived his first ambition. If he only had enough talent to get out of his obscurity and poverty, and could become a famous writer and easily earn his living! It was not impossible, after all. Oh, with what pleasure he would ask this exquisite child to be his wife! How sweet it would be to know that she was happy with, and proud of, him! But he must not think of it now, they were too poor; and then, would Maria love him?

He often asked himself that question, and with uneasiness. In his own heart he felt that the childish intimacy had become a sincere affection, a real love. He had no reason to hope that the same transformation had taken place in the young girl's heart. She always treated him very affectionately, but rather like a good comrade, and she was no more stirred by his presence now than she was when she had lain in wait with him behind the old green sofa to hunt Father Gerard's battered fur hat.

Amedee had most naturally taken the Gerard family into his confidence regarding his work. After the Sunday dinner they would seat themselves around the table where Mamma Gerard had just served the coffee, and the young man would read to his friends, in a grave, slow voice, the poem he had composed during the week. A painter having the taste and inclination for interior scenes, like the old masters of the Dutch school, would have been stirred by the contemplation of this group of four persons in mourning. The poet, with his manuscript in his right hand and marking the syllables with a rhythmical movement of his left, was seated between the two sisters. But while Louise—a little too thin and faded for her years—fixes her attentive eyes upon the reader and listens with avidity, the pretty Maria is listless and sits with a bored little face, gazing mechanically at the other side of the table. Mother Gerard knits with a serious air and her spectacles perched upon the tip of her nose.

Alas! during these readings Louise was the only one who heaved sighs of emotion; and sometimes even great tear-drops would tremble upon her lashes. She was the only one who could find just the right delicate word with which to congratulate the poet, and show that she had understood and been touched by his verses. At the most Maria would sometimes accord the young poet, still agitated by the declamation of his lines, a careless "It is very pretty!" with a commonplace smile of thanks.

She did not care for poetry, then? Later, if he married her, would she remain indifferent to her husband's intellectual life, insensible even to the glory that he might reap? How sad it was for Amedee to have to ask himself that question!

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Soon Maria inspired a new fear within him. Maurice and his mother had been already three months in Italy, and excepting two letters that he had received from Milan, at the beginning of his journey, in the first flush of his enthusiasm, Amedee had had no news from his friend. He excused this negligence on the part of the lazy Maurice, who had smilingly told him, on the eve of departure, not to count upon hearing from him regularly. At each visit that Amedee paid the Gerards, Maria always asked him:

“Have you received any news from your friend Maurice?”

At first he had paid no attention to this, but her persistency at length astonished him, planting a little germ of suspicion and alarm in his heart. Maurice Roger had only paid the Gerards a few visits during the father’s lifetime, and accompanied on each occasion by Amedee. He had always observed the most respectful manner toward Maria, and they had perhaps exchanged twenty words. Why should Maria preserve such a particular remembrance of a person so nearly a stranger to her? Was it possible that he had made a deep impression, perhaps even inspired a sentiment of love? Did she conceal in the depths of her heart, when she thought of him, a tender hope? Was she watching for him? Did she wish him to return?

When these fears crossed Amedee’s mind, he felt a choking sensation, and his heart was troubled. Happy Maurice, who had only to be seen to please! But immediately, with a blush of shame, the generous poet chased away this jealous fancy. But every Sunday, when Maria, lowering her eyes, and with a slightly embarrassed voice, repeated her question, “Have you received any news from Monsieur Maurice?” Amedee felt a cruelly discouraged feeling, and thought, with deep sadness:

“She never will love me!”

To conquer this new grief, he plunged still more deeply into work; but he did not find his former animation and energy. After the drizzling rain of the last days of March, the spring arrived. Now, when Amedee awoke, it was broad daylight at six o’clock in the morning. Opening his mansard window, he admired, above the tops of the roofs, the large, ruddy sun rising in the soft gray sky, and from the convent gardens beneath came a fresh odor of grass and damp earth. Under the shade of the arched lindens which led to the shrine of a plaster Virgin, a first and almost imperceptible rustle, a presentiment of verdure, so to speak, ran through the branches, and the three almond trees in the kitchen-garden put forth their delicate flowers. The young poet was invaded by a sweet and overwhelming languor, and Maria’s face, which was commonly before his inner vision upon awakening, became confused and passed from his mind. He seated himself for a moment before a table and reread the last lines of a page that he had begun; but he was immediately overcome by physical lassitude, and abandoned himself to thought, saying to himself that he was twenty years old, and that it would be very good, after all, to enjoy life.



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CHAPTER X

A BUDDING POET

It is the first of May, and the lilacs in the Luxembourg Gardens are in blossom. It has just struck four o'clock. The bright sun and the pure sky have rendered more odious than ever the captivity of the office to Amedee, and he departs before the end of the sitting for a stroll in the Medicis garden around the pond, where, for the amusement of the children in that quarter, a little breeze from the northeast is pushing on a miniature flotilla. Suddenly he hears himself called by a voice which bursts out like a brass band at a country fair.

"Good-day, Violette."

It is Jocquelet, the future comedian, with his turned-up nose, which cuts the air like the prow of a first-class ironclad, superb, triumphant, dressed like a Brazilian, shaved to the quick, the dearest hope of Regnier's class at the Conservatoire-Jocquelet, who has made an enormous success in an act from the "Precieuses," at the last quarter's examination—he says so himself, without any useless modesty—Jocquelet, who will certainly have the first comedy prize at the next examination, and will make his debut with out delay at the Comedie Francaise! All this he announces in one breath, like a speech learned by heart, with his terrible voice, like a quack selling shaving-paste from a gilded carriage. In two minutes that favorite word of theatrical people had been repeated thirty times, punctuating the phrases: "!! !! !! !!"

Amedee is only half pleased at the meeting. Jocquelet was always a little too noisy to please him. After all, he was an old comrade, and out of politeness the poet congratulated him upon his success.

Jocquelet questioned him. What was Amedee doing? What had become of him? Where was his literary work? All this was asked with such cordiality and warmth of manner that one would have thought that Jocquelet was interested in Amedee, and had a strong friendship for him. Nothing of the sort. Jocquelet was interested in only one person in this world, and that person was named Jocquelet. One is either an actor or he is not. This personage was always one wherever he was—in an omnibus, while putting on his suspenders, even with the one he loved. When he said to a newcomer, "How do you do?" he put so much feeling into this very original question, that the one questioned asked himself whether he really had not just recovered from a long and dangerous illness. Now, at this time Jocquelet found himself in the presence of an unknown and poor young poet. What role ought such an eminent person as himself to play in such circumstances? To show affection for the young man, calm his timidity, and patronize him without too much haughtiness; that was the position to take, and Jocquelet acted it.

Amedee was an artless dupe, and, touched by the interest shown him, he frankly replied:

“Well, my dear friend, I have worked hard this winter. I am not dissatisfied. I think that I have made some progress; but if you knew how hard and difficult it is!”

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He was about to confide to Jocquelet the doubts and sufferings of a sincere artist, but Jocquelet, as we have said, thought only of himself, and brusquely interrupted the young poet:

“You do not happen to have a poem with you—something short, a hundred or a hundred and fifty lines—a poem intended for effect, that one could recite?”

Amedee had copied out that very day, at the office, a war story, a heroic episode of Sebastopol that he had heard Colonel Lantz relate not long since at Madame Roger’s, and had put into verse with a good French sentiment and quite the military spirit, verse which savored of powder, and went off like reports of musketry. He took the sheets out of his pocket, and, leading the comedian into a solitary by-path of sycamores which skirted the Luxembourg orangery, he read his poem to him in a low voice. Jocquelet, who did not lack a certain literary instinct, was very enthusiastic, for he foresaw a success for himself, and said to the poet:

“You read those verses just like a poet, that is, very badly. But no matter, this battle is very effective, and I see what I could do with it—with my voice. But what do you mean?” added he, planting himself in front of his friend. “Do you write verses like these and nobody knows anything about them? It is absurd. Do you wish, then, to imitate Chatterton? That is an old game, entirely used up! You must push yourself, show yourself. I will take charge of that myself! Your evening is free, is it not? Very well, come with me; before six o’clock I shall have told your name to twenty trumpeters, who will make all Paris resound with the news that there is a poet in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques. I will wager, you savage, that you never have put your foot into the Cafe de Seville. Why, my dear fellow, it is our first manufactory of fame! Here is the Odeon omnibus, get on! We shall be at the Boulevard Montmartre in twenty minutes, and I shall baptize you there, as a great man, with a glass of absinthe.”

Dazzled and carried away, Amedee humored him and climbed upon the outside of the omnibus with his comrade. The vehicle hurried them quickly along toward the quay, crossed the Seine, the Carrousel, and passed before the Theatre-Francais, at which Jocquelet, thinking of his approaching debut, shook his fist, exclaiming, “Now I am ready for you!” Here the young men were planted upon the asphalt boulevard, in front of the Cafe de Seville.

Do not go to-day to see this old incubator, in which so many political and literary celebrities have been hatched; for you will only find a cafe, just like any other, with its groups of ugly little Jews who discuss the coming races, and here and there a poor creature, painted like a Jezebel, dying of chagrin over her pot of beer.

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At the decline of the Second Empire—it was May 1, 1866, that Amedee Violette entered there for the first time—the Cafe de Seville passed for, and with reason too, one of the most remarkable places in Paris. For this glorious establishment had furnished by itself, or nearly so, the eminent staff of our third Republic! Be honest, Monsieur le Prefet, you who presided at the opening of the agricultural meeting in our province, and who played the peacock in your dress-coat, embroidered in silver, before an imposing line of horned creatures; be honest and admit, that, at the time when you opposed the official candidates in your democratic journal, you had your pipe in the rack of the Cafe de Seville, with your name in white enamel upon the blackened bowl! Remember, Monsieur le Depute, you who voted against all the exemption cases of the military law, remember who, in this very place, at your daily game of dominoes for sixty points, more than a hundred times ranted against the permanent army—you, accustomed to the uproar of assemblies and the noise of the tavern—contributed to the parliamentary victories by crying, “Six all! count that!” And you too, Monsieur le Ministre, to whom an office-boy, dating from the tyrants, still says, “Your excellency,” without offending you; you also have been a constant frequenter of the Cafe de Seville, and such a faithful customer that the cashier calls you by your Christian name. And do you recall, Monsieur the future president of the Council, that you did not acquit yourself very well when the sedentary dame, who never has been seen to rise from her stool, and who, as a joker pretended, was afflicted with two wooden legs, called you by a little sign to the desk, and said to you, not without a shade of severity in her tone: “Monsieur Eugene, we must be thinking of this little bill.”

Notwithstanding his title of poet, Amedee had not the gift of prophecy. While seeing all these negligently dressed men seated outside at the Cafe de Seville’s tables, taking appetizers, the young man never suspected that he had before him the greater part of the legislators destined to assure, some years later, France’s happiness. Otherwise he would have respectfully taken note of each drinker and the color of his drink, since at a later period this would have been very useful to him as a mnemonical method for the understanding of our parliamentary combinations, which are a little complicated, we must admit. For example, would it not have been handy and agreeable to note down that the recent law on sugars had been voted by the solid majority of absinthe and bitters, or to know that the Cabinet’s fall, day before yesterday, might be attributed simply to the disloyal and perfidious abandonment of the bitter mints or blackcurrant wine?

Jocquelet, who professed the most advanced opinions in politics, distributed several riotous and patronizing handshakes among these future statesmen as he entered the establishment, followed by Amedee.

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Here, there were still more of politics, and also poets and literary men. They lived a sort of hurly-burly life, on good terms, but one could not get them confounded, for the politicians were all beard, the litterateurs, all hair.

Jocquelet directed his steps without hesitation toward the magnificent red head of the whimsical poet, Paul Sillery, a handsome young fellow with a wide-awake face, who was nonchalantly stretched upon the red velvet cushion of the window-seat, before a table, around which were three other heads of thick hair worthy of our early kings.

"My dear Paul," said Jocquelet, in his most thrilling voice, handing Sillery Amedee's manuscript, "here are some verses that I think are superb, and I am going to recite them as soon as I can, at some entertainment or benefit. Read them and give us your opinion of them. I present their author to you, Monsieur Amedee Violette. Amedee, I present you to Monsieur Paul Sillery."

All the heads of hair, framing young and amiable faces, turned curiously toward the newcomer, whom Paul Sillery courteously invited to be seated, with the established formula, "What will you take?" Then he began to read the lines that the comedian had given him.

Amedee, seated on the edge of his chair, was distracted with timidity, for Paul Sillery already enjoyed a certain reputation as a rising poet, and had established a small literary sheet called *La Guepe*, which published upon its first page caricatures of celebrated men with large heads and little bodies, and Amedee had read in it some of Paul's poems, full of impertinence and charm. An author whose work had been published! The editor of a journal! The idea was stunning to poor innocent Violette, who was not aware then that *La Guepe* could not claim forty subscribers. He considered Sillery something wonderful, and waited with a beating heart for the verdict of so formidable a judge. At the end of a few moments Sillery said, without raising his eyes from the manuscript:

"Here are some fine verses!"

A flood of delight filled the heart of the poet from the Faubourg St.-Jacques.

As soon as he had finished his reading, Paul arose from his seat, and, extending both hands over the carafes and glasses to Amedee, said, enthusiastically:

"Let me shake hands with you! Your description of the battle-scene is astonishing! It is admirable! It is as clear and precise as *Merimee*, and it has all the color and imagination that he lacks to make him a poet. It is something absolutely new. My dear Monsieur Violette, I congratulate you with all my heart! I can not ask you for this beautiful poem for *La Guepe* that Jocquelet is so fortunate as to have to recite, and of which I hope he will make a success. But I beg of you, as a great favor, to let me have

some verses for my paper; they will be, I am sure, as good as these, if not better. To be sure, I forgot to tell you that we shall not

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be able to pay you for the copy, as La Guepe does not prosper; I will even admit that it only stands on one leg. In order to make it appear for a few months longer, I have recently been obliged to go to a money-lender, who has left me, instead of the classical stuffed crocodile, a trained horse which he had just taken from an insolvent circus. I mounted the noble animal to go to the Bois, but at the Place de la Concorde he began to waltz around it, and I was obliged to get rid of this dancing quadruped at a considerable loss. So your contribution to La Guepe would have to be gratuitous, like those of all the rest. You will give me the credit of having saluted you first of all, my dear Violette, by the rare and glorious title of true poet. You will let me reserve the pleasure of intoxicating you with the odor that a printer's first proofs give, will you not? Is it agreed?"

Yes, it was agreed! That is to say, Amedee, touched to the depths of his heart by so much good grace and fraternal cordiality, was so troubled in trying to find words to express his gratitude, that he made a terrible botch of it.

"Do not thank me," said Paul Sillery, with his pleasant but rather sceptical smile, "and do not think me better than I am. If all your verses are as strong as these that I have just read, you will soon publish a volume that will make a sensation, and—who knows?—perhaps will inspire me first of all with an ugly attack of jealousy. Poets are no better than other people; they are like the majority of Adam's sons, vain and envious, only they still keep the ability to admire, and the gift of enthusiasm, and that proves their superiority and is to their credit. I am delighted to have found a mare's nest to-day, an original and sincere poet, and with your permission we will celebrate this happy meeting. The price of the waltzing horse having hardly sufficed to pay off the debt to the publisher of La Guepe, I am not in funds this evening; but I have credit at Pere Lebuffle's, and I invite you all to dinner at his pot-house; after which we will go to my rooms, where I expect a few friends, and there you will read us your verses, Violette; we will all read some of them, and have a fine orgy of rich rhymes."

This proposition was received with favor by the three young men with the long hair, a la Clodion and Chilperic. As for Violette, he would have followed Paul Sillery at that moment, had it been into the infernal regions.

Jocquelet could not go with them, he had promised his evening to a lady, he said, and he gave this excuse with such a conceited smile that all were convinced he was going to crown himself with the most flattering of laurels at the mansion of some princess of the royal blood. In reality, he was going to see one of his Conservatoire friends, a large, lanky dowdy, as swarthy as a mole and full of pretensions, who was destined for the tragic line of character, and inflicted upon her lover Athalie's dream, Camille's imprecations, and Phedre's monologue.

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After paying for the refreshments, Sillery gave his arm to Amedee, and, followed by the three Merovingians, they left the cafe. Forcing a way through the crowd which obstructed the sidewalk of the Faubourg Montmartre he conducted his guests to Pere Lebuffle's table d'hote, which was situated on the third floor of a dingy old house in the Rue Lamartine, where a sickening odor of burnt meat greeted them as soon as they reached the top of the stairs. They found there, seated before a tablecloth remarkable for the number of its wine-stains, two or three wild-looking heads of hair, and four or five shaggy beards, to whom Pere Lebuffle was serving soup, aided by a tired-looking servant. The name under which Sillery had designated the proprietor of the table d'hote might have been a nickname, for this stout person in his shirt-sleeves recommended himself to one's attentions by his bovine face and his gloomy, wandering eyes. To Amedee's amazement, Pere Lebuffle called the greater part of his clients "thou," and as soon as the newcomers were seated at table, Amedee asked Sillery, in a low voice, the cause of this familiarity.

"It is caused by the hard times, my dear Violette," responded the editor of 'La Guepe' as he unfolded his napkin. "There is no longer a 'Maecenas' or 'Lawrence the Magnificent.' The last patron of literature and art is Pere Lebuffle. This wretched cook, who has perhaps never read a book or seen a picture, has a fancy for painters and poets, and allows them to cultivate that plant, Debt, which, contrary to other vegetables, grows all the more, the less it is watered with instalments. We must pardon the good man," said he, lowering his voice, "his little sin—a sort of vanity. He wishes to be treated like a comrade and friend by the artists. Those who have several accounts brought forward upon his ledger, arrive at the point of calling him 'thou,' and I, alas! am of that number. Thanks to that, I am going to make you drink something a little less purgative than the so-called wine which is turning blue in that carafe, and of which I advise you to be suspicious. I say, Lebuffle, my friend here, Monsieur Amedee Violette, will be, sooner or later, a celebrated poet. Treat him accordingly, my good fellow, and go and get us a bottle of Moulins-Vent."

The conversation meanwhile became general between the bearded and long-haired men. Is it necessary to say that they were all animated, both politicians and 'litterateurs', with the most revolutionary sentiments? At the very beginning, with the sardines, which evidently had been pickled in lamp-oil, a terribly hairy man, the darkest of them all, with a beard that grew up into its owner's eyes and then sprung out again in tufts from his nose and ears, presented some elegiac regrets to the memory of Jean-Paul Marat, and declared that at the next revolution it would be necessary to realize the programme of that delightful friend of the people, and make one hundred thousand heads fall.

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“By thunder, Flambard, you have a heavy hand!” exclaimed one of the least important of beards, one of those that degenerate into side-whiskers as they become conservative. “One hundred thousand heads!”

“It is the minimum,” replied the sanguinary beard.

Now, it had just been revealed to Amedee that under this ferocious beard was concealed a photographer, well known for his failures, and the young man could not help thinking that if the one hundred thousand heads in question had posed before the said Flambard’s camera, he would not show such impatience to see them fall under the guillotine.

The conversation of the men with the luxuriant hair was none the less anarchical when the roast appeared, which sprung from the legendary animal called ‘vache enragee’. The possessor of the longest and thickest of all the shock heads, which spread over the shoulders of a young story writer—between us, be it said, he made a mistake in not combing it oftener—imparted to his brothers the subject for his new novel, which should have made the hair of the others bristle with terror; for the principal episode in this agreeable fiction was the desecration of a dead body in a cemetery by moonlight. There was a sort of hesitation in the audience, a slight movement of recoil, and Sillery, with a dash of raillery in his glance, asked the novelist:

“Why the devil do you write such a story?”

The novelist replied, in a thundering tone:

“To astonish the bourgeoisie!”

And nobody made the slightest objection.

To “astonish the bourgeoisie” was the dearest hope and most ardent wish of these young men, and this desire betrayed itself in their slightest word; and doubtless Amedee thought it legitimate and even worthy of praise. However, he did not believe—must we admit his lack of confidence?—that so many glorious efforts were ever crowned with success. He went so far as to ask himself whether the character and cleverness of these bourgeoisie would not lead them to ignore not only the works, but even the existence, of the authors who sought to “astonish” them; and he thought, not without sadness, that when La Guepe should have published this young novelist’s ghostly composition, the unconquerable bourgeoisie would know nothing about it, and would continue to devote itself to its favorite customs, such as tapping the barometer to know whether there was a change, or to heave a deep sigh after guzzling its soup, saying, “I feel better!” without being the least astonished in the world.



In spite of these mental reservations, which Amedee reproached himself with, being himself an impure and contemptible Philistine, the poet was delighted with his new friends and the unknown world opening before him. In this Bohemian corner, where one got intoxicated with wild excesses and paradoxes, recklessness and gayety reigned. The sovereign charm of youth was there, and Amedee, who had until now lived in a dark hiding-place, blossomed out in this warm atmosphere.

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After a horrible dessert of cheese and prunes, Pere Lebuffle's guests dispersed. Sillery escorted Amedee and the three Merovingians to the little, sparsely furnished first floor in the Rue Pigalle, where he lived; and half a dozen other lyric poets, who might have furnished some magnificent trophies for an Apache warrior's scalping-knife, soon came to reenforce the club which met there every Wednesday evening.

Seats were wanting at the beginning, but Sillery drew from a closet an old black trunk which would hold two, and contented himself, as master of the house, with sitting from time to time, with legs dangling, upon the marble mantel. The company thus found themselves very comfortable; still more so when an old woman with a dirty cap had placed upon the table, in the middle of the room, six bottles of beer, some odd glasses, and a large flowered plate upon which was a package of cut tobacco with cigarette paper. They began to recite their verses in a cloud of smoke. Each recited his own, called upon by Sillery; each would rise without being urged, place his chair in front of him, and leaning one hand upon its back, would recite his poem or elegy. Certainly some of them were wanting in genius, some were even ludicrous. Among the number was a little fellow with a cadaverous face, about as large as two farthings' worth of butter, who declared, in a long speech with flat rhymes, that an Asiatic harem was not capable of quenching his ardent love of pleasure. A fat-faced fellow with a good, healthy, country complexion, announced, in a long story, his formal intention of dying of a decline, on account of the treason of a courtesan with a face as cold as marble; while, if the facts were known, this peaceable boy lived with an artless child of the people, brightening her lot by reducing her to a state of slavery; she blacked his boots for him every morning before he left the house.

In spite of these ridiculous things, there were present some genuine poets who knew their business and had real talent. These filled Amedee with respect and fear, and when Sillery called his name, he arose with a dry mouth and heavy heart.

"It is your turn now, you newcomer! Recite us your 'Before Sebastopol.'"

And so, thoroughbred that he was, Amedee overcame his emotion and recited, in a thrilling voice, his military rhymes, that rang out like the report of a veteran's gun.

The last stanza, was greeted with loud applause, and all the auditors arose and surrounded Amedee to offer him their congratulations.

"Why, it is superb!"

"Entirely new!"

"It will make an enormous success!"

"It is just what is needed to arouse the public!"

“Recite us something else!—something else!”

Reassured and encouraged, master of himself, he recited a popular scene in which he had freely poured out his love for the poor people. He next recited some of his Parisian suburban scenes, and then a series of sonnets, entitled “Love’s Hopes,” inspired by his dear Maria; and he astonished all these poets by the versatility and variety of his inspirations.

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At each new poem bravos were thundered out, and the young man's heart expanded with joy under this warm sunshine of success. His audience vied with each other to approach Amedee first, and to shake his hand. Alas! some of those who were there would, later, annoy him by their low envy and treason; but now, in the generous frankness of their youth, they welcomed him as a master.

What an intoxicating evening! Amedee reached his home about two o'clock in the morning, his hands burning with the last grasps, his brain and heart intoxicated with the strong wine of praise. He walked with long and joyful strides through the fairy scene of a beautiful moonlight, in the fresh morning wind which made his clothes flutter and caressed his face. He thought he even felt the breath of fame.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Dreams, instead of living
Fortunate enough to keep those one loves
Learned that one leaves college almost ignorant
Paint from nature
The sincere age when one thinks aloud
Upon my word, there are no ugly ones (women)
Very young, and was in love with love

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By Francois Coppee

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XI

SUCCESS

Success, which usually is as fickle as justice, took long strides and doubled its stations in order to reach Amedee. The Cafe de Seville, and the coterie of long-haired writers, were busying themselves with the rising poet already. His suite of sonnets, published in La Guepe, pleased some of the journalists, who reproduced them in portions in well-distributed journals. Ten days after Amedee's meeting with Jocquelet, the latter recited his poem "Before Sebastopol" at a magnificent entertainment given at the Gaite for the benefit of an illustrious actor who had become blind and reduced to poverty.

This "dramatic solemnity," to use the language of the advertisement, began by being terribly tiresome. There was an audience present who were accustomed to grand

Parisian soirees, a blase and satiated public, who, upon this warm evening in the suffocating theatre, were more fatigued and satiated than ever. The sleepy journalists collapsed in their chairs, and in the back part of the stage-boxes, ladies' faces, almost green under paint, showed the excessive lassitude of a long winter of pleasure. The Parisians had all come there from custom, without having the slightest desire to do so, just as they always came, like galley-slaves condemned to "first nights." They were so lifeless that they did not even feel the slightest horror at seeing one another grow old. This chloroformed audience was afflicted with a long and too heavy programme, as is the custom in performances of this kind. They played fragments of the best

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known pieces, and sang songs from operas long since fallen into disuse even on street organs. This public saw the same comedians march out; the most famous are the most monotonous; the comical ones abused their privileges; the lover spoke distractedly through his nose; the great coquette—the actress par excellence, the last of the Celimenes—discharged her part in such a sluggish way that when she began an adverb ending in “ment,” one would have almost had time to go out and smoke a cigarette or drink a glass of beer before she reached the end of the said adverb.

But at the most lethargic moment of this drowsy soirees, after the comedians from the Francais had played in a stately manner one act from a tragedy, Jocquelet appeared. Jocquelet, still a pupil at the Conservatoire, showed himself to the public for the first time and by an exceptional grace—Jocquelet, absolutely unknown, too short in his evening clothes, in spite of the two packs of cards that he had put in his boots. He appeared, full of audacity, riding his high horse, raising his flat-nosed, bull-dog face toward the “gallery gods,” and, in his voice capable of making Jericho’s wall fall or raising Jehoshaphat’s dead, he dashed off in one effort, but with intelligence and heroic feeling, his comrade’s poem.

The effect was prodigious. This bold, common, but powerful actor, and these picturesque and modern verses were something entirely new to this public satiated with old trash. What a happy surprise! Two novelties at once! To think of discovering an unheard-of poet and an unknown comedian! To nibble at these two green fruits! Everybody shook off his torpor; the anaesthetized journalists aroused themselves; the colorless and sleepy ladies plucked up a little animation; and when Jocquelet had made the last rhyme resound like a grand flourish of trumpets, all applauded enough to split their gloves.

In one of the theatre lobbies, behind a bill-board pasted over with old placards, Amedee Violette heard with delight the sound of the applause which seemed like a shower of hailstones. He dared not think of it! Was it really his poem that produced so much excitement, which had thawed this cold public? Soon he did not doubt it, for Jocquelet, who had just been recalled three times, threw himself into the poet’s arms and glued his perspiring, painted face to his.

“Well, my little one, I have done it!” he exclaimed, bursting with gratification and vanity. “You heard how I caught them!”

Immediately twenty, thirty, a hundred spectators appeared, most of them very correct in white cravats, but all eager and with beaming countenances, asking to see the author and the interpreter, and to be presented to them, that they might congratulate them with an enthusiastic word and a shake of the hand. Yes! it was a success, an instantaneous

one. It was certainly that rare tropical flower of the Parisian greenhouse which blossoms out so seldom, but so magnificently.

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One large, very common-looking man, wearing superb diamond shirt-buttons, came in his turn to shake Amedee's hand, and in a hoarse, husky voice which would have been excellent to propose tickets "cheaper than at the office!" he asked for the manuscript of the poem that had just been recited.

"It is so that I may put you upon the first page of my tomorrow's edition, young man, and I publish eighty thousand. Victor Gaillard, editor of 'Le Tapage'. Does that please you?"

He took the manuscript without listening to the thanks of the poet, who trembled with joy at the thought that his work had caught the fancy of this Barnum of the press, the foremost advertiser in France and Europe, and that his verses would meet the eyes of two hundred thousand readers.

Yes, it was certainly a success, and he experienced the first bitterness of it as soon as he arrived the next morning at the Cafe de Seville, where he now went every two or three days at the hour for absinthe. His verses had appeared in that morning's Tapage, printed in large type and headed by a few lines of praise written by Victor Gaillard, a la Barnum. As soon as Amedee entered the cafe he saw that he was the object of general attention, and the lyric gentlemen greeted him with acclamations and bravos; but at certain expressions of countenance, constrained looks, and bitter smiles, the impressionable young man felt with a sudden sadness that they already envied him.

"I warned you of it," said Paul Sillery to him, as he led him into a corner of the cafe. "Our good friends are not pleased, and that is very natural. The greater part of these rhymers are 'cheap jewellers,' and they are jealous of a master workman. Above all things, pretend not to notice it; they will never forgive you for guessing their bad sentiments. And then you must be indulgent to them. You have your beautiful lieutenant's epaulettes, Violette, do not be too hard upon these poor privates. They also are fighting under the poetic flag, and ours is a poverty-stricken regiment. Now you must profit by your good luck. Here you are, celebrated in forty-eight hours. Do you see, even the political people look at you with curiosity, although a poet in the estimation of these austere persons is an inferior and useless being. It is all they will do to accept Victor Hugo, and only on account of his 'Chatiments.' You are the lion of the day. Lose no time. I met just now upon the boulevard Massif, the publisher. He had read 'Le Tapage' and expects you. Carry him all your poems to-morrow; there will be enough to make a volume. Massif will publish it at his own expense, and you will appear before the public in one month. You never will inveigle a second time that big booby of a Gaillard, who took a mere passing fancy for you. But no matter! I know your book, and it will be a success. You are launched. Forward, march! Truly, I am better than I thought, for your success gives me pleasure."

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This amiable comrade's words easily dissipated the painful feelings that Amedee had just experienced. However, it was one of those exalted moments when one will not admit that evil exists. He spent some time with the poets, forcing himself to be more gracious and friendly than ever, and left them persuaded—the unsuspecting child!—that he had disarmed them by his modesty; and very impatient to share his joy with his friends, the Gerards, he quickly walked the length of Montmartre and reached them just at their dinner hour.

They did not expect him, and only had for their dinner the remains of the boiled beef of the night before, with some cucumbers. Amedee carried his cake, as usual, and, what was better still, two sauces that always make the poorest meal palatable—hope and happiness.

They had already read the journals and knew that the poem had been applauded at the Gaite, and that it had at once been printed on the first page of the journal; and they were all so pleased, so glad, that they kissed Amedee on both cheeks. Mamma Gerard remembered that she had a few bottles—five or six—of old chambertin in the cellar, and you could not have prevented the excellent woman from taking her key and taper at once, and going for those old bottles covered with cobwebs and dust, that they might drink to the health of the triumphant one. As to Louise, she was radiant, for in several houses where she gave lessons she had heard them talk of the fine and admirable verses published in *Le Tapage*, and she was very proud to think that the author was a friend of hers. What completed Amedee's pleasure was that for the first time Maria seemed to be interested in his poem, and said several times to him, with such a pretty, vain little air:

“Do you know, your battle is very nice. Amedee, you are going to become a great poet, a celebrated man! What a superb future you have before you!”

Ah! what exquisitely sweet hopes he carried away that evening to his room in the Faubourg St.-Jacques! They gave him beautiful dreams, and pervaded his thoughts the next morning when the concierge brought him two letters.

Still more happiness! The first letter contained two notes of a hundred francs each, with Victor Gaillard's card, who congratulated Amedee anew and asked him to write something for his journal in the way of prose; a story, or anything he liked. The young poet gave a cry of joyful surprise when he recognized the handwriting of Maurice Roger upon the other envelope.

“I have just returned to Paris, my dear Amedee,” wrote the traveller, “and your success was my first greeting. I must embrace you quickly and tell you how happy I am. Come to see me at four o'clock in my den in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. We will dine and pass the evening together.”

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Ah! how the poet loved life that morning, how good and sweet it seemed to him! Clothed in his best, he gayly descended the Rue St.-Jacques, where boxes of asparagus and strawberries perfumed the fruit-stalls, and went to the Boulevard St. Michel, where he purchased an elegant gray felt hat and a new cravat. Then he went to the Cafe Voltaire, where he lunched. He changed his second hundred-franc bill, so that he might feel, with the pleasure of a child, the beautiful louis d'or which he owed to his work and its success. At the office the head clerk—a good fellow, who sang well at dinners—complimented Amedee upon his poem. The young man had only made his appearance to ask for leave that afternoon, so as to take his manuscript to the publisher.

Once more in the street in the bright May sun, after the fashion of nabobs, he took an open carriage and was carried to Massif, in the Passage des Princes. The editor of the *Jeunes* was seated in his office, which was decorated with etchings and beautiful bindings. He is well known by his magnificent black beard and his large bald head, upon which a wicked jester once advised him to paste his advertisements; he publishes the works of audacious authors and sensational books, and had the honor of sharing with Charles Bazile, the poet, an imprisonment at St.-Pelagie. He received this thin-faced rhymers coldly. Amedee introduced himself, and at once there was a broad smile, a handshake, and a connoisseur's greedy sniffing. Then Massif opened the manuscript.

"Let us see! Ah, yes, with margins and false titles we can make out two hundred and fifty pages."

The business was settled quickly. A sheet of stamped paper—an agreement! Massif will pay all the expenses of the first edition of one thousand, and if there is another edition—and of course there will be!—he will give him ten cents a copy. Amedee signs without reading. All that he asks is that the volume should be published without delay.

"Rest easy, my dear poet! You will receive the first proofs in three days, and in one month it will appear."

Was it possible? Was Amedee not dreaming? He, poor Violette's son, the little office clerk—his book would be published, and in a month! Readers and unknown friends will be moved by his agitation, will suffer in his suspense; young people will love him and find an echo of their sentiments in his verses; women will dreamily repeat—with one finger in his book—some favorite verse that touches their hearts! Ah! he must have a confidant in his joy, he must tell some true friend.

"Driver, take me to the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince."



He mounted, four steps at a time, the stairs leading to Maurice's room. The key is in the door. He enters and finds the traveller there, standing in the midst of the disorder of open trunks.

"Maurice!"

"Amedee!"

What an embrace! How long they stood hand in hand, looking at each other with happy smiles!

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Maurice is more attractive and gracious than ever. His beauty is more manly, and his golden moustache glistens against his sun-browned skin. What a fine fellow! How he rejoiced at his friend's first success!

"I am certain that your book will turn everybody's head. I always told you that you were a genuine poet. We shall see!"

As to himself, he was happy too. His mother had let him off from studying law and allowed him to follow his vocation. He was going to have a studio and paint. It had all been decided in Italy, where Madame Roger had witnessed her son's enthusiasm over the great masters. Ah, Italy! Italy! and he began to tell of his trip, show knickknacks and souvenirs of all kinds that littered the room. He turned in his hands, that he might show all its outlines, a little terra-cotta reduction of the Antinous in the Museum of Naples. He opened a box, full to bursting, of large photographs, and passed them to his friend with exclamations of retrospective admiration.

"Look! the Coliseum! the ruins of Paestum—and this antique from the Vatican! Is it not beautiful?"

While looking at the pictures he recalled the things that he had seen and the impressions he had experienced. There was a band of collegians in little capes and short trousers taking their walk; they wore buckled shoes, like the abbés of olden times, and nothing could be more droll than to see these childish priests play leapfrog. There, upon the Riva dei Schiavoni, he had followed a Venetian. "Shabbily dressed, and fancy, my friend, bare-headed, in a yellow shawl with ragged green fringe! No, I do not know whether she was pretty, but she possessed in her person all the attractions of Giorgione's goddesses and Titian's courtesans combined!"

Maurice is still the same wicked fellow. But, bah! it suits him; he even boasts of it with such a joyous ardor and such a youthful dash, that it is only one charm the more in him. The clock struck seven, and they went to dine. They started off through the Latin Quarter. Maurice gave his arm to Amedee and told him of his adventures on the other side of the Alps. Maurice, once started on this subject, could not stop, and while the dinner was being served the traveller continued to describe his escapades. This kind of conversation was dangerous for Amedee; for it must not be forgotten that for some time the young poet's innocence had weighed upon him, and this evening he had some pieces of gold in his pocket that rang a chime of pleasure. While Maurice, with his elbow upon the table, told him his tales of love, Amedee gazed out upon the sidewalk at the women who passed by in fresh toilettes, in the gaslight which illuminated the green foliage, giving a little nod of the head to those whom they knew. There was voluptuousness in the very air, and it was Amedee who arose from the table and recalled to Maurice that it was Thursday, and that there was a fete that night at Bullier's; and he also was the one to add, with a deliberate air:

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“Shall we take a turn there?”

“Willingly,” replied his gay friend. “Ah, ha! we are then beginning to enjoy ourselves a little, Monsieur Violette! Go to Bullier’s? so be it. I am not sorry to assure myself whether or not I still love the Parisians.”

They started off, smoking their cigarettes. Upon the highway, going in the same direction as themselves, were victorias carrying women in spring costumes and wearing bonnets decked with flowers. From time to time the friends were elbowed by students shouting popular refrains and walking in Indian-file.

Here is Bullier’s! They step into the blazing entrance, and go thence to the stairway which leads to the celebrated public ballroom. They are stifled by the odor of dust, escaping gas, and human flesh. Alas! there are in every village in France doctors in hansom cabs, country lawyers, and any quantity of justices of the peace, who, I can assure you, regret this stench as they take the fresh air in the open country under the starry heavens, breathing the exquisite perfume of new-mown hay; for it is mingled with the little poetry that they have had in their lives, with their student’s love-affairs, and their youth.

All the same, this Bullier’s is a low place, a caricature of the Alhambra in pasteboard. Three or four thousand moving heads in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and an exasperating orchestra playing a quadrille in which dancers twist and turn, tossing their legs with calm faces and audacious gestures.

“What a mob!” said Amedee, already a trifle disgusted. “Let us go into the garden.”

They were blinded by the gas there; the thickets looked so much like old scenery that one almost expected to see the yellow breastplates of comic-opera dragoons; and the jet of water recalled one of those little spurts of a shooting-gallery upon which an empty egg-shell dances. But they could breathe there a little.

“Boy! two sodas,” said Maurice, striking the table with his cane; and the two friends sat down near the edge of a walk where the crowd passed and repassed. They had been there about ten minutes when two women stopped before them.

“Good-day, Maurice,” said the taller, a brunette with rich coloring, the genuine type of a tavern girl.

“What, Margot!” exclaimed the young man. “Will you take something? Sit down a moment, and your friend too. Do you know, your friend is charming? What is her name?”



“Rosine,” replied the stranger, modestly, for she was only about eighteen, and, in spite of the blond frizzles over her eyes, she was not yet bold, poor child! She was making her debut, it was easy to see.

“Well, Mademoiselle Rosine, come here, that I may see you,” continued Maurice, seating the young girl beside him with a caressing gesture. “You, Margot, I authorize to be unfaithful to me once more in favor of my friend Amedee. He is suffering with lovesickness, and has a heart to let. Although he is a poet, I think he happens to have in his pocket enough to pay for a supper.”

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Everywhere and always the same, the egotistical and amiable Maurice takes the lion's share, and Amedee, listening only with one ear to the large Margot, who is already begging him to make an acrostic for her, thinks Rosine is charming, while Maurice says a thousand foolish things to her. In spite of himself, the poet looks upon Maurice as his superior, and thinks it perfectly natural that he should claim the prettier of the two women. No matter! Amedee wanted to enjoy himself too. This Margot, who had just taken off her gloves to drink her wine, had large, red hands, and seemed as silly as a goose, but all the same she was a beautiful creature, and the poet began to talk to her, while she laughed and looked at him with a wanton's eyes. Meanwhile the orchestra burst into a polka, and Maurice, in raising his voice to speak to his friend, called him several times Amedee, and once only by his family name, Violette. Suddenly little Rosine started up and looked at the poet, saying with astonishment:

"What! Is your name Amedee Violette?"

"Certainly."

"Then you are the boy with whom I played so much when I was a child."

"With me?"

"Yes! Do you not remember Rosine, little Rosine Combarieu, at Madame Gerard's, the engraver's wife, in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs? We played games with his little girls. How odd it is, the way one meets old friends!"

What is it that Amedee feels? His entire childhood rises before him. The bitterness of the thought that he had known this poor girl in her innocence and youth, and the Gerards' name spoken in such a place, filled the young man's heart with a singular sadness. He could only say to Rosine, in a voice that trembled a little with pity:

"You! Is it you?"

Then she became red and very embarrassed, lowering her eyes.

Maurice had tact; he noticed that Rosine and Amedee were agitated, and, feeling that he was *de trop*, he arose suddenly and said:

"Now then, Margot. Come on! these children want to talk over their childhood, I think. Give up your acrostic, my child. Take my arm, and come and have a turn."

When they were alone Amedee gazed at Rosine sadly. She was pretty, in spite of her colorless complexion, a child of the faubourg, born with a genius for dress, who could clothe herself on nothing—a linen gown, a flower in her hat. One who lived on salads and vegetables, so as to buy well-made shoes and eighteen-button gloves.

The pretty blonde looked at Amedee, and a timid smile shone in her nut-brown eyes.

“Now, Monsieur Amedee,” said she, at last, “it need not trouble you to meet at Bullier’s the child whom you once played with. What would have been astonishing would be to find that I had become a fine lady. I am not wise, it is true, but I work, and you need not fear that I go with the first comer. Your friend is a handsome fellow, and very amiable, and I accepted his attentions because he knew Margot, while with you it is very different. It gives me pleasure to talk with you. It recalls Mamma Gerard, who was so kind to me. What has become of her, tell me? and her husband and her daughters?”

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"Monsieur Gerard is dead," replied Amedee; "but the ladies are well, and I see them often."

"Do not tell them that you met me here, will you? It is better not. If I had had a good 'mother, like those girls, things would have turned out differently for me. But, you remember, papa was always interested in his politics. When I was fifteen years old he apprenticed me to a florist. He was a fine master, a perfect monster of a man, who ruined me! I say, Pere Combarieu has a droll trade now; he is manager of a Republican journal—nothing to do—only a few months in prison now and then. I am always working in flowers, and I have a little friend, a pupil at Val-de-Grace, but he has just left as a medical officer for Algeria. I was lonely all by myself, and this evening big Margot, whom I got acquainted with in the shop, brought me here to amuse myself. But you—what are you doing? Your friend said just now that you were a poet. Do you write songs? I always liked them. Do you remember when I used to play airs with one finger upon the Gerards' old piano? You were such a pretty little boy then, and as gentle as a girl. You still have your nice blue eyes, but they are a little darker. I remember them. No, you can not know how glad I am to see you again!"

They continued to chatter, bringing up old reminiscences, and when she spoke of the Gerard ladies she put on a respectful little air which pleased Amedee very much. She was a poor feather-headed little thing, he did not doubt; but she had kept at least the poor man's treasure, a simple heart. The young man was pleased with her prattling, and as he looked at the young girl he thought of the past and felt a sort of compassion for her. As she was silent for a moment, the poet said to her, "Do you know that you have become very pretty? What a charming complexion you have! such a lovely pallor!"

The grisette, who had known what poverty was, gave a bitter little laugh:

"Oh, my pallor! that is nothing! It is not the pallor of wealth."

Then, recovering her good-humor at once, she continued:

"Tell me, Monsieur Amedee, does this big Margot, whom you began to pay attentions to a little while ago, please you?"

Amedee quickly denied it. "That immense creature? Never! Now then, Rosine, I came here to amuse myself a little, I will admit. That is not forbidden at my age, is it? But this ball disgusts me. You have no appointment here? No? Is it truly no? Very well, take my arm and let us go. Do you live far from here?"

"In the Avenue d'Orleans, near the Montrouge church."

"Will you allow me to escort you home, then?"



She would be happy to, and they arose and left the ball. It seemed to the young poet as if the pretty girl's arm trembled a little in his; but once upon the boulevard, flooded by the light from the silvery moon, Rosine slackened her steps and became pensive, and her eyes were lowered when Amedee sought a glance from them in the obscurity. How sweet was this new desire that troubled the young man's heart! It was mixed with a little sentiment; his heart beat with emotion, and Rosine was not less moved. They could both find only insignificant things to say.

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"What a beautiful night!"

"Yes! It does one good to breathe the fresh air."

They continued their walk without speaking. Oh, how fresh and sweet it was under these trees!

At last they reached the door of Rosine's dwelling. With a slow movement she pressed her hand upon the bell-button. Then Amedee, with a great effort, and in a confused, husky voice, asked whether he might go up with her and see her little room.

She looked at him steadily, with a tender sadness in her eyes, and then said to him, softly:

"No, certainly not! One must be sensible. I please you this evening, and you know very well that I think you are charming. It is true we knew each other when we were young, and now that we have met again, it seems as if it would be pleasant to love each other. But, believe me, we should commit a great folly, perhaps a wrong. It is better, I assure you, to forget that you ever met me at Bullier's with big Margot, and only remember your little playmate of the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. It will be better than a caprice, it will be something pure that you can keep in your heart. Do not let us spoil the remembrance of our childhood, Monsieur Amedee, and let us part good friends."

Before the young man could find a reply, the bell pealed again, and Rosine gave Amedee a parting smile, lightly kissing the tips of her fingers, and disappeared behind the door, which fell together, with a loud bang. The poet's first movement was one of rage. Giddy weather-cock of a woman! But he had hardly taken twenty steps upon the sidewalk before he said to himself, with a feeling of remorse, "She was right!" He thought that this poor girl had kept in one corner of her heart a shadow of reserve and modesty, and he was happy to feel rise within him a sacred respect for woman!

Amedee, my good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure. You had better give it up!

CHAPTER XII

SOCIAL TRIUMPHS

For one month now Amedee Violette's volume of verses, entitled *Poems from Nature*, had embellished with its pale-blue covers the shelves of the book-shops. The commotion raised by the book's success, and the favorable criticisms given by the journals, had not yet calmed down at the Cafe de Seville.

This emotion, let it be understood, did not exist except among the literary men. The politicians disdained poets and poetry, and did not trouble themselves over such commonplace matters. They had affairs of a great deal more importance to determine the overthrow of the government first, then to remodel the map of Europe! What was necessary to overthrow the Empire? First, conspiracy; second, barricades. Nothing was easier than to conspire. Every body conspired at the Seville. It is the character of the French, who are born cunning, but are light and talkative, to conspire in public places.

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As soon as one of our compatriots joins a secret society his first care is to go to his favorite restaurant and to confide, under a bond of the most absolute secrecy, to his most intimate friend, what he has known for about five minutes, the aim of the conspiracy, names of the actors, the day, hour, and place of the rendezvous, the passwords and countersigns. A little while after he has thus relieved himself, he is surprised that the police interfere and spoil an enterprise that has been prepared with so much mystery and discretion. It was in this way that the “beards” dealt in dark deeds of conspiracy at the Cafe de Seville. At the hour for absinthe and mazagran a certain number of Fiesques and Catilines were grouped around each table. At one of the tables in the foreground five old “beards,” whitened by political crime, were planning an infernal machine; and in the back of the room ten robust hands had sworn upon the billiard-table to arm themselves for regicide; only, as with all “beards,” there were necessarily some false ones among them, that is to say, spies. All the plots planned at the Seville had miserably miscarried.

The art of building barricades was also—you never would suspect it!—very ardently and conscientiously studied. This special branch of the science of fortification reckoned more than one Vauban and Gribeauval among its numbers. “Professor of barricading,” was a title honored at the Cafe de Seville, and one that they would willingly have had engraved upon their visiting-cards. Observe that the instruction was only theoretical; doubtless out of respect for the policemen, they could not give entirely practical lessons to the future rioters who formed the ground-work of the business. The master or doctor of civil war could not go out with them, for instance, and practise in the Rue Drouot. But he had one resource, one way of getting out of it; namely, dominoes. No! you never would believe what a revolutionary appearance these inoffensive mutton-bones took on under the seditious hands of the habitués of the Cafe de Seville. These miniature pavements simulated upon the marble table the subjugation of the most complicated of barricades, with all sorts of bastions, redans, and counterscarps. It was something after the fashion of the small models of war-ships that one sees in marine museums. Any one, not in the secret, would have supposed that the “beards” simply played dominoes. Not at all! They were pursuing a course of technical insurrection. When they roared at the top of their lungs “Five on all sides!” certain players seemed to order a general discharge, and they had a way of saying, “I can not!” which evidently expressed the despair of a combatant who has burned his last cartridge. A “beard” in glasses and a stovepipe hat, who had been refused in his youth at the Ecole Polytechnique, was frightful in the rapidity and mathematical precision with which he added up in three minutes his barricade of dominoes. When this man “blocked the six,” you were transported in imagination to the Rue Transnonain, or to the Cloître St. Merry. It was terrible!

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As to foreign politics, or the remodelling of the map of Europe, it was, properly speaking, only sport and recreation to the “beards.” It added interest to the game, that was all. Is it not agreeable, when you are preparing a discard, at the decisive moment, with one hundred at piquet, which gives you ‘quinte’ or ‘quatorze’, to deliver unhappy Poland; and when one has the satisfaction to score a king and take every trick, what does it cost to let the Russians enter Constantinople?

Nevertheless, some of the most solemn “beards” of the Cafe de Seville attached themselves to international questions, to the great problem of European equilibrium. One of the most profound of these diplomats—who probably had nothing to buy suspenders with, for his shirt always hung out between his waistcoat and trousers—was persuaded that an indemnity of two million francs would suffice to obtain from the Pope the transfer of Rome to the Italians; and another Metternich on a small scale assumed for his specialty the business of offering a serious affront to England and threatening her, if she did not listen to his advice, with a loss in a short time of her Indian Empire and other colonial possessions.

Thus the “beards,” absorbed by such grave speculations, did not trouble themselves about the vanity called literature, and did not care a pin for Amedee Violette’s book. Among the long-haired ones, however, we repeat, the emotion was great. They were furious, they were agitated, and bristled up; the first enthusiasm over Amedee Violette’s verses could not be lasting and had been only a mere flash. The young man saw these Merovingians as they really were toward a man who succeeded, that is, severe almost to cruelty. What! the first edition of Poems from Nature was exhausted and Massif had another in press! What! the bourgeoisie, far from being “astonished” at this book, declared themselves delighted with it, bought it, read it, and perhaps had it rebound! They spoke favorably of it in all the bourgeois journals, that is to say, in those that had subscribers! Did they not say that Violette, incited by Jocquelet, was working at a grand comedy in verse, and that the Theatre-Francais had made very flattering offers to the poet? But then, if he pleased the bourgeoisie so much he was—oh, horror!—a bourgeois himself. That was obvious. How blind they had been not to see it sooner! When Amedee had read his verses not long since at Sillery’s, by what aberration had they confounded this platitude with simplicity, this whining with sincere emotion, these stage tricks with art? Ah! you may rest assured, they never will be caught again!

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As the poets' tables at the Cafe de Seville had been for some time transformed into beds of torture upon which Amedee Violette's poems were stretched out and racked every day from five to seven, the amiable Paul Sillery, with a jeering smile upon his lips, tried occasionally to cry pity for his friend's verses, given up to such ferocious executioners. But these literary murderers, ready to destroy a comrade's book, are more pitiless than the Inquisition. There were two inquisitors more relentless than the others; first, the little scrubby fellow who claimed for his share all the hours of a Mussulman's palace; another, the great elegist from the provinces. Truly, his heartaches must have made him gain flesh, for very soon he was obliged to let out the strap on his waistcoat.

Of course, when Amedee appeared, the conversation was immediately changed, and they began to talk of insignificant things that they had read in the journals; for example, the fire-damp, which had killed twenty-five working-men in a mine, in a department of the north; or of the shipwreck of a transatlantic steamer in which everything was lost, with one hundred and fifty passengers and forty sailors—events of no importance, we must admit, if one compares them to the recent discovery made by the poet inquisitors of two incorrect phrases and five weak rhymes in their comrade's work.

Amedee's sensitive nature soon remarked the secret hostility of which he was the object in this group of poets, and he now came to the Cafe de Seville only on rare occasions, in order to take Paul Sillery by the hand, who, in spite of his ironical air, had always shown himself a good and faithful friend.

It was there that he recognized one evening his classmate of the Lycee, Arthur Papillon, seated at one of the political tables. The poet wondered to himself how this fine lawyer, with his temperate opinions, happened to be among these hot-headed revolutionists, and what interest in common could unite this correct pair of blond whiskers to the uncultivated, bushy ones. Papillon, as soon as he saw Amedee, took leave of the group with whom he was talking and came and offered his hearty congratulations to the author of Poems from Nature, leading him out upon the boulevard and giving him the key to the mystery.

All the old parties were united against the Empire, in view of the coming elections; Orleanists and Republicans were, for the time being, close friends. He, Papillon, had just taken his degree, and had attached himself to the fortunes of an old wreck of the July government; who, having rested in oblivion since 1852, had consented to run as candidate for the Liberal opposition in Seine-et-Oise. Papillon was flying around like a hen with her head cut off, to make his companion win the day. He came to the Seville to assure himself of the neutral goodwill of the unreconciled journalists, and he was full of hope.

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“Oh! my dear friend, how difficult it is to struggle against an official candidate! But our candidate is an astonishing man. He goes about all day upon the railroads in our department, unfolding his programme before the travelling countrymen and changing compartments at each station. What a stroke of genius! a perambulating public assembling. This idea came to him from seeing a harpist make the trip from Havre to Honfleur, playing ‘Il Bacio’ all the time. Ah, one must look alive! The prefect does not shrink from any way of fighting us. Did he not spread through one of our most Catholic cantons the report that we were Voltairians, enemies to religion and devourers of priests? Fortunately, we have yet four Sundays before us, from now until the voting-day, and the patron will go to high mass and communion in our four more important parishes. That will be a response! If such a man is not elected, universal suffrage is hopeless!”

Amedee was not at that time so disenchanted with political matters as he became later, and he asked himself with an uneasy feeling whether this model candidate, who was perhaps about to give himself sacrilegious indigestion, and who showed his profession of faith as a cutler shows his knives, was not simply a quack.

Arthur Papillon did not give him time to devote himself to such unpleasant reflections, but said to him, in a frank, protecting tone:

“And you, my boy, let us see, where do you stand? You have been very successful, have you not? The other evening at the house of Madame la Comtesse Fontaine, you know—the widow of one of Louis Philippe’s ministers and daughter of Marshal Lefievre—Jocquelet recited your ‘Sebastopol’ with enormous success. What a voice that Jocquelet has! We have not his like at the Paris bar. Fortunate poet! I have seen your book lying about in the boudoir of more than one beautiful woman. Well, I hope that you will leave the Cafe de Seville and not linger with all these badly combed fellows. You must go into society; it is indispensable to a man of letters, and I will present you whenever you wish.”

For the time being Amedee’s ardor was a little dampened concerning the Bohemians with whom he enjoyed so short a favor, and who had also in many ways shocked his delicacy. He was not desirous to be called “thou” by Pere Lebuffle.

But to go into society! His education had been so modest! Should he know how to appear, how to conduct himself properly? He asked this of Papillon. Our poet was proud, he feared ridicule, and would not consent to play an inferior role anywhere; and then his success just then was entirely platonic. He was still very poor and lived in the Faubourg St.-Jacques. Massif ought to pay him in a few days five hundred francs for the second edition of his book; but what is a handful of napoleons?

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"It is enough," said the advocate, who thought of his friend's dress. "It is all that is necessary to buy fine linen, and a well cut dress-coat, that is the essential thing. Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent. With your fine and yielding nature you will become at once a gentleman; better still, you are not a bad-looking fellow; you have an interesting pallor. I am convinced that you will please. It is now the beginning of July, and Paris is almost empty, but Madame la Comtesse Fontaine does not go away until the vacations, as she is looking after her little son, who is finishing his studies at the Lycee Bonaparte. The Countess's drawing-rooms are open every evening until the end of the month, and one meets there all the chic people who are delayed in Paris, or who stop here between two journeys. Madame Fontaine is a very amiable and influential old lady; she has a fancy for writers when they are good company. Do not be silly, but go and order yourself some evening clothes. By presenting you there, my dear fellow, I assure you, perhaps in fifteen years, a seat in the Academy. It is agreed! Get ready for next week."

Attention! Amedee Violette is about to make his first appearance in society.

Although his concierge, who aided him to finish his toilette and saw him put on his white cravat, had just said to him, "What a love of a husband you would make!" the poet's heart beat rapidly when the carriage in which he was seated beside Arthur Papillon stopped before the steps of an old house in the Rue de Bellechasse, where Madame la Comtesse Fontaine lived.

In the vestibule he tried to imitate the advocate's bearing, which was full of authority; but quickly despaired of knowing how to swell out his starched shirt-front under the severe looks of four tall lackeys in silk stockings. Amedee was as much embarrassed as if he were presented naked before an examining board. But they doubtless found him "good for service," for the door opened into a brightly lighted drawing-room into which he followed Arthur Papillon, like a frail sloop towed in by an imposing three-master, and behold the timid Amedee presented in due form to the mistress of the house! She was a lady of elephantine proportions, in her sixtieth year, and wore a white camellia stuck in her rosewood-colored hair. Her face and arms were plastered with enough flour to make a plate of fritters; but for all that, she had a grand air and superb eyes, whose commanding glance was softened by so kindly a smile that Amedee was a trifle reassured.

She had much applauded M. Violette's beautiful verse, she said, that Jocquelet had recited at her house on the last Thursday of her season; and she had just read with the greatest pleasure his Poems from Nature. She thanked M. Papillon—who bows his head and lets his monocle fall—for having brought M. Violette. She was charmed to make his acquaintance.

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Amedee was very much embarrassed to know what to reply to this commonplace compliment which was paid so gracefully. Fortunately he was spared this duty by the arrival of a very much dressed, tall, bony woman, toward whom the Countess darted off with astonishing vivacity, exclaiming, joyfully: "Madame la Marechale!" and Amedee, still following in the wake of his comrade, sailed along toward the corner of the drawing-room, and then cast anchor before a whole flotilla of black coats. Amedee's spirits began to revive, and he examined the place, so entirely new to him, where his growing reputation had admitted him.

It was a vast drawing-room after the First Empire style, hung and furnished in yellow satin, whose high white panels were decorated with trophies of antique weapons carved in wood and gilded. A dauber from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts would have branded with the epithet "sham" the armchairs and sofas ornamented with sphinx heads in bronze, as well as the massive green marble clock upon which stood, all in gold, a favorite court personage, clothed in a cap, sword, and fig-leaf, who seemed to be making love to a young person in a floating tunic, with her hair dressed exactly like that of the Empress Josephine. But the dauber would have been wrong, for this massive splendor was wanting neither in grandeur nor character. Two pictures only lighted up the cold walls; one, signed by Gros, was an equestrian portrait of the Marshal, Madame Fontaine's father, the old drummer of Pont de Lodi, one of the bravest of Napoleon's lieutenants. He was represented in full-dress uniform, with an enormous black-plumed hat, brandishing his blue velvet baton, sprinkled with golden bees, and under the rearing horse's legs one could see in the dim distance a grand battle in the snow, and mouths of burning cannons. The other picture, placed upon an easel and lighted by a lamp with a reflector, was one of Ingre's the 'chef-d'oeuvres'. It was the portrait of the mistress of the house at the age of eighteen, a portrait of which the Countess was now but an old and horrible caricature.

Arthur Papillon talked in a low voice with Amedee, explaining to him how Madame Fontaine's drawing-room was neutral ground, open to people of all parties. As daughter of a Marshal of the First Empire, the Countess preserved the highest regard for the people at the Tuileries, although she was the widow of Count Fontaine, who was one of the brood of Royer-Collard's conservatives, a parliamentarian ennobled by Louis-Philippe, twice a colleague of Guizot on the ministerial bench, who died of spite and suppressed ambition after '48 and the coup d'etat. Besides, the Countess's brother, the Duc d'Eylau, married, in 1829, one of the greatest heiresses in the Faubourg St. Germain; for his father, the Marshal, whose character did not equal his bravery, attached himself to every government, and carried his candle in the processions on Corpus Christi Day under Charles X, and had ended by being

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manager of the Invalides at the beginning of the July monarchy. Thanks to this fortunate combination of circumstances, one met several great lords, many Orleanists, a certain number of official persons, and even some republicans of high rank, in this liberal drawing-room, where the Countess, who was an admirable hostess, knew how to attract learned men, writers, artists, and celebrities of all kinds, as well as young and pretty women. As the season was late, the gathering this evening was not large. However, neglecting the unimportant gentlemen whose ancestors had perhaps been fabricated by Pere Issacar, Papillon pointed out to his friend a few celebrities. One, with the badge of the Legion of Honor upon his coat, which looked as if it had come from the stall of an old-clothes man, was Forgerol, the great geologist, the most grasping of scientific men; Forgerol, rich from his twenty fat sinecures, for whom one of his confreres composed this epitaph in advance: "Here lies Forgerol, in the only place he did not solicit."

That grand old man, with the venerable, shaky head, whose white, silky hair seemed to shed blessings and benedictions, was M. Dussant du Fosse, a philanthropist by profession, honorary president of all charitable works; senator, of course, since he was one of France's peers, and who in a few years after the Prussians had left, and the battles were over, would sink into suspicious affairs and end in the police courts.

That old statesman, whose rough, gray hairs were like brushes for removing cobwebs, a pedant from head to foot, leaning in his favorite attitude against the mantel decorated only with flowers, by his mulish obstinacy contributed much to the fall of the last monarchy. He was respectfully listened to and called "dear master" by a republican orator, whose red-hot convictions began to ooze away, and who, soon after, as minister of the Liberal empire, did his best to hasten the government's downfall.

Although Amedee was of an age to respect these notabilities, whom Papillon pointed out to him with so much deference, they did not impress him so much as certain visitors who belonged to the world of art and letters. In considering them the young man was much surprised and a little saddened at the want of harmony that he discovered between the appearance of the men and the nature of their talents. The poet Leroy des Saules had the haughty attitude and the Apollo face corresponding to the noble and perfect beauty of his verses; but Edouard Durocher, the fashionable painter of the nineteenth century, was a large, common-looking man with a huge moustache, like that of a book agent; and Theophile de Sonis, the elegant story-writer, the worldly romancer, had a copper-colored nose, and his harsh beard was like that of a chief in a custom-house.

What attracted Amedee's attention, above all things, were the women—the fashionable women that he saw close by for the first time. Some of them were old, and horrified him. The jewels with which they were loaded made their fatigued looks, dark-ringed

eyes, heavy profiles, thick flabby lips, like a dromedary's, still more distressing; and with their bare necks and arms—it was etiquette at Madame Fontaine's receptions—which allowed one to see through filmy lace their flabby flesh or bony skeletons, they were as ridiculous as an elegant cloak would be upon an old crone.

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As he saw these decrepit, painted creatures, the young man felt the respect that he should have for the old leave him. He would look only at the young and beautiful women, those with graceful figures and triumphant smiles upon their lips, flowers in their hair, and diamonds upon their necks. All this bare flesh intimidated Amedee; for he had been brought up so privately and strictly that he was distressed enough to lower his eyes at the sight of so many arms, necks, and shoulders. He thought of Maria Gerard as she looked the other day, when he met her going to work in the Louvre, so pretty in her short high-necked dress, her magnificent hair flying out from her close bonnet, and her box of pastels in her hand. How much more he preferred this simple rose, concealed among thorns, to all these too full-blown peonies!

Soon the enormous and amiable Countess came to the poet and begged him, to his great confusion, to recite a few verses. He was forced to do it. It was his turn to lean upon the mantel. Fortunately it was a success for him; all the full-blown peonies, who did not understand much of his poetry, thought him a handsome man, with his blue eyes, and their ardent, melancholy glance; and they applauded him as much as they could without bursting their very tight gloves. They surrounded him and complimented him. Madame Fontaine presented him to the poet Leroy des Saules, who congratulated him with the right word, and invited him with a paternal air to come and see him. It would have been a very happy moment for Amedee, if one of the old maids with camel-like lips, whose stockings were probably as blue as her eyelids, had not monopolized him for a quarter of an hour, putting him through a sort of an examination on contemporary poets. At last the poet retired, after receiving a cup of tea and an invitation to dinner for the next Tuesday. Then he was once more seated in the carriage with Arthur Papillon, who gave him a slap on the thigh, exclaiming, joyfully:

“Well, you are launched!”

It was true; he was launched, and he will wear out more than one suit of evening clothes before he learns all that this action “going into society,” which seems nothing at all at first, and which really is nothing, implies, to an industrious man and artist, of useless activity and lost time. He is launched! He has made a successful debut! A dinner in the city! At Madame Fontaine’s dinner on the next Tuesday, some abominable wine and aged salmon was served to Amedee by a butler named Adolphe, who ought rather to have been called Exili or Castaing, and who, after fifteen years’ service to the Countess, already owned two good paying houses in Paris. At the time, however, all went well, for Amedee had a good healthy stomach and could digest buttons from a uniform; but when all the Borgias, in black-silk stockings and white-silk gloves, who wish to become house-owners, have cooked their favorite dishes for him, and have practised only half a dozen

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winters, two or three times a week upon him, we shall know more as to his digestion. Still that dinner was enjoyable. Beginning with the suspicious salmon, the statesman with the brush-broom head, the one who had overthrown Louis-Philippe without suspecting it, started to explain how, if they had listened to his advice, this constitutional king's dynasty would yet be upon the throne; and at the moment when the wretched butler poured out his most poisonous wine, the old lady who looked like a dromedary with rings in its ears, made Amedee—her unfortunate neighbor—undergo a new oral examination upon the poets of the nineteenth century, and asked him what he thought of Lamartine's clamorous debts, and Victor Hugo's foolish pride, and Alfred de Musset's intemperate habits.

The worthy Amedee is launched! He will go and pay visits of indigestion; appear one day at Madame such a one's, and at the houses of several other "Madames." At first he will stay there a half-hour, the simpleton! until he sees that the cunning ones only come in and go out exactly as one does in a booth at a fair. He will see pass before him—but this time in corsages of velvet or satin—all the necks and shoulders of his acquaintances, those that he turned away from with disgust and those that made him blush. Each Madame this one, entering Madame that one's house, will seat herself upon the edge of a chair, and will always say the same inevitable thing, the only thing that can be or should be said that day; for example, "So the poor General is dead!" or "Have you heard the new piece at the Francais? It is not very strong, but it is well played!" "This will be delicious;" and Amedee will admire, above all things, Madame this one's play of countenance, when Madame G-----tells her that Madame B-----'s daughter is to marry Madame C-----'s nephew. While she hardly knows these people, she will manifest as lively a joy as if they had announced the death of an old aunt, whose money she is waiting for to renew the furniture in her house. And, on the contrary, when Madame D--- announces that Madame E-----'s little son has the whooping-cough, at once, without transition, by a change of expression that would make the fortune of an actress, the lady of the house puts on an air of consternation, as if the cholera had broken out the night before in the Halles quarter.

Amedee is launched, I repeat it. He is still a little green and will become the dupe, for a long time, of all the shams, grimaces, acting, and false smiles, which cover so many artificial teeth. At first sight all is elegance, harmony, and delicacy. Since Amedee does not know that the Princess Krazinska's celebrated head of hair was cut from the heads of the Breton girls, how could he suspect that the austere defender of the clergy, M. Lemarguillier, had been gravely compromised in a love affair, and had thrown himself at the feet of the chief of police, exclaiming, "Do not ruin me!" When the king of society

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is announced, the young Duc de la Tour-Prends-Garde, whose one ancestor was at the battle of the bridge, and who is just now introducing a new style in trousers, Amedee could not suspect that the favorite amusement of this fashionable rake consisted in drinking in the morning upon an empty stomach, with his coachman, at a grog-shop on the corner. When the pretty Baroness des Nenuphars blushed up to her ears because someone spoke the word “tea-spoon” before her, and she considered it to be an unwarrantable indelicacy—nobody knows why—it is assuredly not our young friend who will suspect that, in order to pay the gambling debts of her third lover, this modest person had just sold secretly her family jewels.

Rest assured Amedee will lose all these illusions in time. The day will come when he will not take in earnest this grand comedy in white cravats. He will not have the bad taste to show his indignation. No! he will pity these unfortunate society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood. He will even excuse their whims and vices as he thinks of the frightful ennui that overwhelms them. Yes, he will understand how the unhappy Duc de la Tour-Prends-Garde, who is condemned to hear *La Favorita* seventeen times during the winter, may feel at times the need of a violent distraction, and go to drink white wine with his servant. Amedee will be full of indulgence, only one must pardon him for his plebeian heart and native uncouthness; for at the moment when he shall have fathomed the emptiness and vanity of this worldly farce, he will keep all of his sympathy for those who retain something like nature. He will esteem infinitely more the poorest of the workmen—a wood-sawyer or a bell-hanger—than a politician haranguing from the mantel, or an old literary dame who sparkles like a window in the Palais-Royal, and is tattooed like a Caribbean; he will prefer an old, wrinkled, village grand-dame in her white cap, who still hoes, although sixty years old, her little field of potatoes.

CHAPTER XIII

A SERPENT AT THE FIRESIDE

A little more than a year has passed. It is now the first days of October; and when the morning mist is dissipated, the sky is of so limpid a blue and the air so pure and fresh, that Amedee Violette is almost tempted to make a paper kite and fly it over the fortifications, as he did in his youth. But the age for that has passed; Amedee’s real kite is more fragile than if it had been made of sticks and pieces of old paper pasted on one over another; it does not ascend very high yet, and the thread that sails it is not very strong. Amedee’s kite is his growing reputation. He must work to sustain it; and always with the secret hope of making little Maria his wife. Amedee works. He is not so poor now, since he earns at the ministry two hundred francs a month, and from time to time publishes a prose story in journals where his copy is paid for. He has also left his garret

in the Faubourg St.-Jacques and lives on the Ile St. Louis, in one room only, but large and bright, from whose window he can see, as he leans out, the coming and going of boats on the river and the sun as it sets behind Notre-Dame.

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Amedee has been working mostly upon his drama, for the Comedie-Francaise this summer, and it is nearly done; it is a modern drama in verse, entitled *L'Atelier*. The action is very simple, like that of a tragedy, but he believes it is sympathetic and touching, and it ends in a popular way. Amedee thinks he has used for his dialogue familiar but nevertheless poetic lines, in which he has not feared to put in certain graphic words and energetic speeches from the mouths of working-people.

The grateful poet has destined the principal role for Jocquelet, who has made a successful debut in the 'Fourberies de Scapin', and who, since then, has won success after success. Jocquelet, like all comic actors, aspires to play also in drama. He can do so in reality, but under particular conditions; for in spite of his grotesque nose, he has strong and spirited qualities, and recites verses very well. He is to represent an old mechanic, in his friend's work, a sort of faubourg Nestor, and this type will accommodate itself very well to the not very aristocratic face of Jocquelet, who more and more proves his cleverness at "making-up." However, at first the actor was not satisfied with his part. He fondles the not well defined dream of all actors, he wishes, like all the others, the "leading part." They do not exactly know what they mean by it, but in their dreams is vaguely visible a wonderful Almanzor, who makes his first entrance in an open barouche drawn by four horses harnessed a la Daumont, and descends from it dressed in tight-fitting gray clothes, tasselled boots, and decorations. This personage is as attractive as Don Juan, brave as Murat, a poet like Shakespeare, and as charitable as St. Vincent de Paul. He should have, before the end of the first act, crushed with love by one single glance, the young leading actress; dispersed a dozen assassins with his sword; addressed to the stars—that is to say, the spectators in the upper gallery—a long speech of eighty or a hundred lines, and gathered up two lost children under the folds of his cloak.

A "fine leading part" should also, during the rest of the piece, accomplish a certain number of sublime acts, address the multitude from the top of a staircase, insult a powerful monarch to his face, dash into the midst of a conflagration—always in the long-topped boots. The ideal part would be for him to discover America, like Christopher Columbus; win pitched battles, like Bonaparte, or some other equally senseless thing; but the essential point is, never to leave the stage and to talk all the time—the work, in reality, should be a monologue in five acts.

This role of an old workman, offered to Jocquelet by Amedee, obtained only a grimace of displeasure from the actor. However, it ended by his being reconciled to the part, studying it, and, to use his own expression, "racking his brains over it," until one day he ran to Violette's, all excited, exclaiming:

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"I have the right idea of my old man now! I will dress him in a tricot waistcoat with ragged sleeves and dirty blue overalls. He is an apprentice, is he not? A fellow with a beard! Very well! in the great scene where they tell him that his son is a thief and he defies the whole of the workmen, he struggles and his clothes are torn open, showing a hairy chest. I am not hairy, but I will make myself so—does that fill the bill? You will see the effect."

While reserving the right to dissuade Jocquelet from making himself up in this way, Amedee carried his manuscript to the director of the Theatre Francais, who asked a little time to look it over, and also promised the young poet that he would read it aloud to the committee.

Amedee is very anxious, although Maurice Roger, to whom he has read the piece, act by act, predicts an enthusiastic acceptance.

The handsome Maurice has been installed for more than a year in a studio on the Rue d'Assas and leads a jolly, free life there. Does he work? Sometimes; by fits and starts. And although he abandons his sketches at the first attack of idleness, there is a charm about these sketches, suspended upon the wall; and he will some day show his talent. One of his greatest pleasures is to see pass before him all his beautiful models, at ten francs an hour. With palette in hand, he talks with the young women, tells them amusing stories, and makes them relate all their love-affairs. When friends come to see him, they can always see a model just disappearing behind a curtain. Amedee prefers to visit his friend on Sunday afternoons, and thus avoid meeting these models; and then, too, he meets there on that day Arthur Papillon, who paves the way for his political career by pleading lawsuits for the press. Although he is, at heart, only a very moderate Liberalist, this young man, with the very chic side whiskers, defends the most republican of "beards," if it can be called defending; for in spite of his fine oratorical efforts, his clients are regularly favored with the maximum of punishment. But they are all delighted with it, for the title of "political convict" is one very much in demand among the irreconcilables. They are all convinced that the time is near when they will overthrow the Empire, without suspecting, alas! that in order to do that twelve hundred thousand German bayonets will be necessary. The day after the triumph, the month of imprisonment will be taken into account, and St. Pelagie is not the 'carcere duro'. Papillon is cunning and wishes to have a finger in every pie, so he goes to dine once a week with those who owe their sojourn in this easy-going jail to him, and regularly carries them a lobster.

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Paul Sillery, who has also made Maurice's acquaintance, loiters in this studio. The amiable Bohemian has not yet paid his bill to Pere Lebuffle, but he has cut his red fleece close to his head, and publishes every Sunday, in the journals, news full of grace and humor. Of course they will never pardon him at the Cafe de Seville; the "long-haired" ones have disowned this traitor who has gone over to the enemy, and is now only a sickening and fetid bourgeois; and if the poetical club were able to enforce its decrees, Paul Sillery, like an apostate Jew in the times of the Inquisition, would have been scourged and burned alive. Paul Sillery does not trouble himself about it, however; and from time to time returns to the "Seville" and treats its members to a bumper all around, which he pays for with the gold of his dishonor. Sometimes Jocquelet appears, with his smooth-shaved face; but only rarely, for he is at present a very busy man and already celebrated. His audacious nose is reproduced in all positions and displayed in photographers' windows, where he has for neighbors the negatives most in demand; for instance, the fatherly and benevolent face of the pope; Pius IX, or the international limbs of Mademoiselle Ketty, the majestic fairy, in tights. The journals, which print Jocquelet's name, treat him sympathetically and conspicuously, and are full of his praises. "He is good to his old aunt," "gives alms," "picked up a lost dog in the street the other evening." An artist such as he, who stamps immortality on all the comic repertory, and takes Moliere under his wing, has no time to go to visit friends, that is understood. However, he still honors Maurice Roger with short visits. He only has time to make all the knickknacks and china on the sideboard tremble with the noise of his terrible voice; only time to tell how, on the night before, in the greenroom, when still clothed in Scapin's striped cloak, he deigned to receive, with the coldest dignity, the compliments of a Royal Highness, or some other person of high rank. A prominent society lady has been dying of love for him the past six months; she occupies stage box Number Six—and then off he goes. Good riddance!

Amedee enjoys himself in his friend's studio, where gay and witty artists come to talk. They laugh and amuse themselves, and this Sunday resting-place is the most agreeable of the hard-working poet's recreations. Amedee prolongs them as long as possible, until at last he is alone with his friend; then the young men stretch themselves out upon the Turkish cushions, and they talk freely of their hopes, ambitions, and dreams for the future.

Amedee, however, keeps one secret to himself; he never has told of his love for Maria Gerard. Upon his return from Italy the traveller inquired several times for the Gerards, sympathized politely with their misfortune, and wished to be remembered to them through Amedee. The latter had been very reserved in his replies, and Maurice no longer broaches the subject in their conversation. Is it through neglect? After all, he hardly knew the ladies; still, Amedee is not sorry to talk of them no longer with his friend, and it is never without a little embarrassment and unacknowledged jealousy that he replies to Maria when she asks for news of Maurice.

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She no longer inquires. The pretty Maria is cross and melancholy, for now they talk only of one thing at the Gerards; it is always the same, the vulgar and cruel thought, obtaining the means to live; and within a short time they have descended a few steps lower on the slippery ladder of poverty. It is not possible to earn enough to feed three mouths with a piano method and a box of pastels—or, at least, it does not hold out. Louise has fewer pupils, and Pere Issacar has lessened his orders. Mamma Gerard, who has become almost an old woman, redoubles her efforts; but they can no longer make both ends meet. Amedee sees it, and how it makes him suffer!

The poor women are proud, and complain as little as possible; but the decay inside this house, already so modest, is manifested in many ways. Two beautiful engravings, the last of their father's souvenirs, had been sold in an hour of extreme want; and one could see, by the clean spots upon the wall, where the frames once hung. Madame Gerard's and her daughters' mourning seemed to grow rusty, and at the Sunday dinner Amedee now brings, instead of a cake, a pastry pie, which sometimes constitutes the entire meal. There is only one bottle of old wine in the cellar, and they drink wine by the pot from the grocer's. Each new detail that proves his friends' distress troubles the sensitive Amedee. Once, having earned ten Louis from some literary work, he took the poor mother aside and forced her to accept one hundred francs. The unfortunate woman, trembling with emotion, while two large tears rolled down her cheeks, admitted that the night before, in order to pay the washerwoman, they had pawned the only clock in the house.

What can he do to assist them, to help them to lead a less terrible life? Ah! if Maria would have it so, they could be married at once, without any other expense than the white dress, as other poor people do; and they would all live together. He has his salary of twenty-four hundred francs, besides a thousand francs that he has earned in other ways. With Louise's lessons this little income would be almost sufficient. Then he would exert himself to sell his writings; he would work hard, and they could manage. Of course it would be quite an undertaking on his part to take all this family under his charge. Children might be born to them. Had he not begun to gain a reputation; had he not a future before him? His piece might be played and meet with success. This would be their salvation. Oh! the happy life that the four would lead together! Yes, if Maria could love him a little, if he persisted in hoping, if she had the courage, it was the only step to take.

Becoming enthusiastic upon this subject, Amedee decided to submit the question to the excellent Louise, in whom he had perfect confidence, and considered to be goodness and truth personified. Every Thursday, at six o'clock, she left a boarding-school in the Rue de la Rochefoucault, where she gave lessons to young ladies in singing. He would go and wait for her as she came out that very evening. And there he met her. Poor Louise! her dress was lamentable; and what a sad countenance! What a tired, distressed look!

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"What, you, Amedee!" said she, with a happy smile, as he met her.

"Yes, my dear Louise. Take my arm and let me accompany you part of the way. We will talk as we walk; I have something very serious to say to you, confidentially—important advice to ask of you."

The poet then began to make his confession. He recalled their childhood days in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, when they played together; it was as long ago as that that he had first begun to be charmed by little Maria. As soon as he became a young man he felt that he loved the dear child, and had always cherished the hope that he might inspire her with a tender sentiment and marry her some day. If he had not spoken sooner it was because he was too poor, but he had always loved her, he loved her now, and never should love any other woman. He then explained his plan of life in simple and touching terms; he would become Madame Gerard's son and his dear Louise's brother; the union of their two poverties would become almost comfort. Was it not very simple and reasonable? He was very sure that she would approve of it, and she was wisdom itself and the head of the family.

While he was talking Louise lowered her eyes and looked at her feet. He did not feel that she was trembling violently. Blind, blind Amedee! You do not see, you will never see, that she is the one who loves you! Without hope! she knows that very well; she is older than you, she is not pretty, and she will always be in your eyes an adopted elder sister, who once showed you your alphabet letters with the point of her knitting-needle. She has suspected for a long time your love for Maria; she suffers, but she is resigned to it, and she will help you, the brave girl! But this confession that you make, Maria's name that you murmur into her ear in such loving accents, this dream of happiness in which, in your artless egotism, you reserve for her the role of an old maid who will bring up your children, is cruel, oh! how cruel! They have reached the Boulevard Pigalle; the sun has set; the sky is clear and bright as a turquoise, and the sharp autumn wind detaches the last of the dried leaves from the trees. Amedee is silent, but his anxious glance solicits and waits for Louise's reply.

"Dear Amedee," said she, raising her frank, pure eyes to his face, "you have the most generous and best of hearts. I suspected that you loved Maria, and I would be glad to tell you at once that she loves you, so that we might hereafter be but one family—but frankly I can not. Although the dear child is a little frivolous, her woman's instinct must suspect your feeling for her, but she has never spoken of it to mamma or to me. Have confidence; I do not see anything that augurs ill for you in that. She is so young and so innocent that she might love you without suspecting it herself. It is very possible, probable even, that your avowal will enlighten her as to the state of her own heart.

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She will be touched by your love, I am sure, as well as by your devotion to the whole family. I hope, with all my heart, Amedee, that you will succeed; for, I can say it to you, some pleasure must happen in poor Maria's life soon. She has moments of the deepest sadness and attacks of weeping that have made me uneasy for some time. You must have noticed, too, that she is overwhelmed with ennui. I can see that she suffers more than mamma or I, at the hard life that we lead. It is not strange that she feels as she does, for she is pretty and attractive, and made for happiness; and to see the present and the future so sad! How hard it is! You can understand, my friend, how much I desire this marriage to take place. You are so good and noble, you will make Maria happy; but you have said it, I am the one who represents wisdom in our house. Let me have then a few days in which to observe Maria, to obtain her confidence, to discover perhaps a sentiment in her heart of which she is ignorant; and remember that you have a sure and faithful ally in me."

"Take your own time, dear Louise," replied the poet. "I leave everything to you. Whatever you do will be for the best."

He thanked her and they parted at the foot of the Rue Lepic. It was a bitter pleasure for the slighted one to give the young man her poor, deformed, pianist's hand, and to feel that he pressed it with hope and gratitude.

She desired and must urge this marriage. She said this over and over again to herself, as she walked up the steep street, where crowds of people were swarming at the end of their day's work. No! no! Maria did not care for Amedee. Louise was very sure of it; but at all events it was necessary that she should try to snatch her young sister from the discouragements and bad counsel of poverty. Amedee loved her and would know how to make her love him. In order to assure their happiness these two young people must be united. As to herself, what matter! If they had children she would accept in advance her duties as coddling aunt and old godmother. Provided, of course, that Maria would be guided, or, at least, that she would consent. She was so pretty that she was a trifle vain. She was nourishing, perhaps, nobody knew what fancy or vain hope, based upon her beauty and youth. Louise had grave fears. The poor girl, with her thin, bent shoulders wrapped up in an old black shawl, had already forgotten her own grief and only thought of the happiness of others, as she slowly dragged herself up Montmartre Hill. When she reached the butcher's shop in front of the mayor's office, she remembered a request of her mother's; and as is always the case with the poor, a trivial detail is mixed with the drama of life. Louise, without forgetting her thoughts, while sacrificing her own heart, went into the shop and picked out two breaded cutlets and had them done up in brown paper, for their evening's repast.

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The day after his conversation with Louise, Amedee felt that distressing impatience that waiting causes nervous people. The day at the office seemed unending, and in order to escape solitude, at five o'clock he went to Maurice's studio, where he had not been for fifteen days. He found him alone, and the young artist also seemed preoccupied. While Amedee congratulated him upon a study placed upon an easel, Maurice walked up and down the room with his hands in his pocket, and eyes upon the floor, making no reply to his friend's compliments. Suddenly he stopped and looking at Amedee said:

"Have you seen the Gerard ladies during the past few days?"

Maurice had not spoken of these ladies for several months, and the poet was a trifle surprised.

"Yes," he replied. "Not later than yesterday I met Mademoiselle Louise."

"And," replied Maurice, in a hesitating manner, "were all the family well?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" said the artist, in a strange voice, and he resumed his silent promenade.

Amedee always had a slightly unpleasant sensation when Maurice spoke the name of the Gerards, but this time the suspicious look and singular tone of the young painter, as he inquired about them, made the poet feel genuinely uneasy. He was impressed, above all, by Maurice's simple exclamation, "Ah!" which seemed to him to be enigmatical and mysterious. But nonsense! all this was foolish; his friend's questions were perfectly natural.

"Shall we pass the evening together, my dear Maurice?"

"It is impossible this evening," replied Maurice, still continuing his walk. "A duty—I have an engagement."

Amedee had the feeling that he had come at an unfortunate time, and discreetly took his departure. Maurice had seemed indifferent and less cordial than usual.

"What is the matter with him?" said the poet to himself several times, while dining in the little restaurant in the Latin Quarter. He afterward went to the Comedie Francaise, to kill time, as well as to inquire after his drama of Jocquelet, who played that evening in 'Le Legataire Universel'.

The comedian received him in his dressing-room, being already arrayed in Crispin's long boots and black trousers. He was seated in his shirt-sleeves before his toilet-table, and had just pasted over his smooth lips the bristling moustache of this traditional

personage. Without rising, or even saying "Good-day," he cried out to the poet as he recognized him in the mirror.

"No news as to your piece! The manager has not one moment to himself; we are getting ready for the revival of Camaraderie. But we shall be through with it in two days, and then—"

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And immediately, talking to hear himself talk, and to exercise his terrible organ, he belched out, like the noise from an opened dam, a torrent of commonplace things. He praised Scribe's works, which they had put on the stage again; he announced that the famous Guillery, his senior in the comedy line, would be execrable in this performance, and would make a bungle of it. He complained of being worried to death by the pursuit of a great lady—"You know, stage box Number Six," and showed, with a conceited gesture, a letter, tossed in among the jars of paint and pomade, which smelled of musk. Then, ascending to subjects of a more elevated order, he scored the politics of the Tuileries, and scornfully exposed the imperial corruption while recognizing that this "poor Badingue," who, three days before, had paid a little compliment to the actor, was of more account than his surroundings.

The poet went home and retired, bewildered by such gossip. When he awoke, the agony of his thoughts about Maria had become still more painful. When should he see Louise again? Would her reply be favorable? In spite of the fine autumn morning his heart was troubled, and he felt that he had no courage. His administrative work had never seemed more loathsome than on that day. His fellow-clerk, an amateur in hunting, had just had two days' absence, and inflicted upon him, in an unmerciful manner, his stories of slaughtered partridges, and dogs who pointed, so wonderfully well, and of course punctuated all this with numerous Pan-Pans! to imitate the report of a double-barrelled gun.

When he left the office Amedee regained his serenity a little; he returned home by the quays, hunting after old books and enjoying the pleasures of a beautiful evening, watching, in the golden sky, around the spires of *Ste.-Chapelle*, a large flock of swallows assembling for their approaching departure.

At nightfall, after dining, he resolved to baffle his impatience by working all the evening and retouching one act of his drama with which he was not perfectly content. He went to his room, lighted his lamp, and seated himself before his open manuscript. Now, then! to work! He had been silly ever since the night before. Why should he imagine that misfortune was in the air? Do such things as presentiments exist?

Suddenly, three light, but hasty and sharp knocks were struck upon his door. Amedee arose, took his lamp, and opened it. He jumped back—there stood Louise Gerard in her deep mourning!

"You?—At my rooms?—At this hour?—What has happened?"

She entered and dropped into the poet's armchair. While he put the lamp upon the table he noticed that the young girl was as white as wax. Then she seized his hands and pressing them with all her strength, she said, in a voice unlike her own—a voice hoarse with despair:

“Amedee, I come to you by instinct, as toward our only friend, as to a brother, as to the only man who will be able to help us repair the frightful misfortune which overwhelms us!” She stopped, stifled with emotion.



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"A misfortune!" exclaimed the young man. "What misfortune? Maria?"

"Yes! Maria!"

"An accident?—An illness?"

Louise made a rapid gesture with her arm and head which signified: "If it were only that!" With her mouth distorted by a bitter smile and with lowered eyes, talking confusedly, she said:

"Monsieur Maurice Roger—yes—your friend Maurice! A miserable wretch!—he has deceived and ruined the unhappy child! Oh! what infamy!—and now—now—"

Her deathly pale face flushed and became purple to the roots of her hair.

"Now Maria will become a mother!"

At these words the poet gave a cry like some enraged beast; he reeled, and would have fallen had the table not been near. He sat down on the edge of it, supporting himself with his hands, completely frozen as if from a great chill. Louise, overcome with shame, sat in the armchair, hiding her face in her hands while great tears rolled down between the fingers of her ragged gloves.

ETEXT *editor's bookmarks:*

Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent
Intimate friend, whom he has known for about five minutes
My good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure
Society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood

A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By Francois Coppee

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XIV

Too late!

It had been more than three months since Maria and Maurice had met again. One day the young man went to the Louvre to see his favorite pictures of the painters of the Eighteenth Century. His attention was attracted by the beautiful hair of a young artist

dressed in black, who was copying one of Rosalba's portraits. It was our pretty pastel artist whose wonderful locks disturbed all the daubers in the museum, and which made colorists out of Signol's pupils themselves. Maurice approached the copyist, and then both exclaimed at once:

"Mademoiselle Maria!"

"Monsieur Maurice!"

She had recognized him so quickly and with such a charming smile, she had not, then, forgotten him? When he used to visit Pere Gerard he had noticed that she was not displeased with him; but after such a long time, at first sight, to obtain such a greeting, such a delighted exclamation—it was flattering!

The young man standing by her easel, with his hat off, so graceful and elegant in his well-cut garments, began to talk with her. He spoke first, in becoming and proper terms, of her father's death; inquired for her mother and sister, congratulated himself upon having been recognized thus, and then yielding to his bold custom, he added:

"As to myself, I hesitated at first. You have grown still more beautiful in two years."



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As she blushed, he continued, in a joking way, which excused his audacity:

“Amedee told me that you had become delicious, but now I hardly dare ask him for news of you. Ever since you have lived at Montmartre—and I know that he sees you every Sunday—he has never offered to take me with him to pay my respects. Upon my word of honor, Mademoiselle Maria, I believe that he is in love with you and as jealous as a Turk.”

She protested against it, confused but still smiling.

Ah! if he had known of the dream that Maria had kept concealed in one corner of her heart ever since their first meeting. If he had known that her only desire was to be chosen and loved by this handsome Maurice, who had gone through their house and among poor Papa Gerard's bric-a-brac like a meteor! Why not, after all? Did she not possess that great power, beauty? Her father, her mother, and even her sister, the wise Louise, had often said so to her. Yes! from the very first she had been charmed by this young man with the golden moustache, and the ways of a young lord; she had hoped to please him, and later, in spite of poverty and death, she had continued to be intoxicated with this folly and to dream of this narcotic against grief, of the return of this Prince Charming. Poor Maria, so good and so artless, who had been told too many times that she was pretty! Poor little spoiled child!

When he left you yesterday, little Maria, after half an hour's pleasing conversation, Maurice said to you jokingly: “Do not tell Violette, above all, that we have met. I should lose my best friend.” You not only said nothing to Amedee, but you told neither your mother nor your sister. For Louise and Madame Gerard are prudent and wise, and they would tell you to avoid this rash fellow who has accosted you in a public place, and has told you at once that you are beautiful and beloved. They would scold you; they would tell you that this young man is of a rich and distinguished family; that his mother has great ambitions for him; that you have only your old black dress and beautiful eyes, and to-morrow, when you return to the Louvre, Madame Gerard will establish herself near your easel and discourage the young gallant.

But, little Maria, you conceal it from your mother and Louise! You have a secret from your family! To-morrow when you make your toilette before the mirror and twist up your golden hair, your heart will beat with hope and vanity. In the Louvre your attention will be distracted from your work when you hear a man's step resound in a neighboring gallery, and when Maurice arrives you will doubtless be troubled, but very much surprised and not displeased, ah! only too much pleased. Little Maria, little Maria, he talks to you in a low tone now. His blond moustache is very near your cheek, and you do well to lower your eyes, for I see a gleam of pleasure under your long lashes. I do not hear what he says, nor your

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replies; but how fast he works, how he gains your confidence! You will compromise yourself, little Maria, if you keep him too long by your easel. Four o'clock will soon strike, and the watchman in the green coat, who is snoozing before Watteau's designs, will arouse from his torpor, stretch his arms, look at his watch, get up from his seat, and call out "Time to close." Why do you allow Maurice to help you arrange your things, to accompany you through the galleries, carrying your box of pastels? The long, lanky girl in the Salon Carre, who affects the English ways, the one who will never finish copying the "Vierge au coussin vert," has followed you into the Louvre court. Take care! She has noticed, envious creature, that you are very much moved as you take leave of your companion, and that you let your hand remain for a second in his! This old maid 'a l'anglaise' has a viper's tongue. To-morrow you will be the talk of the Louvre, and the gossip will spread to the 'Ecole des Beaux-Arts', even to Signol's studio, where the two daubers, your respectful admirers, who think of cutting their throats in your honor, will accost each other with a "Well, the pretty pastellist! Yes, I know, she has a lover."

If it was only a lover! But the pretty pastellist has been very careless, more foolish than the old maid or the two young fellows dream of. It is so sweet to hear him say: "I love you!" and so delicious to listen for the question: "And you, do you love me a little?" when she is dying to say, "Yes!" Bending her head and blushing with confusion under Maurice's ardent gaze, the pretty Maria ends by murmuring the fatal "Yes." Then she sees Maurice turn pale with joy, and he says to her, "I must talk to you alone; not before these bores." She replies: "But how? It is impossible!" Then he asks whether she does not trust him, whether she does not believe him to be an honest man, and the young girl's looks say more than any protestation would.

"Well! to-morrow morning at ten o'clock—instead of coming to the Louvre—will you? I will wait for you on the Quai d'Orsay, before the Saint-Cloud pier."

She was there at the appointed hour, overwhelmed with emotion and ready to faint. He took her by the arm and led her aboard the boat.

"Do you see, now we are almost alone. Give me the pleasure of wandering through the fields with you. It is such beautiful weather. Be tranquil, we shall return early."

Oh, the happy day! Maria sees pass before her, as she is seated beside Maurice, who is whispering in her ear loving words and whose glances cover her with caresses, as if in a dream, views of Paris that were not familiar to her, high walls, arches of bridges, then the bare suburbs, the smoking manufactories of Grenelle, the Bas Meudon, with its boats and public-houses. At last, on the borders of the stream, the park with its extensive verdure appeared.

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They wandered there for a long time under the chestnut-trees, loaded with their fruit in its green shells. The sun, filtering through the foliage, dotted the walks with patches of light, and Maurice continued to repeat to Maria that he loved her; that he had never loved any one but her! that he had loved her from the very first time that he saw her at Pere Gerard's, and that neither time nor absence had been able to drive away the remembrance of her. And at this moment he imagined that it was true. He did not think that he was telling a lie. As to poor Maria, do not be too severe upon her! think of her youth, her poverty and imprisonment—she was overwhelmed with happiness. She could think of nothing to say, and, giving herself up into the young man's arms, she had hardly the strength to turn upon him, from time to time, her eyes tortured with love.

Is it necessary to tell how she succumbed? how they went to a restaurant and dined? Emotion, the heavy heat of the afternoon, champagne, that golden wine that she tasted for the first time, stunned the imprudent child. Her charming head slips down upon the sofa-pillow, she is nearly fainting.

"You are too warm," said Maurice. "This bright light makes you ill."

He draws the curtains; they are in the darkness, and he takes the young girl in his arms, covering her hands, eyes, and lips with kisses.

Doubtless he swears to her that she shall be his wife. He asks only a little time, a few weeks, in which to prepare his mother, the ambitious Madame Roger, for his unexpected marriage. Maria never doubts him, but overcome by her fault, she feels an intense shame, and buries her face on her lover's shoulder. She thinks then, the guilty girl, of her past; of her innocence and poverty, of her humble but honest home; her dead father, her mother and sister—her two mothers, properly speaking—who yet call her "little one" and always consider her as a child, an infant in all its purity. She feels impressed with her sin, and wishes that she might die there at once.

Oh! I beg of you, be charitable to the poor, weak Maria, for she is young and she must suffer!

Maurice was not a rascal, after all; he was in earnest when he promised to marry her without delay. He even meant to admit all to his mother the next day; but when he saw her she never had appeared so imposing to him, with her gray hair under her widow's cap. He shivered as he thought of the tearful scenes, the reproaches and anger, and in his indolence he said to himself: "Upon my honor, I will do it later!" He loves Maria after his fashion. He is faithful to her, and when she steals away an hour from her work to come to see him, he is uneasy at the least delay. She is truly adorable, only Maurice does not like the unhappy look that she wears when she asks him, in a trembling voice: "Have you spoken to your mother?" He embraces her, reassures her. "Be easy. Leave me time

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to arrange it.” The truth is, that now he begins to be perplexed at the idea of this marriage. It is his duty, he knows that very well; but he is not twenty three years old yet. There is no hurry. After all, is it duty? the little one yielded easily enough. Has he not the right to test her and wait a little? It is what his mother would advise him, he is certain. That is the only reasonable way to look at it.

Alas, egotists and cowards always have a reason for everything!

How dearly poor Maria’s foolish step has cost her! How heavily such a secret weighs upon the child’s heart! For a few moments of uneasy intoxication with this man, whom she already doubts and who sometimes makes her afraid, she must lie to her mother without blushing or lowering her eyes, and enter Maurice’s house veiled and hiding like a thief. But that is nothing yet. After some time of this agonizing life her health is troubled. Quickly she goes to find Maurice! She arrives unexpectedly and finds him lying upon the sofa smoking a cigar. Without giving him time to rise, she throws herself into his arms, and, bursting into sobs, makes her terrible avowal. At first he only gives a start of angry astonishment, a harsh glance.

“Bah! you must be mistaken.”

“I am sure of it, I tell you, I am sure of it!”

She has caught his angry glance and feels condemned in advance. However, he gives her a cold kiss, and it is with a great effort that she stammers:

“Maurice—you must—speak to your mother—”

He rises with an impatient gesture and Maria seats herself—her strength is leaving her—while he walks up and down the room.

“My poor Maria,” he begins in a hesitating manner, “I dared not tell you, but my mother will not consent to our marriage—now, at least.”

He lies! He has not spoken to his mother; she knows it. Ah! unhappy creature! he does not love her! and, discouraged, with a rumbling noise in her ears, she listens to Maurice as he speaks in his soft voice.

“Oh! be tranquil. I shall not abandon you, my poor child. If what you say is true—if you are sure of it, then the best thing that you can do, you see, is to leave your family and come and live with me. At first we will go away from Paris; you can be confined in the country. We can put the child out to nurse; they will take care of the little brat, of course. And later, perhaps, my mother will soften and will understand that we must marry. No, truly, the more I think of it, the more I believe that that is the best way to do.



Yes! I know very well it will be hard to leave your home, but what can you do, my darling? You can write your mother a very affectionate letter.”

And going to her he takes her, inert and heartbroken, into his arms, and tries to show himself loving.

“You are my wife, my dear little wife, I repeat it. Are you not glad, eh! that we can live together?”

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This is what he proposes to do. He thinks to take her publicly to his house and to blazon her shame before the eyes of everybody! Maria feels that she is lost. She rises abruptly and says to him in the tone of a somnambulist: "That will do. We will talk of it again."

She goes away and returns to Montmartre at a crazy woman's pace, and finds her mother knitting and her sister ready to lay the table—yes! as if nothing at all was the matter. She takes their hands and falls at their feet!

Ah, poor women!

They had already been very much tried. The decay of this worthy family was lamentable; but in spite of all, yesterday even, they endured their fate with resignation. Yes! the economy, the degrading drudgery, the old, mended gowns—they accepted all this without a murmur. A noble sentiment sustained and gave them courage. All three—the old mother in a linen cap doing the cooking and the washing, the elder sister giving lessons at forty sous, and the little one working in pastels—were vaguely conscious of representing something very humble, but sacred and noble—a family without a blemish on their name. They felt that they moved in an atmosphere of esteem and respect. "Those ladies upon the first floor have so many accomplishments," say the neighbors. Their apartment—with its stained woodwork, its torn wall, paper, but where they were all united in work and drawn closer and closer to each other in love—had still the sweetness of a home; and upon their ragged mourning, their dilapidated furniture, the meagre meat soup at night, the pure light of honor gleamed and watched over them. Now, after this guilty child's avowal, all this was ended, lost forever! There was a blemish upon their life of duty and poverty, upon their irreproachable past, even upon the father's memory. Certainly the mother and elder sister excused the poor creature who sobbed under their kisses and begged their pardon. However, when they gazed at each other with red eyes and dry lips, they measured the fall of the family; they saw for the first time how frightful were their destitution and distress; they felt the unbearable feeling of shame glide into their hearts like a sinister and unexpected guest who, at the first glance, makes one understand that he has come to be master of the lodging. This was the secret, the overwhelming secret, which the distracted Louise Gerard revealed that evening to her only friend, Amedee Violette, acting thus by instinct, as a woman with too heavy a burden throws it to the ground, crying for help.

When she had ended her cruel confidence, to which the poet listened with his face buried in his hands, and he uncovered his face creased and furrowed by the sudden wrinkles of despair, Louise was frightened.

"How I have wounded him!" she thought. "How he loves Maria!"

But she saw shining in the young man's eyes a gloomy resolution.

“Very well, Louise,” muttered he, between his teeth. “Do not tell me any more, I beg of you. I do not know where to find Maurice at this hour, but he will see me to-morrow morning, rest easy. If the evil is not repaired—and at once!”

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He did not finish; his voice was stifled with grief and rage, and upon an almost imperious gesture to leave, Louise departed, overcome by her undertaking.

No, Maurice Roger was not a villain. After Maria's departure he felt ashamed and displeased with himself. A mother! poor little thing! Certainly he would take charge of her and the child; he would behave like a gentleman. But, to speak plainly, he did not now love her as much as he did. His vagabond nature was already tired of his love-affair. This one was watered too much by tears. Bah! he was usually lucky, and this troublesome affair would come out all right like the others. Truly, it was as bad an accident as if one had fallen into a hole and broken his leg. But then, who could tell? Chance and time arrange many things. The child might not live, perhaps; at any rate, it was perfectly natural that he should wait and see what happened.

The next morning the reckless Maurice—who had not slept badly—was tranquilly preparing his palette while awaiting his model, when he saw Amedee Violette enter his studio. At the first glance he saw that the poet knew all.

"Maurice," said Amedee, in a freezing tone, "I received a visit from Mademoiselle Louise Gerard last evening. She told me everything—all, do you understand me perfectly? I have come to learn whether I am mistaken regarding you—whether Maurice Roger is an honest man."

A flame darted from the young artist's eyes. Amedee, with his livid complexion and haggard from a sleepless night and tears, was pitiful to see. And then it was Amedee, little Amedee whom Maurice sincerely loved, for whom he had kept, ever since their college days, a sentiment, all the more precious that it flattered his vanity, the indulgent affection and protection of a superior.

"Oh! Grand, melodramatic words already!" said he, placing his palette upon the table. "Amedee, my dear boy, I do not recognize you, and if you have any explanation that you wish to ask of your old friend, it is not thus that you should do it. You have received, you tell me, Mademoiselle Gerard's confidence. I know you are devoted to those ladies. I understand your emotion and I think your intervention legitimate; but you see I speak calmly and in a friendly way. Calm yourself in your turn and do not forget that, in spite of your zeal for those ladies, I am the best and dearest companion of your youth. I am, I know, in one of the gravest situations of my life. Let us talk of it. Advise me; you have the right to do so; but not in that tone of voice—that angry, threatening tone which I pardon, but which hurts and makes me doubt, were it possible, your love for me."

"Ah! you know very well that I love you," replied the unhappy Amedee, "but why do you need my advice? You are frank enough to deny nothing. You admit that it is true, that you have seduced a young girl. Does not your conscience tell you what to do?"

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"To marry her? That is my intention. But, Amedee, do you think of my mother? This marriage will distress her, destroy her fond hopes and ambitions. I hope to be able to gain her consent; only I must have time to turn myself. Later—very soon. I do not say—if the child lives."

This word, torn from Maurice by the cynicism which is in the heart of all egotists, made Amedee angry.

"Your mother!" exclaimed he. "Your mother is the widow of a French officer who died facing the enemy. She will understand it, I am sure, as a matter of honor and duty. Go and find her, tell her that you have ruined this unfortunate child. Your mother will advise you to marry her. She will command you to do it."

This argument was forcible and direct, and impressed Maurice; but his friend's violence irritated him.

"You go to work badly, Amedee, I repeat it," said he, raising his tone. "You have no right to prejudge my mother's opinion, and I receive no orders from anybody. After all, nothing authorizes you to do it; if it is because you were in love with Maria—"

A furious cry interrupted him. Amedee, with wild eyes and shaking his fists, walked toward Maurice, speaking in a cutting tone:

"Well, yes! I loved her," said he, "and I wished to make her my wife. You, who no longer love her, who took her out of caprice, as you have taken others, you have destroyed all of my dreams for the future. She preferred you, and, understand me, Maurice, I am too proud to complain, too just to hold spite against you. I am only here to prevent your committing an infamy. Upon my honor! If you repulse me, our friendship is destroyed forever, and I dare not think of what will happen between us, but it will be terrible! Alas! I am wrong, I do not talk to you as I ought. Maurice, there is time yet! Only listen to your heart, which I know is generous and good. You have wronged an innocent child and driven a poor and worthy family to despair. You can repair the evil you have caused. You wish to. You will! I beg of you, do it out of respect for yourself and the name you bear. Act like a brave man and a gentleman! Give this young girl—whose only wrong has been in loving you too much—give the mother of your child your name, your heart, your love. You will be happy with her and through her. Go! I shall not be jealous of your happiness, but only too glad to have found my friend, my loyal Maurice once more, and to be able still to love and admire him as heretofore."

Stirred by these warm words, and fatigued by the discussion and struggle, the painter reached out his hands to his friend, who pressed them in his. Suddenly he looked at Amedee and saw his eyes shining with tears, and, partly from sorrow, but more from want of will and from moral weakness, to end it he exclaimed:

“You are right, after all. We will arrange this matter without delay. What do you wish me to do?”

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Ah, how Amedee bounded upon his neck!

“My good, my dear Maurice! Quickly dress yourself. Let us go to those ladies and embrace and console that dear child. Ah! I knew very well that you would understand me and that your heart was in the right place. How happy the poor women will be! Now then, my old friend, is it not good to do one’s duty?”

Yes, Maurice found that it was good now; excited and carried away by his friend, he hurried toward the good action that was pointed out to him as he would to a pleasure-party, and while putting on his coat to go out, he said:

“After all, my mother can only approve, and since she always does as I wish, she will end by adoring my little Maria. It is all right; there is no way of resisting you, Violette. You are a good and persuasive Violette. Now, then, here I am, ready—a handkerchief—my hat. Off we go!”

They went out and took a cab which carried them toward Montmartre. The easy-going Maurice, reconciled to his future, sketched out his plan of life. Once married, he would work seriously. At first, immediately after the ceremony, he would leave with his wife to pass the winter in the South, where she could be confined. He knew a pretty place in the Corniche, near Antibes, where he should not lose his time, as he could bring back marine and landscape sketches. But it would not be until the next winter that he would entirely arrange his life. The painter Laugeol was going to move; he would hire his apartment—“a superb studio, my dear fellow, with windows looking out upon the Luxembourg.” He could see himself there now, working hard, having a successful picture in the Salon, wearing a medal. He chose even the hangings in the sleeping-rooms in advance. Then, upon beautiful days, how convenient the garden would be for the child and the nurse.

Suddenly, in the midst of this chattering, he noticed Amedee’s sad face as he shrank into the back of the carriage.

“Forgive me, my dear friend,” said he, taking him affectionately by the hand. “I forgot what you told me just now. Ah! fate is ridiculous, when I think that my happiness makes you feel badly.”

The poet gave his friend a long, sad look.

“Be happy with Maria and make her happy, that is all I ask for you both.”

They had reached the foot of Montmartre, and the carriage went slowly up the steep streets.

“My friend,” said Amedee, “we shall arrive there soon. You will go in alone to see these ladies, will you not? Oh! do not be afraid. I know Louise and the mother. They will not



utter one word of reproach. Your upright act will be appreciated by them as it merits—but you will excuse me from going with you, do you see? It would be too painful for me.”

“Yes, I understand, my poor Amedee. As it pleases you. Now then, courage, you will be cured of it. Everything is alleviated in time,” replied Maurice, who supposed everybody to have his fickle nature. “I shall always remember the service that you have rendered me, for I blush now as I think of it. Yes, I was going to do a villainous act. Amedee, embrace me.”

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They threw their arms about each other's neck, and the carriage stopped. Once on the sidewalk, Amedee noticed his friend's wry face as he saw the home of the Gerards, a miserable, commonplace lodging-house, whose crackled plastered front made one think of the wrinkles on a poor man's face. On the right and on the left of the entrance-door were two shops, one a butcher's, the other a fruiterer's, exhaling their fetid odors. But Amedee paid no attention to the delicate Maurice's repugnance, saying:

"Do you see that little garden at the end of the walk? It is there. Au revoir."

They separated with a last grasp of the hand. The poet saw Maurice enter the dark alley, cross the narrow court and push the gate open into the garden, and then disappear among the mass of verdure. How many times Amedee had passed through there, moved at the thought that he was going to see Maria; and Maurice crossed this threshold for the first time in his life to take her away. He wanted her! He had himself given his beloved to another! He had begged, almost forced his rival, so to speak, to rob him of his dearest hope! What sorrow!

Amedee gave his address to the driver and entered the carriage again. A cold autumn rain had commenced to fall, and he was obliged to close the windows. As he was jolted harshly through the streets of Paris at a trot, the young poet, all of a shiver, saw carriages streaming with water, bespattered pedestrians under their umbrellas, a heavy gloom fall from the leaden sky; and Amedee, stupefied with grief, felt a strange sensation of emptiness, as if somebody had taken away his heart.

When he entered his room, the sight of his furniture, his engravings, his books on their shelves, and his table covered with its papers distressed him. His long evenings of study near this lamp, the long hours of thought over some difficult work, the austere and cheerless year that he had lived there, all had been dedicated to Maria. It was in order to obtain her some day, that he had labored so assiduously and obstinately! And now the frivolous and guilty child was doubtless weeping for joy in Maurice's arms, her husband to-morrow?

Seated before his table, with his head buried in his hands, Amedee sank into the depths of melancholy. His life seemed such a failure, his fate so disastrous, his future so gloomy, he felt so discouraged and lonely, that for the moment the courage to live deserted him. It seemed to him that an invisible hand touched him upon the shoulder with compassion, and he had at once a desire and a fear to turn around and look; for he knew very well that this hand was that of the dead. He did not fancy it under the hideous aspect of a skeleton, but as a calm, sad, but yet very sweet face which drew him against its breast with a mother's tenderness, and made him and his grief sleep—a sleep without dreams, profound and eternal. Suddenly he turned around and uttered a frightful cry. For a moment he thought he saw, extended at his feet, and still holding a razor in his hand, the dead body of his unhappy father, a horrible wound in his throat, and his thin gray hair in a pool of blood!

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He was still trembling with this frightful hallucination when somebody knocked at his door. It was the concierge, who brought him two letters.

The first was stamped with the celebrated name:

“Comedie Francaise, 1680.” The manager announced in the most gracious terms that he had read with the keenest pleasure his drama in verse, entitled *L’Atelier*, and he hoped that the reading committee would accept this work.

“Too late!” thought the young poet, as he tore open the other envelope.

This second letter bore the address of a Paris notary, and informed M. Amedee Violette that M. Isidore Gaufre had died without leaving a will, and that, as nephew of the defunct, he would receive a part of the estate, still difficult to appraise, but which would not be less than two hundred and fifty or three hundred thousand francs.

Success and fortune! Everything came at once! Amedee was at first overwhelmed with surprise; but with all these unhopèd-for favors of fortune, which did not give him the power to repair his misfortune, the noble poet deeply realized that riches and glory were not equal to a great love or a beautiful dream, and, completely upset by the irony of his fate, he broke into a harsh burst of laughter.

CHAPTER XV

REPARATION

The late M. Violette was not mistaken when he supposed M. Gaufre capable of disinheriting his family in favor of his servant-mistress, but Berenice was wanting in patience. The rough beard and cap of an irresistible sergeant-major were the ruin of the girl. One Sunday, when M. Gaufre, as usual, recited vespers at St. Sulpice, he found that for the first time in his life he had forgotten his snuff-box. The holy offices were unbearable to this hypocritical person unless frequently broken by a good pinch of snuff. Instead of waiting for the final benediction and then going to take his usual walk, he left his church warden’s stall and returned unexpectedly to the Rue Servandoni, where he surprised Berenice in a loving interview with her military friend. The old man’s rage was pitiful to behold. He turned the Normandy beauty ignominiously out of doors, tore up the will he had made in her favor, and died some weeks after from indigestion, and left, in spite of himself, all his fortune to his natural heirs.

Amedee’s drama had been accepted by the Comedie Francaise, but was not to be brought out until spring. The notary in charge of his uncle’s estate had advanced him a few thousand francs, and, feeling sad and not having the courage to be present at the marriage of Maurice and Maria, the poet wished at least to enjoy, in a way, his new

fortune and the independence that it gave him; so he resigned his position and left for a trip to Italy, in the hope of dissipating his grief.

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Ah, never travel when the heart is troubled! You sleep with the echo of a dear name in your thoughts, and the half sleep of nights on a train is feverish and full of nightmares. Amedee suffered tortures from it. In the midst of the continual noise of the cars he thought he could hear sad voices crying loudly the name of a beloved lost one. Sometimes the tumult would become quiet for a little; brakes, springs, wheels, all parts of the furious cast-iron machine seemed to him tired of howling the deafening rhythmical gallop, and the vigorously rocked traveller could distinguish in the diminished uproar a strain of music, at first confused like a groan, then more distinct, but always the same cruel, haunting monotone—the fragment of a song that Maria once sang when they were both children. Suddenly a mournful and prolonged whistle would resound through the night. The express rushed madly into a tunnel. Under the sonorous roof, the frightful concert redoubled, exasperating him among all these metallic clamors; but Amedee still heard a distant sound like that of a blacksmith's hammer, and each heavy blow made his heart bound painfully.

Ah! never travel, and above all, never travel alone, if your heart is sad! How hostile and inhospitable the first sensation is that one feels then when entering an unknown city! Amedee was obliged to submit to the tiresome delay of looking after his baggage in a commonplace station; the hasty packing into an omnibus of tired-out travellers, darting glances of bad humor and suspicion; to the reception upon the hotel steps by the inevitable Swiss porter with his gold-banded cap, murdering all the European languages, greeting all the newcomers, and getting mixed in his "Yes, sir," "Ja, wohl," and "Si, signor." Amedee was an inexperienced tourist, who did not drag along with him a dozen trunks, and had not a rich and indolent air; so he was quickly despatched by the Swiss polyglot into a fourth-story room, which looked out into an open well, and was so gloomy that while he washed his hands he was afraid of falling ill and dying there without help. A notice written in four languages hung upon the wall, and, to add to his cheerfulness, it advised him to leave all his valuables at the office of the hotel—as if he had penetrated a forest infested with brigands. The rigid writing warned him still further that they looked upon him as a probable sharper, and that his bill would be presented every five days.

The tiresome life of railroads and table-d'hotes began for him.

He would be dragged about from city to city, like a bag of wheat or a cask of wine. He would dwell in pretentious and monumental hotels, where he would be numbered like a convict; he would meet the same carnivorous English family, with whom he might have made a tour of the world without exchanging one word; swallowing every day the tasteless soup, old fish, tough vegetables, and insipid wine which have an international

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reputation, so to speak. But above all, he was to have the horror, every evening upon going to his room, of passing through those uniform and desolate corridors, faintly lighted by gas, where before each door are pairs of cosmopolitan shoes—heavy alpine shoes, filthy German boots, the conjugal boots of my lord and my lady, which make one think, by their size, of the troglodyte giants—awaiting, with a fatigued air, their morning polish.

The imprudent Amedee was destined to all sorts of weariness, all sorts of deceptions, and all the homesickness of a solitary traveller. At the sight of the famous monuments and celebrated sites, which have become in some way looked upon as models for painters and material for literary development, Amedee felt that sensation of “already seen” which paralyzes the faculty of admiration. Dare we say it? The dome in Milan, that enormous quiver of white marble arrows, did not move him. He was indifferent to the sublime medley of bronze in the Baptistery in Florence; and the leaning tower at Pisa produced simply the effect of mystification. He walked miles through the museums and silent galleries, satiated with art and glutted with masterpieces. He was disgusted to find that he could not tolerate a dozen “Adorations of the Shepherds,” or fourteen “Descents from the Cross,” consecutively, even if they were signed with the most glorious names. The scenes of suffering and martyrdom, so many times repeated, were particularly distasteful to him; and he took a still greater dislike even to a certain monk, always represented on his knees in prayer with an axe sticking in his tonsure, than to the everlasting St. Sebastian pierced with arrows. His deadened and depraved attention discerned only the disagreeable and ugly side of a work of art. In the adorable artless originals he could see only childish and barbarous drawing, and he thought the old colorists’ yolk-of-an-egg tone monotonous.

He wished to spur his sensations, to see something extraordinary. He travelled toward Venice, the noiseless city, the city without birds or verdure, toward that silent country of sky, marble, and water; but once there, the reality seemed inferior to his dream. He had not that shock of surprise and enthusiasm in the presence of St. Mark’s and the Doges’ palace which he had hoped for. He had read too many descriptions of all these wonders; seen too many more or less faithful pictures, and in his disenchantment he recalled a lamp-shade which once, in his own home, had excited his childish imagination—an ugly lampshade of blue pasteboard upon which was printed a nocturnal fete, the illuminations upon the ducal palace being represented by a row of pin-pricks.

Once more I repeat it, never travel alone, and above all, never go to Venice alone and without love! For young married people in their honeymoon, or a pair of lovers, the gondola is a floating boudoir, a nest upon the waters like a kingfisher’s. But for one who is sad, and who stretches himself upon the sombre cushions of the bark, the gondola is a tomb.

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Toward the last of January, Amedee suddenly returned to Paris. He would not be obliged to see Maurice or his young bride at once. They had been married one month and would remain in the South until the end of winter. He was recalled by the rehearsals of his drama. The notary who had charge of his affairs gave him twelve thousand pounds' income, a large competency, which enabled him to work for the pure and disinterested love of art, and without concessions to common people. The young poet furnished an elegant apartment in an old and beautiful house on the Quai d'Orsay, and sought out some of his old comrades—among others Paul Sillery, who now held a distinguished place in journalism and reappeared a little in society, becoming very quickly reconciled with life.

His first call was upon Madame Roger. He was very glad to see Maurice's mother; she was a little sad, but indulgent to Maurice, and resigned to her son's marriage, because she felt satisfied that he had acted like a man of honor. He also went at once to Montmartre to embrace Louise and Madame Gerard, who received him with great demonstrations. They were not so much embarrassed in money matters, for Maurice was very generous and had aided his wife's family. Louise gave lessons now for a proper remuneration, and Madame Gerard was able to refuse, with tears of gratitude, the poet's offer of assistance, who filially opened his purse to her. He dined as usual with his old friends, and they had tact enough not to say too much about the newly married ones; but there was one empty place at the table. He was once more seized with thoughts of the absent, and returned to his room that evening with an attack of the blues.

The rehearsal of his piece, which had just begun at the Comedie Francaise, the long sittings at the theatre, and the changes to be made from day to day, were a useful and powerful distraction for Amedee Violette's grief. L'Atelier, when played the first week in April, did not obtain more than a respectful greeting from the public; it was an indifferent success. This vulgar society, these simple, plain, sentiments, the sweetheart in a calico gown, the respectable old man in short frock and overalls, the sharp lines where here and there boldly rang out a slang word of the faubourg; above all, the scene representing a mill in full activity, with its grumbling workmen, its machines in motion, even the continual puffing of steam, all displeased the worldly people and shocked them. This was too abrupt a change from luxurious drawing-rooms, titled persons, aristocratic adulteresses, and declarations of love murmured to the heroine in full toilette by a lover leaning his elbow upon the piano, with all the airs and graces of a first-class dandy. However, Jocquelet, in the old artisan's role, was emphatic and exaggerated, and an ugly and commonplace debutante was an utter failure. The criticisms, generally routine in character, were not gracious, and the least

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surly ones condemned Amedee's attempt, qualifying it as an honorable effort. There were some slashes; one "long-haired" fellow from the Cafe de Seville failed in his criticism—the very one who once wrote a description of the violation of a tomb—to crush the author of L'Atelier in an ultra-classical article, wherein he protested against realism and called to witness all the silent, sculptured authors in the hall.

It was a singular thing, but Amedee was easily consoled over his failure. He did not have the necessary qualities to succeed in the theatrical line? Very well, he would give it up, that was all! It was not such a great misfortune, upon the whole, to abandon the most difficult art of all, but not the first; which did not allow a poet to act his own free liking. Amedee began to compose verses for himself—for his own gratification; to become intoxicated with his own rhymes and fancies; to gather with a sad pleasure the melancholy flowers that his trouble had caused to blossom in his heart.

Meanwhile summer arrived, and Maurice returned to Paris with his wife and a little boy, born at Nice, and Amedee must go to see them, although he knew in advance that the visit would make him unhappy.

The amateur painter was handsomer than ever. He was alone in his studio, wearing his same red jacket. He had decorated and even crammed the room full of luxurious and amusing knickknacks. The careless young man received his friend as if nothing had happened between them, and after their greetings and inquiries as to old friends, and the events that had happened since their last meeting, they lighted their cigarettes.

"Well, what have you done?" asked the poet. "You had great projects of work. Have you carried out your plans? Have you many sketches to show me?"

"Upon my word, no! Almost nothing. Do you know, when I was there I abandoned myself to living; I played the lizard in the sun. Happiness is very engrossing, and I have been foolishly happy."

Then placing his hand upon his friend's, who sat near him, he added:

"But I owe that happiness to you, my good Amedee."

Maurice said this carelessly, in order to satisfy his conscience. Did he remember, did he even suspect how unhappy the poet had been, and was now, on account of this happiness? A bell rang.

"Ah!" exclaimed the master of the house, joyfully.

"It is Maria returning with the baby from a walk in the gardens. This little citizen will be six weeks old to-morrow, and you must see what a handsome little fellow he is already."



Amedee felt stifled with emotion. He was about to see her again! To see her as a wife and a mother was quite different, of course.

She appeared, raising the portiere with one hand, while behind her appeared the white bonnet and rustic face of the nurse. No! she was not changed, but maternity, love, and a rich and easy life had expanded her beauty. She was dressed in a fresh and charming toilette. She blushed when she first recognized Amedee; and he felt with sadness that his presence could only awaken unpleasant recollections in the young woman's mind.

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"Kiss each other, like old acquaintances," said the painter, laughing, with the air of a man who is loved and sure of himself.

But Amedee contented himself with kissing the tips of her glove, and the glance with which Maria thanked him for this reserve was one more torture for him to endure. She was grateful to him and gave him a kind smile.

"My mother and my sister," said she, graciously, "often have the pleasure of a visit from you, Monsieur Amedee. I hope that you will not make us jealous, but come often to see Maurice and me."

"Maurice and me!" How soft and tender her voice and eyes became as she said these simple words, "Maurice and me!" Ah, were they not one! How she loved him! How she loved him!

Then Amedee must admire the baby, who was now awake in his nurse's arms, aroused by his father's noisy gayety. The child opened his blue eyes, as serious as those of an old man's, and peeped out from the depth of lace, feebly squeezing the finger that the poet extended to him.

"What do you call him?" asked Amedee, troubled to find anything to say.

"Maurice, after his father," quickly responded Maria, who also put a mint of love into these words.

Amedee could endure no more. He made some pretext for withdrawing and went away, promising that he would see them again soon.

"I shall not go there very often!" he said to himself, as he descended the steps, furious with himself that he was obliged to hold back a sob.

He went there, however, and always suffered from it. He was the one who had made this marriage; he ought to rejoice that Maurice, softened by conjugal life and paternity, did not return to his recklessness of former days; but, on the contrary, the sight of this household, Maria's happy looks, the allusions that she sometimes made of gratitude to Amedee; above all Maurice's domineering way in his home, his way of speaking to his wife like an indulgent master to a slave delighted to obey, all displeased and unmanned him. He always left Maurice's displeased with himself, and irritated with the bad sentiments that he had in his heart; ashamed of loving another's wife, the wife of his old comrade; and keeping up all the same his friendship for Maurice, whom he was never able to see without a feeling of envy and secret bitterness.

He managed to lengthen the distance between his visits to the young pair, and to put another interest into his life. He was now a man of leisure, and his fortune allowed him to work when he liked and felt inspired. He returned to society and traversed the midst



of miscellaneous parlors, greenrooms, and Bohemian society. He loitered about these places a great deal and lost his time, was interested by all the women, duped by his tender imagination; always expending too much sensibility in his fancies; taking his desires for love, and devoting himself to women.

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The first of his loves was a beautiful Madame, whom he met in the Countess Fontaine's parlors. She was provided with a very old husband belonging to the political and financial world; a servant of several regimes, who having on many occasions feathered his own nest, made false statements of accounts, and betrayed his vows, his name could not be spoken in public assemblies without being preceded by the epithet of honorable. A man so seriously occupied in saving the Capitol, that is to say, in courageously sustaining the stronger, approving the majorities in all of their mean actions and thus increasing his own ground, sinecures, tips, stocks, and various other advantages, necessarily neglected his charming wife, and took very little notice of the ridicule that she inflicted upon him often, and to which he seemed predestined.

The fair lady—with a wax doll's beauty, not very young, confining herself to George Sand in literature, making three toilettes a day, and having a large account at the dentist's—singled out the young poet with a romantic head, and rapidly traversed with him the whole route through the country of Love. Thanks to modern progress, the voyage is now made by a through train. After passing the smaller stations, "blushing behind the fan," a "significant pressure of the hand," "appointment in a museum," *etc.*, and halting at a station of very little importance called "scruples" (ten minutes' pause), Amedee reached the terminus of the line and was the most enviable of mortals. He became Madame's lapdog, the essential ornament in her drawing-room, figured at all the dinners, balls, and routs where she appeared, stifled his yawns at the back of her box at the Opera, and received the confidential mission of going to hunt for sweetmeats and chocolates in the foyer. His recompense consisted in metaphysical conversations and sentimental seances, in which he was not long in discovering that his heart was blinded by his emotions. At the end of a few months of this commonplace happiness, the rupture took place without any regrets on either side, and Amedee returned, without a pang, the love-tokens he had received, namely: a photograph, a package of letters in imitation of fashionable romances, written in long, angular handwriting, after the English style, upon very chic paper; and, we must not forget, a white glove which was a little yellowed from confinement in the casket, like the beautiful Madame herself.

A tall girl, with a body like a goddess, who earned three hundred francs a month by showing her costumes on the Vaudeville stage, and who gave one louis a day to her hairdresser, gave Amedee a new experience in love, more expensive, but much more amusing than the first. There were no more psychological subtleties or hazy consciences; but she had fine, strong limbs and the majestic carriage of a cardinal's mistress going through the Rue de Constance in heavy brocade garments, to see Jean Huss burned; and her voluptuous

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smile showed teeth made to devour patrimonies. Unfortunately, Mademoiselle Rose de Juin's—that was the young lady's theatrical name—charming head was full of the foolishness and vanity of a poor actress. Her attacks of rage when she read an article in the journals which cut her up, her nervous attacks and torrents of tears when they gave her parts with only fifteen lines in a new piece, had begun to annoy Amedee, when chance gave him a new rival in the person of Gradoux, an actor in the Varietes, the ugly clown whose chronic cold in the head and ugly face seemed for twenty years so delicious to the most refined public in the world. Relieved of a large number of bank-notes, Violette discreetly retired.

He next carried on a commonplace romance with a pretty little girl whose acquaintance he made one evening at a public fete. Louison was twenty years old, and earned her living at a famous florist's, and was as pink and fresh as an almond-bush in April. She had had only two lovers, gay fellows—an art student first—then a clerk in a novelty store, who had given her the not very aristocratic taste for boating. It was on the Marne, seated near Louison in a boat moored to the willows on the Ile d'Amour, that Amedee obtained his first kiss between two stanzas of a boating song, and this pretty creature, who never came to see him without bringing him a bouquet, charmed the poet. He remembered Beranger's charming verses, "I am of the people as well, my love!" felt that he loved, and was softened. In reality, he had turned this naive head. Louison became dreamy, asked for a lock of his hair, which she always carried with her in her 'porte-monnaie', went to get her fortune told to know whether the dark-complexioned young man, the knave of clubs, would be faithful to her for a long time. Amedee trusted this simple heart for some time, but at length he became tired of her vulgarities. She was really too talkative, not minding her h's and punctuating her discourse with "for certain" and "listen to me, then," calling Amedee "my little man," and eating vulgar dishes. One day she offered to kiss him, with a breath that smelled of garlic. She was the one who left him, from feminine pride, feeling that he no longer loved her, and he almost regretted her.

Thus his life passed; he worked a little and dreamed much. He went as rarely as possible to Maurice Roger's house. Maurice had decidedly turned out to be a good husband, and was fond of his home and playing with his little boy. Every time that Amedee saw Maria it meant several days of discouragement, sorrow, and impossibility of work.

"Well! well!" he would murmur, throwing down his pen, when the young woman's face would rise between his thoughts and his page; "I am incurable; I shall always love her."



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In the summer of 1870 Amedee, being tired of Paris, thought of a new trip, and he was upon the point of going again, unfortunate fellow! to see the Swiss porters who speak all the languages in the world, and to view the melancholy boots in the hotel corridors, when the war broke out. The poet's passage through the midst of the revolutionary "beards" in the Cafe de Seville, and the parliamentary cravats in the Countess's drawing-room, had disgusted him forever with politics. He also was very suspicious of the Liberal ministers and all the different phases of the malady that was destroying the Second Empire. But Amedee was a good Frenchman. The assaults upon the frontiers, and the first battles lost, made a burning blush suffuse his face at the insult. When Paris was threatened he asked for arms, like the others, and although he had not a military spirit, he swore to do his duty, and his entire duty, too. One beautiful September morning he saw Trochu's gilded cap passing among the bayonets; four hundred thousand Parisians were there, like himself, full of good-will, who had taken up their guns with the resolve to die steadfast. Ah, the misery of defeat! All these brave men for five months could only fidget about the place and eat carcasses. May the good God forgive the timid and the prattler! Alas! Poor old France! After so much glory! Poor France of Jeanne d'Arc and of Napoleon!

CHAPTER XVI

IN TIME OF WAR

The great siege lasted nearly three months. Upon the thirtieth of November they had fought a battle upon the banks of the Marne, then for twenty-four hours the fight had seemed to slacken, and there was a heavy snow-storm; but they maintained that the second of December would be decisive. That morning the battalion of the National Guard, of which Amedee Violette was one, went out for the first time, with the order simply to hold themselves in reserve in the third rank, by the fort's cannons, upon a hideous plain at the east of Paris.

Truly this National Guard did not make a bad appearance. They were a trifle awkward, perhaps, in their dark-blue hooded cloaks, with their tin-plate buttons, and armed with breech-loading rifles, and encumbered with canteens, basins, and pouches, all having an unprepared and too-new look. They all came from the best parts of the city, with accelerated steps and a loud beating of drums, and headed, if you please, by their major on horseback, a truss-maker, who had formerly been quartermaster of the third hussars. Certainly they only asked for service; it was not their fault, after all, if one had not confidence in them, and if they were not sent to the front as soon as they reached the fortifications. While crossing the drawbridge they had sung the Marseillaise like men ready to be shot down. What spoiled their martial appearance, perhaps, were their strong hunting-boots, their leather leggings, knit gloves,

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and long gaiters; lastly, that comfortable air of people who have brought with them a few dainties, such as a little bread with something eatable between, some tablets of chocolate, tobacco, and a phial filled with old rum. They had not gone two kilometres outside the ramparts, and were near the fort, where for the time being the artillery was silent, when a staff officer who was awaiting them upon an old hack of a horse, merely skin and bones, stopped them by a gesture of the hand, and said sharply to their major to take position on the left of the road, in an open field. They then stacked their arms there and broke ranks, and rested until further orders.

What a dismal place! Under a canopy of dull clouds, the earth bare with half-melted snow, with the low fort rising up before them as if in an attitude of defence, here and there groups of ruined houses, a mill whose tall chimney and walls had been half destroyed by shells, but where one still read, in large black letters, these words, "Soap-maker to the Nobility;" and through this desolated country was a long and muddy road which led over to where the battle field lay, and in the midst of which, presenting a symbol of death, lay the dead body of a horse.

In front of the National Guard, on the other side of the road, a battalion, which had been strongly put to the test the night before, were cooking. They had retreated as far as this to rest a little, and had spent all that night without shelter under the falling snow. Exhausted, bespattered, in rags, they were dolefully crouched around their meagre green-wood fires; the poor creatures were to be pitied. Underneath their misshapen caps they all showed yellow, wrinkled, and unshaven faces. The bitter, cold wind that swept over the plain made their thin shoulders, stooping from fatigue, shiver, and their shoulder-blades protruded under their faded capes. Some of them were wounded, too slightly to be sent away in the ambulance, and wore about their wrists and foreheads bands of bloody linen. When an officer passed with his head bent and a humiliated air, nobody saluted him. These men had suffered too much, and one could divine an angry and insolent despair in their gloomy looks, ready to burst out and tell of their injuries. They would have disgusted one if they had not excited one's pity. Alas, they were vanquished!

The Parisians were eager for news as to recent military operations, for they had only read in the morning papers—as they always did during this frightful siege—enigmatical despatches and bulletins purposely bristling with strategic expressions not comprehensible to the outsider. But all, or nearly all, had kept their patriotic hopes intact, or, to speak more plainly, their blind fanatical patriotism, and were certain against all reason of a definite victory; they walked along the road in little groups, and drew near the red pantaloons to talk a little.

"Well, it was a pretty hot affair on the thirtieth, wasn't it? Is it true that you had command of the Marne? You know what they say in Paris, my children? That Trochu

knows something new, that he is going to make his way through the Prussian lines and join hands with the helping armies—in a word that we are going to strike the last blow.”

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At the sight of these spectres of soldiers, these unhappy men broken down with hunger and fatigue, the genteel National Guards, warmly clad and wrapped up for the winter, commenced to utter foolish speeches and big hopes which had been their daily food for several months: "Break the iron circle;" "not one inch, not a stone;" "war to the knife;" "one grand effort," etc. But the very best talkers were speedily discouraged by the shrugging of shoulders and ugly glances of the soldiers, that were like those of a snarling cur.

Meanwhile, a superb sergeant-major of the National Guard, newly equipped, a big, full-blooded fellow, with a red beard, the husband of a fashionable dressmaker, who every evening at the beer-house, after his sixth glass of beer would show, with matches, an infallible plan for blocking Paris and crushing the Prussian army like pepper, and was foolish enough to insist upon it.

"Now then, you, my good fellow," said he, addressing an insignificant corporal just about to eat his stew, as if he were questioning an old tactician or a man skilled like Turenne or Davoust; "do you see? you hit it in this affair of day before yesterday. Give us your opinion. Are the positions occupied by Ducrot as strong as they pretend? Is it victory for to-day?"

The corporal turned around suddenly; with a face the color of boxwood, and his blue eyes shining with rage and defiance, he cried in a hoarse voice:

"Go and see for yourselves, you stay-at-homes!"

Saddened and heart-broken at the demoralization of the soldiers, the National Guards withdrew.

"Behold the army which the Empire has left us!" said the dressmaker's husband, who was a fool.

Upon the road leading from Paris, pressing toward the cannon's mouth which was commencing to grumble again in the distance, a battalion of militia arrived, a disorderly troop. They were poor fellows from the departments in the west, all young, wearing in their caps the Brittany coat-of-arms, and whom suffering and privation had not yet entirely deprived of their good country complexions. They were less worn out than the other unfortunate fellows whose turn came too often, and did not feel the cold under their sheepskins, and still respected their officers, whom they knew personally, and were assured in case of accident of absolution given by one of their priests, who marched in the rear file of the first company, with his cassock tucked up and his Roman hat over his eyes. These country fellows walked briskly, a little helter-skelter, like their ancestors in the time of Stofflet and M. de la Rochejaquelin, but with a firm step and their muskets well placed upon their shoulders, by Ste. Anne! They looked like soldiers in earnest.

When they passed by the National Guard, the big blond waved his cap in the air, furiously shouting at the top of his lungs:

“Long live the Republic!”

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But once more the fanatical patriot's enthusiasm fell flat. The Bretons were marching into danger partly from desire, but more from duty and discipline. At the very first shot these simple-minded creatures reach the supreme wisdom of loving one's country and losing one's life for it, if necessary, without interesting themselves in the varied mystifications one calls government. Four or five of the men, more or less astonished at the cry which greeted them, turned their placid, countrified faces toward the National Guard, and the battalion passed by.

The dressmaker's husband—he did nothing at his trade, for his wife adored him, and he spent at cafes all the money which she gave him—was extremely scandalized. During this time Amedee Violette was dreamily walking up and down before the stacks of guns. His warlike ardor of the first few days had dampened. He had seen and heard too many foolish things said and done since the beginning of this horrible siege; had taken part too many times in one of the most wretched spectacles in which a people can show vanity in adversity. He was heart broken to see his dear compatriots, his dear Parisians, redouble their boasting after each defeat and take their levity for heroism. If he admired the resignation of the poor women standing in line before the door of a butcher's shop, he was every day more sadly tormented by the bragging of his comrades, who thought themselves heroes when playing a game of corks. The official placards, the trash in the journals, inspired him with immense disgust, for they had never lied so boldly or flattered the people with so much low meanness. It was with a despairing heart and the certitude of final disaster that Amedee, needing a little sleep after the fatigue, wandered through Paris's obscure streets, barely lighted here and there by petroleum lamps, under the dark, opaque winter sky, where the echoes of the distant cannonading unceasingly growled like the barking of monstrous dogs.

What solitude! The poet had not one friend, not one comrade to whom he could confide his patriotic sorrows. Paul Sillery was serving in the army of the Loire. Arthur Papillon, who had shown such boisterous enthusiasm on the fourth of September, had been nominated prefet in a Pyrenean department, and having looked over his previous studies, the former laureate of the university examinations spent much of his time therein, far from the firing, in making great speeches and haranguing from the top of the balconies, in which speeches the three hundred heroes of antiquity in a certain mountain-pass were a great deal too often mentioned. Amedee sometimes went to see Jockeyet in the theatres, where they gave benefit performances for the field hospitals or to contribute to the molding of a new cannon. The actor, wearing a short uniform and booted to the thighs, would recite with enormous success poems of the times in which enthusiasm and fine sentiments took the place of art and common sense. What can one say to a triumphant actor who takes himself for a second Tyrtee, and who after a second recall is convinced that he is going to save the country, and that Bismarck and old William had better look after their laurels.

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As to Maurice Roger, at the beginning of the campaign he sent his mother, wife, and child into the country, and, wearing the double golden stripe of a lieutenant upon his militia jacket, he was now at the outposts near his father's old friend, Colonel Lantz.

Owing to a scarcity of officers, they had fished up the old Colonel from the depths of his engineer's office, and had torn him away from his squares and compasses. Poor old fellow! His souvenirs of activity went as far back as the Crimea and Sebastopol. Since that time he had not even seen a pickaxe glisten in the sun, and, behold, they asked this worthy man to return to the trench, and to powder his despatches with earth ploughed up by bombs, like Junot at Toulon in the fearless battery.

Well, he did not say "No," and after kissing his three portionless daughters on the forehead, he took his old uniform, half-eaten up by moths, from a drawer, shook the grains of pepper and camphor from it, and, with his slow, red-tapist step, went to make his excavators work as far as possible from the walls and close by the Prussians. I can tell you, the men of the auxiliary engineers and the gentlemen with the American-caps had not joked for some time over his African cape or his superannuated cap, which seemed to date from Pere Bugeaud. One day, when a German bomb burst among them, and they all fell to the ground excepting Colonel Lantz, who had not flinched. He tranquilly settled his glasses upon his nose and wiped off his splashed beard as coolly as he had, not long since, cleaned his India-ink brushes. Bless me! it gave you a lesson, gentlemen snobs, to sustain the honor of the special army, and taught you to respect the black velvet plastron and double red bands on the trousers. In spite of his appearance of absence of mind and deafness, the Colonel had just before heard murmured around him the words "old Lantz," and "old dolphin." Very well, gentlemen officers, you know now that the old army was composed of good material!

Maurice Roger was ordered from his battalion to Colonel Lantz, and did his duty like a true soldier's son, following his chief into the most perilous positions, and he no longer lowered his head or bent his shoulders at the whistling of a bomb. It was genuine military blood that flowed in his veins, and he did not fear death; but life in the open air, absence from his wife, the state of excitement produced by the war, and this eagerness for pleasure common to all those who risk their lives, had suddenly awakened his licentious temperament. When his service allowed him to do so, he would go into Paris and spend twenty-four hours there, profiting by it to have a champagne dinner at Brebant's or Voisin's, in company with some beautiful girl, and to eat the luxurious dishes of that time, such as beans, Gruyere cheese, and the great rarity which had been secretly raised for three months on the fifth floor, a leg of mutton.

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One evening Amedee Violette was belated upon the boulevards, and saw coming out of a restaurant Maurice in full uniform, with one of the pretty comedienes from the Varietes leaning upon his arm. This meeting gave Amedee one heart-ache the more. It was for such a husband as this, then, that Maria, buried in some country place, was probably at this very time overwhelmed with fears about his safety. It was for this incorrigible rake that she had disdained her friend from childhood, and scorned the most delicate, faithful, and tender of lovers.

Finally, to kill time and to flee from solitude, Amedee went to the Cafe de Seville, but he only found a small group of his former acquaintances there. No more literary men, or almost none. The "long-haired" ones had to-day the "regulation cut," and wore divers head-gears, for the most of the scattered poets carried cartridge-boxes and guns; but some of the political "beards" had not renounced their old customs; the war and the fall of the Empire had been a triumph for them, and the fourth of September had opened every career for them. Twenty of these "beards" had been provided with prefectures; at least all, or nearly all, of them occupied public positions. There was one in the Government of National Defence, and three or four others, chosen from among the most rabid ones, were members of the Committee on Barricades; for, improbable as the thing may seem today, this commission existed and performed its duties, a commission according to all rules, with an organized office, a large china inkstand, stamped paper, verbal reports read and voted upon at the beginning of each meeting; and, around a table covered with green cloth, these professional instigators of the Cafe de Seville, these teachers of insurrection, generously gave the country the benefit of the practical experience that they had acquired in practising with the game of dominoes.

The "beards" remaining in Paris were busied with employments more or less considerable in the government, but did not do very much, the offices in which they worked for France's salvation usually closed at four o'clock, and they went as usual to take their appetizers at the Cafe de Seville. It was there that Amedee met them again, and mixed anew in their conversations, which now dwelt exclusively upon patriotic and military subjects. These "beards" who would none of them have been able to command "by the right flank" a platoon of artillery, had all at once been endowed by some magical power with the genius of strategy. Every evening, from five to seven, they fought a decisive battle upon each marble table, sustained by the artillery of the iced decanter which represented Mount Valerien, a glass of bitters, that is to say, Vinoy's brigade, feigned to attack a saucer representing the Montretout batteries; while the regular army and National Guard, symbolized by a glass of vermouth and absinthe, were coming in solid masses from the south, and marching straight into the heart of the enemy, the match-box.

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There were scheming men among these “beards,” and particularly terrible inventors, who all had an infallible way of destroying at a blow the Prussian army, and who accused General Trochu of treason, and of refusing their offers, giving as a reason the old prejudices of military laws among nations. One of these visionary people had formerly been physician to a somnambulist, and took from his pocket—with his tobacco and cigarette papers—a series of bottles labelled: cholera, yellow fever, typhus fever, smallpox, *etc.*, and proposed as a very simple thing to go and spread these epidemics in all the German camps, by the aid of a navigable balloon, which he had just invented the night before upon going to bed. Amedee soon became tired of these braggarts and lunatics, and no longer went to the Cafe de Seville. He lived alone and shut himself up in his discouragement, and he had never perhaps had it weigh more heavily upon his shoulders than this morning of the second of December, the last day of the battle of Champigny, while he was sadly promenading before the stacked guns of his battalion.

The dark clouds, heavy with snow, were hurrying by, the tormenting rumble of the cannons, the muddy country, the crumbling buildings, and these vanquished soldiers shivering under their rags, all threw the poet into the most gloomy of reveries. Then humanity so many ages, centuries, perhaps, old, had only reached this point: Hatred, absurd war, fratricidal murder! Progress? Civilization? Mere words! No rest, no peaceful repose, either in fraternity or love! The primitive brute always reappears, the right of the stronger to hold in its clutches the pale cadaver of justice! What is the use of so many religions, philosophies, all the noble dreams, all the grand impulses of the thought toward the ideal and good? This horrible doctrine of the pessimists was true then! We are, then, like animals, eternally condemned to kill each other in order to live? If that is so, one might as well renounce life, and give up the ghost!

Meanwhile the cannonading now redoubled, and with its tragic grumbling was mingled the dry crackling sound of the musketry; beyond a wooded hillock, which restricted the view toward the southeast, a very thick white smoke spread over the horizon, mounting up into the gray sky. The fight had just been resumed there, and it was getting hot, for soon the ambulances and army-wagons drawn by artillery men began to pass. They were full of the wounded, whose plaintive moans were heard as they passed. They had crowded the least seriously wounded ones into the omnibus, which went at a foot pace, but the road had been broken up by the bad weather, and it was pitiful to behold these heads shaken as they passed over each rut. The sight of the dying extended upon bloody mattresses was still more lugubrious to see. The frightful procession of the slaughtered went slowly toward the city to the hospitals, but the carriages sometimes

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stopped, only a hundred steps from the position occupied by the National Guards, before a house where a provisional hospital had been established, and left their least transportable ones there. The morbid but powerful attraction that horrible sights exert over a man urged Amedee Violette to this spot. This house had been spared from bombardment and protected from pillage and fire by the Geneva flag; it was a small cottage which realized the dream of every shopkeeper after he has made his fortune. Nothing was lacking, not even the earthen lions at the steps, or the little garden with its glittering weather-vane, or the rock-work basin for goldfish. On warm days the past summer passers-by might have seen very often, under the green arbor, bourgeoisie in their shirt-sleeves and women in light dresses eating melons together. The poet's imagination fancied at once this picture of a Parisian's Sunday, when suddenly a young assistant appeared at an open window on the first floor, wiping his hands upon his blood-stained apron. He leaned out and called to a hospital attendant, that Amedee had not noticed before, who was cutting linen upon a table in the garden:

"Well, Vidal, you confounded dawdler," exclaimed he, impatiently, "are those bandages ready? Good God! are we to have them to-day or tomorrow?"

"Make room, if you please!" said at this moment a voice at Amedee's elbow, who stepped aside for two stretchers borne by four brothers of the Christian doctrine to pass. The poet gave a start and a cry of terror. He recognized in the two wounded men Maurice Roger and Colonel Lantz.

Wounded, both of them, yes! and mortally. Only one hour ago.

Affairs had turned out badly for us down there, then, on the borders of the Marne. They did a foolish thing to rest one day and give the enemy time to concentrate his forces; when they wished to renew the attack they dashed against vast numbers and formidable artillery. Two generals killed! So many brave men sacrificed! Now they beat a retreat once more and lose the ground. One of the chief generals, with lowered head and drooping shoulders, more from discouragement than fatigue, stood glass in hand, observing from a distance our lines, which were breaking.

"If we could fortify ourselves there at least," said he, pointing to an eminence which overlooked the river, "and establish a redoubt—in one night with a hundred picks it could be done. I do not believe that the enemy's fire could reach this position—it is a good one."

"We could go there and see, General," said some one, very quietly.

It was Pere Lantz, the "old dolphin," who was standing there with Maurice beside him and three or four of the auxiliary engineers; and, upon my word, in spite of his cap,

which seemed to date from the time of Horace Vernet's "Smala," the poor man, with his glasses upon his nose, long cloak, and pepper colored beard, had no more prestige than a policeman in a public square, one of those old fellows who chase children off the grass, threatening them with their canes.

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"When I say that the German artillery will not reach there," murmured the head general, "I am not sure of it. But you are right, Colonel. We must see. Send two of your men."

"With your permission, General," said Pere Lantz, "I will go myself." Maurice bravely added at once:

"Not without me, Colonel!"

"As you please," said the General, who had already pointed his glass upon another point of the battlefield.

Followed by the only son of his companion in arms in Africa and the Crimea, this office clerk and dauber in watercolors walked to the front as tranquilly as he would have gone to the minister's office with his umbrella under his arm. At the very moment when the two officers reached the plateau, a projectile from the Prussian batteries fell upon a chest and blew it up with a frightful uproar. The dead and wounded were heaped upon the ground. Pere Lantz saw the foot-soldiers fleeing, and the artillery men harnessing their wagons.

"What!" exclaimed he, rising up to his full height, "do they abandon the position?"

The Colonel's face was transfigured; opening wide his long cloak and showing his black velvet plastron upon which shone his commander's cross, he drew his sword, and, putting his cap upon the tip of it, bareheaded, with his gray hair floating in the wind, with open arms he threw himself before the runaways.

"Halt!" he commanded, in a thundering tone. "Turn about, wretches, turn about! You are here at a post of honor. Form again, my men! Gunners, to your places! Long life to France!"

Just then a new shell burst at the feet of the Colonel and of Maurice, and they both fell to the ground.

Amedee, staggering with emotion and a heart bursting with grief and fear, entered the hospital behind the two litters.

"Put them in the dining-room," said one of the brothers. "There is nobody there. The doctor will come immediately."

The young man with the bloody apron came in at once, and after a look at the wounded man he gave a despairing shake of the head, and, shrugging his shoulders, said:

"There is nothing to be done they will not last long."

In fact, the Colonel was dying. They had thrown an old woollen covering over him through which the hemorrhage showed itself by large stains of blood which were constantly increasing and penetrating the cloth. The wounded man seemed to be coming out of his faint; he half opened his eyes, and his lips moved.

The doctor, who had just come in, came up to the litter upon which the old officer was lying and leaned over him.

“Did you wish to say anything?” he asked.

The old Colonel, without moving his head, turned his sad gaze upon the surgeon, oh! so sad, and in a voice scarcely to be heard he murmured:

“Three daughters—to marry—without a dowry! Three—three—!”

Then he heaved a deep sigh, his blue eyes paled and became glassy. Colonel Lantz was dead.

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Do not despair, old military France! You will always have these simple-hearted soldiers who are ready to sacrifice themselves for your flag, ready to serve you for a morsel of bread, and to die for you, bequeathing their widows and orphans to you! Do not despair, old France of the one hundred years' war and of '92!

The brothers, who wore upon their black robes the red Geneva cross, were kneeling around the body and praying in a low tone. The assistant surgeon noticed Amedee Violette for the first time, standing motionless in a corner of the room.

"What are you doing here?" he asked him, brusquely.

"I am this poor officer's friend," Amedee replied, pointing to Maurice.

"So be it! stay with him—if he asks for a drink you have the tea there upon the stove. You, gentlemen," added he, addressing the brothers, who arose after making the sign of the cross, "you will return to the battle-field, I suppose?"

They silently bowed their heads, the eldest of them closed the dead man's eyes. As they were all going out together, the assistant surgeon said to them, in a petulant tone of voice:

"Try to bring me some not quite so much used up."

Maurice Roger was about to die, too. His shirt was stained with blood, and a stream ran down from his forehead upon his blond moustache, but he was still beautiful in his marble-like pallor. Amedee carefully raised up one of the wounded man's arms and placed it upon the stretcher, keeping his friend's hand in his own. Maurice moved slightly at the touch, and ended by opening his eyes.

"Ah, how thirsty I am!" he groaned.

Amedee went to the stove and got the pot of tea, and leaned over to help the unfortunate man drink it. Maurice looked at him with surprise. He recognized Amedee.

"You, Amedee!—where am I, then?"

He attempted in vain to rise. His head dropped slightly to the left, and he saw, not two steps from him, the lifeless body of his old colonel, with eyes closed and features already calmed by the first moments of perfect repose.

"My Colonel!" said he. "Ah! I understand—I remember—! How they ran away—miserable cowards! But you, Amedee? Why are you here—?"

His friend could not restrain his tears, and Maurice murmured:



"Done for, am I not?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Amedee, with animation. "They are going to dress your wounds at once—They will come soon! Courage, my good Maurice! Courage!"

Suddenly the wounded man had a terrible chill; his teeth chattered, and he said again:

"I am thirsty!—something to drink, my friend!—give me something to drink!"

A few swallows of tea calmed him a little. He closed his eyes as if to rest, but a moment after he opened them, and, fixing them upon his friend's face, he said to him in a faint voice:

"You know—Maria, my wife—marry her—I confide them to you—she and my son—"

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Then, doubtless tired out by the fatigue of having spoken these words, he seemed to collapse and sink down into the litter, which was saturated now with his blood. A moment later he began to pant for breath. Amedee knelt by his side, and tears fell upon his hands, while between the dying man's gasps he could hear in the distance, upon the battlefield, the uninterrupted rumbling of the cannon as it mowed down others.

CHAPTER XVII

"When youth, the dream, departs"

The leaves are falling!

This October afternoon is deliciously serene, there is not a cloud in the grayish-blue sky, where the sun, which has shed a pure and steady light since morning, has begun majestically to decline, like a good king who has grown old after a long and prosperous reign. How soft the air is! How calm and fresh! This is certainly one of the most beautiful of autumn days. Below, in the valley, the river sparkles like liquid silver, and the trees which crown the hill-tops are of a lurid gold and copper color. The distant panorama of Paris is grand and charming, with all its noted edifices and the dome of the Invalides shining like gold outlined upon the horizon. As a loving and coquettish woman, who wishes to be regretted, gives at the moment of departure her most intoxicating smile to a friend, so the close of autumn had put on for one of her last days all her splendid charms.

But the leaves are falling!

Amedee Violette is walking alone in his garden at Meudon. It is his country home, where he has lived for eight years. A short time after the close of the war he married Maurice's widow. He is walking upon the terrace planted with lindens that are now more than half-despoiled of their leaves, admiring the beautiful picture and thinking.

He is celebrated, he has worked hard and has built up a reputation by good, sincere books, as a poet. Doubtless, some persons are still jealous of him, and he is often treated with injustice, but he is estimated by the dignity of his life, which his love of art fills entirely, and he occupies a superior position in literature. Although his resources are modest, they are sufficient to exempt him from anxieties of a trivial nature. Living far from society, in the close intimacy of those that he loves, he does not know the miseries of ambition and vanity. Amedee Violette should be happy.

His old friend, Paul Sillery, who breakfasted with him that morning in Meudon, is condemned to daily labor and the exhausting life of a journalist; and when he was seated in the carriage which took him back to Paris that morning, to forced labor, to the article to be knocked off for tomorrow, in the midst of the racket and chattering of an

editor's office, beside an interrupted cigar laid upon the edge of a table, he heaved a deep sigh as he thought of Amedee.

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Ah, this Violette was to be envied! With money, home, and a family, he was not obliged to disseminate his ideas right and left. He had leisure, and could stop when he was not in the spirit of writing; he could think before he wrote and do some good work. It was not astonishing, to be sure, that he produced veritable works of art when he is cheered by the atmosphere of affection. First, he adores his wife, that is easily seen, and he looks upon Maurice's little son as his own, the little fellow is so pretty and attractive with his long, light curls. Certainly, one can see that Madame Violette has a never-to-be-forgotten grief, but what a kind and grateful glance she gives her husband! Could anything be more touching than Louise Gerard, that excellent old maid, the life of the house, who has the knack of making pleasing order and elegant comfort reign in the house, while she surrounds her mother, the paralytic Grandmother Gerard, with every care? Truly, Amedee has arranged his life well. He loves and is loved: he has procured for mind and body valuable and certain customs. He is a wise and fortunate man.

While Paul Sillery, buried in the corner of a carriage, allowed himself to be almost carried away by jealousy of his friend, Amedee, detained by the charm of this beautiful day which is drawing to a close, walks with slow, lingering steps under the lindens on the terrace.

The leaves are falling around him!

A very slight breeze is rising, the blue sky is fading a little below; in the nearest Paris suburb the windows are shining in the oblique rays of the setting sun. It will soon be night, and upon this carpet of dead leaves, which crackle under the poet's tread, other leaves will fall. They fall rarely, slowly, but continually. The frost of the night before has blighted them all. Dried up and rusty, they barely hang to the trees, so that the slightest wind that passes over them gathers them one after another, detaching them from their branches; whirling an instant in the golden light, they at last rejoin, with a sad little sound, their withered sisters, who sprinkle the gravel walks. The leaves fall, the leaves fall!

Amedee Violette is filled with melancholy.

He ought to be happy. What can he reproach destiny with? Has he not the one he always desired for his wife? Is she not the sweetest and best of companions for him? Yes! but he knows very well that she consented to marry him in order to obey Maurice's last wish, he knows very well that Maria's heart is buried in the soldier's grave at Champigny. She has set apart a sanctuary within herself where burns, as a perpetual light, the remembrance of the adored dead, of the man to whom she gave herself without reserve, the father of her son, the hero who tore himself from her arms to shed his blood for his country.

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Amedee may be certain of the gratitude and devotion of his wife, but he never will have her love, for Maurice, a posthumous rival, rises between them. Ah, this Maurice! He had loved Maria very little or not very faithfully! She should remember that he had first betrayed her, that but for Amedee he would have abandoned her and she never would have been his wife. If she knew that in Paris when she was far away he had deceived her! But she never would know anything of it, for Amedee has too much delicacy to hurt the memory of the dead, and he respects and even admires this fidelity of illusion and love in Maria. He suffers from it. The one to whom he has given his name, his heart, and his life, is inconsolable, and he must be resigned to it. Although remarried, she is a widow at the bottom of her heart, and it is in vain that she puts on bright attire, her eyes and her smile are in mourning forever.

How could she forget her Maurice when he is before her every day in her son, who is also named Maurice and whose bright, handsome face strikingly resembles his father's? Amedee feels a presentiment that in a few years this child will be another Maurice, with the same attractions and vices. The poet does not forget that his dying friend confided the orphan to him, and he endeavors to be kind and good to him and to bring him up well. He sometimes has a feeling of sorrow when he discovers the same instincts and traits in the child as in the man whom he had so dearly loved and who had made him such trouble; in spite of all, he can not feel the sentiments of a father for another's son. His own union has been sterile.

Poor Amedee! Yet he is envied! The little joy that he has is mingled with grief and sorrow, and he dares not confide it to the excellent Louise—who suspects it, however—whose old and secret attachment for him he surmises now, and who is the good genius of his household. Had he only realized it before! It might have been happiness, genuine happiness for him!

The leaves fall! the leaves fall!

After breakfast, while they were smoking their cigars and walking along beside the masses of dahlias, upon which the large golden spider had spun its silvery web, Amedee Violette and Paul Sillery had talked of times past and the comrades of their youth. It was not a very gay conversation, for since then there had been the war, the Commune. How many were dead! How many had disappeared! And, then, this retrospective review proves to one that one can be entirely deceived as to certain people, and that chance is master.

Such an one, whom they had once considered as a great prose writer, as the leader of a sect, and whose doctrines of art five or six faithful disciples spread while copying his waistcoats and even imitating his manner of speaking with closed teeth, is reduced to writing stories for obscene journals. "Chose," the fiery revolutionist, had obtained a good place; and the modest "Machin," a man hardly noticed in the clubs, had published two exquisite books, genuine works of art.

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All of the “beards” and “long-haired” men had taken unexpected paths. But the politicians, above all, were astonishing in the variety of their destinies. Among the cafe’s frequenters at the hour for absinthe one could count eight deputies, three ministers, two ambassadors, one treasurer, and thirty exiles at Noumea awaiting the long-expected amnesty. The most interesting, everything considered, is that imbecile, that old fanatic of a Dubief, the man that never drank anything but sweetened water; for he, at least, was shot on the barricades by the Versaillese soldiers.

One person of whom the very thought disgusted the two friends was that jumping-jack of an Arthur Papillon. Universal suffrage, with its accustomed intelligence, had not failed to elect this nonentity and bombastic fool, and to-day he flounders about like a fish out of water in the midst of this political cesspool. Having been enriched by a large dowry, he has been by turns deputy, secretary, vice-president, president, head of committees, under secretary of State, in one word, everything that it was possible to be. For the time being he rants against the clergy, and his wife, who is ugly, rich, and pious, has just put their little girl into the Oiseaux school. He has not yet become minister, but rest assured he will reach that in time. He is very vain, full of confidence in himself, not more honest than necessary, and very obtrusive. Unless in the meantime they decide to establish a rotation providing that all the deputies be ministers by turns, Arthur Papillon is the inevitable, necessary man mentioned. In such a case, this would be terrible, for his eloquence would flow in torrents, and he would be one of the most agitating of microbes in the parliamentary culture.

And Jocquelet? Ah! the two friends only need to speak his name to burst into peals of laughter, for the illustrious actor now fills the universe with his glory and ridiculousness. Jocquelet severed the chain some time ago which bound him to the Parisian theatres. Like the tricolored flag, he has made the tour of Europe several times; like the English standard, he has crossed every ocean. He is the modern Wandering Actor, and the capitals of the Old World and both Americas watch breathless with desire for him to deign to shower over them the manna of his monologues. At Chicago, they detached his locomotive, and he intended, at the sight of this homage proportioned to his merits, to become a naturalized American citizen. But they proposed a new tour for him in old Europe, and out of filial remembrance he consented to return once more among us. As usual, he gathered a cartload of gold and laurels. He was painfully surprised upon reaching Stockholm by water not to be greeted by the squadrons with volleys of artillery, as was once done in honor of a famous cantatrice. Let Diplomacy look sharp! Jocquelet is indifferent to the court of Sweden!

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After Paul Sillery's departure Amedee turned over in his mind various other recollections of former days. He has been a trifle estranged from Madame Roger since his marriage to Maria, but he sometimes takes little Maurice to see her. She has sheltered and given each of Colonel Lantz's daughters a dowry. Pretty Rosine Combarieu's face rises up before him, his childhood's companion, whom he met at Bullier's and never has seen since. What has become of the poor little creature? Amedee almost hopes that she is dead. Ah, how sad these old memories are in the autumn, when the leaves are falling and the sun is setting!

It has set, it has plunged beneath the horizon, and suddenly all is dark. Over the darkened landscape in the vast pearl-colored sky spreads the melancholy chill which follows the farewell of day. The white smoke from the city has turned gray, the river is like a dulled mirror. A moment ago, in the sun's last rays, the dead leaves, as they fell, looked like a golden rain, now they seem a dark snow.

Where are all your illusions and hopes of other days, Amedee Violette? You think this evening of the rapid flight of years, of the snowy flakes of winter which are beginning to fall on your temples. You have the proof to-day of the impossibility of absolutely requited love in this world. You know that happiness, or what is called so, exists only by snatches and lasts only a moment, and how commonplace it often is and how sad the next day! You depend upon your art for consolation. Oppressed by the monotonous ennui of living, you ask for the forgetfulness that only the intoxication of poetry and dreams can give you. Alas! Poor sentimentalist, your youth is ended!

And still the leaves fall!

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Egotists and cowards always have a reason for everything
Eternally condemned to kill each other in order to live
God forgive the timid and the prattler!
Happiness exists only by snatches and lasts only a moment
He almost regretted her
He does not know the miseries of ambition and vanity
How sad these old memories are in the autumn
Never travel when the heart is troubled!
Not more honest than necessary
Poor France of Jeanne d'Arc and of Napoleon
Redouble their boasting after each defeat
Take their levity for heroism
The leaves fall! the leaves fall!
Universal suffrage, with its accustomed intelligence
Were certain against all reason



ETEXT *editor's bookmarks of the entire romance of youth:*

Break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out
Dreams, instead of living
Egotists and cowards always have a reason for everything
Eternally condemned to kill each other in order to live
Fortunate enough to

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keep those one loves

God forgive the timid and the prattler!
Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent
Happiness exists only by snatches and lasts only a moment
He does not know the miseries of ambition and vanity
He almost regretted her
How sad these old memories are in the autumn
Inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody
Intimate friend, whom he has known for about five minutes
It was all delightfully terrible!
Learned that one leaves college almost ignorant
Mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them
My good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure
Never travel when the heart is troubled!
Not more honest than necessary
Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him
Paint from nature
Poor France of Jeanne d'Arc and of Napoleon
Redouble their boasting after each defeat
Society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood
Take their levity for heroism
Tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings
The leaves fall! the leaves fall!
The sincere age when one thinks aloud
Tired smile of those who have not long to live
Trees are like men; there are some that have no luck
Universal suffrage, with its accustomed intelligence
Upon my word, there are no ugly ones (women)
Very young, and was in love with love
Voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart
Were certain against all reason
When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about

COSMOPOLIS

By Paul Bourget

With a Preface by *Jules Lemaitre*, of the French academy,

PAUL BOURGET

Born in Amiens, September 2, 1852, Paul Bourget was a pupil at the Lycee Louis le Grand, and then followed a course at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, intending to devote himself to Greek philology. He, however, soon gave up linguistics for poetry, literary criticism, and fiction. When yet a very young man, he became a contributor to various journals and reviews, among others to the 'Revue des deux Mondes, La Renaissance, Le Parlement, La Nouvelle Revue', etc. He has since given himself up almost exclusively to novels and fiction, but it is necessary to mention here that he also wrote poetry. His poetical works comprise: 'Poesies (1872-876), La Vie Inquiete (1875), Edel (1878), and Les Aveux (1882)'.

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With riper mind and to far better advantage, he appeared a few years later in literary essays on the writers who had most influenced his own development—the philosophers Renan, Taine, and Amiel, the poets Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle; the dramatist Dumas fils, and the novelists Turgenieff, the Goncourts, and Stendhal. Brunetiere says of Bourget that “no one knows more, has read more, read better, or meditated, more profoundly upon what he has read, or assimilated it more completely.” So much “reading” and so much “meditation,” even when accompanied by strong assimilative powers, are not, perhaps, the most desirable and necessary tendencies in a writer of verse or of fiction. To the philosophic critic, however, they must evidently be invaluable; and thus it is that in a certain self-allotted domain of literary appreciation allied to semi-scientific thought, Bourget stands to-day without a rival. His 'Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine' (1883), 'Nouveaux Essais' (1885), and 'Etudes et Portraits' (1888) are certainly not the work of a week, but rather the outcome of years of self-culture and of protracted determined endeavor upon the sternest lines. In fact, for a long time, Bourget rose at 3 a.m. and elaborated anxiously study after study, and sketch after sketch, well satisfied when he sometimes noticed his articles in the theatrical 'feuilleton' of the 'Globe' and the 'Parlement', until he finally contributed to the great 'Debats' itself. A period of long, hard, and painful probation must always be laid down, so to speak, as the foundation of subsequent literary fame. But France, fortunately for Bourget, is not one of those places where the foundation is likely to be laid in vain, or the period of probation to endure for ever and ever.

In fiction, Bourget carries realistic observation beyond the externals (which fixed the attention of Zola and Maupassant) to states of the mind: he unites the method of Stendhal to that of Balzac. He is always interesting and amusing. He takes himself seriously and persists in regarding the art of writing fiction as a science. He has wit, humor, charm, and lightness of touch, and ardently strives after philosophy and intellectuality—qualities that are rarely found in fiction. It may well be said of M. Bourget that he is innocent of the creation of a single stupid character. The men and women we read of in Bourget's novels are so intellectual that their wills never interfere with their hearts.

The list of his novels and romances is a long one, considering the fact that his first novel, 'L'Irreparable,' appeared as late as 1884. It was followed by 'Cruelle Enigme' (1885); 'Un Crime d'Amour' (1886); 'Andre Cornelis and Mensonges' (1887); 'Le Disciple' (1889); 'La Terre promise'; 'Cosmopolis' (1892), crowned by the Academy; 'Drames de Famille' (1899); 'Monique' (1902)'; his romances are 'Une Idylle tragique' (1896); 'La Duchesse Bleue' (1898); 'Le Fantome' (1901); and 'L'Etape' (1902)'.

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'Le Disciple' and 'Cosmopolis' are certainly notable books. The latter marks the cardinal point in Bourget's fiction. Up to that time he had seen environment more than characters; here the dominant interest is psychic, and, from this point on, his characters become more and more like Stendhal's, "different from normal clay." *Cosmopolis* is perfectly charming. Bourget is, indeed, the past-master of "psychological" fiction.

To sum up: Bourget is in the realm of fiction what Frederic Amiel is in the realm of thinkers and philosophers—a subtle, ingenious, highly gifted student of his time. With a wonderful dexterity of pen, a very acute, almost womanly intuition, and a rare diffusion of grace about all his writings, it is probable that Bourget will remain less known as a critic than as a romancer. Though he neither feels like Loti nor sees like Maupassant—he reflects.

Jules Lemaitre
de l'Academie Francaise.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

I send you, my dear Primoli, from beyond the Alps, the romance of international life, begun in Italy almost under your eyes, to which I have given for a frame that ancient and noble Rome of which you are so ardent an admirer.

To be sure, the drama of passion which this book depicts has no particularly Roman features, and nothing was farther from my thoughts than to trace a picture of the society so local, so traditional, which exists between the Quirinal and the Vatican. The drama is not even Italian, for the scene might have been laid, with as much truth, at Venice, Florence, Nice, St. Moritz, even Paris or London, the various cities which are like quarters scattered over Europe of the fluctuating '*Cosmopolis*,' christened by Beyle: '*Vengo adesso da Cosmopoli*'. It is the contrast between the rather incoherent ways of the rovers of high life and the character of perennity impressed everywhere in the great city of the Caesars and of the Popes which has caused me to choose the spot where even the corners speak of a secular past, there to evoke some representatives of the most modern, as well as the most arbitrary and the most momentary, life. You, who know better than any one the motley world of cosmopolites, understand why I have confined myself to painting here only a fragment of it. That world, indeed, does not exist, it can have neither defined customs nor a general character. It is composed of exceptions and of singularities. We are so naturally creatures of custom, our continual mobility has such a need of gravitating around one fixed axis, that motives of a personal order alone can determine us upon an habitual and voluntary exile from our native land. It is so, now in the case of an artist, a person seeking for instruction and change; now in the case of a business man who desires to escape the consequences of some scandalous error; now in the case of a man of pleasure in search of new

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adventures; in the case of another, who cherishes prejudices from birth, it is the longing to find the “happy mean;” in the case of another, flight from distasteful memories. The life of the cosmopolite can conceal all beneath the vulgarity of its whims, from snobbery in quest of higher connections to swindling in quest of easier prey, submitting to the brilliant frivolities of the sport, the sombre intrigues of policy, or the sadness of a life which has been a failure. Such a variety of causes renders at once very attractive and almost impracticable the task of the author who takes as a model that ever-changing society so like unto itself in the exterior rites and fashions, so really, so intimately complex and composite in its fundamental elements. The writer is compelled to take from it a series of leading facts, as I have done, essaying to deduce a law which governs them. That law, in the present instance, is the permanence of race. Contradictory as may appear this result, the more one studies the cosmopolites, the more one ascertains that the most irreducible idea within them is that special strength of heredity which slumbers beneath the monotonous uniform of superficial relations, ready to reawaken as soon as love stirs the depths of the temperament. But there again a difficulty, almost insurmountable, is met with. Obligated to concentrate his action to a limited number of personages, the novelist can not pretend to incarnate in them the confused whole of characters which the vague word race sums up. Again, taking this book as an example, you and I, my dear Primoli, know a number of Venetians and of English women, of Poles and of Romans, of Americans and of French who have nothing in common with Madame Steno, Maud and Boleslas Gorka, Prince d’Ardea, Marquis Cibo, Lincoln Maitland, his brother-in-law, and the Marquis de Montfanon, while Justus Hafner only represents one phase out of twenty of the European adventurer, of whom one knows neither his religion, his family, his education, his point of setting out, nor his point of arriving, for he has been through various ways and means. My ambition would be satisfied were I to succeed in creating here a group of individuals not representative of the entire race to which they belong, but only as possibly existing in that race—or those races. For several of them, Justus Hafner and his daughter Fanny, Alba Steno, Florent Chapron, Lydia Maitland, have mixed blood in their veins. May these personages interest you, my dear friend, and become to you as real as they have been to me for some time, and may you receive them in your palace of Tor di Nona as faithful messengers of the grateful affection felt for you by your companion of last winter.

Paul Bourget.

Paris, November 16, 1892.

COSMOPOLIS

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

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A DILETTANTE AND A BELIEVER

Although the narrow stall, flooded with heaped-up books and papers, left the visitor just room enough to stir, and although that visitor was one of his regular customers, the old bookseller did not deign to move from the stool upon which he was seated, while writing on an unsteady desk. His odd head, with its long, white hair, peeping from beneath a once black felt hat with a broad brim, was hardly raised at the sound of the opening and shutting of the door. The newcomer saw an emaciated, shriveled face, in which, from behind spectacles, two brown eyes twinkled slyly. Then the hat again shaded the paper, which the knotty fingers, with their dirty nails, covered with uneven lines traced in a handwriting belonging to another age, and from the thin, tall form, enveloped in a greenish, worn-out coat, came a faint voice, the voice of a man afflicted with chronic laryngitis, uttering as an apology, with a strong Italian accent, this phrase in French:

“One moment, Marquis, the muse will not wait.”

“Very well, I will; I am no muse. Listen to your inspiration comfortably, Ribalta,” replied, with a laugh, he whom the vendor of old books received with such original unconstraint. He was evidently accustomed to the eccentricities of the strange merchant. In Rome—for this scene took place in a shop at the end of one of the most ancient streets of the Eternal City, a few paces from the Place d’Espagne, so well known to tourists—in the city which serves as a confluent for so many from all points of the world, has not that sense of the odd been obliterated by the multiplicity of singular and anomalous types stranded and sheltering there? You will find there revolutionists like boorish Ribalta, who is ending in a curiosity-shop a life more eventful than the most eventful of the sixteenth century.

Descended from a Corsican family, this personage came to Rome when very young, about 1835, and at first became a seminarist. On the point of being ordained a priest, he disappeared only to return, in 1849, so rabid a republican that he was outlawed at the time of the reestablishment of the pontifical government. He then served as secretary to Mazzini, with whom he disagreed for reasons which clashed with Ribalta’s honor. Would passion for a woman have involved him in such extravagance? In 1870 Ribalta returned to Rome, where he opened, if one may apply such a term to such a hole, a book-shop. But he is an amateur bookseller, and will refuse you admission if you displease him. Having inherited a small income, he sells or he does not, following his fancy or the requirements of his own purchases, to-day asking you twenty francs for a wretched engraving for which he paid ten sous, to-morrow giving you at a low price a costly book, the value of which he knows. Rabid Gallophobe, he never pardoned his old general the campaign of Dijon any more than he forgave Victor Emmanuel for

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having left the Vatican to Pius IX. "The house of Savoy and the papacy," said he, when he was confidential, "are two eggs which we must not eat on the same dish." And he would tell of a certain pillar of St. Peter's hollowed into a staircase by Bernin, where a cartouch of dynamite was placed. If you were to ask him why he became a book collector, he would bid you step over a pile of papers, of boarding and of folios. Then he would show you an immense chamber, or rather a shed, where thousands of pamphlets were piled up along the walls: "These are the rules of all the convents suppressed by Italy. I shall write their history." Then he would stare at you, for he would fear that you might be a spy sent by the king with the sole object of learning the plans of his most dangerous enemy—one of those spies of whom he has been so much in awe that for twenty years no one has known where he slept, where he ate, where he hid when the shutters of his shop in the Rue Borgognona were closed. He expected, on account of his past, and his secret manner, to be arrested at the time of the outrage of Passanante as one of the members of those Circoli Barsanti, to whom a refractory corporal gave his name.

But, on examining the dusty cartoons of the old book-stall, the police discovered nothing except a prodigious quantity of grotesque verses directed against the Piedmontese and the French, against the Germans and the Triple Alliance, against the Italian republicans and the ministers, against Cavour and Signor Crispi, against the University of Rome and the Inquisition, against the monks and the capitalists! It was, no doubt, one of those pasquinades which his customers watched him at work upon, thinking, as he did so, how Rome abounded in paradoxical meetings.

For, in 1867, that same old Garibaldian exchanged shots at Mentana with the Pope's Zouaves, among whom was Marquis de Montfaron, for so was called the visitor awaiting Ribalta's pleasure. Twenty-three years had sufficed to make of the two impassioned soldiers of former days two inoffensive men, one of whom sold old volumes to the other! And there is a figure such as you will not find anywhere else—the French nobleman who has come to die near St. Peter's.

Would you believe, to see him with his coarse boots, dressed in a simple coat somewhat threadbare, a round hat covering his gray head, that you have before you one of the famous Parisian dandies of 1864? Listen to this other history. Scruples of devoutness coming in the wake of a serious illness cast at one blow the frequenter of the 'Cafe Anglais' and gay suppers into the ranks of the pontifical zouaves. A first sojourn in Rome during the last four years of the government of Pius IX, in that incomparable city to which the presentiment of the approaching termination of a secular rule, the advent of the Council, and the French occupation gave a still more peculiar character, was enchantment. All the germs of piety instilled in the nobleman by the education of

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the Jesuits of Brughetti ended by reviving a harvest of noble virtues, in the days of trial which came only too quickly. Montfanon made the campaign of France with the other zouaves, and the empty sleeve which was turned up in place of his left arm attested with what courage he fought at Patay, at the time of that sublime charge when the heroic General de Sonis unfurled the banner of the Sacred Heart. He had been a duelist, sportsman, gambler, lover, but to those of his old companions of pleasure whom chance brought to Rome he was only a devotee who lived economically, notwithstanding the fact that he had saved the remnants of a large fortune for alms, for reading and for collecting.

Every one has that vice, more or less, in Rome, which is in itself the most surprising museum of history and of art. Montfanon is collecting documents in order to write the history of the French nobility and of the Church. His mistresses of the time when he was the rival of the Gramont-Caderousses and the Demidoffs would surely not recognize him any more than he would them. But are they as happy as he seems to have remained through his life of sacrifice? There is laughter in his blue eyes, which attest his pure Germanic origin, and which light up his face, one of those feudal faces such as one sees in the portraits hung upon the walls of the priories of Malta, where plainness has race. A thick, white moustache, in which glimmers a vague reflection of gold, partly hides a scar which would give to that red face a terrible look were it not for the expression of those eyes, in which there is fervor mingled with merriment. For Montfanon is as fanatical on certain subjects as he is genial and jovial on others. If he had the power he would undoubtedly have Ribalta arrested, tried, and condemned within twenty-four hours for the crime of free-thinking. Not having it, he amused himself with him, so much the more so as the vanquished Catholic and the discontented Socialists have several common hatreds. Even on this particular morning we have seen with what indulgence he bore the brusqueness of the old bookseller, at whom he gazed for ten minutes without disconcerting him in the least. At length the revolutionist seemed to have finished his epigram, for with a quiet smile he carefully folded the sheet of paper, put it in a wooden box which he locked. Then he turned around.

"What do you desire, Marquis?" he asked, without any further preliminary.

"First of all, you will have to read me your poem, old redshirt," said Montfanon, "which will only be my recompense for having awaited your good pleasure more patiently than an ambassador. Let us see whom are you abusing in those verses? Is it Don Ciccio or His Majesty? You will not reply? Are you afraid that I shall denounce you at the Quirinal?"

"No flies enter a closed mouth," replied the old conspirator, justifying the proverb by the manner in which he shut his toothless mouth, into which, indeed, at that moment, neither a fly nor the tiniest grain of dust could enter.

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"An excellent saying," returned the Marquis, with a laugh, "and one I should like to see engraved on the facade of all the modern parliaments. But between your poetry and your adages have you taken the time to write for me to that bookseller at Vienna, who owns the last copy of the pamphlet on the trial of the bandit Hafner?"

"Patience," said the merchant. "I will write."

"And my document on the siege of Rome, by Bourbon, those three notarial deeds which you promised me, have you dislodged them?"

"Patience, patience," repeated the merchant, adding, as he pointed with a comical mixture of irony and of despair to the disorder in his shop, "How can you expect me to know where I am in the midst of all this?"

"Patience, patience," repeated Montfanon. "For a month you have been singing that old refrain. If, instead of composing wretched verses, you would attend to your correspondence, and, if, instead of buying continually, you would classify this confused mass But," said he, more seriously, with a brusque gesture, "I am wrong to reproach you for your purchases, since I have come to speak to you of one of the last. Cardinal Guerillot told me that you showed him, the other day, an interesting prayer-book, although in very bad condition, which you found in Tuscany. Where is it?"

"Here it is," said Ribalta, who, leaping over several piles of volumes and thrusting aside with his foot an enormous heap of cartoons, opened the drawer of a tottering press. In that drawer he rummaged among an accumulation of odd, incongruous objects: old medals and old nails, bookbindings and discolored engravings, a large leather box gnawed by insects, on the outside of which could be distinguished a partly effaced coat-of-arms. He opened that box and extended toward Montfanon a volume covered with leather and studded. One of the clasps was broken, and when the Marquis began to turn over the pages, he could see that the interior had not been better taken care of than the exterior. Colored prints had originally ornamented the precious work; they were almost effaced. The yellow parchment had been torn in places. Indeed, it was a shapeless ruin which the curious nobleman examined, however, with the greatest care, while Ribalta made up his mind to speak.

"A widow of Montalcino, in Tuscany, sold it to me. She asked me an enormous price, and it is worth it, although it is slightly damaged. For those are miniatures by Matteo da Siena, who made them for Pope Pius II Piccolomini. Look at the one which represents Saint Blaise, who is blessing the lions and panthers. It is the best preserved. Is it not fine?"

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"Why try to deceive me, Ribalta?" interrupted Montfanon, with a gesture of impatience. "You know as well as I that these miniatures are very mediocre, and that they do not in the least resemble Matteo's compact work; and another proof is that the prayerbook is dated 1554. See!" and, with his remaining hand, very adroitly he showed the merchant the figures; "and as I have quite a memory for dates, and as I am interested in Siena, I have not forgotten that Matteo died before 1500. I did not go to college with Machiavelli," continued he, with some brusqueness, "but I will tell you that which the Cardinal would have told you if you had not deceived him by your finesse, as you tried to deceive me just now. Look at this partly effaced signature, which you have not been able to read. I will decipher it for you. Blaise de Mo, and then a c, with several letters missing, just three, and that makes Montluc in the orthography of the time, and the b is in a handwriting which you might have examined in the archives of that same Siena, since you come from there. Now, with regard to this coat-of-arms," and he closed the book to detail to his stupefied companion the arms hardly visible on the cover, "do you see a wolf, which was originally of gold, and turtles of gales? Those are the arms which Montluc has borne since the year 1554, when he was made a citizen of Siena for having defended it so bravely against the terrible Marquis de Marignan. As for the box," he took it in its turn to study it, "these are really the half-moons of the Piccolominis. But what does that prove? That after the siege, and just as it was necessary to retire to Montalcino, Montluc gave his prayer-book, as a souvenir, to some of that family. The volume was either lost or stolen, and finally reduced to the state in which it now is. This book, too, is proof that a little French blood was shed in the service of Italy. But those who have sold it have forgotten that, like Magenta and Solferino, you have only memory for hatred. Now that you know why I want your prayer-book, will you sell it to me for five hundred francs?"

The bookseller listened to that discourse with twenty contradictory expressions upon his face. From force of habit he felt for Montfanon a sort of respect mingled with animosity, which evidently rendered it very painful for him to have been surprised in the act of telling an untruth. It is necessary, to be just, to add that in speaking of the great painter Matteo and of Pope Pius II in connection with that unfortunate volume, he had not thought that the Marquis, ordinarily very economical and who limited his purchases to the strict domain of ecclesiastical history, would have the least desire for that prayer-book. He had magnified the subject with a view to forming a legend and to taking advantage of some rich, unversed amateur.

On the other hand, if the name of Montluc meant absolutely nothing to him, it was not the same with the direct and brutal allusion which his interlocutor had made to the war of 1859. It is always a thorn in the flesh of those of our neighbors from beyond the Alps who do not love us. The pride of the Garibaldian was not far behind the generosity of the former zouave. With an abruptness equal to that of Montfanon, he took up the volume and grumbled as he turned it over and over in his inky fingers:

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"I would not sell it for six hundred francs. No, I would not sell it for six hundred francs."

"It is a very large sum," said Montfanon.

"No," continued the good man, "I would not sell it." Then extending it to the Marquis, in evident excitement, he cried: "But to you I will sell it for four hundred francs."

"But I have offered you five hundred francs for it," said the nonplussed purchaser. "You know that is a small sum for such a curiosity."

"Take it for four," insisted Ribalta, growing more and more eager, "not a sou less, not a sou more. It is what it cost me. And you shall have your documents in two days and the Hafner papers this week. But was that Bourbon who sacked Rome a Frenchman?" he continued. "And Charles d'Anjou, who fell upon us to make himself King of the two Sicilies? And Charles VIII, who entered by the Porte du Peuple? Were they Frenchmen? Why did they come to meddle in our affairs? Ah, if we were to calculate closely, how much you owe us! Was it not we who gave you Mazarin, Massena, Bonaparte and many others who have gone to die in your army in Russia, in Spain and elsewhere? And at Dijon? Did not Garibaldi stupidly fight for you, who would have taken from him his country? We are quits on the score of service . . . But take your prayer-book-good-evening, good-evening. You can pay me later."

And he literally pushed the Marquis out of the stall, gesticulating and throwing down books on all sides. Montfanon found himself in the street before having been able to draw from his pocket the money he had got ready.

"What a madman! My God, what a madman!" said he to himself, with a laugh. He left the shop at a brisk pace, with the precious book under his arm. He understood, from having frequently come in contact with them, those southern natures, in which swindling and chivalry elbow without harming one another—Don Quixotes who set their own windmills in motion. He asked himself:

"How much would he still make after playing the magnanimous with me?" His question was never to be answered, nor was he to know that Ribalta had bought the rare volume among a heap of papers, engravings, and old books, paying twenty-five francs for all. Moreover, two encounters which followed one upon the other on leaving the shop, prevented him from meditating on that problem of commercial psychology. He paused for a moment at the end of the street to cast a glance at the Place d'Espagne, which he loved as one of those corners unchanged for the last thirty years. On that morning in the early days of May, the square, with its sinuous edge, was indeed charming with bustle and light, with the houses which gave it a proper contour, with the double staircase of La Trinite-des-Monts lined with idlers, with the water which gushed from a large fountain in the form of a bark placed in the centre-one of the innumerable caprices in which the fancy of Bernin, that illusive decorator, delighted

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to indulge. Indeed, at that hour and in that light, the fountain was as natural in effect as were the nimble hawkers who held in their extended arms baskets filled with roses, narcissus, red anemones, fragile cyclamens and dark pansies. Barefooted, with sparkling eyes, entreaties upon their lips, they glided among the carriages which passed along rapidly, fewer than in the height of the season, still quite numerous, for spring was very late this year, and it came with delightful freshness. The flower-sellers besieged the hurried passers-by, as well as those who paused at the shop-windows, and, devout Catholic as Montfanon was, he tasted, in the face of the picturesque scene of a beautiful morning in his favorite city, the pleasure of crowning that impression of a bright moment by a dream of eternity. He had only to turn his eyes to the right, toward the College de la Propagande, a seminary from which all the missions of the world set out.

But it was decreed that the impassioned nobleman should not enjoy undisturbed the bibliographical trifle obtained so cheaply and which he carried under his arm, nor that feeling so thoroughly Roman; a sudden apparition surprised him at the corner of a street, at an angle of the sidewalk. His bright eyes lost their serenity when a carriage passed by him, a carriage, perfectly appointed, drawn by two black horses, and in which, notwithstanding the early hour, sat two ladies. The one was evidently an inferior, a companion who acted as chaperon to the other, a young girl of almost sublime beauty, with large black eyes, which contrasted strongly with a pale complexion, but a pallor in which there was warmth and life. Her profile, of an Oriental purity, was so much on the order of the Jewish type that it left scarcely a doubt as to the Hebrew origin of the creature, a veritable vision of loveliness, who seemed created, as the poets say, "To draw all hearts in her wake." But no! The jovial, kindly face of the Marquis suddenly darkened as he watched the girl about to turn the corner of the street, and who bowed to a very fashionable young man, who undoubtedly knew the late pontifical zouave, for he approached him familiarly, saying, in a mocking tone and in a French which came direct from France:

"Well! Now I have caught you, Marquis Claude-Francois de Montfanon!.... She has come, you have seen her, you have been conquered. Have your eyes feasted upon divine Fanny Hafner? Tremble! I shall denounce you to his Eminence, Cardinal Guerillot; and if you malign his charming catechist I will be there to testify that I saw you hypnotized as she passed, as were the people of Troy by Helen. And I know very positively that Helen had not so modern a grace, so beautiful a mind, so ideal a profile, so deep a glance, so dreamy a mouth and such a smile. Ah, how lovely she is! When shall you call?"

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"If Monsieur Julien Dorsenne," replied Montfanon, in the same mocking tone, "does not pay more attention to his new novel than he is doing at this moment, I pity his publisher. Come here," he added, brusquely, dragging the young man to the angle of Rue Borgognona. "Did you see the victoria stop at No. 13, and the divine Fanny, as you call her, alight? . . . She has entered the shop of that old rascal, Ribalta. She will not remain there long. She will come out, and she will drive away in her carriage. It is a pity she will not pass by us again. We should have had the pleasure of seeing her disappointed air. This is what she is in search of," added he, with a gay laugh, exhibiting his purchase, "but which she could not have were she to offer all the millions which her honest father has stolen in Vienna. Ha, ha!" he concluded, laughing still more heartily, "Monsieur de Montfanon rose first; this morning has not been lost, and you, Monsieur, can see what I obtained at the curiosity-shop of that old fellow who will not make a plaything of this object, at least," he added, extending the book to his interlocutor, at whom he glanced with a comical expression of triumph.

"I do not wish to look at it," responded Dorsenne. "But, yes," he continued, as Montfanon shrugged his shoulders, "in my capacity of novelist and observer, since you cast it at my head, I know already what it is. What do you bet? . . . It is a prayer-book which bears the signature of Marshal de Montluc, and which Cardinal Guerillot discovered. Is that true? He spoke to Mademoiselle Hafner about it, and he thought he would mitigate your animosity toward her by telling you she was an enthusiast and wished to buy it. Is that true as well? And you, wretched man, had only one thought, to deprive that poor little thing of the trifle. Is that true? We spent the evening before last together at Countess Steno's; she talked to me of nothing but her desire to have the book on which the illustrious soldier, the great believer, had prayed. She told me of all her heroic resolutions. Later she went to buy it. But the shop was closed; I noticed it on passing, and you certainly went there, too . . . Is that true? . . . And, now that I have detailed to you the story, explain to me, you who are so just, why you cherish an antipathy so bitter and so childish—excuse the word!—for an innocent, young girl, who has never speculated on 'Change, who is as charitable as a whole convent, and who is fast becoming as devout as yourself. Were it not for her father, who will not listen to the thought of conversion before marriage, she would already be a Catholic, and—Protestants as they are for the moment—she would never go anywhere but to church . . . When she is altogether a Catholic, and under the protection of a Sainte-Claudine and a Sainte-Francoise, as you are under the protection of Saint-Claude and Saint-Francois, you will have to lay down your arms, old leaguer, and acknowledge the sincerity of the religious sentiments of that child who has never harmed you."

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“What! She has done nothing to me?” . . . interrupted Montfanon. “But it is quite natural that a sceptic should not comprehend what she has done to me, what she does to me daily, not to me personally, but to my opinions. When one has, like you, learned intellectual athletics in the circus of the Sainte-Beuves and Renans, one must think it fine that Catholicism, that grand thing, should serve as a plaything for the daughter of a pirate who aims at an aristocratic marriage. It may, too, amuse you that my holy friend, Cardinal Guerillot, should be the dupe of that intriguer. But I, Monsieur, who have received the sacrament by the side of a Sonis, I can not admit that one should make use of what was the faith of that hero to thrust one’s self into the world. I do not admit that one should play the role of dupe and accomplice to an old man whom I venerate and whom I shall enlighten, I give you my word.”

“And as for this ancient relic,” he continued, again showing the volume, “you may think it childish that I do not wish it mixed up in the shameful comedy. But no, it shall not be. They shall not exhibit with words of emotion, with tearful eyes, this breviary on which once prayed that grand soldier; yes, Monsieur, that great believer. She has done nothing to me,” he repeated, growing more and more excited, his red face becoming purple with rage, “but they are the quintessence of what I detest the most, people like her and her father. They are the incarnation of the modern world, in which there is nothing more despicable than these cosmopolitan adventurers, who play at grand seigneur with the millions filibustered in some stroke on the Bourse. First, they have no country. What is this Baron Justus Hafner—German, Austrian, Italian? Do you know? They have no religion. The name, the father’s face, that of the daughter, proclaim them Jews, and they are Protestants—for the moment, as you have too truthfully said, while they prepare themselves to become Mussulmen or what not. For the moment, when it is a question of God!.... They have no family. Where was this man reared? What did his father, his mother, his brothers, his sisters do? Where did he grow up? Where are his traditions? Where is his past, all that constitutes, all that establishes the moral man?.... Just look. All is mystery in this personage, excepting this, which is very clear: if he had received his due in Vienna, at the time of the suit of the ‘Credit Austro-Dalmate’, in 1880, he would be in the galleys, instead of in Rome. The facts were these: there were innumerable failures. I know something about it. My poor cousin De Saint-Remy, who was with the Comte de Chambord, lost the bread of his old age and his daughter’s dowry. There were suicides and deeds of violence, notably that of a certain Schroeder, who went mad on account of that crash, and who killed himself, after murdering his wife and his two children. And the Baron came out of it unsullied. It is

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not ten years since the occurrence, and it is forgotten. When he settled in Rome he found open doors, extended hands, as he would have found them in Madrid, London, Paris, or elsewhere. People go to his house; they receive him! And you wish me to believe in the devoutness of that man's daughter!.... No, a thousand times no; and you yourself, Dorsenne, with your mania for paradoxes and sophisms, you have the right spirit in you, and these people horrify you in reality, as they do me."

"Not the least in the world," replied the writer, who had listened to the Marquis's tirade; with an unconvinced smile, he repeated: "Not the least in the world.... You have spoken of me as an acrobat or an athlete. I am not offended, because it is you, and because I know that you love me dearly. Let me at least have the suppleness of one. First, before passing judgment on a financial affair I shall wait until I understand it. Hafner was acquitted. That is enough, for one thing. Were he even the greatest rogue in the universe, that would not prevent his daughter from being an angel, for another. As for that cosmopolitanism for which you censure him, we do not agree there; it is just that which interests me in him. Thirdly,.... I should not consider that I had lost the six months spent in Rome, if I had met only him. Do not look at me as if I were one of the patrons of the circus, Uncle Beuve, or poor Monsieur Renan himself," he continued, tapping the Marquis's shoulder. "I swear to you that I am very serious. Nothing interests me more than these exceptions to the general rule—than those who have passed through two, three, four phases of existence. Those individuals are my museum, and you wish me to sacrifice to your scruples one of my finest subjects.... Moreover,"—and the malice of the remark he was about to make caused the young man's eyes to sparkle—"revile Baron Hafner as much as you like," he continued; "call him a thief and a snob, an intriguer and a knave, if it pleases you. But as for being a person who does not know where his ancestors lived, I reply, as did Bonhomet when he reached heaven and the Lord said to him: 'Still a chimney-doctor, Bonhomet?'—'And you, Lord?'. For you were born in Bourgogne, Monsieur de Montfanon, of an ancient family, related to all the nobility-upon which I congratulate you—and you have lived here in Rome for almost twenty-four years, in the Cosmopolis which you revile."

"First of all," replied the Pope's former soldier, holding up his mutilated arm, "I might say that I no longer count, I do not live. And then," his face became inspired, and the depths of that narrow mind, often blinded but very exalted, suddenly appeared, "and then, my Rome to me, Monsieur, has nothing in common with that of Monsieur Hafner nor with yours, since you are come, it seems, to pursue studies of moral teratology. Rome to me is not Cosmopolis, as you say, it is Metropolis, it is the mother of cities.... You forget that

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I am a Catholic in every fibre, and that I am at home here. I am here because I am a monarchist, because I believe in old France as you believe in the modern world; and I serve her in my fashion, which is not very efficacious, but which is one way, nevertheless.... The post of trustee of Saint Louis, which I accepted from Corcelle, is to me my duty, and I will sustain it in the best way in my power.... Ah! that ancient France, how one feels her grandeur here, and what a part she is known to have had in Christianity! It is that chord which I should like to have heard vibrate in a fluent writer like you, and not eternally those paradoxes, those sophisms. But what matters it to you who date from yesterday and who boast of it," he added, almost sadly, "that in the most insignificant corners of this city centuries of history abound? Does your heart blush at the sight of the facade of the church of Saint-Louis, the salamander of Francois I and the lilies? Do you know why the Rue Bargognona is called thus, and that near by is Saint-Claudes-Bourguignons, our church? Have you visited, you who are from the Vosges, that of your province, Saint-Nicolas-des-Lorrains? Do you know Saint-Yves-des-Bretons?"

"But," and here his voice assumed a gay accent, "I have thoroughly charged into that rascal of a Hafner. I have laid him before you without any hesitation. I have spoken to you as I feel, with all the fervor of my heart, although it may seem sport to you. You will be punished, for I shall not allow you to escape. I will take you to the France of other days. You shall dine with me at noon, and between this and then we will make the tour of those churches I have just named. During that time we will go back one hundred and fifty years in the past, into that world in which there were neither cosmopolites nor dilettantes. It is the old world, but it is hardy, and the proof is that it has endured; while your society-look where it is after one hundred years in France, in Italy, in England—thanks to that detestable Gladstone, of whom pride has made a second Nebuchadnezzar. It is like Russia, your society; according to the only decent words of the obscene Diderot, 'rotten before mature!' Come, will you go?"

"You are mistaken," replied the writer, "in thinking that. I do not love your old France, but that does not prevent me from enjoying the new. One can like wine and champagne at the same time. But I am not at liberty. I must visit the exposition at Palais Castagna this morning."

"You will not do that," exclaimed impetuous Montfanon, whose severe face again expressed one of those contrarities which caused it to brighten when he was with one of whom he was fond as he was of Dorsenne. "You would not have gone to see the King assassinated in '93? The selling at auction of the old dwelling of Pope Urban VII is almost as tragical! It is the beginning of the agony of what was Roman nobility. I know. They deserve it all, since

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they were not killed to the last man on the steps of the Vatican when the Italians took the city. We should have done it, we who had no popes among our grand-uncles, if we had not been busy fighting elsewhere. But it is none the less pitiful to see the hammer of the appraisers raised above a palace with which is connected centuries of history. Upon my life, if I were Prince d'Ardea—if I had inherited the blood, the house, the titles of the Castagnas, and if I thought I should leave nothing behind me of that which my fathers had amassed—I swear to you, Dorsenne, I should die of grief. And if you recall the fact that the unhappy youth is a spoiled child of eight-and-twenty, surrounded by flatterers, without parents, without friends, without counsellors, that he risked his patrimony on the Bourse among thieves of the integrity of Monsieur Hafner, that all the wealth collected by that succession of popes, of cardinals, of warriors, of diplomatists, has served to enrich ignoble men, you would think the occurrence too lamentable to have any share in it, even as a spectator. Come, I will take you to Saint-Claude."

"I assure you I am expected," replied Dorsenne, disengaging his arm, which his despotic friend had already seized. "It is very strange that I should meet you on the way, having the rendezvous I have. I, who dote on contrasts, shall not have lost my morning. Have you the patience to listen to the enumeration of the persons whom I shall join immediately? It will not be very long, but do not interrupt me. You will be angry if you will survive the blow I am about to give you. Ah, you do not wish to call your Rome a Cosmopolis; then what do you say to the party with which, in twenty minutes, I shall visit the ancient palace of Urban VII? First of all, we have your beautiful enemy, Fanny Hafner, and her father, the Baron, representing a little of Germany, a little of Austria, a little of Italy and a little of Holland. For it seems the Baron's mother was from Rotterdam. Do not interrupt. We shall have Countess Steno to represent Venice, and her charming daughter, Alba, to represent a small corner of Russia, for the Chronicle claims that she was the child, not of the defunct Steno, but of Werekiew-Andre, you know, the one who killed himself in Paris five or six years ago, by casting himself into the Seine, not at all aristocratically, from the Pont de la Concorde. We shall have the painter, the celebrated Lincoln Maitland, to represent America. He is the lover of Steno, whom he stole from Gorka during the latter's trip to Poland. We shall have the painter's wife, Lydia Maitland, and her brother, Florent Chapron, to represent a little of France, a little of America, and a little of Africa; for their grandfather was the famous Colonel Chapron mentioned in the Memorial, who, after 1815, became a planter in Alabama. That old soldier, without any prejudices, had, by a mulattress, a son whom he recognized and to whom he left—I do not know how many dollars. 'Inde' Lydia and Florent. Do not interrupt, it is almost finished. We shall have, to represent England, a Catholic wedded to a Pole, Madame Gorka, the wife of Boleslas, and, lastly, Paris, in the form of your servant. It is now I who will essay to drag you away, for were you to join our party, you, the feudal, it would be complete.... Will you come?"

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"Has the blow satisfied you?" asked Montfanon. "And the unhappy man has talent," he exclaimed, talking of Dorsenne as if the latter were not present, "and he has written ten pages on Rhodes which are worthy of Chateaubriand, and he has received from God the noblest gifts—poetry, wit, the sense of history; and in what society does he delight! But, come, once for all, explain to me the pleasure which a man of your genius can find in frequenting that international Bohemia, more or less gilded, in which there is not one being who has standing or a history. I no longer allude to that scoundrel Hafner and his daughter, since you have for her, novelist that you are, the eyes of Monsieur Guerillot. But that Countess Steno, who must be at least forty, who has a grown daughter, should she not remain quietly in her palace at Venice, respectably, bravely, instead of holding here that species of salon for transients, through which pass all the libertines of Europe, instead of having lover after lover, a Pole after a Russian, an American after a Pole? And that Maitland, why did he not obey the only good sentiment with which his compatriots are inspired, the aversion to negro blood, an aversion which would prevent them from doing what he has done—from marrying an octoroon? If the young woman knows of it, it is terrible, and if she does not it is still more terrible. And Madame Gorka, that honest creature, for I believe she is, and truly pious as well, who has not observed for the past two years that her husband was the Countess's lover, and who does not see, moreover, that it is now Maitland's turn. And that poor Alba Steno, that child of twenty, whom they drag through these improper intrigues! Why does not Florent Chapron put an end to the adultery of her sister's husband? I know him. He once came to see me with regard to a monument he was raising in Saint-Louis in memory of his cousin. He respects the dead, that pleased me. But he is a dupe in this sinister comedy at which you are assisting, you, who know all, while your heart does not revolt."

"Pardon, pardon!" interrupted Dorsenne, "it is not a question of that. You wander on and you forget what you have just asked me.... What pleasure do I find in the human mosaic which I have detailed to you? I will tell you, and we will not talk of the morals, if you please, when we are simply dealing with the intellect. I do not pride myself on being a judge of human nature, sir leaguer; I like to watch and to study it, and among all the scenes it can present I know of none more suggestive, more peculiar, and more modern than this: You are in a salon, at a dining-table, at a party like that to which I am going this morning. You are with ten persons who all speak the same language, are dressed by the same tailor, have read the same morning paper, think the same thoughts and feel the same sentiments.... But these persons are like those I have just enumerated to you, creatures from very different points of the world and of history.

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You study them with all that you know of their origin and their heredity, and little by little beneath the varnish of cosmopolitanism you discover their race, irresistible, indestructible race! In the mistress of the house, very elegant, very cultured, for example, a Madame Steno, you discover the descendant of the Doges, the patrician of the fifteenth century, with the form of a queen, strength in her passion and frankness in her incomparable immorality; while in a Florent Chapron or a Lydia you discover the primitive slave, the black hypnotized by the white, the unfreed being produced by centuries of servitude; while in a Madame Gorka you recognize beneath her smiling amiability the fanaticism of truth of the Puritans; beneath the artistic refinement of a Lincoln Maitland you find the squatter, invincibly coarse and robust; in Boleslas Gorka all the nervous irritability of the Slav, which has ruined Poland. These lineaments of race are hardly visible in the civilized person, who speaks three or four languages fluently, who has lived in Paris, Nice, Florence, here, that same fashionable, monotonous life. But when passion strikes its blow, when the man is stirred to his inmost depths, then occurs the conflict of characteristics, more surprising when the people thus brought together have come from afar: And that is why," he concluded with a laugh, "I have spent six months in Rome without hardly having seen a Roman, busy, observing the little clan which is so revolting to you. It is probably the twentieth I have studied, and I shall no doubt study twenty more, for not one resembles another. Are you indulgently inclined toward me, now that you have got even with me in making me hold forth at this corner, like the hero of a Russian novel? Well, now adieu."

Montfanon had listened to the discourse with an impenetrable air. In the religious solitude in which he was awaiting the end, as he said, nothing afforded him greater pleasure than the discussion of ideas. But he was inspired by the enthusiasm of a man who feels with extreme ardor, and when he was met by the partly ironical dilettanteism of Dorsenne he was almost pained by it, so much the more so as the author and he had some common theories, notably an extreme fancy for heredity and race. A sort of discontented grimace distorted his expressive face. He clicked his tongue in ill-humor, and said:

"One more question!.... And the result of all that, the object? To what end does all this observation lead you?"

"To what should it lead me? To comprehend, as I have told you," replied Dorsenne.

"And then?"

"There is no then," answered the young man, "one debauchery is like another."

"But among the people whom you see living thus," said Montfanon, after a pause, "there are some surely whom you like and whom you dislike, for whom you entertain esteem

and for whom you feel contempt? Have you not thought that you have some duties toward them, that you can aid them in leading better lives?"

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"That," said Dorsenne, "is another subject which we will treat of some other day, for I am afraid now of being late.... Adieu."

"Adieu," said the Marquis, with evident regret at parting. Then, brusquely: "I do not know why I like you so much, for in the main you incarnate one of those vices of mind which inspire me with the most horror, that dilettanteism set in vogue by the disciples of Monsieur Renan, and which is the very foundation of the decline. You will recover from it, I hope. You are so young!" Then becoming again jovial and mocking: "May you enjoy yourself in your descent of Courtille; I almost forgot that I had a message to give to you for one of the supernumeraries of your troop. Will you tell Gorka that I have dislodged the book for which he asked me before his departure?"

"Gorka," replied Julien, "has been in Poland three months on family business. I just told you how that trip cost him his mistress."

"What," said Montfanon, "in Poland? I saw him this morning as plainly as I see you. He passed the Fountain du Triton in a cab. If I had not been in such haste to reach Ribalta's in time to save the Montluc, I could have stopped him, but we were both in too great a hurry."

"You are sure that Gorka is in Rome—Boleslas Gorka?" insisted Dorsenne.

"What is there surprising in that?" said Montfanon. "It is quite natural that he should not wish to remain away long from a city where he has left a wife and a mistress. I suppose your Slav and your Anglo-Saxon have no prejudices, and that they share their Venetian with a dilettanteism quite modern. It is cosmopolitan, indeed.... Well, once more, adieu.... Deliver my message to him if you see him, and," his face again expressed a childish malice, "do not fail to tell Mademoiselle Hafner that her father's daughter will never, never have this volume. It is not for intriguers!" And, laughing like a mischievous schoolboy, he pressed the book more tightly under his arm, repeating: "She shall not have it. Listen.... And tell her plainly. She shall not have it!"

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNING OF A DRAMA

"There is an intelligent man, who never questions his ideas," said Dorsenne to himself, when the Marquis had left him. "He is like the Socialists. What vigor of mind in that old wornout machine!" And for a brief moment he watched, with a glance in which there was at least as much admiration as pity, the Marquis, who was disappearing down the Rue de la Propagande, and who walked at the rapid pace characteristic of monomaniacs. They follow their thoughts instead of heeding objects. However, the care he exercised in avoiding the sun's line for the shade attested the instincts of an old Roman, who

knew the danger of the first rays of spring beneath that blue sky. For a moment Montfanon paused to give alms to one of the numerous mendicants who abound in the neighborhood

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of the Place d'Espagne, meritorious in him, for with his one arm and burdened with the prayer-book it required a veritable effort to search in his pocket. Dorsenne was well enough acquainted with that original personage to know that he had never been able to say "no" to any one who asked charity, great or small, of him. Thanks to that system, the enemy of beautiful Fanny Hafner was always short of cash with forty thousand francs' income and leading a simple existence. The costly purchase of the relic of Montluc proved that the antipathy conceived for Baron Justus's charming daughter had become a species of passion. Under any other circumstances, the novelist, who delighted in such cases, would not have failed to meditate ironically on that feeling, easy enough of explanation. There was much more irrational instinct in it than Montfanon himself suspected. The old leaguer would not have been logical if he had not had in point of race an inquisition partiality, and the mere suspicion of Jewish origin should have prejudiced him against Fanny. But he was just, as Dorsenne had told him, and if the young girl had been an avowed Jewess, living up zealously to her religion, he would have respected but have avoided her, and he never would have spoken of her with such bitterness.

The true motive of his antipathy was that he loved Cardinal Guerillot, as was his habit in all things, with passion and with jealousy, and he could not forgive Mademoiselle Hafner for having formed an intimacy with the holy prelate in spite of him, Montfanon, who had vainly warned the old Bishop de Clermont against her whom he considered the most wily of intriguers. For months vainly did she furnish proofs of her sincerity of heart, the Cardinal reporting them in due season to the Marquis, who persisted in discrediting them, and each fresh good deed of his enemy augmented his hatred by aggravating the uneasiness which was caused him, notwithstanding all, by a vague sense of his iniquity.

But Dorsenne no sooner turned toward the direction of the Palais Castagna than he quickly forgot both Mademoiselle Hafner's and Montfanon's prejudices, in thinking only of one sentence uttered by the latter that which related to the return of Boleslas Gorka. The news was unexpected, and it awakened in the writer such grave fears that he did not even glance at the shop-window of the French bookseller at the corner of the Corso to see if the label of the "Fortieth thousand" flamed upon the yellow cover of his last book, the *Eclogue Mondaine*, brought out in the autumn, with a success which his absence of six months from Paris, had, however, detracted from. He did not even think of ascertaining if the regimen he practised, in imitation of Lord Byron, against embonpoint, would preserve his elegant form, of which he was so proud, and yet mirrors were numerous on the way from the Place d'Espagne to the Palais Castagna, which rears its sombre mass on the margin of the Tiber, at the extremity of the

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Via Giulia, like a pendant of the Palais Sacchetti, the masterwork of Sangallo. Dorsenne did not indulge in his usual pastime of examining the souvenirs along the streets which met his eye, and yet he passed in the twenty minutes which it took him to reach his rendezvous a number of buildings teeming with centuries of historical reminiscences. There was first of all the vast Palais Borghese—the piano of the Borghese, as it has been called, from the form of a clavecin adopted by the architect—a monument of splendor, which was, less than two years later, to serve as the scene of a situation more melancholy than that of the Palais Castagna.

Dorsenne had not an absent glance for the sumptuous building—he passed unheeding the facade of St.-Louis, the object of Montfanon's admiration. If the writer did not profess for that relic of ancient France the piety of the Marquis, he never failed to enter there to pay his literary respects to the tomb of Madame de Beaumont, to that 'quia non sunt' of an epitaph which Chateaubriand inscribed upon her tombstone, with more vanity, alas, than tenderness. For the first time Dorsenne forgot it; he forgot also to gaze with delight upon the rococo fountain on the Place Navonne, that square upon which Domitian had his circus, and which recalls the cruel pageantries of imperial Rome. He forgot, too, the mutilated statue which forms the angle of the Palais Braschi, two paces farther—two paces still farther, the grand artery of the Corso Victor-Emmanuel demonstrated the effort at regeneration of present Rome; two paces farther yet, the Palais Farnese recalls the grandeur of modern art, and the tragedy of contemporary monarchies. Does not the thought of Michelangelo seem to be still imprinted on the sombre cross-beam of that immense sarcophagus, which was the refuge of the last King of Naples? But it requires a mind entirely free to give one's self up to the charm of historical dilettanteism which cities built upon the past conjure up, and although Julien prided himself, not without reason, on being above emotion, he was not possessed of his usual independence of mind during the walk which took him to his "human mosaic," as he picturesquely expressed it, and he pondered and repondered the following questions:

"Boleslas Gorka returned? And two days ago I saw his wife, who did not expect him until next month. Montfanon is not, however, imaginative. Boleslas Gorka returned? At the moment when Madame Steno is mad over Maitland—for she is mad! The night before last, at her house at dinner, she looked at him—it was scandalous. Gorka had a presentiment of it this winter. When the American attempted to take Alba's portrait the first time, the Pole put a stop to it. It was fine for Montfanon to talk of division between these two men. When Boleslas left here, Maitland and the Countess were barely acquainted and now——If he has returned it is because he has discovered that he has a rival. Some one has warned him—an

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enemy of the Countess, a confrere of Maitland. Such pieces of infamy occur among good friends. If Gorka, who is a shot like Casal, kills Maitland in a duel, it will make one deceiver less. If he avenges himself upon his mistress for that treason, it would be a matter of indifference to me, for Catherine Steno is a great rogue.... But my little friend, my poor, charming Alba, what would become of her if there should be a scandal, bloodshed, perhaps, on account of her mother's folly? Gorka returned? And he did not write it to me, to me who have received several letters from him since he went away; to me, whom he selected last autumn as the confidant of his jealousies, under the pretext that I knew women, and, with the vain hope of inspiring me.... His silence and return no longer seem like a romance; they savor rather of a drama, and with a Slav, as much a Slav as he is, one may expect anything. I know not what to think of it, for he will be at the Palais Castagna. Poor, charming Alba!"

The monologue did not differ much from a monologue uttered under similar circumstances by any young man interested in a young girl whose mother does not conduct herself becomingly. It was a touching situation, but a very common one, and there was no necessity for the author to come to Rome to study it, one entire winter and spring. If that interest went beyond a study, Dorsenne possessed a very simple means of preventing his little friend, as he said, from being rendered unhappy by the conduct of that mother whom age did not conquer. Why not propose for her hand? He had inherited a fortune, and his success as an author had augmented it. For, since the first book which had established his reputation, the 'Etudes de Femmes,' published in 1879, not a single one of the fifteen novels or selections from novels had remained unnoticed. His personal celebrity could, strictly speaking, combine with it family celebrity, for he boasted that his grandfather was a cousin of that brave General Dorsenne whom Napoleon could only replace at the head of his guard by Friant. All can be told in a word. Although the heirs of the hero of the Empire had never recognized the relationship, Julien believed in it, and when he said, in reply to compliments on his books, "At my age my grand-uncle, the Colonel of the Guard, did greater things," he was sincere in his belief. But it was unnecessary to mention it, for, situated as he was, Countess Steno would gladly have accepted him as a son-in-law. As for gaining the love of the young girl, with his handsome face, intelligent and refined, and his elegant form, which he had retained intact in spite of his thirty-seven years, he might have done so. Nothing, however, was farther from his thoughts than such a project, for, as he ascended the steps of the staircase of the palace formerly occupied by Urban VII, he continued, in very different terms, his monologue, a species of involuntary "copy" which is written instinctively in the brain of the man of letters when he is particularly fond of literature.

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At times it assumes a written form, and it is the most marked of professional distortions, the most unintelligible to the illiterate, who think waveringly and who do not, happily for them, suffer the continual servitude to precision of word and to too conscientious thought.

“Yes; poor, charming Alba!” he repeated to himself. “How unfortunate that the marriage with Countess Gorka’s brother could not have been arranged four months ago. Connection with the family of her mother’s lover would be tolerably immoral! But she would at least have had less chance of ever knowing it; and the convenient combination by which the mother has caused her to form a friendship with that wife in order the better to blind the two, would have bordered a little more on propriety. To-day Alba would be Lady Ardrahan, leading a prosaic English life, instead of being united to some imbecile whom they will find for her here or elsewhere. She will then deceive him as her mother deceived the late Steno—with me, perhaps, in remembrance of our pure intimacy of to-day. That would be too sad! Do not let us think of it! It is the future, of the existence of which we are ignorant, while we do know that the present exists and that it has all rights. I owe to the Contessina my best impressions of Rome, to the vision of her loveliness in this scene of so grand a past. And this is a sensation which is enjoyable; to visit the Palais Castagna with the adorable creature upon whom rests the menace of a drama. To enjoy the Countess Steno’s kindness, otherwise the house would not have that tone and I would never have obtained the little one’s friendship. To rejoice that Ardea is a fool, that he has lost his fortune on the Bourse, and that the syndicate of his creditors, presided over by Monsieur Ancona, has laid hands upon his palace. For, otherwise, I should not have ascended the steps of this papal staircase, nor have seen this debris of Grecian sarcophagi fitted into the walls, and this garden of so intense a green. As for Gorka, he may have returned for thirty-six other reasons than jealousy, and Montfanon is right: Caterina is cunning enough to inveigle both the painter and him. She will make Maitland believe that she received Gorka for the sake of Madame Gorka, and to prevent him from ruining that excellent woman at gaming. She will tell Boleslas that there was nothing more between her and Maitland than Platonic discussions on the merits of Raphael and Perugino.... And I should be more of a dupe than the other two for missing the visit. It is not every day that one has a chance to see auctioned, like a simple Bohemian, the grand-nephew of a pope.”

The second suite of reflections resembled more than the first the real Dorsenne, who was often incomprehensible even to his best friends. The young man with the large, black eyes, the face with delicate features, the olive complexion of a Spanish monk, had never had but one passion, too exceptional not to baffle the ordinary observer, and developed in a sense so singular that to the most charitable it assumed either an attitude almost outrageous or else that of an abominable egotism and profound corruption.

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Dorsenne had spoken truly, he loved to comprehend—to comprehend as the gamester loves to game, the miser to accumulate money, the ambitious to obtain position—there was within him that appetite, that taste, that mania for ideas which makes the scholar and the philosopher. But a philosopher united by a caprice of nature to an artist, and by that of fortune and of education to a worldly man and a traveller. The abstract speculations of the metaphysician would not have sufficed for him, nor would the continuous and simple creation of the narrator who narrates to amuse himself, nor would the ardor of the semi-animal of the man-of-pleasure who abandons himself to the frenzy of vice. He invented for himself, partly from instinct, partly from method, a compromise between his contradictory tendencies, which he formulated in a fashion slightly pedantic, when he said that his sole aim was to “intellectualize the forcible sensations;” in clearer terms, he dreamed of meeting with, in human life, the greatest number of impressions it could give and to think of them after having met them.

He thought, with or without reason, to discover in his two favorite writers, Goethe and Stendhal, a constant application of a similar principle. His studies had, for the past fourteen years when he had begun to live and to write, passed through the most varied spheres possible to him. But he had passed through them, lending his presence without giving himself to them, with this idea always present in his mind: that he existed to become familiar with other customs, to watch other characters, to clothe other personages and the sensations which vibrated within them. The period of his revival was marked by the achievement of each one of his books which he composed then, persuaded that, once written and construed, a sentimental or social experience was not worth the trouble of being dwelt upon. Thus is explained the incoherence of custom and the atmospheric contact, if one may so express it, which are the characteristics of his work. Take, for example, his first collection of novels, the ‘*Etudes de Femmes*,’ which made him famous. They are about a sentimental woman who loved unwisely, and who spent hours from excess of the romantic studying the avowed or disguised demi-monde. By the side of that, ‘*Sans Dieu*,’ the story of a drama of scientific consciousness, attests a continuous frequenting of the Museum, the Sorbonne and the College of France, while ‘*Monsieur de Premier*’ presents one of the most striking pictures of the contemporary political world, which could only have been traced by a familiar of the Palais Bourbon.

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On the other hand, the three books of travel pretentiously named 'Tourisme,' 'Les Profils d'Etrangères' and the 'Eclogue Mondaine,' which fluctuated between Florence and London, St.-Moritz and Bayreuth, revealed long sojourns out of France; a clever analysis of the Italian, English, and German worlds; a superficial but true knowledge of the languages, the history and literature, which in no way accords with 'l'odor di femina', exhale from every page. These contrasts are brought out by a mind endowed with strangely complex qualities, dominated by a firm will and, it must be said, a very mediocre sensibility. The last point will appear irreconcilable with the extreme and almost morbid delicacy of certain of Dorsenne's works. It is thus however. He had very little heart. But, on the other hand, he had an abundance of nerves and nerves, and their irritability suffice for him who desires to paint human passions, above all, love, with its joys and its sorrows, of which one does not speak to a certain extent when one experiences them. Success had come to Julien too early not to have afforded him occasion for several adventures. In each of the centres traversed in the course of his sentimental vagabondage he tried to find a woman in whom was embodied all the scattered charms of the district. He had formed innumerable intimacies. Some had been frankly affectionate. The majority were Platonic. Others had consisted of the simple coquetry of friendship, as was the case with Mademoiselle Steno. The young man had never employed more vanity than enthusiasm. Every woman, mistress or friend, had been to him, nine times out of ten, a curiosity, then a model. But, as he held that the model could not be recognized by any exterior sign, he did not think that he was wrong in making use of his prestige as a writer, for what he called his "culture." He was capable of justice, the defense which he made of Fanny Hafner to Montfanon proved it; of admiration, his respect for the noble qualities of that same Montfanon testify to it; of compassion, for without it he would not have apprehended at once with so much sympathy the result which the return of Count Gorka would have on the destiny of innocent Alba Steno.

On reaching the staircase of the Palais Castagna, instead of hastening, as was natural, to find out at least what meant the return to Rome of the lover whom Madame Steno deceived, he collected his startled sensibilities before meeting Alba, and, pausing, he scribbled in a note-book which he drew from his pocket, with a pencil always within reach of his fingers, in a firm hand, precise and clear, this note savoring somewhat of sentimentalism:

"25 April, '90. Palais Castagna.—Marvellous staircase constructed by Balthazar Peruzzi; so broad and long, with double rows of stairs, like those of Santa Colomba, near Siena. Enjoyed above all the sight of an interior garden so arranged, so designed that the red flowers, the regularity of the green shrubs, the neat lines of the graveled walks resemble the features of a face. The idea of the Latin garden, opposed to the Germanic or Anglo-Saxon, the latter respecting the irregularity of nature, the other all in order, humanizing and administering even to the flower-garden."

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“Subject the complexity of life to a thought harmonious and clear, a constant mark of the Latin genus, for a group of trees as well as an entire nation, an entire religion—Catholicism. It is the contrary in the races of the North. Significance of the word: the forests have taught man liberty.”

He had hardly finished writing that oddly interpreted memorandum, and was closing his note-book, when the sound of a familiar voice caused him to turn suddenly. He had not heard ascend the stairs a personage who waited until he finished writing, and who was no other than one of the actors in his “troupe” to use his expression, one of the persons of the party of that morning organized the day before at Madame Steno’s, and just the one whom the intolerable marquis had defamed with so much ardor, the father of beautiful Fanny Hafner, Baron Justus himself. The renowned founder of the ‘Credit Austro-Dalmate’ was a small, thin man, with blue eyes of an acuteness almost insupportable, in a face of neutral color. His ever-courteous manner, his attire, simple and neat, his speech serious and discreet, gave to him that species of distinction so common to old diplomatists. But the dangerous adventurer was betrayed by the glance which Hafner could not succeed in veiling with indifferent amiability. The man-of-the-world, which he prided himself upon having become, was visible through all by certain indefinable trifles, and above all by those eyes, of a restlessness so singular in so wealthy a man, indicating an enigmatical and obscure past of dark and contrasting struggles, of covetous sharpness, of cold calculation and indomitable energy. Fanatical Montfanon, who abused the daughter with such unjustness, judged the father justly. The son of a Jew of Berlin and of a Dutch Protestant, Justus Hafner was inscribed on the civil state registers as belonging to his mother’s faith. But the latter died when Justus was very young, and he was not reared in any other liturgy than that of money. From his father, a persevering and skilful jeweller, but too prudent to risk or gain much, he learned the business of precious stones, to which he added that of laces, paintings, old materials, tapestries, rare furniture.

An infallible eye, the patience of a German united with his Israelitish and Dutch extraction, soon amassed for him a small capital, which his father’s bequest augmented. At twenty-seven Justus had not less than five hundred thousand marks. Two imprudent operations on the Bourse, enterprises to force fortune and to obtain the first million, ruined the too-audacious courtier, who began again the building up of his fortune by becoming a diamond broker.

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He went to Paris, and there, in a wretched little room on the Rue Montmartre, in three years, he made his second capital. He then managed it so well that in 1870, at the time of the war, he had made good his losses. The armistice found him in England, where he had married the daughter of a Viennese agent, in London, for the purpose of starting a vast enterprise of revictualing the belligerent armies. The enormous profits made by the father-in-law and the son-in-law during that year determined them to found a banking-house which should have its principal seat in Vienna and a branch in Berlin. Justus Hafner, a passionate admirer of Herr von Bismarck, controlled, besides, a newspaper. He tried to gain the favor of the great statesman, who refused to aid the former diamond merchant in gratifying political ambitions cherished from an early age.

It was a bitter disappointment to the persevering man, who, having tried his luck in Prussia, emigrated definitively to Vienna. The establishment of the 'Credit Austro-Dalmate,' launched with extraordinary claims, permitted him at length to realize at least one of his chimeras. His wealth, while not equaling that of the mighty financiers of the epoch, increased with a rapidity almost magical to a cipher high enough to permit him, from 1879, to indulge in the luxurious life which can not be led by any one with an income short of five hundred thousand francs. Contrary to the custom of speculators of his genus, Hafner in time invested his earnings safely. He provided against the coming demolition of the structure so laboriously built up. The 'Credit Austro-Dalmate' had suffered in great measure owing to innumerable public and private disasters and scandals, such as the suicide and murder in the Schroeder family.

Suits were begun against a number of the founders, among them Justus Hafner. He was acquitted, but with such damage to his financial integrity and in the face of such public indignation that he abandoned Austria for Italy and Vienna for Rome. There, heedless of first rebuffs, he undertook to realize the third great object of his life, the gaining of social position. To the period of avidity had succeeded, as it frequently does with those formidable handlers of money, the period of vanity. Being now a widower, he aimed at his daughter's marriage with a strength of will and a complication of combinations equal to his former efforts, and that struggle for connection with high life was disguised beneath the cloak of the most systematically adopted politeness of deportment. How had he found the means, in the midst of struggles and hardships, to refine himself so that the primitive broker and speculator were almost unrecognizable in the baron of fifty-four, decorated with several orders, installed in a magnificent palace, the father of a charming daughter, and himself an agreeable conversationalist, a courteous gentleman, an ardent sportsman? It is the secret of those natures created for social conquest, like a Napoleon for war and a Talleyrand for diplomacy. Dorsenne asked himself the question frequently, and he could not solve it. Although he boasted of watching the Baron with an intellectual curiosity, he could not restrain a shudder of antipathy each time he met the eyes of the man.

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And on this particular morning it was especially disagreeable to him that those eyes had seen him making his unoffending notes, although there was scarcely a shade of gentle condescension—that of a great lord who patronizes a great artist—in the manner in which Hafner addressed him.

“Do not inconvenience yourself for me, dear sir,” said he to Dorsenne. “You work from nature, and you are right. I see that your next novel will touch upon the ruin of our poor Prince d’Ardea. Do not be too hard on him, nor on us.”

The artist could not help coloring at that benign pleasantry. It was all the more painful to him because it was at once true and untrue. How should he explain the sort of literary alchemy, thanks to which he was enabled to affirm that he never drew portraits, although not a line of his fifteen volumes was traced without a living model? He replied, therefore, with a touch of ill-humor:

“You are mistaken, my dear Baron. I do not make notes on persons.”

“All authors say that,” answered the Baron, shrugging his shoulders with the assumed good-nature which so rarely forsook him, “and they are right.... At any rate, it is fortunate that you had something to write, for we shall both be late in arriving at a rendezvous where there are ladies.... It is almost a quarter past eleven, and we should have been there at eleven precisely.... But I have one excuse, I waited for my daughter.”

“And she has not come?” asked Dorsenne.

“No,” replied Hafner, “at the last moment she could not make up her mind. She had a slight annoyance this morning—I do not know what old book she had set her heart on. Some rascal found out that she wanted it, and he obtained it first.... But that is not the true cause of her absence. The true cause is that she is too sensitive, and she finds it so sad that there should be a sale of the possessions of this ancient family.... I did not insist. What would she have experienced had she known the late Princess Nicoletta, Pepino’s mother? When I came to Rome on a visit for the first time, in ’75, what a salon that was and what a Princess!.... She was a Condolmieri, of the family of Eugene IV.”

“How absurd vanity renders the most refined man,” thought Julien, suiting his pace to the Baron’s. “He would have me believe that he was received at the house of that woman who was politically the blackest of the black, the most difficult to please in the recruiting of her salon.... Life is more complex than the Montfanons even know of! This girl feels by instinct that which the chouan of a marquis feels by doctrine, the absurdity of this striving after nobility, with a father who forgets the broker and who talks of the popes of the Middle Ages as of a trinket!.... While we are alone, I must ask this old fox what he knows of Boleslas Gorka’s return. He is the confidant of Madame Steno. He should be informed of the doings and whereabouts of the Pole.”

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The friendship of Baron Hafner for the Countess, whose financial adviser he was, should have been for Dorsenne a reason for avoiding such a subject, the more so as he was convinced of the man's dislike for him. The Baron could, by a single word perfidiously repeated, injure him very much with Alba's mother. But the novelist, similar on that point to the majority of professional observers, had only the power of analysis of a retrospective order. Never had his keen intelligence served him to avoid one of those slight errors of conversation which are important mistakes on the pitiful checker-board of life. Happily for him, he cherished no ambition except for his pleasure and his art, without which he would have found the means of making for himself, gratuitously, enough enemies to clear all the academies.

He, therefore, chose the moment when the Baron arrived at the landing on the first floor, pausing somewhat out of breath, and after the agent had verified their passes, to say to his companion:

"Have you seen Gorka since his arrival?"

"What? Is Boleslas here?" asked Justus Hafner, who manifested his astonishment in no other manner than by adding: "I thought he was still in Poland."

"I have not seen him myself," said Dorsenne. He already regretted having spoken too hastily. It is always more prudent not to spread the first report. But the ignorance of that return of Countess Steno's best friend, who saw her daily, struck the young man with such surprise that he could not resist adding: "Some one, whose veracity I can not doubt, met him this morning." Then, brusquely: "Does not this sudden return make you fearful?"

"Fearful?" repeated the Baron. "Why so?" As he uttered those words he glanced at the writer with his usual impassive expression, which, however, a very slight sign, significant to those who knew him, belied. In exchanging those few words the two men had passed into the first room of "objects of art," having belonged to the apartment of "His Eminence Prince d'Ardea," as the catalogue said, and the Baron did not raise the gold glass which he held at the end of his nose when near the smallest display of bric-a-brac, as was his custom. As he walked slowly through the collection of busts and statues of that first room, called "Marbles" on the catalogue, without glancing with the eye of a practised judge at the Gobelin tapestry upon the walls, it must have been that he considered as very grave the novelist's revelation. The latter had said too much not to continue:

"Well, I who have not been connected with Madame Steno for years, like you, trembled for her when that return was announced to me. She does not know what Gorka is when he is jealous, or of what he is capable."

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"Jealous? Of whom?" interrupted Hafner. "It is not the first time I have heard the name of Boleslas uttered in connection with the Countess. I confess I have never taken those words seriously, and I should not have thought that you, a frequenter of her salon, one of her friends, would hesitate on that subject. Rest assured, Gorka is in love with his charming wife, and he could not make a better choice. Countess Caterina is an excellent person, very Italian. She is interested in him, as in you, as in Maitland, as in me; in you because you write such admirable books, in Maitland because he paints like our best masters, in Boleslas on account of the sorrow he had in the death of his first child, in me because I have so delicate a charge. She is more than an excellent person, she is a truly superior woman, very superior." He uttered his hypocritical speech with such perfect ease that Dorsenne was surprised and irritated. That Hafner did not believe one treacherous word of what he said the novelist was sure, he who, from the indiscreet confidences of Gorka, knew what to think of the Venetian's manner, and he; too, understood the Baron's glance! At any other time he would have admired the policy of the old stager. At that moment the novelist was vexed by it, for it caused him to play a role, very common but not very elevating, that of a calumniator, who has spoken ill of a woman with whom he dined the day before. He, therefore, quickened his pace as much as politeness would permit, in order not to remain tete-a-tete with the Baron, and also to rejoin the persons of their party already arrived.

They emerged from the first room to enter a second, marked "Porcelain;" then a third, "Frescoes of Perino del Vaga," on account of the ceiling upon which the master painted a companion to his vigorous piece at Genoa—"Jupiter crushing the Giants"—and, lastly, into a fourth, called "The Arazzi," from the wonderful panels with which it was decorated.

A few visitors were lounging there, for the season was somewhat advanced, and the date which M. Ancona had chosen for the execution proved either the calculation of profound hatred or else the adroit ruse of a syndicate of retailers. All the magnificent objects in the palace were adjudged at half the value they would have brought a few months sooner or later. The small group of curios stood out in contrast to the profusion of furniture, materials, objects of art of all kinds, which filled the vast rooms. It was the residence of five hundred years of power and of luxury, where masterpieces, worthy of the great Medicis, and executed in their time, alternated with the gewgaws of the eighteenth century and bronzes of the First Empire, with silver trinkets ordered but yesterday in London. Baron Justus could not resist these. He raised his glass and called Dorsenne to show him a curious armchair, the carving of a cartel, the embroidery on some material. One glance sufficed for him to judge.... If the novelist had been capable of observing, he would have perceived in the detailed knowledge the banker had of the catalogue the trace of a study too deep not to accord with some mysterious project.

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"There are treasures here," said he. "See these two Chinese vases with convex lids, with the orange ground decorated with gilding. Those are pieces no longer made in China. It is a lost art. And this tete-a-tete decorated with flowers; and this pluvial cope in this case. What a marvel! It is as good as the one of Pius Second, which was at Pienza and which has been stolen. I could have bought it at one time for fifteen hundred francs. It is worth fifteen thousand, twenty thousand, all of that. Here is some faience. It was brought from Spain when Cardinal Castagna came from Madrid, when he took the place of Pius Fifth as sponsor of Infanta Isabella. Ah, what treasures! But you go like the wind," he added, "and perhaps it is better, for I would stop, and Cavalier Fossati, the auctioneer, to whom those terrible creditors of Peppino have given charge of the sale, has spies everywhere. You notice an object, you are marked as a solid man, as they say in Germany. You are noted. I shall be down on his list. I have been caught by him enough. Ha! He is a very shrewd man! But come, I see the ladies. We should have remembered that they were here," and smiling—but at whom?—at Fossati, at himself or his companion?—he made the latter read the notice hung on the door of a transversal room, which bore this inscription: "Salon of marriage-chests."

There were, indeed, ranged along the walls about fifteen of those wooden cases painted and carved, of those 'cassoni' in which it was the fashion, in grand Italian families, to keep the trousseaux destined for the brides. Those of the Castagnas proved, by their escutcheons, what alliances the last of the grand-nephews of Urban VII, the actual Prince d'Ardea, entered into. Three very elegant ladies were examining the chests; in them Dorsenne recognized at once fair and delicate Alba Steno, Madame Gorka, with her tall form, her fair hair, too, and her strong English profile, and pretty Madame Maitland, with her olive complexion, who did not seem to have inherited any more negro blood than just enough to tint her delicate face. Florent Chapron, the painter's brother-in-law, was the only man with those three ladies. Countess Steno and Lincoln Maitland were not there, and one could hear the musical voice of Alba spelling the heraldry carved on the coffers, formerly opened with tender curiosity by young girls, laughing and dreaming by turns like her.

"Look, Maud," said she to Madame Gorka, "there is the oak of the Della Rovere, and there the stars of the Altieri."

"And I have found the column of the Colonna," replied Maud Gorka.

"And you, Lydia?" said Mademoiselle Steno to Madame Maitland.

"And I, the bees of the Barberini."

"And I, the lilies of the Farnese," said in his turn Florent Chapron, who, having raised his head first, perceived the newcomers. He greeted them with a pleasant smile, which was reflected in his eyes and which showed his white teeth. "We no longer expected you, sirs. Every one has disappointed us. Lincoln did not wish to leave his atelier. It

seems that Mademoiselle Hafner excused herself yesterday to these ladies. Countess Steno has a headache. We did not even count on the Baron, who is usually promptness personified."

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"I was sure Dorsenne would not fail us," said Alba, gazing at the young man with her large eyes, of a blue as clear as those of Madame Gorka were dark. "Only that I expected we should meet him on the staircase as we were leaving, and that he would say to us, in surprise: 'What, I am not on time?' Ah," she continued, "do not excuse yourself, but reply to the examination in Roman history we are about to put you through. We have to follow here a veritable course studying all these old chests. What are the arms of this family?" she asked, leaning with Dorsenne over one of the cassoni. "You do not know? The Carafa, famous man! And what Pope did they have? You do not know that either? Paul Fourth, sir novelist. If ever you visit us in Venice, you will be surprised at the Doges."

She employed so affectionate a grace in that speech, and she was so apparently in one of her moods—so rare, alas! of childish joyousness, that Dorsenne, preoccupied as he was, felt his heart contract on her account. The simultaneous absence of Madame Steno and Lincoln Maitland could only be fortuitous. But persuaded that the Countess loved Maitland, and not doubting that she was his mistress, the absence of both appeared singularly suspicious to him. Such a thought sufficed to render the young girl's innocent gayety painful to him. That gayety would become tragical if it were true that the Countess's other lover had returned unexpectedly, warned by some one. Dorsenne experienced genuine agitation on asking Madame Gorka:

"How is Boleslas?"

"Very well, I suppose," said his wife. "I have not had a letter to-day. Does not one of your proverbs say, 'No news is good news?'"

Baron Hafner was beside Maud Gorka when she uttered that sentence. Involuntarily Dorsenne looked at him, and involuntarily, master as he was of himself, he looked at Dorsenne. It was no longer a question of a simple hypothesis. That Boleslas Gorka had returned to Rome unknown to his wife constituted, for any one who knew of his relations with Madame Steno, and of the infidelity of the latter, an event full of formidable consequences. Both men were possessed by the same thought. Was there still time to prevent a catastrophe? But each of them in this circumstance, as is so often the case in important matters of life, was to show the deepness of his character. Not a muscle of Hafner's face quivered. It was a question, perhaps, of rendering a service to a woman in danger, whom he loved with all the feeling of which he was capable. That woman was the mainspring of his social position in Rome. She was still more. A plan for Fanny's marriage, as yet secret, but on the point of being consummated, depended upon Madame Steno. But he felt it impossible to attempt to render her any service before having spent half an hour in the rooms of the Palais Castagna, and he began to employ that half hour in a manner which would be most profitable to his possible purchases, for he turned to Madame Gorka and said to her, with the rather exaggerated politeness habitual to him:

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"Countess, if you will permit me to advise you, do not pause so long before these coffers, interesting as they may be. First, as I have just told Dorsenne, Cavalier Fossati, the agent, has his spies everywhere here. Your position has already been remarked, you may be sure, so that if you take a fancy for one, he will know it in advance, and he will manage to make you pay double, triple, and more for it. And then we have to see so much, notably a cartoon of twelve designs by old masters, which Ardea did not even suspect he had, and which Fossati discovered—would you believe?—worm-eaten, in a cupboard in one of the granaries."

"There is some one whom your collection would interest," said Florent, "my brother-in-law."

"Well," replied Madame Gorka to Hafner with her habitual good-nature, "there are at least two of these coffers that I like and wish to have. I said it in so loud a tone that it is not worth the trouble of hoping that your Cavalier Fossati does not know it, if he really has that mode of espionage in practice. But forty or fifty pounds more make no difference—nor forty thousand even."

"Baron Hafner will warn you that your tone is not low enough," laughed Alba Steno, "and he will add his great phrase: 'You will never be diplomatic.' But," added the girl, turning toward Dorsenne, having drawn back from silent Lydia Maitland, and arranging to fall behind with the young man, "I am about to employ a little diplomacy in order to find out whether you have any trouble." And here her mobile face changed its expression, looking into Julien's with genuine anxiety. "Yes," said she, "I have never seen you so preoccupied as you seem to be this morning. Do you not feel well? Have you received ill news from Paris? What ails you?"

"I preoccupied?" replied Dorsenne. "You are mistaken. There is absolutely nothing, I assure you." It was impossible to lie with more apparent awkwardness, and if any one merited the scorn of Baron Hafner, it was he. Hardly had Madame Gorka spoken, when he had, with the rapidity of men of vivid imagination, seen Countess Steno and Maitland surprised by Gorka, at that very moment, in some place of rendezvous, and that surprise followed by a challenge, perhaps an immediate murder. And, as Alba continued to laugh merrily, his presentiment of her sad fate became so vivid that his face actually clouded over. He felt impelled to ascertain, when she questioned him, how great a friendship she bore him. But his effort to hide his emotion rendered his voice so harsh that the young girl resumed:

"I have vexed you by my questioning?"

"Not the least in the world," he replied, without being able to find a word of friendship. He felt at that moment incapable of talking, as they usually did, in that tone of familiarity, partly mocking, partly sentimental, and he added: "I simply think this exposition somewhat melancholy, that is all." And, with a smile, "But we shall lose the opportunity

of having it shown us by our incomparable cicerone,” and he obliged her, by quickening her pace, to rejoin the group piloted by Hafner through the magnificence of the almost deserted apartment.

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"See," said the former broker of Berlin and of Paris, now an enlightened amateur—"see, how that charlatan of a Fossati has taken care not to increase the number of trinkets now that we are in the reception-rooms. These armchairs seem to await invited guests. They are known. They have been illustrated in a magazine of decorative art in Paris. And that dining-room through that door, with all the silver on the table, would you not think a fete had been prepared?"

"Baron," said Madame Gorka, "look at this material; it is of the eighteenth century, is it not?"

"Baron," asked Madame Maitland, "is this cup with the lid old Vienna or Capadimonte?"

"Baron," said Florent Chapron, "is this armor of Florentine or Milanese workmanship?"

The eyeglass was raised to the Baron's thin nose, his small eyes glittered, his lips were pursed up, and he replied, in words as exact as if he had studied all the details of the catalogue verbatim. Their thanks were soon followed by many other questions, in which two voices alone did not join, that of Alba Steno and that of Dorsenne. Under any other circumstances, the latter would have tried to dissipate the increasing sadness of the young girl, who said no more to him after he repulsed her amicable anxiety. In reality, he attached no great importance to it. Those transitions from excessive gayety to sudden depression were so habitual with the Contessina, above all when with him. Although they were the sign of a vivid sentiment, the young man saw in them only nervous unrest, for his mind was absorbed with other thoughts.

He asked himself if, at any hazard, after the manner in which Madame Gorka had spoken, it would not be more prudent to acquaint Lincoln Maitland with the secret return of his rival. Perhaps the drama had not yet taken place, and if only the two persons threatened were warned, no doubt Hafner would put Countess Steno upon her guard. But when would he see her? What if he, Dorsenne, should at once tell Maitland's brother-in-law of Gorka's return, to that Florent Chapron whom he saw at the moment glancing at all the objects of the princely exposition? The step was an enormous undertaking, and would have appeared so to any one but Julien, who knew that the relations between Florent Chapron and Lincoln Maitland were of a very exceptional nature. Julien knew that Florent—sent when very young to the Jesuits of Beaumont, in England, by a father anxious to spare him the humiliation which his blood would call down upon him in America—had formed a friendship with Lincoln, a pupil in the same school. He knew that the friendship for the schoolmate had turned to enthusiasm for the artist, when the talent of his old comrade had begun to reveal itself. He knew that the marriage, which had placed the fortune of Lydia at the service of the development of the painter, had been the work of that enthusiasm at an epoch when Maitland, spoiled by the unwise government of his

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mother, and unappreciated by the public, was wrung by despair. The exceptional character of the marriage would have surprised a man less heeding of moral peculiarities than was Dorsenne, who had observed, all too frequently, the silence and reserve of that sister not to look upon her as a sacrifice. He fancied that admiration for his brother-in-law's genius had blinded Florent to such a degree that he was the first cause of the sacrifice.

"Drama for drama," said he to himself, as the visit drew near its close, and after a long debate with himself. "I should prefer to have it one rather than the other in that family. I should reproach myself all my life for not having tried every means." They were in the last room, and Baron Hafner was just fastening the strings of an album of drawings, when the conviction took possession of the young man in a definite manner. Alba Steno, who still maintained silence, looked at him again with eyes which revealed the struggle of her interest for him and of her wounded pride. She longed, without doubt, at the moment they were about to separate, to ask him, according to their intimate and charming custom, when they should meet again. He did not heed her—any more than he did the other pair of eyes which told him to be more prudent, and which were those of the Baron; any more than he did the observation of Madame Gorka, who, having remarked the ill-humor of Alba, was seeking the cause, which she had long since divined was the heart of the young girl; any more than the attitude of Madame Maitland, whose eyes at times shot fire equal to her brother's gentleness. He took the latter by the arm, and said to him aloud:

"I should like to have your opinion on a small portrait I have noticed in the other room, my dear Chapron." Then, when they were before the canvas which had served as a pretext for the aside, he continued, in a low voice: "I heard very strange news this morning. Do you know Boleslas Gorka is in Rome unknown to his wife?"

"That is indeed strange," replied Maitland's brother-in-law, adding simply, after a silence: "Are you certain of it?"

"As certain as that we are here," said Dorsenne. "One of my friends, Marquis de Montfanon, met him this morning."

A fresh silence ensued between the two, during which Julien felt that the arm upon which he rested trembled. Then they joined the party, while Florent said aloud: "It is an excellent piece of painting, which has, unfortunately, been revarnished too much."

"May I have done right!" thought Julien. "He understood me."



CHAPTER III

BOLESLAS GORKA

Hardly ten minutes had passed since Dorsenne had spoken as he had to Florent Chapron, and already the imprudent novelist began to wonder whether it would not have been wiser not to interfere in any way in an adventure in which his intervention was of the least importance.

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The apprehension of an immediate drama which had possessed him, for the first time, after the conversation with Montfanon, for the second time, in a stronger manner, by proving the ignorance of Madame Gorka on the subject of the husband's return—that frightful and irresistible evocation in a clandestine chamber, suddenly deluged with blood, was banished by the simplest event. The six visitors exchanged their last impressions on the melancholy and magnificence of the Castagna apartments, and they ended by descending the grand staircase with the pillars, through the windows of which staircase smiled beneath the scorching sun the small garden which Dorsenne had compared to a face. The young man walked a little in advance, beside Alba Steno, whom he now tried, but in vain, to cheer. Suddenly, at the last turn of the broad steps which tempered the decline gradually, her face brightened with surprise and pleasure. She uttered a slight cry and said: "There is my mother!" And Julien saw the Madame Steno, whom he had seen, in an access of almost delirious anxiety, surprised, assassinated by a betrayed lover. She was standing upon the gray and black mosaic of the peristyle, dressed in the most charming morning toilette. Her golden hair was gathered up under a large hat of flowers, over which was a white veil; her hand toyed with the silver handle of a white parasol, and in the reflection of that whiteness, with her clear, fair complexion, with her lovely blue eyes in which sparkled passion and intelligence, with her faultless teeth which gleamed when she smiled, with her form still slender notwithstanding the fulness of her bust, she seemed to be a creature so youthful, so vigorous, so little touched by age that a stranger would never have taken her to be the mother of the tall young girl who was already beside her and who said to her—

"What imprudence! Ill as you were this morning, to go out in this sun. Why did you do so?"

"To fetch you and to take you home!" replied the Countess gayly. "I was ashamed of having indulged myself! I rose, and here I am. Good-day, Dorsenne. I hope you kept your eyes open up there. A story might be written on the Ardea affair. I will tell it to you. Good-day, Maud. How kind of you to make lazy Alba exercise a little! She would have quite a different color if she walked every morning. Goodday, Florent. Good-day, Lydia. The master is not here? And you, old friend, what have you done with Fanny?"

She distributed these simple "good-days" with a grace so delicate, a smile so rare for each one—tender for her daughter, spirituelle for the author, grateful for Madame Gorka, amicably surprised for Chapron and Madame Maitland, familiar and confiding for her old friend, as she called the Baron. She was evidently the soul of the small party, for her mere presence seemed to have caused animation to sparkle in every eye.

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All talked at once, and she replied, as they walked toward the carriages, which waited in a court of honor capable of holding seventy gala chariots. One after the other these carriages advanced. The horses pawed the ground; the harnesses shone; the footmen and coachmen were dressed in perfect liveries; the porter of the Palais Castagna, with his long redingote, on the buttons of which were the symbolical chestnuts of the family, had beneath his laced hat such a dignified bearing that Julien suddenly found it absurd to have imagined an impassioned drama in connection with such people. The last one left, while watching the others depart, he once more experienced the sensation so common to those who are familiar with the worst side of the splendor of society and who perceive in them the moral misery and ironical gayety.

"You are becoming a great simpleton, my friend, Dorsenne," said he, seating himself more democratically in one of those open cabs called in Rome a botte. "To fear a tragical adventure for the woman who is mistress of herself to such a degree is something like casting one's self into the water to prevent a shark from drowning. If she had not upon her lips Maitland's kisses, and in her eyes the memory of happiness, I am very much mistaken. She came from a rendezvous. It was written for me, in her toilette, in the color upon her cheeks, in her tiny shoes, easy to remove, which had not taken thirty steps. And with what mastery she uttered her string of falsehoods! Her daughter, Madame Gorka, Madame Maitland, how quickly she included them all! That is why I do not like the theatre, where one finds the actress who employs that tone to utter her: 'Is the master not here?'"

He laughed aloud, then his thoughts, relieved of all anxiety, took a new course, and, using the word of German origin familiar to Cosmopolitans, to express an absurd action, he said: "I have made a pretty schlemylade, as Hafner would say, in relating to Florent Gorka's unexpected arrival. It was just the same as telling him that Maitland was the Countess's lover. That is a conversation at which I should like to assist, that which will take place between the two brothers-in-law. Should I be very much surprised to learn that this unattached negro is the confidant of his great friend? It is a subject to paint, which has never been well treated; the passionate friendships of a Tattet for a Musset, of an Eckermann for a Goethe, of an Asselineau for a Beaudelaire, the total absorption of the admirer in the admired. Florent found that the genius of the great painter had need of a fortune, and he gave him his sister. Were he to find that that genius required a passion in order to develop still more, he would not object. My word of honor! He glanced at the Countess just now with gratitude! Why not, after all? Lincoln is a colorist of the highest order, although his desire to be with the tide has led him into too many imitations. But it is his race. Young Madame Maitland has as much sense as the handle of a basket; and Madame Steno is one of those extraordinary women truly created to exalt the ideals of an artist. Never has he painted anything as he painted the portrait of Alba. I can hear this dialogue:

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“You know the Pole has returned? What Pole? The Countess’s. What? You believe those calumnies?’ Ah, what comedies here below! ‘Gad! The cabman has also committed his ‘schlemylade’. I told him Rue Sistina, near La Trinite-des-Monts, and here he is going through Place Barberini instead of cutting across Capo le Case. It is my fault as well. I should not have heeded it had there been an earthquake. Let us at least admire the Triton of Bernin. What a sculptor that man was! yet he never thought of nature except to falsify it.”

These incoherent remarks were made with a good-nature decidedly optimistic, as could be seen, when the fiacre finally drew up at the given address. It was that of a very modest restaurant decorated with this signboard: ‘Trattoria al Marzocco.’ And the ‘Marzocco’, the lion symbolical of Florence, was represented above the door, resting his paw on the escutcheon ornamented with the national lys. The appearance of that front did not justify the choice which the elegant Dorsenne had made of the place at which to dine when he did not dine in society. But his dilettantism liked nothing better than those sudden leaps from society, and M. Egiste Brancadori, who kept the Marzocco, was one of those unconscious buffoons of whom he was continually in search in real life, one of those whom he called his “Thebans”, in reference to King Lear. “I’ll talk a word with this same learned Theban,” cried the mad king, one knows not why, when he meets “poor Tom” on the heath.

That Dorsenne’s Parisian friends, the Casals, the Machaults, the De Vardes, those habitués of the club, might not judge him too severely, he explained that the Theban born in Florence was a cook of the first order and that the modest restaurant had its story. It amused so paradoxical an observer as Julien was. He often said, “Who will ever dare to write the truth of the history?” This, for example: Pope Pius IX, having asked the Emperor to send him some troops to protect his dominions, the latter agreed to do so—an occupation which bore two results: a Corsican hatred of the half of Italy against France and the founding of the Marzocco by Egiste Brancadori, says the Theban or the doctor. It was one of the pleasantries of the novelist to pretend to have cured his dyspepsia in Italy, thanks to the wise and wholesome cooking of the said Egiste. In reality, and more simply, Brancadori was the old cook of a Russian lord, one of the Werekiews, the cousin of pretty Alba Steno’s real father. That Werekiew, renowned in Rome for the daintiness of his dinners, died suddenly in 1866. Several of the frequenters of his house, advised by a French officer of the army of occupation, and tired of clubs, hotels, and ordinary restaurants, determined to form a syndicate and to employ his former cook. They, with his cooperation, established a sort of superior café, to which with some pride they gave the name of the Culinary Club. By assuring to each one a

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minimum of sixteen meals for seven francs, they kept for four years an excellent table, at which were to be found all the distinguished tourists in Rome. The year 1870 had disbanded that little society of connoisseurs and of conversationalists, and the club was metamorphosed into a restaurant, almost unknown, except to a few artists or diplomats who were attracted by the ancient splendors of the place, and, above all, by the knowledge of the “doctor’s” talents.

It was not unusual at eight o’clock for the three small rooms which composed the establishment to be full of men in white cravats, white waistcoats and evening coats. To cosmopolitan Dorsenne this was a singularly interesting sight; a member of the English embassy here, of the Russian embassy farther on, two German attaches elsewhere, two French secretaries near at hand from St. Siege, another from the Quirinal. What interested the novelist still more was the conversation of the doctor himself, genial Brancadori, who could neither read nor write. But he had preserved a faithful remembrance of all his old customers, and when he felt confidential, standing erect upon the threshold of his kitchen, of the possession of which he was so insolently proud, he repeated curious stories of Rome in the days of his youth. His gestures, so conformable to the appearance of things, his mobile face and his Tuscan tongue, which softened into *h* all the harsh *e*’s between two vowels, gave a savor to his stories which delighted a seeker after local truths. It was in the morning especially, when there was no one in the restaurant, that he voluntarily left his ovens to chat, and if Dorsenne gave the address of the Marzocco to his cabman, it was in the hope that the old cook would in his manner sketch for him the story of the ruin of Ardea. Brancadori was standing by the bar where was enthroned his niece, Signorina Sabatina, with a charming Florentine face, chin a trifle long, forehead somewhat broad, nose somewhat short, a sinuous mouth, large, black eyes, an olive complexion and waving hair, which recalled in a forcible manner the favorite type of the first of the Ghirlandajos.

“Uncle,” said the young girl, as soon as she perceived Dorsenne, “where have you put the letter brought for the Prince?”

In Italy every foreigner is a prince or a count, and the profound good-nature which reigns in the habit gives to those titles, in the mouths of those who employ them, an amiability often free from calculation. There is no country in the world where there is a truer, a more charming familiarity of class for class, and Brancadori immediately gave a proof of it in addressing as “Carolei”—that is to say, “my dear”—him whom his daughter had blazoned with a coronet, and he cried, fumbling in the pockets of the alpaca waistcoat which he wore over his apron of office:

“The brain is often lacking in a gray head. I put it in the pocket of my coat in order to be more sure of not forgetting it. I changed my coat, because it was warm, and left it with the letter in my apartments.”

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"You can look for it after lunch," said Dorsenne.

"No," replied the young girl, rising, "it is not two steps from here; I will go. The concierge of the palace where your Excellency lives brought it himself, and said it must be delivered immediately."

"Very well, go and fetch it," replied Julien, who could not suppress a smile at the honor paid his dwelling, "and I will remain here and talk with my doctor, while he gives me the prescription for this morning—that is to say, his bill of fare. Guess whence I come, Brancadori," he added, assured of first stirring the cook's curiosity, then his power of speech. "From the Palais Castagna, where they are selling everything."

"Ah! Per Bacco!" exclaimed the Tuscan, with evident sorrow upon his old parchment-like face, scorched from forty years of cooking. "If the deceased Prince Urban can see it in the other world, his heart will break, I assure you. The last time he came to dine here, about ten years ago, on Saint Joseph's Day, he said to me: 'Make me some fritters, Egiste, like those we used to have at Monsieur d'Epinag's, Monsieur Clairin's, Fortuny's, and poor Henri Regnault's.' And he was happy! 'Egiste,' said he to me, 'I can die contented! I have only one son, but I shall leave him six millions and the palace. If it was Gigi I should be less easy, but Peppino!' Gigi was the other one, the elder, who died, the gay one, who used to come here every day—a fine fellow, but bad! You should have heard him tell of his visit to Pius Ninth on the day upon which he converted an Englishman. Yes, Excellency, he converted him by lending him by mistake a pious book instead of a novel. The Englishman took the book, read it, read another, a third, and became a Catholic. Gigi, who was not in favor at the Vatican, hastened to tell the Holy Father of his good deed. 'You see, my son,' said Pius Ninth, 'what means our Lord God employs!' Ah, he would have used those millions for his amusement, while Peppino! They were all squandered in signatures. Just think, the name of Prince d'Ardea meant money! He speculated, he lost, he won, he lost again, he drew up bills of exchange after bills of exchange. And every time he made a move such as I am making with my pencil—only I can not sign my name—it meant one hundred, two hundred thousand francs to go into the world. And now he must leave his house and Rome. What will he do, Excellency, I ask you?" With a shake of his head he added: "He should reconstruct his fortune abroad. We have this saying: 'He who squanders gold with his hands will search for it with his feet.' But Sabatino is coming! She has been as nimble as a cat."

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The good man's invaluable mimetic art, his proverbs, the story of the fete of St. Joseph, the original evocation of the heir of the Castagnas continually signing and signing, the coarse explanation of his ruin—very true, however—everything in the recital had amused Dorsenne. He knew enough Italian to appreciate the untranslatable passages of the language of the man of the people. He was again on the verge of laughter, when the fresco madonna, as he sometimes designated the young girl, handed him an envelope the address upon which soon converted his smile into an undisguised expression of annoyance. He pushed aside the day's bill of fare which the old cook presented to him and said, brusquely: "I fear I can not remain to breakfast." Then, opening the letter: "No, I can not; adieu." And he went out, in a manner so precipitate and troubled that the uncle and niece exchanged smiling glances. Those typical Southerners could not think of any other trouble in connection with so handsome a man as Dorsenne than that of the heart.

"Chi ha l'amor nel petto," said Signorina Sabatina.

"Ha lo spron nei fianchi," replied the uncle.

That naive adage which compares the sharp sting which passion drives into our breasts to the spurring given the flanks of a horse, was not true of Dorsenne. The application of the proverb to the circumstance was not, however, entirely erroneous, and the novelist commented upon it in his passion, although in another form, by repeating to himself, as he went along the Rue Sistina: "No, no, I can not interfere in that affair, and I shall tell him so firmly."

He examined again the note, the perusal of which had rendered him more uneasy than he had been twice before that morning. He had not been mistaken in recognizing on the envelope the handwriting of Boleslas Gorka, and these were the terms, teeming with mystery under the circumstances, in which the brief message was worded:

"I know you to be such a friend to me, dear Julien, and I have for your character, so chivalrous and so French, such esteem that I have determined to turn to you in an era of my life thoroughly tragical. I wish to see you immediately. I shall await you at your lodging. I have sent a similar note to the Cercle de la Chasse, another to the bookshop on the Corso, another to your antiquary's. Wheresoever my appeal finds you, leave all and come at once. You will save more for me than life. For a reason which I will tell you, my return is a profound secret. No one, you understand, knows of it but you. I need not write more to a friend as sincere as you are, and whom I embrace with all my heart."

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"It is unequalled!" said Dorsenne, crumpling the letter with rising anger. "He embraces me with all his heart. I am his most sincere friend! I am chivalrous, French, the only person he esteems! What disagreeable commission does he wish me to undertake for him? Into what scrape is he about to ask me to enter, if he has not already got me into it? I know that school of protestation. We are allied for life and death, are we not? Do me a favor! And they upset your habits, encroach upon your time, embark you in tragedies, and when you say 'No' to them-then they squarely accuse you of selfishness and of treason! It is my fault, too. Why did I listen to his confidences? Have I not known for years that a man who relates his love-affairs on so short an acquaintance as ours is a scoundrel and a fool? And with such people there can be no possible connection. He amused me at the beginning, when he told me his sly intrigue, without naming the person, as they all do at first. He amused me still more by the way he managed to name her without violating that which people in society call honor. And to think that the women believe in that honor and that discretion! And yet it was the surest means of entering Steno's, and approaching Alba.... I believe I am about to pay for my Roman flirtation. If Gorka is a Pole, I am from Lorraine, and the heir of the Castellans will only make me do what I agree to, nothing more."

In such an ill-humor and with such a resolution, Julien reached the door of his house. If that dwelling was not the palace alluded to by Signorina Sabatina, it was neither the usually common house as common today in new Rome as in contemporary Paris, modern Berlin, and in certain streets of London opened of late in the neighborhood of Hyde Park. It was an old building on the Place de la Trinite-des-Monts, at an angle of the two streets Sistina and Gregoriana. Although reduced to the state of a simple pension, more or less bourgeoise, that house had its name marked in certain guide-books, and like all the corners of ancient Rome it preserved the traces of a glorious, artistic history. The small columns of the porch gave it the name of the tempietto, or little temple, while several personages dear to litterateurs had lived there, from the landscape painter Claude Lorrain to the poet Francois Coppee. A few paces distant, almost opposite, lived Poussin, and one of the greatest among modern English poets, Keats, died quite near by, the John Keats whose tomb is to be seen in Rome, with that melancholy epitaph upon it, written by himself:

Here lies one whose name was writ in water.

It was seldom that Dorsenne returned home without repeating to himself the translation he had attempted of that beautiful 'Ci-git un don't le nom, jut ecrit sur de l'eau'.

Sometimes he repeated, at evening, this delicious fragment:

The sky was tinged with tender green and pink.

This time he entered in a more prosaic manner; for he addressed the concierge in the tone of a jealous husband or a debtor hunted by creditors:

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"Have you given the key to any one, Tonino?" he asked.

"Count Gorka said that your Excellency asked him to await you here," replied the man, with a timidity rendered all the more comical by the formidable cut of his gray moustache and his imperial, which made him a caricature of the late King Victor Emmanuel.

He had served in '59 under the Galantuomo, and he paid the homage of a veteran of Solferino to that glorious memory. His large eyes rolled with fear at the least confusion, and he repeated:

"Yes, he said that your Excellency asked him to wait," while Dorsenne ascended the staircase, saying aloud: "More and more perfect. But this time the familiarity passes all bounds; and it is better so. I have been so surprised and annoyed from the first that I shall be easily able to refuse the imprudent fellow what he will ask of me." In his anger the novelist sought to arm himself against his weakness, of which he was aware—not the weakness of insufficient will, but of a too vivid perception of the motives which the person with whom he was in conflict obeyed. He, however, was to learn that there is no greater dissolvent of rancor than intelligent curiosity. His was, indeed, aroused by a simple detail, which consisted in ascertaining under what conditions the Pole had travelled; his dressing-case, his overcoat and his hat, still white with the dust of travel, were lying upon the table in the antechamber.

Evidently he had come direct from Warsaw to the Place de la Trinite-des-Monts. A prey to what delirium of passion? Dorsenne had not time to ask the question any more than he had presence of mind to compose his manner to such severity that it would cut short all familiarity on the part of his strange visitor. At the noise made by the opening of the antechamber door, Boleslas started up. He seized both hands of the man into whose apartments he had obtruded himself. He pressed them. He gazed at him with feverish eyes, with eyes which had not closed for hours, and he murmured, drawing the novelist into the tiny salon:

"You have come, Julien, you are here! Ah, I thank you for having answered my call at once! Let me look at you, for I am sure I have a friend beside me, one in whom I can trust, with whom I can speak frankly, upon whom I can depend. If this solitude had lasted much longer I should have become mad."

Although Madame Steno's lover belonged to the class of excitable, nervous people who exaggerate their feelings by an unconscious wildness of tone and of manner, his face bore the traces of a trouble too deep not to be startling.

Julien, who had seen him set out, three months before, so radiantly handsome, was struck by the change which had taken place during such a brief absence. He was the same Boleslas Gorka, that handsome man, that admirable human animal, so refined



and so strong, in which was embodied centuries of aristocracy—the Counts de Gorka belong to the ancient house of Lodzia, with which are connected so many illustrious Polish families, the Opałenice-Opałenskis, the Brin-Brinskis, the Ponin-Poninskis and many others—but his cheeks were sunken beneath his long, brown beard, in which were glints of gold; his eyes were heavy as if from wakeful nights, his nostrils were pinched and his face was pale. The travel-stains upon his face accentuated the alteration.

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Yet the native elegance of that face and form gave grace to his lassitude. Boleslas, in the vigorous and supple maturity of his thirty-four years, realized one of those types of manly beauty so perfect that they resist the strongest tests. The excesses of emotion, as those of libertinism, seem only to invest the man with a new prestige; the fact is that the novelist's room, with its collection of books, photographs, engravings, paintings and moldings, invested that form, tortured by the bitter sufferings of passion, with a poesy to which Dorsenne could not remain altogether insensible. The atmosphere, impregnated with Russian tobacco and the bluish vapor which filled the room, revealed in what manner the betrayed lover had diverted his impatience, and in the centre of the writing-table a cup with a bacchanal painted in red on a black ground, of which Julien was very proud, contained the remains of about thirty cigarettes, thrown aside almost as soon as lighted. Their paper ends had been gnawed with a nervousness which betrayed the young man's condition, while he repeated, in a tone so sad that it almost called forth a shudder:

"Yes, I should have gone mad."

"Calm yourself, my dear Boleslas, I implore you," replied Dorsenne. What had become of his ill-humor? How could he preserve it in the presence of a person so evidently beside himself? Julien continued, speaking to his companion as one speaks to a sick child: "Come, be seated. Be a little more tranquil, since I am here, and you have reason to count on my friendship. Speak to me. Explain to me what has happened. If there is any advice to give you, I am ready. I am prepared to render you a service. My God! In what a state you are!"

"Is it not so?" said the other, with a sort of ironical pride. It was sufficient that he had a witness of his grief for him to display it with secret vanity. "Is it not so?" he continued. "Could you only know how I have suffered. This is nothing," said he, alluding to his haggard appearance. "It is here that you should read," he struck his breast, then passing his hands over his brow and his eyes, as if to exorcise a nightmare. "You are right. I must be calm, or I am lost."

After a prolonged silence, during which he seemed to have gathered together his thoughts and to collect his will, for his voice had become decided and sharp, he began: "You know that I am here unknown to any one, even to my wife."

"I know it," replied Dorsenne. "I have just left the Countess. This morning I visited the Palais Castagna with her, Hafner, Madame Maitland, Florent Chapron." He paused and added, thinking it better not to lie on minor points, "Madame Steno and Alba were there, too."

"Any one else?" asked Boleslas, with so keen a glance that the author had to employ all his strength to reply:

“No one else.”

There was a silence between the two men.

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Dorsenne anticipated from his question toward what subject the conversation was drifting. Gorka, now lying rather than sitting upon the divan in the small room, appeared like a beast that, at any moment, might bound. Evidently he had come to Julien's a prey to the mad desire to find out something, which is to jealousy what thirst is to certain punishments. When one has tasted the bitter draught of certainty, one does not suffer less. Yet one walks toward it, barefooted, on the heated pavement, heedless of the heat. The motives which led Boleslas to choose the French novelist as the one from whom to obtain his information, demonstrated that the feline character of his physiognomy was not deceptive. He understood Dorsenne much better than Dorsenne understood him. He knew him to be nervous, on the one hand, and perspicacious on the other. If there was an intrigue between Maitland and Madame Steno, Julien had surely observed it, and, approached in a certain manner, he would surely betray it. Moreover—for that violent and crafty nature abounded in perplexities—Boleslas, who passionately admired the author's talent, experienced a sort of indefinable attraction in exhibiting himself before him in the role of a frantic lover. He was one of the persons who would have his photograph taken on his deathbed, so much importance did he attach to his person. He would, no doubt, have been insulted, if the author of 'Une Eglogue Mondaine' had portrayed in a book himself and his love for Countess Steno, and yet he had only approached the author, had only chosen him as a confidant with the vague hope of impressing him. He had even thought of suggesting to him some creation resembling himself. Yes, Gorka was very complex, for he was not contented with deceiving his wife, he allowed the confiding creature to form a friendship with the daughter of her husband's mistress. Still, he deceived her with remorse, and had never ceased bearing her an affection as sorrowful as it was respectful. But it required Dorsenne to admit the like anomalies, and the rare sensation of being observed in his passionate frenzy attracted the young man to some one who was at once a sure confidant, a possible portrayer, a moral accomplice. It was necessary now, but it would not be an easy matter, to make of him his involuntary detective.

"You see," resumed he suddenly, "to what miserable, detailed inquiries I have descended, I who always had a horror of espionage, as of some terrible degradation. I shall question you frankly, for you are my friend. And what a friend! I intended to use artifice with you at first, but I was ashamed. Passion takes possession of me and distorts me. No matter what infamy presents itself, I rush into it, and then I am afraid. Yes, I am afraid of myself! But I have suffered so much! You do not understand? Well! Listen," continued he, covering Dorsenne with one of those glances so scrutinizing that not a gesture, not a quiver of his eyelids, escaped him, "and

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tell me if you have ever imagined for one of your romances a situation similar to mine. You remember the mortal fear in which I lived last winter, with the presence of my brother-in-law, and the danger of his denouncing me to my poor Maud, from stupidity, from a British sense of virtue, from hatred. You remember, also, what that voyage to Poland cost me, after those long months of anxiety? The press of affairs and the illness of my aunt coming just at the moment when I was freed from Ardahan, inspired me with miserable forebodings. I have always believed in presentiments. I had one. I was not mistaken. From the first letter I received—from whom you can guess—I saw that there was taking place in Rome something which threatened me in what I held dearest on earth, in that love for which I sacrificed all, toward which I walked by trampling on the noblest of hearts. Was Catherine ceasing to love me? When one has spent two years of one's life in a passion—and what years!—one clings to it with every fibre! I will spare you the recital of those first weeks spent in going here and there, in paying visits to relatives, in consulting lawyers, in caring for my sick aunt, in fulfilling my duty toward my son, since the greater part of the fortune will go to him. And always with this firm conviction: She no longer writes to me as formerly, she no longer loves me. Ah! if I could show you the letter she wrote when I was absent once before. You have a great deal of talent, Julien, but you have never composed anything more beautiful.”

He paused, as if the part of the confession he was approaching cost him a great effort, while Dorsenne interpolated:

“A change of tone in correspondence is not, however, sufficient to explain the fever in which I see you.”

“No,” resumed Gorka, “but it was not merely a change of tone. I complained. For the first time my complaint found no echo. I threatened to cease writing. No reply. I wrote to ask forgiveness. I received a letter so cold that in my turn I wrote an angry one. Another silence! Ah! You can imagine the terrible effect produced upon me by an unsigned letter which I received fifteen days since. It arrived one morning. It bore the Roman postmark. I did not recognize the handwriting. I opened it. I saw two sheets of paper on which were pasted cuttings from a French journal. I repeat it was unsigned; it was an anonymous letter.”

“And you read it?” interrupted Dorsenne. “What folly!”

“I read it,” replied the Count. “It began with words of startling truth relative to my own situation. That our affairs are known to others we may be sure, since we know theirs. We should, consequently, remember that we are at the mercy of their indiscretion, as they are at ours. The beginning of the note served as a guarantee of the truth of the end, which was a detailed, minute recital of an intrigue which Madame Steno had been carrying on during my absence, and with whom? With the man whom I always

mistrusted, that dauber who wanted to paint Alba's portrait—but whose desires I nipped in the bud—with the fellow who degraded himself by a shameful marriage for money, and who calls himself an artist—with that American—with Lincoln Maitland!"

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Although the childish and unjust hatred of the jealous—the hatred which degrades us in lowering the one we love—had poisoned his discourse with its bitterness, he did not cease watching Dorsenne. He partly raised himself on the couch and thrust his head forward as he uttered the name of his rival, glancing keenly at the novelist meanwhile. The latter fortunately had been rendered indignant at the news of the anonymous letter, and he repeated, with an astonishment which in no way aided his interlocutor:

“Wait,” resumed Boleslas; “that was merely a beginning. The next day I received another letter, written and sent under the same conditions; the day after, a third. I have twelve of them—do you hear? twelve—in my portfolio, and all composed with the same atrocious knowledge of the circle in which we move, as was the first. At the same time I was receiving letters from my poor wife, and all coincided, in the terrible series, in a frightful concordance. The anonymous letter told me: ‘To-day they were together two hours and a quarter,’ while Maud wrote: ‘I could not go out to-day, as agreed upon, with Madame Steno, for she had a headache.’ Then the portrait of Alba, of which they told me incidentally. The anonymous letters detailed to me the events, the prolongation of sitting, while my wife wrote: ‘We again went to see Alba’s portrait yesterday. The painter erased what he had done.’ Finally it became impossible for me to endure it. With their abominable minuteness of detail, the anonymous letters gave me even the address of their rendezvous! I set out. I said to myself, ‘If I announce my arrival to my wife they will find it out, they will escape me.’ I intended to surprise them. I wanted—Do I know what I wanted? I wanted to suffer no longer the agony of uncertainty. I took the train. I stopped neither day nor night. I left my valet yesterday in Florence, and this morning I was in Rome.

“My plan was made on the way. I would hire apartments near theirs, in the same street, perhaps in the same house. I would watch them, one, two days, a week. And then—would you believe it? It was in the cab which was bearing me directly toward that street that I saw suddenly, clearly within me, and that I was startled. I had my hand upon this revolver.” He drew the weapon from his pocket and laid it upon the divan, as if he wished to repulse any new temptation. “I saw myself as plainly as I see you, killing those two beings like two animals, should I surprise them. At the same time I saw my son and my wife. Between murder and me there was, perhaps, just the distance which separated me from the street, and I felt that it was necessary to fly at once—to fly that street, to fly from the guilty ones, if they were really guilty; to fly from myself! I thought of you, and I have come to say to you, ‘My friend, this is how things are; I am drowning, I am lost; save me.’”

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"You have yourself found the salvation," replied Dorsenne. "It is in your son and your wife. See them first, and if I can not promise you that you will not suffer any more, you will no longer be tempted by that horrible idea." And he pointed to the pistol, which gleamed in the sunlight that entered through the casement. Then he added: "And you will have the idea still less when you will have been able to prove 'de visu' what those anonymous letters were worth. Twelve letters in fifteen days, and cuttings from how many papers? And they claim that we invent heinousness in our books! If you like, we will search together for the person who can have elaborated that little piece of villany. It must be a Judas, a Rodin, an Iago—or Iago. But this is not the moment to waste in hypotheses.

"Are you sure of your valet? You must send him a despatch, and in that despatch the copy of another addressed to Madame Gorka, which your man will send this very evening. You will announce your arrival for tomorrow, making allusion to a letter written, so to speak, from Poland, and which was lost. This evening from here you will take the train for Florence, from which place you will set out again this very night. You will be in Rome again to-morrow morning. You will have avoided, not only the misfortune of having become a murderer, though you would not have surprised any one, I am sure, but the much more grave misfortune of awakening Madame Gorka's suspicions. Is it a promise?"

Dorsenne rose to prepare a pen and paper: "Come, write the despatch immediately, and render thanks to your good genius which led you to a friend whose business consists in imagining the means of solving insoluble situations."

"You are quite right," Boleslas replied, after taking in his hand the pen which he offered to the other, "it is fortunate." Then, casting aside the pen as he had the revolver, "I can not. No, I can not, as long as I have this doubt within me. Ah, it is too horrible! I can see them plainly. You speak to me of my wife; but you forget that she loves me, and at the first glance she would read me, as you did. You can not imagine what an effort it has cost me for two years never to arouse suspicion. I was happy, and it is easy to deceive when one has nothing to hide but happiness. To-day we should not be together five minutes before she would seek, and she would find. No, no; I can not. I need something more."

"Unfortunately," replied Julien, "I cannot give it to you. There is no opium to lull asleep doubts such as those horrible anonymous letters have awakened. What I know is this, that if you do not follow my advice Madame Gorka will not have a suspicion, but certainty. It is now perhaps too late. Do you wish me to tell you what I concealed from you on seeing you so troubled? You did not lose much time in coming from the station hither, and probably you did not look out of your cab twice. But you were seen. By whom? By Montfanon. He told me so this morning almost on the threshold of the Palais Castagna. If I had not gathered from some words uttered by your wife that she

was ignorant of your presence in Rome, I—do you hear?—I should have told her of it. Judge now of your situation!"

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He spoke with an agitation which was not assumed, so much was he troubled by the evidence of danger which Gorka's obstinacy presented. The latter, who had begun to collect himself, had a strange light in his eyes. Without doubt his companion's nervousness marked the moment he was awaiting to strike a decisive blow. He rose with so sudden a start that Dorsenne drew back. He seized both of his hands, but with such force that not a quiver of the muscles escaped him:

"Yes, Julien, you have the means of consoling me, you have it," said he in a voice again hoarse with emotion.

"What is it?" asked the novelist.

"What is it? You are an honest man, Dorsenne; you are a great artist; you are my friend, and a friend allied to me by a sacred bond, almost a brother-in-arms; you, the grandnephew of a hero who shed his blood by the side of my grandfather at Somo-Sierra. Give me your word of honor that you are absolutely certain Madame Steno is not Maitland's mistress, that you never thought it, have never heard it said, and I will believe you, I will obey you! Come," continued he, pressing the writer's hand with more fervor, "I see you hesitate!"

"No," said Julien, disengaging himself from the wild grasp, "I do not hesitate. I am sorry for you. Were I to give you that word, would it have any weight with you for five minutes? Would you not be persuaded immediately that I was perjuring myself to avoid a misfortune?"

"You hesitate," interrupted Boleslas. Then, with a burst of wild laughter, he said, "It is then true! I like that better! It is frightful to know it, but one suffers less—To know it! As if I did not know she had lovers before me, as if it were not written on Alba's every feature that she is Werekiew's child, as if I had not heard it said seventy times before knowing her that she had loved Branciforte, San Giobbe, Strabane, ten others. Before, during, or after, what difference does it make? Ah, I was sure on knocking at your door—at this door of honor—I should hear the truth, that I would touch it as I touch this object," and he laid his hand upon a marble bust on the table.

"You see I hear it like a man. You can speak to me now. Who knows? Disgust is a great cure for passion. I will listen to you. Do not spare me!"

"You are mistaken, Gorka," replied Dorsenne. "What I have to say to you, I can say very simply. I was, and I am, convinced that in a quarter of an hour, in an hour, tomorrow, the day after, you will consider me a liar or an imbecile. But, since you misinterpreted my silence, it is my duty to speak, and I do so. I give you my word of honor I have never had the least suspicion of a connection between Madame Steno and Maitland, nor have their relations seemed changed to me for a second since your absence. I give

you my word of honor that no one, do you hear, no one has spoken of it to me. And, now, act as you please, think as you please. I have said all I can say.”

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The novelist uttered those words with a feverish energy which was caused by the terrible strain he was making upon his conscience. But Gorka's laugh had terrified him so much the more as at the same instant the jealous lover's disengaged hand was voluntarily or involuntarily extended toward the weapon which gleamed upon the couch. The vision of an immediate catastrophe, this time inevitable, rose before Julien. His lips had spoken, as his arm would have been out stretched, by an irresistible instinct, to save several lives, and he had made the false statement, the first and no doubt the last in his life, without reflecting. He had no sooner uttered it than he experienced such an excess of anger that he would at that moment almost have preferred not to be believed. It would indeed have been a comfort to him if his visitor had replied by one of those insulting negations which permit one man to strike another, so great was his irritation. On the contrary, he saw the face of Madame Steno's lover turned toward him with an expression of gratitude upon it. Boleslas's lips quivered, his hands were clasped, two large tears gushed from his burning eyes and rolled down his cheeks. When he was able to speak, he moaned:

"Ah, my friend, how much good you have done me! From what a nightmare you have relieved me. Ah! Now I am saved! I believe you, I believe you. You are intimate with them. You see them every day. If there had been anything between them you would know it. You would have heard it talked of. Ah! Thanks! Give me your hand that I may press it. Forget all I said to you just now, the slander I uttered in a moment of delirium. I know very well it was untrue. And now, let me embrace you as I would if you had really saved me from drowning. Ah, my friend, my only friend!"

And he rushed up to clasp to his bosom the novelist, who replied with the words uttered at the beginning of this conversation: "Calm yourself, I beseech you, calm yourself!" and repeating to himself, brave and loyal man that he was: "I could not act differently, but it is hard!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Follow their thoughts instead of heeding objects
Has as much sense as the handle of a basket
Mediocre sensibility
No flies enter a closed mouth
Pitiful checker-board of life
Scarcely a shade of gentle condescension
That you can aid them in leading better lives?
The forests have taught man liberty
There is an intelligent man, who never questions his ideas
Thinking it better not to lie on minor points
Too prudent to risk or gain much
Walked at the rapid pace characteristic of monomaniacs

COSMOPOLIS

By Paul Bourget

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER IV

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APPROACHING DANGER

"I could not act differently," repeated Dorsenne on the evening of that eventful day. He had given his entire afternoon to caring for Gorka. He made him lunch. He made him lie down. He watched him. He took him in a closed carriage to Portonaccio, the first stopping-place on the Florence line. Indeed, he made every effort not to leave alone for a moment the man whose frenzy he had rather suspended than appeased, at the price, alas, of his own peace of mind! For, once left alone, in solitude and in the apartments on the Place de la Trinite, where twenty details testified to the visit of Gorka, the weight of the perjured word of honor became a heavy load to the novelist, so much the more heavy when he discovered the calculating plan followed by Boleslas. His tardy penetration permitted him to review the general outline of their conversation. He perceived that not one of his interlocutor's sentences, not even the most agitated, had been uttered at random. From reply to reply, from confidence to confidence, he, Dorsenne, had become involved in the dilemma without being able to foresee or to avoid it; he would either have had to accuse a woman or to lie with one of those lies which a manly conscience does not easily pardon. He did not forgive himself for it.

"It is so much worse," said he to himself, "as it will prevent nothing. A person vile enough to pen anonymous letters will not stop there. She will find the means of again unchaining the madman.... But who wrote those letters? Gorka may have forged them in order to have an opportunity to ask me the question he did.... And yet, no.... There are two indisputable facts—his state of jealousy and his extraordinary return. Both would lead one to suppose a third, a warning. But given by whom?.... He told me of twelve anonymous letters.... Let us assume that he received one or two.... But who is the author of those?"

The immediate development of the drama in which Julien found himself involved was embodied in the answer to the question. It was not easy to formulate. The Italians have a proverb of singular depth which the novelist recalled at that moment. He had laughed a great deal when he heard sententious Egiste Brancadori repeat it. He repeated it to himself, and he understood its meaning. 'Chi non sa fingersi amico, non sa essere nemico. "He who does not know how to disguise himself as a friend, does not know how to be an enemy." In the little corner of society in which Countess Steno, the Gorkas and Lincoln Maitland moved, who was hypocritical and spiteful enough to practise that counsel?

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"It is not Madame Steno," thought Julien; "she has related all herself to her lover. I knew a similar case. But it involved degraded Parisians, not a Dogesse of the sixteenth century found intact in the Venice of today, like a flower of that period preserved. Let us strike her off. Let us strike off, too, Madame Gorka, the truthful creature who could not even condescend to the smallest lie for a trinket which she desires. It is that which renders her so easily deceived. What irony!.... Let us strike off Florent. He would allow himself to be killed, if necessary, like a Mameluke at the door of the room where his genial brother-in-law was dallying with the Countess.... Let us strike off the American himself. I have met such a case, a lover weary of a mistress, denouncing himself to her in order to be freed from his love-affair. But he was a roue, and had nothing in common with this booby, who has a talent for painting as an elephant has a trunk—what irony! He married this octoroon to have money. But it was a base act which freed him from commerce, and permitted him to paint all he wanted, as he wanted. He allows Steno to love him because she is diabolically pretty, notwithstanding her forty years, and then she is, in spite of all, a real noblewoman, which flattered him. He has not one dollar's-worth of moral delicacy in his heart. But he has an abundance of knavery.... Let us, too, strike out his wife. She is such a veritable slave whom the mere presence of a white person annihilates to such a degree that she dares not look her husband in the face.... It is not Hafner. The sly fox is capable of doing anything by cunning, but is he capable of undertaking a useless and dangerous piece of rascality? Never.... Fanny is a saint escaped from the Golden Legend, no matter what Montfanon thinks! I have now reviewed the entire coterie.... I was about to forget Alba.... It is too absurd even to think of her.... Too absurd? Why?"

Dorsenne was, on formulating that fantastic thought, upon the point of retiring. He took up, as was his habit, one of the books on his table, in order to read a few pages, when once in bed. He had thus within his reach the works by which he strengthened his doctrine of intransitive intellectuality; they were Goethe's *Memoirs*; a volume of George Sand's correspondence, in which were the letters to Flaubert; the '*Discours de la Methode*' by Descartes, and the essay by Burckhart on the Renaissance.

But, after turning over the leaves of one of those volumes, he closed it without having read twenty lines. He extinguished his lamp, but he could not sleep. The strange suspicion which crossed his mind had something monstrous about it, applied thus to a young girl. What a suspicion and what a young girl! The preferred friend of his entire winter, she on whose account he had prolonged his stay in Rome, for she was the most graceful vision of delicacy and of melancholy in the framework of a tragical and solemn past.

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Any other than Dorsenne would not have admitted such an idea without being inspired with horror. But Dorsenne, on the contrary, suddenly began to dive into that sinister hypothesis, to help it forward, to justify it. No one more than he suffered from a moral deformity which the abuse of a certain literary work inflicts on some writers. They are so much accustomed to combining artificial characters with creations of their imaginations that they constantly fulfil an analogous need with regard to the individuals they know best. They have some friend who is dear to them, whom they see almost daily, who hides nothing from them and from whom they hide nothing. But if they speak to you of him you are surprised to find that, while continuing to love that friend, they trace to you in him two contradictory portraits with the same sincerity and the same probability.

They have a mistress, and that woman, even in the space sometimes of one day, sees them, with fear, change toward her, who has remained the same. It is that they have developed in them to a very intense degree the imagination of the human soul, and that to observe is to them only a pretext to construe. That infirmity had governed Julien from early maturity. It was rarely manifested in a manner more unexpected than in the case of charming Alba Steno, who was possibly dreaming of him at the very moment when, in the silence of the night, he was forcing himself to prove that she was capable of that species of epistolary parricide.

"After all," he said to himself, for there is iconoclasm in the excessively intellectual, and they delight in destroying their dearest moral or sentimental idols, the better to prove their strength, "after all, have I really understood her relations toward her mother? When I came to Rome in November, when I was to be presented to the Countess, what did not only one, but nine or ten persons tell me? That Madame Steno had a liaison with the husband of her daughter's best friend, and that the little one was grieving about it. I went to the house. I saw the child. She was sad that evening. I had the curiosity to wish to read her heart.... It is six months since then. We have met almost daily, often twice a day. She is so hermetically sealed that I am no farther advanced than I was on the first day. I have seen her glance at her mother as she did this morning, with loving, admiring eyes. I have seen her turn pale at a word, a gesture, on her part. I have seen her embrace Maud Gorka, and play tennis with that same friend so gayly, so innocently. I have seen that she could not bear the presence of Maitland in a room, and yet she asked the American to take her portrait.... Is she guileless?.... Is she a hypocrite? Or is she tormented by doubt-divining, not divining-believing, not believing in her mother? Is she underhand in any case, with her eyes the color of the sea? Has she the ambiguous mind at once of a Russian and an Italian?.... This would be

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a solution of the problem, that she was a girl of extraordinary inward energy, who, both aware of her mother's intrigues and detesting them with an equal hatred, had planned to precipitate the two men upon each other. For a young girl the undertaking is great. I will go to the Countess's to-morrow night, and I will amuse myself by watching Alba, to see. . . If she is innocent, my deed will be inoffensive. If perchance she is not?"

It is vain to profess to one's own heart a complaisant dandyism of misanthropy. Such reflections leave behind them a tinge of a remorse, above all when they are, as these, absolutely whimsical and founded on a simple paradox of dilettantism. Dorsenne experienced a feeling of shame when he awoke the following morning, and, thinking of the mystery of the letters received by Gorka, he recalled the criminal romance he had constructed around the charming and tender form of his little friend; happily for his nerves, which were strained by the consideration of the formidable problem. If it is not some one in the Countess's circle, who has written those letters? He received, on rising, a voluminous package of proofs with the inscription: "Urgent." He was preparing to give to the public a collection of his first articles, under the title of 'Poussiere d'Idees.'

Dorsenne was a faithful literary worker. Usually, involved titles serve to hide in a book-stall shop—made goods, and romance writers or dramatic authors who pride themselves on living to write, and who seek inspiration elsewhere than in regularity of habits and the work-table, have their efforts marked from the first by sterility. Obscure or famous, rich or poor, an artist must be an artisan and practise these fruitful virtues—patient application, conscientious technicality, absorption in work. When he seated himself at his table Dorsenne was heart and soul in his business. He closed his door, he opened no letters nor telegrams, and he spent ten hours without taking anything but two eggs and some black coffee, as he did on this particular day, when looking over the essays of his twenty-fifth year with the talent of his thirty-fifth, retouching here a word, rewriting an entire page, dissatisfied here, smiling there at his thought. The pen flew, carrying with it all the sensibility of the intellectual man who had completely forgotten Madame Steno, Gorka, Maitland, and the calumniated Contessina, until he should awake from his lucid intoxication at nightfall. As he counted, in arranging the slips, the number of articles prepared, he found there were twelve.

"Like Gorka's letters," said he aloud, with a laugh. He now felt coursing through his veins the lightness which all writers of his kind feel when they have labored on a work they believe good. "I have earned my evening," he added, still in a loud voice. "I must now dress and go to Madame Steno's. A good dinner at the doctor's. A half-hour's walk. The night promises to be divine. I shall find out if they have news of the Palatine,"—the name he gave Gorka in his moments of gayety. "I shall talk in a loud voice of anonymous letters. If the author of those received by Boleslas is there, I shall be in the best position to discover him; provided that it is not Alba.... Decidedly—that would be sad!"

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It was ten o'clock in the evening, when the young man, faithful to his programme, arrived at the door of the large house on the Rue du Vingt Septembre occupied by Madame Steno. It was an immense modern structure, divided into two distinct parts; to the left a revenue building and to the right a house on the order of those which are to be seen on the borders of Park Monceau. The Villa Steno, as the inscription in gold upon the black marble door indicated, told the entire story of the Countess's fortune—that fortune appraised by rumor, with its habitual exaggeration, now at twenty, now at thirty, millions. She had in reality two hundred and fifty thousand francs' income. But as, in 1873, Count Michel Steno, her husband, died, leaving only debts, a partly ruined palace at Venice and much property heavily mortgaged, the amount of that income proved the truth of the title, "superior woman," applied by her friends to Alba's mother. Her friends likewise added: "She has been the mistress of Hafner, who has aided her with his financial advice," an atrocious slander which was so much the more false as it was before ever knowing the Baron that she had begun to amass her wealth. This is how she managed it:

At the close of 1873, when, as a young widow, living in retirement in the sumptuous and ruined dwelling on the Grand Canal, she was struggling with her creditors, one of the largest bankers in Rome came to propose to her a very advantageous scheme. It dealt with a large piece of land which belonged to the Steno estate, a piece of land in Rome, in one of the suburbs, between the Porta Salara and the Porta Pia, a sort of village which the deceased Cardinal Steno, Count Michel's uncle, had begun to lay out. After his demise, the land had been rented in lots to kitchen-gardeners, and it was estimated that it was worth about forty centimes a square metre. The financier offered four francs for it, under the pretext of establishing a factory on the site. It was a large sum of money. The Countess required twenty-four hours in which to consider, and, at the end of that time, she refused the offer, which won for her the admiration of the men of business who knew of the refusal. In 1882, less than ten years later, she sold the same land for ninety francs a metre. She saw, on glancing at a plan of Rome, and in recalling the history of modern Italy, first, that the new masters of the Eternal City would centre all their ambition in rebuilding it, then that the portion comprised between the Quirinal and the two gates of Salara and Pia would be one of the principal points of development; finally, that if she waited she would obtain a much greater sum than the first offer. And she had waited, applying herself to watching the administration of her possessions like the severest of intendants, depriving herself, stopping up gaps with unhopd-for profits. In 1875, she sold to the National Gallery a suite of four panels by Carpaccio, found in one of her country houses, for one hundred and twenty thousand francs. She had been as active and practical in her material life as she had been light and audacious in her sentimental experiences. The story circulated of her infidelity to Steno with Werekiew at St. Petersburg, where the diplomatist was stationed, after one year of marriage, was confirmed by the wantonness of her conduct, of which she gave evidence as soon as free.

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At Rome, where she lived a portion of the year after the sale of her land, out of which she retained enough to build the double house, she continued to increase her fortune with the same intelligence. A very advantageous investment in Acqua Marcia enabled her to double in five years the enormous profits of her first operation. And what proved still more the exceptional good sense with which the woman was endowed, when love was not in the balance, she stopped on those two gains, just at the time when the Roman aristocracy, possessed by the delirium of speculation, had begun to buy stocks which had reached their highest value.

To spend the evening at the Villa Steno, after spending all the morning of the day before at the Palais Castagna, was to realize one of those paradoxes of contradictory sensations such as Dorsenne loved, for poor Ardea had been ruined in having attempted to do a few years later that which Countess Catherine had done at the proper moment. He, too, had hoped for an increase in the value of property. Only he had bought the land at seventy francs a metre, and in '90 it was not worth more than twenty-five. He, too, had calculated that Rome would improve, and on the high-priced land he had begun to build entire streets, imagining he could become like the Dukes of Bedford and of Westminster in London, the owner of whole districts. His houses finished, they did not rent, however. To complete the rest he had to borrow. He speculated in order to pay his debts, lost, and contracted more debts in order to pay the difference. His signature, as the proprietor of the Marzocco had said, was put to innumerable bills of exchange. The result was that on all the walls of Rome, including that of the Rue Vingt Septembre on which was the Villa Steno, were posted multi-colored placards announcing the sale, under the management of Cavalier Fossati, of the collection of art and of furniture of the Palais Castagna.

"To foresee is to possess power," said Dorsenne to himself, ringing at Madame Steno's door and summing up thus the invincible association of ideas which recalled to him the palace of the ruined Roman Prince at the door of the villa of the triumphant Venetian: "It is the real Alpha and Omega."

The comparison between the lot of Madame Steno and that of the heir of the Castagnas had almost caused the writer to forget his plan of inquiry as to the author of the anonymous letters. It was to be impressed upon him, however, when he entered the hall where the Countess received every evening. Ardea himself was there, the centre of a group composed of Alba Steno, Madame Maitland, Fanny Hafner and the wealthy Baron, who, standing aloof and erect, leaning against a console, seemed like a beneficent and venerable man in the act of blessing youth. Julien was not surprised on finding so few persons in the vast salon, any more than he was surprised at the aspect of the room filled with old tapestry, bric-a-brac, furniture, flowers, and divans with innumerable cushions.

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He had had the entire winter in which to observe the interior of that house, similar to hundreds of others in Vienna, Madrid, Florence, Berlin, anywhere, indeed, where the mistress of the house applies herself to realizing an ideal of Parisian luxury. He had amused himself many an evening in separating from the almost international framework local features, those which distinguished the room from others of the same kind. No human being succeeds in being absolutely factitious in his home or in his writings. The author had thus noted that the salon bore a date, that of the Countess's last journey to Paris in 1880. It was to be seen in the plush and silk of the curtains. The general coloring, in which green predominated, a liberty egotistical in so brilliant a blonde, had too warm a tone and betrayed the Italian. Italy was also to be found in the painted ceiling and in the frieze which ran all around, as well as in several paintings scattered about. There were two panels by Moretti de Brescia in the second style of the master, called his silvery manner, on account of the delicate and transparent fluidity of the coloring; a 'Souper chez le Pharisien' and a 'Jesus ressuscite sur le rivage', which could only have come from one of the very old palaces of a very ancient family. Dorsenne knew all that, and he knew, too, for what reasons he found almost empty at that time of the year the hall so animated during the entire winter, the hall through which he had seen pass a veritable carnival of visitors: great lords, artists, political men, Russians and Austrians, English and French—pellmell. The Countess was far from occupying in Rome the social position which her intelligence, her fortune and her name should have assured her. For, having been born a Navagero, she combined on her escutcheon the cross of gold of the Sebastien Navagero who was the first to mount the walls of Lepante, with the star of the grand Doge Michel.

But one particular trait of character had always prevented her from succeeding on that point. She could not bear ennui nor constraint, nor had she any vanity. She was positive and impassioned, in the manner of the men of wealth to whom their meditated—upon combinations serve to assure the conditions of their pleasures. Never had Madame Steno displayed diplomacy in the changes of her passions, and they had been numerous before the arrival of Gorka, to whom she had remained faithful two years, an almost incomprehensible thing! Never had she, save in her own home, observed the slightest bounds when there was a question of reaching the object of her desire. Moreover, she had not in Rome to support her any member of the family to which she belonged, and she had not joined either of the two sets into which, since 1870, the society of the city was divided. Of too modern a mind and of a manner too bold, she had not been received by the admirable woman who reigns at the Quirinal, and who had managed to gather around her an atmosphere of such noble elevation.

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These causes would have brought about a sort of semi-ostracism, had the Countess not applied herself to forming a salon of her own, the recruits for which were almost altogether foreigners. The sight of new faces, the variety of conversation, the freedom of manner, all in that moving world, pleased the thirst for diversion which, in that puissant, spontaneous, and almost manly immoral nature, was joined with very just clear-sightedness. If Julien paused for a moment surprised at the door of the hall, it was not, therefore, on finding it empty at the end of the season; it was on beholding there, among the inmates, Peppino Ardea, whom he had not met all winter. Truly, it was a strange time to appear in new scenes when the hammer of the appraiser was already raised above all which had been the pride and the splendor of his name. But the grand-nephew of Urban VII, seated between sublime Fanny Hafner, in pale blue, and pretty Alba Steno, in bright red, opposite Madame Maitland, so graceful in her mauve toilette, had in no manner the air of a man crushed by adversity.

The subdued light revealed his proud manly face, which had lost none of its gay hauteur. His eyes, very black, very brilliant, and very unsteady, seemed almost in the same glance to scorn and to smile, while his mouth, beneath its brown moustache, wore an expression of disdain, disgust, and sensuality. The shaven chin displayed a bluish shade, which gave to the whole face a look of strength, belied by the slender and nervous form. The heir of the Castagnas was dressed with an affectation of the English style, peculiar to certain Italians. He wore too many rings on his fingers, too large a bouquet in his buttonhole, and above all he made too many gestures to allow for a moment, with his dark complexion, of any doubt as to his nationality. It was he who, of all the group, first perceived Julien, and he said to him, or rather called out familiarly:

“Ah, Dorsenne! I thought you had gone away. We have not seen you at the club for fifteen days.”

“He has been working,” replied Hafner, “at some new masterpiece, at a romance which is laid in Roman society, I am sure. Mistrust him, Prince, and you, ladies, disarm the portrayer.”

“I,” resumed Ardea, laughing pleasantly, “will give him notes upon myself, if he wants them, as long as this, and I will illustrate his romance into the bargain with photographs which I once had a rage for taking.... See, Mademoiselle,” he added, turning to Fanny, “that is how one ruins one’s self. I had a mania for the instantaneous ones. It was very innocent, was it not? It cost me thirty thousand francs a year, for four years.”

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Dorsenne had heard that it was a watchword between Peppino Ardea and his friends to take lightly the disaster which came upon the Castagna family in its last and only scion. He was not expecting such a greeting. He was so disconcerted by it that he neglected to reply to the Baron's remark, as he would have done at any other time. Never did the founder of the 'Credit Austyr-Dalmate' fail to manifest in some such way his profound aversion for the novelist. Men of his species, profoundly cynical and calculating, fear and scorn at the same time a certain literature. Moreover, he had too much tact not to be aware of the instinctive repulsion with which he inspired Julien. But to Hafner, all social strength was tarified, and literary success as much as any other. As he was afraid, as on the staircase of the Palais Castagna, that he had gone too far, he added, laying his hand with its long, supple fingers familiarly upon the author's shoulder:

"This is what I admire in him: It is that he allows profane persons, such as we are, to plague him, without ever growing angry. He is the only celebrated author who is so simple.... But he is better than an author; he is a veritable man-of-the-world."

"Is not the Countess here?" asked Dorsenne, addressing Alba Steno, and without replying any more to the action, so involuntarily insulting, of the Baron than he had to his sly malice or to the Prince's facetious offer. Madame Steno's absence had again inspired him with an apprehension which the young girl dissipated by replying:

"My mother is on the terrace.... We were afraid it was too cool for Fanny.".... It was a very simple phrase, which the Contessina uttered very simply, as she fanned herself with a large fan of white feathers. Each wave of it stirred the meshes of her fair hair, which she wore curled upon her rather high forehead. Julien understood her too well not to perceive that her voice, her gestures, her eyes, her entire being, betrayed a nervousness at that moment almost upon the verge of sadness.

Was she still reserved from the day before, or was she a prey to one of those inexplicable transactions, which had led Dorsenne in his meditations of the night to such strange suspicions? Those suspicions returned to him with the feeling that, of all the persons present, Alba was the only one who seemed to be aware of the drama which undoubtedly was brewing. He resolved to seek once more for the solution of the living enigma which that singular girl was. How lovely she appeared to him that evening with, those two expressions which gave her an almost tragical look! The corners of her mouth drooped somewhat; her upper lip, almost too short, disclosed her teeth, and in the lower part of her pale face was a bitterness so prematurely sad! Why? It was not the time to ask the question. First of all, it was necessary for the young man to go in search of Madame Steno on the terrace, which terminated in a paradise of

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Italian voluptuousness, the salon furnished in imitation of Paris. Shrubs blossomed in large terra-cotta vases. Statuettes were to be seen on the balustrade, and, beyond, the pines of the Villa Bonaparte outlined their black umbrellas against a sky of blue velvet, strewn with large stars. A vague aroma of acacias, from a garden near by, floated in the air, which was light, caressing, and warm. The soft atmosphere sufficed to convict of falsehood the Contessina, who had evidently wished to justify the *tete-a-tete* of her mother and of Maitland. The two lovers were indeed together in the perfume, the mystery and the solitude of the obscure and quiet terrace.

It took Dorsenne, who came from the bright glare of the salon, a moment to distinguish in the darkness the features of the Countess who, dressed all in white, was lying upon a willow couch with soft cushions of silk. She was smoking a cigarette, the lighted end of which, at each breath she drew, gave sufficient light to show that, notwithstanding the coolness of the night, her lovely neck, so long and flexible, about which was clasped a collar of pearls, was bare, as well as her fair shoulders and her perfect arms, laden with bracelets, which were visible through her wide, flowing sleeves. On advancing, Julien recognized, through the vegetable odors of that spring night, the strong scent of the Virginian tobacco which Madame Steno had used since she had fallen in love with Maitland, instead of the Russian "papyrus" to which Gorka had accustomed her. It is by such insignificant traits that amorous women recognize a love profoundly, insatiably sensual, the only one of which the Venetian was capable. Their passionate desire to give themselves up still more leads them to espouse, so to speak, the slightest habits of the men whom they love in that way. Thus are explained those metamorphoses of tastes, of thoughts, even of appearance, so complete, that in six months, in three months of separation they become like different people. By the side of that graceful and supple vision, Lincoln Maitland was seated on a low chair. But his broad shoulders, which his evening coat set off in their amplitude, attested that before having studied "Art"—and even while studying it—he had not ceased to practise the athletic sports of his English education. As soon as he was mentioned, the term "large" was evoked. Indeed, above the large frame was a large face, somewhat red, with a large, red moustache, which disclosed, in broad smiles, his large, strong teeth.

Large rings glistened on his large fingers. He presented a type exactly opposite to that of Boleslas Gorka. If the grandson of the Polish Castellan recalled the dangerous finesse of a feline, of a slender and beautiful panther, Maitland could be compared to one of those mastiffs in the legends, with a jaw and muscles strong enough to strangle lions. The painter in him was only in the eye and in the hand, in consequence of a gift as physical as the voice

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to a tenor. But that instinct, almost abnormal, had been developed, cultivated to excess, by the energy of will in refinement, a trait so marked in the Anglo-Saxons of the New World when they like Europe, instead of detesting it. For the time being, the longing for refinement seemed reduced to the passionate inhalations of that divine, fair rose of love which was Madame Steno, a rose almost too full-blown, and which the autumn of forty years had begun to fade. But she was still charming. And how little Maitland heeded the fact that his wife was in the room near by, the windows of which cast forth a light which caused to stand out more prominently the shadow of the voluptuous terrace! He held his mistress's hand within his own, but abandoned it when he perceived Dorsenne, who took particular pains to move a chair noisily on approaching the couple, and to say, in a loud voice, with a merry laugh:

"I should have made a poor gallant abbe of the last century, for at night I can really see nothing. If your cigarette had not served me as a beacon-light I should have run against the balustrade."

"Ah, it is you, Dorsenne," replied Madame Steno, with a sharpness contrary to her habitual amiability, which proved to the novelist that first of all he was the "inconvenient third" of the classical comedies, then that Hafner had reported his imprudent remarks of the day before.

"So much the better," thought he, "I shall have forewarned her. On reflection she will be pleased. It is true that at this moment there is no question of reflection." As he said those words to himself, he talked aloud of the temperature of the day, of the probabilities of the weather for the morrow, of Ardea's good-humor. He made, indeed, twenty trifling remarks, in order to manage to leave the terrace and to leave the lovers to their tete-a-tete, without causing his withdrawal to become noticeable by indiscreet haste, as disagreeable as suggestive.

"When may we come to your atelier to see the portrait finished, Maitland?" he asked, still standing, in order the better to manage his retreat.

"Finished?" exclaimed the Countess, who added, employing a diminutive which she had used for several weeks: "Do you then not know that Linco has again effaced the head?"

"Not the entire head," said the painter, "but the face is to be done over. You remember, Dorsenne, those two canvases by Pier delta Francesca, which are at Florence, Duc Federigo d'Urbino and his wife Battista Sforza. Did you not see them in the same room with La Calomnie by Botticelli, with a landscape in the background? It is drawn like this," and he made a gesture with his thumb, "and that is what I am trying to obtain, the necessary curve on which all faces depend. There is no better painter in Italy."

“And Titian and Raphael?” interrupted Madame Steno.

“And the Sienese and the Lorenzetti, of whom you once raved? You wrote to me of them, with regard to my article on your exposition of 'eighty-six; do you remember?” inquired the writer.

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"Raphael?" replied Maitland.... "Do you wish me to tell you what Raphael really was? A sublime builder. And Titian? A sublime upholsterer. It is true, I admired the Sienese very much," he added, turning toward Dorsenne. "I spent three months in copying the Simone Martini of the municipality, the Guido Riccio, who rides between two strongholds on a gray heath, where there is not a sign of a tree or a house, but only lances and towers. Do I remember Lorenzetti? Above all, the fresco at San Francesco, in which Saint Francois presents his order to the Pope, that was his best work.... Then, there is a cardinal, with his fingers on his lips, thus!" another gesture. "Well, I remember it, you see, because there is an anecdote. It is portrayed on a wall—oh, a grand portrayal, but without the subject, flutt!".... and he made a hissing sound with his lips, "while Pier della Francesca, Carnevale, Melozzo,".... he paused to find a word which would express the very complicated thought in his head, and he concluded: "That is painting."

"But the Assumption by Titian, and the Transfiguration by Raphael," resumed the Countess, who added in Italian, with an accent of enthusiasm: "Ah, the bellezza!"

"Do not worry, Countess," said Dorsenne, laughing heartily, "those are an artist's opinions. Ten years ago, I said that Victor Hugo was an amateur and Alfred de Musset a bourgeois. But," he added, "as I am not descended from the Doges nor the Pilgrim Fathers, I, a poor, degenerate Gallo-Roman, fear the dampness on account of my rheumatism, and ask your permission to reenter the house." Then, as he passed through the door of the salon: "Raphael, a builder! Titian, an upholsterer! Lorenzetti, a reproducer!" he repeated to himself. "And the descendant of the Doges, who listened seriously to those speeches, her ideal should be a madonna en chromo! Of the first order! As for Gorka, if he had not made me lose my entire day yesterday, I should think I had been dreaming, so little is there any question of him.... And Ardea, who continues to laugh at his ruin. He is not bad for an Italian. But he talks too much about his affairs, and it is in bad taste!".... Indeed, as he turned toward the group assembled in a corner of the salon, he heard the Prince relating a story about Cavalier Fossati, to whom was entrusted the charge of the sale:

"How much do you think will be realized on all?" I asked him, finally. "Oh," he replied, "very little.... But a little and a little more end by making a great deal. With what an air he added: 'E gia il moschino e conte'—Already the gnat is a count.' The gnat was himself. 'A few more sales like yours, my Prince, and my son, the Count of Fossati, will have half a million. He will enter the club and address you with the familiar 'thou' when playing 'goffo' against you. That is what there is in this gia (already).... On my honor, I have not been happier than since I have, not a sou."

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"You are an optimist, Prince," said Hafner, "and whatsoever our friend Dorsenne here present may claim, it is necessary to be optimistic."

"You are attacking him again, father," interrupted Fanny, in a tone of respectful reproach.

"Not the man," returned the Baron, "but his ideas—yes, and above all those of his school.... Yes, yes," he continued, either wishing to change the conversation, which Ardea persisted in turning upon his ruin, or finding very well organized a world in which strokes like that of the Credit Austro-Dalmate are possible, he really felt a deep aversion to the melancholy and pessimism with which Julien's works were tinged. And he continued: "On listening to you, Ardea, just now, and on seeing this great writer enter, I am reminded by contrast of the fashion now in vogue of seeing life in a gloomy light."

"Do you find it very gay?" asked Alba, brusquely.

"Good," said Hafner; "I was sure that, in talking against pessimism, I should make the Contessina talk.... Very gay?" he continued. "No. But when I think of the misfortunes which might have come to all of us here, for instance, I find it very tolerable. Better than living in another epoch, for example. One hundred and fifty years ago, Contessina, in Venice, you would have been liable to arrest any day under a warrant of the Council of Ten.... And you, Dorsenne, would have been exposed to the cudgel like Monsieur de Voltaire, by some jealous lord.... And Prince d'Ardea would have run the risk of being assassinated or beheaded at each change of Pope. And I, in my quality of Protestant, should have been driven from France, persecuted in Austria, molested in Italy, burned in Spain."

As can be seen, he took care to choose between his two inheritances. He had done so with an enigmatical good-nature which was almost ironical. He paused, in order not to mention what might have come to Madame Maitland before the suppression of slavery. He knew that the very pretty and elegant young lady shared the prejudices of her American compatriots against negro blood, and that she made every effort to hide the blemish upon her birth to the point of never removing her gloves. It may, however, in justice be added, that the slightly olive tinge in her complexion, her wavy hair, and a vague bluish reflection in the whites of her eyes would scarcely have betrayed the mixture of race. She did not seem to have heeded the Baron's pause, but she arranged, with an absent air, the folds of her mauve gown, while Dorsenne replied: "It is a fine and specious argument.... Its only fault is that it has no foundation. For I defy you to imagine yourself what you would have been in the epoch of which you speak. We say frequently, 'If I had lived a hundred years ago.' We forget that a hundred years ago we should not have been the same; that we should not have had the same ideas, the same tastes, nor the same requirements. It is almost the same as imagining that you could think like a bird or a serpent."

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"One could very well imagine what it would be never to have been born," interrupted. Alba Steno.

She uttered the sentence in so peculiar a manner that the discussion begun by Hafner was nipped in the bud.

The words produced their effect upon the chatter of the idlers who only partly believed in the ideas they put forth. Although there is always a paradox in condemning life amid a scene of luxury when one is not more than twenty, the Contessina was evidently sincere. Whence came that sincerity? From what corner of her youthful heart, wounded almost to death? Dorsenne was the only person who asked himself the question, for the conversation turned at once, Lydia Maitland having touched with her fan the sleeve of Alba, who was two seats from her, to ask her this question with an irony as charming, after the young girl's words, as it was involuntary:

"It is silk muslin, is it not?"

"Yes," replied the Contessina, who rose and leaned over, to offer to the curious gaze of her pretty neighbor her arm, which gleamed frail, nervous, and softly fair through the transparent red material, with a bow of ribbon of the same color tied at her slender shoulder and her graceful wrist, while Ardea, by the side of Fanny, could be heard saying to the daughter of Baron Justus, more beautiful than ever that evening, in her pallor slightly tinged with pink by some secret agitation:

"You visited my palace yesterday, Mademoiselle?"

"No," she replied.

"Ask her why not, Prince," said Hafner.

"Father!" cried Fanny, with a supplication in her black eyes which Ardea had the delicacy to obey, as he resumed:

"It is a pity. Everything there is very ordinary. But you would have been interested in the chapel. Indeed, I regret that the most, those objects before which my ancestors have prayed so long and which end by being listed in a catalogue.... They even took the reliquary from me, because it was by Ugolina da Siena. I will buy it back as soon as I can. Your father applauds my courage. I could not part from those objects without real sorrow."

"But it is the feeling she has for the entire palace," said the Baron.

"Father!" again implored Fanny.



"Come, compose yourself, I will not betray you," said Hafner, while Alba, taking advantage of having risen, left the group. She walked toward a table at the other extremity of the room, set in the style of an English table, with tea and iced drinks, saying to Julien, who followed her:

"Shall I prepare your brandy and soda, Dorsenne?"

"What ails you, Contessina?" asked the young man, in a whisper, when they were alone near the plateau of crystal and the collection of silver, which gleamed so brightly in the dimly lighted part of the room.

"Yes," he persisted, "what ails you? Are you still vexed with me?"

"With you?" said she. "I have never been. Why should I be?" she repeated. "You have done nothing to me."

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"Some one has wounded you?" asked Julien.

He saw that she was sincere, and that she scarcely remembered the ill-humor of the preceding day. "You can not deceive a friend such as I am," he continued. "On seeing you fan yourself, I knew that you had some annoyance. I know you so well."

"I have no annoyance," she replied, with an impatient frown. "I can not bear to hear lies of a certain kind. That is all!"

"And who has lied?" resumed Dorsenne.

"Did you not hear Ardea speak of his chapel just now, he who believes in God as little as Hafner, of whom no one knows whether he is a Jew or a Gentile!.... Did you not see poor Fanny look at him the while? And did you not remark with what tact the Baron made the allusion to the delicacy which had prevented his daughter from visiting the Palais Castagna with us? And did that comedy enacted between the two men give you no food for thought?"

"Is that why Peppino is here?" asked Julien. "Is there a plan on foot for the marriage of the heiress of Papa Hafner's millions and the grand-nephew of Pope Urban VII? That will furnish me with a fine subject of conversation with some one of my acquaintance!".... And the mere thought of Montfanon learning such news caused him to laugh heartily, while he continued, "Do not look at me so indignantly, dear Contessina. But I see nothing so sad in the story. Fanny to marry Peppino? Why not? You yourself have told me that she is partly Catholic, and that her father is only awaiting her marriage to have her baptized. She will be happy then. Ardea will keep the magnificent palace we saw yesterday, and the Baron will crown his career in giving to a man ruined on the Bourse, in the form of a dowry, that which he has taken from others."

"Be silent," said the young girl, in a very grave voice, "you inspire me with horror. That Ardea should have lost all scruples, and that he should wish to sell his title of a Roman prince at as high a price as possible, to no matter what bidder, is so much the more a matter of indifference, for we Venetians do not allow ourselves to be imposed upon by the Roman nobility. We all had Doges in our families when the fathers of these people were bandits in the country, waiting for some poor monk of their name to become Pope. That Baron Hafner sells his daughter as he once sold her jewels is also a matter of indifference to me. But you do not know her. You do not know what a creature, charming and enthusiastic, simple and sincere, she is, and who will never, never mistrust that, first of all, her father is a thief, and, then, that he is selling her like a trinket in order to have grand-children who shall be at the same time grandnephews of the Pope, and, finally, that Peppino does not love her, that he wants her dowry, and that he will have for her as little feeling as they have for her." She glanced at Madame Maitland. "It is worse than I can tell you," she said, enigmatically, as if vexed by her own words, and almost frightened by them.

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"Yes," said Julien, "it would be very sad; but are you sure that you do not exaggerate the situation? There is not so much calculation in life. It is more mediocre and more facile. Perhaps the Prince and the Baron have a vague project."

"A vague project?" interrupted Alba, shrugging her shoulders. "There is never anything vague with a Hafner, you may depend. What if I were to tell you that I am positive—do you hear—positive that it is he who holds between his fingers the largest part of the Prince's debts, and that he caused the sale by Ancona to obtain the bargain?"

"It is impossible!" exclaimed Dorsenne. "You saw him yourself yesterday thinking of buying this and that object."

"Do not make me say any more," said Alba, passing over her brow and her eyes two or three times her hand, upon which no ring sparkled—that hand, very supple and white, whose movements betrayed extreme nervousness. "I have already said too much. It is not my business, and poor Fanny is only to me a recent friend, although I think her very attractive and affectionate.... When I think that she is on the point of pledging herself for life, and that there is no one, that there can be no one, to cry: They lie to you! I am filled with compassion. That is all. It is childish!"

It is always painful to observe in a young person the exact perception of the sinister dealings of life, which, once entered into the mind, never allows of the carelessness so natural at the age of twenty.

The impression of premature disenchantment Alba Steno had many times given to Dorsenne, and it had indeed been the principal attraction to the curious observer of the feminine character, who still was struck by the terrible absence of illusion which such a view of the projects of Fanny's father revealed. Whence did she know them? Evidently from Madame Steno herself. Either the Baron and the Countess had talked of them before the young girl too openly to leave her in any doubt, or she had divined what they did not tell her, through their conversation. On seeing her thus, with her bitter mouth, her bright eyes, so visibly a prey to the fever of suppressed loathing, Dorsenne again was impressed by the thought of her perfect perspicacity. It was probable that she had applied the same force of thought to her mother's conduct. It seemed to him that on raising, as she was doing, the wick of the silver lamp beneath the large teakettle, that she was glancing sidewise at the terrace, where the end of the Countess's white robe could be seen through the shadow. Suddenly the mad thoughts which had so greatly agitated him on the previous day possessed him again, and the plan he had formed of imitating his model, Hamlet, in playing in Madame Steno's salon the role of the Danish prince before his uncle occurred to him. Absently, with his customary air of indifference, he continued:



“Rest assured, Ardea does not lack enemies. Hafner, too, has plenty of them. Some one will be found to denounce their plot, if there is a plot, to lovely Fanny. An anonymous letter is so quickly written.”

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He had no sooner uttered those words than he interrupted himself with the start of a man who handles a weapon which he thinks unloaded and which suddenly discharges.

It was, really, to discharge a duty in the face of his own scepticism that he had spoken thus, and he did not expect to see another shade of sadness flit across Alba's mobile and proud face.

There was in the corners of her mouth more disgust, her eyes expressed more scorn, while her hands, busy preparing the tea, trembled as she said, with an accent so agitated that her friend regretted his cruel plan:

"Ah! Do not speak of it! It would be still worse than her present ignorance. At least, now she knows nothing, and if some miserable person were to do as you say she would know in part without being sure.... How could you smile at such a supposition?.... No! Poor, gentle Fanny! I hope she will receive no anonymous letters. They are so cowardly and make so much trouble!"

"I ask your pardon if I have wounded you," replied Dorsenne. He had touched, he felt it, a tender spot in that heart, and perceived with grief that not only had Alba Steno not written the anonymous letters addressed to Gorka, but that, on the contrary, she had received some herself. From whom? Who was the mysterious denunciator who had warned in that abominable manner the daughter of Madame Steno after the lover? Julien shuddered as he continued: "If I smiled, it was because I believe Mademoiselle Hafner, in case the misfortune should come to her, sensible enough to treat such advice as it merits. An anonymous letter does not deserve to be read. Any one infamous enough to make use of weapons of that sort does not deserve that one should do him the honor even to glance at what he has written."

"Is it not so?" said the girl. There was in her eyes, the pupils of which suddenly dilated, a gleam of genuine gratitude which convinced her companion that he had seen correctly. He had uttered just the words of which she had need. In the face of that proof, he was suddenly overwhelmed by an access of shame and of pity—of shame, because in his thoughts he had insulted the unhappy girl—of pity, because she had to suffer a blow so cruel, if, indeed, her mother had been exposed to her. It must have been on the preceding afternoon or that very morning that she had received the horrible letter, for, during the visit to the Palais Castagna, she had been, by turns, gay and quiet, but so childish, while on that particular evening it was no longer the child who suffered, but the woman. Dorsenne resumed:

"You see, we writers are exposed to those abominations. A book which succeeds, a piece which pleases, an article which is extolled, calls forth from the envious unsigned letters which wound us or those whom we love. In such cases, I repeat, I burn them unread, and if ever in your life such come to you, listen to me, little Countess, and follow

the advice of your friend, Dorsenne, for he is your friend; you know it, do you not, your true friend?"

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"Why should I receive anonymous letters?" asked the girl, quickly. "I have neither fame, beauty, nor wealth, and am not to be envied."

As Dorsenne looked at her, regretting that he had said so much, she forced her sad lips to smile, and added: "If you are really my friend, instead of making me lose time by your advice, of which I shall probably never have need, for I shall never become a great authoress, help me to serve the tea, will you? It should be ready." And with her slender fingers she raised the lid of the kettle, saying: "Go and ask Madame Maitland if she will take some tea this evening, and Fanny, too.... Ardea takes whiskey and the Baron mineral water.... You can ring for his glass of vichy.... There.... You have delayed me.... There are more callers and nothing is ready.... Ah," she cried, "it is Maud!"—then, with surprise, "and her husband!"

Indeed, the folding doors of the hall opened to admit Maud Gorka, a robust British beauty, radiant with happiness, attired in a gown of black crepe de Chine with orange ribbons, which set off to advantage her fresh color. Behind her came Boleslas. But he was no longer the traveller who, thirty-six hours before, had arrived at the Place de la Trinite-des-Monts, mad with anxiety, wild with jealousy, soiled by the dust of travel, his hair disordered, his hands and face dirty. It was, though somewhat thinner, the elegant Gorka whom Dorsenne had known—tall, slender, and perfumed, in full dress, a bouquet in his buttonhole, his lips smiling. To the novelist, knowing what he knew, the smile and the composure had something in them more terrible than the frenzy of the day before. He comprehended it by the manner in which the Pole gave him his hand. One night and a day of reflection had undermined his work, and if Boleslas had enacted the comedy to the point of lulling his wife's suspicions and of deciding on the visit of that evening, it was because he had resolved not to consult any one and to lead his own inquiry. He was succeeding in the beginning; he had certainly perceived Madame Steno's white gown upon the terrace, while radiant Maud explained his unexpected return with her usual ingenuousness.

"This is what comes of sending to a doting father accounts of our boy's health.... I wrote him the other day that Luc had a little fever. He wrote to ask about its progress. I did not receive his letter. He became uneasy, and here he is."

"I will tell mamma," said Alba, passing out upon the terrace, but her haste seemed too slow to Dorsenne. He had such a presentiment of danger that he did not think of smiling, as he would have done on any other occasion, at the absolute success of the deception which he and Boleslas had planned on the preceding day, and of which the Count had said, with a fatuity now proven: "Maud will be so happy to see me that she will believe all."

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It was a scene both simple and tragical—of that order in which in society the most horrible incidents occur without a sound, without a gesture, amid phrases of conventionality and in a festal framework! Two of the spectators, at least, besides Julien, understood its importance—Ardea and Hafner. For neither the one nor the other had failed to notice the relations between Madame Steno and Maitland, much less her position with regard to Gorka. The writer, the grand seigneur, and the business man had, notwithstanding the differences of age and of position, a large experience of analogous circumstances.

They knew of what presence of mind a courageous woman was capable, when surprised, as was the Venetian. All these have declared since that they had never imagined more admirable self-possession, a composure more superbly audacious, than that displayed by Madame Steno, at that decisive moment. She appeared on the threshold of the French window, surprised and delighted, just in the measure she conformably should be. Her fair complexion, which the slightest emotion tinged with carmine, was bewitchingly pink. Not a quiver of her long lashes veiled her deep blue eyes, which gleamed brightly. With her smile, which exhibited her lovely teeth, the color of the large pearls which were twined about her neck, with the emeralds in her fair hair, with her fine shoulders displayed by the slope of her white corsage, with her delicate waist, with the splendor of her arms from which she had removed the gloves to yield them to the caresses of Maitland, and which gleamed with more emeralds, with her carriage marked by a certain haughtiness, she was truly a woman of another age, the sister of those radiant princesses whom the painters of Venice evoke beneath the marble porticoes, among apostles and martyrs. She advanced to Maud Gorka, whom she embraced affectionately, then, pressing Boleslas's hand, she said in a voice so warm, in which at times there were deep tones, softened by the habitual use of the caressing dialect of the lagoon:

"What a surprise! And you could not come to dine with us? Well, sit down, both of you, and relate to me the Odyssey of the traveller," and, turning toward Maitland, who had followed her into the salon with the insolent composure of a giant and of a lover:

"Be kind, my little Linco, and fetch me my fan and my gloves, which I left on the couch."

At that moment Dorsenne, who had only one fear, that of meeting Gorka's eyes—he could not have borne their glance—was again by the side of Alba Steno. The young girl's face, just now so troubled, was radiant. It seemed as if a great weight had been lifted from the pretty Contessina's mind.

"Poor child," thought the writer, "she would not think her mother could be so calm were she guilty. The Countess's manner is the reply to the anonymous letter. Have they written all to her? My God! Who can it be?"

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And he fell into a deep revery, interrupted only by the hum of the conversation, in which he did not participate. It would have satisfied him had he observed, instead of meditated, that the truth with regard to the author of the anonymous letters might have become clear to him, as clear as the courage of Madame Steno in meeting danger—as the blind confidence of Madame Gorka—as the disdainful imperturbability of Maitland before his rival and the suppressed rage of that rival—as the finesse of Hafner in sustaining the general conversation—as the assiduous attentions of Ardea to Fanny—as the emotion of the latter—as clear as Alba's sense of relief. All those faces, on Boleslas's entrance, had expressed different feelings. Only one had, for several minutes, expressed the joy of crime and the avidity of ultimately satisfied hatred. But as it was that of little Madame Maitland, the silent creature, considered so constantly by him as stupid and insignificant, Dorsenne had not paid more attention to it than had the other witnesses the surprising reappearance of the betrayed lover.

Every country has a metaphor to express the idea that there is no worse water than that which is stagnant. Still waters run deep, say the English, and the Italians, Still waters ruin bridges.

These adages would not be accurate if one did not forget them in practise, and the professional analyst of the feminine heart had entirely forgotten them on that evening.

CHAPTER V

COUNTESS STENO

A woman less courageous than the Countess, less capable of looking a situation in the face and of advancing to it, such an evening would have marked the prelude to one of those nights of insomnia when the mind exhausts in advance all the agonies of probable danger. Countess Steno did not know what weakness and fear were.

A creature of energy and of action, who felt herself to be above all danger, she attached no meaning to the word uneasiness. So she slept, on the night which followed that soiree, a sleep as profound, as refreshing, as if Gorka had never returned with vengeance in his heart, with threats in his eyes. Toward ten o'clock the following morning, she was in the tiny salon, or rather, the office adjoining her bedroom, examining several accounts brought by one of her men of business. Rising at seven o'clock, according to her custom, she had taken the cold bath in which, in summer as well as winter, she daily quickened her blood. She had breakfasted, 'à l'anglaise', following the rule to which she claimed to owe the preservation of her digestion, upon eggs, cold meat, and tea. She had made her complicated toilette, had visited her daughter to ascertain how she had slept, had written five letters, for her cosmopolitan salon compelled her to carry on an immense correspondence, which radiated between

Cairo and New York, St. Petersburg and Bombay, taking in Munich, London, and Madeira,

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and she was as faithful in friendship as she was inconstant in love. Her large handwriting, so elegant in its composition, had covered pages and pages before she said: "I have a rendezvous at eleven o'clock with Maitland. Ardea will be here at ten to talk of his marriage. I have accounts from Finoli to examine. I hope that Gorka will not come, too, this morning.".... Persons in whom the feeling of love is very complete, but very physical, are thus. They give themselves and take themselves back altogether. The Countess experienced no more pity than fear in thinking of her betrayed lover. She had determined to say to him, "I no longer love you," frankly, openly, and to offer him his choice between a final rupture or a firm friendship.

The only annoyance depended upon the word of explanation, which she desired to see postponed until afternoon, when she would be free, an annoyance which, however, did not prevent her from examining with her usual accuracy the additions and multiplications of her intendant, who stood near her with a face such as Bonifazio gave to his Pharisees. He managed the seven hundred hectares of Piove, near Padua, Madame Steno's favorite estate. She had increased the revenue from it tenfold, by the draining of a sterile and often malignant lagoon, which, situated a metre below the water-level, had proved of surprising fertility; and she calculated the probable operations for weeks in advance with the detailed and precise knowledge of rural cultivation which is the characteristic of the Italian aristocracy and the permanent cause of its vitality.

"Then you estimate the gain from the silkworms at about fifty kilos of cocoons to an ounce?"

"Yes, Excellency," replied the intendant.

"One hundred ounces of yellow; one hundred times fifty makes five thousand," resumed the Countess. "At four francs fifty?"

"Perhaps five, Excellency," said the intendant.

"Let us say twenty-two thousand five hundred," said the Countess, "and as much for the Japanese.... That will bring us in our outlay for building."

"Yes, Excellency. And about the wine?"

"I am of the opinion, after what you have told me of the vineyard, that you should sell as quickly as possible to Kauffmann's agent all that remains of the last crop, but not at less than six francs. You know it is necessary that our casks be emptied and cleaned after the month of August.... If we were to fail this time, for the first year that we manufacture our wine with the new machine, it would be too bad."

"Yes, Excellency. And the horses?"



"I think that is an opportunity we should not let escape. My advice is that you take the express to Florence to-day at two o'clock. You will reach Verona to-morrow morning. You will conclude the bargain. The horses will be sent to Pieve the same evening....

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"We have finished just in time," she continued, arranging the intendant's papers. She put them herself in their envelope, which she gave him. She had an extremely delicate sense of hearing, and she knew that the door of the antechamber opened. It seemed that the administrator took away in his portfolio all the preoccupation of this extraordinary woman. For, after concluding that dry conversation, or rather that monologue, she had her clearest and brightest smile with which to receive the new arrival, who was, fortunately, Prince d'Ardea. She said to the servant:

"I wish to speak with the Prince. If any one asks for me, do not admit him and do not send any one hither. Bring me the card." Then, turning toward the young man, "Well, *Simpaticone*," it was the nickname she gave him, "how did you finish your evening?"

"You would not believe me," replied Peppino Ardea, laughing; "I, who no longer have anything, not even my bed. I went to the club and I played.... For the first time in my life I won."

He was so gay in relating his childish prank, he jested so merrily about his ruin, that the Countess looked at him in surprise, as he had looked at her on entering.... We understand ourselves so little, and we know so little about our own singularities of character, that each one was surprised at finding the other so calm. Ardea could not comprehend that Madame Steno should not be at least uneasy about Gorka's return and the consequences which might result therefrom. She, on the other hand, admired the strange youth who, in his misfortune, could find such joviality at his command. He had evidently expended as much care upon his toilette as if he had not to take some immediate steps to assure his future, and his waistcoat, the color of his shirt, his cravat, his yellow shoes, the flower in his buttonhole, all united to make of him an amiable and incorrigibly frivolous dandy. She felt the need which strong characters have in the presence of weak ones; that of acting for the youth, of aiding him in spite of himself, and she attacked at once the question of marriage with Fanny Hafner. With her usual common-sense, and with her instinct of arranging everything, Madame Steno perceived in the union so many advantages for every one that she was in haste to conclude it as quickly as if it involved a personal affair.

The marriage was earnestly desired by the Baron, who had spoken of it to her for months. It suited Fanny, who would be converted to Catholicism with the consent of her father. It suited the Prince, who at one stroke would be freed from his embarrassment. Finally, it suited the name of Castagna. Although Peppino was its only representative at that time, and as, by an old family tradition, he bore a title different from the patronymic title of Pope Urban VII, the sale of the celebrated palace had called forth a scandal to which it was essential to put an end. The Countess had forgotten that she had assisted, without

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a protestation, in that sale. Had she not known through Hafner that he had bought at a low price an enormous heap of the Prince's bills of exchange? Did she not know the Baron well enough to be sure that M. Noe Ancona, the implacable creditor who sold the palace, was only the catspaw of this terrible friend? In a fit of ill-humor at the Baron, had she not herself accused him in Alba's presence of this very simple plan, to bring Ardea to a final catastrophe in order to offer him salvation in the form of the union with Fanny, and to execute at the same time an excellent operation? For, once freed from the mortgages which burdened them, the Prince's lands and buildings would regain their true value, and the imprudent speculator would find himself again as rich, perhaps richer.

"Come," said Madame Steno to the Prince, after a moment's silence and without any preamble, "it is now time to talk business. You dined by the side of my little friend yesterday; you had the entire evening in which to study her. Answer me frankly, would she not make the prettiest little Roman princess who could kneel in her wedding-gown at the tomb of the apostles? Can you not see her in her white gown, under her veil, alighting at the staircase of Saint Peter's from the carriage with the superb horses which her father has given her? Close your eyes and see her in your thoughts. Would she not be pretty? Would she not?"

"Very pretty," replied Ardea, smiling at the tempting vision Madame Steno had conjured up, "but she is not fair. And you know, to me, a woman who is not fair—ah, Countess! What a pity that in Venice, five years ago, on a certain evening—do you remember?"

"How much like you that is!" interrupted she, laughing her deep, clear laugh. "You came to see me this morning to talk to me of a marriage, unhoped for with your reputation of gamester, of supper-giver, of 'mauvais sujet'; of a marriage which fulfils conditions most improbable, so perfect are they—beauty, youth, intelligence, fortune, and even, if I have read my little friend aright, the beginning of an interest, of a very deep interest. And, for a little, you would make a declaration to me. Come, come!" and she extended to him for a kiss her beautiful hand, on which gleamed large emeralds. "You are forgiven. But answer—yes or no. Shall I make the proposal? If it is yes, I will go to the Palace Savorelli at two o'clock. I will speak to my friend Hafner. He will speak to his daughter, and it will not depend upon me if you have not their reply this evening or to-morrow morning. Is it yes? Is it no?"

"This evening? To-morrow?" exclaimed the Prince, shaking his head with a most comical gesture. "I can not decide like that. It is an ambush! I come to talk, to consult you."

"And on what?" asked Madame Steno, with a vivacity almost impatient. "Can I tell you anything you do not already know? In twenty-four hours, in forty-eight, in six months,

what difference will there be, I pray you? We must look at things as they are, however. To-morrow, the day after, the following days, will you be less embarrassed?"

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"No," said the Prince, "but—"

"There is no but," she resumed, allowing him to say no more than she had allowed her intendant. The despotism natural to puissant personalities scorned to be disguised in her, when there were practical decisions in which she was to take part. "The only serious objection you made to me when I spoke to you of this marriage six months ago was that Fanny was not a Catholic. I know today that she has only to be asked to be converted. So do not let us speak of that."

"No," said the Prince, "but—"

"As for Hafner," continued the Countess, "you will say he is my friend and that I am partial, but that partiality even is an opinion. He is precisely the father-in-law you need. Do not shake your head. He will repair all that needs repairing in your fortune. You have been robbed, my poor Peppino. You told me so yourself.... Become the Baron's son-in-law, and you will have news of your robbers. I know.... There is the Baron's origin and the suit of ten years ago with all the 'pettogolezzi' to which it gave rise. All that has not the common meaning. The Baron began life in a small way. He was from a family of Jewish origin—you see, I do not deceive you—but converted two generations back, so that the story of his change of religion since his stay in Italy is a calumny, like the rest. He had a suit in which he was acquitted. You would not require more than the law, would you?"

"No, but—"

"For what are you waiting, then?" concluded Madame Steno. "That it may be too late? How about your lands?"

"Ah! let me breathe, let me fan myself," said Ardea, who, indeed, took one of the Countess's fans from the desk. "I, who have never known in the morning what I would do in the evening, I, who have always lived according to my pleasure, you ask me to take in five minutes the resolution to bind myself forever!"

"I ask you to decide what you wish to do," returned the Countess. "It is very amusing to travel at one's pleasure. But when it is a question of arranging one's life, this childishness is too absurd. I know of only one way: to see one's aim and to march directly to it. Yours is very clear—to get out of this dilemma. The way is not less clear; it is marriage with a girl who has five millions dowry. Yes or no, will you have her?.... Ah," said she, suddenly interrupting herself, "I shall not have a moment to myself this morning, and I have an appointment at eleven o'clock!.... She looked at the timepiece on her table, which indicated twenty-five minutes past ten. She had heard the door open. The footman was already before her and presented to her a card upon a salver. She took the card, looked at it, frowned, glanced again at the clock, seemed to hesitate, then: "Let him wait in the small salon, and say that I will be there immediately," said

she, and turning again toward Ardea: "You think you have escaped. You have not. I do not give you permission to

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go before I return. I shall return in fifteen minutes. Would you like some newspapers? There are some. Books? There are some. Tobacco? This box is filled with cigars.... In a quarter of an hour I shall be here and I will have your reply. I wish it, do you hear? I wish it".... And on the threshold with another smile, using that time a term of patois common in Northern Italy and which is only a corruption of 'schiavo' or servant: 'Ciao Simpaticone.'

"What a woman!" said Peppino Ardea, when the door was closed upon the Countess. "Yes, what a pity that five years ago in Venice I was not free! Who knows? If I had dared, when she took me to my hotel in her gondola. She was about to leave San Giobbe. She had not yet accepted Boleslas. She would have advised—have directed me. I should have speculated on the Bourse, as she did, with Hafner's counsel. But not in the quality of son-in-law. I should not have been obliged to marry. And she would not now have such bad tobacco.".... He was on the point of lighting one of the Virginian cigarettes, a present from Maitland. He threw it away, making a grimace with his air of a spoiled child, at the risk of scorching the rug which lay upon the marble floor; and he passed into the antechamber in order to fetch his own case in the pocket of the light overcoat he had prudently taken on coming out after eight o'clock.

As he lighted one of the cigarettes in that case, filled with so-called Egyptian tobacco, mixed with opium and saltpetre, which he preferred to the tobacco of the American, he mechanically glanced at the card which the servant had left on going from the room—the card of the unknown visitor for whom Madame Steno had left him.

Ardea read upon it, with astonishment, these words:

Count Boleslas Gorka.

"She is better than I thought her," said he, on reentering the deserted office. "She had no need to bid me not to go. I think I should wait to see her return from that conversation."

It was indeed Boleslas whom the Countess found in the salon, which she had chosen as the room the most convenient for the stormy explanation she anticipated. It was isolated at the end of the hall, and was like a pendant to the terrace. It formed, with the dining-room, the entire ground-floor, or, rather, the entresol of the house. Madame Steno's apartments, as well as the other small salon in which Peppino was, were on the first floor, together with the rooms set apart for the Contessina and her German governess, Fraulein Weber, for the time being on a journey.

The Countess had not been mistaken. At the first glance exchanged on the preceding day with Gorka, she had divined that he knew all. She would have suspected it,

nevertheless, since Hafner had told her the few words indiscreetly uttered by Dorsenne on the clandestine return of the Pole to Rome. She had not at that time been mistaken in Boleslas's intentions, and she had no sooner looked in his face

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than she felt herself to be in peril. When a man has been the lover of a woman as that man had been hers, with the vibrating communion of a voluptuousness unbroken for two years, that woman maintains a sort of physiological, quasi-animal instinct. A gesture, the accent of a word, a sigh, a blush, a pallor, are signs for her that her intuition interprets with infallible certainty. How and why is that instinct accompanied by absolute oblivion of former caresses? It is a particular case of that insoluble and melancholy problem of the birth and death of love. Madame Steno had no taste for reflection of that order. Like all vigorous and simple creatures, she acknowledged and accepted it. As on the previous day, she became aware that the presence of her former lover no longer touched in her being the chord which had rendered her so weak to him during twenty-five months, so indulgent to his slightest caprices. It left her as cold as the marble of the bas-relief by Mino da Fiesole fitted into the wall just above the high chair upon which he leaned.

Boleslas, notwithstanding the paroxysm of lucid fury which he suffered at that moment, and which rendered him capable of the worst violence, had on his part a knowledge of the complete insensibility in which his presence left her. He had seen her so often, in the course of their long liaison, arrive at their morning rendezvous at that hour, in similar toilettes, so fresh, so supple, so youthful in her maturity, so eager for kisses, tender and ardent. She had now in her blue eyes, in her smile, in her entire person, some thing at once so gracious and so inaccessible, which gives to an abandoned lover the mad longing to strike, to murder, a woman who smiles at him with such a smile. At the same time she was so beautiful in the morning light, subdued by the lowered blinds, that she inspired him with an equal desire to clasp her in his arms whether she would or no. He had recognized, when she entered the room, the aroma of a preparation which she had used in her bath, and that trifle alone had aroused his passion far more than when the servant told him Madame Steno was engaged, and he wondered whether she was not alone with Maitland. Those impassioned, but suppressed, feelings trembled in the accent of the very simple phrase with which he greeted her. At certain moments, words are nothing; it is the tone in which they are uttered. And to the Countess that of the young man was terrible.

"I am disturbing you?" he asked, bowing and barely touching with the tips of his fingers the hand she had extended to him on entering. "Excuse me, I thought you alone. Will you be pleased to name another time for the conversation which I take the liberty of demanding?"

"No, no," she replied, not permitting him to finish his sentence. "I was with Peppino Ardea, who will await me," said she, gently. "Moreover, you know I am in all things for the immediate. When one has something to say, it should be said, one, two, three?.... First, there is not much to say, and then it is better said.... There is nothing that will

sooner render difficult easy explanations and embroil the best of friends than delay and maintaining silence.”

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"I am very happy to find you in such a mind," replied Boleslas, with a sarcasm which distorted his handsome face into a smile of atrocious hatred. The good-nature displayed by her cut him to the heart, and he continued, already less self-possessed: "It is indeed an explanation which I think I have the right to ask of you, and which I have come to claim."

"To claim, my dear?" said the Countess, looking him fixedly in the face without lowering her proud eyes, in which those imperative words had kindled a flame.

If she had been admirable the preceding evening in facing as she had done the return of her discarded lover, on coming direct from the *tete-a-tete* with her new one, perhaps, at that moment, she was doubly so, when she did not have her group of intimate friends to support her. She was not sure that the madman who confronted her was not armed, and she believed him perfectly capable of killing her, while she could not defend herself. But a part had to be played sooner or later, and she played it without flinching. She had not spoken an untruth in saying to Peppino Ardea: "I know only one way: to see one's aim and to march directly to it." She wanted a definitive rupture with Boleslas. Why should she hesitate as to the means?

She was silent, seeking for words. He continued:

"Will you permit me to go back three months, although that is, it seems, a long space of time for a woman's memory? I do not know whether you recall our last meeting? Pardon, I meant to say the last but one, since we met last night. Do you concede that the manner in which we parted then did not presage the manner in which we met?"

"I concede it," said the Countess, with a gleam of angry pride in her eyes, "although I do not very much like your style of expression. It is the second time you have addressed me as an accuser, and if you assume that attitude it will be useless to continue."

"Catherine!".... That cry of the young man, whose anger was increasing, decided her whom he thus addressed to precipitate the issue of a conversation in which each reply was to be a fresh burst of rancor.

"Well?" she inquired, crossing her arms in a manner so imperious that he paused in his menace, and she continued: "Listen, Boleslas, we have talked ten minutes without saying anything, because neither of us has the courage to put the question such as we know and feel it to be. Instead of writing to me, as you did, letters which rendered replies impossible to me; instead of returning to Rome and hiding yourself like a malefactor; instead of coming to my home last night with that threatening face; instead of approaching me this morning with the solemnity of a judge, why did you not question me simply, frankly, as one who knows that I have loved him very, very much?.... Having been lovers, is that a reason for detesting each other when we cease those relations?"



“When we cease those relations!” replied Gorka. “So you no longer love me? Ah, I knew it; I guessed it after the first week of that fatal absence! But to think that you should tell it to me some day like that, in that calm voice which is a horrible blasphemy for our entire past. No, I do not believe it. I do not yet believe it. Ah, it is too infamous.”

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"Why?" interrupted the Countess, raising her head with still more haughtiness.... "There is only one thing infamous in love, and that is a falsehood. Ah, I know it. You men are not accustomed to meeting true women, who have the respect, the religion of their sentiment. I have that respect; I practise that religion. I repeat that I loved you a great deal, Boleslas. I did not hide it from you formerly. I was as loyal to you as truth itself. I have the consciousness of being so still, in offering you, as I do, a firm friendship, the friendship of man for man, who only asks to prove to you the sincerity of his devotion."

"I, a friendship with you, I—I—I?" exclaimed Boleslas. "Have I had enough patience in listening to you as I have listened? I heard you lie to me and scented the lie in the same breath. Why do you not ask me as well to form a friendship for him with whom you have replaced me? Ah, so you think I am blind, and you fancy I did not see that Maitland near you, and that I did not know at the first glance what part he was playing in your life? You did not think I might have good reasons for returning as I did? You did not know that one does not dally with one whom one loves as I love you?.... It is not true.... You have not been loyal to me, since you took this man for a lover while you were still my mistress. You had not the right, no, no, no, you had not the right!.... And what a man!.... If it had been Ardea, Dorsenne, no matter whom, that I might not blush for you.... But that brute, that idiot, who has nothing in his favor, neither good looks, birth, elegance, mind nor talent, for he has none—he has nothing but his neck and shoulders of a bull.... It is as if you had deceived me with a lackey.... No..... it is too terrible.... Ah, Catherine, swear to me that it is not true. Tell me that you no longer love me, I will submit, I will go away, I will accept all, provided that you swear to me you do not love that man—swear, swear!"... he added, grasping her hands with such violence that she uttered a slight exclamation, and, disengaging herself, said to him:

"Cease; you pain me. You are mad, Gorka; that can be your sole excuse.... I have nothing to swear to you. What I feel, what I think, what I do no longer concerns you after what I have told you.... Believe what it pleases you to believe.... But," and the irritation of an enamored woman, wounded in the man she adores, possessed her, "you shall not speak twice of one of my friends as you have just spoken. You have deeply offended me, and I will not pardon you. In place of the friendship I offered you so honestly, we will have no further connections excepting those of society. That is what you desired.... Try not to render them impossible to yourself. Be correct at least in form. Remember you have a wife, I have a daughter, and that we owe it to them to spare them the knowledge of this unhappy rupture.... God is my witness, I wished to have it otherwise."

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"My wife! Your daughter!" cried Boleslas with bitterness. "This is indeed the hour to remember them and to put them between you and my just vengeance! They never troubled you formerly, the two poor creatures, when you began to win my love?.... It was convenient for you that they should be friends! And I lent myself to it!.... I accepted such baseness—that to-day you might take shelter behind the two innocents!... No, it shall not be.... you shall not escape me thus. Since it is the only point on which I can strike you, I will strike you there. I hold you by that means, do you hear, and I will keep you. Either you dismiss that man, or I will no longer respect anything. My wife shall know all! Her! So much the better! For some time I have been stifled by my lies.... Your daughter, too, shall know all. She shall judge you now as she would judge you one day."

As he spoke he advanced to her with a manner so cruel that she recoiled. A few more moments and the man would have carried out his threat. He was about to strike her, to break objects around him, to call forth a terrible scandal. She had the presence of mind of an audacity more courageous still. An electric bell was near at hand. She pressed it, while Gorka said to her, with a scornful laugh, "That was the only affront left you to offer me—to summon your servants to defend you."

"You are mistaken," she replied. "I am not afraid. I repeat you are mad, and I simply wish to prove it to you by recalling you to the reality of your situation.... Bid Mademoiselle Alba come down," said she to the footman whom her ring had summoned. That phrase was the drop of cold water which suddenly broke the furious jet of vapor. She had found the only means of putting an end to the terrible scene. For, notwithstanding his menace, she knew that Maud's husband always recoiled before the young girl, the friend of his wife, of whose delicacy and sensibility he was aware.

Gorka was capable of the most dangerous and most cruel deeds, in an excess of passion augmented by vanity.

He had in him a chivalrous element which would paralyze his frenzy before Alba. As for the immorality of that combination of defence which involved her daughter in her rupture with a vindictive lover, the Countess did not think of that. She often said: "She is my comrade, she is my friend.".... And she thought so. To lean upon her in that critical moment was only natural to her. In the tempest of indignation which shook Gorka, the sudden appeal to innocent Alba appeared to him the last degree of cynicism. During the short space of time which elapsed between the departure of the footman and the arrival of the young girl, he only uttered these words, repeating them as he paced the floor, while his former mistress defied him with her bold gaze:

"I scorn you, I scorn you; ah, how I scorn you!" Then, when he heard the door open: "We will resume our conversation, Madame."

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"When you wish," replied Countess Steno, and to her daughter, who entered, she said: "You know the carriage is to come at ten minutes to eleven, and it is now the quarter. Are you ready?"

"You can see," replied the young girl, displaying her pearl-gray gloves, which she was just buttoning, while on her head a large hat of black tulle made a dark and transparent aureole around her fair head. Her delicate bust was displayed to advantage in the corsage Maitland had chosen for her portrait, a sort of cuirass of a dark-blue material, finished at the neck and wrists with bands of velvet of a darker shade. The fine lines of cuffs and a collar gave to that pure face a grace of youth younger than her age.

She had evidently come at her mother's call, with the haste and the smile of that age. Then, to see Gorka's expression and the feverish brilliance of the Countess's eyes had given her what she called, in an odd but very appropriate way, the sensation of "a needle in the heart," of a sharp, fine point, which entered her breast to the left. She had slept a sleep so profound, after the soiree of the day before, on which she had thought she perceived in her mother's attitude between the Polish count and the American painter a proof of certain innocence.

She admired her mother so much, she thought her so intelligent, so beautiful, so good, that to doubt her was a thought not to be borne! There were times when she doubted her. A terrible conversation about the Countess, overheard in a ballroom, a conversation between two men, who did not know Alba to be behind them, had formed the principal part of the doubt, which, by turns, had increased and diminished, which had abandoned and tortured her, according to the signs, as little decisive as Madame Steno's tranquillity of the preceding day or her confusion that morning. It was only an impression, very rapid, instantaneous, the prick of a needle, which merely leaves after it a drop of blood, and yet she had a smile with which to say to Boleslas:

"How did Maud rest? How is she this morning? And my little friend Luc?"

"They are very well," replied Gorka. The last stage of his fury, suddenly arrested by the presence of the young girl, was manifested, but only to the Countess, by the simple phrase to which his eyes and his voice lent an extreme bitterness: "I found them as I left them.... Ah! They love me dearly.... I leave you to Peppino, Countess," added he, walking toward the door. "Mademoiselle, I will bear your love to Maud."He had regained all the courtesy which a long line of savage 'grands seigneurs', but 'grands seigneurs' nevertheless, had instilled in him. If his bow to Madame Steno was very ceremonious, he put a special grace in the low bow with which he took leave of the Contessina. It was merely a trifle, but the Countess was keen enough to perceive it. She was touched by it, she whom despair, fury, and threats had found so impassive. For an instant she was vaguely humiliated by the success which she had gained over the man whom she would, voluntarily, five minutes before, have had cast out of doors

by her servants. She was silent, oblivious even of her daughter's presence, until the latter recalled her to herself by saying:

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"Shall I put on my veil and fetch my parasol?"

"You can join me in the office, whither I am going to talk with Ardea," replied her mother; adding, "I shall perhaps have some news to tell you in the carriage which will give you pleasure!".... She had again her bright smile, and she did not mistrust while she resumed her conversation with Peppino that poor Alba, on reentering her chamber, wiped from her pale cheeks two large tears, and that she opened, to re-read it, the infamous anonymous letter received the day before. She knew by heart all the perfidious phrases. Must it not have been that the mind which had composed them was blinded by vengeance to such a degree that it had no scruples about laying before the innocent child a denunciation which ran thus:

"A true friend of Mademoiselle Steno warns her that she is compromised, more than a marriageable young girl should be, in playing, with regard to M. Maitland the role she has already played with regard to M. Goyka. There are conditions of blindness so voluntary that they become complicity."

Those words, enigmatical to any one else, but to the Contessina horribly clear, had been, like the letters of which Boleslas had told Dorsenne, cut from a journal and pasted on a sheet of paper. How had Alba trembled on reading that note for the first time, with an emotion increased by the horror of feeling hovering over her and her mother a hatred so relentless! Later in the day how much had the words exchanged with Dorsenne comforted her, and how reassured had she been by the Countess's imperturbability on the entrance of Boleslas Gorka! Fragile peace, which had vanished when she saw her mother and the husband of her best friend face to face, with traces in their eyes, in their gestures, upon their countenances, of an angry scene! The thought "Why were they thus! What had they said?" again occurred to her to sadden her. Suddenly she crushed in her hand with violence the anonymous letter, which gave a concrete form to her sorrow and her suspicion, and, lighting a taper, she held it to the paper, which the flames soon reduced to ashes. She ran her fingers through the debris until there was very little left, and then, opening the window, she cast it to the winds.

She looked at her glove after doing this—her glove, a few moments before, of so delicate a gray, now stained by the smoky dust. It was symbolical of the stain which the letter, even when destroyed, had left upon her mind. The gloves, too, inspired her with horror. She hastily drew them off, and, when she descended to rejoin Madame Steno, it was not any more possible to perceive on those hands, freshly gloved, the traces of that tragical childishness, than it was possible to discern, beneath the large veil which she had tied over her hat, the traces of tears. She found the mother for whom she was suffering so much, wearing, too, a large sun-hat, but a white one with a white veil, beneath which could be seen her fair hair, her sparkling blue eyes and pink-and-white complexion; her form was enveloped in a gown of a material and cut more youthful than her daughter's, while, radiant with delight, she said to Peppino Ardea:

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"Well, I congratulate you on having made up your mind. The step shall be taken to-day, and you will be grateful to me all your life!"

"Yet," replied the young man, "I understand myself. I shall regret my decision all the afternoon. It is true," he added, philosophically, "that I should regret it just as much if I had not made it."

"You have guessed that we were talking of Fanny's marriage," said Madame Steno to her daughter several minutes later, when they were seated side by side, like two sisters, in the victoria which was bearing them toward Maitland's studio.

"Then," asked the Contessina, "you think it will be arranged?"

"It is arranged," gayly replied Madame Steno. "I am commissioned to make the proposition.... How happy all three will be!.... Hafner has aimed at it this long time! I remember how, in 1880, after his suit, he came to see me in Venice—you and Fanny played on the balcony of the palace—he questioned me about the Quirinal, the Vatican and society.... Then he concluded, pointing to his daughter, 'I shall make a Roman princess of the little one!'"

The 'dogaresse' was so delighted at the thought of the success of her negotiations, so delighted, too, to go, as she was going, to Maitland's studio, behind her two English cobs, which trotted so briskly, that she did not see on the sidewalk Boleslas Gorka, who watched her pass.

Alba was so troubled by that fresh proof of her mother's lack of conscience that she did not notice Maud's husband either. Baron Hafner's and Prince d'Ardea's manner toward Fanny had inspired her the day before with a dolorous analogy between the atmosphere of falsehood in which that poor girl lived and the atmosphere in which she at times thought she herself lived. That analogy again possessed her, and she again felt the "needle in the heart" as she recalled what she had heard before from the Countess of the intrigue by which Baron Justus Hafner had, indeed, ensnared his future son-in-law. She was overcome by infinite sadness, and she lapsed into one of her usual silent moods, while the Countess related to her Peppino's indecision. What cared she for Boleslas's anger at that moment? What could he do to her? Gorka was fully aware of her utter carelessness of the scene which had taken place between them, as soon as he saw the victoria pass. For some time he remained standing, watching the large white and black hats disappear down the Rue du Vingt Septembre.

This thought took possession of him at once. Madame Steno and her daughter were going to Maitland's atelier.... He had no sooner conceived that bitter suspicion than he felt the necessity of proving it at once. He entered a passing cab, just as Ardea, having left the Villa, Steno after him, sauntered up, saying:

“Where are you going? May I go with you that we may have a few moments’ conversation?”

“Impossible,” replied Gorka. “I have a very urgent appointment, but in an hour I shall perhaps have occasion to ask a service of you. Where shall I find you?”

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"At home," said Peppino, "lunching."

"Very well," replied Boleslas, and, raising himself, he whispered in the cabman's ear, in a voice too low for his friend to hear what he said: "Ten francs for you if in five minutes you drive me to the corner of the Rue Napoleon III and the Place de la Victor-Emmanuel."

The man gathered up his reins, and, by some sleight-of-hand, the jaded horse which drew the botte was suddenly transformed into a fine Roman steed, the botte itself into a light carriage as swift as the Tuscan carrozzelle, and the whole disappeared in a cross street, while Peppino said to himself:

"There is a fine fellow who would do so much better to remain with his friend Ardea than to go whither he is going. This affair will end in a duel. If I had not to liquidate that folly," and he pointed out with the end of his cane a placard relative to the sale of his own palace, "I would amuse myself by taking Caterina from both of them. But those little amusements must wait until after my marriage."

As we have seen, the cunning Prince had not been mistaken as to the course taken by the cab Gorka had hailed. It was indeed into the neighborhood of the atelier occupied by Maitland that the discarded lover hastened, but not to the atelier. The madman wished to prove to himself that the exhibition of his despair had availed him nothing, and that, scarcely rid of him, Madame Steno had repaired to the other. What would it avail him to know it and what would the evidence prove? Had the Countess concealed those sittings—those convenient sittings—as the jealous lover had told Dorsenne? The very thought of them caused the blood to flow in his veins much more feverishly than did the thoughts of the other meetings. For those he could still doubt, notwithstanding the anonymous letters, notwithstanding the tete-a-tete on the terrace, notwithstanding the insolent "Linco," whom she had addressed thus before him, while of the long intimacies of the studio he was certain. They maddened him, and, at the same time, by that strange contradiction which is characteristic of all jealousy, he hungered and thirsted to prove them.

He alighted from his cab at the corner he had named to his cabman, and from which point he could watch the Rue Leopardi, in which was his rival's house. It was a large structure in the Moorish style, built by the celebrated Spanish artist, Juan Santigosa, who had been obliged to sell all five years before—house, studio, horses, completed paintings, sketches begun—in order to pay immense losses at gaming. Florent Chapron had at the time bought the sort of counterfeit Alhambra, a portion of which he rented to his brother-in-law. During the few moments that he stood at the corner, Boleslas Gorka recalled having visited that house the previous year, while taking, in the company of Madame Steno, Alba, Maud, and Hafner, one of those walks of which fashionable women are so fond in Rome

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as well as in Paris. An irrational instinct had rendered the painter and his paintings antipathetic to him at their first meeting. Had he had sufficient cause? Suddenly, on leaning forward in such a manner as to see without being seen, he perceived a victoria which entered the Rue Leopardi, and in that victoria the black hat of Mademoiselle Steno and the light one of her mother. In two minutes more the elegant carriage drew up at the Moorish structure, which gleamed among the other buildings in that street, for the most part unfinished, with a sort of insolent, sumptuousness.

The two ladies alighted and disappeared through the door, which closed upon them, while the coachman started up his horses at the pace of animals which are returning to their stable. He checked them that they might not become overheated, and the fine cobs trembled impatiently in their harnesses. Evidently the Countess and Alba were in the studio for a long sitting. What had Boleslas learned that he did not already know? Was he not ridiculous, standing upon the sidewalk of the square in the centre of which rose the ruin of an antique reservoir, called, for a reason more than doubtful, the trophy of Marius. With one glance the young man took in this scene—the empty victoria turning in the opposite direction, the large square, the ruin, the row of high houses, his cab. He appeared to himself so absurd for being there to spy out that of which he was only too sure, that he burst into a nervous laugh and reentered his cab, giving his own address to the cabman: Palazzetto Doria, Place de Venise. The cab that time started off leisurely, for the man comprehended that the mad desire to arrive hastily no longer possessed his fare. By a sudden metamorphosis, the swift Roman steed became a common nag, and the vehicle a heavy machine which rumbled along the streets. Boleslas yielded to depression, the inevitable reaction of an excess of violence such as he had just experienced. His composure could not last. The studio, in which was Madame Steno, began to take a clear form in the jealous lover's mind in proportion as he drove farther from it. In his thoughts he saw his former mistress walking about in the framework of tapestry, armor, studies begun, as he had frequently seen her walking in his smoking-room, with the smile upon her lips of an amorous woman, touching the objects among which her lover lives. He saw impassive Alba, who served as chaperon in the new intrigue of her mother's with the same naivete she had formerly employed in shielding their liaison. He saw Maitland with his indifferent glance of the day before, the glance of a preferred lover, so sure of his triumph that he did not even feel jealous of the former lover.

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The absolute tranquillity of one who replaces us in an unfaithful mistress's affections augments our fury still more if we have the misfortune to be placed in a position similar to Gorka's. In a moment his rival's evocation became to him impossible to bear. He was very near his own home, for he was just at that admirable square encumbered with the debris of basilica, the Forum of Trajan, which the statue of St. Peter at the summit of the column overlooks. Around the base of the sculptured marble, legends attest the triumph of the humble Galilean fisherman who landed at the port of the Tiber 1800 years ago, unknown, persecuted, a beggar. What a symbol and what counsel to say with the apostle: "Whither shall we go, Lord? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life!"

But Gorka was neither a Montfanon nor a Dorsenne to hear within his heart or his mind the echo of such precepts. He was a man of passion and of action, who only saw his passion and his actions in the position in which fortune threw him. A fresh access of fury recalled to him Maitland's attitude of the preceding day. This time he would no longer control himself. He violently pulled the surprised coachman's sleeve, and called out to him the address of the Rue Leopardi in so imperative a tone that the horse began again to trot as he had done before, and the cab to go quickly through the labyrinth of streets. A wave of tragical desire rolled into the young man's heart. No, he would not bear that affront. He was too bitterly wounded in the most sensitive chords of his being, in his love as well as his pride. Both struggled within him, and another instinct as well, urging him to the mad step he was about to take. The ancient blood of the Palatines, with regard to which Dorsenne always jested, boiled in his veins. If the Poles have furnished many heroes for dramas and modern romances, they have remained, through their faults, so dearly atoned for, the race the most chivalrously, the most madly brave in Europe. When men of so intemperate and so complex an excitability are touched to a certain depth, they think of a duel as naturally as the descendants of a line of suicides think of killing themselves.

Joyous Ardea, with his Italian keenness, had seen at a glance the end to which Gorka's nature would lead him. The betrayed lover required a duel to enable him to bear the treason. He might wound, he might, perhaps, kill his rival, and his passion would be satisfied, or else he would risk being killed himself, and the courage he would display braving death would suffice to raise him in his own estimation. A mad thought possessed him and caused him to hasten toward the Rue Leopardi, to provoke his rival suddenly and before Madame Steno! Ah, what pleasure it would give him to see her tremble, for she surely would tremble when she saw him enter the studio! But he would be correct, as she had so insolently asked him to be. He would go, so to speak, to see Alba's portrait. He would

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dissemble, then he would be better able to find a pretext for an argument. It is so easy to find one in the simplest conversation, and from an argument a quarrel is soon born. He would speak in such a manner that Maitland would have to answer him. The rest would follow. But would Alba Steno be present? Ha, so much the better! He would be so much more at ease, if the altercation arose before her, to deceive his own wife as to the veritable reason of the duel. Ah, he would have his dispute at any price, and from the moment that the seconds had exchanged visits the American's fate would be decided. He knew how to render it impossible for the fellow to remain longer in Rome. The young man was greatly wrought up by the romance of the provocation and the duel.

"How it refreshes the blood to be avenged upon two fools," said he to himself, descending from his cab and inquiring at the door of the Moorish house.

"Monsieur Maitland?" he asked the footman, who at one blow dissipated his excitement by replying with this simple phrase, the only one of which he had not thought in his frenzy:

"Monsieur is not at home."

"He will be at home to me," replied Boleslas. "I have an appointment with Madame and Mademoiselle Steno, who are awaiting me."

"Monsieur's orders are strict," replied the servant.

Accustomed, as are all servants entrusted with the defence of an artist's work, to a certain rigor of orders, he yet hesitated, in the face of the untruth which Gorka had invented on the spur of the moment, and he was about to yield to his importunity when some one appeared on the staircase of the hall. That some one was none other than Florent Chapron. Chance decreed that the latter should send for a carriage in which to go to lunch, and that the carriage should be late. At the sound of wheels stopping at the door, he looked out of one of the windows of his apartment, which faced the street. He saw Gorka alight. Such a visit, at such an hour, with the persons who were in the atelier, seemed to him so dangerous that he ran downstairs immediately. He took up his hat and his cane, to justify his presence in the hall by the very natural excuse that he was going out. He reached the middle of the staircase just in time to stop the servant, who had decided to "go and see," and, bowing to Boleslas with more formality than usual:

"My brother-in-law is not there, Monsieur," said he; and he added, turning to the footman, in order to dispose of him in case an altercation should arise between the importunate visitor and himself, "Nero, fetch me a handkerchief from my room. I have forgotten mine."



"That order could not be meant for me, Monsieur," insisted Boleslas. "Monsieur Maitland has made an appointment with me, with Madame Steno, in order to show us Alba's portrait."

"It is no order," replied Florent. "I repeat to you that my brother-in-law has gone out. The studio is closed, and it is impossible for me to undertake to open it to show you the picture, since I have not the key. As for Madame and Mademoiselle Steno, they have not been here for several days; the sittings have been interrupted."

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"What is still more extraordinary, Monsieur," replied the other, "is that I saw them with my own eyes, five minutes ago, enter this house and I, too, saw their carriage drive away.".... He felt his anger increase and direct itself altogether against the watch-dog so suddenly raised upon the threshold of his rival's house.

Florent, on his part, had begun to lose patience. He had within him the violent irritability of the negro blood, which he did not acknowledge, but which slightly tinted his complexion. The manner of Madame Steno's former lover seemed to him so outrageous that he replied very dryly, as he opened the door, in order to oblige the caller to leave:

"You are mistaken,—Monsieur, that is all."

"You are aware, Monsieur," replied Boleslas, "of the fact that you just addressed me in a tone which is not the one which I have a right to expect from you.... When one charges one's self with a certain business, it is at least necessary to introduce a little form."

"And I, Monsieur," replied Chapron, "would be very much obliged to you if, when you address me, you would not do so in enigmas. I do not know what you mean by 'a certain business,' but I know that it is unbecoming a gentleman to act as you have acted at the door of a house which is not yours and for reasons that I can not comprehend."

"You will comprehend them very soon, Monsieur," said Boleslas, beside himself, "and you have not constituted yourself your brother's slave without motives."

He had no sooner uttered that sentence than Florent, incapable any longer of controlling himself, raised his cane with a menacing gesture, which the Polish Count arrested just in time, by seizing it in his right hand. It was the work of a second, and the two men were again face to face, both pale with anger, ready to collar one another rudely, when the sound of a door closing above their heads recalled to them their dignity. The servant descended the stairs. It was Chapron who first regained his self-possession, and he said to Boleslas, in a voice too low to be heard by any one but him:

"No scandal, Monsieur, eh? I shall have the honor of sending two of my friends to you."

"It is I, Monsieur," replied Gorka, "who will send you two. You shall answer to me for your manner, I assure you."

"Ha! Whatsoever you like," said the other. "I accept all your conditions in advance.... But one thing I ask of you," he added, "that no names be mentioned. There would be too many persons involved. Let it appear that we had an argument on the street, that we disagreed, and that I threatened you."

"So be it," said Boleslas, after a pause. "You have my word. There is a man," said he to himself five minutes later, when again rolling through the streets in his cab, after giving

the cabman the address of the Palais Castagna. "Yes, there is a man.... He was very insolent just now, and I lacked composure. I am too nervous. I should be sorry to injure the boy. But, patience, the other will lose nothing by waiting."

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CHAPTER VI

THE INCONSISTENCY OF AN OLD CHOUAN

While the madman, Boleslas, hastened to Ardea to ask his cooperation in the most unreasonable of encounters, with a species of savage delight, Florent Chapron was possessed by only one thought: at any price to prevent his brother-in-law from suspecting his quarrel with Madame Steno's former lover and the duel which was to be the result. His passionate friendship for Lincoln was so strong that it prevented the nervousness which usually precedes a first duel, above all when he who appears upon the ground has all his life neglected practising with the sword or pistol. To a fencer, and to one accustomed to the use of firearms, a duel means a number of details which remove the thought of danger. The man conceives the possibilities of the struggle, of a deed to be bravely accomplished. That is sufficient to inspire him with a composure which absolute ignorance can not inspire, unless it is supported by one of those deep attachments often so strong within us. Such was the case with Florent.

Dorsenne's instinct, which could so easily read the heart, was not mistaken there; the painter had in his wife's brother a friend of self-sacrificing devotion. He could exact anything of the Mameluke, or, rather, of that slave, for it was the blood of the slaves, of his ancestors, which manifested itself in Chapron by so total an absorption of his personality. The atavism of servitude has these two effects which are apparently contradictory: it produces fathomless capacities of sacrifice or of perfidy. Both of these qualities were embodied in the brother and in the sister. As happens, sometimes, the two characteristics of their race were divided between them; one had inherited all the virtue of self-sacrifice, the other all the puissance of hypocrisy.

But the drama called forth by Madame Steno's infidelity, and finally by Gorka's rashness, would only expose to light the moral conditions which Dorsenne had foreseen without comprehending. He was completely ignorant of the circumstances under which Florent had developed, of those under which Maitland and he had met, of how Maitland had decided to marry Lydia; finally an exceptional and lengthy history which it is necessary to sketch here at least, in order to render clear the singular relations of those three beings.

As we have seen, the allusion coarsely made by Boleslas to negro blood marked the moment when Florent lost all self-control, to the point even of raising his cane to his insolent interlocutor. That blemish, hidden with the most jealous care, represented to the young man what it had represented to his father, the vital point of self-love, secret and constant humiliation. It was very faint, the trace of negro blood which flowed in their veins, so faint that it was necessary to be told of it, but it was sufficient to render a stay in America so much the more intolerable

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to both, as they had inherited all the pride of their name, a name which the Emperor mentioned at St. Helena as that of one of his bravest officers. Florent's grandfather was no other, indeed, than the Colonel Chapron who, as Napoleon desired information, swam the Dnieper on horseback, followed a Cossack on the opposite shore, hunted him like a stag, laid him across his saddle and took him back to the French camp. When the Empire fell, that hero, who had compromised himself in an irreparable manner in the army of the Loire, left his country and, accompanied by a handful of his old comrades, went to found in the southern part of the United States, in Alabama, a sort of agricultural colony, to which they gave the name—which it still preserves—of Arcola, a naive and melancholy tribute to the fabulous epoch which, however, had been dear to them.

Who would have recognized the brilliant colonel, who penetrated by the side of Montbrun the heart of the Grande Redoute, in the planter of forty-five, busy with his cotton and his sugar-cane, who made a fortune in a short time by dint of energy and good sense? His success, told of in France, was the indirect cause of another emigration to Texas, led by General Lallemand, and which terminated so disastrously. Colonel Chapron had not, as can be believed, acquired in roaming through Europe very scrupulous notions on the relations of the two sexes. Having made the mother of his child a pretty and sweet-tempered mulattress whom he met on a short trip to New Orleans, and whom he brought back to Arcola, he became deeply attached to the charming creature and to his son, so much the more so as, with a simple difference of complexion and of hair, the child was the image of him. Indeed, the old warrior, who had no relatives in his native land, on dying, left his entire fortune to that son, whom he had christened Napoleon. While he lived, not one of his neighbors dared to treat the young man differently from the way in which his father treated him.

But it was not the same when the prestige of the Emperor's soldier was not there to protect the boy against that aversion to race which is morally a prejudice, but socially interprets an instinct of preservation of infallible surety. The United States has grown only on that condition.

[Those familiar with the works of Bourget will recognize here again his well known antipathy for the United States of America. Mark Twain in the late 1800's felt obliged to rebut some of Bourget's prejudice: "What Paul Bourget thinks of us." D.W.]

The mixture of blood would there have dissolved the admirable Anglo-Saxon energy which the struggle against a nature at once very rich and very mutinous has exalted to such surprising splendor. It is not necessary to ask those who are the victims of such an instinct to comprehend the legal injustice. They only feel its ferocity. Napoleon Chapron, rejected in several offers of marriage, thwarted in his plans,

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humiliated under twenty trifling circumstances by the Colonel's former companions, became a species of misanthrope. He lived, sustained by a twofold desire, on the one hand to increase his fortune, and on the other to wed a white woman. It was not until 1857, at the age of thirty-five, that he realized the second of his two projects. In the course of a trip to Europe, he became interested on the steamer in a young English governess, who was returning from Canada, summoned home by family troubles. He met her again in London. He helped her with such delicacy in her distress, that he won her heart, and she consented to become his wife. From that union were born, one year apart, Florent and Lydia.

Lydia had cost her mother her life, at the moment when the War of Secession jeopardized the fortune of Chapron, who, fortunately for him, had, in his desire to enrich himself quickly, invested his money a little on all sides. He was only partly ruined, but that semi-ruin prevented him from returning to Europe, as he had intended. He was compelled to remain in Alabama to repair that disaster, and he succeeded, for at his death, in 1880, his children inherited more than four hundred thousand dollars each. The incomparable father's devotion had not limited itself to the building up of a large fortune. He had the courage to deprive himself of the presence of the two beings whom he adored, to spare them the humiliation of an American school, and he sent them after their twelfth year to England, the boy to the Jesuits of Beaumont, the girl to the convent of the Sacred Heart, at Roehampton. After four years there, he sent them to Paris, Florent to Vaugirard, Lydia to the Rue de Varenne, and just at the time that he had realized the amount he considered requisite, when he was preparing to return to live near them in a country without prejudices, a stroke of apoplexy took him off suddenly. The double wear of toil and care had told upon one of those organisms which the mixture of the black and white races often produces, athletic in appearance, but of a very keen sensibility, in which the vital resistance is not in proportion to the muscular vigor.

Whatever care the man, so deeply grieved by the blemish upon his birth, had taken to preserve his children from a similar experience, he had not been able to do so, and soon after his son entered Beaumont his trials began. The few boys with whom Florent was thrown in contact, in the hotels or in his walks, during his sojourn in America, had already made him feel that humiliation from which his father had suffered so much. The youth of twelve, silent and absurdly sensitive, who made his appearance on the lawn of the peaceful English college on an autumn morning, brought with him a self-love already bleeding, to whom it was a delightful surprise to find himself among comrades of his age who did not even seem to suspect that any difference separated them from him. It required the perception of a Yankee to discern,

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beneath the nails of the handsome boy with the dark complexion, the tiny drops of negro blood, so far removed. Between an octoroon and a creole a European can never tell the difference. Florent had been represented as what he really was, the grandson of one of the Emperor's best officers. His father had taken particular pains to designate him as French, and his companions only saw in him a pupil like themselves, coming from Alabama—that is to say, from a country almost as chimerical as Japan or China.

All who in early youth have known the torture of apprehension will be able to judge of the poor child's agony when, after four months of a life amid the warmth of sympathy, one of the Jesuit fathers who directed the college announced to him, thinking it would afford him pleasure, the expected arrival of an American, of young Lincoln Maitland. This was to Florent so violent a shock that he had a fever for forty-eight hours. In after years he could remember what thoughts possessed him on the day when he descended from his room to the common refectory, sure that as soon as he was brought face to face with the new pupil he would have to sustain the disdainful glance suffered so frequently in the United States. There was no doubt in his mind that, his origin once discovered, the atmosphere of kindness in which he moved with so much surprise would soon be changed to hostility. He could again see himself crossing the yard; could hear himself called by Father Roberts—the master who had told him of the expected new arrival—and his surprise when Lincoln Maitland had given him the hearty handshake of one demi-compatriot who meets another. He was to learn later that that reception was quite natural, coming from the son of an Englishman, educated altogether by his mother, and taken from New York to Europe before his fifth year, there to live in a circle as little American as possible. Chapron did not reason in that manner. He had an infinitely tender heart. Gratitude entered it—gratitude as impassioned as had been his fear. One week later Lincoln Maitland and he were friends, and friends so intimate that they never parted.

The affection, which was merely to the indifferent nature of Maitland a simple college episode, became to Florent the most serious, most complete sentiment of his life. Those fraternities of election, the loveliest and most delicate of the heart of man, usually dawn thus in youth. It is the ideal age of passionate friendship, that period between ten and sixteen, when the spirit is so pure, so fresh, still so virtuous, so fertile in generous projects for the future. One dreams of a companionship almost mystical with the friend from whom one has no secret, whose character one sees in such a noble light, on whose esteem one depends as upon the surest recompense, whom one innocently desires to resemble. Indeed, they are, between the innocent lads who work side by side on a problem of geometry or a lesson in history, veritable poems

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of tenderness at which the man will smile later, finding so far different from him in all his tastes, him whom he desired to have for a brother. It happens, however, in certain natures of a sensibility particularly precocious and faithful at the same time, that the awakening of effective life is so strong, so encroaching, that the impassioned friendship persists, first through the other awakening, that of sensuality, so fatal to all the senses of delicacy, then through the first tumult of social experience, not less fatal to our ideal of youth.

That was the case with Florent Chapron, whether his character, at once somewhat wild and yet submissive, rendered him more qualified for that renunciation of his personality than friendship demands, whether, far from his father and his sister and not having any mother, his loving heart had need of attaching itself to some one who could fill the place of his relatives, or whether Maitland exercised over him a special prestige by his opposite qualities. Fragile and somewhat delicate, was he seduced by the strength and dexterity which his friend exhibited in all his exercises? Timid and naturally taciturn, was he governed by the assurance of that athlete with the loud laugh, with the invincible energy? Did the surprising tendency toward art which the other one showed conquer him, as well as sympathy for the misfortunes which were confided to him and which touched him more than they touched him who experienced them?

Gordon Maitland, Lincoln's father, of an excellent family of New York, had been killed at the battle of Chancellorsville, during the same war which had ruined Florent's father in part. Mrs. Maitland, the poor daughter of a small rector of a Presbyterian church at Newport, and who had only married her husband for his money, had but one idea, when once a widow—to go abroad. Whither? To Europe, vague and fascinating spot, where she fancied she would be distinguished by her intelligence and her beauty. She was pretty, vain and silly, and that voyage in pursuit of a part to play in the Old World caused her to pass two years first in one hotel and then in another, after which she married the second son of a poor Irish peer, with the new chimera of entering that Olympus of British aristocracy of which she had dreamed so much. She became a Catholic, and her son with her, to obtain the result which cost her dear, for not only was the lord who had given her his name brutal, a drunkard and cruel, but he added to all those faults that of being one of the greatest gamblers in the entire United Kingdom. He kept his stepson away from home, beat his wife, and died toward 1880, after dissipating the poor creature's fortune and almost all of Lincoln's. At that time the latter, whom his stepfather had naturally left to develop in his own way, and who, since leaving Beaumont, had studied painting at Venice, Rome and Paris, was in the latter city and one of the first pupils in Bonnat's studio. Seeing his mother

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ruined, without resources at forty-four years of age, persuaded himself of his glorious future, he had one of those magnificent impulses such as one has in youth and which prove much less the generosity than the pride of life. Of the fifteen thousand francs of income remaining to him, he gave up to his mother twelve thousand five hundred. It is expedient to add that in less than a year afterward he married the sister of his college friend and four hundred thousand dollars. He had seen poverty and he was afraid of it. His action with regard to his mother seemed to justify in his own eyes the purely interested character of the combination which freed his brush forever. There are, moreover, such artistic consciences. Maitland would not have pardoned himself a concession of art. He considered rascals the painters who begged success by compromise in their style, and he thought it quite natural to take the money of Mademoiselle Chapron, whom he did not love, and for whom, now that he had grown to manhood and knew several of her compatriots, he likewise felt the prejudice of race. "The glory of the colonel of the Empire and friendship for that good Florent," as he said, "covered all."

Poor and good Florent! That marriage was to him the romance of his youth realized. He had desired it since the first week that Maitland had given him the cordial handshake which had bound them. To live in the shadow of his friend, become at once his brother-in-law and his ideal—he did not dream of any other solution of his own destiny. The faults of Maitland, developed by age, fortune, and success—we recall the triumph of his 'Femme en violet et en jeune' in the Salon of 1884—found Florent as blind as at the epoch when they played cricket together in the fields at Beaumont. Dorsenne very justly diagnosed there one of those hypnotisms of admiration such as artists, great or small, often inspire around them. But the author, who always generalized too quickly, had not comprehended that the admirer with Florent was grafted on a friend worthy to be painted by La Fontaine or by Balzac, the two poets of friendship, the one in his sublime and tragic Cousin Pons, the other in that short but fine fable, in which is this verse, one of the most tender in the French language:

Vous metes, en dormant, un peu triste apparu.

Florent did not love Lincoln because he admired him; he admired him because he loved him. He was not wrong in considering the painter as one of the most gifted who had appeared for thirty years. But Lincoln would have had neither the bold elegance of his drawing, nor the vivid strength of coloring, nor the ingenious finesse of imagination if the other had lent himself with less ardor to the service of the work and to the glory of the artist. When Lincoln wanted to travel he found his brother-in-law the most diligent of couriers. When he had need of a model he had only to say a word for Florent to set about finding one. Did Lincoln exhibit at Paris or

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London, Florent took charge of the entire proceeding—seeing the journalists and picture dealers, composing letters of thanks for the articles, in a handwriting so like that of the painter that the latter had only to sign it. Lincoln desired to return to Rome. Florent had discovered the house on the Rue Leopardi, and he settled it even before Maitland, then in Egypt, had finished a large study begun at the moment of the departure of the other.

Florent had, by virtue of the affection felt for his brother-in-law, come to comprehend the paintings as well as the painter himself. These words will be clear to those who have been around artists and who know what a distance separates them from the most enlightened amateur. The amateur can judge and feel. The artist only, who has wielded the implements, knows, before a painting, how it is done, what stroke of the brush has been given, and why; in short, the trituration of the matter by the workman. Florent had watched Maitland work so much, he had rendered him so many effective little services in the studio, that each of his brother-in-law's canvases became animated to him, even to the slightest details. When he saw them on the wall of the gallery they told him of an intimacy which was at once his greatest joy and his greatest pride. In short, the absorption of his personality in that of his former comrade was so complete that it had led to this anomaly, that Dorsenne himself, notwithstanding his indulgence for psychological singularities, had not been able to prevent himself from finding almost monstrous: Florent was Lincoln's brother-in-law, and he seemed to find it perfectly natural that the latter should have adventures outside, if the emotion of those adventures could be useful to his talent!

Perhaps this long and yet incomplete analysis will permit us the better to comprehend what emotions agitated the young man as he reascended the staircase of his house—of their house, Lincoln's and his—after his unexpected dispute with Boleslas Gorka. It will attenuate, at least with respect to him, the severity of simple minds. All passion, when developed in the heart, has the effect of etiolating around it the vigor of other instincts. Chapron was too fanatical a friend to be a very equitable brother. It seemed to him very simple and very legitimate that his sister should be at the service of the genius of Lincoln, as he himself was. Moreover, if, since the marriage with her brother's friend, his sister had been stirred by the tempest of a moral tragedy, Florent did not suspect it. When had he studied Lydia, the silent, reserved Lydia, of whom he had once for all formed an opinion, as is the almost invariable custom of relative with relative? Those who have seen us when young are like those who see us daily. The images which they trace of us always reproduce what we were at a certain moment—scarcely ever what we are. Florent considered his sister very good, because he had formerly found her so; very gentle, because she had never resisted him; not intelligent, because she did not seem sufficiently interested in the painter's work; as for the suffering and secret rebellion of the oppressed creature, crushed between his blind partiality and the selfishness of a scornful husband, he did not even suspect them, much less the terrible resolution of which that apparent resignation was capable.

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If he had trembled when Madame Steno began to interest herself in Lincoln, it was solely for the work of the latter, so much the more as for a year he had perceived not a decline but a disturbance in the painting of that artist, too voluntary not to be unequal. Then Florent had seen, on the other hand, the nerve of Maitland reawakened in the warmth of that little intrigue.

The portrait of Alba promised to be a magnificent study, worthy of being placed beside the famous 'Femme en violet et en jaune,' which those envious of Lincoln always remembered. Moreover, the painter had finished with unparalleled ardor two large compositions partly abandoned. In the face of that proof of a fever of production more and more active, how would not Florent have blessed Madame Steno, instead of cursing her, so much the more that it sufficed him to close his eyes and to know that his conscience was in repose when opposite his sister? He knew all, however. The proof of it was in his shudder when Dorsenne announced to him the clandestine arrival in Rome of Madame Steno's other lover, and one proof still more certain, the impulse which had precipitated him upon Boleslas, who was parleying with the servant, and now it was he who had accepted the duel which an exasperated rival had certainly come to propose to his dear Lincoln, and he thought only of the latter.

"He must know nothing until afterward. He would take the affair upon himself, and I have a chance to kill him, that Gorka—to wound him, at least. In any case, I will arrange it so that a second duel will be rendered difficult to that lunatic.... But, first of all, let us make sure that we have not spoken too loudly and that they have not heard upstairs the ill-bred fellow's loud voice."

It was in such terms that he qualified his adversary of the morrow. For very little more he would have judged Gorka unpardonable not to thank Lincoln, who had done him the honor to supplant him in the Countess's favor!

In the meantime, let us cast a glance at the atelier! When the friend, devoted to complicity, but also to heroism, entered the vast room, he could see at the first glance that he had been mistaken and that no sound of voices had reached that peaceful retreat.

The atelier of the American painter was furnished with a harmonious sumptuousness which real artists know how to gather around them. The large strip of sky seen through the windows looked down upon a corner veritably Roman—of the Rome of to-day, which attests an uninterrupted effort toward forming a new city by the side of the old one. One could see an angle of the old garden and the fragment of an antique building, with a church steeple beyond. It was on a background of azure, of verdure and of ruins, in a horizon larger and more distant, but composed of the same elements, that was to arise the face of the young girl, designed after the manner, so sharp and so modelled, of the 'Pier della Francesca', with whom Maitland had been preoccupied for six months.

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All great composers, of an originality more composite than genitive, have these infatuations.

Maitland was at his easel, dressed with that correct elegance which is the almost certain mark of Anglo-Saxon artists. With his little varnished shoes, his fine black socks, spotted with red, his coat of quilted silk, his light cravat and the purity of his linen, he had the air of a gentleman who applied himself to an amateur effort, and not of the patient and laborious worker he really was. But his canvases and his studies, hung on all sides, among tapestries, arms and trinkets, bespoke patient labor. It was the history of an energy bent upon the, acquisition of a personality constantly fleeing. Maitland manifested in a supreme degree the trait common to almost all his compatriots, even those who came in early youth to Europe, that intense desire not to lack civilization, which is explained by the fact that the American is a being entirely new, endowed with an activity incomparable, and deprived of traditional saturation. He is not born cultivated, matured, already fashioned virtually, if one may say so, like a child of the Old World. He can create himself at his will. With superior gifts, but gifts entirely physical, Maitland was a self-made man of art, as his grand father had been a self-made man of money, as his father had been a self-made man of war. He had in his eye and in his hand two marvellous implements for painting, and in his perseverance in developing a still more marvellous one. He lacked constantly the something necessary and local which gives to certain very inferior painters the inexpressible superiority of a savor of soil. It could not be said that he was not inventive and new, yet one experienced on seeing no matter which one of his paintings that he was a creature of culture and of acquisition. The scattered studies in the atelier first of all displayed the influence of his first master, of solid and simple Bonnat. Then he had been tempted by the English pre-Raphaelites, and a fine copy of the famous 'Song of Love', by Burne-Jones, attested that reaction on the side of an art more subtle, more impressed by that poetry which professional painters treat scornfully as literary. But Lincoln was too vigorous for the languors of such an ideal, and he quickly turned to other teachings. Spain conquered him, and Velasquez, the colorist of so peculiar a fancy that, after a visit to the Museum of the Prado, one carries away the idea that one has just seen the only painting worthy of the name.

The spirit of the great Spaniard, that despotic stroke of the brush which seems to draw the color in the groundwork of the picture, to make it stand out in almost solid lights, his absolute absence of abstract intentions and his newness which affects entirely to ignore the past, all in that formula of art, suited Maitland's temperament. To him, too, he owed his masterpiece, the 'Femme en violet et en jaune', but the restless seeker did not adhere to that style. Italy and the Florentines next influenced him, just those the most opposed to Velasquez; the Pollajuoli, Andrea del Castagna, Paolo Uccello and Pier delta Francesca. Never would one have believed that the same hand which had wielded with so free a brush the color of the 'Femme en violet...' could be that which sketched the contour of the portrait of Alba with so severe, so rigid a drawing.

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At the moment Florent entered the studio that work so completely absorbed the attention of the painter that he did not hear the door open any more than did Madame Steno, who was smoking cigarettes, reclining indolently and blissfully upon the divan, her half-closed eyes fixed upon the man she loved. Lincoln only divined another presence by a change in Alba's face. God! How pale she was, seated in the immobility of her pose in a large, heraldic armchair, with a back of carved wood, her hands grasping the arms, her mouth so bitter, her eyes so deep in their fixed glance!... Did she divine that which she could not, however, know, that her fate was approaching with the visitor who entered, and who, having left the studio fifteen minutes before, had to justify his return by an excuse.

"It is I," said he. "I forgot to ask you, Lincoln, if you wish to buy Ardea's three drawings at the price they offer."

"Why did you not tell me of it yesterday, my little Linco?" interrupted the Countess. "I saw Peppino again this morning.... I would have from him his lowest figure."

"That would only be lacking," replied Maitland, laughing his large laugh. "He does not acknowledge those drawings, dear dogaresse.... They are a part of the series of trinkets he carefully subtracted from his creditor's inventory and put in different places. There are some at seven or eight antiquaries', and we may expect that for the next ten years all the cockneys of my country will be allured by this phrase, 'This is from the Palais Castagna. I have it by a little arrangement.'"

His eyes sparkled as he imitated one of the most celebrated bric-a-brac dealers in Rome, with the incomparable art of imitation which distinguishes all the old habitues of Parisian studios.

"At present these three drawings are at an antiquary's of Babuino, and very authentic."

"Except when they are represented as Vincis," said Florent, "when Leonardo was left-handed, and their hatchings are made from left to right."

"And you think Ardea would not agree with me in it?" resumed the Countess.

"Not even with you," said the painter. "He had the assurance last night, when I mentioned them before him, to ask me the address in order to go to see them."

"How did you learn their production?" questioned Madame Steno.

"Ask him," said Maitland, pointing to Chapron with the end of his brush. "When there is a question of enriching his old Maitland's collection, he becomes more of a merchant than the merchants themselves. They tell him all.... Vinci or no Vinci, it is the pure Lombard style. Buy them. I want them."

“I will go, then,” replied Florent. “Countess. . . . Contessina.”

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He bowed to Madame Steno and her daughter. The mother bestowed upon him her pleasantest smile. She was not one of those mistresses to whom their lovers' intimate friends are always enemies. On the contrary, she enveloped them in the abundant and blissful sympathy which love awoke in her. Besides, she was too cunning not to feel that Florent approved of her love. But, on the other hand, the intense aversion which Alba at that moment felt toward her mother's suspected intrigues was expressed by the formality with which she inclined her head in response to the farewell of the young man, who was too happy to have found that the dispute had not been heard.

"From now until to-morrow," thought he, on redescending the staircase, "there will be no one to warn Lincoln.... The purchase of the drawings was an invention to demonstrate my tranquillity.... Now I must find two discreet seconds."

Florent was a very deliberate man, and a man who had at his command perfect evenness of temperament whenever it was not a question of his enthusiastic attachment to his brother-in-law. He had the power of observation habitual to persons whose sensitive amour propre has frequently been wounded. He therefore deferred until later his difficult choice and went to luncheon, as if nothing had happened, at the restaurant where he was expected. Certainly the proprietor did not mistrust, in replying to the questions of his guest relative to the most recent portraits of Lenbach, that the young man, so calm, so smiling, had on hand a duel which might cost him his life. It was only on leaving the restaurant that Florent, after mentally reviewing ten of his older acquaintances, resolved to make a first attempt upon Dorsenne. He recalled the mysterious intelligence given him by the novelist, whose sympathy for Maitland had been publicly manifested by an eloquent article. Moreover, he believed him to be madly in love with Alba Steno. That was one probability more in favor of his discretion.

Dorsenne would surely maintain silence with regard to a meeting in connection with which, if it were known, the cause of the contest would surely be mentioned. It was only too clear that Gorka and Chapron had no real reason to quarrel and fight a duel. But at ten-thirty, that is to say, three hours after the unreasonable altercation in the vestibule, Florent rang at the door of Julien's apartments. The latter was at home, busy upon the last correction of the proofs of 'Poussiere d'Idees'. His visitor's confidence upset him to such a degree that his hands trembled as he arranged his scattered papers. He remembered the presence of Boleslas on that same couch, at the same time of the day, forty-eight hours before. How the drama would progress if that madman went away in that mood! He knew only too well that Maitland's brother-in-law had not told him all.

"It is absurd," he cried, "it is madness, it is folly!.... You are not going to fight about an argument such as you have related to me? You talked at the corner of the street, you exchanged a few angry words, and then, suddenly, seconds, a duel.... Ah, it is absurd."

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"You forget that I offered him a violent insult in raising my cane to him," interrupted Florent, "and since he demands satisfaction I must give it to him."

"Do you believe," said the writer, "that the public will be contented with those reasons? Do you think they will not look for the secret motives of the duel? Do I know the story of a woman?.... You see, I ask no questions. I rely upon what you confide in me. But the world is the world, and you will not escape its remarks."

"It is precisely for that reason that I ask absolute discretion of you," replied Florent, "and for that reason that I have come to ask you to serve me as a second.... There is no one in whom I trust as implicitly as I do in you.... It is the only excuse for my step."

"I thank you," said Dorsenne. He hesitated a moment. Then the image of Alba, which had haunted him since the previous day, suddenly presented itself to his mind. He recalled the sombre anguish he had surprised in the young girl's eyes, then her comforted glance when her mother smiled at once upon Gorka and Maitland. He recalled the anonymous letter and the mysterious hatred which impended over Madame Steno. If the quarrel between Boleslas and Florent became known, there was no doubt that it would be said generally that Florent was fighting for his brother-in-law on account of the Countess. No doubt, too, that the report would reach the poor Contessina. It was sufficient to cause the writer to reply: "Very well! I accept. I will serve you. Do not thank me. We are losing valuable time. You will require another second. Of whom have you thought?"

"Of no one," returned Florent. "I confess I have counted on you to aid me."

"Let us make a list," said Julien. "It is the best way, and then cross off the names."

Dorsenne wrote down a number of their acquaintances, and they indeed crossed them off, according to his expression, so effectually that after a minute examination they had rejected all of them. They were then as much perplexed as ever, when suddenly Dorsenne's eyes brightened, he uttered a slight exclamation, and said brusquely:

"What an idea! But it is an idea!.... Do you know the Marquis de Montfanon?" he asked Florent.

"He with one arm?" replied the latter. "I saw him once with reference to a monument I put up at Saint Louis des Francais."

"He told me of it," said Dorsenne. "For one of your relatives, was it not?"

"Oh, a distant cousin," replied Florent; "one Captain Chapron, killed in 'forty-nine in the trenches before Rome."

“Now, to our business,” cried Dorsenne, rubbing his hands. “It is Montfanon who must be your second. First of all, he is an experienced duellist, while I have never been on the ground. That is very important. You know the celebrated saying: ‘It is neither swords nor pistols which kill; it is the seconds.’.... And then if the matter has to be arranged, he will have more prestige than your servant.”

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"It is impossible," said Florent; "Marquis de Montfanon.... He will never consent. I do not exist for him."

"That is my affair," cried Dorsenne. "Let me take the necessary steps in my own name, and then if he agrees you can make it in yours.... Only we have no time to lose. Do not leave your house until six o'clock. By that time I shall know upon what to depend."

If, at first, the novelist had felt great confidence in the issue of his strange attempt with reference to his old friend, that confidence changed to absolute apprehension when he found himself, half an hour later, at the house which Marquis Claude Francois occupied in one of the oldest parts of Rome, from which location he could obtain an admirable view of the Forum. How many times had Julien come, in the past six months, to that Marquis who dived constantly in the sentiment of the past, to gaze upon the tragical and grand panorama of the historical scene! At the voice of the recluse, the broken columns rose, the ruined temples were rebuilt, the triumphal view was cleared from its mist. He talked, and the formidable epopee of the Roman legend was evoked, interpreted by the fervent Christian in that mystical and providential sense, which all, indeed, proclaims in that spot, where the Mamertine prison relates the trial of St. Peter, where the portico of the temple of Faustine serves as a pediment to the Church of St. Laurent, where *Ste.-Marie-Liberatrice* rises upon the site of the Temple of Vesta—'Sancta Maria, libera nos a poenis inferni'—Montfanon always added when he spoke of it, and he pointed out the Arch of Titus, which tells of the fulfilment of the prophecies of Our Lord against Jerusalem, while, opposite, the groves reveal the out lines of a nunnery upon the ruins of the dwellings of the Caesars. And, at the extreme end, the Coliseum recalls to mind the ninety thousand spectators come to see the martyrs suffer.

Such were the sights where lived the former pontifical zouave, and, on ringing the bell of the third etage, Julien said to himself: "I am a simpleton to come to propose to such a man what I have to propose. Yet it is not to be a second in an ordinary duel, but simply to prevent an adventure which might cost the lives of two men in the first place, then the honor of Madame Steno, and, lastly, the peace of mind of three innocent persons, Madame Gorka, Madame Maitland and my little friend Alba.... He alone has sufficient authority to arrange all. It will be an act of charity, like any other.... I hope he is at home," he concluded, hearing the footstep of the servant, who recognized the visitor and who anticipated all questions.

"The Marquis went out this morning before eight o'clock. He will not return until dinner-time."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"To hear mass in a catacomb, and to be present at a procession," replied the footman, who took Dorsenne's card, adding: "The Trappists of Saint Calixtus certainly know where the Marquis is.... He lunched with them."

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"We shall see," said the young man to himself, somewhat disappointed. His carriage rolled in the direction of Porte St. Sebastien, near which was the catacomb and the humble dwelling contiguous to it—the last morsel of the Papal domains kept by the poor monks. "Montfanon will have taken communion this morning," thought he, "and at the very word duel he will listen to nothing more. However, the matter must be arranged; it must be.... What would I not give to know the truth of the scene between Gorka and Florent? By what strange and diabolical ricochet did the Palatine hit upon the latter when his business was with the brother-in-law?.... Will he be angry that I am his adversary's second?.... Bah!... After our conversation of the other day our friendship is ended.... Good, I am already at the little church of 'Domine, quo vadis.'—["Lord, whither art thou going?"]—I might say to myself: 'Juliane, quo vadis?' 'To perform an act a little better than the majority of my actions,' I might reply."

That impressionable soul which vibrated at the slightest contact was touched by the souvenir of one of the innumerable pious legends which nineteen centuries of Catholicism have suspended at all the corners of Rome and its surrounding districts. He recalled the touching story of St. Peter flying from persecution and meeting our Lord: "Lord, whither art thou going?" asked the apostle. "To be crucified a second time," replied the Saviour, and Peter was ashamed of his weakness and returned to martyrdom. Montfanon himself had related that episode to the novelist, who again began to reflect upon the Marquis's character and the best means of approaching him. He forgot to glance at the vast solitude of the Roman suburbs before him, and so deep was his reverie that he almost passed unheeded the object of his search. Another disappointment awaited him at the first point in his voyage of exploration.

The monk who came at his ring to open the door of the inclosure contiguous to St. Calixtus, informed him that he of whom he was in search had left half an hour before.

"You will find him at the Basilica of Saint Neree and Saint Achilles," added the Trappist; "it is the fete of those two saints, and at five o'clock there will be a procession in their catacombs.... It is a fifteen minutes' ride from here, near the tower Marancia, on the Via Ardeatina."

"Shall I miss him a third time?" thought Dorsenne, alighting from the carriage finally, and proceeding on foot to the opening which leads to the subterranean Necropolis dedicated to the two saints who were the eunuchs of Domitilla, the niece of Emperor Vespasian. A few ruins and a dilapidated house alone mark the spot where once stood the pious Princess's magnificent villa. The gate was open, and, meeting no one who could direct him, the young man took several steps in the subterranean passage. He perceived that the long gallery was lighted. He entered there, saying to himself that the row of tapers, lighted

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every ten paces, assuredly marked the line which the procession would follow, and which led to the central basilica. Although his anxiety as to the issue of his undertaking was extreme, he could not help being impressed by the grandeur of the sight presented by the catacomb thus illuminated. The uneven niches reserved for the dead, asleep in the peace of the Lord for so many centuries, made recesses in the corridors and gave them a solemn and tragical aspect. Inscriptions were to be seen there, traced on the stone, and all spoke of the great hope which those first Christians had cherished, the same which believers of our day cherish.

Julien knew enough of symbols to understand the significance of the images between which the persecuted of the primitive church had laid their fathers. They are so touching and so simple! The anchor represents safety in the storm; the gentle dove and the ewe, symbols of the soul, which flies away and seeks its shepherd; the phoenix, whose wings announce the resurrection. Then there were the bread and the wine, the branches of the olive and the palm. The silent cemetery was filled with a faint aroma of incense, noticed by Dorsenne on entering. High mass, celebrated in the morning, left the sacred perfume diffused among those bones, once the forms of human beings who kneeled there amid the same holy aroma. The contrast was strong between that spot, where everything spoke of things eternal, and the drama of passion, worldly and culpable, the progress of which agitated even Dorsenne. At that moment he appeared to himself in the light of a profaner, although he was obeying generous and humane instincts. He experienced a sense of relief when, at a bend in one of the corridors which he had selected from among many others, he found himself face to face with a priest, who held in his hand a basket filled with the petals of flowers, destined, no doubt, for the procession. Dorsenne inquired of him the way to the Basilica in Italian, while the reply was given in perfect French.

"Perhaps you know the Marquis de Montfanon, father?" asked the novelist.

"I am one of the chaplains of Saint Louis," said the priest, with a smile, adding: "You will find him in the Basilica."

"Now, the moment has come," thought Dorsenne, "I must be subtle.... After all, it is charity I am about to ask him to do.... Here I am. I recognize the staircase and the opening above."

A corner of the sky, indeed, was to be seen, and a ray of light entered which permitted the writer to distinguish him whom he was seeking among the few persons assembled in the ruined chapel, the most venerable of all those which encircle Rome with a hidden girdle of sanctuaries. Montfanon, too recognizable, alas! by the empty sleeve of his black redingote, was seated on a chair, not very far from the altar, on which burned

enormous tapers. Priests and monks were arranging baskets filled with petals, like those

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of the chaplain, whom Dorsenne had just met. A group of three curious visitors commented in whispers upon the paintings, scarcely visible on the discolored stucco of the ceiling. Montfanon was entirely absorbed in the book which he held in his one hand. The large features of his face, ennobled and almost transfigured by the ardor of devotion, gave him the admirable expression of an old Christian soldier. 'Bonus miles Christi'—a good soldier of Christ—had been inscribed upon the tomb of the chief under whom he had been wounded at Patay. One would have taken him for a guardian layman of the tombs of the martyrs, capable of confessing his faith like them, even to the death. And when Julien determined to approach and to touch him lightly on the shoulder, he saw that, in the nobleman's clear, blue eyes, ordinarily so gay, and sometimes so choleric, sparkled unshed tears. His voice, too, naturally sharp, was softened by the emotion of the thought which his reading, the place, the time, the occupation of his day had awakened within him.

"Ah, you here?" said he to his young friend, without any astonishment. "You have come for the procession. That is well. You will hear sung the lovely lines: 'Hi sunt quos fatue mundus abhorruit.'" He pronounced *ou* as *u*, 'à l'Italienne'; for his liturgic training had been received in Rome. "The season is favorable for the ceremonies. The tourists have gone. There will only be people here who pray and who feel, like you.... And to feel is half of prayer. The other half is to believe. You will become one of us. I have always predicted it. There is no peace but here."

"I would gladly have come only for the procession," replied Dorsenne, "but my visit has another motive, dear friend," said he, in a still lower tone. "I have been seeking for you for more than an hour, that you might aid me in rendering a great service to several people, in preventing a very great misfortune, perhaps."

"I can help you to prevent a very great misfortune?" repeated Montfanon.

"Yes," replied Dorsenne, "but this is not the place in which to explain to you the details of the long and terrible adventure.... At what hour is the ceremony? I will wait for you, and tell it to you on leaving here."

"It does not begin until five o'clock-five-thirty," said Montfanon, looking at his watch, "and it is now fifteen minutes past four. Let us leave the catacomb, if you wish, and you can repeat your story to me up above. A very great misfortune? Well," he added, pressing the hand of the young man whom, personally, he liked as much as he detested his views, "rest assured, my dear child, we will prevent it!"

There was in the manner in which he uttered those words the tranquillity of a mind which knows not uneasiness, that of a believer who feels sure of always accomplishing all that he wishes to do. It would not have been Montfanon, that is to say, a species of

visionary, who loved to argue with Dorsenne, because he knew that in spite of all he was understood, if he had not continued, as they walked along the lighted corridor, while remounting toward daylight:

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"If it is all the same to you, sir apologist of the modern world, I should like to pause here and ask you frankly: Do you not feel yourself more contemporary with all the dead who slumber within these walls than with a radical elector or a free-mason deputy? Do you not feel that if these martyrs had not come to pray beneath these vaults eighteen hundred years ago, the best part of your soul would not exist? Where will you find a poetry more touching than that of these symbols and of these epitaphs? That admirable De Rossi showed me one at Saint Calixtus last year. My tears flow as I recall it. 'Pete pro Phoebe et pro virginio ejus'. Pray for Phoebus and for—How do you translate the word 'virginus', the husband who has known only one wife, the virgin husband of a virgin spouse? Your youth will pass, Dorsenne. You will one day feel what I feel, the happiness which is wanting on account of bygone errors, and you will comprehend that it is only to be found in Christian marriage, whose entire sublimity is summed up in thus prayer: 'Pro virginio ejus'.... You will be like me then, and you will find in this book," he held up 'l'Eucologe', which he clasped in his hand, "something through which to offer up to God your remorse and your regrets. Do you know the hymn of the Holy Sacrament, 'Adoro te, devote'? No. Yet you are capable of feeling what is contained in these lines. Listen. It is this idea: That on the cross one sees only the man, not the God; that in the host one does not even see the man, and that yet one believes in the real presence.

In cruce latebat sola Deitas.
At hic latet simul et humanitas.
Ambo tamen credens atque confitens....

"And now this last verse:

Peto quod petivit latro poenitens!

[I ask that which the penitent thief asked.]

"What a cry! Ah, but it is beautiful! It is beautiful! What words to say in dying! And what did the poor thief ask, that Dixmas of whom the church has made a saint for that one appeal: 'Remember me, Lord, in Thy kingdom!' But we have arrived. Stoop, that you may not spoil your hat. Now, what do you want with me? You know the motto of the Montfanons: 'Excelsior et firmior'—Always higher and always firmer.... One can never do too many good deeds. If it be possible, 'present', as we said to the rollcall."

A singular mixture of fervor and of good-nature, of enthusiastic eloquence and of political or religious fanaticism, was Montfanon. But the good-nature rapidly vanished from his face, at once so haughty and so simple, in proportion as Dorsenne's story proceeded. The writer, indeed, did not make the error of at once formulating his proposition. He felt that he could not argue with the pontifical zouave of bygone days. Either the latter would look upon it as monstrous and absurd, or he would see in it a charitable duty to be accomplished, and then, whatever annoyance the matter might occasion him,

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he would accept it, as he would bestow alms. It was that chord of generosity which Julien, diplomatic for once in his life, essayed to touch by his confidence. Gaining authority by their conversation of a few days before, he related all he could of Gorka's visit, concealing the fact of that word of honor so falsely given, which still oppressed him with a mortal weight. He told how he had soothed the madman, how he conducted him to the station, then he described the meeting of the two rivals twenty-four hours later. He dwelt upon Alba's manner that evening and the infamy of the anonymous letters written to Madame Steno's discarded lover and to her daughter. And after he had reported the mysterious quarrel which had suddenly arisen between Gorka and Chapron:

"I, therefore, promised to be his second," he concluded, "because I believe it my absolute duty to do all I can to prevent the duel from taking place. Only think of it. If it should take place, and if one of them is killed or wounded, how can the affair be kept secret in this gossiping city of Rome? And what remarks it will call forth! It is evident that these two boys have quarrelled only on account of the relations between Madame Steno and Maitland. By what strange coincidence? Of that I know nothing.

"But there will not be a doubt in public opinion. And can you not see additional anonymous letters written to Alba, Madame Gorka, Madame Maitland?.... The men I do not care for.... Two out of three merit all that comes to them. But those innocent creatures—is it not frightful?"

"Frightful, indeed," replied Montfanon; "it is that which renders those adulterous adventures so hideous. There are many people who are affected by it besides the guilty ones.... You see that, you who thought that society so pleasant, so refined, so interesting, the day before yesterday? But it does no good to recriminate. I understand. You have come to ask me to advise you in your role of second. My follies of youth will enable me to direct you.... Correctness in the slightest detail and no nerves, when one has to arrange a duel. Oh! You will have trouble. Gorka is mad. I know the Poles. They have great faults, but they are brave. Lord, but they are brave! And little Chapron, I know him, too; he has one of those stubborn natures, which would allow their breasts to be pierced without saying 'Ouf!' And 'amour propre'. He has good soldier's blood in his veins, that child, notwithstanding the mixture. And with that mixture, do you not see what a hero the first of the three Dumas, the mulatto general, has been?.... Yes. You have there a hard job, my good Dorsenne.... You will need another second to assist you, who will have the same views as you and—pardon me—more experience, perhaps."

"Marquis," replied Julien, whose voice trembled with anxiety, "there is only one person in Rome who would be respected enough, venerated by all, so that his intervention in that delicate and dangerous matter be decisive, one person who could suggest excuses to



Chapron, or obtain them from the other.... In short, there is only one person who has the authority of a hero before whom they will remain silent when he speaks of honor, and that person is you."

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"I," exclaimed Montfanon, "I, you wish me to be—"

"One of Chapron's seconds," interrupted Dorsenne. "Yes. It is true. I come on his part and for that. Do not tell me what I already know, that your position will not allow of such a step. It is because it is what it is, that I thought of coming to you. Do not tell me that your religious principles are opposed to duels. It is that there may be no duel that I conjure you to accept.... It is essential that it does not take place. I swear to you, that the peace of too many innocent persons is concerned."

And he continued, calling into service at that moment all the intelligence and all the eloquence of which he was capable. He could follow on the face of the former duellist, who had become the most ardent of Catholics and the most monomaniacal of old bachelors, twenty diverse expressions. At length Montfanon laid his hand with veritable solemnity on his interlocutor's arm and said to him:

"Listen, Dorsenne, do not tell me any more.... I consent to what you ask of me, but on two conditions. They are these: The first is that Monsieur Chapron will trust absolutely to my judgment, whatsoever it may be; the second is that you will retire with me if these gentlemen persist in their childishness.... I promise to aid you in fulfilling a mission of charity, and not anything else; I repeat, not anything else. Before bringing Monsieur Chapron to me you will repeat to him what I have said, word for word."

"Word for word," replied the other, adding: "He is at home awaiting the result of my undertaking."

"Then," said the Marquis, "I will return to Rome with you at once. He has probably already received Gorka's seconds, and if they really wish to arrange a duel the rule is not to put it off.... I shall not see my procession, but to prevent misfortune is to do a good deed, and it is one way of praying to God."

"Let me press your hand, my noble friend," said Dorsenne; "never have I better understood what a truly brave man is."

When the writer alighted, three-quarters of an hour later, at the house on the Rue Leopardi, after having seen Montfanon home, he felt sustained by such moral support that was almost joyous. He found Florent in his species of salon-smoking-room, arranging his papers with methodical composure.

"He accepts," were the first words the young men uttered, almost simultaneously, while Dorsenne repeated Montfanon's words.

"I depend absolutely on you two," replied the other. "I have no thirst for Monsieur de Gorka's blood.... But that gentleman must not accuse the grandson of Colonel Chapron

of cowardice.... For that I rely upon the relative of General Dorsenne and on the old soldier of Charette."

As he spoke, Florent handed a letter to Julien, who asked: "From whom is this?"

"This," said Florent, "is a letter addressed to you, on this very table half an hour ago by Baron Hafner.... There is some news. I have received my adversary's seconds. The Baron is one, Ardea the other."

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“Baron Hafner!” exclaimed Dorsenne. “What a singular choice!” He paused, and he and Florent exchanged glances. They understood one another without speaking. Boleslas could not have found a surer means of informing Madame Steno as to the plan he intended to employ in his vengeance. On the other hand, the known devotion of the Baron for the Countess gave one chance more for a pacific solution, at the same time that the fanaticism of Montfanon would be confronted with Fanny’s father, an episode of comedy suddenly cast across Gorka’s drama of jealousy.

Julien resumed with a smile: “You must watch Montfanon’s face when we inform him of those two witnesses. He is a man of the fifteenth century, you know, a Montluc, a Duc d’Alba, a Philippe II. I do not know which he detests the most, the Freemasons, the Free-thinkers, the Protestants, the Jews, or the Germans. And as this obscure and tortuous Hafner is a little of everything, he has vowed hatred against him!.... Leaving that out of the question, he suspects him of being a secret agent in the service of the Triple Alliance! But let us see the letter.”

He opened and glanced through it. “This craftiness serves for something, it is equivalent almost to kindness. He, too, has felt that it is necessary to end our affair, were it only to avoid scandal. He appoints a meeting at his house between six and seven o’clock with me and your second. Come, time is flying. You must come to the Marquis to make your request officially. Begin this way. Obtain his promise before mentioning Hafner’s name. I know him. He will not retract his word. But it is just.”

The two friends found Montfanon awaiting them in his office, a large room filled with books, from which could be obtained a fine view of the panorama of the Forum, more majestic still on that afternoon when the shadows of the columns and arches grew longer on the sidewalk. The room with its brick floor had no other comfort than a carpet under the large desk littered with papers—no doubt fragments of the famous work on the relations of the French nobility and the Church. A crucifix stood upon the desk. On the wall were two engravings, that of Monseigneur Pie, the holy Bishop of Poitiers, and that of General de Sonis, on foot, with his wooden leg, and a painting representing St. Francois, the patron of the house. Those were the only artistic decorations of the modest habitation. The nobleman often said: “I have freed myself from the tyranny of objects.” But with that marvellous background of grandiose ruins and that sky, the simple spot was an incomparable retreat in which to end in meditation and renouncement a life already shaken by the tempests of the senses and of the world.

The hermit of that Thebaide rose to greet his two visitors, and pointing out to Chapron an open volume on his table, he said to him:

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"I was thinking of you. It is Chateauvillars's book on duelling. It contains a code which is not very complete. I recommend it to you, however, if ever you have to fulfil a mission like ours," and he pointed to Dorsenne and himself, with a gesture which constituted the most amicable of acceptations. "It seems you had too hasty a hand.... Ha! ha! Do not defend yourself. Such as you see me, at twenty-one I threw a plate in the face of a gentleman who bantered Comte de Chambord before a number of Jacobins at a table d'hôte in the provinces. See," continued he, raising his white moustache and disclosing a scar, "this is the souvenir. The fellow was once a dragoon; he proposed the sabre. I accepted, and this is what I got, while he lost two fingers.... That will not happen to us this time at least.... Dorsenne has told you our conditions."

"And I replied that I was sure I could not intrust my honor to better hands," replied Florent.

"Cease!" replied Montfanon, with a gesture of satisfaction. "No more phrases. It is well. Moreover, I judged you, sir, from the day on which you spoke to me at Saint Louis. You honor your dead. That is why I shall be happy, very happy, to be useful to you."

"Now tell me very clearly the recital you made to Dorsenne."

Then Florent related concisely that which had taken place between him and Gorka—that is to say, their argument and his passion, carefully omitting the details in which the name of his brother-in-law would be mixed.

"The deuce!" said Montfanon, familiarly, "the affair looks bad, very bad.... You see, a second is a confessor. You have had a discussion in the street with Monsieur Gorka, but about what? You can not reply? What did he say to you to provoke you to the point of wishing to strike him? That is the first key to the position."

"I can not reply," said Florent.

"Then," resumed the Marquis, after a silence, "there only remains to assert that the gesture on your part was—how shall I say? Unmeditated and unfinished. That is the second key to the position.... You have no special grudge against Monsieur Gorka?"

"None."

"Nor he against you?"

"None."

"The affair looks better," said Montfanon, who was silent for a time, to resume, in the voice of a man who is talking to himself, "Count Gorka considers himself offended? But is there any offence? It is that which we should discuss.... An assault or the threat of

an assault would afford occasion for an arrangement.... But a gesture restrained, since it was not carried into effect.... Do not interrupt me," he continued.

"I am trying to understand it clearly.... We must arrive at a solution. We shall have to express our regret, leaving the field open to another reparation, if Gorka requires it.... And he will not require it. The entire problem now rests on the choice of his seconds.... Whom will he select?"

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"I have already received visits from them," said Florent. "Half an hour ago. One is Prince d'Ardea."

"He is a gentleman," replied Montfanon. "I shall not be sorry to see him to tell him my feelings with regard to the public sale of his palace, to which he should never have allowed himself to be driven.... And the other?"

"The other?" interrupted Dorsenne. "Prepare yourself for a blow.... I swear to you I did not know his name when I went in search of you at the catacomb. It is—in short—it is Baron Hafner."

"Baron Hafner!" exclaimed Montfanon. "Boleslas Gorka, the descendant of the Gorkas, of that grand Luc Gorka who was Palatine of Posen and Bishop of Cujavie, has chosen for his second Monsieur Justus Hafner, the thief, the scoundrel, who had the disgraceful suit!.... No, Dorsenne, do not tell me that; it is not possible." Then, with the air of a combatant: "We will challenge him; that is all, for his lack of honor. I take it upon myself, as well as to tell of his deeds to Boleslas. We will spend an enjoyable quarter of an hour there, I promise you."

"You will not do that," said Dorsenne, quickly. "First, with regard to official honor, there is only one law, is there not? Hafner was acquitted and his adversaries condemned. You told me so the other day.... And then, you forget the conversation we just had."

"Pardon," interrupted Florent, in his turn. "Monsieur de Montfanon, in promising to assist me, has done me a great honor, which I shall never forget. If there should result from it any annoyance to him I should be deeply grieved, and I am ready to release him from his promise."

"No," said the Marquis, after another silence. "I will not take it back.".... He was so magnanimous when his two or three hobbies were not involved that the slightest delicacy awoke an echo in him. He again extended his hand to Chapron and continued, but with an accent which betrayed suppressed irritation: "After all, it does not concern us if Monsieur Gorka has chosen to be represented in an affair of honor by one whom he should not even salute.... You will, then, give our two names to those two gentlemen.... and Dorsenne and I will await them, as is the rule.... It is their place to come, since they are the proxies of the person insulted."

"They have already arranged a meeting for this evening," replied Chapron.

"What's arranged? With whom? For whom?" exclaimed Montfanon, a prey to a fresh access of choler. "With you?.... For us?.... Ah, I do not like such conduct where such grave matters are concerned.... The code is absolute on that subject.... Their challenge once made, to which you, Monsieur Chapron, have to reply by yes or no, these gentlemen should withdraw immediately.... It is not your fault, it is Ardea's, who has

allowed that dabbler in spurious dividends to perform his part of intriguer.... But we will rectify all in the right way, which is the French.... And where is the rendezvous?"

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"I will read to you the letter which the Baron left for me with Florent," said Dorsenne, who indeed read the very courteous note Hafner had written to him, in which he excused himself for choosing his own house as a rendezvous for the four witnesses. "One can not ignore so polite a note."

"There are too many dear sirs, and too many compliments," said Montfanon, brusquely. "Sit here," he continued, relinquishing his armchair to Florent, "and inform the two men of our names and address, adding that we are at their service and ignoring the first inaccuracy on their part. Let them return!.... And you, Dorsenne, since you are afraid of wounding that gentleman, I will not prevent you from going to his house—personally, do you hear—to warn him that Monsieur Chapron, here present, has chosen for his first second a disagreeable person, an old duellist, anything you like, but who desires strict form, and, first of all, a correct call made upon us by them, in order to settle officially upon a rendezvous."

"What did I tell you?" asked Dorsenne, when he with Florent descended Montfanon's staircase. "He is a different man since you mentioned the Baron to him. The discussion between them will be a hot one. I hope he will not spoil all by his folly. On my honor, if I had guessed whom Gorka would choose I should not have suggested to you the old leaguer, as I call him."

"And I, if Monsieur de Montfanon should make me fight at five paces," replied Chapron, with a laugh, "would be grateful to you for having brought me into relations with him. He is a whole-souled man, as was my poor father, as is Maitland. I adore such people."

"Is there no means of having at once heart and head?" said Julien to himself, on reaching the Palais Savorelli, where Hafner lived, and recalling the Marquis's choler on the one hand, and on the other the egotism of Maitland, of which Florent's last words reminded him. His apprehension of the afternoon returned in a greater degree, for he knew Montfanon to be very sensitive on certain points, and it was one of those points which would be wounded to the quick by the forced relations with Gorka's witnesses. "I do not trust Hafner," thought he; "if the cunning fellow has accepted the mission utterly contrary to his tastes, his habits, almost to his age, it must be to connive with his future son-in-law and to conciliate all. Perhaps even the marriage had been already settled? I hope not. The Marquis would be so furious he would require the duel to a letter."

The young man had guessed aright. Chance, which often brings one event upon another, decreed that Ardea, at the very moment that he was deliberating with Gorka as to the choice of another second, received a note from Madame Steno containing simply these words: "Your proposal has been made, and the answer is yes. May I be the first to embrace you, Simpaticone?"

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An ingenious idea occurred to him; to have arranged by his future father-in-law the quarrel which he considered at once absurd, useless, and dangerous. The eagerness with which Gorka had accepted Hafner's name, proved, as Dorsenne and Florent had divined, his desire that his perfidious mistress should be informed of his doings. As for the Baron, he consented—oh, irony of coincidences!—by saying to Peppino Ardea words almost identical with those which Montfanon had uttered to Dorsenne:

"We will draw up, in advance, an official plan of conciliation, and, if the matter can not be arranged, we will withdraw."

It was in such terms that the memorable conversation was concluded, a conversation truly worthy of the *combinazione* which poor Fanny's marriage represented. There had been less question of the marriage itself than that of the services to be rendered to the infidelity of the woman who presided over the sorry traffic! Is it necessary to add that neither Ardea nor his future father-in-law had made the shadow of an allusion to the true side of the affair? Perhaps at any other time the excessive prudence innate to the Baron and his care never to compromise himself would have deterred him from the possible annoyances which might arise from an interference in the adventure of an exasperated and discarded lover. But his joy at the thought that his daughter was to become a Roman princess—and with what a name!—had really turned his brain.

He had, however, the good sense to say to the stunned Ardea: "Madame Steno must know nothing of it, at least beforehand. She would not fail to inform Madame Gorka, and God knows of what the latter would be capable."

In reality, the two men were convinced that it was essential, directly or indirectly, to beware of warning Maitland. They employed the remainder of the afternoon in paying their visit to Florent, then in sending telegram after telegram to announce the betrothal, with which charming Fanny seemed more satisfied since Cardinal Guerillot had consented, at simply a word from her, to preside at her baptism. The Baron, in the face of that consent, could not restrain his joy. He loved his daughter, strange man, somewhat in the manner in which a breeder loves a favorite horse which has won the Grand Prix for him. When Dorsenne arrived, bearing Chapron's note and Montfanon's message, he was received with a cordiality and a complaisance which at once enlightened him upon the result of the matrimonial intrigue of which Alba had spoken to him.

"Anything that your friend wishes, my dear sir.... Is it not so, Peppino?" said the Baron, seating himself at his table. "Will you dictate the letter yourself, Dorsenne?.... See, is this all right? You will understand with what sentiments we have accepted this mission when you learn that Fanny is betrothed to Prince Ardea, here present. The news dates from three o'clock. So you are the first to know it, is he not, Peppino?" He had drawn up not less than two hundred despatches. "Return whenever you like with the Marquis.... I simply ask, under the circumstances, that the interview take place, if it be possible,

between six and seven, or between nine and ten, in order not to interfere with our little family dinner.”

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"Let us say nine o'clock," said Dorsenne. "Monsieur de Montfanon is somewhat formal. He would like to have your reply by letter."

"Prince Ardea to marry Mademoiselle Hafner!" That cry which the news brought by Julien wrested from Montfanon was so dolorous that the young man did not think of laughing. He had thought it wiser to prepare his irascible friend, lest the Baron might make some allusion to the grand event during the course of the conversation, and that the other might not make some impulsive remark.

"Did I not tell you that the girl's Catholicism was a farce? Did I not tell Monseigneur Guerillot? This was what she aimed at all those years, with such perfect hypocrisy? It was the Palais Castagna. And she will enter there as mistress!.... She will bring there the dishonor of that pirated gold on which there are stains of blood! Warn them, that they do not speak to me of it, or I will not answer for myself.... The second of a Gorka, the father-in-law of an Ardea, he triumphs, the thief who should by rights be a convict!.... But we shall see. Will not all the other Roman princes who have no blots upon their escutcheons, the Orsinis, the Colonnas, the Odeschalchis, the Borgheses, the Rospigliosis, not combine to prevent this monstrosity? Nobility is like love, those who buy those sacred things degrade them in paying for them, and those to whom they are given are no better than mire.... Princess d'Ardea! That creature! Ah, what a disgrace!.... But we must remember our engagement relative to that brave young Chapron. The boy pleases me; first, because very probably he is going to fight for some one else and out of a devotion which I can not very well understand! It is devotion all the same, and it is chivalry!.... He desires to prevent that miserable Gorka from calling forth a scandal which would have warned his sister.... And then, as I told him, he respects the dead.... Let us.... I have my wits no longer about me, that intelligence has so greatly disturbed me.... Princess d'Ardea!.... Well, write that we will be at Monsieur Hafner's at nine o'clock.... I do not want any of those people at my house.... At yours it would not be proper; you are too young. And I prefer going to the father-in-law's rather than to the son-in-law's. The rascal has made a good bargain in buying what he has bought with his stolen millions. But the other.... And his great-great-uncle might have been Jules Second, Pie Fifth, Hildebrand; he would have sold all just the same!.... He can not deceive himself! He has heard the suit against that man spoken of! He knows whence come those millions! He has heard their family, their lives spoken of! And he has not been inspired with too great a horror to accept the gold of that adventurer. Does he not know what a name is? Our name! It is ourselves, our honor, in the mouths, in the thoughts, of others! How happy I am, Dorsenne, to have been fifty-two years of age last month. I shall be gone before having

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seen what you will see, the agony of all the aristocrats and royalties. It was only in blood that they fell! But they do not fall. Alas! They fix themselves upon the ground, which is the saddest of all. Still, what matters it? The monarchy, the nobility, and the Church are everlasting. The people who disregard them will die, that is all. Come, write your letter, which I will sign. Send it away, and you will dine with me. We must go into the den provided with an argument which will prevent this duel, and sustaining our part toward our client. There must be an arrangement which I would accept myself. I like him, I repeat."

The excitement which began to startle Dorsenne was only augmented during dinner, so much the more so as, on discussing the conditions of that arrangement he hoped to bring about, the recollection of his terrible youth filled the thoughts and the discourse of the former duellist. Was it, indeed, the same personage who recited the verses of a hymn in the catacombs a few hours before? It only required the feudal in him to be reawakened to transform him. The fire in his eyes and the color in his face betrayed that the duel in which he had thought best to engage, out of charity, intoxicated him on his own statement. It was the old amateur, the epicure of the sword, very ungovernable, which stirred within that man of faith, in whom passion had burned and who had loved all excitement, including that of danger, as to-day he loved his ideas, as he loved his flagi mmoderately. He no longer thought of the three women to be spared suspicion, nor of the good deed to be accomplished. He saw all his old friends and their talent for fighting, the thrusts of this one, the way another had of striking, the composure of a third, and then this refrain interrupted constantly his warlike anecdotes: "But why the deuce has Gorka chosen that Hafner for his second?.... It is incomprehensible.".... On entering the carriage which was to bear them to their interview, he heard Dorsenne say to the coachman: "Palais Savorelli."

"That is the final blow," said he, raising his arm and clenching his fist. "The adventurer occupies the Pretender's house, the house of the Stuarts.".... He repeated: "The house of the Stuarts!" and then lapsed into a silence which the writer felt to be laden with more storminess than his last denunciation. He did not emerge from his meditations until ushered into the salon of the ci-devant jeweller, now a grand seigneur—into one of the salons, rather, for there were five. There Montfanon began to examine everything around him, with an air of such contempt and pride that, notwithstanding his anxiety, Dorsenne could not resist laughing and teasing him by saying:

"You will not pretend to say that there are no pretty things here? These two paintings by Moroni, for example?"

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"Nothing that is appropriate," replied Montfanon. "Yes, they are two magnificent portraits of ancestors, and this man has no ancestors!.... There are some weapons in that cupboard, and he has never touched a sword! And there is a piece of tapestry representing the miracles of the loaves, which is a piece of audacity! You may not believe me, Dorsenne, but it is making me ill to be here.... I am reminded of the human toil, of the human soul in all these objects, and to end here, paid for how? Owned by whom? Close your eyes and think of Schroeder and of the others whom you do not know. Look into the hovels where there is neither furniture, fire, nor bread. Then, open your eyes and look at this."

"And you, my dear friend," replied the novelist, "I conjure you to think of our conversation in the catacombs, to think of the three ladies in whose names I besought you to aid Florent."

"Thank you," said Montfanon, passing his hand over his brow, "I promise you to be calm."

He had scarcely uttered those words when the door opened, disclosing to view another room, lighted also, and which, to judge by the sound of voices, contained several persons. No doubt Madame Steno and Alba, thought Julien; and the Baron entered, accompanied by Peppino Ardea. While going through the introductions, the writer was struck by the contrast offered between his three companions. Hafner and Ardea in evening dress, with buttonhole bouquets, had the open and happy faces of two citizens who had clear consciences. The usually sallow complexion of the business man was tinged with excitement, his eyes, as a rule so hard, were gentler. As for the Prince, the same childish carelessness lighted up his jovial face, while the hero of Patay, with his coarse boots, his immense form enveloped in a somewhat shabby redingote, exhibited a face so contracted that one would have thought him devoured by remorse. A dishonest intendant, forced to expose his accounts to generous and confiding masters, could not have had a face more gloomy or more anxious. He had, moreover, put his one arm behind his back in a manner so formal that neither of the two men who entered offered him their hands. That appearance was without doubt little in keeping with what the father and the fiance of Fanny had expected; for there was, when the four men were seated, a pause which the Baron was the first to break. He began in his measured tones, in a voice which handles words as the weight of a usurer weighs gold pieces to the milligramme:

"Gentlemen, I believe I shall express our common sentiment in first of all establishing a point which shall govern our meeting.... We are here, it is understood, to bring about the work of reconciliation between two men, two gentlemen whom we know, whom we esteem—I might better say, whom we all love.".... He turned, in pronouncing those words, successively to each of his three listeners, who all bowed, with the exception of the Marquis. Hafner

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examined the nobleman, with his glance accustomed to read the depths of the mind in order to divine the intentions. He saw that Chapron's first witness was a troublesome customer, and he continued: "That done, I beg to read to you this little paper." He drew from his pocket a sheet of folded paper and placed upon the end of his nose his famous gold 'lorgnon': "It is very trifling, one of those directives, as Monsieur de Moltke says, which serve to guide operations, a plan of action which we will modify after discussion. In short, it is a landmark that we may not launch into space."

"Pardon, sir," interrupted Montfanon, whose brows contracted still more at the mention of the celebrated field-marshal, and, stopping by a gesture the reader, who, in his surprise, dropped his lorgnon upon the table on which his elbow rested. "I regret very much," he continued, "to be obliged to tell you that Monsieur Dorsenne and I"—here he turned to Dorsenne, who made an equivocal gesture of vexation—"can not admit the point of view in which you place yourself.... You claim that we are here to arrange a reconciliation. That is possible.... I concede that it is desirable.... But I know nothing of it and, permit me to say, you do not know any more. I am here—we are here, Monsieur Dorsenne and I, to listen to the complaints which Count Gorka has commissioned you to formulate to Monsieur Florent Chapron's proxies. Formulate those complaints, and we will discuss them. Formulate the reparation you claim in the name of your client and we will discuss it. The papers will follow, if they follow at all, and, once more, neither you nor we know what will be the issue of this conversation, nor should we know it, before establishing the facts."

"There is some misunderstanding, sir," said Ardea, whom Montfanon's words had irritated somewhat. He could not, any more than Hafner, understand the very simple, but very singular, character of the Marquis, and he added: "I have been concerned in several 'rencontres'—four times as second, and once as principal—and I have seen employed without discussion the proceeding which Baron Hafner has just proposed to you, and which of itself is, perhaps, only a more expeditious means of arriving at what you very properly call the establishment of facts."

"I was not aware of the number of your affairs, sir," replied Montfanon, still more nervous since Hafner's future son-in-law joined in the conversation; "but since it has pleased you to tell us I will take the liberty of saying to you that I have fought seven times, and that I have been a second fourteen.... It is true that it was at an epoch when the head of your house was your father, if I remember right, the deceased Prince Urban, whom I had the honor of knowing when I served in the zouaves. He was a fine Roman nobleman, and did honor to his name. What I have told you is proof that I have some competence in the matter of a duel.... Well, we have always held that seconds were constituted to arrange affairs that could be arranged, but also to settle affairs, as well as they can, that seem incapable of being arranged. Let us now inquire into the matter; we are here for that, and for nothing else."

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"Are these gentlemen of that opinion?" asked Hafner in a conciliatory voice, turning first to Dorsenne, then to Ardea: "I do not adhere to my method," he continued, again folding his paper. He slipped it into his vest-pocket and continued: "Let us establish the facts, as you say. Count Gorka, our friend, considers himself seriously, very seriously, offended by Monsieur Florent Chapron in the course of the discussion in a public street. Monsieur Chapron was carried away, as you know, sirs, almost to—what shall I say?—hastiness, which, however, was not followed by consequences, thanks to the presence of mind of Monsieur Gorka.... But, accomplished or not, the act remains. Monsieur Gorka was insulted, and he requires satisfaction.... I do not believe there is any doubt upon that point which is the cause of the affair, or, rather, the whole affair."

"I again ask your pardon, sir," said Montfanon, dryly, who no longer took pains to conceal his anger, "Monsieur Dorsenne and I can not accept your manner of putting the question.... You say that Monsieur Chapron's hastiness was not followed by consequences by reason of Monsieur Gorka's presence of mind. We claim that there was only on the part of Monsieur Chapron a scarcely indicated gesture, which he himself restrained. In consequence you attribute to Monsieur Gorka the quality of the insulted party; you are over-hasty. He is merely the plaintiff, up to this time. It is very different."

"But by rights he is the insulted party," interrupted Ardea. "Restrained or not, it constitutes a threat of assault. I did not wish to claim to be a duellist by telling you of my engagements. But this is the A B C of the 'codice cavalleresco', if the insult be followed by an assault, he who receives the blow is the offended party, and the threat of an assault is equivalent to an actual assault. The offended party has the choice of a duel, weapons and conditions. Consult your authors and ours: Chateauevillars, Du Verger, Angelini and Gelli, all agree."

"I am sorry for their sakes," said Montfanon, and he looked at the Prince with a contraction of the brows almost menacing, "but it is an opinion which does not hold good generally, nor in this particular case. The proof is that a duellist, as you have just said," his voice trembled as he emphasized the insolence offered by the other, "a bravo, to use the expression of your country, would only have to commit a justifiable murder by first insulting him at whom he aims with rude words. The insulted person replies by a voluntary gesture, on the signification of which one may be mistaken, and you will admit that the bravo is the offended party, and that he has the choice of weapons."

"But, Marquis," resumed Hafner, with evident disgust, so greatly did the cavilling and the ill-will of the nobleman irritate him, "where are you wandering to? What do you mean by bringing up chicanery of this sort?"

"Chicanery!" exclaimed Montfanon, half rising.

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"Montfanon!" besought Dorsenne, rising in his turn and forcing the terrible man to be seated.

"I retract the word," said the Baron, "if it has insulted you. Nothing was farther from my thoughts.... I repeat that I apologize, Marquis.... But, come, tell us what you want for your client, that is very simple.... And then we will do all we can to make your demands agree with those of our client.... It is a trifling matter to be adjusted."

"No, sir," said Montfanon, with insolent severity, "it is justice to be rendered, which is very different. What we, Monsieur Dorsenne and I, desire," he continued in a severe voice, "is this: Count Gorka has gravely insulted Monsieur Chapron. Let me finish," he added upon a simultaneous gesture on the part of Ardea and of Hafner. "Yes, sirs, Monsieur Chapron, known to us all for his perfect courtesy, must have been very gravely insulted, even to make the improper gesture of which you just spoke. But it was agreed upon between these two gentlemen, for reasons of delicacy which we had to accept—it was agreed, I say, that the nature of the insult offered by Monsieur Gorka to Monsieur Chapron should not be divulged.... We have the right, however, and I may add the duty devolves upon us, to measure the gravity of that insult by the excess of anger aroused in Monsieur Chapron.... I conclude from it that, to be just, the plan of reconciliation, if we draw it up, should contain reciprocal concessions. Count Gorka will retract his words and Monsieur Chapron apologize for his hastiness."

"It is impossible," exclaimed the Prince; "Gorka will never accept that."

"You, then, wish to have them fight the duel?" groaned Hafner.

"And why not?" said Montfanon, exasperated. "It would be better than for the one to nurse his insults and the other his blow."

"Well, sirs," replied the Baron, rising after the silence which followed that imprudent whim of a man beside himself, "we will confer again with our client. If you wish, we will resume this conversation tomorrow at ten o'clock, say here or in any place convenient to you.... You will excuse me, Marquis. Dorsenne has no doubt told you under what circumstances—"

"Yes, he has told me," interrupted Montfanon, who again glanced at the Prince, and in a manner so mournful that the latter felt himself blush beneath the strange glance, at which, however, it was impossible to feel angry. Dorsenne had only time to cut short all other explanations by replying to Justus Hafner himself.

"Would you like the meeting at my house? We shall have more chance to escape remarks."

"You have done well to change the place," said Montfanon, five minutes later, on entering the carriage with his young friend.

They had descended the staircase without speaking, for the brave and unreasonable Marquis regretted his strangely provoking attitude of the moment before.

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"What would you have?" he added. "The profaned palace, the insolent luxury of that thief, the Prince who has sold his family, the Baron whose part is so sinister. I could no longer contain myself! That Baron, above all, with his directives! Words to repeat when one is German, to a French soldier who fought in 1870, like those words of Monsieur de Moltke! His terms, too, applied to honor and that abominable politeness in which there is servility and insolence!.... Still, I am not satisfied with myself. I am not at all satisfied."

There was in his voice so much good-nature, such evident remorse at not having controlled himself in so grave a situation, that Dorsenne pressed his hand instead of reproaching him, as he said:

"It will do to-morrow.... We will arrange all; it has only been postponed."

"You say that to console me," said the Marquis, "but I know it was very badly managed. And it is my fault! Perhaps we shall have no other service to render our brave Chapron than to arrange a duel for him under the most dangerous conditions. Ah, but I became inopportunately angry!.... But why the deuce did Gorka select such a second? It is incomprehensible!.... Did you see what the cabalistic word gentleman means to those rascals: Steal, cheat, assassinate, but have carriages perfectly appointed, a magnificent mansion, well-served dinners, and fine clothes!.... No, I have suffered too much! Ah, it is not right; and on what a day, too? God! That the old man might die!".... he added, in a voice so low that his companion did not hear his words.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Conditions of blindness so voluntary that they become complicity
Despotism natural to puissant personalities
Egyptian tobacco, mixed with opium and saltpetre
Have never known in the morning what I would do in the evening
I no longer love you
Imagine what it would be never to have been born
Melancholy problem of the birth and death of love
Only one thing infamous in love, and that is a falsehood
Words are nothing; it is the tone in which they are uttered

COSMOPOLIS

By Paul Bourget

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE RELATIVE OF IAGO

The remorse which Montfanon expressed so naively, once acknowledged to himself, increased rapidly in the honest man's heart. He had reason to say from the beginning that the affair looked bad. A quarrel, together with assault, or an attempt at assault, would not be easily set right. It required a diplomatic miracle. The slightest lack of self-possession on the part of the seconds is equivalent to a catastrophe. As happens in such circumstances, events are hurried,

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and the pessimistic anticipations of the irritable Marquis were verified almost as soon as he uttered them. Dorsenne and he had barely left the Palais Savorelli when Gorka arrived. The energy with which he repulsed the proposition of an arrangement which would admit of excuses on his part, served prudent Hafner, and the not less prudent Ardea, as a signal for withdrawal. It was too evident to the two men that no reconciliation would result from a collision of such a madman with a personage so difficult as the most authorized of Florent's proxies had shown himself to be. They then asked Gorka to relieve them from their duty. They had too plausible an excuse in Fanny's betrothal for Boleslas to refuse to release them. That retirement was a second catastrophe. In his impatience to find other seconds who would be firm, Gorka hastened to the Cercle de la Chasse. Chance willed that he should meet with two of his comrades—a Marquis Cibo, Roman, and a Prince Pietrapertoso, Neapolitan, who were assuredly the best he could have chosen to hasten the simplest affair to its worst consequences.

Those two young men of the best Italian families, both very intelligent, very loyal and very good, belonged to that particular class which is to be met with in Vienna, Madrid, St. Petersburg, as in Milan and in Rome, of foreign club-men hypnotized by Paris. And what a Paris! That of showy and noisy fetes, that which passes the morning in practising the sports in fashion, the afternoons in racing, in frequenting fencing-schools, the evening at the theatre and the night at the gaming-table! That Paris which emigrates by turns, according to the season, to Monte Carlo for the 'Tir aux Pigeons', to Deauville for the race week, to Aix-les-Bains for the baccarat season; that Paris which has its own customs, its own language, its own history, even its own cosmopolitanism, for it exercises over certain minds, throughout Europe, so despotic a rule that Cibo, for example, and his friend Pietrapertoso never opened a French journal that was not Parisian.

They sought the short paragraphs in which were related, in detail, the doings of the demi-monde, the last supper given by some well-known viveur, the details of some large party in such and such a fashionable club, the result of a shooting match, or of a fencing match between celebrated fencers! There were between them subjects of conversation of which they never wearied; to know if spirituelle Gladys Harvey was more elegant than Leona d'Astri, if Machault made "counters" as rapid as those of General Garnier, if little Lautrec would adhere or would not adhere to the game he was playing. Imprisoned in Rome by the scantiness of their means, and also by the wishes, the one of his uncle, the other of his grandfather, whose heirs they were, their entire year was summed up in the months which they spent at Nice in the winter, and in the trip they took to Paris at the time of the Grand Prix for six weeks. Jealous

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one of the other, with the most comical rivalry, of the least occurrence at the 'Cercle des Champs-Elysees' or of the Rue Royale in the Eternal City, they affected, in the presence of their colleagues of la chasse, the impassive manner of augurs when the telegraph brought them the news of some Parisian scandal. That inoffensive mania which had made of stout, ruddy Cibo, and of thin, pale Pietrapertoso two delightful studies for Dorsenne during his Roman winter, made of them terrible proxies in the service of Gorka's vengeance.

With what joy and what gravity they accepted that mission all those who have studied swordsmen will understand after this simple sketch, and with what promptness they presented themselves to confer at nine o'clock in the morning with their client's adversary! In short, at half-past twelve the duel was arranged in its slightest detail. The energy employed by Montfanon had only ended in somewhat tempering the conditions—four balls to be exchanged at twenty-five paces at the word of command. The duel was fixed for the following morning, in the inclosure which Cibo owned, with an inn adjoining, not very far distant from the classical tomb of Cecilia Metella. To obtain that distance and the use of new weapons it required the prestige with which the Marquis suddenly clothed himself in the eyes of Gorka's seconds by pronouncing the name, still legendary in the provinces and to the foreigner, of Gramont-Caderousse—'Sic transit gloria mundi'! On leaving that rendezvous the excellent man really had tears in his eyes.

"It is my fault," he moaned, "it is my fault. With that Hafner we should have obtained such a fine official plan by mixing in a little of ours. He offered it to us himself.... Brave Chapron! It is I who have brought him into this dilemma!.... I owe it to him not to abandon him, but to follow him to the end.... Here I shall be assisting at a duel, at my age!.... Did you see how those young snobs lowered their voices when I mentioned my encounter with poor Caderousse?.... Fifty-two years and a month, and not to know yet how to conduct one's self! Let us go to the Rue Leopardi. I wish to ask pardon of our client, and to give him some advice. We will take him to one of my old friends who has a garden near the Villa Pamphili, very secluded. We will spend the rest of the afternoon practising.... Ah! Accursed choler! Yes, it would have been so simple to accept the other's plan yesterday. By the exchange of two or three words, I am sure it could have been arranged."

"Console yourself, Marquis," replied Florent, when the unhappy nobleman had described to him the deplorable result of his negotiations. "I like that better. Monsieur Gorka needs correction. I have only one regret, that of not having given it to him more thoroughly.... Since I shall have to fight a duel, I would at least have had my money's worth!"

"And you have never used a pistol?" asked Montfanon.

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"Bah! I have hunted a great deal and I believe I can shoot."

"That is like night and day," interrupted the Marquis. "Hold yourself in readiness. At three o'clock come for me and I will give you a lesson. And remember there is a merciful God for the brave!"

Although Florent deserved praise for the cheerfulness of which his reply was proof, the first moments which he spent alone after the departure of his two witnesses were very painful.

That which Chapron experienced during those few moments was simply very natural anxiety, the enervation caused by looking at the clock, and saying:

"In twenty-four hours the hand will be on this point of the dial. And shall I still be living?".... He was, however, manly, and knew how to control himself. He struggled against the feeling of weakness, and, while awaiting the time to rejoin his friends, he resolved to write his last wishes. For years his intention had been to leave his entire fortune to his brother-in-law. He, therefore, made a rough draft of his will in that sense, with a pen at first rather unsteady, then quite firm. His will completed, he had courage enough to write two letters, addressed the one to that brother-in-law, the other to his sister. When he had finished his work the hands of the clock pointed to ten minutes of three.

"Still seventeen hours and a half to wait," said he, "but I think I have conquered my nerves. A short walk, too, will benefit me."

So he decided to go on foot to the rendezvous named by Montfanon. He carefully locked the three envelopes in the drawer of his desk. He saw, on passing, that Lincoln was not in his studio. He asked the footman if Madame Maitland was at home. The reply received was that she was dressing, and that she had ordered her carriage for three o'clock.

"Good," said he, "neither of them will have the slightest suspicion; I am saved."

How astonished he would have been could he, while walking leisurely toward his destination, have returned in thought to the smoking-room he had just left! He would have seen a woman glide noiselessly through the open door, with the precaution of a malefactor! He would have seen her examine, without disarranging, all the papers on the table. She frowned on seeing Dorsenne's and the Marquis's cards. She took from the blotting-case some loose leaves and held them in front of the glass, trying to read there the imprint left upon them. He would have seen finally the woman draw from her pocket a bunch of keys. She inserted one of them in the lock of the drawer which Florent had so carefully turned, and took from that drawer the three unsealed envelopes he had placed within it. And the woman who thus read, with a face contracted by



anguish, the papers discovered in such a manner, thanks to a ruse the abominable indelicacy of which gave proof of shameful habits of espionage, was his own sister, the Lydia whom he believed so gentle and so simple, to whom

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he had penned an adieu so tender in case he should be killed—the Lydia who would have terrified him had he seen her thus, with passion distorting the face which was considered insignificant! She herself, the audacious spy, trembled as if she would fall, her eyes dilated, her bosom heaved, her teeth chattered, so greatly was she unnerved by what she had discovered, by the terrible consequences which she had brought about.

Had she not written the anonymous letters to Gorka, denouncing to him the intrigue between Maitland and Madame Steno? Was it not she who had chosen, the better to poison those terrible letters, phrases the most likely to strike the betrayed lover in the most sensitive part of his 'amour propre'? Was it not she who had hastened the return of the jealous man with the certain hope of drawing thus a tragical vengeance upon the hated heads of her husband and the Venetian? That vengeance, indeed, had broken. But upon whom? Upon the only person Lydia loved in the world, upon the brother whom she saw endangered through her fault; and that thought was to her so overwhelming that she sank into the armchair in which Florent had been seated fifteen minutes before, repeating, with an accent of despair: "He is going to fight a duel. He is going to fight instead of the other!"

All the moral history of that obscure and violent soul was summed up in the cry in which passionate anxiety for her brother was coupled with a fierce hatred of her husband. That hatred was the result of a youth and a childhood without the story of which a duplicity so criminal in a being so young would be unintelligible. That youth and that childhood had presaged what Lydia would one day be. But who was there to train the nature in which the heredity of an oppressed race manifested itself, as has been already remarked, by the two most detestable characteristics —hypocrisy and perfidy? Who, moreover, observes in children the truth, as much neglected in practise as it is common in theory, that the defects of the tenth year become vices in the thirtieth? When quite a child Lydia invented falsehoods as naturally as her brother spoke the truth.... Whosoever observed her would have perceived that those lies were all told to paint herself in a favorable light. The germ, too, of another defect was springing up within her—a jealousy instinctive, irrational, almost wicked. She could not see a new plaything in Florent's hands without sulking immediately. She could not bear to see her brother embrace her father without casting herself between them, nor could she see him amuse himself with other comrades.

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Had Napoleon Chapron been interested in the study of character as deeply as he was in his cotton and his sugarcane, he would have perceived, with affright, the early traces of a sinful nature. But, on that point, like his son, he was one of those trustful men who did not judge when they loved. Moreover, Lydia and Florent, to his wounded sensibility of a demi-pariah, formed the only pleasant corner in his life—were the fresh and youthful comforters of his widowerhood and of his misanthropy. He cherished them with the idolatry which all great workers entertain for their children, which is one of the most dangerous forms of paternal tenderness; Lydia's incipient vices were to the planter delightful fancies! Did she lie? The excellent man exclaimed: What an imagination she has! Was she jealous? He would sigh, pressing to his broad breast the tiny form: How sensitive she is!.... The result of that selfish blindness—for to love children thus is to love them for one's self and not for them—was that the girl, at the time of her entrance at Roehampton, was spoiled in the essential traits of her character. But she was so pretty, she owed to the singular mixture of three races an originality of grace so seductive that only the keen glance of a governess of genius could have discerned, beneath that exquisite exterior, the already marked lines of her character. Such governesses are rare, still more so at convents than elsewhere. There was none at Roehampton when Lydia entered that pious haven which was to prove fatal to her, for a reason precisely contrary to that which transformed for Florent the lawns of peaceful Beaumont into a radiant paradise of friendship.

Among the pupils with whom Lydia was to be educated were four young girls from Philadelphia, older than the newcomer by two years, and who, also, had left America for the first time. They brought with them the unconquerable aversion to negro blood and that wonderful keenness in discovering it, even in the most infinitesimal degree, which distinguishes real Yankees. Little Lydia Chapron, having been entered as French, they at first hesitated in the face of a suspicion speedily converted into a certainty and that certainty into an aversion, which they could not conceal. They would not have been children had they not been unfeeling. They, therefore, began to offer poor Lydia petty affronts. Convents and colleges resemble other society. There, too, unjust contempt is like that "ferret of the woods," which runs from hand to hand and which always returns to its point of setting out. All the scornful are themselves scorned by some one—a merited punishment, which does not correct our pride any more than the other punishments which abound in life cure our other faults. Lydia's persecutors were themselves the objects of outrages practised by their comrades born in England, on account of certain peculiarities in their language and for the nasal quality of their voices. The drama was limited, as we can imagine, to a series of insignificant episodes and of which the superintendents only surprised a demi-echo.

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Children nurse passions as strong as ours, but so much interrupted by playfulness that it is impossible to measure their exact strength. Lydia's 'amour propre' was wounded in an incurable manner by that revelation of her own peculiarity. Certain incidents of her American life recurred to her, which she comprehended more clearly. She recalled the portrait of her grandmother, the complexion, the hands, the hair of her father, and she experienced that shame of her birth and of her family much more common with children than our optimism imagines. Parents of humble origin give their sons a liberal education, expose them to the demoralization which it brings with it in their positions, and what social hatreds date from the moment when the boy of twelve blushes in secret at the condition of his relatives! With Lydia, so instinctively jealous and untruthful, those first wounds induced falsehood and jealousy. The slightest superiority even, noticed in one of her companions, became to her a cause for suffering, and she undertook to compensate by personal triumphs the difference of blood, which, once discovered, wounds a vain nature. In order to assure herself those triumphs she tried to win all the persons who approached her, mistresses and comrades, and she began to practise that continued comedy of attitude and of sentiment to which the fatal desire to please, so quickly leads—that charming and dangerous tendency which borders much less on goodness than falseness. At eighteen, submitted to a sort of continual cabotinage, Lydia was, beneath the most attractive exterior, a being profoundly, though unconsciously, wicked, capable of very little affection—she loved no one truly but her brother—open to the invasion of the passions of hatred which are the natural products of proud and false minds. It was one of these passions, the most fatal of all, which marriage was to develop within her—envy.

That hideous vice, one of those which govern the world, has been so little studied by moralists, as all too dishonorable for the heart of man, no doubt, that this statement may appear improbable. Madame Maitland, for years, had been envious of her husband, but envious as one of the rivals of an artist would be, envious as one pretty woman is of another, as one banker is of his opponent, as a politician of his adversary, with the fierce, implacable envy which writhes with physical pain in the face of success, which is transported with a sensual joy in the face of disaster. It is a great mistake to limit the ravages of that guilty passion to the domain of professional emulation. When it is deep, it does not alone attack the qualities of the person, but the person himself, and it was thus that Lydia envied Lincoln. Perhaps the analysis of this sentiment, very subtle in its ugliness, will explain to some a few of the antipathies against which they have struck in their relatives. For it is not only between husband and wife that these unavowed

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envies are met, it is between lover and mistress, friend and friend, brother and brother, sometimes, alas, father and son, mother and daughter! Lydia had married Lincoln Maitland partly out of obedience to her brother's wishes, partly from vanity, because the young man was an American, and because it was a sort of victory over the prejudices of race, of which she thought constantly, but of which she never spoke.

It required only three months of married life to perceive that Maitland could not forgive himself for that marriage. Although he affected to scorn his compatriots, and although at heart he did not share any of the views of the country in which he had not set foot since his fifth year, he could not hear remarks made in New York upon that marriage without a pang. He disliked Lydia for the humiliation, and she felt it. The birth of a child would no doubt have modified that feeling, and, if it would not have removed it, would at least have softened the embittered heart of the young wife. But no child was born to them. They had not returned from their wedding tour, upon which Florent accompanied them, before their lives rolled along in that silence which forms the base of all those households in which husband and wife, according to a simple and grand expression of the people, do not live heart against heart.

After the journey through Spain, which should have been one continued enchantment, the wife became jealous of the evident preference which Florent showed for Maitland. For the first time she perceived the hold which that impassioned friendship had taken upon her brother's heart. He loved her, too, but with a secondary love. The comparison annoyed her daily, hourly, and it did not fail to become a real wound. Returned to Paris, where they spent almost three years, that wound was increased by the sole fact that the puissant individuality of the painter speedily relegated to the shade the individuality of his wife, simply, almost mechanically, like a large tree which pushes a smaller one into the background. The composite society of artists, amateurs, and writers who visited Lincoln came there only for him. The house they had rented was rented only for him. The journeys they made were for him. In short, Lydia was borne away, like Florent, in the orbit of the most despotic force in the world—that of a celebrated talent. An entire book would be required to paint in their daily truth the continued humiliations which brought the young wife to detest that talent and that celebrity with as much ardor as Florent worshipped them. She remained, however, an honest woman, in the sense in which the word is construed by the world, which sums up woman's entire dishonor in errors of love.

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But within Lydia's breast grew a rooted aversion toward Lincoln. She detested him for the pure blood which made of that large, fair, and robust man so admirable a type of Anglo-Saxon beauty, by the side of her, so thin, so insignificant indeed, in spite of the grace of her pretty, dark face. She detested him for his taste, for the original elegance with which he understood how to adorn the places in which he lived, while she maintained within her a barbarous lack of taste for the least arrangement of materials and of colors. When she was forced to acknowledge progress in the painter, bitter hatred entered her heart. When he lamented over his work, and when she saw him a prey to the dolorous anxiety of an artist who doubts himself, she experienced a profound joy, marred only by the evident sadness into which Lincoln's struggles plunged Florent. Never had she met the eyes of Chapron fixed upon Maitland with that look of a faithful dog which rejoices in the joy of its master, or which suffers in his sadness, without enduring, like Alba Steno, the sensation of a "needle in the heart."

The idolatrous worship of her brother for the painter caused her to suffer still more as she comprehended, with the infallible perspicacity of antipathy, the immense dupery. She read the very depths of the souls of the two old comrades of Beaumont. She knew that in that friendship, as is almost always the case, one alone gave all to receive in exchange only the most brutal recognition, that with which a huntsman or a master gratifies a faithful dog! As for enlightening Florent with regard to Lincoln's character, she had vainly tried to do so by those fine and perfidious insinuations in which women excel. She only recognized her impotence, and myriads of hateful impressions were thus accumulated in her heart, to be summed up in one of those frenzies of taciturn rancor which bursts on the first opportunity with terrifying energy. Crime itself has its laws of development. Between the pretty little girl who wept on seeing a new toy in her brother's hand and the Lydia Maitland, forcer of locks, author of anonymous letters, driven by the thirst for vengeance, even to villainy, no dramatic revolution of character had taken place. The logical succession of days had sufficed.

The occasion to gratify that deep and mortal longing to touch Lincoln on some point truly sensitive, how often Lydia had sought it in vain, before Madame Steno obtained an ascendancy over the painter. She had been reduced by it to those meannesses of feminine animosity to manage, as if accidentally, that her husband might read all the disagreeable articles written about his paintings, innocently to praise before him the rivals who had given him offense, to repeat to him with an air of embarrassment the slightest criticisms pronounced on one of his exhibits—all the unpleasantnesses which had the result of irritating Florent, above all, for Maitland was one of those artists too well satisfied with the results of his

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own work for the opinion of others to annoy him very much. On the other hand, before the passion for the dogaresse had possessed him, he had never loved. Many painters are thus, satisfying with magnificent models an impetuosity of temperament which does not mount from the senses to the heart. Accustomed to regard the human form from a certain point, they find in beauty, which would appear to us simply animal, principles of plastic emotion which at times suffice for their amorous requirements. They are only more deeply touched by it, when to that rather coarse intoxication is joined, in the woman who inspires them, the refined graces of mind, the delicacy of elegance and the subtleties of sentiment.

Such was Madame Steno, who at once inspired the painter with a passion as complete as a first love. It was really such. The Countess, who was possessed of the penetration of voluptuousness, was not mistaken there. Lydia, who was possessed of the penetration of hatred, was not mistaken either. She knew from the first day how matters stood in the beginning, because she was as observing as she was dissimulating; then, thanks to means less hypothetic, she had always had the habit of making those abominable inquiries which are natural, we venture to avow, to nine women out of ten! And how many men are women, too, on this point, as said the fabulist. At school Lydia was one of those who ascended to the dormitory, or who reentered the study to rummage in the cupboards and open trunks of her companions. When mature, never had a sealed letter passed through her hands without her having ingeniously managed to read through the envelope, or at least to guess from the postmark, the seal, the handwriting of the address, who was the author of it. The instinct of curiosity was so strong that she could not refrain, at a telegraph office, from glancing over the shoulders of the persons before her, to learn the contents of their despatches. She never had her hair dressed or made her toilette without minutely questioning her maid as to the goings-on in the pantry and the antechamber. It was through a story of that kind that she learned the altercation between Florent and Gorka in the vestibule, which proves, between parentheses, that these espionages by the aid of servants are often efficacious. But they reveal a native baseness, which will not recoil before any piece of villainy.

When Madame Maitland suspected the liaison of Madame Steno and her husband, she no more hesitated to open the latter's secretary than she later hesitated to open the desk of her brother. The correspondence which she read in that way was of a nature which exasperated her desire for vengeance almost to frenzy. For not only did she acquire the evidence of a happiness shared by them which humiliated in her the woman barren in all senses of the word, a stranger to voluptuousness as well as to maternity, but she gathered from it numerous proofs that the Countess cherished, with regard to her, a scorn of race as absolute as if Venice had been a city of the United States.... That part of the Adriatic abounds in prejudices of blood, as do all countries which serve

as confluents for every nation. It is sufficient to convince one's self of it, to have heard a Venetian treat of the Slavs as 'Cziavoni', and the Levantines as 'Gregugni'.

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Madame Steno, in those letters she had written with all the familiarity and all the liberty of passion, never called Lydia anything but La Morettina, and by a very strange illogicalness never was the name of the brother of La Morettina mentioned without a formula of friendship. As the mistress treated Florent in that manner, it must be that she apprehended no hostility on the part of her lover's brother-in-law. Lydia understood it only too well, as well as the fresh proof of Florent's sentiments for Lincoln. Once more he gave precedence to the friend over the sister, and on what an occasion! The most secret wounds in her inmost being bled as she read. The success of Alba's portrait, which promised to be a masterpiece, ended by precipitating her into a fierce and abominable action. She resolved to denounce Madame Steno's new love to the betrayed lover, and she wrote the twelve letters, wisely calculated and graduated, which had indeed determined Gorka's return. His return had even been delayed too long to suit the relative of Iago, who had decided to aim at Madame Steno through Alba by a still more criminal denunciation. Lydia was in that state of exasperation in which the vilest weapons seem the best, and she included innocent Alba in her hatred for Maitland, on account of the portrait, a turn of sentiment which will show that it was envy by which that soul was poisoned above all. Ah, what bitter delight the simultaneous success of that double infamy had procured for her! What savage joy, mingled with bitterness and ecstasy, had been hers the day before, on witnessing the nervousness of poor Alba and the suppressed fury of Boleslas!

In her mind she had seen Maitland provoked by the rival whom she knew to be as adroit with the sword as with the pistol. She would not have been the great-grandchild of a slave of Louisiana, if she had not combined with the natural energy of her hatreds a considerable amount of superstition. A fortune-teller had once foretold, from the lines in her palm, that she would cause the violent death of some person. "It will be he," she had thought, glancing at her husband with a horrible tremor of hope.... And now she had the proof, the indisputable proof, that her plot for vengeance was to terminate in the danger of another. Of what other?

The letter and will made by Florent disclosed to her the threat of a fatal duel suspended over the head which was the dearest to her. So she had driven to a tragical encounter the only being whom she loved.... The disappointment of the heart in which palpitated the wild energies of a bestial atavism was so sudden, so acute, so dolorous, that she uttered an inarticulate cry, leaning upon her brother's desk, and, in the face of those sheets of paper which had revealed so much, she repeated:

"He is going to fight a duel! He!.... And I am the cause!".... Then, returning the letters and the will to the drawer, she closed it and rose, saying aloud:

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"No. It shall not be. I will prevent it, if I have to cast myself between them. I do not wish it! I do not wish it!"

It was easy to utter such words. But the execution of them was less easy. Lydia knew it, for she had no sooner uttered that vow than she wrung her hands in despair—those weak hands which Madame Steno compared in one of her letters to the paws of a monkey, the fingers were so supple and so long—and she uttered this despairing cry: "But how?".... which so many criminals have uttered before the issue, unexpected and fatal to them, of their shrewdest calculations. The poet has sung it in the words which relate the story of all our faults, great and small:

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us."

It is necessary that the belief in the equity of an incomprehensible judge be well grounded in us, for the strongest minds are struck by a sinister apprehension when they have to brave the chance of a misfortune absolutely merited. The remembrance of the soothsayer's prediction suddenly occurred to Lydia. She uttered another cry, rubbing her hands like a somnambulist. She saw her brother's blood flowing.... No, the duel should not take place! But how to prevent it? How-how? she repeated. Florent was not at home. She could, therefore, not implore him. If he should return, would there still be time? Lincoln was not at home. Where was he? Perhaps at a rendezvous with Madame Steno.

The image of that handsome idol of love clasped in the painter's arms, plunged in the abyss of intoxication which her ardent letters described, was presented to the mind of the jealous wife. What irony to perceive thus those two lovers, whom she had wished to strike, with the ecstasy of bliss in their eyes! Lydia would have liked to tear out their eyes, his as well as hers, and to trample them beneath her heel. A fresh flood of hatred filled her heart. God! how she hated them, and with what a powerless hatred! But her time would come; another need pressed sorely—to prevent the meeting of the following day, to save her brother. To whom should she turn, however? To Dorsenne? To Montfanon? To Baron Hafner? To Peppino Ardea? She thought by turns of the four personages whose almost simultaneous visits had caused her to believe that they were the seconds of the two champions. She rejected them, one after the other, comprehending that none of them possessed enough authority to arrange the affair. Her thoughts finally reverted to Florent's adversary, to Boleslas Gorka, whose wife was her friend and whom she had always found so courteous. What if she should ask him to spare her brother? It was not Florent against whom the discarded lover bore a grudge. Would he not be touched by her tears? Would he not tell her what had led to the quarrel and what she should ask of her brother that the quarrel might be conciliated? Could she not obtain from him the promise to discharge his weapon in the air, if the duel was with pistols, or, if it was with swords, simply to disarm his enemy?

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Like nearly all persons unversed in the art, she believed in infallible fencers, in marksmen who never missed their aim, and she had also ideas profoundly, absolutely inexact on the relations of one man with another in the matter of an insult. But how can women admit that inflexible rigor in certain cases, which forms the foundation of manly relations, when they themselves allow of a similar rigor neither in their arguments with men, nor in their discussions among themselves? Accustomed always to appeal from convention to instinct and from reason to sentiment, they are, in the face of certain laws, be they those of justice or of honor, in a state of incomprehension worse than ignorance. A duel, for example, appears to them like an arbitrary drama, which the wish of one of those concerned can change at his fancy. Ninety-nine women out of a hundred would think like Lydia Maitland of hastening to the adversary of the man they love, to demand, to beg for his life. Let us add, however, that the majority would not carry out that thought. They would confine themselves to sewing in the vest of their beloved some blessed medal, in recommending him to the Providence, which, for them, is still the favoritism of heaven. Lydia felt that if ever Florent should learn of her step with regard to Gorka, he would be very indignant. But who would tell him? She was agitated by one of those fevers of fear and of remorse which are too acute not to act, cost what it might. Her carriage was announced, and she entered it, giving the address of the Palazzetto Doria. In what terms should she approach the man to whom she was about to pay that audacious and absurd visit? Ah, what mattered it? The circumstances would inspire her. Her desire to cut short the duel was so strong that she did not doubt of success.

She was greatly disappointed when the footman at the palace told her that the Count had gone out, while at the same moment a voice interrupted him with a gay laugh. It was Countess Maud Gorka, who, returning from her walk with her little boy, recognized Lydia's coup, and who said to her:

"What a lucky idea I had of returning a little sooner. I see you were afraid of a storm, as you drove out in a closed carriage. Will you come upstairs a moment?" And, perceiving that the young woman, whose hand she had taken, was trembling: "What ails you? I should think you were ill! You do not feel well? My God, what ails her! She is ill, Luc," she added, turning to her son; "run to my room and bring me the large bottle of English salts; Rose knows which one. Go, go quickly."

"It is nothing," replied Lydia, who had indeed closed her eyes as if on the point of swooning. "See, I am better already. I think I will return home; it will be wiser."

"I shall not leave you," said Maud, seating herself, too, in the carriage; and, as they handed her the bottle of salts, she made Madame Maitland inhale it, talking to her the while as to a sick child: "Poor little thing!"

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"How her cheeks burn! And you pay visits in this state. It is very venturesome! Rue Leopardi," she called to the coachman, "quickly."

The carriage rolled away, and Madame Gorka continued to press the tiny hands of Lydia, to whom she gave the tender name, so ironical under the circumstances, of "Poor little one!" Maud was one of those women like whom England produces many, for the honor of that healthy and robust British civilization, who are at once all energy and all goodness. As large and stout as Lydia was slender, she would rather have borne her to her bed in her vigorous arms than to have abandoned her in the troubled state in which she had surprised her. Not less practical and, as her compatriots say, as matter-of-fact as she was charitable, she began to question her friend on the symptoms which had preceded that attack, when with astonishment she saw that altered face contract, tears gushing from the closed eyes, and the fragile form convulsed by sobs. Lydia had a nervous attack caused by anxiety, by the fresh disappointment of Boleslas's absence from home, and no doubt, too, by the gentleness with which Maud addressed her, and tearing her handkerchief with her white teeth, she moaned:

"No, I am not ill. But it is that thought which I can not bear. No, I can not. Ah, it is maddening!" And turning toward her companion, she in her turn pressed her hands, saying: "But you know nothing! You suspect nothing! It is that which maddens me, when I see you tranquil, calm, happy, as if the minutes were not valuable, every one, to-day, to you as well as to me. For if one is my brother, the other is your husband; and you love him. You must love him, to have pardoned him for what you have pardoned him."

She had spoken in a sort of delirium, brought about by her extreme nervous excitement, and she had uttered, she, usually so dissembling, her very deepest thought. She did not think she was giving Madame Gorka any information by that allusion, so direct, to the liaison of Boleslas with Madame Steno. She was persuaded, as was entire Rome, that Maud knew of her husband's infidelities, and that she tolerated them by one of those heroic sacrifices which maternity justifies. How many women have immolated thus their wifely pride to maintain the domestic relation which the father shall at least not desert officially! All Rome was mistaken, and Lydia Maitland was to have an unexpected proof. Not a suspicion that such an intrigue could unite her husband with the mother of her best friend had ever entered the thoughts of Boleslas's wife. But to account for that, it is necessary to admit, as well, and to comprehend the depth of innocence of which, notwithstanding her twenty-six years, the beautiful and healthy Englishwoman, with her eyes so clear, so frank, was possessed.

She was one of those persons who command the respect of the boldest of men, and before whom the most dissolute women exercised care. She might have seen the freedom of Madame Steno without being disillusioned. She had only a liking for acquaintances and positive conversation. She was very intellectual, but without any desire to study character.

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Dorsenne said of her, with more justness than he thought: "Madame Boleslas Gorka is married to a man who has never been presented to her," meaning by that, that first of all she had no idea of her husband's character, and then of the treason of which she was the victim. However, the novelist was not altogether right. Boleslas's infidelity was of too long standing for the woman passionately, religiously loyal, who was his wife, not to have suffered by it. But there was an abyss between such sufferings and the intuition of a determined fact such as that which Lydia had just mentioned, and such a suspicion was so far from Maud's thoughts that her companion's words only aroused in her astonishment at the mysterious danger of which Lydia's troubles was a proof more eloquent still than her words.

"Your brother? My husband?" she said. "I do not understand you."

"Naturally," replied Lydia, "he has hidden all from you, as Florent hid all from me. Well! They are going to fight a duel, and to-morrow morning.... Do not tremble, in your turn," she continued, twining her arms around Maud Gorka. "We shall be two to prevent the terrible affair, and we shall prevent it."

"A duel? To-morrow morning?" repeated Maud, in affright. "Boleslas fights to-morrow with your brother? No, it is impossible. Who told you so? How do you know it?"

"I read the proof of it with my eyes," replied Lydia. "I read Florent's will. I read the letter which he prepared for Maitland and for me in case of accident...."

"Should I be in the state in which you see me if it were not true?"

"Oh, I believe you!" cried Maud, pressing her hands to her eyelids, as if to shut out a horrible sight. "But where can they be seen? Boleslas has been here scarcely any of the time for two days. What is there between them? What have they said to one another? One does not risk one's life for nothing when he has, like Boleslas, a wife and a son. Answer me, I conjure you. Tell me all. I desire to know all. What is there at the bottom of this duel?"

"What could there be but a woman?" interrupted Lydia, who put into the two last words more savage scorn than if she had publicly spit in Caterina Steno's face. But that fresh access of anger fell before the surprise caused her by Madame Gorka's reply.

"What woman? I understand you still less than I did just now."

"When we are at home I will speak,".... replied Lydia, after having looked at Maud with a surprised glance, which was in itself the most terrible reply. The two women were silent. It was Maud who now required the sympathy of friendship, so greatly had the words uttered by Lydia startled her. The companion whose arm rested upon hers in that carriage, and who had inspired her with such pity fifteen minutes before, now rendered

her fearful. She seemed to be seated by the side of another person. In the creature whose thin nostrils were dilated with

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passion, whose mouth was distorted with bitterness, whose eyes sparkled with anger, she no longer recognized little Madame Maitland, so taciturn, so reserved that she was looked upon as insignificant. What had that voice, usually so musical, told her; that voice so suddenly become harsh, and which had already revealed to her the great danger suspended over Boleslas? To what woman had that voice alluded, and what meant that sudden reticence?

Lydia was fully aware of the grief into which she would plunge Maud without the slightest premeditation. For a moment she thought it almost a crime to say more to a woman thus deluded. But at the same time she saw in the revelation two certain results. In undeceiving Madame Gorka she made a mortal enemy for Madame Steno, and, on the other hand, never would the woman so deeply in love with her husband allow him to fight for a former mistress. So, when they both entered the small salon of the Moorish mansion, Lydia's resolution was taken. She was determined to conceal nothing of what she knew from unhappy Maud, who asked her, with a beating heart, and in a voice choked by emotion:

"Now, will you explain to me what you want to say?"

"Question me," replied the other; "I will answer you. I have gone too far to draw back."

"You claimed that a woman was the cause of the duel between your brother and my husband?"

"I am sure of it," replied Lydia.

"What is that woman's name?"

"Madame Steno."

"Madame Steno?" repeated Maud. "Catherine Steno is the cause of that duel? How?"

"Because she is my husband's mistress," replied Lydia, brutally; "because she has been your husband's, because Gorka came here, mad with jealousy, to provoke Lincoln, and because he met my brother, who prevented him from entering.... They quarrelled, I know not in what manner. But I know the cause of the duel.... Am I right, yes or no, in telling you they are to fight about that woman?"

"My husband's mistress?" cried Maud. "You say Madame Steno has been my husband's mistress? It is not true. You lie! You lie! You lie! I do not believe it."

"You do not believe me?" said Lydia, shrugging her shoulders. "As if I had the least interest in deceiving you; as if one would lie when the life of the only being one loves in



the world is in the balance! For I have only my brother, and perhaps to-morrow I shall no longer have him.... But you shall believe me. I desire that we both hate that woman, that we both be avenged upon her, as we both do not wish the duel to take place—the duel of which, I repeat, she is the cause, the sole cause.... You do not believe me? Do you know what caused your husband to return? You did not expect him; confess! It was I—I, do you hear—who wrote him what Steno and Lincoln were doing; day after day I wrote about their love, their meetings, their bliss. Ah, I was sure it would not be in vain, and he returned. Is that a proof?"

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"You did not do that?" cried Madame Gorka, recoiling with horror. "It was infamous."

"Yes, I did it," replied Lydia, with savage pride, "and why not? It was my right when she took my husband from me. You have only to return and to look in the place where Gorka keeps his letters. You will certainly find those I wrote, and others, I assure you, from that woman. For she has a mania for letter-writing.... Do you believe me now, or will you repeat that I have lied?"

"Never," returned Maud, with sorrowful indignation upon her lovely, loyal face, "no, never will I descend to such baseness."

"Well, I will descend for you," said Lydia. "What you do not dare to do, I will dare, and you will ask me to aid you in being avenged. Come," and, seizing the hand of her stupefied companion, she drew her into Lincoln's studio, at that moment unoccupied. She approached one of those Spanish desks, called baygenos, and she touched two small panels, which disclosed, on opening, a secret drawer, in which were a package of letters, which she seized. Maud Gorka watched her with the same terrified horror with which she would have seen some one killed and robbed. That honorable soul revolted at the scene in which her mere presence made of her an accomplice. But at the same time she was a prey, as had been her husband several days before, to that maddening appetite to know the truth, which becomes, in certain forms of doubt, a physical need, as imperious as hunger and thirst, and she listened to Florent's sister, who continued:

"Will it be a proof when you have seen the affair written in her own hand? Yes," she continued, with cruel irony, "she loves correspondence, our fortunate rival. Justice must be rendered her that she may make no more avowals. She writes as she feels. It seems that the successor was jealous of his predecessor.... See, is this a proof this time?".... And, after having glanced at the first letters as a person familiar with them, she handed one of those papers to Maud, who had not the courage to avert her eyes. What she saw written upon that sheet drew from her a cry of anguish. She had, however, only read ten lines, which proved how much mistaken psychological Dorsenne was in thinking that Maitland was ignorant of the former relations between his mistress and Gorka. Countess Steno's grandeur, that which made a courageous woman almost a heroine in her passions, was an absolute sincerity and disgust for the usual pettiness of flirtations. She would have disdained to deny to a new lover the knowledge of her past, and the semiavowals, so common to women, would have seemed to her a cowardice still worse. She had not essayed to hide from Maitland what connection she had broken off for him, and it was upon one of those phrases, in which she spoke of it openly, that Madame Gorka's eyes fell:

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"You will be pleased with me," she wrote, "and I shall no longer see in your dear blue eyes which I kiss, as I love them, that gleam of mistrust which troubles me. I have stopped the correspondence with Gorka. If you require it, I will even break with Maud, notwithstanding the reason you know of and which will render it difficult for me. But how can you be jealous yet?... Is not my frankness with regard to that liaison the surest guarantee that it is ended? Come, do not be jealous. Listen to what I know so well, that I felt I loved, and that my life began only on the day when you took me in your arms. The woman you have awakened in me, no one has known—"

"She writes well, does she not?" said Lydia, with a gleam of savage triumph in her eyes. "Do you believe me, now?... Do you see that we have the same interest to-day, a common affront to avenge? And we will avenge it.... Do you understand that you can not allow your husband to fight a duel with my brother? You owe that to me who have given you this weapon by which you hold him.... Threaten him with a divorce. Fortune is with you. The law will give you your child. I repeat, you hold him firmly. You will prevent the duel, will you not?"

"Ah! What do you think it matters to me now if they fight or not?" said Maud. "From the moment he deceived me was I not widowed? Do not approach me," she added, looking at Lydia with wild eyes, while a shudder of repulsion shook her entire frame.... "Do not speak to me.... I have as much horror of you as of him.... Let me go, let me leave here.... Even to feel myself in the same room with you fills me with horror.... Ah, what disgrace!"

She retreated to the door, fixing upon her informant a gaze which the other sustained, notwithstanding the scorn in it, with the gloomy pride of defiance. She went out repeating: "Ah, what disgrace!" without Lydia having addressed her, so greatly had surprise at the unexpected result of all her attempts paralyzed her. But the formidable creature lost no time in regret and repentance. She paused a few moments to think. Then, crushing in her nervous hand the letter she had shown Maud, at the risk of being discovered by her husband later, she said aloud:

"Coward! Lord, what a coward she is! She loves. She will pardon. Will there, then, be no one to aid me? No one to smite them in their insolent happiness." After meditating awhile, her face still more contracted, she placed the letter in the drawer, which she closed again, and half an hour later she summoned a commissionaire, to whom she intrusted a letter, with the order to deliver it immediately, and that letter was addressed to the inspector of police of the district. She informed him of the intended duel, giving him the names of the two adversaries and of the four seconds. If she had not been afraid of her brother, she would even that time have signed her name.

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"I should have gone to work that way at first," said she to herself, when the door of the small salon closed behind the messenger to whom she had given her order personally. "The police know how to prevent them from fighting, even if I do not succeed with Florent.... As for him?".... and she looked at a portrait of Maitland upon the desk at which she had just been writing. "Were I to tell him what is taking place.... No, I will ask nothing of him.... I hate him too much.".... And she concluded with a fierce smile, which disclosed her teeth at the corners of her mouth:

"It is all the same. It is necessary that Maud Gorka work with me against her. There is some one whom she will not pardon, and that is.... Madame Steno." And, in spite of her uneasiness, the wicked woman trembled with delight at the thought of her work.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE GROUND

When Maud Gorka left the house on the Rue Leopardi she walked on at first rapidly, blindly, without seeing, without hearing anything, like a wounded animal which runs through the thicket to escape danger, to escape its wounds, to escape itself. It was a little more than half-past three o'clock when the unhappy woman hastened from the studio, unable to bear near her the presence of Lydia Maitland, of that sinister worker of vengeance who had so cruelly revealed to her, with such indisputable proofs, the atrocious affair, the long, the infamous, the inexpiable treason.

It was almost six o'clock before Maud Gorka really regained consciousness. A very common occurrence aroused her from the somnambulism of suffering in which she had wandered for two hours. The storm which had threatened since noon at length broke. Maud, who had scarcely heeded the first large drops, was forced to seek shelter when the clouds suddenly burst, and she took refuge at the right extremity of the colonnade of St. Peter's. How had she gone that far? She did not know herself precisely. She remembered vaguely that she had wandered through a labyrinth of small streets, had crossed the Tiber—no doubt by the Garibaldi bridge—had passed through a large garden—doubtless the Janicule, since she had walked along a portion of the ramparts. She had left the city by the Porte de Saint-Pancrace, to follow by that of Cavallegieri the sinuous line of the Urban walls.

That corner of Rome, with a view of the pines of the Villa Pamfili on one side, and on the other the back part of the Vatican, serves as a promenade during the winter for the few cardinals who go in search of the afternoon sun, certain there of meeting only a few strangers. In the month of May it is a desert, scorched by the sun, which glows upon the brick, discolored by two centuries of that implacable heat which caresses the scales of the green and gray lizards about to crawl between the bees of Pope Urbain VIII's escutcheon of the Barberini family. Madame Gorka's

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instinct had at least served her in leading her upon a route on which she met no one. Now the sense of reality returned. She recognized the objects around her, and that framework, so familiar to her piety of fervent Catholicism, the enormous square, the obelisk of Sixte-Quint in the centre, the fountains, the circular portico crowned with bishops and martyrs, the palace of the Vatican at the corner, and yonder the facade of the large papal cathedral, with the Saviour and the apostles erect upon the august pediment.

On any other occasion in life the pious young woman would have seen in the chance which led her thither, almost unconsciously, an influence from above, an invitation to enter the church, there to ask the strength to suffer of the God who said: "Let him who wishes follow me, let him renounce all, let him take up his cross and follow me!" But she was passing through that first bitter paroxysm of grief in which it is impossible to pray, so greatly does the revolt of nature cry out within us. Later, we may recognize the hand of Providence in the trial imposed upon us. We see at first only the terrible injustice of fate, and we tremble in the deepest recesses of our souls with rebellion at the blow from which we bleed. That which rendered the rebellion more invincible and more fierce in Maud, was the suddenness of the mortal blow.

Daily some pure, honest woman, like her, acquires the proof of the treason of a husband whom she has not ceased to love. Ordinarily, the indisputable proof is preceded by a long period of suspicion. The faithless one neglects his hearth. A change takes place in his daily habits. Various hints reveal to the outraged wife the trace of a rival, which woman's jealousy distinguishes with a scent as certain as that of a dog which finds a stranger in the house. And, finally, although there is in the transition from doubt to certainty a laceration of the heart, it is at least the laceration of a heart prepared. That preparation, that adaptation, so to speak, of her soul to the truth, Maud had been deprived of. The care taken by Madame Steno to strengthen the friendship between her and Alba had suppressed the slightest signs. Boleslas had no need to change his domestic life in order to see his mistress at his convenience and in an intimacy entertained, provoked, by his wife herself. The wife, too, had been totally, absolutely deceived. She had assisted in her husband's adultery with one of those illusions so complete that it seemed improbable to the indifferent and to strangers. The awakening from such illusions is the most terrible. That man whom society considered a complaisant husband, that woman who seemed so indulgent a wife, suddenly find that they have committed a murder or a suicide, to the great astonishment of the world which, even then, hesitates to recognize in that access of folly the proof, the blow, more formidable, more instantaneous in its ravages, than those of love-sudden disillusion.

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When the disaster is not interrupted by acts of violence, it causes an irreparable destruction of the youthfulness of the soul, it is the idea instilled in us forever that all can betray, since we have been betrayed in that manner. It is for years, for life, sometimes, that powerlessness to be affected, to hope, to believe, which caused Maud Gorka to remain, on that afternoon, leaning against the pedestal of a column, watching the rain fall, instead of ascending to the Basilica, where the confessional offers pardon for all sins and the remedy for all sorrows. Alas! It was consolation simply to kneel there, and the poor woman was only in the first stage of Calvary.

She watched the rain fall, and she found a savage comfort in the formidable character of the storm, which seemed like a cataclysm of nature, to such degree did the flash of the lightning and the roar of the thunder mingle with the echoes of the vast palace beneath the lash of the wind. Forms began to take shape in her mind, after the whirlwind of blind suffering in which she felt herself borne away after the first glance cast upon that fatal letter. Each word rose before her eyes, so feverish that she closed them with pain. The last two years of her life, those which had bound her to Countess Steno, returned to her thoughts, illuminated by a brilliance which drew from her constantly these words, uttered with a moan: How could he? She saw Venice and their sojourn in the villa to which Boleslas had conducted her after the death of their little girl, in order that there, in the restful atmosphere of the lagoon, she might overcome the keen paroxysm of pain.

How very kind and delicate Madame Steno had been at that time; at least how kind she had seemed, and how delicate likewise, comprehending her grief and sympathizing with it.... Their superficial relations had gradually ripened into friendship. Then, no doubt, the treason had begun. The purloiner of love had introduced herself under cover of the pity in which Maud had believed. Seeing the Countess so generous, she had treated as calumny the slander of the world relative to a person capable of such touching kindness of heart. And it was at that moment that the false woman took Boleslas from her! A thousand details recurred to her which at the time she had not understood; the sails of the two lovers in the gondola, which she had not even thought of suspecting; a visit which Boleslas had made to Piove and from which he only returned the following day, giving as a pretext a missed train; words uttered aside on the balcony of the Palais Steno at night, while she talked with Alba. Yes, it was at Venice that their adultery began, before her who had divined nothing, her whose heart was filled with inconsolable regret for her lost darling! Ah, how could he? she moaned again, and the visions multiplied.

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In her mind were then opened all the windows which Gorka's perfidity and the Countess's as well, had sealed with such care. She saw again the months which followed their return to Rome, and that mode of life so convenient for both. How often had she walked out with Alba, thus freeing the mother and the husband from the only surveillance annoying to them. What did the lovers do during those hours? How many times on returning to the Palazzetto Doria had she found Catherine Steno in the library, seated on the divan beside Boleslas, and she had not mistrusted that the woman had come, during her absence, to embrace that man, to talk to him of love, to give herself to him, without doubt, with the charm of villainy and of danger! She remembered the episode of their meeting at Bayreuth the previous summer, when she went to England alone with her son, and when her husband undertook to conduct Alba and the Countess from Rome to Bavaria. They had all met at Nuremberg. The apartments of the hotel in which the meeting took place became again very vivid in Maud's memory, with Madame Steno's bedroom adjoining that of Boleslas's.

The vision of their caresses, enjoyed in the liberty of the night, while innocent Alba slept near by, and when she rolled away in a carriage with little Luc, drew from her this cry once more: "Ah, how could he!".... And immediately that vision awoke in her the remembrance of her husband's recent return. She saw him traversing Europe on the receipt of an anonymous letter, to reach that woman's side twenty-four hours sooner. What a proof of passion was the frenzy which had not allowed him any longer to bear doubt and absence!.... Did he love the mistress who did not even love him, since she had deceived him with Maitland? And he was going to fight a duel on her account!.... Jealousy, at that moment, wrung the wife's heart with a pang still stronger than that of indignation. She, the strong Englishwoman, so large, so robust, almost masculine in form, mentally compared herself with the supple Italian with her form so round, with her gestures so graceful, her hands so delicate, her feet so dainty; compared herself with the creature of desire, whose every movement implied a secret wave of passion, and she ceased her cry—"Ah, how could he?"—at once. She had a clear knowledge of the power of her rival.

It is indeed a supreme agony for an honorable woman, who loves, to feel herself thus degraded by the mere thought of the intoxication her husband has tasted in arms more beautiful, more caressing, more entwining than hers. It was, too, a signal for the return of will to the tortured but proud soul. Disgust possessed her, so violent, so complete, for the atmosphere of falsehood and of sensuality in which Boleslas had lived two years, that she drew herself up, becoming again strong and implacable. Braving the storm, she turned in the direction of her home, with this resolution as firmly rooted in her mind as if she had deliberated for months and months.

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"I will not remain with that man another day. Tomorrow I will leave for England with my son."

How many, in a similar situation, have uttered such vows, to abjure them when they find themselves face to face with the man who has betrayed them, and whom they love. Maud was not of that order. Certainly she loved dearly the seductive Boleslas, wedded against her parents' will the perfidious one for whom she had sacrificed all, living far from her native land and her family for years, because it pleased him, breathing, living, only for him and for their boy. But there was within her—as her long, square chin, her short nose and the strength of her brow revealed—the force of inflexibility—which is met with in characters of an absolute uprightness. Love, with her, could be stifled by disgust, or, rather, she considered it degrading to continue to love one whom she scorned, and, at that moment, it was supreme scorn which reigned in her heart. She had, in the highest degree, the great virtue which is found wherever there is nobility, and of which the English have made the basis of their moral education—the religion, the fanaticism of loyalty. She had always grieved on discovering the wavering nature of Boleslas. But if she had observed in him, with sorrow, any exaggerations of language, any artificial sentiment, a dangerous suppleness of mind, she had pardoned him those defects with the magnanimity of love, attributing them to a defective training. Gorka at a very early age had witnessed a stirring family drama—his mother and his father lived apart, while neither the one nor the other had the exclusive guidance of the child. How could she find indulgence for the shameful hypocrisy of two years' standing, for the villainy of that treachery practised at the domestic hearth, for the continued, voluntary disloyalty of every day, every hour? Though Maud experienced, in the midst of her despair, the sort of calmness which proves a firm and just resolution, when she reentered the Palazzetto Doria—what a drama had been enacted in her heart since her going out!—and it was in a voice almost as calm as usual that she asked: "Is the Count at home?"

What did she experience when the servant, after answering her in the affirmative, added: "Madame and Mademoiselle Steno, too, are awaiting Madame in the salon." At the thought that the woman who had stolen from her her husband was there, the betrayed wife felt her blood boil, to use a common but expressive phrase. It was very natural that Alba's mother should call upon her, as was her custom. It was still more natural for her to come there that day. For very probably a report of the duel the following day had reached her. Her presence, however, and at that moment, aroused in Maud a feeling of indignation so impassioned that her first impulse was to enter, to drive out Boleslas's mistress as one would drive out a servant surprised thieving. Suddenly the thought of Alba presented

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itself to her mind, of that sweet and pure Alba, of that soul as pure as her name, of her whose dearest friend she was. Since the dread revelation she had thought several times of the young girl. But her deep sorrow having absorbed all the power of her soul, she had not been able to feel such friendship for the delicate and pretty child. At the thought of ejecting her rival, as she had the right to do, that sentiment stirred within her. A strange pity flooded her soul, which caused her to pause in the centre of the large hall, ornamented with statues and columns, which she was in the act of crossing. She called the servant just as he was about to put his hand on the knob of the door. The analogy between her situation and that of Alba struck her very forcibly. She experienced the sensation which Alba had so often experienced in connection with Fanny, sympathy with a sorrow so like her own. She could not give her hand to Madame Steno after what she had discovered, nor could she speak to her otherwise than to order her from her house. And to utter before Alba one single phrase, to make one single gesture which would arouse her suspicions, would be too implacable, too iniquitous a vengeance! She turned toward the door which led to her own room, bidding the servant ask his master to come thither. She had devised a means of satisfying her just indignation without wounding her dear friend, who was not responsible for the fact that the two culprits had taken shelter behind her innocence.

Having entered the small, pretty boudoir which led into her bedroom, she seated herself at her desk, on which was a photograph of Madame Steno, in a group consisting of Boleslas, Alba, and herself. The photograph smiled with a smile of superb insolence, which suddenly reawakened in the outraged woman her frenzy of rancor, interrupted or rather suspended for several moments by pity. She took the frame in her hands, she cast it upon the ground, trampling the glass beneath her feet, then she began to write, on the first blank sheet, one of those notes which passion alone dares to pen, which does not draw back at every word:

"I know all. For two years you have been my husband's mistress. Do not deny it. I have read the confession written by your own hand. I do not wish to see nor to speak to you again. Never again set foot in my house. On account of your daughter I have not driven you out to-day. A second time I shall not hesitate."

She was just about to sign Maud Gorka, when the sound of the door opening and shutting caused her to turn. Boleslas was before her. Upon his face was an ambiguous expression, which exasperated the unhappy wife still more. Having returned more than an hour before, he had learned that Maud had accompanied to the Rue Leopardi Madame Maitland, who was ill, and he awaited her return with impatience, agitated by the thought that Florent's sister was no doubt ill owing to the duel of the morrow, and in that case,

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Maud, too, would know all. There are conversations and, above all, adieux which a man who is about to fight a duel always likes to avoid. Although he forced a smile, he no longer doubted. His wife's evident agitation could not be explained by any other cause. Could he divine that she had learned not only of the duel, but, too, of an intrigue that day ended and of which she had known nothing for two years? As she was silent, and as that silence embarrassed him, he tried, in order to keep him in countenance, to take her hand and kiss it, as was his custom. She repelled him with a look which he had never seen upon her face and said to him, handing him the sheet of paper lying before her:

"Do you wish to read this note before I send it to Madame Steno, who is in the salon with her daughter?"

Boleslas took the letter. He read the terrible lines, and he became livid. His agitation was so great that he returned the paper to his wife without replying, without attempting to prevent, as was his duty, the insult offered to his former mistress, whom he still loved to the point of risking his life for her. That man, so brave and so yielding at once, was overwhelmed by one of those surprises which put to flight all the powers of the mind, and he watched Maud slip the note into an envelope, write the address and ring. He heard her say to the servant:

"You will take this note to Countess Steno and you will excuse me to the ladies.... I feel too indisposed to receive any one. If they insist, you will reply that I have forbidden you to admit any one. You understand—any one."

The man took the note. He left the room and he had no doubt fulfilled his errand while the husband and wife stood there, face to face, neither of them breaking the formidable silence. They felt that the hour was a solemn one.

Never, since the day on which Cardinal Manning had united their destinies in the chapel of Ardrahan Castle, had they been engaged in a crisis so tragical. Such moments lay bare the very depths of the character. Courageous and noble, Maud did not think of weighing her words. She did not try to feed her jealousy, nor to accentuate the cruelty of the cause of the insult which she had the right to launch at the man toward whom that very morning she had been so confiding, so tender. The baseness and the cruelty were to remain forever unknown to the woman who no longer hesitated as to the bold resolution she had made. No. That which she expected of the man whom she had loved so dearly, of whom she had entertained so exalted an opinion, whom she had just seen fall so low, was a cry of truth, an avowal in which she would find the throb of a last remnant of honor. If he were silent it was not because he was preparing a denial. The tenor of Maud's letter left no doubt as to the nature of the proofs she had in her hand, which she had there no doubt. How? He did not ask himself that question, governed as

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he was by a phenomenon in which was revealed to the full the singular complexity of his nature. The Slav's especial characteristic is a prodigious, instantaneous nervousness. It seems that those beings with the uncertain hearts have a faculty of amplifying in themselves, to the point of absorbing the heart altogether, states of partial, passing, and yet sincere emotion. The intensity of their momentary excitement thus makes of them sincere comedians, who speak to you as if they felt certain sentiments of an exclusive order, to feel contradictory ones the day after, with the same ardor, with the same untruthfulness, unjustly say the victims of those natures, so much the more deceitful as they are more vibrating.

He suffered, indeed, on discovering that Maud had been initiated into his criminal intrigue, but he suffered more for her than for himself. It was sufficient for that suffering to occupy a few moments, a few hours. It reinvested the personality of the impassioned and weak husband who loved his wife while betraying her. There was, indeed, a shade of it in his adventure, but a very slight shade. And yet, he did not think he was telling an untruth, when he finally broke the silence to say to her whom he had so long deceived:

"You have avenged yourself with much severity, Maud, but you had the right.... I do not know who has informed you of an error which was very culpable, very wrong, very unfortunate, too.... I know that I have in Rome enemies bent upon my ruin, and I am sure they have left me no means of defending myself. I have deceived you, and I have suffered."

He paused after those words, uttered with a tremor of conviction which was not assumed. He had forgotten that ten minutes before he had entered the room with the firm determination to hide his duel and its cause from the woman for whose pardon he would at that moment have sacrificed his life without hesitation. He continued, in a voice softened by affection: "Whatever they have told you, whatever you have read, I swear to you, you do not know all."

"I know enough," interrupted Maud, "since I know that you have been the lover of that woman, of the mother of my intimate friend, at my side, under my very eyes.... If you had suffered by that deception, as you say, you would not have waited to avow all to me until I held in my hands the undeniable proof of your infamy.... You have cast aside the mask, or, rather, I have wrested it from you.... I desire no more.... As for the details of the shameful story, spare me them. It was not to hear them that I reentered a house every corner of which reminds me that I believed in you implicitly, and that you have betrayed me, not one day, but every day; that you betrayed me the day before yesterday, yesterday, this morning, an hour ago.... I repeat, that is sufficient."

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"But it is not sufficient for me!" exclaimed Boleslas. "Yes, all you have just said is true, and I deserve to have you tell it to me. But that which you could not read in those letters shown to you, that which I have kept for two years in the depths of my heart, and which must now be told—is that, through all these fatal impulses, I have never ceased to love you.... Ah, do not recoil from me, do not look at me thus.... I feel it once more in the agony I have suffered since you are speaking to me; there is something within me that has never ceased being yours. That woman has been my aberration. She has had my madness, my senses, my passion, all the evil instincts of my being.... You have remained my idol, my affection, my religion.... If I lied to you it was because I knew that the day on which you would find out my fault I should see you before me, despairing and implacable as you now are, as I can not bear to have you be. Ah, judge me, condemn me, curse me; but know, but feel, that in spite of all I have loved you, I still love you."

Again he spoke with an enthusiasm which was not feigned. Though he had deceived her, he recognized only too well the value of the loyal creature before him, whom he feared he should lose. If he could not move her at the moment when he was about to fight a duel, when could he move her? So he approached her with the same gesture of suppliant and impassioned adoration which he employed in the early days of their marriage, and before his treason, when he had told her of his love. No doubt that remembrance thrust itself upon Maud and disgusted her, for it was with veritable horror that she again recoiled, replying:

"Be silent! That lie is the worst of all. It pains me. I blush for you, in seeing that you have not even the courage to acknowledge your fault. God is my witness, I should have respected you more, had you said: 'I have ceased loving you. I have taken a mistress. It was convenient for me to lie to you. I have lied. I have sacrificed all to my passion, my honor, my duties, my vows and you.'.... Ah, speak to me like that, that I may have with you the sentiment of truth.... But that you dare to repeat to me words of tenderness after what you have done to me, inspires me with repulsion. It is too bitter."

"Yes," said Boleslas, "you think thus. True and simple as you are, how could you have learned to understand what a weak will is—a will which wishes and which does not, which rises and which falls?.... And yet, if I had not loved you, what interest would I have in lying to you? Have I anything to conceal now? Ah, if you knew in what a position I am, on the eve of what day, I beseech you to believe that at least the best part of my being has never ceased to be yours!"

It was the strongest effort he could make to bring back the heart of his wife so deeply wounded—the allusion to his duel. For since she had not mentioned it to him, it was no doubt because she was still ignorant of it. He was once more startled by the reply she made, and which proved to him to what a degree indignation had paralyzed even her love. He resumed:

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"Do you know it?"

"I know that you fight a duel to-morrow," said she, "and for your mistress, I know, too."

"It is not true," he exclaimed; "it is not for her."

"What?" asked Maud, energetically. "Was it not on her account that you went to the Rue Leopardi to provoke your rival? For she is not even true to you, and it is justice. Was it not on her account that you wished to enter the house, in spite of that rival's brother-in-law, and that a dispute arose between you, followed by this challenge? Was it not on her account, and to revenge yourself, that you returned from Poland, because you had received anonymous letters which told you all? And to know all has not disgusted you forever with that creature?.... But if she had deigned to lie to you, she would have you still at her feet, and you dare to tell me that you love me when you have not even cared to spare me the affront of learning all that villainy—all that baseness, all that disgrace—through some one else?"

"Who was it?" he asked. "Name that Judas to me, at least?"

"Do not speak thus," interrupted Maud, bitterly; "you have lost the right.... And then do not seek too far.... I have seen Madame Maitland to-day."

"Madame Maitland?" repeated Boleslas. "Did Madame Maitland denounce me to you? Did Madame Maitland write those anonymous letters?"

"She desired to be avenged," replied Maud, adding: "She has the right, since your mistress robbed her of her husband."

"Well, I, too, will be avenged!" exclaimed the young man. "I will kill that husband for her, after I have killed her brother. I will kill them both, one after the other.".... His mobile countenance, which had just expressed the most impassioned of supplications, now expressed only hatred and rage, and the same change took place in his immoderate sensibility. "Of what use is it to try to settle matters?" he continued. "I see only too well all is ended between us. Your pride and your rancor are stronger than your love. If it had been otherwise, you would have begged me not to fight, and you would only have reproached me, as you have the right to do, I do not deny.... But from the moment that you no longer love me, woe to him whom I find in my path! Woe to Madame Maitland and to those she loves!"

"This time at least you are sincere," replied Maud, with renewed bitterness. "Do you think I have not suffered sufficient humiliation? Would you like me to supplicate you not to fight for that creature? And do you not feel the supreme outrage which that encounter is to me? Moreover," she continued with tragical solemnity, "I did not summon you to have with you a conversation as sad as it is useless, but to tell you my

resolution.... I hope that you will not oblige me to resort for its execution to the means which the law puts in my power?"

"I don't deserve to be spoken to thus," said Boleslas, haughtily.

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"I will remain here to-night," resumed Maud, without heeding that reply, "for the last time. To-morrow evening I shall leave for England."

"You are free," said he, with a bow.

"And I shall take my son with me," she added.

"Our son!" he replied, with the composure of a man overcome by an access of tenderness and who controls himself. "That? No. I forbid it."

"You forbid it?" said she. "Very well, we will appeal it. I knew that you would force me," she continued, haughtily, in her turn, "to have recourse to the law.... But I shall not recoil before anything. In betraying me as you have done, you have also betrayed our child. I will not leave him to you. You are not worthy of him."

"Listen, Maud," said Boleslas, sadly, after a pause, "remember that it is perhaps the last time we shall meet.... To-morrow, if I am killed, you shall do as you like.... If I live, I promise to consent to any arrangement that will be just.... What I ask of you is—and I have the right, notwithstanding my faults—in the name of our early years of wedded life, in the name of that son himself, to leave me in a different way, to have a feeling, I don't say of pardon, but of pity."

"Did you have it for me," she replied, "when you were following your passion by way of my heart? No!".... And she walked before him in order to reach the door, fixing upon him eyes so haughty that he involuntarily lowered his. "You have no longer a wife and I have no longer a husband.... I am no Madame Maitland; I do not avenge myself by means of anonymous letters nor by denunciation.... But to pardon you?.... Never, do you hear, never!"

With those words she left the room, with those words into which she put all the indomitable energy of her character.... Boleslas did not essay to detain her. When, an hour after that horrible conversation, his valet came to inform him that dinner was served, the wretched man was still in the same place, his elbow on the mantelpiece and his forehead in his hand. He knew Maud too well to hope that she would change her determination, and there was in him, in spite of his faults, his folly and his complications, too much of the real gentleman to employ means of violence and to detain her forcibly, when he had erred so gravely. So she went thus. If, just before, he had exaggerated the expression of his feelings in saying, in thinking rather, that he had never ceased loving her, it was true that amid all his errors he had maintained for her an affection composed particularly of gratitude, remorse, esteem and, it must be said, of selfishness.

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He loved for the devotion of which he was absolutely sure, and then, like many husbands who deceive an irreproachable wife, he was proud of her, while unfaithful to her. She seemed to him at once the dignity and the charity of his life. She had remained in his eyes the one to whom he could always return, the assured friend of moments of trial, the haven after the tempest, the moral peace when he was weary of the troubles of passion. What life would he lead when she was gone? For she would go! Her resolution was irrevocable. All dropped from his side at once. The mistress, to whom he had sacrificed the noblest and most loving heart, he had lost under circumstances as abject as their two years of passion had been dishonorable. His wife was about to leave him, and would he succeed in keeping his son? He had returned to be avenged, and he had not even succeeded in meeting his rival. That being so impressionable had experienced, in the face of so many repeated blows, a disappointment so absolute that he gladly looked forward to the prospect of exposing himself to death on the following day, while at the same time a bitter flood of rancor possessed him at the thought of all the persons concerned in his adventure. He would have liked to crush Madame Steno and Maitland, Lydia and Florent—Dorsenne, too—for having given him the false word of honor, which had strengthened still more his thirst for vengeance by calming it for a few hours.

His confusion of thoughts was only greater when he was seated alone with his son at dinner. That morning he had seen before him his wife's smiling face. The absence of her whom at that moment he valued above all else was so sad to him that he ventured one last attempt, and after the meal he sent little Luc to see if his mother would receive him. The child returned with a reply in the negative. "Mamma is resting.... She does not wish to be disturbed." So the matter was irremissible. She would not see her husband until the morrow—if he lived. For vainly did Boleslas convince himself that afternoon that he had lost none of his skill in practising before his admiring seconds; a duel is always a lottery. He might be killed, and if the possibility of an eternal separation had not moved the injured woman, what prayer would move her? He saw her in his thoughts—her who at that moment, with blinds drawn, all lights subdued, endured in the semi-darkness that suffering which curses but does not pardon. Ah, but that sight was painful to him! And, in order that she might at least know how he felt, he took their son in his arms, and, pressing him to his breast, said: "If you see your mother before I do, you will tell her that we spent a very lonesome evening without her, will you not?"

"Why, what ails you?" exclaimed the child. "You have wet my cheeks with tears—you are sweeping!"

"You will tell her that, too, promise me," replied the father, "so that she will take good care of herself, seeing how we love her."

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"But," said the little boy, "she was not ill when we walked together after breakfast. She was so gay."

"I think, too, it will be nothing serious," replied Gorka. He was obliged to dismiss his son and to go out. He felt so horribly sad that he was physically afraid to remain alone in the house. But whither should he go? Mechanically he repaired to the club, although it was too early to meet many of the members there. He came upon Pietrapertosa and Cibo, who had dined there, and who, seated on one of the divans, were conferring in whispers with the gravity of two ambassadors discussing the Bulgarian or Egyptian question.

"You have a very nervous air," they said to Boleslas, "you who were in such good form this afternoon."

"Yes," said Cibo, "you should have dined with us as we asked you to."

"When one is to fight a duel," continued Pietrapertosa, sententiously, "one should see neither one's wife nor one's mistress. Madame Gorka suspects nothing, I hope?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied Boleslas; "you are right. I should have done better not to have left you. But, here I am. We will exorcise dismal thoughts by playing cards and supping!"

"By playing cards and supping!" exclaimed Pietrapertosa. "And your hand? Think of your hand.... You will tremble, and you will miss your man."

"Alright dinner," said Cibo, "to bed at ten o'clock, up at six-thirty, and two eggs with a glass of old port is the recipe Machault gives."

"And which I shall not follow," said Boleslas, adding: "I give you my word that if I had no other cause for care than this duel, you would not see me in this condition." He uttered that phrase in a tragical voice, the sincerity of which the two Italians felt. They looked at each other without speaking. They were too shrewd and too well aware of the simplest scandals of Rome not to have divined the veritable cause of the encounter between Florent and Boleslas. On the other hand, they knew the latter too well not to mistrust somewhat his attitudes. However, there was such simple emotion in his accent that they spontaneously pitied him, and, without another word, they no longer opposed the caprices of their strange client, whom they did not leave until two o'clock in the morning—and fortune favored them. For they found themselves at the end of a game, recklessly played, each the richer by two or three hundred louis apiece. That meant a few days more in Paris on the next visit. They, too, truly regretted their friend's luck, saying, on separating:



"I very much fear for him," said Cibo. "Such luck at gaming, the night before a duel—bad sign, very bad sign."

"So much the more so that some one was there," replied Pietrapertosa, making with his fingers the sign which conjures the jettatura. For nothing in the world would he have named the personages against whose evil eye he provided in that manner. But Cibo understood him, and, drawing from his trousers pocket his watch, which he fastened a l'anglaise by a safety chain to his belt, he pointed out among the charms a golden horn:

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"I have not let it go this evening," said he. "The worst is, that Gorka will not sleep, and then, his hand!"

Only the first of those two prognostics was to be verified. Returning home at that late hour, Boleslas did not even retire. He employed the remainder of the night in writing a long letter to his wife, one to his son, to be given to him on his eighteenth birthday, all in case of an accident. Then he examined his papers and he came upon the package of letters he had received from Madame Steno. Merely to reread a few of them, and to glance at the portraits of that faithless mistress again, heightened his anger to such a degree that he enclosed the whole in a large envelope, which he addressed to Lincoln Maitland. He had no sooner sealed it than he shrugged his shoulders, saying: "Of what use?" He raised the piece of material which stopped up the chimney, and, placing the envelope on the fire-dogs, he set it on fire. He shook with the tongs the remains of that which had been the most ardent, the most complete passion of his life, and he relighted the flames under the pieces of paper still intact. The unreasonable employment of a night which might be his last had scarcely paled his face. But his friends, who knew him well, started on seeing him with that impassively sinister countenance when he alighted from his phaeton, at about eight o'clock, at the inn selected for the meeting. He had ordered the carriage the day before to allay his wife's suspicions by the pretense of taking one of his usual morning drives. In his mental confusion he had forgotten to give a counter order, and that accident caused him to escape the two policemen charged by the questorship to watch the Palazzetto Doria, on Lydia Maitland's denunciation. The hired victoria, which those agents took, soon lost track of the swift English horses, driven as a man of his character and of his mental condition could drive.

The precaution of Chapron's sister was, therefore, baffled in that direction, and she succeeded no better with regard to her brother, who, to avoid all explanation with Lincoln, had gone, under the pretext of a visit to the country, to dine and sleep at the hotel. It was there that Montfanon and Dorsenne met him to conduct him to the rendezvous in the classical landau. Hardly had they reached the eminence of the circus of Maxence, on the Appian Way, when they were passed by Boleslas's phaeton.

"You can rest very easy," said Montfanon to Florent. "How can one aim correctly when one tires one's arm in that way?"

That had been the only allusion to the duel made between the three men during the journey, which had taken about an hour. Florent talked as he usually did, asking all sorts of questions which attested his care for minute information—the most of which might be utilized by his brother-in-law—and the Marquis had replied by evoking, with his habitual erudition, several of the souvenirs which peopled that vast country, strewn with tombs, aqueducts, ruined villas, with the line of the Monts Albains enclosing them beyond.

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Dorsenne was silent. It was the first affair at which he had assisted, and his nervous anxiety was extreme.

Tragical presentiments oppressed him, and at the same time he apprehended momentarily that, Montfanon's religious scruples reawakening, he would not only have to seek another second, but would have to defer a solution so near. However, the struggle which was taking place in the heart of the "old leaguer" between the gentleman and the Christian, was displayed during the drive only by an almost imperceptible gesture. As the carriage passed the entrance to the catacomb of St. Calixtus, the former soldier of the Pope turned away his head. Then he resumed the conversation with redoubled energy, to pause in his turn, however, when the landau took, a little beyond the Tomb of Caecilia, a transverse road in the direction of the Ardeatine Way. It was there that 'l'Osteria del tempo perso' was built, upon the ground belonging to Cibo, on which the duel was to take place.

Before l'Osteria, whose signboard was surmounted by the arms of Pope Innocent VIII, three carriages were already waiting—Gorka's phaeton, a landau which had brought Cibo, Pietrapertosa and the doctor, and a simple botte, in which a porter had come. That unusual number of vehicles seemed likely to attract the attention of riflemen out for a stroll, but Cibo answered for the discretion of the innkeeper, who indeed cherished for his master the devotion of vassal to lord, still common in Italy. The three newcomers had no need to make the slightest explanation. Hardly had they alighted from the carriage, when the maid conducted them through the hall, where at that moment two huntsmen were breakfasting, their guns between their knees, and who, like true Romans, scarcely deigned to glance at the strangers, who passed from the common hall into a small court, from that court, through a shed, into a large field enclosed by boards, with here and there a few pine-trees.

That rather odd duelling-ground had formerly served Cibo as a paddock. He had essayed to increase his slender income by buying at a bargain some jaded horses, which he intended fattening by means of rest and good fodder, and then selling to cabmen, averaging a small profit. The speculation having miscarried, the place was neglected and unused, save under circumstances similar to those of this particular morning.

"We have arrived last," said Montfanon, looking at his watch; "we are, however, five minutes ahead of time. Remember," he added in a low voice, turning to Florent, "to keep the body well in the background," these words being followed by other directions.

"Thanks," replied Florent, who looked at the Marquis and Dorsenne with a glance which he ordinarily had only for Lincoln, "and you know that, whatever may come, I thank you for all from the depths of my heart."

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The young man put so much grace in that adieu, his courage was so simple, his sacrifice for his brother-in-law so magnanimous and natural—in fact, for two days both seconds had so fully appreciated the charm of that disposition, absolutely free from thoughts of self—that they pressed his hand with the emotion of true friends. They were themselves, moreover, interested, and at once began the series of preparations without which the role of assistant would be physically insupportable to persons endowed with a little sensibility. In experienced hands like those of Montfanon, Cibo and Pietrapertosa, such preliminaries are speedily arranged. The code is as exact as the step of a ballet. Twenty minutes after the entrance of the last arrivals, the two adversaries were face to face. The signal was given. The two shots were fired simultaneously, and Florent sank upon the grass which covered the enclosure. He had a bullet in his thigh.

Dorsenne has often related since, as a singular trait of literary mania, that at the moment the wounded man fell he, himself, notwithstanding the anxiety which possessed him, had watched Montfanon, to study him. He adds that never had he seen a face express such sorrowful piety as that of the man who, scorning all human respect, made the sign of the cross. It was the devotee of the catacombs, who had left the altar of the martyrs to accomplish a work of charity, then carried away by anger so far as to place himself under the necessity of participating in a duel, who was, no doubt, asking pardon of God. What remorse was stirring within the heart of the fervent, almost mystical Christian, so strangely mixed up in an adventure of that kind? He had at least this comfort, that after the first examination, and when they had borne Florent into a room prepared hastily by the care of Cibo, the doctor declared himself satisfied. The ball could even be removed at once, and as neither the bone nor the muscles had been injured it was a matter of a few weeks at the most.

“All that now remains for us,” concluded Cibo, who had brought back the news, “is to draw up our official report.”

At that instant, and as the witnesses were preparing to reenter the house for the last formality, an incident occurred, very unexpected, which was to transform the encounter, up to that time so simple, into one of those memorable duels which are talked over at clubs and in armories. If Pietrapertosa and Cibo had ceased since morning to believe in the jettatura of the “some one” whom neither had named, it must be acknowledged that they were very unjust, for the good fortune of having gained something wherewith to swell their Parisian purses was surely naught by the side of this—to have to discuss with the Cavals, the Machaults and other professionals the case, almost unprecedented, in which they were participants.

Boleslas Gorka, who, when once his adversary had fallen, paced to and fro without seeming to care as to the gravity of the wound, suddenly approached the group formed by the four men, and in a tone of voice which did not predict the terrible aggression in which he was about to indulge, he said:

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"One moment, gentlemen. I desire to say a few words in your presence to Monsieur Dorsenne."

"I am at your service, Gorka," replied Julien, who did not suspect the hostile intention of his old friend. He did not divine the form which that hostility was about to take, but he had always upon his mind his word of honor falsely given, and he was prepared to answer for it.

"It will not take much time, sir," continued Boleslas, still with the same insolently formal politeness, "you know we have an account to settle.... But as I have some cause not to believe in the validity of your honor, I should like to remove all cause of evasion." And before any one could interfere in the unheard-of proceedings he had raised his glove and struck Dorsenne in the face. As Gorka spoke, the writer turned pale. He had not the time to reply to the audacious insult offered him by a similar one, for the three witnesses of the scene cast themselves between him and his aggressor. He, however, pushed them aside with a resolute air.

"Remember, sirs," said he, "that by preventing me from inflicting on Monsieur Gorka the punishment he deserves, you force me to obtain another reparation. And I demand it immediately.... I will not leave this place," he continued, "without having obtained it."

"Nor I, without having given it to you," replied Boleslas. "It is all I ask."

"No, Dorsenne," cried Montfanon, who had been the first to seize the raised arm of the writer, "you shall not fight thus. First, you have no right. It requires at least twenty-four hours between the provocation and the encounter.... And you, sirs, must not agree to serve as seconds for Monsieur Gorka, after he has failed in a manner so grave in all the rules of the ground.... If you lend yourselves to it, it is barbarous, it is madness, whatsoever you like. It is no longer a duel."

"I repeat, Montfanon," replied Dorsenne, "that I will not leave here and that I will not allow Monsieur Gorka to leave until I have obtained the reparation to which I feel I have the right."

"And I repeat that I am at Monsieur Dorsenne's service," replied Boleslas.

"Very well, sirs," said Montfanon. "There only remains for us to leave you to arrange it one with the other as you wish, and for us to withdraw.... Is not that your opinion?" he continued, addressing Cibo and Pietrapertosa, who did not reply immediately.

"Certainly," finally said one; "the case is difficult."

"There are, however, precedents," insinuated the other.

"Yes," resumed Cibo, "if it were only the two successive duels of Henry de Pene."

“Which furnish authority,” concluded Pietrapertosa.

“Authority has nothing to do with it,” again exclaimed Montfanon. “I know, for my part, that I am not here to assist at a butchery, and that I will not assist at it.... I am going, sirs, and I expect you will do the same, for I do not suppose you would select coachmen to play the part of seconds.... Adieu, Dorsenne.... You do not doubt my friendship for you.... I think I am giving you a veritable proof of it by not permitting you to fight under such conditions.”

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When the old nobleman reentered the inn, he waited ten minutes, persuaded that his departure would determine that of Cibo and of Pietrapertosa, and that the new affair, following so strangely upon the other, would be deferred until the next day. He had not told an untruth. It was his strong friendship for Julien which had made him apprehend a duel organized in that way, under the influence of a righteous indignation. Gorka's unjustifiable violence would certainly not permit a second encounter to be avoided. But as the insult had been outrageous, it was the more essential that the conditions should be fixed calmly and after grave consideration. To divert his impatience, Montfanon bade the innkeeper point out to him whither they had carried Florent, and he ascended to the tiny room, where the doctor was dressing the wounded man's leg.

"You see," said the latter, with a smile, "I shall have to limp a little for a month.... And Dorsenne?"

"He is all right, I hope," replied Montfanon, adding, with ill-humor: "Dorsenne is a fool; that is what Dorsenne is. And Gorka is a wild beast; that is what Gorka is." And he related the episode which had just taken place to the two men, who were so surprised that the doctor, bandage in hand, paused in his work. "And they wish to fight there at once, like redskins. Why not scalp one another?.... And that Cibo and that Pietrapertosa would have consented to the duel if I had not opposed it! Fortunately they lack two seconds, and it is not easy to find in this district two men who can sign an official report, for it is the mode nowadays to have those paltry scraps of paper. One of my friends and myself had two such witnesses at twenty francs apiece. But that was in Paris in 'sixty-two." And he entered upon the recital of the old-time duel, to calm his anxiety, which burst forth again in these words: "It seems they do not decide to separate so quickly. It is not, however, possible that they will fight.... Can we see them from here?" He approached the window, which indeed looked upon the enclosure. The sight which met his eyes caused the excellent man to stammer.... "The miserable men!.... It is monstrous.... They are mad.... They have found seconds.... Whom have they taken?.... Those two huntsmen!.... Ali, my God! My God!".... He could say no more. The doctor had hastened to the window to see what was passing, regardless of the fact that Florent dragged himself thither as well. Did they remain there a few seconds, fifteen minutes or longer? They could never tell, so greatly were they terrified.

As Montfanon had anticipated, the conditions of the duel were terrible. For Pietrapertosa, who seemed to direct the combat, after having measured a space sufficiently long, of about fifty feet, was in the act of tracing in the centre two lines scarcely ten or twelve metres apart.

"They have chosen the duel a 'marche interrompue'," groaned the veteran duellist, whose knowledge of the ground did not deceive him. Dorsenne and Gorka, once placed, face to face, commenced indeed to advance, now raising, now lowering their weapons with the terrible slowness of two adversaries resolved not to miss their mark.



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A shot was fired. It was by Boleslas. Dorsenne was unharmed. Several steps had still to be taken in order to reach the limit. He took them, and he paused to aim at his opponent with so evident an intention of killing him that they could distinctly hear Cibo cry:

"Fire! For God's sake, fire!"

Julien pressed the trigger, as if in obedience to that order, incorrect, but too natural to be even noticed. The weapon was discharged, and the three spectators at the window of the bedroom uttered three simultaneous exclamations on seeing Gorka's arm fall and his hand drop the pistol.

"It is nothing," cried the doctor, "but a broken arm."

"The good Lord has been better to us than we deserve," said the Marquis.

"Now, at least, the madman will be quieted.... Brave Dorsenne!" cried Florent, who thought of his brother-in-law and who added gayly, leaning on Montfanon and the doctor in order to reach the couch: "Finish quickly, doctor, they will need you below immediately."

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

One of those trustful men who did not judge when they loved
That suffering which curses but does not pardon

COSMOPOLIS

By Paul Bourget

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER IX

LUCID ALBA

The doctor had diagnosed the case correctly. Dorsenne's ball had struck Gorka below the wrist. Two centimetres more to the right or to the left, and undoubtedly Boleslas would have been killed. He escaped with a fracture of the forearm, which would confine him for a few days to his room, and which would force him to submit for several weeks to the annoyance of a sling. When he was taken home and his personal physician, hastily summoned, made him a bandage and prescribed for the first few days bed and

rest, he experienced a new access of rage, which exceeded the paroxysms of the day before and of that morning. All parts of his soul, the noblest as well as the meanest, bled at once and caused him to suffer with another agony than that occasioned by his wounded arm. Was he satisfied in the desire, almost morbid, to figure in the eyes of those who knew him as an extraordinary personage? He had hastened from Poland through Europe as an avenger of his betrayed love, and he had begun by missing his rival. Instead of provoking him immediately in the salon of Villa Steno, he had waited, and another had had time to substitute himself for the one he had wished to chastise. The other, whose death would at least have given a tragical issue to the adventure, Boleslas had scarcely touched. He had hoped in striking Dorsenne to execute at least one traitor whom he considered as having trifled with the most sacred of confidences. He had simply succeeded

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in giving that false friend occasion to humiliate him bitterly, leaving out of the question that he had rendered it impossible to fight again for many days. None of the persons who had wronged him would be punished for some time, neither his coarse and cowardly rival, nor his perfidious mistress, nor monstrous Lydia Maitland, whose infamy he had just discovered. They were all happy and triumphant, on that lovely, radiant May day, while he tossed on a bed of pain, and it was proven too clearly to him that very afternoon by his two seconds, the only visitors whom he had not denied admission, and who came to see him about five o'clock. They came from the races of Tor di Quinto, which had taken place that day.

"All is well," began Cibo, "I will guarantee that no one has talked.... I have told you before, I am sure of my innkeeper, and we have paid the witnesses and the coachman."

"Were Madame Steno and her daughter at the races?" interrupted Boleslas.

"Yes," replied the Roman, whom the abruptness of the question surprised too much for him to evade it with his habitual diplomacy.

"With whom?" asked the wounded man.

"Alone, that time," replied Cibo, with an eagerness in which Boleslas distinguished an intention to deceive him.

"And Madame Maitland?"

"She was there, too, with her husband," said Pietrapertosa, heedless of Cibo's warning glances, "and all Rome besides," adding: "Do you know the engagement of Ardea and little Hafner is public? They were all three there, the betrothed and the father, and so happy! I vow, it was fine. Cardinal Guerillot baptized pretty Fanny."

"And Dorsenne?" again questioned the invalid.

"He was there," said Cibo. "You will be vexed when I tell you of the reply he dared to make us. We asked him how he had managed—nervous as he is—to aim at you as he aimed, without trembling. For he did not tremble. And guess what he replied? That he thought of a recipe of Stendhal's—to recite from memory four Latin verses, before firing. 'And might one know what you chose?' I asked of him. Thereupon he repeated: 'Tityre, tu patulae recubens!'"

"It is a case which recalls the word of Casal," interrupted Pietrapertosa, "when that snob of a Figon recommended to us at the club his varnish manufactured from a recipe of a valet of the Prince of Wales. If the young man is not settled by us, I shall be sorry for him."



Although the two 'confreres' had repeated that mediocre pleasantry a hundred times, they laughed at the top of their sonorous voices and succeeded in entirely unnerving the injured man. He gave as a pretext his need of rest to dismiss the fine fellows, of whose sympathy he was assured, whom he had just found loyal and devoted, but who caused him pain in conjuring up, in answer to his question, the images of all his enemies. When one is suffering from a certain sort of pain, remarks like those naively

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exchanged between the two Roman imitators of Casal are intolerable to the hearer. One desires to be alone to feed upon, at least in peace, the bitter food, the exasperating and inefficacious rancor against people and against fate, with which Gorka at that moment felt his heart to be so full. The presence of his former mistress at the races, and on that afternoon, wounded him more cruelly than the rest. He did not doubt that she knew through Maitland, himself, certainly informed by Chapron, of the two duels and of his injury. It was on her account that he had fought, and that very day she appeared in public, smiling, coquetting, as if two years of passion had not united their lives, as if he were to her merely a social acquaintance, a guest at her dinners and her soirees. He knew her habits so well, and how eagerly, when she loved, she drank in the presence of him she loved. No doubt she had an appointment on the race-course with Maitland, as she had formerly had with him, and the painter had gone thither when he should have cared for his courageous, his noble brother-in-law, whom he had allowed to fight for him! What a worthy lover the selfish and brutal American was of that vile creature! The image of the happy couple tortured Boleslas with the bitterest jealousy intermingled with disgust, and, by contrast, he thought of his own wife, the proud and tender Maud whom he had lost.

He pictured to himself other illnesses when he had seen that beautiful nurse by his bedside. He saw again the true glance with which that wife, so shamefully betrayed, looked at him, the movements of her loyal hands, which yielded to no one the care of waiting upon him. To-day she had allowed him to go to a duel without seeing him. He had returned. She had not even inquired as to his wound. The doctor had dressed it without her presence, and all that he knew of her was what he learned from their child. For he sent for Luc. He explained to him his broken arm, as had been agreed upon with his friends, by a fall on the staircase, and little Luc replied:

“When will you join us, then? Mamma says we leave for England this evening or in the morning. All the trunks are almost ready.”

That evening or to-morrow? So Maud was going to execute her threat. She was going away forever, and without an explanation. He could not even plead his cause once more to the woman who certainly would not respond to another appeal, since she had found, in her outraged pride, the strength to be severe, when he was in danger of death. In the face of that evidence of the desertion of all connected with him, Boleslas suffered one of those accesses of discouragement, deep, absolute, irremediable, in which one longs to sleep forever. He asked himself: “Were I to try one more step?” and he replied: “She will not!” when his valet entered with word that the Countess desired to speak with him. His agitation was so extreme that, for a second, he fancied it was with regard to Madame Steno, and he was almost afraid to see his wife enter.

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Without any doubt, the emotions undergone during the past few days had been very great. He had, however, experienced none more violent, even beneath the pistol raised by Dorsenne, than that of seeing advance to his bed the embodiment of his remorse. Maud's face, in which ordinarily glowed the beauty of a blood quickened by the English habits of fresh air and daily exercise, showed undeniable traces of tears, of sadness, and of insomnia. The pallor of the cheeks, the dark circles beneath the eyes, the dryness of the lips and their bitter expression, the feverish glitter, above all, in the eyes, related more eloquently than words the terrible agony of which she was the victim. The past twenty-four hours had acted upon her like certain long illnesses, in which it seems that the very essence of the organism is altered. She was another person. The rapid metamorphosis, so tragical and so striking, caused Boleslas to forget his own anguish. He experienced nothing but one great regret when the woman, so visibly bowed down by grief, was seated, and when he saw in her eyes the look of implacable coldness, even through the fever, before which he had recoiled the day before. But she was there, and her un hoped-for presence was to the young man, even under the circumstances, an infinite consolation. He, therefore, said, with an almost childish grace, which he could assume when he desired to please:

"You recognized the fact that it would be too cruel of you to go away without seeing me again. I should not have dared to ask it of you, and yet it was the only pleasure I could have.... I thank you for having given it to me."

"Do not thank me," replied Maud, shaking her head, "it is not on your account that I am here. It is from duty.... Let me speak," she continued, stopping by a gesture her husband's reply, "you can answer me afterward.... Had it only been a question of you and of me, I repeat, I should not have seen you again.... But, as I told you yesterday, we have a son."

"Ah!" exclaimed Boleslas, sadly. "It is to make me still more wretched that you have come.... You should remember, however, that I am in no condition to discuss with you so cruel a question.... I thought I had already said that I would not disregard your rights on condition that you did not disregard mine."

"It is not of my rights that I wish to speak, nor of yours," interrupted Maud, "but of his, the only ones of importance. When I left you yesterday, I was suffering too severely to feel anything but my pain. It was then that, in my mental agony, I recalled words repeated to me by my father: 'When one suffers, he should look his grief in the face, and it will always teach him something.' I was ashamed of my weakness, and I looked my grief in the face. It taught me, first, to accept it as a just punishment for having married against the advice and wishes of my father."

"Ah, do not abjure our past!" cried the young man; "the past which has remained so dear to me through all."

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"No, I do not abjure it," replied Maud, "for it was on recurring to it—it was on returning to my early impressions—that I could find not an excuse, but an explanation of your conduct. I remembered what you related to me of the misfortunes of your childhood and of your youth, and how you had grown up between your father and your mother, passing six months with one, six months with the other—not caring for, not being able to judge either of them—forced to hide from one your feelings for the other. I saw for the first time that your parents' separation had the effect of saddening your heart at that epoch. It is that which perverted your character.... And I read in advance Luc's history in yours.... Listen, Boleslas! I speak to you as I would speak before God! My first feeling when that thought presented itself to my mind was not to resume life with you; such a life would be henceforth too bitter. No, it was to say to myself, I will have my son to myself. He shall feel my influence alone. I saw you set out this morning—set out to insult me once more, to sacrifice me once more! If you had been truly repentant would you have offered me that last affront? And when you returned—when they informed me that you had a broken arm—I wished to tell the little one myself that you were ill.... I saw how much he loved you, I discovered what a place you already occupied in his heart, and I comprehended that, even if the law gave him to me, as I know it would, his childhood would be like yours, his youth like your youth."

"Then," she went on, with an accent in which emotion struggled through her pride, "I did not feel justified in destroying the respect so deep, the love so true, he bears you, and I have come to say to you: You have wronged me greatly. You have killed within me something that will never come to life again. I feel that for years I shall carry a weight on my mind and on my heart at the thought that you could have betrayed me as you have. But I feel that for our boy this separation on which I had resolved is too perilous. I feel that I shall find in the certainty of avoiding a moral danger for him the strength to continue a common existence, and I will continue it. But human nature is human nature, and that strength I can have only on one condition."

"And that is?" asked Boleslas. Maud's speech, for it was a speech carefully reflected upon, every phrase of which had been weighed by that scrupulous conscience, contrasted strongly in its lucid reasoning with the state of nervous excitement in which he had lived for several days. He had been more pained by it than he would have been by passionate reproaches. At the same time he had been moved by the reference to his son's love for him, and he felt that if he did not become reconciled with Maud at that moment his future domestic life would be ended. There was a little of each sentiment in the few words he added to the anxiety of his question. "Although

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you have spoken to me very severely, and although you might have said the same thing in other terms, although, above all, it is very painful to me to have you condemn my entire character on one single error, I love you, I love my son, and I agree in advance to your conditions. I esteem your character too much to doubt that they will be reconcilable with my dignity. As for the duel of this morning," he added, "you know very well that it was too late to withdraw without dishonor."

"I should like your promise, first of all," replied Madame Gorka, who did not answer his last remark, "that during the time in which you are obliged to keep your room no one shall be admitted.... I could not bear that creature in my house, nor any one who would speak to me or to you of her."

"I promise," said the young man, who felt a flood of warmth enter his soul at the first proof that the jealousy of the loving woman still existed beneath the indignation of the wife. And he added, with a smile, "That will not be a great sacrifice. And then?"

"Then?.... That the doctor will permit us to go to England. We will leave orders for the management of things during our absence. We will go this winter wherever you like, but not to this house; never again to this city."

"That is a promise, too," said Boleslas, "and that will be no great sacrifice either; and then?"

"And then," said she in a low voice, as if ashamed of herself. "You must never write to her, you must never try to find out what has become of her."

"I give you my word," replied Boleslas, taking her hand, and adding: "And then?"

"There is no then," said she, withdrawing her hand, but gently. And she began to realize herself her promise of pardon, for she rearranged the pillows under the wounded man's head, while he resumed:

"Yes, my noble Maud, there is a then. It is that I shall prove to you how much truth there was in my words of yesterday, in my assurance that I love you in spite of my faults. It is the mother who returns to me today. But I want my wife, my dear wife, and I shall win her back."

She made no reply. She experienced, on hearing him pronounce those last words with a transfigured face, an emotion which did not vanish. She had acquired, beneath the shock of her great sorrow, an intuition too deep of her husband's nature, and that facility, which formerly charmed her by rendering her anxious, now inspired her with horror. That man with the mobile and complaisant conscience had already forgiven himself. It sufficed him to conceive the plan of a reparation of years, and to respect himself for it—

as if that was really sufficient—for the difficult task. At least during the eight days which lapsed between that conversation and their departure he strictly observed the promise he had given his wife. In vain did Cibo, Pietrapertosa, Hafner, Ardea try to see him. When the train which bore them away steamed out he asked his wife, with a pride that time justified by deeds:

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"Are you satisfied with me?"

"I am satisfied that we have left Rome," said she, evasively, and it was true in two senses of the word:

First of all, because she did not delude herself with regard to the return of the moral energy of which Boleslas was so proud. She knew that his variable will was at the mercy of the first sensation. Then, what she had not confessed to her husband, the sorrow of a broken friendship was joined in her to the sorrows of a betrayed wife. The sudden discovery of the infamy of Alba's mother had not destroyed her strong affection for the young girl, and during the entire week, busy with her preparations for a final departure, she had not ceased to wonder anxiously: "What will she think of my silence?.... What has her mother told her?.... What has she divined?"

She had loved the "poor little soul," as she called the Contessina in her pretty English term. She had devoted to her the friendship peculiar to young women for young girls—a sentiment—very strong and yet very delicate, which resembles, in its tenderness, the devotion of an elder sister for a younger. There is in it a little naive protection and also a little romantic and gracious melancholy. The elder friend is severe and critical. She tries to assuage, while envying them, the excessive enthusiasms of the younger. She receives, she provokes her confidence with the touching gravity of a counsellor. The younger friend is curious and admiring. She shows herself in all the truth of that graceful awakening of thoughts and emotions which precede her own period before marriage. And when there is, as was the case with Alba Steno, a certain discord of soul between that younger friend and her mother, the affection for the sister chosen becomes so deep that it can not be broken without wounds on both sides. It was for that reason that, on leaving Rome, faithful and noble Maud experienced at once a sense of relief and of pain—of relief, because she was no longer exposed to the danger of an explanation with Alba; of pain, because it was so bitter a thought for her that she could never justify her heart to her friend, could never aid her in emerging from the difficulties of her life, could, finally, never love her openly as she had loved her secretly. She said to herself as she saw the city disappear in the night with its curves and its lights:

"If she thinks badly of me, may she divine nothing! Who will now prevent her from yielding herself up to her sentiment for that dangerous and perfidious Dorsenne? Who will console her when she is sad? Who will defend her against her mother? I was perhaps wrong in writing to the woman, as I did, the letter, which might have been delivered to her in her daughter's presence.... Ah, poor little soul!.... May God watch over her!"

She turned, then, toward her son, whose hair she stroked, as if to exorcise, by the evidence of present duty, the nostalgia which possessed her at the thought of an

affection sacrificed forever. Hers was a nature too active, too habituated to the British virtue of self-control to submit to the languor of vain emotions.

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The two persons of whom her friendship, now impotent, had thought, were, for various reasons, the two fatal instruments of the fate of the “poor little soul,” and the vague remorse which Maud herself felt with regard to the terrible note sent to Madame Steno in the presence of the young girl, was only too true. When the servant had given that letter to the Countess, saying that Madame Gorka excused herself on account of indisposition, Alba Steno’s first impulse had been to enter her friend’s room.

“I will go to embrace her and to see if she has need of anything,” she said.

“Madame has forbidden any one to enter her room,” replied the footman, with embarrassment, and, at the same moment, Madame Steno, who had just opened the note, said, in a voice which struck the young girl by its change:

“Let us go; I do not feel well, either.”

The woman, so haughty, so accustomed to bend all to her will, was indeed trembling in a very pitiful manner beneath the insult of those phrases which drove her, Caterina Steno, away with such ignominy. She paled to the roots of her fair hair, her face was distorted, and for the first and last time Alba saw her form tremble. It was only for a few moments. At the foot of the staircase energy gained the mastery in that courageous character, created for the shock of strong emotions and for instantaneous action. But rapid as had been that passage, it had sufficed to disconcert the young girl. For not a moment did she doubt that the note was the cause of that extraordinary metamorphosis in the Countess’s aspect and attitude. The fact that Maud would not receive her, her friend, in her room was not less strange. What was happening? What did the letter contain? What were they hiding from her? If she had, the day before, felt the “needle in the heart” only on divining a scene of violent explanation between her mother and Boleslas Gorka, how would she have been agonized to ascertain the state into which the few lines of Boleslas’s wife had cast that mother! The anonymous denunciation recurred to her, and with it all the suspicion she had in vain rejected. The mother was unaware that for months there was taking place in her daughter a moral drama of which that scene formed a decisive episode, she was too shrewd not to understand that her emotion had been very imprudent, and that she must explain it. Moreover, the rupture with Maud was irreparable, and it was necessary that Alba should be included in it.

The mother, at once so guilty and so loving, so blind and so considerate, had no sooner foreseen the necessity than her decision was made, and a false explanation invented:

“Guess what Maud has just written me?” said she, brusquely, to her daughter, when they were seated side by side in their carriage. God, what balm the simple phrase introduced into Alba’s heart! Her mother was about to show her the note! Her joy was short-lived! The note remained where the Countess had slipped it, after having nervously folded it, in the opening in her glove. And she continued: “She accuses me

of being the cause of a duel between her husband and Florent Chapron, and she quarrels with me by letter, without seeing me, without speaking to me!"

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"Boleslas Gorka has fought a duel with Florent Chapron?" repeated the young girl.

"Yes," replied her mother. "I knew that through Hafner. I did not speak of it to you in order not to worry you with regard to Maud, and I have only awaited her so long to cheer her up in case I should have found her uneasy, and this is how she rewards me for my friendship! It seems that Gorka took offence at some remark of Chapron's about Poles, one of those innocent remarks made daily on any nation—the Italians, the French, the English, the Germans, the Jews—and which mean nothing.... I repeated the remark in jest to Gorka!.... I leave you to judge.... Is it my fault if, instead of laughing at it, he insulted poor Florent, and if the absurd encounter resulted from it? And Maud, who writes me that she will never pardon me, that I am a false friend, that I did it expressly to exasperate her husband.... Ah, let her watch her husband, let her lock him up, if he is mad! And I, who have received them as I have, I, who have made their position for them in Rome, I, who had no other thought than for her just now!.... You hear," she added, pressing her daughter's hand with a fervor which was at least sincere, if her words were untruthful, "I forbid you seeing her again or writing to her. If she does not offer me an apology for her insulting note, I no longer wish to know her. One is foolish to be so kind!"

For the first time, while listening to that speech, Alba was convinced that her mother was deceiving her. Since suspicion had entered her heart with regard to her mother, the object until then of such admiration and affection, she had passed through many stages of mistrust. To talk with the Countess was always to dissipate them. That was because Madame Steno, apart from her amorous immorality, was of a frank and truthful nature.

It was indeed a customary and known weakness of Florent's to repeat those witticisms which abound in national epigrams, as mediocre as they are iniquitous. Alba could recall at least twenty circumstances when the excellent man had uttered such jests at which a sensitive person might take offence. She would not have thought it utterly impossible that a duel between Gorka and Chapron might have been provoked by an incident of that order. But Chapron was the brother-in-law of Maitland, of the new friend with whom Madame Steno had become infatuated during the absence of the Polish Count, and what a brother-in-law! He of whom Dorsenne said: "He would set Rome on fire to cook an egg for his sister's husband." When Madame Steno announced that duel to her daughter, an invincible and immediate deduction possessed the poor child—Florent was fighting for his brother-in-law. And on account of whom, if not of Madame Steno? The thought would not, however, have possessed her a second in the face of the very plausible explanation made by the Countess, if Alba had not had in her heart a certain proof that her mother was not telling the truth. The young girl loved Maud as much as she was loved by her. She knew the sensibility of her faithful and, delicate friend, as that friend knew hers. For Maud to write her mother a letter which produced an immediate rupture, there must have been some grave reason.

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Another material proof was soon joined to that moral proof. Granted the character and the habits of the Countess, since she had not shown Maud's letter to her daughter there and then, it was because the letter was not fit to be shown. But she heard on the following day only the description of the duel, related by Maitland to Madame Steno, the savage aggression of Gorka against Dorsenne, the composure of the latter and the issue, relatively harmless, of the two duels.

"You see," said her mother to her, "I was right in saying that Gorka is mad!.... It seems he has had a fit of insanity since the duel, and that they prevent him from seeing any one.... Can you now comprehend how Maud could blame me for what is hereditary in the Gorka family?"

Such was indeed the story which the Venetian and her friends, Hafner, Ardea, and others, circulated throughout Rome in order to diminish the scandal. The accusation of madness is very common to women who have goaded to excess man's passion, and who then wish to avoid all blame for the deeds or words of that man. In this case, Boleslas's fury and his two incomprehensible duels, fifteen minutes apart, justified the story. When it became known in the city that the Palazzetto Doria was strictly closed, that Maud Gorka received no one, and finally that she was taking away her husband in the manner which resembled a flight, no doubt remained of the young man's wrecked reason.

Two persons profited very handsomely by the gossiping, the origin of which was a mystery. One was the innkeeper of the 'Tempo Perso', whose simple 'bettola' became, during those few days, a veritable place of pilgrimage, and who sold a quantity of wine and numbers of fresh eggs. The other was Dorsenne's publisher, of whom the Roman booksellers ordered several hundred volumes.

"If I had had that duel in Paris," said the novelist to Mademoiselle Steno, relating to her the unforeseen result, "I should perhaps have at length known the intoxication of the thirtieth edition."

It was a few days after the departure of the Gorkas that he jested thus, at a large dinner of twenty-four covers, given at Villa Steno in honor of Peppino Ardea and Fanny Hafner. Reestablished in the Countess's favor since his duel, he had again become a frequenter of her house, so much the more assiduous as the increasing melancholy of Alba interested him greatly. The enigma of the young girl's character redoubled that interest at each visit in such a degree that, notwithstanding the heat, already beginning, of the dangerous Roman summer, he constantly deferred his return to Paris until the morrow. What had she guessed in consequence of the encounter, the details of which she had asked of him with an emotion scarcely hidden in her eyes of a blue as clear, as transparent, as impenetrable at the same time, as the water of certain Alpine lakes at the foot of the glaciers. He thought he was doing right in corroborating the

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story of Boleslas Gorka's madness, which he knew better than any one else to be false. But was it not the surest means of exempting Madame Steno from connection with the affair? Why had he seen Alba's beautiful eyes veiled with a sadness inexplicable, as if he had just given her another blow? He did not know that since the day on which the word insanity had been uttered before her relative to Maud's husband, the Contessina was the victim of a reasoning as simple as irrefutable.

"If Boleslas be mad, as they say," said Alba, "why does Maud, whom I know to be so just and who loves me so dearly, attribute to my mother the responsibility of this duel, to the point of breaking with me thus, and of leaving without a line of explanation?.... No.... There is something else.".... The nature of the "something else" the young girl comprehended, on recalling her mother's face during the perusal of Maud's letter. During the ten days following that scene, she saw constantly before her that face, and the fear imprinted upon those features ordinarily so calm, so haughty! Ah, poor little soul, indeed, who could not succeed in banishing this fixed idea "My mother is not a good woman."

Idea! So much the more terrible, as Alba had no longer the ignorance of a young girl, if she had the innocence. Accustomed to the conversations, at times very bold, of the Countess's salon, enlightened by the reading of novels chanced upon, the words lover and mistress had for her a signification of physical intimacy such that it was an almost intolerable torture for her to associate them with the relations of her mother, first toward Gorka, then toward Maitland. That torture she had undergone during the entire dinner, at the conclusion of which Dorsenne essayed to chat gayly with her. She sat beside the painter, and the man's very breath, his gestures, the sound of his voice, his manner of eating and of drinking, the knowledge of his very proximity, had caused her such keen suffering that it was impossible for her to take anything but large glasses of iced water. Several times during that dinner, prolonged amid the sparkle of magnificent silver and Venetian crystal, amid the perfume of flowers and the gleam of jewels, she had seen Maitland's eyes fixed upon the Countess with an expression which almost caused her to cry out, so clearly did her instinct divine its impassioned sensuality, and once she thought she saw her mother respond to it.

She felt with appalling clearness that which before she had uncertainly experienced, the immodest character of that mother's beauty. With the pearls in her fair hair, with neck and arms bare in a corsage the delicate green tint of which showed to advantage the incomparable splendor of her skin, with her dewy lips, with her voluptuous eyes shaded by their long lashes, the dogaresse looked in the centre of that table like an empress and like a courtesan. She resembled the Caterina Cornaro, the gallant queen of the island of Cypress, painted by Titian, and whose name she worthily bore. For years Alba had been so proud of the ray of seduction cast forth by the Countess, so proud of those statuesque arms, of the superb carriage, of the face which defied the passage of time,

of the bloom of opulent life the glorious creature displayed. During that dinner she was almost ashamed of it.

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She had been pained to see Madame Maitland seated a few paces farther on, with brow and lips contracted as if by thoughts of bitterness. She wondered: Does Lydia suspect them, too? But was it possible that her mother, whom she knew to be so generous, so magnanimous, so kind, could have that smile of sovereign tranquillity with such secrets in her heart? Was it possible that she could have betrayed Maud for months and months with the same light of joy in her eyes?

"Come," said Julien, stopping himself suddenly in the midst of a speech, in which he had related two or three literary anecdotes. "Instead of listening to your friend Dorsenne, little Countess, you are following several blue devils flying through the room."

"They would fly, in any case," replied Alba, who, pointing to Fanny Hafner and Prince d'Ardea seated on a couch, continued: "Has what I told you a few weeks since been realized? You do not know all the irony of it. You have not assisted, as I did the day before yesterday, at the poor girl's baptism."

"It is true," replied Julien, "you were godmother. I dreamed of Leo Thirteenth as godfather, with a princess of the house of Bourbon as godmother. Hafner's triumph would have been complete!"

"He had to content himself with his ambassador and your servant," replied Alba with a faint smile, which was speedily converted into an expression of bitterness. "Are you satisfied with your pupil?" she added. "I am progressing.... I laugh—when I wish to weep.... But you yourself would not have laughed had you seen the fervor of charming Fanny. She was the picture of blissful faith. Do not scoff at her."

"And where did the ceremony take place?" asked Dorsenne, obeying the almost suppliant injunction.

"In the chapel of the Dames du Cenacle."

"I know the place," replied the novelist, "one of the most beautiful corners of Rome! It is in the old Palais Piancini, a large mansion almost opposite the 'Calcographie Royale', where they sell those fantastic etchings of the great Piranese, those dungeons and those ruins of so intense a poesy! It is the Gaya of stone. There is a garden on the terrace. And to ascend to the chapel one follows a winding staircase, an incline without steps, and one meets nuns in violet gowns, with faces so delicate in the white framework of their bonnets. In short, an ideal retreat for one of my heroines. My old friend Montfanon took me there. As we ascended to that tower, six weeks ago, we heard the shrill voices of ten little girls, singing: 'Questo cuor tu la vedrai'. It was a procession of catechists, going in the opposite direction, with tapers which flickered dimly in the remnant of daylight.... It was exquisite.... But, now permit me to laugh at the thought of Montfanon's choler when I relate to him this baptism. If I knew where to find the old leaguer! But he has been hiding since our duel. He is in some retreat doing

penance. As I have already told you, the world for him has not stirred since Francois de Guise. He only admits the alms of the Protestants and the Jews. When Monseigneur Guerillot tells him of Fanny's religious aspirations, he raves immoderately. Were she to cast herself to the lions, like Saint Blandine, he would still cry out 'sacrilege.'"

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"He did not see her the day before yesterday," said Alba, "nor the expression upon her face when she recited the Credo. I do not believe in mysticism, you know, and I have moments of doubt. There are times when I can no longer believe in anything, life seems to me so wretched and sad.... But I shall never forget that expression. She saw God!.... Several women were present with very touching faces, and there were many devotees.... The Cardinal is very venerable.... All were by Fanny's side, like saints around the Madonna in the early paintings which you have taught me to like, and when the baptism had been gone through, guess what she said to me: 'Come, let us pray for my dear father, and for his conversion.' Is not such blindness melancholy."

"The fact is," said Dorsenne again, jocosely, "that in the father's dictionary the word has another meaning: Conversion, feminine substantive, means to him income.... But let us reason a little, Countess. Why do you think it sad that the daughter should see her father's character in her own light?.... You should, on the contrary, rejoice at it.... And why do you find it melancholy that this adorable saint should be the daughter of a thief?.... How I wish that you were really my pupil, and that it would not be too absurd to give you here, in this corner of the hall, a lesson in intellectuality!.... I would say to you, when you see one of those anomalies which renders you indignant, think of the causes. It is so easy. Although Protestant, Fanny is of Jewish origin—that is to say, the descendant of a persecuted race—which in consequence has developed by the side of the inherent defects of a proscribed people the corresponding virtues, the devotion, the abnegation of the woman who feels that she is the grace of a threatened hearth, the sweet flower which perfumes the sombre prison."

"It is all beautiful and true," replied Alba, very seriously. She had hung upon Dorsenne's lips while he spoke, with the instinctive taste for ideas of that order which proved her veritable origin. "But you do not mention the sorrow. This is what one can not do—look upon as a tapestry, as a picture, as an object; the creature who has not asked to live and who suffers. You, who have feeling, what is your theory when you weep?"

"I can very clearly foresee the day on which Fanny will feel her misfortune," continued the young girl. "I do not know when she will begin to judge her father, but that she already begins to judge Ardea, alas, I am only too sure.... Watch her at this moment, I pray you."

Dorsenne indeed looked at the couple. Fanny was listening to the Prince, but with a trace of suffering upon her beautiful face, so pure in outline that the nobleness in it was ideal.

He was laughing at some anecdote which he thought excellent, and which clashed with the sense of delicacy of the person to whom he was addressing himself. They were no longer the couple who, in the early days of their betrothal, had given to Julien the sentiment of a complete illusion on the part of the young girl for her future husband.

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"You are right, Contessina," said he, "the decrystallization has commenced. It is a little too soon."

"Yes, it is too soon," replied Alba. "And yet it is too late. Would you believe that there are times when I ask myself if it would not be my duty to tell her the truth about her marriage, such as I know it, with the story of the weak man, the forced sale, and of the bargaining of Ardea?"

"You will not do it," said Dorsenne. "Moreover, why? This one or another, the man who marries her will only want her money, rest assured. It is necessary that the millions be paid for here below, it is one of their ransoms.... But I shall cause you to be scolded by your mother, for I am monopolizing you, and I have still two calls to pay this evening."

"Well, postpone them," said Alba. "I beseech you, do not go."

"I must," replied Julien. "It is the last Wednesday of old Duchess Pietrapertosa, and after her grandson's recent kindness—"

"She is so ugly," said Alba, "will you sacrifice me to her?"

"Then there is my compatriot, who goes away tomorrow and of whom I must take leave this evening, Madame de Sauve, with whom you met me at the museum You will not say she is ugly, will you?"

"No," responded Alba, dreamily, "she is very pretty.".... She had another prayer upon her lips, which she did not formulate. Then, with a beseeching glance: "Return, at least. Promise me that you will return after your two visits. They will be over in an hour and a half. It will not be midnight. You know some do not ever come before one and sometimes two o'clock. You will return?"

"If possible, yes. But at any rate, we shall meet to-morrow, at the studio, to see the portrait."

"Then, adieu," said the young girl, in a low voice.

CHAPTER X

COMMON MISERY

The Contessina's disposition was too different from her mother's for the mother to comprehend that heart, the more contracted in proportion as it was touched, while emotion was synonymous with expansion in the opulent and impulsive Venetian. That evening she had not even observed Alba's dreaminess, Dorsenne once gone, and it required that Hafner should call her attention to it. To the scheming Baron, if the

novelist was attentive to the young girl it was certainly with the object of capturing a considerable dowry. Julien's income of twenty-five thousand francs meant independence. The two hundred and fifty thousand francs which Alba would have at her mother's death was a very large fortune. So Hafner thought he would deserve the name of "old friend," by taking Madame Steno aside and saying to her:

"Do you not think Alba has been a little strange for several days!"

"She has always been so," replied the Countess. "Young people are like that nowadays; there is no more youth."

"Do you not think," continued the Baron, "that perhaps there is another cause for that sadness—some interest in some one, for example?"

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"Alba?" exclaimed the mother. "For whom?"

"For Dorsenne," returned Hafner, lowering his voice; "he just left five minutes ago, and you see she is no longer interested in anything nor in any one."

"Ah, I should be very much pleased," said Madame Steno, laughing. "He is a handsome fellow; he has talent, fortune. He is the grand-nephew of a hero, which is equivalent to nobility, in my opinion. But Alba has no thought of it, I assure you. She would have told me; she tells me everything. We are two friends, almost two comrades, and she knows I shall leave her perfectly free to choose.... No, my old friend, I understand my daughter. Neither Dorsenne nor any one else interests her, unfortunately. I sometimes fear she will go into a decline, like her cousin Andryana Navagero, whom she resembles.... But I must cheer her up. It will not take long."

"A Dorsenne for a son-in-law!" said Hafner to himself, as he watched the Countess walk toward Alba through the scattered groups of her guests, and he shook his head, turning his eyes with satisfaction upon his future son-in-law. "That is what comes of not watching one's children closely. One fancies one understands them until some folly opens one's eyes!.... And, it is too late!.... Well, I have warned her, and it is no affair of mine!"

In spite of Fanny's observed and increasing vexation Ardea amused himself by relating to her anecdotes, more or less true, of the goings-on in the Vatican. He thus attempted to abate a Catholic enthusiasm at which he was already offended. His sense of the ridiculous and that of his social interest made him perceive how absurd it would be to go into clerical society after having taken for a wife a millionaire converted the day before. To be just, it must be added that the Countess's dry champagne was not altogether irresponsible for the persistency with which he teased his betrothed. It was not the first time he had indulged in the semi-intoxication which had been one of the sins of his youth, a sin less rare in the southern climates than the modesty of the North imagines.

"You come opportunely, Contessina," said he, when Mademoiselle Steno had seated herself upon the couch beside them. "Your friend is scandalized by a little story I have just told her.... The one of the noble guard who used the telephone of the Vatican this winter to appoint rendezvous with Guilia Rezzonico without awakening the jealousy of Ugolino.... But it is nothing. I have almost quarrelled with Fanny for having revealed to her that the Holy Father repeated his benediction in Chapel Sixtine, with a singing master, like a prima donna...."

"I have already told you that I do not like those jests," said Fanny, with visible irritation, which her patience, however, governed. "If you desire to continue them, I will leave you to converse with Alba."

"Since you see that you annoy her," said the latter to the Prince, "change the subject."

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"Ah, Contessina," replied Peppino, shaking his head, "you support her already. What will it be later? Well, I apologize for my innocent epigrams on His Holiness in his dressing-gown. And," he continued, laughing, "it is a pity, for I have still two or three entertaining stories, notably one about a coffer filled with gold pieces, which a faithful bequeathed to the Pope. And that poor, dear man was about to count them when the coffer slipped from his hand, and there was the entire treasure on the floor, and the Pope and a cardinal on all fours were scrambling for the napoleons, when a servant entered.... Tableau!I assure you that good Pius IX would be the first to laugh with us at all the Vatican jokes. He is not so much 'alla mano'. But he is a holy man just the same. Do not think I do not render him justice. Only, the holy man is a man, and a good old man. That is what you do not wish to see."

"Where are you going?" said Alba to Fanny, who had risen as she had threatened to do.

"To talk with my father, to whom I have several words to say."

"I warned you to change the subject," said Alba, when she and the Prince were alone. Ardea, somewhat abashed, shrugged his shoulders and laughed:

"You will confess that the situation is quite piquant, little Countess.... You will see she will forbid me to go to the Quirinal.... Only one thing will be lacking, and it is that Papa Hafner should discover religious scruples which would prevent him from greeting the King.... But Fanny must be appeased!"

"My God!" said Alba to herself, seeing the young man rise in his turn. "I believe he is intoxicated. What a pity!"

As have almost all revolutions of that order, the work of Christianity, accomplished for years, in Fanny had for its principle an example.

The death of a friend, the sublime death of a true believer, ended by determining her faith. She saw the dying woman receive the sacrament, and the ineffable joy of the benediction upon the face of the sufferer of twenty lighted up by ecstasy. She heard her say, with a smile of conviction:

"I go to ask you of Our Lord, Jesus Christ."

How could she have resisted such a cry and such a sight?

The very day after that death she asked of her father permission to be baptized, which request drew from the Baron a reply too significant not to be repeated here:

"Undoubtedly," had replied the surprising man, who instead of a heart, had a Bourse list on which all was tarified, even God, "undoubtedly I am touched, very deeply touched, and very happy to see that religious matters preoccupy you to such a degree. To the



people it is a necessary curb, and to us it accords with a certain rank, a certain society, a certain deportment. I think that a person called like you to live in Austria and in Italy should be a Catholic. However, it is necessary to remember that you might marry some one of another

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faith. Do not object. I am your father. I can foresee all. I know you will marry only according to the dictates of your heart. Wait then until it has spoken, to settle the question.... If you love a Catholic, you will then have occasion to pay a compliment to your betrothed by adopting his faith, of which he will be very sensible.... From now until then, I shall not prevent you from following ceremonies which please you. Those of the Roman liturgy are, assuredly, among the best; I myself attended Saint Peter's at the time of the pontifical government.... The taste, the magnificence, the music, all moved me.... But to take a definite, irreparable step, I repeat, you must wait. Your actual condition of a Protestant has the grand sentiment of being more neutral, less defined."

What words to listen to by a heart already touched by the attraction of 'grace and by the nostalgia of eternal life! But the heart was that of a young girl very pure and very tender. To judge her father was to her impossible, and the Baron's firmness had convinced her that she must obey his wishes and pray that he be enlightened. She therefore waited, hoping, sustained and directed meanwhile by Cardinal Guerillot, who later on was to baptize her and to obtain for her the favor of approaching the holy table for the first time at the Pope's mass. That prelate, one of the noblest figures of which the French bishopric has had cause to be proud, since Monseigneur Pie, was one of those grand Christians for whom the hand of God is as visible in the direction of human beings as it is invisible to doubtful souls. When Fanny, already devoted to her charities, confided in him the serious troubles of her mind and the discord which had arisen between her and her father on the so essential point of her baptism, the Cardinal replied:

"Have faith in God. He will give you a sign when your time has come." And he uttered those words with an accent whose conviction had filled the young girl with a certainty which had never left her.

In spite of his seventy years, and of the experiences of the confession, in spite of the disenchanting struggle with the freemasonry of his French diocese, which had caused his exile to Rome, the venerable man looked at Fanny's marriage from a supernatural standpoint. Many priests are thus capable of a naivete which, on careful analysis, is often in the right. But at the moment the antithesis between the authentic reality and that which they believe, constitutes an irony almost absurd. When he had baptized Fanny, the old Bishop of Clermont was possessed by a joy so deep that he said to her, to express to her the more delicately the tender respect of his friendship:

"I can now say as did Saint Monica after the baptism of Saint Augustine: 'Cur hic sim, nescio; jam consumpta spe hujus saeculi'. I do not know why I remain here below. All my hope of the age is consummated. And like her I can add—the only thing which made me desire to remain awhile was to see you a Catholic before dying. The traveller,

who has tarried, has now nothing to do but to go. He has gathered the last and the prettiest flower."....

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Noble and faithful apostle, who was indeed to go so shortly after, meriting what they said of him, that which the African bishop said of his mother: "That religious soul was at length absolved from her body.".... He did not anticipate that he would pay dearly for that realization of his last wish! He did not foresee that she whom he ingenuously termed his most beautiful flower was to become to him the principal cause of bitter sorrow. Poor, grand Cardinal! It was the final trial of his life, the supremely bitter drop in his chalice, to assist at the disenchantment which followed so closely upon the blissful intoxication of his gentle neophyte's first initiation. To whom, if not to him, should she have gone to ask counsel, in all the tormenting doubts which she at once began to have in her feelings with regard to her fiance?

It was, therefore, that on the day following the evening on which imprudent Ardea had jested so persistently upon a subject sacred to her that she rang at the door of the apartment which Monseigneur Guerillot occupied in the large mansion on Rue des Quatre-Fontaines. There was no question of incriminating the spirit of those pleasantries, nor of relating her humiliating observations on the Prince's intoxication. No. She wished to ease her mind, on which rested a shade of sorrow. At the time of her betrothal, she had fancied she loved Ardea, for the emotion of her religious life at length freed had inspired her with gratitude for him who was, however, only the pretext of that exemption. She trembled to-day, not only at not loving him any more, but at hating him, and above all she felt herself a prey to that repugnance for the useless cares of the world, to that lassitude of transitory hopes, to that nostalgia of repose in God, undeniable signs of true vocations.

At the thought that she might, if she survived her father and she remained free, retire to the 'Dames du Cenacle,' she felt at her approaching marriage an inward repugnance, which augmented still more the proof of her future husband's deplorable character. Had she the right to form such bonds with such feelings? Would it be honorable to break, without further developments, the betrothal which had been between her and her father the condition of her baptism? She was already there, after so few days! And her wound was deeper after the night on which the Prince had, uttered his careless jests.

"It is permitted you to withdraw," replied Monsieur Guerillot, "but you are not permitted to lack charity in your judgment."

There was within Fanny too much sincerity, her faith was too simple and too deep for her not to follow out that advice to the letter, and she conformed to it in deeds as well as in intentions. For, before taking a walk in the afternoon with Alba, she took the greatest care to remove all traces which the little scene of the day before could have left in her friend's mind. Her efforts went very far. She would

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ask pardon of her fiancé.... Pardon! For what? For having been wounded by him, wounded to the depths of her sensibility? She felt that the charity of judgment recommended by the pious Cardinal was a difficult virtue. It exercises a discipline of the entire heart, sometimes irreconcilable with the clearness of the intelligence. Alba looked at her friend with a glance full of an astonishment, almost sorrowful, and she embraced her, saying:

“Peppino is not worthy even to kiss the ground on which you tread, that is my opinion, and if he does not spend his entire life in trying to be worthy of you, it will be a crime.”

As for the Prince himself, the impulses which dictated to his fiancée words of apology when he was in the wrong, were not unintelligible to him, as they would have been to Hafner. He thought that the latter had lectured his daughter, and he congratulated himself on having cut short at once that little comedy of exaggerated religious feeling.

“Never mind that,” said he, with condescension, “it is I who have failed in form. For at heart you have always found me respectful of that which my fathers respected. But times have changed, and certain fanaticisms are no longer admissible. That is what I have wished to say to you in such a manner that you could take no offence.”

And he gallantly kissed Fanny’s tiny hand, not divining that he had redoubled the melancholy of that too-generous child. The discord continued to be excessive between the world of ideas in which she moved and that in which the ruined Prince existed. As the mystics say with so much depth, they were not of the same heaven.

Of all the chimeras which had lasted hours, God alone remained. It sufficed the noble creature to say: “My father is so happy, I will not mar his joy.”

“I will do my duty toward my husband. I will be so good a wife that I will transform him. He has religion. He has heart. It will be my role to make of him a true Christian. And then I shall have my children and the poor.” Such were the thoughts which filled the mind of the envied betrothed. For her the journals began to describe the dresses already prepared, for her a staff of tailors, dressmakers, needlewomen and jewellers were working; she would have on her contract the same signature as a princess of the blood, who would be a princess herself and related to one of the most glorious aristocracies in the world. Such were the thoughts she would no doubt have through life, as she walked in the garden of the Palais Castagna, that historical garden in which is still to be seen a row of pear-trees, in the place where Sixte-Quint, near death, gathered some fruit. He tasted it, and he said to Cardinal Castagna—playing on their two names, his being Peretti—“The pears are spoiled. The Romans have had enough. They will soon eat chestnuts.” That family anecdote enchanted Justus Hafner. It seemed to him full of the most delightful humor. He repeated it to his colleagues at the

club, to his tradesmen, to it mattered not whom. He did not even mistrust Dorsenne's irony.

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"I met Hafner this morning on the Corso," said the latter to Alba at one of the soirees at the end of the month, "and I had my third edition of the pleasantries on the pears and chestnuts. And then, as we took a few steps in the same direction, he pointed out to me the Palais Bonaparte, saying, 'We are also related to them.'.... Which means that a grand-nephew of the Emperor married a cousin of Peppino.... I swear he thinks he is related to Napoleon!.... He is not even proud of it. The Bonapartes are nowhere when it is a question of nobility!.... I await the time when he will blush."

"And I the time when he will be punished as he deserves," interrupted Alba Steno, in a mournful voice. "He is insolently triumphant. But no.He will succeed.... If it be true that his fortune is one immense theft, think of those he has ruined. In what can they believe in the face of his infamous happiness?"

"If they are philosophers," replied Dorsenne, laughing still more gayly, "this spectacle will cause them to meditate on the words uttered by one of my friends: 'One can not doubt the hand of God, for it created the world.' Do you remember a certain prayer-book of Montluc's?"

"The one which your friend Montfanon bought to vex the poor little thing?"

"Precisely. The old-leaguer has returned it to Ribalta; the latter told me so yesterday; no doubt in a spirit of mortification. I say no doubt for I have not seen the poor, dear man since the duel, which his impatience toward Ardea and Hafner rendered inevitable. He retired, I know not for how many days, to the convent of Mount Olivet, near Sienna, where he has a friend, one Abbe de Negro, of whom he always speaks as of a saint. I learned, through Ribalta, that he has returned, but is invisible. I tried to force an entrance. In short, the volume is again in the shop of the curiosity-seeker in the Rue Borgognona, if Mademoiselle Hafner still wants it!"

"What good fortune!" exclaimed Fanny, with a sparkle of delight in her eyes. "I did not know what present to offer my dear Cardinal. Shall we make the purchase at once?"

"Montluc's prayer-book?" repeated old Ribalta, when the two young ladies had alighted from the carriage before his small book-shop, more dusty, more littered than ever with pamphlets, in which he still was, with his face more wrinkled, more wan and more proud, peering from beneath his broad-brimmed hat, which he did not raise. "How do you know it is here? Who has told you? Are there spies everywhere?"

"It was Monsieur Dorsenne, one of Monsieur de Montfanon's friends," said Fanny, in her gentle voice.

"Sara sara," replied the merchant with his habitual insolence, and, opening the drawer of the chest in which he kept the most incongruous treasures, he drew from it the precious volume, which he held toward them, without giving it up. Then he began a

speech, which reproduced the details given by Montfanon himself. “Ah, it is very authentic. There is an indistinct but undeniable signature. I have compared it with that which is preserved in the archives of Sienna. It is Montluc’s writing, and there is his escutcheon with the turtles.... Here, too, are the half-moons of the Piccolomini.... This book has a history....”

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"The Marshal gave it, after the famous siege, to one of the members of that illustrious family. And it was for one of the descendants that I was commissioned to buy it.... They will not give it up for less than two thousand francs."

"What a cheat!" said Alba to her companion, in English. "Dorsenne told me that Monsieur de Monfanon bought it for four hundred."

"Are you sure?" asked Fanny, who, on receiving a reply in the affirmative, addressed the bookseller, with the same gentleness, but with reproach in her accent: "Two thousand francs, Monsieur Ribalta? But it is not a just price, since you sold it to Monsieur de Montfanon for one-fifth of that sum."

"Then I am a liar and a thief," roughly replied the old man; "a thief and a liar," he repeated. "Four hundred francs! You wish to have this book for four hundred francs? I wish Monsieur de Montfanon was here to tell you how much I asked him for it."

The old bookseller smiled cruelly as he replaced the prayerbook in the drawer, the key of which he turned, and turning toward the two young girls, whose delicate beauty, heightened by their fine toilettes, contrasted so delightfully with the sordid surroundings, he enveloped them with a glance so malicious that they shuddered and instinctively drew nearer one another. Then the bookseller resumed, in a voice hoarser and deeper than ever: "If you wish to spend four hundred francs I have a volume which is worth it, and which I propose to take to the Palais Savorelli one of these days.... Ha, ha! It must be one of the very last, for the Baron has bought them all." In uttering, those enigmatical words, he opened the cupboard which formed the lower part of the chest, and took from one of the shelves a book wrapped in a newspaper. He then unfolded the journal, and, holding the volume in his enormous hand with his dirty nails, he disclosed the title to the two young girls: 'Hafner and His Band; Some Reflections on the Scandalous Acquittal. By a Shareholder.' It was a pamphlet, at that date forgotten, but which created much excitement at one time in the financial circles of Paris, of London and of Berlin, having been printed at once in three languages—in French, in German and in English—on the day after the suit of the 'Credit Austro Dalmate.' The dealer's chestnut-colored eyes twinkled with a truly ferocious joy as he held out the volume and repeated:

"It is worth four hundred francs."

"Do not read that book, Fanny," said Alba quickly, after having read the title of the work, and again speaking in English; "it is one of those books with which one should not even pollute one's thoughts."

"You may keep the book, sir," she continued, "since you have made yourself the accomplice of those who have written it, by speculating on the fear you hoped it would

inspire. Mademoiselle Hafner has known of it long, and neither she nor her father will give a centime.”

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"Very well! So much the better, so much the better," said Ribalta, wrapping up his volume again; "tell your father I will keep it at his service."

"Ah, the miserable man!" said Alba, when Fanny and she had left the shop and reentered the carriage. "To dare to show you that!"

"You saw," replied Fanny, "I was so surprised I could not utter a word. That the man should offer me that infamous work is very impertinent. My father?.... You do not know his scrupulousness in business. It is the honor of his profession. There is not a sovereign in Europe who has not given him a testimonial."

That impassioned protestation was so touching, the generous child's illusion was so sincere, that Alba pressed her hand with a deeper tenderness. When Alba found herself that evening with her friend Dorsenne, who again dined at Madame Steno's, she took him aside to relate to him the tragical scene, and to ask him: "Have you seen that pamphlet?"

"To-day," said the writer. "Montfanon, whom I have found at length, has just bought one of the two copies which Ribalta received lately. The old leaguer believes everything, you know, when a Hafner is in the question.... I am more skeptical in the bad as well as in the good. It was only the account given by the trial which produced any impression on me, for that is truth."

"But he was acquitted."

"Yes," replied Dorsenne, "though it is none the less true that he ruined hundreds and hundreds of persons."

"Then, by the account given you of the case, it is clear to you that he is dishonest," interrupted Alba,

"As clear as that you are here, Contessina," replied Dorsenne, "if to steal means to plunder one's neighbors and to escape justice. But that would be nothing. The sinister corner in this affair is the suicide of one Schroeder, a brave citizen of Vienna, who knew our Baron intimately, and who invested, on the advice of his excellent friend, his entire fortune, three hundred thousand florins, in the scheme. He lost them, and, in despair, killed himself, his wife, and their three children."

"My God!" cried Alba, clasping her hands. "And Fanny might have read that letter in the book."

"Yes," continued Julien, "and all the rest with proof in support of it. But rest assured, she shall not have the volume. I will go to that anarchist of a Ribalta to-morrow and I will buy the last copy, if Hafner has not already bought it."

Notwithstanding his constant affectation of irony, and, notwithstanding, his assumption of intellectual egotism, Julien was obliging. He never hesitated to render any one a service. He had not told his little friend an untruth when he promised her to buy the dangerous work, and the following morning he turned toward the Rue Borgognona, furnished with the twenty louis demanded by the bookseller. Imagine his feelings when the latter said to him:

“It is too late, Monsieur Dorsenne. The young lady was here last night. She pretended not to prefer one volume to the other. It was to bargain, no doubt. Ha, ha! But she had to pay the price. I would have asked the father more. One owes some consideration to a young girl.”

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"Wretch!" exclaimed the novelist. "And you can jest after having committed that Judas-like act! To inform a child of her father's misdeeds, when she is ignorant of them!.... Never, do you hear, never any more will Monsieur de Montfanon and I set foot in your shop, nor Monseigneur Guerillot, nor any of the persons of my acquaintance. I will tell the whole world of your infamy. I will write it, and it shall appear in all the journals of Rome. I will ruin you, I will force you to close this dusty old shop."

During the entire day, Dorsenne vainly tried to shake off the weight of melancholy which that visit to the brigand of the Rue Borgognona had left upon his heart.

On crossing, at nine o'clock, the threshold of the Villa Steno to give an account of his mission to the Contessina, he was singularly moved. There was no one there but the Maitlands, two tourists and two English diplomatists, on their way to posts in the East.

"I was awaiting you," said Alba to her friend, as soon as she could speak with him in a corner of the salon. "I need your advice. Last night a tragical incident took place at the Hafner's."

"Probably," replied Dorsenne. "Fanny has bought Ribalta's book."

"She has bought the book!" said Alba, changing color and trembling. "Ah, the unhappy girl; the other thing was not sufficient!"

"What other thing?" questioned Julien.

"You remember," said the young girl, "that I told you of that Noe Ancona, the agent who served Hafner as a tool in selling up Ardea, and in thus forcing the marriage. Well, it seems this personage did not think himself sufficiently well-paid for his complicity. He demanded of the Baron a large sum, with which to found some large swindling scheme, which the latter refused point-blank. The other threatened to relate their little dealing to Ardea, and he did so."

"And Peppino was angry?" asked Dorsenne, shaking his head. "That is not like him."

"Indignant or not," continued Alba, "last night he went to the Palais Savorelli to make a terrible scene with his future father-in-law."

"And to obtain an increase of dowry," said Julian.

"He was not by any means tactful, then," replied Alba, "for even in the presence of Fanny, who entered in the midst of their conversation, he did not pause. Perhaps he had drunk a little more than he could stand, which has of late become common with him. But, you see, the poor child was initiated into the abominable bargain with regard to her future, to her happiness, and if she has read the book, too! It is too dreadful!"

“What a violent scene!” exclaimed Dorsenne. “So the engagement has been broken off?”

“Not officially. Fanny is ill in bed from the excitement. Ardea came this morning to see my mother, who has also seen Hafner. She has reconciled them by proving to them, which she thinks true, that they have a common interest in avoiding all scandal, and arranging matters. But it rests with the poor little one. Mamma wished me to go, this afternoon, to beseech her to reconsider her resolution. For she has told her father she never wishes to hear the Prince’s voice again. I have refused. Mamma insists. Am I not right?”

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"Who knows?" replied Julien. "What would be her life alone with her father, now that her illusions with regard to him have been swept away?"

The touching scene had indeed taken place, and less than twenty-four hours after the novelist had thus expressed to himself the regret of not assisting at it. Only he was mistaken as to the tenor of the dialogue, in a manner which proved that the subtlety of intelligence will never divine the simplicity of the heart. The most dolorous of all moral tragedies knit and unknit the most often in silence. It was in the afternoon, toward six o'clock, that a servant came to announce Mademoiselle Hafner's visit to the Contessina, busy at that moment reading for the tenth time the 'Eglogue Mondaine,' that delicate story by Dorsenne. When Fanny entered the room, Alba could see what a trial her charming god-daughter of the past week had sustained, by the surprising and rapid alteration in that expressive and noble visage. She took her hand at first without speaking to her, as if she was entirely ignorant of the cause of her friend's real indisposition. She then said:

"How pleased I am to see you! Are you better?"

"I have never been ill," replied Fanny, who did not know how to tell an untruth. "I have had pain, that is all." Looking at Alba, as if to beg her to ask no question, she added:

"I have come to bid you adieu."

"You are going away?" asked the Contessina. "Yes," said Fanny, "I am going to spend the summer at one of our estates in Styria." And, in a low voice: "Has your mother told you that my engagement is broken?" "Yes," replied Alba, and both were again silent. After several moments Fanny was the first to ask: "And how shall you spend your summer?"—"We shall go to Piove, as usual," was Alba's answer. "Perhaps Dorsenne will be there, and the Maitlands will surely be." A third pause ensued. They gazed at one another, and, without uttering another word, they distinctly read one another's hearts. The martyrdom they suffered was so similar, they both knew it to be so like, that they felt the same pity possess them at the same moment. Forced to condemn with the most irrevocable condemnation, the one her father, the other, her mother, each felt attracted toward the friend, like her, unhappy, and, falling into one another's arms, they both sobbed.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAKE DI PORTO

Her friend's tears had relieved sad Alba's heart while she held that friend in her arms, quivering with sorrow and pity; but when she was gone, and Madame Steno's daughter was alone, face to face with her thoughts, a greater distress seized her. The pity which

her companion in misery had shown for her—was it not one more proof that she was right in mistrusting her mother? Alas! The miserable child did not know that while she was plunged in despair, there was in Rome and in her immediate

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vicinity a creature bent upon realizing a mad vow. And that creature was the same who had not recoiled before the infamy of an anonymous letter, pretty and sinister Lydia Maitland—that delicate, that silent young woman with the large brown eyes, always smiling, always impenetrable in the midst of that dull complexion which no emotion, it seemed, had ever tinged. The failure of her first attempt had exasperated her hatred against her husband and against the Countess to the verge of fury, but a concentrated fury, which was waiting for another occasion to strike, for weeks, patiently, obscurely. She had thought to wreak her vengeance by the return of Gorka, and in what had it ended? In freeing Lincoln from a dangerous rival and in imperilling the life of the only being for whom she cared!

The sojourn at the country-seat of her husband's mistress exasperated Lydia's hidden anger. She suffered so that she cried aloud, like an imprisoned animal beating against the bars, when she pictured to herself the happiness which the two lovers would enjoy in the intimacy of the villa, with the beauties of the Venetian scenery surrounding them. No doubt the wife could provoke a scandal and obtain a divorce, thanks to proofs as indisputable as those with which she had overwhelmed Maud. It would be sufficient to carry to a lawyer the correspondence in the Spanish escritoire. But of what use? She would not be avenged on her husband, to whom a divorce would be a matter of indifference now that he earned as much money as he required, and she would lose her brother. In vain Lydia told herself that, warned as Alba had been by her letter, her doubt of Madame Steno's misconduct would no longer be impossible. She was convinced by innumerable trifling signs that the Contessina still doubted, and then she concluded:

"It is there that the blow must be struck. But how?"

Yes. How? There was at the service of hatred in that delicate woman, in appearance oblivious of worldliness, that masculine energy in decision which is to be found in all families of truly military origin. The blood of Colonel Chapron stirred within her and gave her the desire to act. By dint of pondering upon those reasonings, Lydia ended by elaborating one of those plans of a simplicity really infernal, in which she revealed what must be called the genius of evil, for there was so much clearness in the conception and of villainy in the execution. She assured herself that it was unnecessary to seek any other stage than the studio for the scene she meditated. She knew too well the fury of passion by which Madame Steno was possessed to doubt that, as soon as she was alone with Lincoln, she did not refuse him those kisses of which their correspondence spoke. The snare to be laid was very simple. It required that Alba and Lydia should be in some post of observation while the lovers believed themselves alone, were it only for a moment. The position of the places

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furnished the formidable woman with the means of obtaining the place of espionage in all security. Situated on the second floor, the studio occupied most of the depth of the house. The wall, which separated it from the side of the apartments, ended in a partition formed of colored glass, through which it was impossible to see. That glass lighted a dark corridor adjoining the linen-room. Lydia employed several hours of several nights in cutting with a diamond a hole, the size of a fifty centime-piece, in one of those unpolished squares.

Her preparations had been completed several days when, notwithstanding her absence of scruple in the satiating of her hatred, she still hesitated to employ that mode of vengeance, so much atrocious cruelty was there in causing a daughter to spy upon her mother. It was Alba herself who kindled the last spark of humanity with which that dark conscience was lighted up, and that by the most innocent of conversations. It was the very evening of the afternoon on which she had exchanged that sad adieu with Fanny Hafner. She was more unnerved than usual, and she was conversing with Dorsenne in that corner of the long hall. They did not heed the fact that Lydia drew near them, by a simple change of seat which permitted her, while herself conversing with some guest, to lend an ear to the words uttered by the Contessina.

It was Florent who was the subject of their conversation, and she said to Dorsenne, who was praising him:

"What would you have? It is true I almost feel repulsion toward him. He is to me like a being of another species. His friendship for his brother-in-law? Yes. It is very beautiful, very touching; but it does not touch me. It is a devotion which is not human. It is too instinctive and too blind. Indeed, I know that I am wrong. There is that prejudice of race which I can never entirely overcome."

Dorsenne touched her fingers at that moment, under the pretext of taking from her her fan, in reality to warn her, and he said, in a very low voice that time:

"Let us go a little farther on. Lydia Maitland is too near."

He fancied he surprised a start on the part of Florent's sister, at whom he accidentally glanced, while his too-sensible interlocutor no longer watched her! But as the pretty, clear laugh of Lydia rang out at the same moment, imprudent Alba replied:

"Fortunately, she has heard nothing. And see how one can speak of trouble without mistrusting it.... I have just been wicked," she continued, "for it is not their fault, neither Florent's nor hers, if there is a little negro blood in their veins, so much the more so as it is connected by the blood of a hero, and they are both perfectly educated, and what is

better, perfectly good, and then I know very well that if there is a grand thought in this age it is to have proclaimed that truly all men are brothers.”

She had spoken in a lower voice, but too late. Moreover, even if Florent’s sister could have heard those words, they would not have sufficed to heal the wound which the first ones had made in the most sensitive part of her ‘amour propre’!

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"And I hesitated," said she to herself, "I thought of sparing her!"

The following morning, toward noon, she found herself at the atelier, seated beside Madame Steno, while Lincoln gave to the portrait the last touches, and while Alba posed in the large armchair, absent and pale as usual. Florent Chapron, after having assisted at part of the sitting, left the room, leaning upon the crutch, which he still used. His withdrawal seemed so propitious to Lydia that she resolved immediately not to allow such an opportunity to escape, and as if fatality interfered to render her work of infamy more easy, Madame Steno aided her by suddenly interrupting the work of the painter who, after hard working without speaking for half an hour, paused to wipe his forehead, on which were large drops of perspiration, so great was his excitement.

"Come, my little Linco," said she, with the affectionate solicitude of an old mistress, "you must rest. For two hours you have not ceased painting, and such minute details.... It tires me merely to watch you."

"I am not at all tired," replied Maitland, who, however, laid down his palette and brush, and rolling a cigarette, lighted it, continuing, with a proud smile: "We have only that one superiority, we Americans, but we have it—it is a power to apply ourselves which the Old World no longer knows.... It is for that reason that there are professions in which we have no rivals."

"But see!" replied Lydia, "you have taken Alba for a Bostonian or a New Yorker, and you have made her pose so long that she is pale. She must have a change. Come with me, dear, I will show you the costume they have sent me from Paris, and which I shall wear this afternoon to the garden party at the English embassy."

She forced Alba Steno to rise from the armchair as she uttered those words, then she entwined her arms about her waist to draw her away and kissed her. Ah, if ever a caress merited being compared to the hideous flattery of Iscariot, it was that, and the young girl might have replied with the sublime words: "Friend, why hast thou betrayed me by a kiss?" Alas! She believed in it, in the sincerity of that proof of affection, and she returned her false friend's kiss with a gratitude which did not soften that heart saturated with hatred, for five minutes had not passed ere Lydia had put into execution her hideous project. Under the pretext of reaching the linen-room more quickly, she took a servant's staircase, which led to that lobby with the glass partition, in which was the opening through which to look into the atelier.

"This is very strange," said she, pausing suddenly. And, pointing out to her innocent companion the round spot, she said: "Probably some servant who has wished to eavesdrop.—But what for? You, who are tall, look and see how it has been done and what it looks on. If it is a hole cut purposely, I shall discover the culprit and he shall go."

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Alba obeyed the perfidious request absently, and applied her eye to the aperture. The author of the anonymous letters had chosen her moment only too well. As soon as the door of the studio was closed, the Countess rose to approach Lincoln. She entwined around the young man's neck her arms, which gleamed through the transparent sleeves of her summer gown, and she kissed with greedy lips his eyes and mouth. Lydia, who had retained one of the girl's hands in hers, felt that hand tremble convulsively. A hunter who hears rustle the foliage of the thicket through which should pass the game he is awaiting, does not experience a joy more complete. Her snare was successful. She said to her unhappy victim:

"What ails you? How you tremble!"

And she essayed to push her away in order to put herself in her place. Alba, whom the sight of her mother embracing Lincoln with those passionate kisses inspired at that moment with an inexplicable horror, had, however, enough presence of mind in the midst of her suffering to understand the danger of that mother whom she had surprised thus, clasping in the arms of a guilty mistress—whom?—the husband of the very woman speaking to her, who asked her why she trembled with fear, who would look through that same hole to see that same tableau!.... In order to prevent what she believed would be to Lydia a terrible revelation, the courageous child had one of those desperate thoughts such as immediate peril inspires. With her free hand she struck the glass so violently that it was shattered into atoms, cutting her fingers and her wrist.

Lydia exclaimed, angrily:

"Miserable girl, you did that purposely!"

The fierce creature as she uttered these words, rushed toward the large hole now made in the panel—too late!

She only saw Lincoln erect in the centre of the studio, looking toward the broken window, while the Countess, standing a few paces from him, exclaimed:

"My daughter! What has happened to my daughter? I recognized her voice."

"Do not alarm yourself," replied Lydia, with atrocious sarcasm. "Alba broke the pane to give you a warning."

"But, is she hurt?" asked the mother.

"Very slightly," replied the implacable woman with the same accent of irony, and she turned again toward the Contessina with a glance of such rancor that, even in the state of confusion in which the latter was plunged by that which she had surprised, that glance paralyzed her with fear. She felt the same shudder which had possessed her dear friend Maud, in that same studio, in the face of the sinister depths of that dark soul,

suddenly exposed. She had not time to precisely define her feelings, for already her mother was beside her, pressing her in her arms—in those very arms which Alba had just seen twined around the neck of a lover—while that same mouth showered kisses upon him. The moral shock was so great that the young girl fainted.

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She regained consciousness and almost at once. She saw her mother as mad with anxiety as she had just seen her trembling with joy and love. She again saw Lydia Maitland's eyes fixed upon them both with an expression too significant now. And, as she had had the presence of mind to save that guilty mother, she found in her tenderness the strength to smile at her, to lie to her, to blind her forever as to the truth of that hideous scene which had just been enacted in that lobby.

"I was frightened at the sight of my own blood," said she, "and I believe it is only a small cut.... See! I can move my hand without pain."

When the doctor, hastily summoned, had confirmed that no particles of glass had remained in the cuts, the Countess felt so reassured that her gayety returned. Never had she been in a mood more charming than in the carriage which took them to the Villa Steno.

To a person obliged by proof to condemn another without ceasing to love her, there is no greater sorrow than to perceive the absolute unconsciousness of that other person and her serenity in her fault. Poor Alba, felt overwhelmed by a sadness greater, more depressing still, and which became materially insupportable, when, toward half-past two, her mother bade her farewell, although the fete at the English embassy did not begin until five o'clock.

"I promised poor Hafner to go to see him to-day. I know he is bowed down with grief. I would like to try to arrange all.... I will send back the carriage if you wish to go out awhile. I have telephoned Lydia to expect me at four o'clock.... She will take me."

She had, on detailing the employment so natural of her afternoon, eyes too brilliant, a smile too happy. She looked too youthful in her light toilette. Her feet trembled with too nervous an impatience. How could Alba not have felt that she was telling her an untruth? The undeceived child had the intuition that the visit to Fanny's father was only a pretext. It was not the first time that the Countess employed it to free herself from inconvenient surveillance, the act of sending back the carriage, which, in Rome as in Paris, is always the probable sign of clandestine meetings with women of their rank. It was not the first time that Alba was possessed by suspicion on certain mysterious disappearances of her mother. That mother did not mistrust that poor Alba—her Alba, the child so tenderly loved in spite of all—was suffering at that very moment and on her account the most terrible of temptations.... When the carriage had disappeared the fixed gaze of the young girl was turned upon the pavement, and then she felt arise in her a sudden, instinctive, almost irresistible idea to end the moral suffering by which she was devoured. It was so simple!.... It was sufficient to end life. One movement which she could make, one single movement—she could lean over the balustrade, against which her arm rested, in a certain manner—so, a little

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more forward, a little more—and that suffering would be terminated. Yes, it would be so very simple. She saw herself lying upon the pavement, her limbs broken, her head crushed, dead—dead—freed! She leaned forward and was about to leap, when her eyes fell upon a person who was walking below, the sight of whom suddenly aroused her from the folly, the strange charm of which had just laid hold so powerfully upon her. She drew back. She rubbed her eyes with her hands, and she, who was accustomed to mystical enthusiasm, said aloud:

“My God! You send him to me! I am saved.” And she summoned the footman to tell him that if M. Dorsenne asked for her, he should be shown into Madame Steno’s small salon. “I am not at home to any one else,” she added.

It was indeed Julien, whom she had seen approach the house at the very instant when she was only separated from the abyss by that last tremor of animal repugnance, which is found even in suicide of the most ardent kind. Do not madmen themselves choose to die in one manner rather than in another? She paused several moments in order to collect herself.

“Yes,” said she at length, to herself, “it is the only solution. I will find out if he loves me truly. And if he does not?”

She again looked toward the window, in order to assure herself that, in case that conversation did not end as she desired, the tragical and simple means remained at her service by which to free herself from that infamous life which she surely could not bear.

Julien began the conversation in his tone of sentimental raillery, so speedily to be transformed into one of drama! He knew very well, on arriving at Villa Steno, that he was to have his last tete-a-tete with his pretty and interesting little friend. For he had at length decided to go away, and, to be more sure of not failing, he had engaged his sleeping-berth for that night. He had jested so much with love that he entered upon that conversation with a jest; when, having tried to take Alba’s hand to press a kiss upon it, he saw that it was bandaged.

“What has happened to you, little Countess? Have my laurels or those of Florent Chapron prevented you from sleeping, that you are here with the classical wrist of a duellist?.... Seriously, how have you hurt yourself?”

“I leaned against a window, which broke and the pieces of glass cut my fingers somewhat,” replied the young girl with a faint smile, adding: “It is nothing.”

“What an imprudent child you are!” said Dorsenne in his tone of friendly scolding. “Do you know that you might have severed an artery and have caused a very serious, perhaps a fatal, hemorrhage?”

“That would not have been such a great misfortune,” replied Alba, shaking her pretty head with an expression so bitter about her mouth that the young man, too, ceased smiling.

“Do not speak in that tone,” said he, “or I shall think you did it purposely.”

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"Purposely?" repeated the young girl. "Purposely? Why should I have done it purposely?"

And she blushed and laughed in the same nervous way she had laughed fifteen minutes before, when she looked down into the street. Dorsenne felt that she was suffering, and his heart contracted. The trouble against which he had struggled for several days with all the energy of an independent artist, and which for some time systematized his celibacy, again oppressed him. He thought it time to put between "folly" and him the irreparability of his categorical resolution. So he replied to his little friend with his habitual gentleness, but in a tone of firmness, which already announced his determination:

"I have again vexed you, Contessina, and you are looking at me with the glance of our hours of dispute. You will later regret having been unkind to-day."

As he pronounced those enigmatical words, she saw that he had in his eyes and in his smile something different and indefinable. It must have been that she loved him still more than she herself believed as for a second she forgot both her pain and her resolution, and she asked him, quickly:

"You have some trouble? You are suffering? What is it?"

"Nothing," replied Dorsenne. "But time is flying, the minutes are going by, and not only the minutes. There is an old and charming. French ode, which you do not know and which begins:

'Le temps s'en va, le temps s'en va, Madame.
Las, le temps? Non. Mais nous nous en allons.'"

"Which means, little Countess, in simple prose, that this is no doubt the last conversation we shall have together this season, and that it would be cruel to mar for me this last visit."

"Do I understand you aright?" said Alba. She, too, knew too well Julien's way of speaking not to know that that mannerism, half-mocking, half-sentimental, always served him to prepare phrases more grave, and against the emotion of which her fear of appearing a dupe rose in advance. She crossed her arms upon her breast, and after a pause she continued, in a grave voice: "You are going away?"

"Yes," he replied, and from his coat-pocket he partly drew his ticket. "You see I have acted like the poltroons who cast themselves into the water. My ticket is bought, and I shall no longer hold that little discourse which I have held for months, that, 'Sir executioner, one moment.... Du Barry'."



"You are going away?" repeated the young girl, who did not seem to have heeded the jest by which Julien had concealed his own confusion at the effect of his so abruptly announced departure. "I shall not see you any more!.... And if I ask you not to go yet? You have spoken to me of our friendship.... If I pray you, if I beseech you, in the name of that friendship, not to deprive me of it at this instant, when I have no one, when I am so alone, so horribly alone, will you answer no? You have often told me that you were my friend, my true friend? If it be true, you will not go. I repeat, I am alone, and I am afraid."

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"Come, little Countess," replied Dorsenne, who began to be terrified by the young girl's sudden excitement, "it is not reasonable to agitate yourself thus, because yesterday you had a very sad conversation with Fanny Hafner! First, it is altogether impossible for me to defer my departure. You force me to give you coarse, almost commercial reasons. But my book is about to appear, and I must be there for the launching of the sale, of which I have already told you. And then you are going away, too. You will have all the diversions of the country, of your Venetian friends and charming Lydia Maitland!"

"Do not mention that name," interrupted Alba, whose face became discomposed at the allusion to the sojourn at Piove. "You do not know how you pain me, nor what that woman is, what a monster of cruelty and of perfidy! Ask me no more. I shall tell you nothing. But," the Contessina that time clasping her hands, her poor, thin hands, which trembled with the anguish of the words she dared to utter, "do you not comprehend that if I speak to you as I do, it is because I have need of you in order to live?" Then in a low voice, choked by emotion: "It is because I love you!" All the modesty natural to a child of twenty mounted to her pale face in a flood of purple, when she had uttered that avowal. "Yes, I love you!" she repeated, in an accent as deep, but more firm. "It is not, however, so common a thing to find real devotion, a being who only asks to serve you, to be useful to you, to live in your shadow. And you will understand that to have the right of giving you my life, to bear your name, to be your wife, to follow you, I felt very vividly in your presence at the moment I was about to lose you. You will pardon my lack of modesty for the first, for the last time. I have suffered too much."

She ceased. Never had the absolute purity of the charming creature, born and bred in an atmosphere of corruption, and remaining in the same so intact, so noble, so frank, flashed out as at that moment. All that virgin and unhappy soul was in her eyes which implored Julien, on her lips which trembled at having spoken thus, on her brow around which floated, like an aureole, the fair hair stirred by the breeze which entered the open window. She had found the means of daring that prodigious step, the boldest a woman can permit herself, still more so a young girl, with so chaste a simplicity that at that moment Dorsenne would not have dared to touch even the hand of that child who confided herself to him so madly, so loyally.

Dorsenne was undoubtedly greatly interested in her, with a curiosity, without enthusiasm, and against which a reaction had already set in. That touching speech, in which trembled a distress so tender and each word of which later on made him weep with regret, produced upon him at that moment an impression of fear rather than love or pity. When at length he broke the cruel silence, the sound of his voice revealed to the unhappy girl the uselessness of that supreme appeal addressed by her to life.

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She had only kept, to exorcise the demon of suicide, her hope in the heart of that man, and that heart, toward which she turned in so immoderate a transport, drew back instead of responding.

“Calm yourself, I beseech you,” said he to her. “You can understand that I am very much moved, very much surprised, at what I have heard! I did not suspect it. My God! How troubled you are. And yet,” he continued with more firmness, “I should despise myself were I to lie to you. You have been so loyal toward me.... To marry you? Ah, it would be the most delightful dream of happiness if that dream were not prevented by honesty. Poor child,” and his voice sounded almost bitter, “you do not know me. You do not know what a writer of my order is, and that to unite your destiny to mine would be for you martyrdom more severe than your moral solitude of to-day. You see, I came to your home with so much joy, because I was free, because each time I could say to myself that I need not return again. Such a confession is not romantic. But it is thus. If that relation became a bond, an obligation, a fixed framework in which to move, a circle of habits in which to imprison me, I should only have one thought—flight. An engagement for my entire life? No, no, I could not bear it. There are souls of passage as well as birds of passage, and I am one. You will understand it tomorrow, now, and you will remember that I have spoken to you as a man of honor, who would be miserable if he thought he had augmented, involuntarily, the sorrows of your life when his only desire was to assuage them. My God! What is to be done?” he cried, on seeing, as he spoke, tears gush from the young girl’s eyes, which she did not wipe away.

“Go away,” she replied, “leave me. I do not want you. I am grateful to you for not having deceived me.”

“But your presence is too cruel. I am ashamed of having spoken to you, now that I know you do not love me. I have been mad, do not punish me by remaining longer. After the conversation we have just had, my honor will not permit us to talk longer.”

“You are right,” said Julien, after another pause. He took his hat, which he had placed upon a table at the beginning of that visit, so rapidly and abruptly terminated by a confession of sentiments so strange. He said:

“Then, farewell.” She inclined her fair head without replying.

The door was closed. Alba Steno was again alone. Half an hour later, when the footman entered to ask for orders relative to the carriage sent back by the Countess, he found her standing motionless at the window from which she had watched Dorsenne depart. There she had once more been seized by the temptation of suicide. She had again felt with an irresistible force the magnetic attraction of death. Life appeared to her once more as something too vile, too useless, too insupportable to be borne. The carriage was at her disposal. By way of the Portese gate and

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along the Tiber, with the Countess's horses, it would take an hour and a half to reach the Lake di Porto. She had, too, this pretext, to avoid the curiosity of the servants: one of the Roman noblewomen of her acquaintance, Princess Torlonia, owned an isolated villa on the border of that lake.... She ascended hastily to don her hat. And without writing a word of farewell to any one, without even casting a glance at the objects among which she had lived and suffered, she descended the staircase and gave the coachman the name of the villa, adding "Drive quickly; I am late now."

The Lake di Porto is only, as its name indicates, the port of the ancient Tiber. The road which leads from Transtevere runs along the river, which rolls through a plain strewn with ruins and indented with barren hills, its brackish water discolored from the sand and mud of the Apennines.

Here groups of eucalyptus, there groups of pine parasols above some ruined walls, were all the vegetation which met Alba Steno's eye. But the scene accorded so well with the moral devastation she bore within her that the barrenness around her in her last walk was pleasant to her.

The feeling that she was nearing eternal peace, final sleep in which she should suffer no more, augmented when she alighted from the carriage, and, having passed the garden of Villa Torlonia, she found herself facing the small lake, so grandiose in its smallness by the wildness of its surroundings, and motionless, surprised in even that supreme moment by the magic of that hidden sight, she paused amid the reeds with their red tufts to look at that pond which was to become her tomb, and she murmured:

"How beautiful it is!"

There was in the humid atmosphere which gradually penetrated her a charm of mortal rest, to which she abandoned herself dreamily, almost with physical voluptuousness, drinking into her being the feverish fumes of that place—one of the most fatal at that season and at that hour of all that dangerous coast—until she shuddered in her light summer gown. Her shoulders contracted, her teeth chattered, and that feeling of discomfort was to her as a signal for action. She took another allee of rose-bushes in flower to reach a point on the bank barren of vegetation, where was outlined the form of a boat. She soon detached it, and, managing the heavy oars with her delicate hands, she advanced toward the middle of the lake.

When she was in the spot which she thought the deepest and the most suitable for her design, she ceased rowing. Then, by a delicate care, which made her smile herself, so much did it betray instinctive and childish order at such a solemn moment, she put her hat, her umbrella and her gloves on one of the transversal boards of the boat. She had made effort to move the heavy oars, so that she was perspiring. A second shudder

seized her as she was arranging the trifling objects, so keen, so chilly, so that time that she paused. She lay there motionless, her eyes fixed upon the water, whose undulations lapped the boat. At the last moment she felt reenter her heart, not love of life, but love for her mother. All the details of the events which would follow her suicide were presented to her mind.

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She saw herself plunging into the deep water which would close over her head. Her suffering would be ended, but Madame Steno? She saw the coachman growing uneasy over her absence, ringing at the door of Villa Torlonia, the servants in search. The loosened boat would relate enough. Would the Countess know that she had killed herself? Would she know the cause of that desperate end? The terrible face of Lydia Maitland appeared to the young girl. She comprehended that the woman hated her enemy too much not to enlighten her with regard to the circumstances which had preceded that suicide. The cry so simple and of a significance so terrible: "You did it purposely!" returned to Alba's memory. She saw her mother learning that her daughter had seen all. She had loved her so much, that mother, she loved her so dearly still!

Then, as a third violent chill shook her from head to foot, Alba began to think of another mode, and one as sure, of death without any one in the world being able to suspect that it was voluntary. She recalled the fact that she was in one of the most dreaded corners of the Roman Campagna; that she had known persons carried off in a few days by the pernicious fevers contracted in similar places, at that hour and in that season, notably one of her friends, one of the Bonapartes living in Rome, who came thither to hunt when overheated. If she were to try to catch that same disease?.... And she took up the oars. When she felt her brow moist with the second effort, she opened her bodice and her chemise, she exposed her neck, her breast, her throat, and she lay down in the boat, allowing the damp air to envelop, to caress, to chill her, inviting the entrance into her blood of the fatal germs. How long did she remain thus, half-unconscious, in the atmosphere more and more laden with miasma in proportion as the sun sank? A cry made her rise and again take up the oars. It was the coachman, who, not seeing her return, had descended from the box and was hailing the boat at all hazards. When she stepped upon the bank and when he saw her so pale, the man, who had been in the Countess's service for years, could not help saying to her, with the familiarity of an Italian servant:

"You have taken cold, Mademoiselle, and this place is so dangerous."

"Indeed," she replied, "I have had a chill. It will be nothing. Let us return quickly. Above all, do not say that I was in the boat. You will cause me to be scolded."

CHAPTER XII

EPILOGUE

"And it was directly after that conversation that the poor child left for the lake, where she caught the pernicious fever?" asked Montfanon.

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"Directly," replied Dorsenne, "and what troubles me the most is that I can not doubt but that she went there purposely. I was so troubled by our conversation that I had not the strength to leave Rome the same evening, as I told her I should. After much hesitation—you understand why, now that I have told you all—I returned to the Villa Steno at six o'clock. To speak to her, but of what? Did I know? It was madness. For her avowal only allowed of two replies, either that which I made her or an offer of marriage. Ah, I did not reason so much. I was afraid.... Of what?.... I do not know. I reached the villa, where I found the Countess, gay and radiant, as was her custom, and tete-a-tete with her American. 'Only think, there is my child,' said she to me, 'who has refused to go to the English embassy, where she would enjoy herself, and who has gone out for a drive alone.... Will you await her?'"

"At length she began to grow uneasy, and I, seeing that no one returned, took my leave, my heart oppressed by presentiments.... Alba's carriage stopped at the door just as I was going out. She was pale, of a greenish pallor, which caused me to say on approaching her: 'Whence have you come?' as if I had the right. Her lips, already discolored, trembled as they replied. When I learned where she had spent that hour of sunset, and near what lake, the most deadly in the neighborhood, I said to her: 'What imprudence!' I shall all my life see the glance she gave me at the moment, as she replied: 'Say, rather, how wise, and pray that I may have taken the fever and that I die of it.' You know the rest, and how her wish has been realized. She indeed contracted the fever, and so severely that she died in less than six days. I have no doubt, since her last words, that it was a suicide."

"And the mother," asked Montfanon, "did she not comprehend finally?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied Dorsenne. "It is inconceivable, but it is thus. Ah! she is truly the worthy friend of that knave Hafner, whom his daughter's broken engagement has not grieved, in spite of his discomfiture. I forgot to tell you that he had just sold Palais Castagna to a joint-stock company to convert it into a hotel. I laugh," he continued with singular acrimony, "in order not to weep, for I am arriving at the most heartrending part. Do you know where I saw poor Alba Steno's face for the last time? It was three days ago, the day after her death, at this hour. I called to inquire for the Countess! She was receiving! 'Do you wish to bid her adieu?' she asked me. 'Good Lincoln is just molding her face for me.' And I entered the chamber of death. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks were sunken, her pretty nose was pinched, and upon her brow and in the corners of her mouth was a mixture of bitterness and of repose which I can not describe to you. I thought: 'If you had liked, she would be alive, she would smile, she would love you!' The American was beside

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the bed, while Florent Chapron, always faithful, was preparing the oil to put upon the face of the corpse, and sinister Lydia Maitland was watching the scene with eyes which made me shudder, reminding me of what I had divined at the time of my last conversation with Alba. If she does not undertake to play the part of a Nemesis and to tell all to the Countess, I am mistaken in faces! For the moment she was silent, and guess the only words the mother uttered when her lover, he on whose account her daughter had suffered so much, approached their common victim: 'Above all, do not injure her lovely lashes!' What horrible irony, was it not? Horrible!"

The young man sank upon a bench as he uttered that cry of distress and of remorse, which Montfanon mechanically repeated, as if startled by the tragical confidence he had just received.

Montfanon shook his gray head several times as if deliberating; then forced Dorsenne to rise, chiding him thus:

"Come, Julien, we can not remain here all the afternoon dreaming and sighing like young women! The child is dead. We can not restore her to life, you in despairing, I in deploring. We should do better to look in the face our responsibility in that sinister adventure, to repent of it and to expiate it."

"Our responsibility?" interrogated Julien. "I see mine, although I can truly not see yours."

"Yours and mine," replied Montfanon. "I am no sophist, and I am not in the habit of shifting my conscience. Yes or no," he insisted, with a return of his usual excitement, "did I leave the catacombs to arrange that unfortunate duel? Yes or no, did I yield to the paroxysm of choler which possessed me on hearing of the engagement of Ardea and on finding that I was in the presence of that equivocal Hafner? Yes or no, did that duel help to enlighten Madame Gorka as to her husband's doings, and, in consequence, Mademoiselle Steno as to her mother's? Did you not relate to me the progress of her anguish since that scandal, there just now?.... And if I have been startled, as I have been, by the news of that suicide, know it has been for this reason especially, because a voice has said to me: 'A few of the tears of that dead girl are laid to your account.'"

"But, my poor friend," interrupted Dorsenne, "whence such reasoning? According to that, we could not live any more. There enters into our lives, by indirect means, a collection of actions which in no way concerns us, and in admitting that we have a debt of responsibility to pay, that debt commences and ends in that which we have wished directly, sincerely, clearly."

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"It would be very convenient," replied the Marquis, with still more vivacity, "but the proof that it is not true is that you yourself are filled with remorse at not having saved the soul so weak of that defenseless child. Ah, I do not mince the truth to myself, and I shall not do so to you. You remember the morning when you were so gay, and when you gave me the theory of your cosmopolitanism? It amused you, as a perfect dilettante, so you said, to assist in one of those dramas of race which bring into play the personages from all points of the earth and of history, and you then traced to me a programme very true, my faith, and which events have almost brought about. Madame Steno has indeed conducted herself toward her two lovers as a Venetian of the time of Aretin; Chapron, with all the blind devotion of a descendant of an oppressed race; his sister with the villainous ferocity of a rebel who at length shakes off the yoke, since you think she wrote those anonymous letters. Hafner and Ardea have laid bare two detestable souls, the one of an infamous usurer, half German, half Dutch; the other of a degraded nobleman, in whom is revived some ancient 'condottiere'. Gorka has been brave and mad, like entire Poland; his wife implacable and loyal, like all of England. Maitland continues to be positive, insensible, and wilful in the midst of it all, as all America. And poor Alba ended as did her father. I do not speak to you of Baron Hafner's daughter," and he raised his hat. Then, in an altered voice:

"She is a saint, in whom I was deceived. But she has Jewish blood in her veins, blood which was that of the people of God. I should have remembered it and the beautiful saying of the Middle Ages: 'The Jewish women shall be saved because they have wept for our Lord in secret.'.... You outlined for me in advance the scene of the drama in which we have been mixed up.... And do you remember what I said: 'Is there not among them a soul which you might aid in doing better?' You laughed in my face at that moment. You would have treated me, had you been less polite, as a Philistine and a cabotin. You wished to be only a spectator, the gentleman in the balcony who wipes the glasses of his lorgnette in order to lose none of the comedy. Well, you could not do so. That role is not permitted a man. He must act, and he acts always, even when he thinks he is looking on, even when he washes his hands as Pontius Pilate, that dilettante, too, who uttered the words of your masters and of yourself. What is truth? Truth is that there is always and everywhere a duty to fulfil. Mine was to prevent that criminal encounter. Yours was not to pay attention to that young girl if you did not love her, and if you loved her, to marry her and to take her from her abominable surroundings. We have both failed, and at what a price!"

"You are very severe," said the young man; "but if you were right would not Alba be dead? Of what use is it for me to know what I should have done when it is too late?"

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"First, never to do so again," said the Marquis; "then to judge yourself and your life."

"There is truth in what you say," replied Dorsenne, "but you are mistaken if you think that the most intellectual men of our age have not suffered, too, from that abuse of thought. What is to be done? Ah, it is the disease of a century too cultivated, and there is no cure."

"There is one," interrupted Montfanon, "which you do not wish to see.... You will not deny that Balzac was the boldest of our modern writers. Is it necessary for me, an ignorant man, to recite to you the phrase which governs his work: 'Thought, principle of evil and of good can only be prepared, subdued, directed by religion.' See?" he continued, suddenly taking his companion by the arm and forcing him to look into a transversal allee through the copse, "there he is, the doctor who holds the remedy for that malady of the soul as for all the others. Do not show yourself. They will have forgotten our presence. But, look, look!Ah, what a meeting!"

The personage who appeared suddenly in that melancholy, deserted garden, and in a manner almost supernatural, so much did his presence form a living commentary to the discourse of the impassioned nobleman, was no other than the Holy Father himself, on the point of entering his carriage for his usual drive. Dorsenne, who only knew Leo XIII from his portraits, saw an old man, bent, bowed, whose white cassock gleamed beneath the red mantle, and who leaned on one side upon a prelate of his court, on the other upon one of his officers. In drawing back, as Montfanon had advised, in order not to bring a reprimand upon the keepers, he could study at his leisure the delicate face of the Sovereign Pontiff, who paused at a bed of roses to converse familiarly with a kneeling gardener. He saw the infinitely indulgent smile of that spirituelle mouth. He saw the light of those eyes which seemed to justify by their brightness the 'lumen in coelo' applied to the successor of Pie IX by a celebrated prophecy. He saw the venerable hand, that white, transparent hand, which was raised to give the solemn benediction with so much majesty, turn toward a fine yellow rose, and the fingers bend the flower without plucking it, as if not to harm the frail creation of God. The old Pope for a second inhaled its perfume and then resumed his walk toward the carriage, vaguely to be seen between the trunks of the green oaks. The black horses set off at a trot, and Dorsenne, turning again toward Montfanon, perceived large tears upon the lashes of the former zouave, who, forgetting the rest of their conversation, said, with a sigh: "And that is the only pleasure allowed him, who is, however, the successor of the first apostle, to inhale his flowers and drive in a carriage as rapidly as his horses can go! They have procured four paltry kilometers of road at the foot of the terrace where we were half an hour since. And he goes on, he goes on, thus deluding

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himself with regard to the vast space which is forbidden him. I have seen many tragical sights in my life. I have been to the war, and I have spent one entire night wounded on a battlefield covered with snow, among the dead, grazed by the wheels of the artillery of the conquerors, who defiled singing. Nothing has moved me like that drive of the old man, who has never uttered a complaint and who has for himself only that acre of land in which to move freely. But these are grand words which the holy man wrote one day at the foot of his portrait for a missionary. The words explain his life: 'Debitricem martyrii fidem'—Faith is bound to martyrdom."

"'Debitricem martyrii fidem'," repeated Dorsenne, "that is beautiful, indeed. And," he added, in a low voice, "you just now abused very rudely the dilettantes and the sceptic. But do you think there would be one of them who would refuse martyrdom if he could have at the same time faith?"

Never had Montfanon heard the young man utter a similar phrase and in such an accent. The image returned to him, by way of contrast, of Dorsenne, alert and foppish, the dandy of literature, so gayly a scoffer and a sophist, to whom antique and venerable Rome was only a city of pleasure, a cosmopolis more paradoxical than Florence, Nice, Biarritz, St. Moritz, than such and such other cities of international winter and summer. He felt that for the first time that soul was strained to its depths, the tragical death of poor Alba had become in the mind of the writer the point of remorse around which revolved the moral life of the superior and incomplete being, exiled from simple humanity by the most invincible pride of mind. Montfanon comprehended that every additional word would pain the wounded heart. He was afraid of having already lectured Dorsenne too severely. He took within his arm the arm of the young man, and he pressed it silently, putting into that manly caress all the warm and discreet pity of an elder brother.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Mobile and complaisant conscience had already forgiven himself
Not an excuse, but an explanation of your conduct
Sufficed him to conceive the plan of a reparation
There is always and everywhere a duty to fulfill

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire cosmopolis:

Conditions of blindness so voluntary that they become complicity
Despotism natural to puissant personalities
Egyptian tobacco, mixed with opium and saltpetre
Follow their thoughts instead of heeding objects
Has as much sense as the handle of a basket



Have never known in the morning what I would do in the evening
I no longer love you
Imagine what it would be never to have been born
Mediocre sensibility
Melancholy problem of the birth and death of love
Mobile and complaisant

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conscience had already forgiven himself

No flies enter a closed mouth

Not an excuse, but an explanation of your conduct

One of those trustful men who did not judge when they loved

Only one thing infamous in love, and that is a falsehood

Pitiful checker-board of life

Scarcely a shade of gentle condescension

Sufficed him to conceive the plan of a reparation

That suffering which curses but does not pardon

That you can aid them in leading better lives?

The forests have taught man liberty

There is an intelligent man, who never questions his ideas

There is always and everywhere a duty to fulfil

Thinking it better not to lie on minor points

Too prudent to risk or gain much

Walked at the rapid pace characteristic of monomaniacs

Words are nothing; it is the tone in which they are uttered

JACQUELINE

By Therese Bentzon (Mme. Blanc)

With a Preface by M. THUREAU-DANGIN, of the French Academy

TH. BENTZON

It is natural that the attention and affection of Americans should be attracted to a woman who has devoted herself assiduously to understanding and to making known the aspirations of our country, especially in introducing the labors and achievements of our women to their sisters in France, of whom we also have much to learn; for simple, homely virtues and the charm of womanliness may still be studied with advantage on the cherished soil of France.

Marie-Therese Blanc, nee Solms—for this is the name of the author who writes under the nom de plume of Madame Bentzon—is considered the greatest of living French female novelists. She was born in an old French chateau at Seine-Porte (Seine et Oise), September 21, 1840. This chateau was owned by Madame Bentzon's grandmother, the Marquise de Vitry, who was a woman of great force and energy of character, "a ministering angel" to her country neighborhood. Her grandmother's first marriage was to a Dane, Major-General Adrien-Benjamin de Bentzon, a Governor of the



Danish Antilles. By this marriage there was one daughter, the mother of Therese, who in turn married the Comte de Solms. "This mixture of races," Madame Blanc once wrote, "surely explains a kind of moral and intellectual cosmopolitanism which is found in my nature. My father of German descent, my mother of Danish—my nom de plume (which was her maiden-name) is Danish—with Protestant ancestors on her side, though she and I were Catholics—my grandmother a sound and witty Parisian, gay, brilliant, lively, with superb physical health and the consequent good spirits—surely these materials could not have produced other than a cosmopolitan being."

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Somehow or other, the family became impoverished. Therese de Solms took to writing stories. After many refusals, her debut took place in the 'Revue des Deux Mondes', and her perseverance was largely due to the encouragement she received from George Sand, although that great woman saw everything through the magnifying glass of her genius. But the person to whom Therese Bentzon was most indebted in the matter of literary advice—she says herself—was the late M. Caro, the famous Sorbonne professor of philosophy, himself an admirable writer, "who put me through a course of literature, acting as my guide through a vast amount of solid reading, and criticizing my work with kindly severity." Success was slow. Strange as it may seem, there is a prejudice against female writers in France, a country that has produced so many admirable women-authors. However, the time was to come when M. Becloz found one of her stories in the 'Journal des Debats'. It was the one entitled 'Un Divorce', and he lost no time in engaging the young writer to become one of his staff. From that day to this she has found the pages of the Revue always open to her.

Madame Bentzon is a novelist, translator, and writer of literary essays. The list of her works runs as follows: 'Le Roman d'un Muet (1868); Un Divorce (1872); La Grande Sauliere (1877); Un remords (1878); Yette and Georgette (1880); Le Retour (1882); Tete folle (1883); Tony, (1884); Emancipee (1887); Constance (1891); Jacqueline (1893). We need not enter into the merits of style and composition if we mention that 'Un remords, Tony, and Constance' were crowned by the French Academy, and 'Jacqueline' in 1893. Madame Bentzon is likewise the translator of Aldrich, Bret Harte, Dickens, and Ouida. Some of her critical works are 'Litterature et Moeurs etrangeres', 1882, and 'Nouveaux romanciers americains', 1885.

M. THUREAU-DANGIN
de l'Academie Francaise.

JACQUELINE

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

A PARISIENNE'S "At home"

Despite a short frock, checked stockings, wide turned-over collar, and a loose sash around the waist of her blouse in other words, despite the childish fashion of a dress which seemed to denote that she was not more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, she seemed much older. An observer would have put her down as the oldest of the young girls who on Tuesdays, at Madame de Nailles's afternoons, filled what was called "the young girls' corner" with whispered merriment and low laughter, while, under

pretence of drinking tea, the noise went on which is always audible when there is anything to eat.

No doubt the amber tint of this young girl's complexion, the raven blackness of her hair, her marked yet delicate features, and the general impression produced by her dark coloring, were reasons why she seemed older than the rest. It was Jacqueline's privilege to exhibit that style of beauty which comes earliest to perfection, and retains it longest; and, what was an equal privilege, she resembled no one.

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The deep bow-window—her favorite spot—which enabled her to have a reception-day in connection with that of her mamma, seemed like a great basket of roses when all her friends assembled there, seated on low chairs in unstudied attitudes: the white rose of the group was Mademoiselle d'Etaples, a specimen of pale and pensive beauty, frail almost to transparency; the Rose of Bengal was the charming Colette Odinska, a girl of Polish race, but born in Paris; the dark-red rose was Isabelle Ray-Belle she was called triumphantly—whose dimpled cheeks flushed scarlet for almost any cause, some said for very coquetry. Then there were three little girls called Wermant, daughters of an agent de change—a spray of May roses, exactly alike in features, manners, and dress, sprightly and charming as little girls could be. A little pompon rose was tiny Dorothee d'Avrigny, to whom the pet name Dolly was appropriate, for never had any doll's waxen face been more lovely than her little round one, with its mouth shaped like a little heart—a mouth smaller than her eyes, and these were round eyes, too, but so bright, and blue, and soft, that it was easy to overlook their too frequently startled expression.

Jacqueline had nothing in common with a rose of any kind, but she was not the less charming to look at. Such was the unspoken reflection of a man who was well able to be a judge in such matters. His name was Hubert Marien. He was a great painter, and was now watching the clear-cut, somewhat Arab—like profile of this girl—a profile brought out distinctly against the dark-red silk background of a screen, much as we see a cameo stand out in sharp relief from the glittering stone from which the artist has fashioned it. Marien looked at her from a distance, leaning against the fireplace of the farther salon, whence he could see plainly the corner shaded by green foliage plants where Jacqueline had made her niche, as she called it. The two rooms formed practically but one, being separated only by a large recess without folding-doors, or 'portires'. Hubert Marien, from his place behind Madame de Nailles's chair, had often before watched Jacqueline as he was watching her at this moment. She had grown up, as it were, under his own eye. He had seen her playing with her dolls, absorbed in her story-books, and crunching sugar-plums, he had paid her visits—for how many years? He did not care to count them.

And little girls bloom fast! How old they make us feel! Who would have supposed the most unpromising of little buds would have transformed itself so soon into what he gazed upon? Marien, as an artist, had great pleasure in studying the delicate outline of that graceful head surmounted by thick tresses, with rebellious ringlets rippling over the brow before they were gathered into the thick braid that hung behind; and Jacqueline, although she appeared to be wholly occupied with her guests, felt the gaze that was fixed upon her, and was conscious of its magnetic influence, from which nothing would have induced her to escape even had she been able. All the young girls were listening attentively (despite their more serious occupation of consuming dainties) to what was going on in the next room among the grown-up people, whose conversation reached them only in detached fragments.

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So long as the subject talked about was the last reception at the French Academy, these young girls (comrades in the class-room and at the weekly catechising) had been satisfied to discuss together their own little affairs, but after Colonel de Valdonjon began to talk complete silence reigned among them. One might have heard the buzzing of a fly. Their attention, however, was of little use. Exclamations of oh! and ah! and protests more or less sincere drowned even the loud and somewhat hoarse voice of the Colonel. The girls heard it only through a sort of general murmur, out of which a burst of astonishment or of dissent would occasionally break forth. These outbreaks were all the curious group could hear distinctly. They sniffed, as it were, at the forbidden fruit, but they longed to inhale the full perfume of the scandal that they felt was in the air. That stout officer of cuirassiers, of whom some people spoke as "The Chatterbox," took advantage of his profession to tell many an unsavory story which he had picked up or invented at his club. He had come to Madame de Nailles's reception with a brand-new concoction of falsehood and truth, a story likely to be hawked round Paris with great success for several weeks to come, though ladies on first hearing it would think proper to cry out that they would not even listen to it, and would pretend to look round them for their fans to hide their confusion.

The principal object of interest in this scandalous gossip was a valuable diamond bracelet, one of those priceless bits of jewelry seldom seen except in show-windows on the Rue de la Paix, intended to be bought only for presentation to princesses—of some sort or kind. Well, by an extraordinary, chance the Marquise de Versannes—aye, the lovely Georgine de Versannes herself—had picked up this bracelet in the street—by chance, as it were.

"It so happened," said the Colonel, "that I was at her mother-in-law's, where she was going to dine. She came in looking as innocent as you please, with her hand in her pocket. 'Oh, see what I have found!' she cried. 'I stepped upon it almost at your door.' And the bracelet was placed under a lamp, where the diamonds shot out sparkles fit to blind the old Marquise, and make that old fool of a Versannes see a thousand lights. He has long known better than to take all his wife says for gospel—but he tries hard to pretend that he believes her. 'My dear,' he said, 'you must take that to the police.'—'I'll send it to-morrow morning,' says the charming Georgine, 'but I wished to show you my good luck.' Of course nobody came forward to claim the bracelet, and a month later Madame de Versannes appeared at the Cranfords' ball with a brilliant diamond bracelet, worn like the Queen of Sheba's, high up on her arm, near the shoulder, to hide the lack of sleeve. This piece of finery, which drew everybody's attention to the wearer, was the famous bracelet picked up in the street. Clever of her!—wasn't it, now?"

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“Horrid! Unlikely! Impossible.... What do you mean us to understand about it, Colonel? Could she have....?”

Then the Colonel went on to demonstrate, with many coarse insinuations, that that good Georgine, as he familiarly called her, had done many more things than people gave her credit for. And he went on to add: “Surely, you must have heard of the row about her between Givrac and the Homme-Volant at the Cirque?”

“What, the man that wears stockinet all covered with gold scales? Do tell us, Colonel!”

But here Madame de Nailles gave a dry little cough which was meant to impose silence on the subject. She was not a prude, but she disapproved of anything that was bad form at her receptions. The Colonel’s revelations had to be made in a lower tone, while his hostess endeavored to bring back the conversation to the charming reply made by M. Renan to the somewhat insipid address of a member of the Academie.

“We sha’n’t hear anything more now,” said Colette, with a sigh. “Did you understand it, Jacqueline?”

“Understand—what?”

“Why, that story about the bracelet?”

“No—not all. The Colonel seemed to imply that she had not picked it up, and indeed I don’t see how any one could have dropped in the street, in broad daylight, a bracelet meant only to be worn at night—a bracelet worn near the shoulder.”

“But if she did not pick it up—she must have stolen it.”

“Stolen it?” cried Belle. “Stolen it! What! The Marquise de Versannes? Why, she inherited the finest diamonds in Paris!”

“How do you know?”

“Because mamma sometimes takes me to the Opera, and her subscription day is the same as that of the Marquise. People say a good deal of harm of her—in whispers. They say she is barely received now in society, that people turn their backs on her, and so forth, and so on. However, that did not hinder her from being superb the other evening at ‘Polyeucte’.”

“So you only go to see ‘Polyeucte’?” said Jacqueline, making a little face as if she despised that opera.

“Yes, I have seen it twice. Mamma lets me go to ‘Polyeucte’ and ‘Guillaume Tell’, and to the ‘Prophete’, but she won’t take me to see ‘Faust’—and it is just ‘Faust’ that I want to

see. Isn't it provoking that one can't see everything, hear everything, understand everything? You see, we could not half understand that story which seemed to amuse the people so much in the other room. Why did they send back the bracelet from the Prefecture to Madame de Versannes if it was not hers?"

"Yes—why?" said all the little girls, much puzzled.

Meantime, as the hour for closing the exhibition at the neighboring hippodrome had arrived, visitors came pouring into Madame de Nailles's reception—tall, graceful women, dressed with taste and elegance, as befitted ladies who were interested in horsemanship. The tone of the conversation changed. Nothing was talked about but superb horses, leaps over ribbons and other obstacles. The young girls interested themselves in the spring toilettes, which they either praised or criticised as they passed before their eyes.

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“Oh! there is Madame Villegry,” cried Jacqueline; “how handsome she is! I should like one of these days to be that kind of beauty, so tall and slender. Her waist measure is only twenty-one and two thirds inches. The woman who makes her corsets and my mamma’s told us so. She brought us one of her corsets to look at, a love of a corset, in brocatelle, all over many-colored flowers. That material is much more ‘distingue’ than the old satin—”

“But what a queer idea it is to waste all that upon a thing that nobody will ever look at,” said Dolly, her round eyes opening wider than before.

“Oh! it is just to please herself, I suppose. I understand that! Besides, nothing is too good for such a figure. But what I admire most is her extraordinary hair.”

“Which changes its color now and then,” observed the sharpest of the three Wermant sisters. “Extraordinary is just the word for it. At present it is dark red. Henna did that, I suppose. Raoul—our brother—when he was in Africa saw Arab women who used henna. They tied their heads up in a sort of poultice made of little leaves, something like tea-leaves. In twenty-four hours the hair will be dyed red, and will stay red for a year or more. You can try it if you like. I think it is disgusting.”

“Oh! look, there is Madame de Sternay. I recognized her by her perfume before I had even seen her. What delightful things good perfumes are!”

“What is it? Is it heliotrope or jessamine?” asked Yvonne d’Etaples, sniffing in the air.

“No—it is only orris-root—nothing but orris-root; but she puts it everywhere about her—in the hem of her petticoat, in the lining of her dress. She lives, one might say, in the middle of a sachet. The thing that will please me most when I am married will be to have no limit to my perfumes. Till then I have to satisfy myself with very little,” sighed Jacqueline, drawing a little bunch of violets from the loose folds of her blouse, and inhaling their fragrance with delight.

“‘Tiens’! here comes somebody who has to be contented with much less,” said Yvonne, as a young girl joined their circle. She was small, awkward, timid, and badly dressed. On seeing her Colette whispered “Oh! that tiresome Giselle. We sha’n’t be able to talk another word.”

Jacqueline kissed Giselle de Monredon. They were distant cousins, though they saw each other very seldom. Giselle was an orphan, having lost both her father and her mother, and was being educated in a convent from which she was allowed to come out only on great occasions. Her grandmother, whose ideas were those of the old school, had placed her there. The Easter holidays accounted for Giselle’s unexpected arrival. Wrapped in a large cloak which covered up her convent uniform, she looked, as compared with the gay girls around her, like a poor sombre night-moth, dazzled by the

light, in company with other glittering creatures of the insect race, fluttering with graceful movements, transparent wings and shining corselets.

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"Come and have some sandwiches," said Jacqueline, and she drew Giselle to the tea-table, with the kind intention apparently of making her feel more at her ease. But she had another motive. She saw some one who was very interesting to her coming at that moment toward the table. That some one was a man about forty, whose pointed black beard was becoming slightly gray—a man whom some people thought ugly, chiefly because they had never seen his somewhat irregular features illumined by a smile which, spreading from his lips to his eyes, lighted up his face and transformed it. The smile of Hubert Marien was rare, however. He was exclusive in his friendships, often silent, always somewhat unapproachable. He seldom troubled himself to please any one he did not care for. In society he was not seen to advantage, because he was extremely bored, for which reason he was seldom to be seen at the Tuesday receptions of Madame de Nailles; while, on other days, he frequented the house as an intimate friend of the family. Jacqueline had known him all her life, and for her he had always his beautiful smile. He had petted her when she was little, and had been much amused by the sort of adoration she had no hesitation in showing that she felt for him. He used to call her *Mademoiselle ma femme*, and M. de Nailles would speak of him as "my daughter's future husband." This joke had been kept up till the little lady had reached her ninth year, when it ceased, probably by order of Madame de Nailles, who in matters of propriety was very punctilious. Jacqueline, too, became less familiar than she had been with the man she called "my great painter." Indeed, in her heart of hearts, she cherished a grudge against him. She thought he presumed on the right he had assumed of teasing her. The older she grew the more he treated her as if she were a baby, and, in the little passages of arms that continually took place between them, Jacqueline was bitterly conscious that she no longer had the best of it as formerly. She was no longer as droll and lively as she had been. She was easily disconcerted, and took everything 'au serieux', and her wits became paralyzed by an embarrassment that was new to her. And, pained by the sort of sarcasm which Marien kept up in all their intercourse, she was often ready to burst into tears after talking to him. Yet she was never quite satisfied unless he was present. She counted the days from one Wednesday to another, for on Wednesdays he always dined with them, and she greeted any opportunity of seeing him on other days as a great pleasure. This week, for example, would be marked with a white stone. She would have seen him twice. For half an hour Marien had been enduring the bore of the reception, standing silent and self-absorbed in the midst of the gay talk, which did not interest him. He wished to escape, but was always kept from doing so by some word or sign from Madame de Nailles. Jacqueline had been thinking: "Oh! if he would only come and talk to us!" He was now drawing near them, and an instinct made her wish to rush up to him and tell him—what should she tell him? She did not know. A few moments before so many things to tell him had been passing through her brain.

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What she said was: "Monsieur Marien, I recommend to you these little spiced cakes." And, with some awkwardness, because her hand was trembling, she held out the plate to him.

"No, thank you, Mademoiselle," he said, affecting a tone of great ceremony, "I prefer to take this glass of punch, if you will permit me."

"The punch is cold, I fear; suppose we were to put a little tea in it. Stay—let me help you."

"A thousand thanks; but I like to attend to such little cookeries myself. By the way, it seems to me that Mademoiselle Giselle, in her character of an angel who disapproves of the good things of this life, has not left us much to eat at your table."

"Who—I?" cried the poor schoolgirl, in a tone of injured innocence and astonishment.

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Jacqueline, as if taking her under her protection. "He is nothing but a tease; what he says is only chaff. But I might as well talk Greek to her," she added, shrugging her shoulders. "In the convent they don't know what to make of a joke. Only spare her at least, if you please, Monsieur Marien."

"I know by report that Mademoiselle Giselle is worthy of the most profound respect," continued the pitiless painter. "I lay myself at her feet—and at yours. Now I am going to slip away in the English fashion. Good-evening."

"Why do you go so soon? You can't do any more work today."

"No, it has been a day lost—that is true."

"That's polite! By the way"—here Jacqueline became very red and she spoke rapidly—"what made you just now stare at me so persistently?"

"I? Impossible that I could have permitted myself to stare at you, Mademoiselle."

"That is just what you did, though. I thought you had found something to find fault with. What could it be? I fancied there was something wrong with my hair, something absurd that you were laughing at. You always do laugh, you know."

"Wrong with your hair? It is always wrong. But that is not your fault. You are not responsible for its looking like a hedgehog's."

"Hedgehogs haven't any hair," said Jacqueline, much hurt by the observation.

"True, they have only prickles, which remind me of the susceptibility of your temper. I beg your pardon I was looking at you critically. Being myself indulgent and kindhearted,



I was only looking at you from an artist's point of view—as is always allowable in my profession. Remember, I see you very rarely by daylight. I am obliged to work as long as the light allows me. Well, in the light of this April sunshine I was saying to myself—excuse my boldness!—that you had reached the right age for a picture.”

“For a picture? Were you thinking of painting me?” cried Jacqueline, radiant with pleasure.

“Hold a moment, please. Between a dream and its execution lies a great space. I was only imagining a picture of you.”



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"But my portrait would be frightful."

"Possibly. But that would depend on the skill of the painter."

"And yet a model should be—I am so thin," said Jacqueline, with confusion and discouragement.

"True; your limbs are like a grasshopper's."

"Oh! you mean my legs—but my arms...."

"Your arms must be like your legs. But, sitting as you were just now, I could see only your head, which is better. So! one has to be accountable for looking at you? Mademoiselle feels herself affronted if any one stares at her! I will remember this in future. There, now! suppose, instead of quarrelling with me, you were to go and cast yourself into the arms of your cousin Fred."

"Fred! Fred d'Argy! Fred is at Brest."

"Where are your eyes, my dear child? He has just come in with his mother."

And at that moment Madame de Nailles, with her pure, clear voice—a voice frequently compared to that of Mademoiselle Reichemberg, called:

"Jacqueline!"

Jacqueline never crossed the imaginary line which divided the two salons unless she was called upon to do so. She was still summoned like a child to speak to certain persons who took an especial interest in her, and who were kind enough to wish to see her—Madame d'Argy, for example, who had been the dearest friend of her dead mother. The death of that mother, who had been long replaced by a stepmother, could hardly be said to be deeply regretted by Jacqueline. She remembered her very indistinctly. The stories of her she had heard from Modeste, her old nurse, probably served her instead of any actual memory. She knew her only as a woman pale and in ill health, always lying on a sofa. The little black frock that had been made for her had been hardly worn out when a new mamma, as gay and fresh as the other had been sick and suffering, had come into the household like a ray of sunshine.

After that time Madame d'Argy and Modeste were the only people who spoke to her of the mother who was gone. Madame d'Argy, indeed, came on certain days to take her to visit the tomb, on which the child read, as she prayed for the departed:

Marie Jacqueline Adelaide de VALTIER

Baronne de Nailles

Died aged twenty-six years

And such filial sentiment as she still retained, concerning the unknown being who had been her mother, was tinged by her association with this melancholy pilgrimage which she was expected to perform at certain intervals. Without exactly knowing the reason why, Jacqueline was conscious of a certain hostility that existed between Madame d'Argy and her stepmother.

The intimate friend of the first Madame de Nailles was a woman with neither elegance nor beauty. She never had left off her widow's weeds, which she had worn since she had lost her husband in early youth. In the eyes of Jacqueline her sombre figure personified austere, exacting Duty, a kind of duty not attractive to her. That very day it seemed as if duty inconveniently stepped in to break up a conversation that was deeply interesting to her. The impatient gesture that she made when her mother called her might have been interpreted into: Bother Madame d'Argy!

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“Jacqueline!” called again the silvery voice that had first summoned her; and a moment after the young girl found herself in the centre of a circle of grown people, saying good-morning, making curtsies, and kissing the withered hand of old Madame de Monredon, as she had been taught to do from infancy. Madame de Monredon was Giselle’s grandmother. Jacqueline had been instructed to call her “aunt;” but in her heart she called her ‘La Fee Gyognon’, while Madame d’Argy, pointing to her son, said: “What do you think, darling, of such a surprise? He is home on leave. We came here the first place-naturally.”

“It was very nice of you. How do you do, Fred?” said Jacqueline, holding out her hand to a very young man, in a jacket ornamented with gold lace, who stood twisting his cap in his hand with some embarrassment “It is a long time since we have seen each other. But it does not seem to me that you have grown a great deal.”

Fred blushed up to the roots of his hair.

“No one can say that of you, Jacqueline,” observed Madame d’Argy.

“No—what a may-pole!—isn’t she?” said the Baronne, carelessly.

“If she realizes it,” whispered Madame de Monredon, who was sitting beside Madame d’Argy on a ‘causeuse’ shaped like an S, “why does she persist in dressing her like a child six years old? It is absurd!”

“Still, she can have no reason for keeping her thus in order to make herself seem young. She is only a stepmother.”

“Of course. But people might make comparisons. Beauty in the bud sometimes blooms out unexpectedly when it is not welcome.”

“Yes—she is fading fast. Small women ought not to grow stout.”

“Anyhow, I have no patience with her for keeping a girl of fifteen in short skirts.”

“You are making her out older than she is.”

“How is that?—how is that? She is two years younger than Giselle, who has just entered her eighteenth year.”

While the two ladies were exchanging these little remarks, the Baronne de Nailles was saying to the young naval cadet:

“Monsieur Fred, we should be charmed to keep you with us, but possibly you might like to see some of your old friends. Jacqueline can take you to them. They will be glad to see you.”

“Tiens!—that’s true,” said Jacqueline. “Dolly and Belle are yonder. You remember Isabelle Ray, who used to take dancing lessons with us.”

“Of course I do,” said Fred, following his cousin with a feeling of regret that his sword was not knocking against his legs, increasing his importance in the eyes of all the ladies who were present. He was not, however; sorry to leave their imposing circle. Above all, he was glad to escape from the clear-sighted, critical eyes of Madame de Nailles. On the other hand, to be sent off to the girls’ corner, after being insulted by being told he had not grown, hurt his sense of self-importance.

Meantime Jacqueline was taking him back to her own corner, where he was greeted by two or three little exclamations of surprise, shaking hands, however, as his former playmates drew their skirts around them, trying to make room for him to sit down.

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"Young ladies," said Jacqueline, "I present to you a 'bordachien'—a little middy from the practice-ship the Borda."

They burst out laughing: "A bordachien! A midy from the practice-ship!" they cried.

"I shall not be much longer on the practice-ship," said the young man, with a gesture which seemed as if his hand were feeling for the hilt of his sword, which was not there, "for I am going very soon on my first voyage as an ensign."

"Yes," explained Jacqueline, "he is going to be transferred from the 'Borda' to the 'Jean-Bart'—which, by the way, is no longer the 'Jean-Bart', only people call her so because they are used to it. Meantime you see before you "C," the great "C," the famous "C," that is, he is the pupil who stands highest on the roll of the naval school at this moment."

There was a vague murmur of applause. Poor Fred was indeed in need of some appreciation on the score of merit, for he was not much to look upon, being at that trying age when a young fellow's moustache is only a light down, an age at which youths always look their worst, and are awkward and unsociable because they are timid.

"Then you are no longer an idle fellow," said Dolly, rather teasingly. "People used to say that you went into the navy to get rid of your lessons. That I can quite understand."

"Oh, he has passed many difficult exams," cried Giselle, coming to the rescue.

"I thought I had had enough of school," said Fred, without making any defense, "and besides I had other reasons for going into the navy."

His "other reasons" had been a wish to emancipate himself from the excessive solicitude of his mother, who kept him tied to her apron-strings like a little girl. He was impatient to do something for himself, to become a man as soon as possible. But he said nothing of all this, and to escape further questions devoured three or four little cakes that were offered him. Before taking them he removed his gloves and displayed a pair of chapped and horny hands.

"Why—poor Fred!" cried Jacqueline, who remarked them in a moment, "what kind of almond paste do you use?"

Much annoyed, he replied, curtly: "We all have to row, we have also to attend to the machinery. But that is only while we are cadets. Of course, such apprenticeship is very hard. After that we shall get our stripes and be ordered on foreign service, and expect promotion."

"And glory," said Giselle, who found courage to speak.

Fred thanked her with a look of gratitude. She, at least, understood his profession. She entered into his feelings far better than Jacqueline, who had been his first confidante—Jacqueline, to whom he had confided his purposes, his ambition, and his day-dreams. He thought Jacqueline was selfish. She seemed to care only for herself. And yet, selfish or not selfish, she pleased him better than all the other girls he knew—a thousand times more than gentle, sweet Giselle.

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"Ah, glory, of course!" repeated Jacqueline. "I understand how much that counts, but there is glory of various kinds, and I know the kind that I prefer," she added in a tone which seemed to imply that it was not that of arms, or of perilous navigation. "We all know," she went on, "that not every man can have genius, but any sailor who has good luck can get to be an admiral."

"Let us hope you will be one soon, Monsieur Fred," said Dolly. "You will have well deserved it, according to the way you have distinguished yourself on board the 'Borda.'"

This induced Fred to let them understand something of life on board the practice-ship; he told how the masters who resided on shore ascended by a ladder to the gun-deck, which had been turned into a schoolroom; how six cadets occupied the space intended for each gun-carriage, where hammocks hung from hooks served them instead of beds; how the chapel was in a closet opened only on Sundays. He described the gymnastic feats in the rigging, the practice in gunnery, and many other things which, had they been well described, would have been interesting; but Fred was only a poor narrator. The conclusion the young ladies seemed to reach unanimously after hearing his descriptions, was discouraging. They cried almost with one voice—

"Think of any woman being willing to marry a sailor."

"Why not?" asked Giselle, very promptly.

"Because, what's the use of a husband who is always out of your reach, as it were, between water and sky? One would better be a widow. Widows, at any rate, can marry again. But you, Giselle, don't understand these things. You are going to be a nun."

"Had I been in your place, Fred," said Isabelle Ray, "I should rather have gone into the cavalry school at Saint Cyr. I should have wanted to be a good huntsman, had I been a man, and they say naval officers are never good horsemen."

Poor Fred! He was not making much progress among the young girls. Almost everything people talked about outside his cadet life was unknown to him; what he could talk about seemed to have no interest for any one, unless indeed it might interest Giselle, who was an adept in the art of sympathetic listening, never having herself anything to say.

Besides this, Fred was by no means at his ease in talking to Jacqueline. They had been told not to 'tutoyer' each other, because they were getting too old for such familiarity, and it was he, and not she, who remembered this prohibition. Jacqueline perceived this after a while, and burst out laughing:

"Tiens! You call me 'you,'" she cried, "and I ought not to say 'thou' but 'you.' I forgot. It seems so odd, when we have always been accustomed to 'tutoyer' each other."

“One ought to give it up after one’s first communion,” said the eldest Mademoiselle Wermant, sententiously. “We ceased to ‘tutoyer’ our boy cousins after that. I am told nothing annoys a husband so much as to see these little familiarities between his wife and her cousins or her playmates.”

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Giselle looked very much astonished at this speech, and her air of disapproval amused Belle and Yvonne exceedingly. They began presently to talk of the classes in which they were considered brilliant pupils, and of their success in compositions. They said that sometimes very difficult subjects were given out. A week or two before, each had had to compose a letter purporting to be from Dante in exile to a friend in Florence, describing Paris as it was in his time, especially the manners and customs of its universities, ending by some allusion to the state of matters between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines.

“Good heavens! And could you do it?” said Giselle, whose knowledge of history was limited to what may be found in school abridgments.

It was therefore a great satisfaction to her when Fred declared that he never should have known how to set about it.

“Oh! papa helped me a little,” said Isabelle, whose father wrote articles much appreciated by the public in the ‘Revue des Deux Mondes.’ “But he said at the same time that it was horrid to give such crack-brained stuff to us poor girls. Happily, our subject this week is much nicer. We have to make comparisons between La Tristesse d’Olympio, Souvenir, and Le Lac’. That will be something interesting.”

“The Tristesse d’Olympio?” repeated Giselle, in a tone of interrogation.

“You know, of course, that it is Victor Hugo’s,” said Mademoiselle de Wermant, with a touch of pity.

Giselle answered with sincerity and humility, “I only knew that Le Lac was by Lamartine.”

“Well!—she knows that much,” whispered Belle to Yvonne—“just that much, anyhow.”

While they were whispering and laughing, Jacqueline recited, in a soft voice, and with feeling that did credit to her instructor in elocution, Mademoiselle X——, of the Theatre Francais:

May the moan of the wind, the green rushes’ soft sighing,
The fragrance that floats in the air you have moved,
May all heard, may all breathed, may all seen, seem but trying
To say: They have loved.

Then she added, after a pause: “Isn’t that beautiful?”

“How dares she say such words?” thought Giselle, whose sense of propriety was outraged by this allusion to love. Fred, too, looked askance and was not comfortable,

for he thought that Jacqueline had too much assurance for her age, but that, after all, she was becoming more and more charming.

At that moment Belle and Yvonne were summoned, and they departed, full of an intention to spread everywhere the news that Giselle, the little goose, had actually known that *Le Lac* had been written by Lamartine. The Benedictine Sisters positively had acquired that much knowledge.

These girls were not the only persons that day at the reception who indulged in a little ill-natured talk after going away. Mesdames d'Argy and de Monredon, on their way to the Faubourg St. Germain, criticised Madame de Nailles pretty freely. As they crossed the Parc Monceau to reach their carriage, which was waiting for them on the Boulevard Malesherbes, they made the young people, Giselle and Fred, walk ahead, that they might have an opportunity of expressing themselves freely, the old dowager especially, whose toothless mouth never lost an opportunity of smirching the character and the reputation of her neighbors.

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“When I think of the pains my poor cousin de Nailles took to impress upon us all that he was making what is called a ‘mariage raisonnable’! Well, if a man wants a wife who is going to set up her own notions, her own customs, he had better marry a poor girl without fortune! This one will simply ruin him. My dear, I am continually amazed at the way people are living whose incomes I know to the last sou. What an example for Jacqueline! Extravagance, fast living, elegant self-indulgence.... Did you observe the Baronne’s gown?—of rough woolen stuff. She told some one it was the last creation of Doucet, and you know what that implies! His serge costs more than one of our velvet gowns And then her artistic tastes, her bric-a-brac! Her salon looks like a museum or a bazaar. I grant you it makes a very pretty setting for her and all her coqueties. But in my time respectable women were contented with furniture covered with red or yellow silk damask furnished by their upholsterers. They didn’t go about trying to hunt up the impossible. ‘On ne cherche pas midi a quatorze heures’. You hold, as I do, to the old fashions, though you are not nearly so old, my dear Elise, and Jacqueline’s mother thought as we think. She would say that her daughter is being very badly brought up. To be sure, all young creatures nowadays are the same. Parents, on a plea of tenderness, keep them at home, where they get spoiled among grown people, when they had much better have the same kind of education that has succeeded so well with Giselle; bolts on the garden-gates, wholesome seclusion, the company of girls of their own age, a great regularity of life, nothing which stimulates either vanity or imagination. That is the proper way to bring up girls without notions, girls who will let themselves be married without opposition, and are satisfied with the state of life to which Providence may be pleased to call them. For my part, I am enchanted with the ladies in the Rue de Monsieur, and, what is more, Giselle is very happy among them; to hear her talk you would suppose she was quite ready to take the veil. Of course, that is a mere passing fancy. But fancies of that sort are never dangerous, they have nothing in common with those that are passing nowadays through most girls’ brains. Having ‘a day!’—what a foolish notion: And then to let little girls take part in it, even in a corner of the room. I’ll wager that, though her skirts are half way up her legs, and her hair is dressed like a baby’s, that that little de Nailles is less of a child than my granddaughter, who has been brought up by the Benedictines. You say that she probably does not understand all that goes on around her. Perhaps not, but she breathes it in. It’s poison—that’s what it is!”

There was a good deal of truth in this harsh picture, although it contained considerable exaggeration.

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At this moment, when Madame de Monredon was sitting in judgment on the education given to the little girls brought up in the world, and on the ruinous extravagance of their young stepmothers, Madame de Nailles and Jacqueline—their last visitors having departed—were resting themselves, leaning tenderly against each other, on a sofa. Jacqueline's head lay on her mother's lap. Her mother, without speaking, was stroking the girl's dark hair. Jacqueline, too, was silent, but from time to time she kissed the slender fingers sparkling with rings, as they came within reach of her lips.

When M. de Nailles, about dinner-time, surprised them thus, he said, with satisfaction, as he had often said before, that it would be hard to find a home scene more charming, as they sat under the light of a lamp with a pink shade.

That the stepmother and stepdaughter adored each other was beyond a doubt. And yet, had any one been able to look into their hearts at that moment, he would have discovered with surprise that each was thinking of something that she could not confide to the other.

Both were thinking of the same person. Madame de Nailles was occupied with recollections, Jacqueline with hope. She was absorbed in Machiavellian strategy, how to realize a hope that had been formed that very afternoon.

"What are you both thinking of, sitting there so quietly?" said the Baron, stooping over them and kissing first his wife and then his child.

"About nothing," said the wife, with the most innocent of smiles.

"Oh! I am thinking," said Jacqueline, "of many things. I have a secret, papa, that I want to tell you when we are quite alone. Don't be jealous, dear mamma. It is something about a surprise—Oh, a lovely surprise for you."

"Saint Clotilde's day-my fete-day is still far off," said Madame de Nailles, refastening, mother-like, the ribbon that was intended to keep in order the rough ripples of Jacqueline's unruly hair, "and usually your whisperings begin as the day approaches my fete."

"Oh, dear!—you will go and guess it!" cried Jacqueline in alarm. "Oh! don't guess it, please."

"Well! I will do my best not to guess, then," said the good-natured Clotilde, with a laugh.

"And I assure you, for my part, that I am discretion itself," said M. de Nailles.

So saying, he drew his wife's arm within his own, and the three passed gayly together into the dining-room.

CHAPTER II

A CLEVER STEPMOTHER

No man took more pleasure than M. de Nailles in finding himself in his own home——partly, perhaps, because circumstances compelled him to be very little there. The post of deputy in the French Chamber is no sinecure. He was not often an orator from the tribune, but he was absorbed by work in the committees—“Harnesses to a lot of bothering reports,” as Jacqueline used to say to him. He had barely any time to give to those important duties of his position, by which, as is well known, members of the Corps Legislatif are shamelessly harassed by constituents, who, on pretence that they have helped to place the interests of their district in your hands, feel authorized to worry you with personal matters, such as the choice of agricultural machines, or a place to be found for a wet-nurse.

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Besides his public duties, M. de Nailles was occupied by financial speculations—operations that were no doubt made necessary by the style of living commented on by his cousin, Madame de Monredon, who was as stingy as she was bitter of tongue. The elegance that she found fault with was, however, very far from being great when compared with the luxury of the present day. Of course, the Baronne had to have her horses, her opera-box, her fashionable frocks. To supply these very moderate needs, which, however, she never insisted upon, being, so far as words went, most simple in her tastes, M. de Nailles, who had not the temperament which makes men find pleasure in hard work, became more and more fatigued. His days were passed in the Chamber, but he never neglected his interest on the Bourse; in the evening he accompanied his young wife into society, which, she always declared, she did not care for, but which had claims upon her nevertheless. It was therefore not surprising that M. de Nailles's face showed traces of the habitual fatigue that was fast aging him; his tall, thin form had acquired a slight stoop; though only fifty he was evidently in his declining years. He had once been a man of pleasure, it was said, before he entered politics. He had married his first wife late in life. She was a prudent woman who feared to expose him to temptation, and had kept him as far as possible away from Paris.

In the country, having nothing to do, he became interested in agriculture, and in looking after his estate at Grandchaux. He had been made a member of the Conseil General, when unfortunately death too early deprived him of the wise and gentle counsellor for whom he felt, possibly not a very lively love, but certainly a high esteem and affection. After he became a widower he met in the Pyrenees, where, as he was whiling away the time of seclusion proper after his loss, a young lady who appeared to him exactly the person he needed to bring up his little daughter—because she was extremely attractive to himself. Of course M. de Nailles found plenty of other reasons for his choice, which he gave to the world and to himself to justify his second marriage—but this was the true reason and the only one. His friends, however, all of whom had urged on him the desirability of taking another wife, in consideration of the age of Jacqueline, raised many objections as soon as he announced his intention of espousing Mademoiselle Clotilde Hecker, eldest daughter of a man who had been, at one time, a prefect under the Empire, but who had been turned out of office by the Republican Government. He had a large family and many debts; but M. de Nailles had some answer always ready for the objections of his family and friends. He was convinced that Mademoiselle Hecker, having no fortune, would be less exacting than other women and more disposed to lead a quiet life.

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She had been almost a mother to her own young brothers and sisters, which was a pledge for motherliness toward Jacqueline, *etc.*, *etc.* Nevertheless, had she not had eyes as blue as those of the beauties painted by Greuze, plenty of audacious wit, and a delicate complexion, due to her Alsatian origin—had she not possessed a slender waist and a lovely figure, he might have asked himself why a young lady who, in winter, studied painting with the commendable intention of making her own living by art, passed the summers at all the watering-places of France and those of neighboring countries, without any perceptible motive.

But, thanks to the bandage love ties over the eyes of men, he saw only what Mademoiselle Clotilde was willing that he should see. In the first place he saw the great desirability of a talent for painting which, unlike music—so often dangerous to married happiness—gives women who cultivate it sedentary interests. And then he was attracted by the model daughter's filial piety as he beheld her taking care of her mother, who was the victim of an incurable disorder, which required her by turns to reside at Cauterets, or sometimes at Ems, sometimes at Aix in Savoy, and sometimes even at Trouville. The poor girl had assured him that she asked no happier lot than to live eight months of the year in the country, where she would devote herself to teaching Jacqueline, for whom at first sight she had taken a violent fancy (the attraction indeed was mutual). She assured him she would teach her all she knew herself, and her diplomas proved how well educated she had been.

Indeed, it seemed as if only prejudice could find any objection to so prudent and reasonable a marriage, a marriage contracted principally for the good of Jacqueline.

It came to pass, however, that the air of Grandchaux, which is situated in the most unhealthful part of Limouzin, proved particularly hurtful to the new Madame de Nailles. She could not live a month on her husband's property without falling into a state of health which she attributed to malaria. M. de Nailles was at first much concerned about the condition of things which seemed likely to upset all his plans for retirement in the country, but, his wife having persuaded him that his position in the Conseil General was only a stepping-stone to a seat in the Corps Legislatif, where his place ought to be, he presented himself to the electors as a candidate, and was almost unanimously elected deputy, the conservative vote being still all powerful in that part of the country.

His wife, it was said, had shown rare zeal and activity at the time of the election, employing in her husband's service all those little arts which enable her sex to succeed in politics, as well as in everything else they set their minds to. No lady ever more completely turned the heads of country electors. It was really Madame de Nailles who took her seat in the Left Centre of the Chamber, in the person of her husband.

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After that she returned to Limouzin only long enough to keep up her popularity, though, with touching resignation, she frequently offered to spend the summer at Grandchaux, even if the consequences should be her death, like that of Pia in the Maremma. Her husband, of course, peremptorily set his face against such self-sacrifice.

The facilities for Jacqueline's education were increased by their settling down as residents of Paris. Madame de Nailles superintended the instruction of her stepdaughter with motherly solicitude, seconded, however, by a 'promeneuse', or walking-governess, which left her free to fulfil her own engagements in the afternoons. The walking-governess is a singular modern institution, intended to supply the place of the too often inconvenient daily governess of former times. The necessary qualifications of such a person are that she should have sturdy legs, and such knowledge of some foreign language as will enable her during their walks to converse in it with her pupil. Fraulein Schult, who came from one of the German cantons of Switzerland, was an ideal 'promeneuse'. She never was tired and she was well-informed. The number of things that could be learned from her during a walk was absolutely incredible.

Madame de Nailles, therefore, after a time, gave up to her, not without apparent regret, the duty of accompanying Jacqueline, while she herself fulfilled those duties to society which the most devoted of mothers can not wholly avoid; but the stepmother and stepdaughter were always to be seen together at mass at one o'clock; together they attended the Cours (that system of classes now so much in vogue) and also the weekly instruction given in the catechism; and if Madame de Nailles, when, at night, she told her husband all she had been doing for Jacqueline during the day (she never made any merit of her zeal for the child's welfare), added: "I left Jacqueline in this place or in that, where Mademoiselle Schult was to call for her," M. de Nailles showed no disposition to ask questions, for he well understood that his wife felt a certain delicacy in telling him that she had been to pay a brief visit to her own relatives, who, she knew, were distasteful to him. He had, indeed, very soon discerned in them a love of intrigue, a desire to get the most they could out of him, and a disagreeable propensity to parasitism. With the consummate tact she showed in everything she did, Madame de Nailles kept her own family in the background, though she never neglected them. She was always doing them little services, but she knew well that there were certain things about them that could not but be disagreeable to her husband. M. de Nailles knew all this, too, and respected his wife's affection for her family. He seldom asked her where she had been during the day. If he had she would have answered, with a sigh: "I went to see my mother while Jacqueline was taking her dancing-lesson, and before she went to her singing-master."

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That she was passionately attached to Jacqueline was proved by the affection the little girl conceived for her. "We two are friends," both mother and daughter often said of each other. Even Modeste, old Modeste, who had been at first indignant at seeing a stranger take the place of her dead mistress, could not but acknowledge that the usurper was no ordinary step mother. It might have been truly said that Madame de Nailles had never scolded Jacqueline, and that Jacqueline had never done anything contrary to the wishes of Madame de Nailles. When anything went wrong it was Fraulein Schult who was reproached first; if there was any difficulty in the management of Jacqueline, she alone received complaints. In the eyes of the "two friends," Fraulein Schult was somehow to be blamed for everything that went wrong in the family, but between themselves an observer might have watched in vain for the smallest cloud. Madame de Nailles, when she was first married, could not make enough of the very ugly yet attractive little girl, whose tight black curls and gypsy face made an admirable contrast to her own more delicate style of beauty, which was that of a blonde. She caressed Jacqueline, she dressed her up, she took her about with her like a little dog, and overwhelmed her with demonstrations of affection, which served not only to show off her own graceful attitudes, but gave spectators a high opinion of her kindness of heart.

When from time to time some one, envious of her happiness, pitied her for being childless, Madame de Nailles would say: "What do you mean? I have one daughter; she is enough for me."

It is a pity children grow so fast, and that little girls who were once ugly sometimes develop into beautiful young women. The time came when the model stepmother began to wish that Jacqueline would only develop morally, intellectually, and not physically. But she showed nothing of this in her behavior, and replied to any compliments addressed to her concerning Jacqueline with as much maternal modesty as if the dawning loveliness of her stepdaughter had been due to herself.

"Her nose is rather too long—don't you think so? And she will always be too dark, I fear." But she used always to add, "She is good enough and pretty enough to pass muster with any critic—poor little pussy-cat!" She became desirous to discover some tendency to ill-health in the plant that was too ready to bloom into beauty and perfection. She would have liked to be able to assert that Jacqueline's health would not permit her to sit up late at night, that fashionable hours would be injurious to her, that it would be undesirable to let her go into society as long as she could be kept from doing so. But Jacqueline persisted in never being ill, and was calculating with impatience how many years it would be before she could go to her first ball—three or four possibly. Was Madame de Nailles in three or four years to be reduced to the position of a chaperon? The young stepmother thought of such a possibility with horror. Her anxiety on this subject, however, as well as several other anxieties, was so well concealed that even her husband suspected nothing.

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The complete sympathy which existed between the two beings he most loved made M. de Nailles very happy. He had but one thing to complain of in his wife, and that thing was very small. Since she had married she had completely given up her painting. He had no knowledge of art himself, and had therefore given her credit for great artistic capacity. The fact was that in her days of poverty she had never been artist enough to make a living, and now that she was rich she felt inclined to laugh at her own limited ability. Her practice of art, she said, had only served to give her a knowledge of outline and of color; a knowledge she utilized in her dress and in the smallest details of house decoration and furniture. Everything she wore, everything that surrounded her, was arranged to perfection. She had a genius for decoration, for furniture, for trifles, and brought her artistic knowledge to bear even on the tying of a ribbon, or the arrangement of a nosegay.

"This is all I retain of your lessons," she said sometimes to Hubert Marien, when recalling to his memory the days in which she sought his advice as to how to prepare herself for the "struggle for life."

This phrase was amusing when it proceeded from her lips. What!—"struggle for life" with those little delicate, soft, childlike hands? How absurd! She laughed at the idea now, and all those who heard her laughed with her; Marien laughed more than any one. He, who had befriended her in her days of adversity, seemed to retain for the Baroness in her prosperity the same respectful and discreet devotion he had shown her as Mademoiselle Hecker. He had sent a wonderful portrait of her, as the wife of M. de Nailles, to the Salon—a portrait that the richer electors of Grandchaux, who had voted for her husband and who could afford to travel, gazed at with satisfaction, congratulating themselves that they had a deputy who had married so pretty a woman. It even seemed as if the beauty of Madame de Nailles belonged in some sort to the arrondissement, so proud were those who lived there of having their share in her charms.

Another portrait—that of M. de Nailles himself—was sent down to Limouzin from Paris, and all the peasants in the country round were invited to come and look at it. That also produced a very favorable impression on the rustic public, and added to the popularity of their deputy. Never had the proprietor of Grandchaux looked so grave, so dignified, so majestic, so absorbed in deep reflection, as he looked standing beside a table covered with papers—papers, no doubt, all having relation to local interests, important to the public and to individuals. It was the very figure of a statesman destined to high dignities. No one who gazed on such a deputy could doubt that one day he would be in the ministry.

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It was by such real services that Marien endeavored to repay the friendship and the kindness always awaiting him in the small house in the Parc Monceau, where we have just seen Jacqueline eagerly offering him some spiced cakes. To complete what seemed due to the household there only remained to paint the curiously expressive features of the girl at whom he had been looking that very day with more than ordinary attention. Once already, when Jacqueline was hardly out of baby-clothes, the great painter had made an admirable sketch of her tousled head, a sketch in which she looked like a little imp of darkness, and this sketch Madame de Nailles took pains should always be seen, but it bore no resemblance to the slender young girl who was on the eve of becoming, whatever might be done to arrest her development, a beautiful young woman. Jacqueline disliked to look at that picture. It seemed to do her an injury by associating her with her nursery. Probably that was the reason why she had been so pleased to hear Hubert Marien say unexpectedly that she was now ready for the portrait which had been often joked about, every one putting it off to the period, always remote, when "the may-pole" should have developed a pretty face and figure.

And now she was disquieted lest the idea of taking her picture, which she felt was very flattering, should remain inoperative in the painter's brain. She wanted it carried out at once, as soon as possible. Jacqueline detested waiting, and for some reason, which she never talked about, the years that seemed so short and swift to her stepmother seemed to her to be terribly long. Marien himself had said: "There is a great interval between a dream and its execution." These words had thrown cold water on her sudden joy. She wanted to force him to keep his promise—to paint her portrait immediately. How to do this was the problem her little head, reclining on Madame de Nailles's lap after the departure of their visitors, had been endeavoring to solve.

Should she communicate her wish to her indulgent stepmother, who for the most part willed whatever she wished her to do? A vague instinct—an instinct of some mysterious danger—warned her that in this case her father would be her better confidant.

CHAPTER III

THE FRIEND OF THE FAY

A week later M. de Nailles said to Hubert Marien, as they were smoking together in the conservatory, after the usual little family dinner on Wednesday was over:

"Well!—when would you like Jacqueline to come to sit for her picture?"

"What! are you thinking about that?" cried the painter, letting his cigar fall in his astonishment.

"She told me that you had proposed to make her portrait."

“The sly little minx!” thought Marien. “I only spoke of painting it some day,” he said, with embarrassment.

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"Well! she would like that 'some day' to be now, and she has a reason for wanting it at once, which, I hope, will decide you to gratify her. The third of June is Sainte-Clotilde's day, and she has taken it into her head that she would like to give her mamma a magnificent present—a present that, of course, we shall unite to give her. For some time past I have been thinking of asking you to paint a portrait of my daughter," continued M. de Nailles, who had in fact had no more wish for the portrait than he had had to be a deputy, until it had been put into his head. But the women of his household, little or big, could persuade him into anything.

"I really don't think I have the time now," said Marien.

"Bah!—you have whole two months before you. What can absorb you so entirely? I know you have your pictures ready for the Salon."

"Yes—of course—of course—but are you sure that Madame de Nailles would approve of it?"

"She will approve whatever I sanction," said M. de Nailles, with as much assurance as if he had been master in his domestic circle; "besides, we don't intend to ask her. It is to be a surprise. Jacqueline is looking forward to the pleasure it will give her. There is something very touching to me in the affection of that little thing for—for her mother." M. de Nailles usually hesitated a moment before saying that word, as if he were afraid of transferring something still belonging to his dead wife to another—that dead wife he so seldom remembered in any other way. He added, "She is so eager to give her pleasure."

Marien shook his head with an air of uncertainty.

"Are you sure that such a portrait would be really acceptable to Madame de Nailles?"

"How can you doubt it?" said the Baron, with much astonishment. "A portrait of her daughter!—done by a great master? However, of course, if we are putting you to any inconvenience—if you would rather not undertake it, you had better say so."

"No—of course I will do it, if you wish it," said Marien, quickly, who, although he was anxious to do nothing to displease Madame de Nailles, was equally desirous to stand well with her husband. "Yet I own that all the mystery that must attend on what you propose may put me to some embarrassment. How do you expect Jacqueline will be able to conceal—"

"Oh! easily enough. She walks out every day with Mademoiselle Schult. Well, Mademoiselle Schult will bring her to your studio instead of taking her to the Champs Elysees—or to walk elsewhere."

“But every day there will be concealments, falsehoods, deceptions. I think Madame de Nailles might prefer to be asked for her permission.”

“Ask for her permission when I have given mine? Ah, fa! my dear Marien, am I, or am I not, the father, of Jacqueline? I take upon myself the whole responsibility.”

“Then there is nothing more to be said. But do you think that Jacqueline will keep the secret till the picture is done?”

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"You don't know little girls; they are all too glad to have something of which they can make a mystery."

"When would you like us to begin?"

Marien had by this time said to himself that for him to hold out longer might seem strange to M. de Nailles. Besides, the matter, though in some respects it gave him cause for anxiety, really excited an interest in him. For some time past, though he had long known women and knew very little of mere girls, he had had his suspicions that a drama was being enacted in Jacqueline's heart, a drama of which he himself was the hero. He amused himself by watching it, though he did nothing to promote it. He was an artist and a keen and penetrating observer; he employed psychology in the service of his art, and probably to that might have been attributed the individual character of his portraits—a quality to be found in an equal degree only in those of Ricard.

What particularly interested him at this moment was the assumed indifference of Jacqueline while her father was conducting the negotiation which was of her suggestion. When they returned to the salon after smoking she pretended not to be the least anxious to know the result of their conversation. She sat sewing near the lamp, giving all her attention to the piece of lace on which she was working. Her father made her a sign which meant "He consents," and then Marien saw that the needle in her fingers trembled, and a slight color rose in her face—but that was all. She did not say a word. He could not know that for a week past she had gone to church every time she took a walk, and had offered a prayer and a candle that her wish might be granted. How very anxious and excited she had been all that week! The famous composition of which she had spoken to Giselle, the subject of which had so astonished the young girl brought up by the Benedictine nuns, felt the inspiration of her emotion and excitement. Jacqueline was in a frame of mind which made reading those three masterpieces by three great poets, and pondering the meaning of their words, very dangerous. The poems did not affect her with the melancholy they inspire in those who have "lived and loved," but she was attracted by their tenderness and their passion. Certain lines she applied to herself—certain others to another person. The very word love so often repeated in the verses sent a thrill through all her frame. She aspired to taste those "intoxicating moments," those "swift delights," those "sublime ecstasies," those "divine transports"—all the beautiful things, in short, of which the poems spoke, and which were as yet unknown to her. How could she know them? How could she, after an experience of sorrow, which seemed to her to be itself enviable, retain such sweet remembrances as the poets described?

"Let us love—love each other! Let us hasten to enjoy the passing hour!" so sang the poet of Le Lac. That passing hour of bliss she thought she had already enjoyed. She was sure that for a long time past she had loved. When had that love begun? She hardly knew. But it would last as long as she might live. One loves but once.

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These personal emotions, mingling with the literary enchantments of the poets, caused Jacqueline's pen to fly over her paper without effort, and she produced a composition so far superior to anything she usually wrote that it left the lucubrations of her companions far behind. M. Regis, the professor, said so to the class. He was enthusiastic about it, and greatly surprised. Belle, who had been always first in this kind of composition, was far behind Jacqueline, and was so greatly annoyed at her defeat that she would not speak to her for a week. On the other hand Colette and Dolly, who never had aspired to literary triumphs, were moved to tears when the "Study on the comparative merits of Three Poems, 'Le Lac,' 'Souvenir,' and 'La Tristesse d'Olympio,'" signed "Mademoiselle de Nailles," received the honor of being read aloud. This reading was followed by a murmur of applause, mingled with some hisses which may have proceeded from the viper of jealousy. But the paper made a sensation like that of some new scandal. Mothers and governesses whispered together. Many thought that that little de Nailles had expressed sentiments not proper at her age. Some came to the conclusion that M. Regis chose subjects for composition not suited to young girls. A committee waited on the unlucky professor to beg him to be more prudent for the future. He even lost, in consequence of Jacqueline's success, one of his pupils (the most stupid one, be it said, in the class), whose mother took her away, saying, with indignation, "One might as well risk the things they are teaching at the Sorbonne!"

This literary incident greatly alarmed Madame de Nailles! Of all things she dreaded that her daughter should early become dreamy and romantic. But on this point Jacqueline's behavior was calculated to reassure her. She laughed about her composition, she frolicked like a six-year-old child; without any apparent cause, she grew gayer and gayer as the time approached for the execution of her plot.

The evening before the day fixed on for the first sitting, Modeste, the elderly maid of the first Madame de Nailles, who loved her daughter, whom she had known from the moment of her birth, as if she had been her own foster-child, arrived at the studio of Hubert Marien in the Rue de Prony, bearing a box which she said contained all that would be wanted by Mademoiselle. Marien had the curiosity to look into it. It contained a robe of oriental muslin, light as air, diaphanous—and so dazzlingly white that he remarked:

"She will look like a fly in milk in that thing."

"Oh!" replied Modeste, with a laugh of satisfaction, "it is very becoming to her. I altered it to fit her, for it is one of Madame's dresses. Mademoiselle has nothing but short skirts, and she wanted to be painted as a young lady."

"With the approval of her papa?"

"Yes, of course, Monsieur, Monsieur le Baron gave his consent. But for that I certainly should not have minded what the child said to me."

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"Then," replied Marien, "I can say nothing," and he made ready for his sitter the next day, by turning two or three studies of the nude, which might have shocked her, with their faces to the wall.

A foreign language can not be properly acquired unless the learner has great opportunities for conversation. It therefore became a fixed habit with Fraulein Schult and Jacqueline to keep up a lively stream of talk during their walks, and their discourse was not always about the rain, the fine weather, the things displayed in the shop-windows, nor the historical monuments of Paris, which they visited conscientiously.

What is near the heart is sure to come eventually to the surface in continual tete-a-tete intercourse. Fraulein Schult, who was of a sentimental temperament, in spite of her outward resemblance to a grenadier, was very willing to allow her companion to draw from her confessions relating to an intended husband, who was awaiting her at Berne, and whose letters, both in prose and verse, were her comfort in her exile. This future husband was an apothecary, and the idea that he pounded out verses as he pounded his drugs in a mortar, and rolled out rhymes with his pills, sometimes inclined Jacqueline to laugh, but she listened patiently to the plaintive outpourings of her 'promeneuse', because she wished to acquire a right to reciprocate by a few half-confidences of her own. In her turn, therefore, she confided to Fraulein Schult—moved much as Midas had been, when for his own relief he whispered to the reeds—that if she were sometimes idle, inattentive, "away off in the moon," as her instructors told her by way of reproach, it was caused by one ever-present idea, which, ever since she had been able to think or feel, had taken possession of her inmost being—the idea of being loved some day by somebody as she herself loved.

"Was that somebody a boy of her own age?"

Oh, fie!—mere boys—still schoolboys—could only be looked upon as playfellows or comrades. Of course she considered Fred—Fred, for example!—Frederic d'Argy—as a brother, but how different he was from her ideal. Even young men of fashion—she had seen some of them on Tuesdays—Raoul Wermant, the one who so distinguished himself as a leader in the 'german', or Yvonne's brother, the officer of chasseurs, who had gained the prize for horsemanship, and others besides these—seemed to her very commonplace by comparison. No!—he whom she loved was a man in the prime of life, well known to fame. She didn't care if he had a few white hairs.

"Is he a person of rank?" asked Fraulein Schult, much puzzled.

"Oh! if you mean of noble birth, no, not at all. But fame is so superior to birth! There are more ways than one of acquiring an illustrious name, and the name that a man makes for himself is the noblest of all!"

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Then Jacqueline begged Fraulein Schult to imagine something like the passion of Bettina for Goethe—Fraulein Schult having told her that story simply with a view of interesting her in German conversation only the great man whose name she would not tell was not nearly so old as Goethe, and she herself was much less childish than Bettina. But, above all, it was his genius that attracted her—though his face, too, was very pleasing. And she went on to describe his appearance—till suddenly she stopped, burning with indignation; for she perceived that, notwithstanding the minuteness of her description, what she said was conveying an idea of ugliness and not one of the manly beauty she intended to portray.

“He is not like that at all,” she cried. “He has such a beautiful smile—a smile like no other I ever saw. And his talk is so amusing—and—” here Jacqueline lowered her voice as if afraid to be overheard, “and I do think—I think, after all, he does love me—just a little.”

On what could she have founded such a notion? Good heaven!—it was on something that had at first deeply grieved her, a sudden coldness and reserve that had come over his manner to her. Not long before she had read an English novel (no others were allowed to come into her hands). It was rather a stupid book, with many tedious passages, but in it she was told how the high-minded hero, not being able, for grave reasons, to aspire to the hand of the heroine, had taken refuge in an icy coldness, much as it cost him, and as soon as possible had gone away. English novels are nothing if not moral.

This story, not otherwise interesting, threw a gleam of light on what, up to that time, had been inexplicable to Jacqueline. He was above all things a man of honor. He must have perceived that his presence troubled her. He had possibly seen her when she stole a half-burned cigarette which he had left upon the table, a prize she had laid up with other relics—an old glove that he had lost, a bunch of violets he had gathered for her in the country. Yes! When she came to think of it, she felt certain he must have seen her furtively lay her hand upon that cigarette; that cigarette had compromised her. Then it was he must have said to himself that it was due to her parents, who had always shown him kindness, to surmount an attachment that could come to nothing—nothing at present. But when she should be old enough for him to ask her hand, would he dare? Might he not rashly think himself too old? She must seek out some way to give him encouragement, to give him to understand that she was not, after all, so far—so very far from being a young lady—old enough to be married. How difficult it all was! All the more difficult because she was exceedingly afraid of him.

It is not surprising that Fraulein Schult, after listening day after day to such recitals, with all the alternations of hope and of discouragement which succeeded one another in the mind of her precocious pupil, guessed, the moment that Jacqueline came to her, in a transport of joy, to ask her to go with her to the Rue de Prony, that the hero of the mysterious love-story was no other than Hubert Marien.

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As soon as she understood this, she perceived that she should be placed in a very false position. But she thought to herself there was no possible way of getting out of it, without giving a great deal too much importance to a very innocent piece of childish folly; she therefore determined to say nothing about it, but to keep a strict watch in the mean time. After all, M. de Nailles himself had given her her orders. She was to accompany Jacqueline, and do her crochet-work in one corner of the studio as long as the sitting lasted.

All she could do was to obey.

“And above all not a word to mamma, whatever she may ask you,” said Jacqueline.

And her father added, with a laugh, “Not a word.” Fraulein Schult felt that she knew what was expected of her. She was naturally compliant, and above all things she was anxious to get paid for as many hours of her time as possible—much like the driver of a fiacre, because the more money she could make the sooner she would be in a position to espouse her apothecary.

When Jacqueline, escorted by her Swiss duenna, penetrated almost furtively into Marien’s studio, her heart beat as if she had a consciousness of doing something very wrong. In truth, she had pictured to herself so many impossible scenes beforehand, had rehearsed the probable questions and answers in so many strange dialogues, had soothed her fancy with so many extravagant ideas, that she had at last created, bit by bit, a situation very different from the reality, and then threw herself into it, body and soul.

The look of the atelier—the first she had ever been in in her life—disappointed her. She had expected to behold a gorgeous collection of bric-a-brac, according to accounts she had heard of the studios of several celebrated masters. That of Marien was remarkable only for its vast dimensions and its abundance of light. Studies and sketches hung on the walls, were piled one over another in corners, were scattered about everywhere, attesting the incessant industry of the artist, whose devotion to his calling was so great that his own work never satisfied him.

Only some interesting casts from antique bronzes, brought out into strong relief by a background of tapestry, adorned this lofty hall, which had none of that confusion of decorative objects, in the midst of which some modern artists seem to pose themselves rather than to labor.

A fresh canvas stood upon an easel, all ready for the sitter.

“If you please, we will lose no time,” said Marien, rather roughly, seeing that Jacqueline was about to explore all the corners of his apartment, and that at that moment, with the tips of her fingers, she was drawing aside the covering he had cast over his Death of

Savonarola, the picture he was then at work upon. It was not the least of his grudges against Jacqueline for insisting on having her portrait painted that it obliged him to lay aside this really great work, that he might paint a likeness.

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"In ten minutes I shall be ready," said Jacqueline, obediently taking off her hat.

"Why can't you stay as you are? That jacket suits you. Let us begin immediately."

"No, indeed! What a horrid suggestion!" she cried, running up to the box which was half open. "You'll see how much better I can look in a moment or two."

"I put no faith in your fancies about your toilette. I certainly don't promise to accept them."

Nevertheless, he left her alone with her Bernese governess, saying: "Call me when you are ready, I shall be in the next room."

A quarter of an hour, and more, passed, and no signal had been given. Marien, getting out of patience, knocked on the door.

"Have you nearly done beautifying yourself?" he asked, in a tone of irony.

"Just done," replied a low voice, which trembled.

He went in, and to the great amusement of Fraulein Schult, who was not too preoccupied to notice everything, he stood confounded—petrified, as a man might be by some work of magic. What had become of Jacqueline? What had she in common with that dazzling vision? Had she been touched by some fairy's wand? Or, to accomplish such a transformation, had nothing been needed but the substitution of a woman's dress, fitted to her person, for the short skirts and loose waists cut in a boyish fashion, which had made the little girl seem hardly to belong to any sex, an indefinite being, condemned, as it were, to childishness? How tall, and slender, and graceful she looked in that long gown, the folds of which fell from her waist in flowing lines, a waist as round and flexible as the branch of a willow; what elegance there was in her modest corsage, which displayed for the first time her lovely arms and neck, half afraid of their own exposure. She still was not robust, but the leanness that she herself had owned to was not brought into prominence by any bone or angle, her dark skin was soft and polished, the color of ancient statues which have been slightly tinted yellow by exposure to the sun. This girl, a Parisienne, seemed formed on the model of a figurine of Tanagra. Greek, too, was her small head, crowned only by her usual braid of hair, which she had simply gathered up so as to show the nape of her neck, which was perhaps the most beautiful thing in all her beautiful person.

"Well!—what do you think of me?" she said to Marien, with a searching glance to see how she impressed him—a glance strangely like that of a grown woman.

"Well!—I can't get over it!—Why have you bedizened yourself in that fashion?" he asked, with an affectation of 'brusquerie', as he tried to recover his power of speech.



"Then you don't like me?" she murmured, in a low voice. Tears came into her eyes; her lips trembled.

"I don't see Jacqueline."

"No—I should hope not—but I am better than Jacqueline, am I not?"

"I am accustomed to Jacqueline. This new acquaintance disconcerts me. Give me time to get used to her. But once again let me ask, what possessed you to disguise yourself?"

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"I am not disguised. I am disguised when I am forced to wear those things, which do not suit me," said Jacqueline, pointing to her gray jacket and plaid skirt which were hung up on a hat-rack. "Oh, I know why mamma keeps me like that—she is afraid I should get too fond of dress before I have finished my education, and that my mind may be diverted from serious subjects. It is no doubt all intended for my good, but I should not lose much time if I turned up my hair like this, and what harm could there be in lengthening my skirts an inch or two? My picture will show her that I am improved by such little changes, and perhaps it will induce her to let me go to the Bal Blanc that Madame d'Etaples is going to give on Yvonne's birthday. Mamma declined for me, saying I was not fit to wear a low-necked corsage, but you see she was mistaken."

"Rather," said Marien, smiling in spite of himself.

"Yes—wasn't she?" she went on, delighted at his look. "Of course, I have bones, but they don't show like the great hollows under the collar-bones that Dolly shows, for instance—but Dolly looks stouter than I because her face is so round. Well! Dolly is going to Madame d'Etaples's ball."

"I grant," said Marien, devoting all his attention to the preparation of his palette, that she might not see him laugh, "I grant that you have bones—yes, many bones—but they are not much seen because they are too well placed to be obtrusive."

"I am glad of that," said Jacqueline, delighted.

"But let me ask you one question. Where did you pick up that queer gown? It seems to me that I have seen it somewhere."

"No doubt you have," replied Jacqueline, who had quite recovered from her first shock, and was now ready to talk; "it is the dress mamma had made some time ago when she acted in a comedy."

"So I thought," growled Marien, biting his lips.

The dress recalled to his mind many personal recollections, and for one instant he paused. Madame de Nailles, among other talents, possessed that of amateur acting. On one occasion, several years before, she had asked his advice concerning what dress she should wear in a little play of Scribe's, which was to be given at the house of Madame d'Avrigny—the house in all Paris most addicted to private theatricals. This reproduction of a forgotten play, with its characters attired in the costume of the period in which the play was placed, had had great success, a success due largely to the excellence of the costumes. In the comic parts the dressing had been purposely exaggerated, but Madame de Nailles, who played the part of a great coquette, would not have been dressed in character had she not tried to make herself as bewitching as possible.

Marien had shown her pictures of the beauties of 1840, painted by Dubufe, and she had decided on a white gauze embroidered with gold, in which, on that memorable evening, she had captured more than one heart, and which had had its influence on the life and destiny of Marien. This might have been seen in the vague glance of indignation with which he now regarded it.

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"Never," he thought, "was it half so pretty when worn by Madame de Nailles as by her stepdaughter."

Jacqueline meantime went on talking.

"You must know—I was rather perplexed what to do—almost all mamma's gowns made me look horribly too old. Modeste tried them on me one after another. We burst out laughing, they seemed so absurd. And then we were afraid mamma might chance to want the one I took. This old thing it was not likely she would ask for. She had worn it only once, and then put it away. The gauze is a little yellow from lying by, don't you think so? But we asked my father, who said it was all right, that I should look less dark in it, and that the dress was of no particular date, which was always an advantage. These Grecian dresses are always in the fashion. Ah! four years ago mamma was much more slender than she is now. But we have taken it in—oh! we took it in a great deal under the arms, but we had to let it down. Would you believe it?—I am taller than mamma—but you can hardly see the seam, it is concealed by the gold embroidery."

"No matter for that. We shall only take a three-quarters' length," said Marien.

"Oh, what a pity! No one will see I have a long skirt on. But I shall be 'decolletee', at any rate. I shall wear a comb. No one would know the picture for me—nobody!—You yourself hardly knew me—did you?"

"Not at first sight. You are much altered."

"Mamma will be amazed," said Jacqueline, clasping her hands. "It was a good idea!"

"Amazed, I do not doubt," said Marien, somewhat anxiously. "But suppose we take our pose—Stay!—keep just as you are. Your hands before you, hanging down—so. Your fingers loosely clasped—that's it. Turn your head a little. What a lovely neck!—how well her head is set upon it!" he cried, involuntarily.

Jacqueline glanced at Fraulein Schult, who was at the farther end of the studio, busy with her crochet. "You see," said the look, "that he has found out I am pretty—that I am worth something—all the rest will soon happen."

And, while Marien was sketching in the graceful figure that posed before him, Jacqueline's imagination was investing it with the white robe of a bride. She had a vision of the painter growing more and more resolved to ask her hand in marriage as the portrait grew beneath his brush; of course, her father would say at first: "You are mad—you must wait. I shall not let Jacqueline marry till she is seventeen." But long engagements, she had heard, had great delights, though in France they are not the fashion. At last, after being long entreated, she was sure that M. and Madame de Nailles would end by giving their consent—they were so fond of Marien. Standing

there, dreaming this dream, which gave her face an expression of extreme happiness, Jacqueline made a most admirable model. She had not felt in the least fatigued when Marien at last said to her, apologetically: "You must be ready to drop—I forgot you were not made of wood; we will go on to-morrow."

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Jacqueline, having put on her gray jacket with as much contempt for it as Cinderella may have felt for her rags after her successes at the ball, departed with the delightful sensation of having made a bold first step, and being eager to make another.

Thus it was with all her sittings, though some left her anxious and unhappy, as for instance when Marien, absorbed in his work, had not paused, except to say, "Turn your head a little—you are losing the pose." Or else, "Now you may rest for today."

On such occasions she would watch him anxiously as he painted swiftly, his brush making great splashes on the canvas, his dark features wearing a scowl, his chin on his breast, a deep frown upon his forehead, on which the hair grew low. It was evident that at such times he had no thought of pleasing her. Little did she suspect that he was saying to himself: "Fool that I am!—A man of my age to take pleasure in seeing that little head filled with follies and fancies of which I am the object. But can one—let one be ever so old—always act—or think reasonably? You are mad, Marien! A child of fourteen! Bah!—they make her out to be fourteen—but she is fifteen—and was not that the age of Juliet? But, you old graybeard, you are not Romeo!—'Ma foi! I am in a pretty scrape. It ought to teach me not to play with fire at my age."

Those words "at my age" were the refrain to all the reflections of Hubert Marien. He had seen enough in his relations with women to have no doubt about Jacqueline's feelings, of which indeed he had watched the rise and progress from the time she had first begun to conceive a passion for him, with a mixture of amusement and conceit. The most cautious of men are not insensible to flattery, whatever form it may take. To be fallen in love with by a child was no doubt absurd—a thing to be laughed at—but Jacqueline seemed no longer a child, since for him she had uncovered her young shoulders and arranged her dark hair on her head with the effect of a queenly diadem. Not only had her dawning loveliness been revealed to him alone, but to him it seemed that he had helped to make her lovely. The innocent tenderness she felt for him had accomplished this miracle. Why should he refuse to inhale an incense so pure, so genuine? How could he help being sensible to its fragrance? Would it not be in his power to put an end to the whole affair whenever he pleased? But till then might he not bask in it, as one does in a warm ray of spring sunshine? He put aside, therefore, all scruples. And when he did this Jacqueline with rapture saw the painter's face, no longer with its scowl, but softened by some secret influence, the lines smoothed from his brow, while the beautiful smile which had fascinated so many women passed like a ray of light over his expressive mobile features; then she would once more fancy that he was making love to her, and indeed he said many things, which, without rousing in himself any scruples of conscience, or alarming the propriety of Fraulein Schult, were well calculated to delude a girl who had had no experience, and who was charmed by the illusions of a love-affair, as she might have been by a fairy-story.

Page 1798

It is true that sometimes, when he fancied he might have gone too far, Marien would grow sarcastic, or stay silent for a time. But this change of behavior produced on Jacqueline only the same effect that the caprices of a coquette produce upon a very young admirer. She grew anxious, she wanted to find out the reason, and finally found some explanation or excuse for him that coincided with her fancies.

The thing that reassured her in such cases was her picture. If she could seem to him as beautiful as he had made her look on canvas she was sure that he must love her.

"Is this really I? Are you sure?" she said to Marien with a laugh of delight. "It seems to me that you have made me too handsome."

"I have hardly done you justice," he replied. "It is not my fault if you are more beautiful than seems natural, like the beauties in the keepsakes. By the way, I hold those English things in horror. What do you say of them?"

Then Jacqueline undertook to defend the keepsake beauties with animation, declaring that no one but a hopelessly realistic painter would refuse to do justice to those charming monstrosities.

"Good heavens!" thought Marien, "if she is adding a quick wit to her other charms—that will put the finishing stroke to me."

When the portrait was sufficiently advanced, M. de Nailles came to the studio to judge of the likeness. He was delighted: "Only, my friend, I think," he cried to Marien, endeavoring to soften his one objection to the picture, "that you have given her a look—how can I put it?—an expression very charming no doubt, but which is not that of a child of her age. You know what I mean. It is something tender—intense—profound, too feminine. It may come to her some day, perhaps—but hitherto Jacqueline's expression has been generally that of a merry, mischievous child."

"Oh, papa!" cried the young girl, stung by the insult.

"You may possibly be right," Marien hastened to reply, "it was probably the fatigue of posing that gave her that expression."

"Oh!" repeated Jacqueline, more shocked than ever.

"I can alter it," said the painter, much amused by her extreme despair. But Marien thought that Jacqueline had not in the least that precocious air which her father attributed to her, when standing before him she gave herself up to thoughts the current of which he followed easily, watching on her candid face its changes of expression. How could he have painted her other than she appeared to him? Was what he saw an apparition—or was it a work of magic?



Several times during the sittings M. de Nailles made his appearance in the studio, and after greatly praising the work, persisted in his objection that it made Jacqueline too old. But since the painter saw her thus they must accept his judgment. It was no doubt an effect of the grown-up costume that she had had a fancy to put on.

"After all," he said to Jacqueline, "it is of not much consequence; you will grow up to it some of these days. And I pay you my compliments in advance on your appearance in the future."



Page 1799

She felt like choking with rage. "Oh! is it right," she thought, "for parents to persist in keeping a young girl forever in her cradle, so to speak?"

CHAPTER IV

A DANGEROUS MODEL

Time passed too quickly to please Jacqueline. Her portrait was finished at last, notwithstanding the willingness Marien had shown—or so it seemed to her—to retouch it unnecessarily that she might again and again come back to his atelier. But it was done at last. She glided into that dear atelier for the last time, her heart big with regret, with no hope that she would ever again put on the fairy robe which had, she thought, transfigured her till she was no longer little Jacqueline.

"I want you only for one moment, and I need only your face," said Marien. "I want to change—a line—I hardly know what to call it, at the corner of your mouth. Your father is right; your mouth is too grave. Think of something amusing—of the Bal Blanc at Madame d'Etaples, or merely, if you like, of the satisfaction it will give you to be done with these everlasting sittings—to be no longer obliged to bear the burden of a secret, in short to get rid of your portrait-painter."

She made him no answer, not daring to trust her voice.

"Come! now, on the contrary you are tightening your lips," said Marien, continuing to play with her as a cat plays with a mouse—provided there ever was a cat who, while playing with its mouse, had no intention of crunching it. "You are not merry, you are sad. That is not at all becoming to you."

"Why do you attribute to me your own thoughts? It is you who will be glad to get rid of all this trouble."

Fraulein Schult, who, while patiently adding stitch after stitch to the long strip of her crochet-work, was often much amused by the dialogues between sitter and painter, pricked up her ears to hear what a Frenchman would say to what was evidently intended to provoke a compliment.

"On the contrary, I shall miss you very much," said Marien, quite simply; "I have grown accustomed to see you here. You have become one of the familiar objects of my studio. Your absence will create a void."

"About as much as if this or that were gone," said Jacqueline, in a hurt tone, pointing first to a Japanese bronze and then to an Etruscan vase; "with only this difference, that you care least for the living object."

“You are bitter, Mademoiselle.”

“Because you make me such provoking answers, Monsieur. My feeling is different,” she went on impetuously, “I could pass my whole life watching you paint.”

“You would get tired of it probably in the long run.”

“Never!” she cried, blushing a deep red.

“And you would have to put up with my pipe—that big pipe yonder—a horror.”

“I should like it,” she cried, with conviction.

“But you would not like my bad temper. If you knew how ill I can behave sometimes! I can scold, I can become unbearable, when this, for example,” here he pointed with his mahlstick to the Savonarola, “does not please me.”



Page 1800

"But it is beautiful—so beautiful!"

"It is detestable. I shall have to go back some day and renew my impressions of Florence—see once more the Piazzes of the Signora and San Marco—and then I shall begin my picture all over again. Let us go together—will you?"

"Oh!" she cried, fervently, "think of seeing Italy!—and with you!"

"It might not be so great a pleasure as you think. Nothing is such a bore as to travel with people who are pervaded by one idea, and my 'idee fixe' is my picture—my great Dominican. He has taken complete possession of me—he overshadows me. I can think of nothing but him."

"Oh! but you think of me sometimes, I suppose," said Jacqueline, softly, "for I share your time with him."

"I think of you to blame you for taking me away from the fifteenth century," replied Hubert Marien, half seriously. "Ouf!—There! it is done at last. That dimple I never could manage I have got in for better or for worse. Now you may fly off. I set you at liberty—you poor little thing!"

She seemed in no hurry to profit by his permission. She stood perfectly still in the middle of the studio.

"Do you think I have posed well, faithfully, and with docility all these weeks?" she asked at last.

"I will give you a certificate to that effect, if you like. No one could have done better."

"And if the certificate is not all I want, will you give me some other present?"

"A beautiful portrait—what can you want more?"

"The picture is for mamma. I ask a favor on my own account."

"I refuse it beforehand. But you can tell me what it is, all the same."

"Well, then—the only part of your house that I have ever been in is this atelier. You can imagine I have a curiosity to see the rest."

"I see! you threaten me with a domiciliary visit without warning. Well! certainly, if that would give you any amusement. But my house contains nothing wonderful. I tell you that beforehand."

“One likes to know how one’s friends look at home—in their own setting, and I have only seen you here at work in your atelier.”

“The best point of view, believe me. But I am ready to do your bidding. Do you wish to see where I eat my dinner?” asked Marien, as he took her down the staircase leading to his dining-room.

Fraulein Schult would have liked to go with them—it was, besides, her duty. But she had not been asked to fulfil it. She hesitated a moment, and in that moment Jacqueline had disappeared. After consideration, the ‘promeneuse’ went on with her crochet, with a shrug of her shoulders which meant: “She can’t come to much harm.”

Seated in the studio, she heard the sound of their voices on the floor below. Jacqueline was lingering in the fencing-room where Marien was in the habit of counteracting by athletic exercises the effects of a too sedentary life. She was amusing herself by fingering the dumb-bells and the foils; she lingered long before some precious suits of armor. Then she was taken up into a small room, communicating with the atelier, where there was a fine collection of drawings by the old masters. “My only luxury,” said Marien.

Page 1801

Mademoiselle Schult, getting impatient, began to roll up yards and yards of crochet, and coughed, by way of a signal, but remembering how disagreeable it would have been to herself to be interrupted in a tete-a-tete with her apothecary, she thought it not worth while to disturb them in these last moments. M. de Nailles's orders had been that she was to sit in the atelier. So she continued to sit there, doing what she had been told to do without any qualms of conscience.

When Marien had shown Jacqueline all his drawings he asked her: "Are you satisfied?"

But Jacqueline's hand was already on the portiere which separated the little room from Marien's bedchamber.

"Oh! I beg pardon," she exclaimed, pausing on the threshold.

"One would think you would like to see me asleep," said Marien with some little embarrassment.

"I never should have thought your bedroom would have been so pretty. Why, it is as elegant as a lady's chamber," said Jacqueline, slipping into it as she spoke, with an exciting consciousness of doing something she ought not to do.

"What an insult, when I thought all my tastes were simple and severe," he replied; but he had not followed her into the chamber, withheld by an impulse of modesty men sometimes feel, when innocence is led into audacity through ignorance.

"What lovely flowers you have!" said Jacqueline, from within. "Don't they make your head ache?"

"I take them out at night."

"I did not know that men liked, as we do, to be surrounded by flowers. Won't you give me one?"

"All, if you like."

"Oh! one pink will be enough for me."

"Then take it," said Marien; her curiosity alarmed him, and he was anxious to get her away.

"Would it not be nicer if you gave it me yourself?" she replied, with reproach in her tones.

"Here is one, Mademoiselle. And now I must tell you that I want to dress. I have to go out immediately."

She pinned the pink into her bodice so high that she could inhale its perfume.

"I beg your pardon. Thank you, and good-by," she said, extending her hand to him with a sigh.

"Au revoir."

"Yes—'au revoir' at home—but that will not be like here."

As she stood there before him there came into her eyes a strange expression, to which, without exactly knowing why, he replied by pressing his lips fervently on the little hand he was still holding in his own.

Very often since her infancy he had kissed her before witnesses, but this time she gave a little cry, and turned as white as the flower whose petals were touching her cheek.

Marien started back alarmed.

"Good-by," he said in a tone that he endeavored to make careless—but in vain.

Though she was much agitated herself she failed not to remark his emotion, and on the threshold of the atelier, she blew a kiss back to him from the tips of her gloved fingers, without speaking or smiling. Then she went back to Fraulein Schult, who was still sitting in the place where she had left her, and said: "Let us go."

Page 1802

The next time Madame de Nailles saw her stepdaughter she was dazzled by a radiant look in her young face.

“What has happened to you?” she asked, “you look triumphant.”

“Yes—I have good reason to triumph,” said Jacqueline. “I think that I have won a victory.”

“How so? Over yourself?”

“No, indeed—victories over one’s self give us the comfort of a good conscience, but they do not make us gay—as I am.”

“Then tell me—”

“No-no! I can not tell you yet. I must be silent two days more,” said Jacqueline, throwing herself into her mother’s arms.

Madame de Nailles asked no more questions, but she looked at her stepdaughter with an air of great surprise. For some weeks past she had had no pleasure in looking at Jacqueline. She began to be aware that near her, at her side, an exquisite butterfly was about for the first time to spread its wings—wings of a radiant loveliness, which, when they fluttered in the air, would turn all eyes away from other butterflies, which had lost some of their freshness during the summer.

A difficult task was before her. How could she keep this too precocious insect in its chrysalis state? How could she shut it up in its dark cocoon and retard its transformation?

“Jacqueline,” she said, and the tones of her voice were less soft than those in which she usually addressed her, “it seems to me that you are wasting your time a great deal. You hardly practise at all; you do almost nothing at the ‘cours’. I don’t know what can be distracting your attention from your lessons, but I have received complaints which should make a great girl like you ashamed of herself. Do you know what I am beginning to think?—That Madame de Monredon’s system of education has done better than mine.”

“Oh! mamma, you can’t be thinking of sending me to a convent!” cried Jacqueline, in tones of comic despair.

“I did not say that—but I really think it might be good for you to make a retreat where your cousin Giselle is, instead of plunging into follies which interrupt your progress.”

“Do you call Madame d’Etaples’s ‘bal blanc’ a folly?”



“You certainly will not go to it—that is settled,” said the young stepmother, dryly.

CHAPTER V

SURPRISES

In all other ways Madame de Nailles did her best to assist in the success of the surprise. On the second of June, the eve of *Ste.-Clotilde's* day, she went out, leaving every opportunity for the grand plot to mature. Had she not absented herself in like manner the year before at the same date—thus enabling an upholsterer to drape artistically her little salon with beautiful thick silk tapestries which had just been imported from the East? Her idea was that this year she might find a certain lacquered screen which she coveted. The Baroness belonged to her period; she liked Japanese things. But, alas! the charming object that awaited her, with a curtain hung over it to prolong the suspense, had nothing Japanese about it whatever. Madame de Nailles received the good wishes of her family, responded to them with all proper cordiality, and then was dragged up joyously to a picture hanging on the wall of her room, but still concealed under the cloth that covered it.

Page 1803

"How good of you!" she said, with all confidence to her husband.

"It is a picture by Marien!—A portrait by Marien! A likeness of Jacqueline!"

And he uncovered the masterpiece of the great artist, expecting to be joyous in the joy with which she would receive it. But something strange occurred. Madame de Nailles sprang back a step or two, stretching out her arms as if repelling an apparition, her face was distorted, her head was turned away; then she dropped into the nearest seat and burst into tears.

"Mamma!—dear little mamma!—what is it?" cried Jacqueline, springing forward to kiss her.

Madame de Nailles disengaged herself angrily from her embrace.

"Let me alone!" she cried, "let me alone!—How dared you?"

And impetuously, hardly restraining a gesture of horror and hate, she rushed into her own chamber. Thither her husband followed her, anxious and bewildered, and there he witnessed a nervous attack which ended in a torrent of reproaches:

Was it possible that he had, not seen the impropriety of those sittings to Marien? Oh, yes! No doubt he was an old friend of the family, but that did not prevent all these deceptions, all these disguises, and all the other follies which he had sanctioned—he—Jacqueline's father!—from being very improper. Did he wish to take from her all authority over his child?—a girl who was already too much disposed to emancipate herself. Her own efforts had all been directed to curb this alarming propensity—yes, alarming—alarming for the future. And all in vain! There was no use in saying more. 'Mon Dieu'! had he no trust in her devotion to his child, in her prudence and her foresight, that he must thwart her thus? And she had always imagined that for ten years she had faithfully fulfilled a mother's duties! What ingratitude from every one! Mademoiselle Schult should be sent away at once. Jacqueline should go to a convent. They would break off all intercourse with Marien. They had conspired against her—every one.

And then she wept more bitterly than ever—tears of rage, salt tears which rubbed the powder off her cheeks and disfigured the face that had remained beautiful by her power of will and self-control. But now the disorder of her nerves got the better of precautions. The blonde angel, whose beauty was on the wane, was transformed into a fury. Her six-and-thirty years were fully apparent, her complexion appeared slightly blotched, all her defects were obtrusive in contrast with the precocious development of beauty in Jacqueline. She was firmly resolved that her stepdaughter's obtrusive womanhood should remain in obscurity a very much longer time, under pretence that

Jacqueline was still a child. She was a child, at any rate! The portrait was a lie! an imposture! an affront! an outrage!

Page 1804

Meantime M. de Nailles, almost beside himself, fancied at first that his wife was going mad, but in the midst of her sobs and reproaches he managed to discover that he had somehow done her wrong, and when, with a broken voice, she cried, "You no longer love me!" he did not know what to do to prove how bitterly he repented having grieved her. He stammered, he made excuses, he owned that he had been to blame, that he had been very stupid, and he begged her pardon. As to the portrait, it should be taken from the salon, where, if seen, it might become a pretext for foolish compliments to Jacqueline. Why not send it at once to Grandchaux? In short, he would do anything she wished, provided she would leave off crying.

But Madame de Nailles continued to weep. Her husband was forced at last to leave her and to return to Jacqueline, who stood petrified in the salon.

"Yes," he said, "your mamma is right. We have made a deplorable mistake in what we have done. Besides, you must know that this unlucky picture is not in the least like you. Marien has made some use of your features to paint a fancy portrait—so we will let nobody see it. They might laugh at you."

In this way he hoped to repair the evil he had done in flattering his daughter's vanity, and promoting that dangerous spirit of independence, denounced to him a few minutes before, but of which, up to that time, he had never heard.

Jacqueline, in her turn, began to sob.

Mademoiselle Schult had cause, too, to wipe her eyes, pretending a more or less sincere repentance for her share in the deception. Vigorously cross-questioned by Madame de Nailles, who called upon her to tell all she knew, under pain of being dismissed immediately, she saw but one way of retaining her situation, which was to deliver up Jacqueline, bound hand and foot, to the anger of her stepmother, by telling all she knew of the childish romance of which she had been the confidante. As a reward she was permitted (as she had foreseen) to retain her place in the character of a spy.

It was a sad *Ste.-Clotilde's* day that year. Marien, who came in the evening, heard with surprise that the Baroness was indisposed and could see no one. For twelve days after this he continued in disgrace, being refused admittance when he called. Those twelve days were days of anguish for Jacqueline. To see Marien no longer, to be treated with coldness by her father, to see in the blue eyes of her stepmother—eyes so soft and tender when they looked upon her hitherto—only a harsh, mistrustful glare, almost a look of hatred, was a punishment greater than she could bear. What had she done to deserve punishment? Of what was she accused? She spoke of her wretchedness to Fraulein Schult, who, perfidiously, day after day, drew from her something to report to Madame de Nailles. That lady was somewhat consoled, while suffering tortures of jealousy, to know that the girl to whom these sufferings were due was paying dearly for her fault and was very unhappy.

Page 1805

On the twelfth day something occurred which, though it made no noise in the household, had very serious consequences. The effect it produced on Jacqueline was decisive and deplorable. The poor child, after going through all the states of mind endured by those who suffer under unmerited disgrace—revolt, indignation, sulkiness, silent obstinacy—felt unable to bear it longer. She resolved to humble herself, hoping that by so doing the wall of ice that had arisen between her stepmother and herself might be cast down. By this time she cared less to know of what fault she was supposed to be guilty than to be taken back into favor as before. What must she do to obtain forgiveness? Explanations are usually worthless; besides, none might be granted her. She remembered that when she was a small child she had obtained immediate oblivion of any fault by throwing herself impulsively into the arms of her little mamma, and asking her to forget whatever she had done to displease her, for she had not done it on purpose. She would do the same thing now. Putting aside all pride and obstinacy, she would go to this mamma, who, for some days, had seemed so different. She would smother her in kisses. She might possibly be repelled at first. She would not mind it. She was sure that in the end she would be forgiven.

No sooner was this resolution formed than she hastened to put it into execution. It was the time of day when Madame de Nailles was usually alone. Jacqueline went to her bedchamber, but she was not there, and a moment after she stood on the threshold of the little salon. There she stopped short, not quite certain how she should proceed, asking herself what would be her reception.

“How shall I do it?” she thought. “How had I better do it?”

“Bah!” she answered these doubts. “It will be very easy. I will go in on tiptoe, so that she can’t hear me. I will slip behind her chair, and I will hug her suddenly, so tight, so tenderly, and kiss her till she tells me that all has been forgiven.”

As she thought thus Jacqueline noiselessly opened the door of the salon, over which, on the inner side, hung a thick plush ‘portiere’. But as she was about to lift it, the sound of a voice within made her stand motionless. She recognized the tones of Marien. He was pleading, imploring, interrupted now and then by the sharp and still angry voice of her mamma. They were not speaking above their breath, but if she listened she could hear them, and, without any scruples of conscience, she did listen intently, anxious to see her way through the dark fog in which, for twelve days, she had wandered.

“I do not go quite so far as that,” said Madame de Nailles, dryly. “It is enough for me that she produced an illusion of such beauty upon you. Now I know what to expect—”

“That is nonsense,” replied Marien—“mere foolishness. You jealous! jealous of a baby whom I knew when she wore white pinafores, who has grown up under my very eyes? But, so far as I am concerned, she exists no longer. She is not, she never will be in my

eyes, a woman. I shall think of her as playing with her doll, eating sugar-plums, and so on."

Page 1806

Jacqueline grew faint. She shivered and leaned against the door-post.

"One would not suppose so, to judge by the picture with which she has inspired you. You may say what you like, but I know that in all this there was a set purpose to insult me."

"Clotilde!"

"In the first place, on no pretext ought you to have been induced to paint her portrait."

"Do you think so? Consider, had I refused, the danger of awakening suspicion? I accepted the commission most unwillingly, much put out by it, as you may suppose. But you are making too much of an imaginary fault. Consign the wretched picture to the barn, if you like. We will never say another word about so foolish a matter. You promise me to forget it, won't you?.... Dear! you will promise me?" he added, after a pause.

Madame de Nailles sighed and replied: "If not she it will be some one else. I am very unhappy.... I am weak and contemptible...."

"Clotilde!" replied Marien, in an accent that went to Jacqueline's heart like a knife.

She fancied that after this she heard the sound of a kiss, and, with her cheeks aflame and her head burning, she rushed away. She understood little of what she had overheard. She only realized that he had given her up, that he had turned her into ridicule, that he had said "Clotilde!" to her mother, that he had called her dear—she!—the woman she had so adored, so venerated, her best friend, her father's wife, her mother by adoption! Everything in this world seemed to be giving way under her feet. The world was full of falsehood and of treason, and life, so bad, so cruel, was no longer what she had supposed it to be. It had broken its promise to herself, it had made her bad—bad forever. She loved no one, she believed in no one. She wished she were dead.

How she reached her own room in this state Jacqueline never knew. She was aware at last of being on her knees beside her bed, with her face hidden in the bed-clothes. She was biting them to stifle her desire to scream. Her hands were clenched convulsively.

"Mamma!" she cried, "mamma!"

Was this a reproach addressed to her she had so long called by that name? Or was it an appeal, vibrating with remorse, to her real mother, so long forgotten in favor of this false idol, her rival, her enemy?

Undoubtedly, Jacqueline was too innocent, too ignorant to guess the real truth from what she had overheard. But she had learned enough to be no longer the pure-minded young girl of a few hours before. It seemed to her as if a fetid swamp now lay before



her, barring her entrance into life. Vague as her perceptions were, this swamp before her seemed more deep, more dark, more dreadful from uncertainty, and Jacqueline felt that thenceforward she could make no step in life without risk of falling into it. To whom now could she open her heart in confidence—that heart bleeding and bruised as if it had been trampled one as if some one had crushed it? The thing that she now knew was not like her own little personal secrets, such as she had imprudently confided to Fraulein Schult. The words that she had overheard she could repeat to no one. She must carry them in her heart, like the barb of an arrow in a secret wound, where they would fester and grow more painful day by day.

Page 1807

"But, above all," she said at length, rising from her knees, "let me show proper pride."

She bathed her fevered face in cold water, then she walked up to her mirror. As she gazed at herself with a strange interest, trying to see whether the entire change so suddenly accomplished in herself had left its visible traces on her features, she seemed to see something in her eyes that spoke of the clairvoyance of despair. She smiled at herself, to see whether the new Jacqueline could play the part, which—whether she would or not—was now assigned to her. What a sad smile it was!

"I have lost everything," she said, "I have lost everything!" And she remembered, as one remembers something in the far-off long ago, how that very morning, when she awoke, her first thought had been "Shall I see him to-day?" Each day she passed without seeing him had seemed to her a lost day, and she had accustomed herself to go to sleep thinking of him, remembering all he had said to her, and how he had looked at her. Of course, sometimes she had been unhappy, but what a difference it seemed between such vague unhappiness and what she now experienced? And then, when she was sad, she could always find a refuge in that dear mamma—in that Clotilde whom she vowed she would never kiss again, except with such kisses as might be necessary to avoid suspicion. Kisses of that kind were worth nothing. Quite the contrary! Could she kiss her father now without a pang? Her father! He had gone wholly over to the side of that other in this affair. She had seen him in one moment turn against herself. No!—no one was left her!.... If she could only lay her head in Modeste's lap and be soothed while she crooned her old songs as in the nursery! But, whatever Marien or any one else might choose to say, she was no longer a baby. The bitter sense of her isolation arose in her. She could hardly breathe. Suddenly she pressed her lips upon the glass which reflected her own image, so sad, so pale, so desolate. She put the pity for herself into a long, long, fervent kiss, which seemed to say: "Yes, I am all alone—alone forever." Then, in a spirit of revenge, she opened what seemed a safety-valve, preventing her from giving way to any other emotion.

She rushed for a little box which she had converted into a sort of reliquary. She took out of it the half-burned cigarette, the old glove, the withered violets, and a visiting-card with his name, on which three unimportant lines had been written. She insulted these keepsakes, she tore them with her nails, she trampled them underfoot, she reduced them to fragments; she left nothing whatever of them, except a pile of shreds, which at last she set fire to. She had a feeling as if she were employed in executing two great culprits, who deserved cruel tortures at her hands; and, with them, she slew now and forever the foolish fancy she had called her love. By a strange association of ideas, the famous composition, so praised by M. Regis, came back to her memory, and she cried:

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“Je ne veux me souvenir.... me souvenir de rien!”

“If I remember, I shall be more unhappy. All has been a dream. His look was a dream, his pressure of my hand, his kiss on the last day, all—all—were dreams. He was making a fool of me when he gave me that pink which is now in this pile of ashes. He was laughing when he told me I was more beautiful than was natural. Never have I been—never shall I be in his eyes—more than the baby he remembers playing with her doll.”

And unconsciously, as Jacqueline said these words, she imitated the careless accent with which she had heard them fall from the lips of the artist. And she would have again to meet him! If she had had thunder and lightning at her command, as she had had the match with which she had set fire to the memorials of her juvenile folly, Marien would have been annihilated on the spot. She was at that moment a murderess at heart. But the dinner-bell rang. The young fury gave a last glance at the adornments of her pretty bedchamber, so elegant, so original—all blue and pink, with a couch covered with silk embroidered with flowers. She seemed to say to them all: “Keep my secret. It is a sad one. Be careful: keep it safely.” The cupids on the clock, the little book-rest on a velvet stand, the picture of the Virgin that hung over her bed, with rosaries and palms entwined about it, the photographs of her girl-friends standing on her writing table in pretty frames of old-fashioned silk—all seemed to see her depart with a look of sympathy.

She went down to the dining-room, resolved to prove that she would not submit to punishment. The best way to brave Madame de Nailles was, she thought, to affect great calmness and indifference, aye, even, if she could, some gayety. But the task before her was more difficult than she had expected. Apparently, as a proof of reconciliation, Marien had been kept to dinner. To see him so soon again after his words of outrage was more than she could bear. For one moment the earth seemed to sink under her feet; she roused her pride by an heroic effort, and that sustained her. She exchanged with the artist, as she always did, a friendly “Good-evening!” and ate her dinner, though it nearly choked her.

Madame de Nailles had red eyes; and Jacqueline made the reflection that women who are thirty-five should never weep. She knew that her face had not been made ugly by her tears, and this gave her a perverse satisfaction in the midst of her misery. Of Marien she thought: “He sits there as if he had been put ‘en penitence’.” No doubt he could not endure scenes, and the one he had just passed through must have given him the downcast look which Jacqueline noticed with contempt.

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What she did not know was that his depression had more than one cause. He felt—and felt with shame and with discouragement—that the fetters of a connection which had long since ceased to charm had been fastened on his wrists tighter than ever; and he thought: “I shall lose all my energy, I shall lose even my talent! While I wear these chains I shall see ever before me—ah! tortures of Tantalus!—the vision of a new love, fresh as the dawn which beckons to me as it passes before my sight, which lays on me the light touch of a caress, while I am forced to see it glide away, to let it vanish, disappear forever! And alas! that is not all. If I have deceived an inexperienced heart by words spoken or deeds done in a moment of weakness or temptation, can I flatter myself that I have acted like an honest man?”

This is what Marien was really thinking, while Jacqueline looked at him with an expression she strove to make indifferent, but which he interpreted, though she knew it not: “You have done me all the harm you can.”

M. de Nailles meantime went on talking, with little response from his wife or his guest, about some vehement discussion of a new law going on just then in the Chamber, and he became so interested in his own discourse that he did not remark the constraint of the others.

Marien at last, tired of responding in monosyllables to his remarks, said abruptly, a short time before dessert was placed upon the table, something about the probability of his soon going to Italy.

“A pilgrimage of art to Florence!” cried the Baron, turning at once from politics. “That’s good. But wait a little—let it be after the rising of the Chamber. We will follow your steps. It has been the desire of my wife’s life—a little jaunt to Italy. Has it not, Clotilde? So we will all go in September or October. What say you?”

“In September or October, whichever suits you,” said Marien, with despair.

Not one month of liberty! Why couldn’t they leave him to his Savanarola! Must he drag about a ball and chain like a galley-slave?

Clotilde rewarded M. de Nailles with a smile—the first smile she had given him since their quarrel about Jacqueline.

“My wife has got over her displeasure,” he said to himself, delightedly.

Jacqueline, on her part, well remembered the day when Hubert had spoken to her for the first time of his intended journey, and how he had added, in a tone which she now knew to be badinage, but which then, alas! she had believed serious: “Suppose we go together!”

And her impulse to shed tears became so great, that when they left the dinner-table she escaped to her own room, under pretence of a headache.

“Yes—you are looking wretchedly,” said her stepmother. And, turning to M. de Nailles, she added: “Don’t you think, ‘mon ami’, she is as yellow as a quince!” Marien dared not press the hand which she, who had been his little friend for years, offered him as usual, but this time with repugnance.

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"You are suffering, my poor Jacqueline!" he ventured to say.

"Oh! not much," she answered, with a glance at once haughty and defiant, "to-morrow I shall be quite well again."

And, saying this, she had the courage to laugh.

But she was not quite well the next day; and for many days after she was forced to stay in bed. The doctor who came to see her talked about "low fever," attributed it to too rapid growth, and prescribed sea-bathing for her that summer. The fever, which was not very severe, was of great service to Jacqueline. It enabled her to recover in quiet from the effects of a bitter deception.

Madame de Nailles was not sufficiently uneasy about her to be always at her bedside. Usually the sick girl stayed alone, with her window-curtains closed, lying there in the soft half-light that was soothing to her nerves. The silence was broken at intervals by the voice of Modeste, who would come and offer her her medicine. When Jacqueline had taken it, she would shut her eyes, and resume, half asleep, her sad reflections. These were always the same. What could be the tie between her stepmother and Marien?

She tried to recall all the proofs of friendship she had seen pass between them, but all had taken place openly. Nothing that she could remember seemed suspicious. So she thought at first, but as she thought more, lying, feverish, upon her bed, several things, little noticed at the time, were recalled to her remembrance. They might mean nothing, or they might mean much. In the latter case, Jacqueline could not understand them very well. But she knew he had called her "Clotilde," that he had even dared to say "thou" to her in private—these were things she knew of her own knowledge. Her pulse beat quicker as she thought of them; her head burned. In that studio, where she had passed so many happy hours, had Marien and her stepmother ever met as lovers?

Her stepmother and Marien! She could not understand what it meant. Must she apply to them a dreadful word that she had picked up in the history books, where it had been associated with such women as Margaret of Burgundy, Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne Boleyn, and other princesses of very evil reputation? She had looked it out in the dictionary, where the meaning given was: "To be unfaithful to conjugal vows." Even then she could not understand precisely the meaning of adultery, and she set herself to solve it during the long lonely days when she was convalescent. When she was able to walk from one room to another, she wandered in a loose dressing-gown, whose long, lank folds showed that she had grown taller and thinner during her illness, into the room that held the books, and went boldly up to the bookcase, the key of which had been left in the lock, for everybody had entire confidence in Jacqueline's scrupulous honesty. Never before had she broken a promise; she knew that a well-brought-up young girl ought to read only such books as were put into her hands.

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The idea of taking a volume from those shelves had no more occurred to her than the idea of taking money out of somebody's purse; that is, up to this moment it had not occurred to her to do so; but now that she had lost all respect for those in authority over her, Jacqueline considered herself released from any obligation to obey them. She therefore made use of the first opportunity that presented itself to take down a novel of George Sand, which she had heard spoken of as a very dangerous book, not doubting it would throw some light on the subject that absorbed her. But she shut up the volume in a rage when she found that it had nothing but excuses to offer for the fall of a married woman. After that, and guided only by chance, she read a number of other novels, most of which were of antediluvian date, thus accounting, she supposed, for their sentiments, which she found old fashioned. We should be wrong, however, if we supposed that Jacqueline's crude judgment of these books had nothing in common with true criticism. Her only object, however, in reading all this sentimental prose was to discover, as formerly she had found in poetry, something that applied to her own case; but she soon discovered that all the sentimental heroines in the so-called bad books were persons who had had bad husbands; besides, they were either widows or old women—at least thirty years old! It was astounding! There was nothing—absolutely nothing—about young girls, except instances in which they renounced their hopes of happiness. What an injustice! Among these victims the two that most attracted her sympathy were Madame de Camors and Renee Mauperin. But what horrors surrounded them! What a varied assortment of deceptions, treacheries, and mysteries, lay hidden under the outward decency and respectability of what men called “the world!” Her young head became a stage on which strange plays were acted. What one reads is good or bad for us, according to the frame of mind in which we read it—according as we discover in a volume healing for the sickness of our souls—or the contrary. In view of the circumstances in which she found herself, what Jacqueline absorbed from these books was poison.

When, after the physical and moral crisis through which she had passed, Jacqueline resumed the life of every day, she had in her sad eyes, around which for some time past had been dark circles, an expression of anxiety such as the first contact with a knowledge of evil might have put into Eve's eyes after she had plucked the apple. Her investigations had very imperfectly enlightened her. She was as much perplexed as ever, with some false ideas besides. When she was well again, however, she continued weak and languid; she felt somehow as if, she had come back to her old surroundings from some place far away. Everything about her now seemed sad and unfamiliar, though outwardly nothing was altered. Her parents had apparently forgotten the unhappy episode of the

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picture. It had been sent away to Grandchaux, which was tantamount to its being buried. Hubert Marien had resumed his habits of intimacy in the family. From that time forth he took less and less notice of Jacqueline—whether it were that he owed her a grudge for all the annoyance she had been the means of bringing upon him, or whether he feared to burn himself in the flame which had once scorched him more than he admitted to himself, who can say? Perhaps he was only acting in obedience to orders.

CHAPTER VI

A CONVENT FLOWER

One of Jacqueline's first walks, after she had recovered, was to see her cousin Giselle at her convent. She did not seek this friend's society when she was happy and in a humor for amusement, for she thought her a little straightlaced, or, as she said, too like a nun; but nobody could condole or sympathize with a friend in trouble like Giselle. It seemed as if nature herself had intended her for a Sister of Charity—a Gray Sister, as Jacqueline would sometimes call her, making fun of her somewhat dull intellect, which had been benumbed, rather than stimulated, by the education she had received.

The Benedictine Convent is situated in a dull street on the left bank of the Seine, all gardens and hotels—that is, detached houses. Grass sprouted here and there among the cobblestones. There were no street-lamps and no policemen. Profound silence reigned there. The petals of an acacia, which peeped timidly over its high wall, dropped, like flakes of snow, on the few pedestrians who passed by it in the springtime.

The enormous porte-cochere gave entrance into a square courtyard, on one side of which was the chapel, on the other, the door that led into the convent. Here Jacqueline presented herself, accompanied by her old nurse, Modeste. She had not yet resumed her German lessons, and was striving to put off as long as possible any intercourse with Fraulein Schult, who had known of her foolish fancy, and who might perhaps renew the odious subject. Walking with Modeste, on the contrary, seemed like going back to the days of her childhood, the remembrance of which soothed her like a recollection of happiness and peace, now very far away; it was a reminiscence of the far-off limbo in which her young soul, pure and white, had floated, without rapture, but without any great grief or pain.

The porters showed them into the parlor. There they found several pupils who were talking to members of their families, from whom they were separated by a grille, whose black bars gave to those within the appearance of captives, and made rather a barrier to eager demonstrations of affection, though they did not hinder the reception of good things to eat.



“Tiens! I have brought you some chocolate,” said Jacqueline to Giselle, as soon as her cousin appeared, looking far prettier in her black cloth frock than when she wore an ordinary walking-costume. Her fair hair was drawn back ‘a la Chinoise’ from a white forehead resembling that of a German Madonna; it was one of those foreheads, slightly and delicately curved, which phrenologists tell us indicate reflection and enthusiasm.

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But Giselle, without thanking Jacqueline for the chocolate, exclaimed at once: "Mon Dieu! What has been the matter with you?"

She spoke rather louder than usual, it being understood that conversations were to be carried on in a low tone, so as not to interfere with those of other persons. She added: "I find you so altered."

"Yes—I have been ill," said Jacqueline, carelessly, "sorrow has made me ill," she added, in a whisper, looking to see whether the nun, who was discreetly keeping watch, walking to and fro behind the grille, might chance to be listening. "Oh, ask me no questions! I must never tell you—but for me, you must know—the happiness of my life is at an end—is at an end—"

She felt herself to be very interesting while she was speaking thus; her sorrows were somewhat assuaged. There was undoubtedly a certain pleasure in letting some one look down into the unfathomable, mysterious depths of a suffering soul.

She had expected much curiosity on the part of Giselle, and had resolved beforehand to give her no answers; but Giselle only sighed, and said, softly:

"Ah—my poor darling! I, too, am very unhappy. If you only knew—"

"How? Good heavens! what can have happened to you here?"

"Here? oh! nothing, of course; but this year I am to leave the convent—and I think I can guess what will then be before me."

Here, seeing that the nun who was keeping guard was listening, Giselle, with great presence of mind, spoke louder on indifferent subjects till she had passed out of earshot, then she rapidly poured her secret into Jacqueline's ear.

From a few words that had passed between her grandmother and Madame d'Argy, she had found out that Madame de Monredon intended to marry her.

"But that need not make you unhappy," said Jacqueline, "unless he is really distasteful to you."

"That is what I am not sure about—perhaps he is not the one I think. But I hardly know why—I have a dread, a great dread, that it is one of our neighbors in the country. Grandmamma has several times spoken in my presence of the advantage of uniting our two estates—they touch each other—oh! I know her ideas! she wants a man well-born, one who has a position in the world—some one, as she says, who knows something of life—that is, I suppose, some one no longer young, and who has not much hair on his head—like Monsieur de Talbrun."

“Is he very ugly—this Monsieur de Talbrun?”

“He’s not ugly—and not handsome. But, just think! he is thirty-four!”

Jacqueline blushed, seeing in this speech a reflection on her own taste in such matters.

“That’s twice my age,” sighed Giselle.

“Of course that would be dreadful if he were to stay always twice your age—for instance, if you were now thirty-five, he would be seventy, and a hundred and twenty when you reached your sixtieth year—but really to be twice your age now will only make him seventeen years older than yourself.”

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In the midst of this chatter, which was beginning to attract the notice of the nun, they broke off with a laugh, but it was only one of those laughs ‘au bout des levres’, uttered by persons who have made up their minds to be unhappy. Then Giselle went on:

“I know nothing about him, you understand—but he frightens me. I tremble to think of taking his arm, of talking to him, of being his wife. Just think even of saying thou to him!”

“But married people don’t say thou to each other nowadays,” said Jacqueline, “it is considered vulgar.”

“But I shall have to call him by his Christian name!”

“What is Monsieur de Talbrun’s Christian name?”

“Oscar.”

“Humph! That is not a very pretty name, but you could get over the difficulty—you could say ‘mon ami’. After all, your sorrows are less than mine.”

“Poor Jacqueline!” said Giselle, her soft hazel eyes moist with sympathy.

“I have lost at one blow all my illusions, and I have made a horrible discovery, that it would be wicked to tell to any one—you understand—not even to my confessor.”

“Heavens! but you could tell your mother!”

“You forget, I have no mother,” replied Jacqueline in a tone which frightened her friend: “I had a dear mamma once, but she would enter less than any one into my sorrows; and as to my father—it would make things worse to speak to him,” she added, clasping her hands. “Have you ever read any novels, Giselle?”

“Hem!” said the discreet voice of the nun, by way of warning.

“Two or three by Walter Scott.”

“Oh! then you can imagine nothing like what I could tell you. How horrid that nun is, she stops always as she comes near us! Why can’t she do as Modeste does, and leave us to talk by ourselves?”

It seemed indeed as if the Argus in a black veil had overheard part of this conversation, not perhaps the griefs of Jacqueline, which were not very intelligible, but some of the words spoken by Giselle, for, drawing near her, she said, gently: “We, too, shall all grieve to lose you, my dearest child; but remember one can serve God anywhere, and save one’s soul—in the world as well as in a convent.” And she passed on, giving a

kind smile to Jacqueline, whom she knew, having seen her several times in the convent parlor, and whom she thought a nice girl, notwithstanding what she called her “fly-away airs”—“the airs they acquire from modern education,” she said to herself, with a sigh.

“Those poor ladies would have us think of nothing but a future life,” said Jacqueline, shrugging her shoulders.

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"We ought to think of it first of all," said Giselle, who had become serious. "Sometimes I think my place should have been among these ladies who have brought me up. They are so good, and they seem to be so happy. Besides, do you know, I stand less in awe of them than I do of my grandmother. When grandmamma orders me I never shall dare to object, even if—But you must think me very selfish, my poor Jacqueline! I am talking only of myself. Do you know what you ought to do as you go away? You should go into the chapel, and pray with all your heart for me, that I may be brought in safety through my troubles about which I have told you, and I will do the same for yours, about which you have not told me. An exchange of prayers is the best foundation for a friendship," she added; for Giselle had many little convent maxims at her fingers' ends, to which, when she uttered them, her sincerity of look and tone gave a personal meaning.

"You are right," said Jacqueline, much moved. "It has done me good to see you. Take this chocolate."

"And you must take this," said Giselle, giving her a little illuminated card, with sacred words and symbols.

"Adieu, dearest-say, have you ever detested any one?"

"Never!" cried Giselle, with horror.

"Well! I do detest—detest—You are right, I will go into the chapel. I need some exorcism."

And laughing at her use of this last word—the same little mirthless laugh that she had uttered before—Jacqueline went away, followed by the admiring glances of the other girls, who from behind the bars of their cage noted the brilliant plumage of this bird who was at liberty. She crossed the courtyard, and, followed by Modeste, entered the chapel, where she sank upon her knees. The mystic half-light of the place, tinged purple by its passage through the stained windows, seemed to enlarge the little chancel, parted in two by a double grille, behind which the nuns could hear the service without being seen.

The silence was so deep that the low murmur of a prayer could now and then be heard. The worshipers might have fancied themselves a hundred leagues from all the noises of the world, which seemed to die out when they reached the convent walls.

Jacqueline read, and re-read mechanically, the words printed in letters of gold on the little card Giselle had given her. It was a symbolical picture, and very ugly; but the words were: "Oh! that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest."



“Wings!” she repeated, with vague aspiration. The aspiration seemed to disengage her from herself, and from this earth, which had nothing more to offer her. Ah! how far away was now the time when she had entered churches, full of happiness and hope, to offer a candle that her prayer might be granted, which she felt sure it would be! All was vanity! As she gazed at the grille, behind which so many women, whose worldly lives had been cut short, now lived,

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safe from the sorrows and temptations of this world, Jacqueline seemed for the first time to understand why Giselle regretted that she might not share forever the blessed peace enjoyed in the convent. A torpor stole over her, caused by the dimness, the faint odor of the incense, and the solemn silence. She imagined herself in the act of giving up the world. She saw herself in a veil, with her eyes raised to Heaven, very pale, standing behind the grille. She would have to cut off her hair.

That seemed hard, but she would make the sacrifice. She would accept anything, provided the ungrateful pair, whom she would not name, could feel sorrow for her loss—maybe even remorse. Full of these ideas, which certainly had little in common with the feelings of those who seek to forgive those who trespass against them, Jacqueline continued to imagine herself a Benedictine sister, under the soothing influence of her surroundings, just as she had mistaken the effects of physical weakness when she was ill for a desire to die. Such feelings were the result of a void which the whole universe, as she thought, never could fill, but it was really a temporary vacuum, like that caused by the loss of a first tooth. These teeth come out with the first jar, and nature intends them to be speedily replaced by others, much more permanent; but children cry when they are pulled out, and fancy they are in very tight. Perhaps they suffer, after all, nearly as much as they think they do.

“Mademoiselle!” said Modeste, touching her on the shoulder.

“I was content to be here,” answered Jacqueline, with a sigh. “Do you know, Modeste,” she went on, when they got out of doors, “that I have almost made up my mind to be a nun. What do you say to that?”

“Heaven forbid!” cried the old nurse, much startled.

“Life is so hard,” replied her young mistress.

“Not for you, anyhow. It would be a sin to say so.”

“Ah! Modeste, we so little know the real truth of things—we can see only appearances. Don’t you think that a linen band over my forehead would be very becoming to me? I should look like Saint Theresa.”

“And what would be the good of your looking like Saint Theresa, when there would be nobody to tell you so?” said Modeste, with the practical good-sense that never forsook her. “You would be beautiful for yourself alone. You would not even be allowed a looking-glass just talk about that fancy to Monsieur—we should soon see what he would say to such a notion.”



M. de Nailles, having just left the Chamber, was crossing the Pont de la Concorde on foot at this moment. His daughter ran up to him, and caught him by the arm. They walked homeward talking of very different things from bolts and bars. The Baron, who was a weak man, thought in his heart that he had been too severe with his daughter for some time past. As he recalled what had taken place, the anger of Madame de Nailles in the matter of the picture seemed to him to have been extreme and unnecessary. Jacqueline was just at an age when young girls are apt to be nervous and impressionable; they had been wrong to be rough with one who was so sensitive. His wife was quite of his opinion, she acknowledged (not wishing him to think too much on the subject) that she had been too quick-tempered.

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"Yes," she had said, frankly, "I am jealous; I want things to myself. I own I was angry when I thought that Jacqueline was about to throw off my authority, and hurt when I found she was capable of keeping up a concealment—when I believed she was so open always with me. My behavior was foolish, I acknowledge. But what can we do? Neither of us can go and ask her pardon?"

"Of course not," said the father, "all we can do is to treat her with a little more consideration for the future; and, with your permission, I shall use her illness as an excuse for spoiling her a little."

"You have carte blanche, my dear, I agree to everything." So M. de Nailles, with his daughter's arm in his, began to spoil her, as he had intended.

"You are still rather pale," he said, "but sea-bathing will change all that. Would you like to go to the seaside next month?"

Jacqueline answered with a little incredulous smile:

"Oh, certainly, papa."

"You don't seem very sure about it. In the first place, where shall we go? Your mamma seems to fancy Houlgate?"

"Of course we must do what she wishes," replied Jacqueline, rather bitterly.

"But, little daughter, what would you like? What do you say to Treport?"

"I should like Treport very much, because there we should be near Madame d'Argy."

Jacqueline had felt much drawn to Madame d'Argy since her troubles, for she had been the nearest friend of her own mother—her own dead mother, too long forgotten. The chateau of Madame d'Argy, called Lizerolles, was only two miles from Treport, in a charming situation on the road to St. Valery.

"That's the very thing, then!" said M. de Nailles.

"Fred is going to spend a month at Lizerolles with his mother. You might ride on horseback with him. He is going to enjoy a holiday, poor fellow! before he has to be sent off on long and distant voyages."

"I don't know how to ride," said Jacqueline, still in the tone of a victim.

"The doctor thinks riding would be good for you, and you have time enough yet to take some lessons. Mademoiselle Schult could take you nine or ten times to the riding-school. And I will go with you the first time," added M. de Nailles, in despair at not

having been able to please her. "To-day we will go to Blackfern's and order a habit—a riding-habit! Can I do more?"

At this, as if by magic, whether she would or not, the lines of sadness and sullenness disappeared from Jacqueline's face; her eyes sparkled. She gave one more proof, that to every Parisienne worthy of the name, the two pleasures in riding are, first to have a perfectly fitting habit, secondly, to have the opportunity of showing how pretty she can be after a new fashion.

"Shall we go to Blackfern's now?"

"This very moment, if you wish it."

"You really mean Blackfern? Yvonne's habit came from Blackfern's!" Yvonne d'Etaples was the incarnation of chic—of fashionable elegance—in Jacqueline's eyes. Her heart beat with pleasure when she thought how Belle and Dolly would envy her when she told them: "I have a myrtle-green riding-habit, just like Yvonne's." She danced rather than walked as they went together to Blackfern's. A habit was much nicer than a long gown.

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A quarter of an hour later they were in the waiting-room, where the last creations of the great ladies' tailor, were displayed upon lay figures, among saleswomen and 'essayeuses', the very prettiest that could be found in England or the Batignolles, chosen because they showed off to perfection anything that could be put upon their shoulders, from the ugliest to the most extravagant. Deceived by the unusual elegance of these beautiful figures, ladies who are neither young nor well-shaped allow themselves to be beguiled and cajoled into buying things not suited to them. Very seldom does a hunchbacked dowager hesitate to put upon her shoulders the garment that draped so charmingly those of the living statue hired to parade before her. Jacqueline could not help laughing as she watched this way of hunting larks; and thought the mirror might have warned them, like a scarecrow, rather than have tempted them into the snare.

The head tailor of the establishment made them wait long enough to allow the pretty showgirls to accomplish their work of temptation. They fascinated Jacqueline's father by their graces and their glances, while at the same time they warbled into his daughter's ear, with a slightly foreign' accent: "That would be so becoming to Mademoiselle."

For ladies going to the seaside there were things of the most exquisite simplicity: this white fur, trimmed with white velvet, for instance; that jacket like the uniform of a naval officer with a cap to match—"All to please Fred," said Jacqueline, laughing. M. de Nailles, while they waited for the tailor, chose two costumes quite as original as those of Mademoiselle d'Etaples, which delighted Jacqueline all the more, because she thought it probable they would displease her stepmother. At last the magnificent personage, his face adorned with luxuriant whiskers, appeared with the bow of a great artist or a diplomatist; took Jacqueline's measure as if he were fulfilling some important function, said a few brief words to his secretary, and then disappeared; the group of English beauties saying in chorus that Mademoiselle might come back that day week and try it on.

Accordingly, a week later Jacqueline, seated on the wooden-horse used for this purpose, had the satisfaction of assuring herself that her habit, fitting marvelously to her bust, showed not a wrinkle, any more than a 'gant de Suede' shows on the hand; it was closely fitted to a figure not yet fully developed, but which the creator of the chef-d'oeuvre deigned to declare was faultless. Usually, he said, he recommended his customers to wear a certain corset of a special cut, with elastic material over the hips covered by satin that matched the riding-habit, but at Mademoiselle's age, and so supple as she was, the corset was not necessary. In short, the habit was fashioned to perfection, and fitted like her skin to her little flexible figure. In her close-fitting petticoat, her riding-trousers and

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nothing else, Jacqueline felt herself half naked, though she was buttoned up to her throat. She had taken an attitude on her wooden horse such as might have been envied by an accomplished equestrienne, her elbows held well back, her shoulders down, her chest expanded, her right leg over the pommel, her left foot in the stirrup, and never after did any real gallop give her the same delight as this imaginary ride on an imaginary horse, she looking at herself with entire satisfaction all the time in an enormous cheval-glass.

ETEXT *editor's bookmarks:*

Great interval between a dream and its execution
Music—so often dangerous to married happiness
Old women—at least thirty years old!
Seldom troubled himself to please any one he did not care for
Small women ought not to grow stout
Sympathetic listening, never having herself anything to say
The bandage love ties over the eyes of men
Waste all that upon a thing that nobody will ever look at
Women who are thirty-five should never weep

JACQUELINE

By Therese Bentzon (Mme. Blanc)

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUE BAND

Love, like any other human malady, should be treated according to the age and temperament of the sufferer. Madame de Nailles, who was a very keen observer, especially where her own interests were concerned, lent herself with the best possible grace to everything that might amuse and distract Jacqueline, of whom she had by this time grown afraid. Not that she now dreaded her as a rival. The attitude of coldness and reserve that the young girl had adopted in her intercourse with Marien, her stepmother could see, was no evidence of coquetry. She showed, in her behavior to the friend of the family, a freedom from embarrassment which was new to her, and a frigidity which could not possibly have been assumed so persistently. No! what struck Madame de Nailles was the suddenness of this transformation. Jacqueline evidently

took no further interest in Marien; she had apparently no longer any affection for herself—she, who had been once her dear little mamma, whom she had loved so tenderly, now felt herself to be considered only as a stepmother. Fraulein Schult, too, received no more confidences. What did it all mean?

Had Jacqueline, through any means, discovered a secret, which, in her hands, might be turned into a most dangerous weapon? She had a way of saying before the guilty pair: “Poor papa!” with an air of pity, as she kissed him, which made Madame de Nailles’s flesh creep, and sometimes she would amuse herself by making ambiguous remarks which shot arrows of suspicion into a heart already afraid. “I feel sure,” thought the Baroness, “that she has found out everything. But, no! it seems impossible. How can I discover what she knows?”

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Jacqueline's revenge consisted in leaving her stepmother in doubt. She more than suspected, not without cause, that Fraulein Schult was false to her, and had the wit to baffle all the clever questions of her 'promeneuse'.

"My worship of a man of genius—a great artist? Oh! that has all come to an end since I have found out that his devotion belongs to an elderly lady with a fair complexion and light hair. I am only sorry for him."

Jacqueline had great hopes that these cruel words would be reported—as they were—to her stepmother, and, of course, they did not mitigate the Baroness's uneasiness. Madame de Nailles revenged herself for this insult by dismissing the innocent echo of the impertinence—of course, under some plausible pretext. She felt it necessary also to be very cautious how she treated the enemy whom she was forced to shelter under her own roof. Her policy—a policy imposed on her by force of circumstances—was one of great indulgence and consideration, so that Jacqueline, soon feeling that she was for the present under no control, took the bit between her teeth. No other impression can adequately convey an idea of the sort of fury with which she plunged into pleasure and excitement, a state of mind which apparently, without any transition, succeeded her late melancholy. She had done with sentiment, she thought, forever. She meant to be practical and positive, a little Parisienne, and "in the swim." There were plenty of examples among those she knew that she could follow. Berthe, Helene, and Claire Wermant were excellent leaders in that sort of thing. Those three daughters of the 'agent de change' were at this time at Treport, in charge of a governess, who let them do whatever they pleased, subject only to be scolded by their father, who came down every Saturday to Treport, on that train that was called the 'train des maris'. They had made friends with two or three American girls, who were called "fast," and Jacqueline was soon enrolled in the ranks of that gay company.

The cure that was begun on the wooden horse at Blackfern's was completed on the sea-shore.

The girls with whom she now associated were nine or ten little imps of Satan, who, with their hair flying in the wind and their caps over one ear, made the quiet beach ring with their boy-like gayety. They were called "the Blue Band," because of a sort of uniform that they adopted. We speak of them intentionally as masculine, and not feminine, because what is masculine best suited their appearance and behavior, for, though all could flirt like coquettes of experience, they were more like boys than girls, if judged by their age and their costume.

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These Blues lived close to one another on that avenue that is edged with chalets, cottages, and villas, whose lower floors are abundantly provided with great glass windows, which seem to let the ocean into their very rooms, as well as to lay bare everything that passes in them to the public eye, as frankly as if their inmates bivouacked in the open street. Nothing was private; neither the meals, nor the coming and going of visitors. It must be said, however, that the inhabitants of these glass houses were very seldom at home. Bathing, and croquet, or tennis, at low water, on the sands, searching for shells, fishing with nets, dances at the Casino, little family dances alternating with concerts, to which even children went till nine o'clock, would seem enough to fill up the days of these young people, but they had also to make boating excursions to Cayeux, Crotoy, and Hourdel, besides riding parties in the beautiful country that surrounded the Chateau of Lizerolles, where they usually dismounted on their return.

At Lizerolles they were received by Madame d'Argy, who was delighted that they provided safe amusement for her son, who appeared in the midst of this group of half-grown girls like a young cock among the hens of his harem. Frederic d'Argy, the young naval officer, who was enjoying his holiday, as M. de Nailles had said, was enjoying it exceedingly. How often, long after, on board the ship Floye, as he paced the silent quarter-deck, far from any opportunity of flirting, did he recall the forms and faces of these young girls, some dark, some fair, some rosy-half-women and half-children, who made much of him, and scolded him, and teased him, and contended for his attentions, while no better could be had, on purpose to tease one another. Oh! what a delightful time he had had! They did not leave him to himself one moment. He had to lift them into their saddles, to assist them as they clambered over the rocks, to superintend their attempts at swimming, to dance with them all by turns, and to look after them in the difficult character of Mentor, for he was older than they, and were they not entrusted to his care? What a serious responsibility! Had not Mentor even found himself too often timid and excited when one little firm foot was placed in his hand, when his arm was round one little waist, when he could render her as a cavalier a thousand little services, or accept with gladness the role of her consoler. He did everything he could think of to please them, finding all of them charming, though Jacqueline never ceased to be the one he preferred, a preference which she might easily have inferred from the poor lad's unusual timidity and awkwardness when he was brought into contact with her. But she paid no attention to his devotion, accepting himself and all he did for her as, in some sort, her personal property.

He was of no consequence, he did not count; what was he but her comrade and former playfellow?

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Happily for Fred, he took pleasure in the familiarity with which she treated him—a familiarity which, had he known it, was not flattering. He was in the seventh heaven for a whole fortnight, during which he was the recipient of more dried flowers and bows of ribbon than he ever got in all the rest of his life—the American girls were very fond of giving keepsakes—but then his star waned. He was no longer the only one. The grown-up brother of the Wermants came to Treport—Raoul, with his air of a young man about town—a boulevardier, with his jacket cut in the latest fashion, with his cockle-shell of a boat, which he managed as well on salt water as on fresh, sculling with his arms bare, a cigarette in his mouth, a monocle in his eye, and a pith-helmet, such as is worn in India. The young ladies used to gather on the sands to watch him as he struck the water with the broad blade of his scull, near enough for them to see and to admire his nautical ability. They thought all his jokes amusing, and they delighted in his way of seizing his partner for a waltz and bearing her off as if she were a prize, hardly allowing her to touch the floor.

Fred thought him, with his stock of old jokes, very ill-mannered. He laughed at his sculling, and had a great mind to strike him after he saw him waltzing with Jacqueline. But he had to acknowledge the general appreciation felt for the fellow whom he called vulgar.

Raoul Wermant did not stay long at Treport. He had only come to see his sisters on his way to Dieppe, where he expected to meet a certain Leah Skip, an actress from the 'Nouveautes'. If he kept her waiting, however, for some days, it was because he was loath to leave the handsome Madame de Villegrgy, who was living near her friend Madame de Nailles, recruiting herself after the fatigues of the winter season. Such being the situation, the young girls of the Blue Band might have tried in vain to make any impression upon him. But the hatred with which he inspired Fred found some relief in the composition of fragments of melancholy verse, which the young midshipman hid under his mattresses. It is not an uncommon thing for naval men to combine a love of the sea with a love of poetry. Fred's verses were not good, but they were full of dejection. The poor fellow compared Raoul Wermant to Faust, and himself to Siebel. He spoke of

The youth whose eyes were brimming with salt tears,
Whose heart was troubled by a thousand fears,
Poor slighted lover!—since in his heavy heart
All his illusions perish and depart.

Again, he wrote of Siebel:

O Siebel!—thine is but the common fate!
They told thee Fortune upon youth would wait;
'Tis false when love's in question—and you may—

Here he enumerated all the proofs of tenderness possible for a woman to give her lover, and then he added:

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You may know all, poor Siebel!—all, some day,
When weary of this life and all its dreams,
You learn to know it is not what it seems;
When there is nothing that can cheer you more,
All that remains is fondly to adore!

And after trying in vain to find a rhyme for lover, he cried:

Oh! tell me—if one grief exceeds another
Is not this worst, to feel mere friendship moves
To cruel kindness the dear girl he loves?

Fred's mother surprised him one night while he was watering with his tears the ink he was putting to so sorry a use. She had been aware that he sat up late at night—his sleeplessness was not the insomnia of genius—for she had seen the glare of light from his little lamp burning later than the usual bedtime of the chateau, in one of the turret chambers at Lizerolles.

In vain Fred denied that he was doing anything, in vain he tried to put his papers out of sight; his mother was so persuasive that at last he owned everything to her, and in addition to the comfort he derived from his confession, he gained a certain satisfaction to his 'amour-propre', for Madame d'Argy thought the verses beautiful. A mother's geese are always swans. But it was only when she said, "I don't see why you should not marry your Jacqueline—such a thing is not by any means impossible," and promised to do all in her power to insure his happiness, that Fred felt how dearly he loved his mother. Oh, a thousand times more than he had ever supposed he loved her! However, he had not yet done with the agonies that lie in wait for lovers.

Madame de Monredon arrived one day at the Hotel de la Plage, accompanied by her granddaughter, whom she had taken away from the convent before the beginning of the holidays. Since she had fully arranged the marriage with M. de Talbrun, it seemed important that Giselle should acquire some liveliness, and recruit her health, before the fatal wedding-day arrived. M. de Talbrun liked ladies to be always well and always lively, and it was her duty to see that Giselle accommodated herself to his taste; sea-bathing, life in the open air, and merry companions, were the things she needed to make her a little less thin, to give her tone, and to take some of her convent stiffness out of her. Besides, she could have free intercourse with her intended husband, thanks to the greater freedom of manners permitted at the sea-side. Such were the ideas of Madame de Monredon.

Poor Giselle! In vain they dressed her in fine clothes, in vain they talked to her and scolded her from morning till night, she continued to be the little convent-bred schoolgirl she had always been; with downcast eyes, pale as a flower that has known no sunlight,

and timid to a point of suffering. M. de Talbrun frightened her as much as ever, and she had looked forward to the comfort of weeping in the arms of Jacqueline,

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who, the last time she had seen her, had been herself so unhappy. But what was her astonishment to find the young girl, who, a few weeks before, had made her such tragic confidences through the grille in the convent parlor, transformed into a creature bent on excitement and amusement. When she attempted to allude to the subject on which Jacqueline had spoken to her at the convent, and to ask her what it was that had then made her so unhappy, Jacqueline cried: "Oh! my dear, I have forgotten all about it!" But there was exaggeration in this profession of forgetfulness, and she hurriedly drew Giselle back to the game of croquet, where they were joined by M. de Talbrun.

The future husband of Giselle was a stout young fellow, short and thick-set, with broad shoulders, a large flat face, and strong jaws, ornamented with an enormous pair of whiskers, which partly compensated him for a loss of hair. He had never done anything but shoot and hunt over his property nine months in the year, and spend the other three months in Paris, where the jockey Club and ballet-dancers sufficed for his amusement. He did not pretend to be a man whose bachelor life had been altogether blameless, but he considered himself to be a "correct" man, according to what he understood by that expression, which implied neither talents, virtues, nor good manners; nevertheless, all the Blue Band agreed that he was a finished type of gentleman-hood. Even Raoul's sisters had to confess, with a certain disgust, that, whatever people may say, in our own day the aristocracy of wealth has to lower its flag before the authentic quarterings of the old noblesse. They secretly envied Giselle because she was going to be a grande dame, while all the while they asserted that old-fashioned distinctions had no longer any meaning. Nevertheless, they looked forward to the day when they, too, might take their places in the Faubourg St. Germain. One may purchase that luxury with a fortune of eight hundred thousand francs.

The croquet-ground, which was underwater at high tide, was a long stretch of sand that fringed the shingle. Two parties were formed, in which care was taken to make both sides as nearly equal as possible, after which the game began, with screams, with laughter, a little cheating and some disputes, as is the usual custom. All this appeared to amuse Oscar de Talbrun—exceedingly. For the first time during his wooing he was not bored. The Misses Sparks—Kate and Nora—by their "high spirits" agreeably reminded him of one or two excursions he had made in past days into Bohemian society.

He formed the highest opinion of Jacqueline when he saw how her still short skirts showed pretty striped silk stockings, and how her well-shaped foot was planted firmly on a blue ball, when she was preparing to roquer the red one. The way in which he fixed his eyes upon her gave great offense to Fred, and did it not alarm and shock Giselle? No! Giselle looked on calmly at the fun and talk around her, as unmoved as the stump of a tree, spoiling the game sometimes by her ignorance or her awkwardness, well

satisfied that M. de Talbrun should leave her alone. Talking with him was very distasteful to her.

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"You have been more stupid than usual," had been what her grandmother had never failed to say to her in Paris after one of his visits, which he alternated with bouquets. But at Treport no one seemed to mind her being stupid, and indeed M. de Talbrun hardly thought of her existence, up to the moment when they were all nearly caught by the first wave that came rolling in over the croquet-ground, when all the girls took flight, flushed, animated, and with lively gesticulation, while the gentlemen followed with the box into which had been hastily flung hoops, balls, and mallets.

On their way Count Oscar condescendingly explained to Fred, as to a novice, that the only good thing about croquet was that it brought men and girls together. He was himself very good at games, he said, having remarkably firm muscles and exceptionally sharp sight; but he went on to add that he had not been able to show what he could do that day. The wet sand did not make so good a croquet-ground as the one he had had made in his park! It is a good thing to know one's ground in all circumstances, but especially in playing croquet. Then, dexterously passing from the game to the players, he went on to say, under cover of giving Fred a warning, that a man need not fear going too far with those girls from America—they had known how to flirt from the time they were born. They could look out for themselves, they had talons and beaks; but up to a certain point they were very easy to get on with. Those other players were queer little things; the three sisters Wermant were not wanting in chic, but, hang it!—the sweetest flower of them all, to his mind, was the tall one, the dark one—unripe fruit in perfection! "And a year or two hence," added M. de Talbrun, with all the self-confidence of an expert, "every one will be talking about her in the world of society."

Poor Fred kept silent, trying to curb his wrath. But the blood mounted to his temples as he listened to these remarks, poured into his ear by a man of thirty-five, between puffs of his cigar, because there was nobody else to whom he could make them. But they seemed to Fred very ill-mannered and ill-timed. If he had not dreaded making himself absurd, he would gladly have stood forth as the champion of the Sparks, the Wermants, and all the other members of the Blue Band, so that he might give vent to the anger raging in his heart on hearing that odious compliment to Jacqueline. Why was he not old enough to marry her? What right had that detestable Talbrun to take notice of any girl but his fiancée? If he himself could marry now, his choice would soon be made! No doubt, later—as his mother had said to him. But would Jacqueline wait? Everybody was beginning to admire her. Somebody would carry her off—somebody would cut him out while he was away at sea. Oh, horrible thought for a young lover!

That night, at the Casino, while dancing a quadrille with Giselle, he could not refrain from saying to her, "Don't you object to Monsieur de Talbrun's dancing so much with Jacqueline?"

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"Who?—I?" she cried, astonished, "I don't see why he should not." And then, with a faint laugh, she added: "Oh, if she would only take him—and keep him!"

But Madame de Monredon kept a sharp eye upon M. de Talbrun. "It seems to me," she said, looking fixedly into the face of her future grandson-in-law, "that you really take pleasure in making children skip about with you."

"So I do," he replied, frankly and good-humoredly. "It makes me feel young again."

And Madame de Monredon was satisfied. She was ready to admit that most men marry women who have not particularly enchanted them, and she had brought up Giselle with all those passive qualities, which, together with a large fortune, usually suit best with a 'mariage de convenance'.

Meantime Jacqueline piqued herself upon her worldly wisdom, which she looked upon as equal to Madame de Monredon's, since the terrible event which had filled her mind with doubts. She thought M. de Talbrun would do well enough for a husband, and she took care to say so to Giselle.

"It is a fact," she told her, with all the self-confidence of large experience, "that men who are very fascinating always remain bachelors. That is probably why Monsieur de Cymier, Madame de Villegry's handsome cousin, does not think of marrying."

She was mistaken. The Comte de Cymier, a satellite who revolved around that star of beauty, Madame de Villegry, had been by degrees brought round by that lady herself to thoughts of matrimony.

Madame de Villegry, notwithstanding her profuse use of henna and many cosmetics, which was always the first thing to strike those who saw her, prided herself on being uncompromised as to her moral character. There are some women who, because they stop short of actual vice, consider themselves irreproachable. They are willing, so to speak, to hang out the bush, but keep no tavern. In former times an appearance of evil was avoided in order to cover evil deeds, but at present there are those who, under the cover of being only "fast," risk the appearance of evil.

Madame de Villegry was what is sometimes called a "professional beauty." She devoted many hours daily to her toilette, she liked to have a crowd of admirers around her. But when one of them became too troublesome, she got rid of him by persuading him to marry. She had before this proposed several young girls to Gerard de Cymier, each one plainer and more insignificant than the others. It was to tell his dear friend that the one she had last suggested was positively too ugly for him, that the young attache to an embassy had come down to the sea-side to visit her.



The day after his arrival he was sitting on the shingle at Madame de Villegry's feet, both much amused by the grotesque spectacle presented by the bathers, who exhibited themselves in all degrees of ugliness and deformity. Of course Madame de Villegry did not bathe, being, as she said, too nervous. She was sitting under a large parasol and enjoying her own superiority over those wretched, amphibious creatures who waddled on the sands before her, comparing Madame X to a seal and Mademoiselle Z to the skeleton of a cuttle-fish.

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"Well! it was that kind of thing you wished me to marry," said M. de Cymier, in a tone of resentment.

"But, my poor friend, what would you have? All young girls are like that. They improve when they are married."

"If one could only be sure."

"One is never sure of anything, especially anything relating to young girls. One can not say that they do more than exist till they are married. A husband has to make whatever he chooses out of them. You are quite capable of making what you choose of your wife. Take the risk, then."

"I could educate her as to morals—though, I must say, I am not much used to that kind of instruction; but you will permit me to think that, as to person, I should at least wish to see a rough sketch of what I may expect in my wife before my marriage."

At that moment, a girl who had been bathing came out of the water a few yards from them; the elegant outline of her slender figure, clad in a bathing-suit of white flannel, which clung to her closely, was thrown into strong relief by the clear blue background of a summer sky.

"Tiens!—but she is pretty!" cried Gerard, breaking off what he was saying: "And she is the first pretty one I have seen!"

Madame de Villegry took up her tortoiseshell opera-glasses, which were fastened to her waist, but already the young girl, over whose shoulders an attentive servant had flung a wrapper—a 'peignoir-eponge'—had run along the boardwalk and stopped before her, with a gay "Good-morning!"

"Jacqueline!" said Madame de Villegry. "Well, my dear child, did you find the water pleasant?"

"Delightful!" said the young girl, giving a rapid glance at M. de Cymier, who had risen.

He was looking at her with evident admiration, an admiration at which she felt much flattered. She was closely wrapped in her soft, snow-white peignoir, bordered with red, above which rose her lovely neck and head. She was trying to catch, on the point of one little foot, one of her bathing shoes, which had slipped from her. The foot which, when well shod, M. de Talbrun, through his eyeglass, had so much admired, was still prettier without shoe or stocking. It was so perfectly formed, so white, with a little pink tinge here and there, and it was set upon so delicate an ankle! M. de Cymier looked first at the foot, and then his glance passed upward over all the rest of the young figure, which could be seen clearly under the clinging folds of the wet drapery. Her form could be discerned from head to foot, though nothing was uncovered but the pretty little arm



which held together with a careless grace the folds of her raiment. The eye of the experienced observer ran rapidly over the outline of her figure, till it reached the dark head and the brown hair, which rippled in little curls over her forehead. Her complexion, slightly golden, was not protected by one of those absurd hats which many bathers place on top of oiled silk caps which

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fit them closely. Neither was the precaution of oiled silk wanted to protect the thick and curling hair, now sprinkled with great drops that shone like pearls and diamonds. The water, instead of plastering her hair upon her temples, had made it more curly and more fleecy, as it hung over her dark eyebrows, which, very near together at the nose, gave to her eyes a peculiar, slightly oblique expression. Her teeth were dazzling, and were displayed by the smile which parted her lips—lips which were, if anything, too red for her pale complexion. She closed her eyelids now and then to shade her eyes from the too blinding sunlight. Those eyes were not black, but that hazel which has golden streaks. Though only half open, they had quickly taken in the fact that the young man sitting beside Madame de Villegruy was very handsome.

As she went on with a swift step to her bathing-house, she drew out two long pins from her back hair, shaking it and letting it fall down her back with a slightly impatient and imperious gesture; she wished, probably, that it might dry more quickly.

“The devil!” said M. de Cymier, watching her till she disappeared into the bathing-house. “I never should have thought that it was all her own! There is nothing wanting in her. That is a young creature it is pleasant to see.”

“Yes,” said Madame de Villegruy, quietly, “she will be very good-looking when she is eighteen.”

“Is she nearly eighteen?”

“She is and she is not, for time passes so quickly. A girl goes to sleep a child, and wakes up old enough to be married. Would you like to be informed, without loss of time, as to her fortune?”

“Oh! I should not care much about her dot. I look out first for other things.”

“I know, of course; but Jacqueline de Nailles comes of a very good family.”

“Is she the daughter of the deputy?”

“Yes, his only daughter. He has a pretty house in the Parc Monceau and a chateau of some importance in the Haute-Vienne.”

“Very good; but, I repeat, I am not mercenary. Of course, if I should marry, I should like, for my wife’s sake, to live as well as a married man as I have lived as a bachelor.”

“Which means that you would be satisfied with a fortune equal to your own. I should have thought you might have asked more. It is true that if you have been suddenly

thunderstruck that may alter your calculations—for it was very sudden, was it not? Venus rising from the sea!”

“Please don’t exaggerate! But you are not so cruel, seeing you are always urging me to marry, as to wish me to take a wife who looks like a fright or a horror.”

“Heaven preserve me from any such wish! I should be very glad if my little friend Jacqueline were destined to work your reformation.”

“I defy the most careful parent to find anything against me at this moment, unless it be a platonic devotion. The youth of Mademoiselle de Nailles is an advantage, for I might indulge myself in that till we were married, and then I should settle down and leave Paris, where nothing keeps me but—”

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"But a foolish fancy," laughed Madame de Villegry. "However, in return for your madrigal, accept the advice of a friend. The Nailles seem to me to be prosperous, but everybody in society appears so, and one never knows what may happen any day. You would not do amiss if, before you go on, you were to talk with Wermant, the 'agent de change', who has a considerable knowledge of the business affairs of Jacqueline's father. He could tell you about them better than I can."

"Wermant is at Treport, is he not? I thought I saw him—"

"Yes, he is here till Monday. You have twenty-four hours."

"Do you really think I am in such a hurry?"

"Will you take a bet that by this time to-morrow you will not know exactly the amount of her dot and the extent of her expectations?"

"You would lose. I have something else to think of—now and always."

"What?" she said, carelessly.

"You have forbidden me ever to mention it."

Silence ensued. Then Madame de Villegry said, smiling:

"I suppose you would like me to present you this evening to my friends the De Nailles?"

And in fact they all met that evening at the Casino, and Jacqueline, in a gown of scarlet foulard, which would have been too trying for any other girl, seemed to M. de Cymier as pretty as she had been in her bathing-costume. Her hair was not dressed high, but it was gathered loosely together and confined by a ribbon of the same color as her gown, and she wore a little sailor hat besides. In this costume she had been called by M. de Talbrun the "Fra Diavolo of the Seas," and she never better supported that part, by liveliness and audacity, than she did that evening, when she made a conquest that was envied—wildly envied—by the three Demoiselles Wermant and the two Misses Sparks, for the handsome Gerard, after his first waltz with Madame de Villegry, asked no one to be his partner but Mademoiselle de Nailles.

The girls whom he neglected had not even Fred to fall back upon, for Fred, the night before, had received orders to join his ship. He had taken leave of Jacqueline with a pang in his heart which he could hardly hide, but to which no keen emotion on her part seemed to respond. However, at least, he was spared the unhappiness of seeing the star of De Cymier rising above the horizon.

"If he could only see me," thought Jacqueline, waltzing in triumph with M. de Cymier. "If he could only see me I should be avenged."

But he was not Fred. She was not giving him a thought. It was the last flash of resentment and hatred that came to her in that moment of triumph, adding to it a touch of exquisite enjoyment.

Thus she performed the obsequies of her first love!

Not long after this M. de Nailles said to his wife:

“Do you know, my dear, that our little Jacqueline is very much admired? Her success has been extraordinary. It is not likely she will die an old maid.”

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The Baronne assented rather reluctantly.

“Wermant was speaking to me the other day,” went on M. de Nailles. “It seems that that young Count de Cymier, who is always hanging around you, by the way, has been making inquiries of him, in a manner that looks as if it had some meaning, as to what is our fortune, our position. But really, such a match seems too good to be true.”

“Why so?” said the Baronne. “I know more about it than you do, from Blanche de Villegrgy. She gave me to understand that her cousin was much struck by Jacqueline at first sight, and ever since she does nothing but talk to me of M. de Cymier—of his birth, his fortune, his abilities—the charming young fellow seems gifted with everything. He could be Secretary of Legation, if he liked to quit Paris: In the meantime attache to an Embassy looks very well on a card. Attache to the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs does not seem so good. Jacqueline would be a countess, possibly an ambassadress. What would you think of that!”

Madame de Nailles, who understood policy much better than her husband, had suddenly become a convert to opportunism, and had made a change of base. Not being able to devise a plan by which to suppress her young rival, she had begun to think that her best way to get rid of her would be by promoting her marriage. The little girl was fast developing into a woman—a woman who would certainly not consent quietly to be set aside. Well, then, it would be best to dispose of her in so natural a way. When Jacqueline’s slender and graceful figure and the freshness of her bloom were no longer brought into close comparison with her own charms, she felt she should appear much younger, and should recover some of her prestige; people would be less likely to remark her increasing stoutness, or the red spots on her face, increased by the salt air which was so favorable to young girls’ complexions. Yes, Jacqueline must be married; that was the resolution to which Madame de Nailles had come after several nights of sleeplessness. It was her fixed idea, replacing in her brain that other fixed idea which, willingly or unwillingly, she saw she must give up—the idea of keeping her stepdaughter in the shade.

“Countess! Ambassadress!” repeated M. de Nailles, with rather a melancholy smile. “You are going too fast, my dear Clotilde. I don’t doubt that Wermant gave the best possible account of our situation; but when it comes to saying what I could give her as a dot, I am very much afraid. We should have, in that case, to fall back on Fred, for I have not told you everything. This morning Madame d’Argy, who has done nothing but weep since her boy went away, and who, she says, never will get accustomed to the life of misery and anxiety she will lead as a sailor’s mother, exclaimed, as she was talking to me: ‘Ah! there is but one way of keeping him at Lizerolles, of having him live there as the D’Argys have lived before him, quietly, like a good landlord, and that would be to give him your daughter; with her he would be entirely satisfied.’”

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"Ah! so that is the reason why she asked whether Jacqueline might not stay with her when we go to Italy! She wishes to court her by proxy. But I don't think she will succeed. Monsieur de Cymier has the best chance."

"Do you suppose the child suspects—"

"That he admires her? My dear friend, we have to do with a very sharp—sighted young person. Nothing escapes the observation of Mademoiselle 'votre fille'."

And Madame de Nailles, in her turn, smiled somewhat bitterly.

"Well," said Jacqueline's father, after a few moments' reflection, "it may be as well that she should weigh for and against a match before deciding. She may spend several years that are difficult and dangerous trying to find out what she wants and to make up her mind."

"Several years?"

"Hang it! You would not marry off Jacqueline at once?"

"Bah! many a girl, practically not as old as she, is married at sixteen or seventeen."

"Why! I fancied you thought so differently!"

"Our ways of thinking are sometimes altered by events, especially when they are founded upon sincere and disinterested affection."

"Like that of good parents, such as we are," added M. de Nailles, ending her sentence with an expression of grateful emotion.

For one moment the Baronne paled under this compliment.

"What did you say to Madame d'Argy?" she hastened to ask.

"I said we must give the young fellow's beard time to grow."

"Yes, that was right. I prefer Monsieur de Cymier a hundred times over. Still, if nothing better offers—a bird in the hand, you know—"

Madame de Nailles finished her sentence by a wave of her fan.

"Oh! our bird in the hand is not to be despised. A very handsome estate—"

"Where Jacqueline would be bored to death. I should rather see her radiant at some foreign court. Let me manage it. Let me bring her out. Give me carte blanche and let me have some society this winter."

Madame de Nailles, whether she knew it or not—probably she did, for she had great skill in reading the thoughts of others—was acting precisely in accordance with the wishes or the will of Jacqueline, who, having found much enjoyment in the dances at the Casino, had made up her mind that she meant to come out into society before any of her young companions.

“I shall not have to beg and implore her,” she said to herself, anticipating the objections of her stepmother. “I shall only have politely to let her suspect that such a thing may have occurred as having had a listener at a door. I paid dearly enough for this hold over her. I have no scruple in using it.”

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Madame de Nailles was not mistaken in her stepdaughter; she was very far advanced beyond her age, thanks to the cruel wrong that had been done her by the loss of her trust in her elders and her respect for them. Her heart had had its past, though she was still hardly more than a child—a sad past, though its pain was being rapidly effaced. She now thought about it only at intervals. Time and circumstances were operating on her as they act upon us generally; only in her case more quickly than usual, which produced in her character and feelings phenomena that might have seemed curious to an observer. She was something of a woman, something of a child, something of a philosopher. At night, when she was dancing with Wermant, or Cymier, or even Talbrun, or on horseback, an exercise which all the Blues were wild about, she was an audacious flirt, a girl up to anything; and in the morning, at low tide, she might be seen, with her legs and feet bare, among the children, of whom there were many on the sands, digging ditches, making ramparts, constructing towers and fortifications in wet sand, herself as much amused as if she had been one of the babies themselves. There was screaming and jumping, and rushing out of reach of the waves which came up ready to overthrow the most complicated labors of the little architects, rough romping of all kinds, enough to amaze and disconcert a lover.

But no one could have guessed at the thoughts which, in the midst of all this fun and frolic, were passing through the too early ripened mind of Jacqueline. She was thinking that many things to which we attach great value and importance in this world are as easily swept away as the sand barriers raised against the sea by childish hands; that everywhere there must be flux and reflux, that the beach the children had so dug up would soon become smooth as a mirror, ready for other little ones to dig it over again, tempting them to work, and yet discouraging their industry. Her heart, she thought, was like the sand, ready for new impressions. The elegant form of M. de Cymier slightly overshadowed it, distinct among other shadows more confused.

And Jacqueline said to herself with a smile, exactly what her father and Madame de Nailles had said to each other:

“Countess!—who knows? Ambadress! Perhaps—some day—”

CHAPTER VIII

A PUZZLING CORRESPONDENCE

“But I can not see any reason why we should not take Jacqueline with us to Italy. She is just of an age to profit by it.”

These words were spoken by M. de Nailles after a long silence at the breakfast-table. They startled his hearers like a bomb.

Jacqueline waited to hear what would come next, fixing a keen look upon her stepmother. Their eyes met like the flash of two swords.

The eyes of the one said: "Now, let us hear what you will answer!" while the other strove to maintain that calmness which comes to some people in a moment of danger. The Baroness grew a little pale, and then said, in her softest tones:

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"You are quite right, 'mon ami', but Jacqueline, I think, prefers to stay."

"I decidedly prefer to stay," said Jacqueline.

Her adversary, much relieved by this response, could not repress a sigh.

"It seems singular," said M. de Nailles.

"What! that I prefer to pass a month or six weeks with Madame d'Argy? Besides, Giselle is going to be married during that time."

"They might put it off until we come back, I should suppose."

"Oh! I don't think they would," cried the Baroness. "Madame de Monredon is so selfish. She was offended to think we should talk of going away on the eve of an event she considers so important. Besides, she has so little regard for me that I should think her more likely to hasten the wedding-day rather than retard it, if it were only for the pleasure of giving us a lesson."

"I am sorry. I should have been glad to be, as she wished, one of Giselle's witnesses, but people don't take my position into consideration. If I do not take advantage of the recess—"

"Besides," interrupted Jacqueline, carelessly, "your journey must coincide with that of Monsieur Marien."

She had the pleasure of seeing her stepmother again slightly change color. Madame de Nailles was pouring out for herself a cup of tea with singular care and attention.

"Of course," said M. de Nailles. His daughter pitied him, and cried, with an increasing wish to annoy her stepmother: "Mamma, don't you see that your teapot has no tea in it? Yes," she went on, "it must be delightful to travel in Italy in company with a great artist who would explain everything; but then one would be expected to visit all the picture-galleries, and I hate pictures, since—"

She paused and again looked meaningly at her stepmother, whose soft blue eyes showed anguish of spirit, and seemed to say: "Oh, what a cruel hold she has upon me!" Jacqueline continued, carelessly—"Picture-galleries I don't care for—I like nature a hundred times better. Some day I should like to take a journey to suit myself, my own journey! Oh, papa, may I? A journey on foot with you in the Tyrol?"

Madame de Nailles was no great walker.

"Both of us, just you and I alone, with our alpenstocks in our hands—it would be lovely! But Italy and painters—"



Here, with a boyish flourish of her hands, she seemed to send that classic land to Jericho!

“Do promise me, papa!”

“Before asking a reward, you must deserve it,” said her father, severely, who saw something was wrong.

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During her stay at Lizerolles, which her perverseness, her resentment, and a repugnance founded on instincts of delicacy, had made her prefer to a journey to Italy, Jacqueline, having nothing better to do, took it into her head to write to her friend Fred. The young man received three letters at three different ports in the Mediterranean and in the West Indies, whose names were long associated in his mind with delightful and cruel recollections. When the first was handed to him with one from his mother, whose letters always awaited him at every stopping-place, the blood flew to his face, his heart beat violently, he could have cried aloud but for the necessity of self-command in the presence of his comrades, who had already remarked in whispers to each other, and with envy, on the pink envelope, which exhaled 'l'odor di femina'. He hid his treasure quickly, and carried it to a spot where he could be alone; then he kissed the bold, pointed handwriting that he recognized at once, though never before had it written his address. He kissed, too, more than once, the pink seal with a J on it, whose slender elegance reminded him of its owner. Hardly did he dare to break the seal; then forgetting altogether, as we might be sure, his mother's letter, which he knew beforehand was full of good advice and expressions of affection, he eagerly read this, which he had not expected to receive:

"Lizerolles, October, 5, 188-

"My dear Fred:

"Your mother thinks you would be pleased to receive a letter from me, and I hope you will be. You need not answer this if you do not care to do so. You will notice, 'par parenthese', that I take this opportunity of saying you and not thou to you. It is easier to change the familiar mode of address in writing than in speaking, and when we meet again the habit will have become confirmed. But, as I write, it will require great attention, and I can not promise to keep to it to the end. Half an hour's chat with an old friend will also help me to pass the time, which I own seems rather long, as it is passed by your sweet, dear mother and myself at Lizerolles. Oh, if you were only here it would be different! In the first place, we should talk less of a certain Fred, which would be one great advantage. You must know that you are the subject of our discourse from morning to night; we talk only of the dangers of the seas, the future prospects of a seaman, and all the rest of it. If the wind is a little higher than usual, your mother begins to cry; she is sure you are battling with a tempest. If any fishing-boat is wrecked, we talk of nothing but shipwrecks; and I am asked to join in another novena, in addition to those with which we must have already wearied Notre Dame de Treport. Every evening we spread out the map: 'See, Jacqueline, he must be here now—no, he is almost there,' and lines of red ink are traced from one port to another, and little crosses are made to show the places where

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we hope you will get your letters—'Poor boy, poor, dear boy!' In short, notwithstanding all the affectionate interest I take in you, this is sometimes too much for me. In fact, I think I must be very fond of thee not to have grown positively to hate thee for all this fuss. There! In this last sentence, instead of saying you, I have said thee! That ought to gild the pill for you!"We do not go very frequently to visit Treport, except to invoke for you the protection of Heaven, and I like it just as well, for since the last fortnight in September, which was very rainy, the beach is dismal—so different from what it was in the summer. The town looks gloomy under a cloudy sky with its blackened old brick houses! We are better off at Lizerolles, whose autumnal beauties you know so well that I will say nothing about them.—Oh, Fred, how often I regret that I am not a boy! I could take your gun and go shooting in the swamps, where there are clouds of ducks now. I feel sure that if you were in my place, you could kill time without killing game; but I am at the end of my small resources when I have played a little on the piano to amuse your mother and have read her the 'Gazette de France'. In the evening we read a translation of some English novel. There are neighbors, of course, old fogies who stay all the year round in Picardy—but, tell me, don't you find them sometimes a little too respectable? My greatest comfort is in your dog, who loves me as much as if I were his master, though I can not take him out shooting. While I write he is lying on the hem of my gown and makes a little noise, as much as to tell me that I recall you to his remembrance. Yet you are not to suppose that I am suffering from ennui, or am ungrateful, nor above all must you imagine that I have ceased to love your excellent mother with all my heart. I love her, on the contrary, more than ever since I passed this winter through a great, great sorrow—a sorrow which is now only a sad remembrance, but which has changed for me the face of everything in this world. Yes, since I have suffered myself, I understand your mother. I admire her, I love her more than ever."How happy you are, my dear Fred, to have such a sweet mother,— a real mother who never thinks about her face, or her figure, or her age, but only of the success of her son; a dear little mother in a plain black gown, and with pretty gray hair, who has the manners and the toilette that just suit her, who somehow always seems to say: 'I care for nothing but that which affects my son.' Such mothers are rare, believe me. Those that I know, the mothers of my friends, are for the most part trying to appear as young as their daughters—nay, prettier, and of course more elegant. When they have sons they make them wear jackets a l'anglaise and turn-down collars, up to the age when I wore short skirts. Have you noticed that nowadays in Paris there are only ladies who are young, or who

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are trying to make themselves appear so? Up to the last moment they powder and paint, and try to make themselves different from what age has made them. If their hair was black it grows blacker—if red, it is more red. But there is no longer any gray hair in Paris—it is out of fashion. That is the reason why I think your mother's pretty silver curls so lovely and 'distingues'. I kiss them every night for you, after I have kissed them for myself.

"Have a good voyage, come back soon, and take care of yourself, dear Fred."

The young sailor read this letter over and over again. The more he read it the more it puzzled him. Most certainly he felt that Jacqueline gave him a great proof of confidence when she spoke to him of some mysterious unhappiness, an unhappiness of which it was evident her stepmother was the cause. He could see that much; but he was infinitely far from suspecting the nature of the woes to which she alluded. Poor Jacqueline! He pitied her without knowing what for, with a great outburst of sympathy, and an honest desire to do anything in the world to make her happy. Was it really possible that she could have been enduring any grief that summer when she had seemed so madly gay, so ready for a little flirtation? Young girls must be very skilful in concealing their inmost feelings! When he was unhappy he had it out by himself, he took refuge in solitude, he wanted to be done with existence. Everybody knew when anything went wrong with him. Why could not Jacqueline have let him know more plainly what it was that troubled her, and why could she not have shown a little tenderness toward him, instead of assuming, even when she said the kindest things to him, her air of mockery? And then, though she might pretend not to find Lizerolles stupid, he could see that she was bored there. Yet why had she chosen to stay at Lizerolles rather than go to Italy?

Alas! how that little pink letter made him reflect and guess, and turn things over in his mind, and wish himself at the devil—that little pink letter which he carried day and night on his breast and made it crackle as it lay there, when he laid his hand on the satin folds so near his heart! It had an odor of sweet violets which seemed to him to overpower the smell of pitch and of salt water, to fill the air, to perfume everything.

"That young fellow has the instincts of a sailor," said his superior officers when they saw him standing in attitudes which they thought denoted observation, though with him it was only reverie. He would stand with his eyes fixed upon some distant point, whence he fancied he could see emerging from the waves a small, brown, shining head, with long hair streaming behind, the head of a girl swimming, a girl he knew so well.

"One can see that he takes an interest in nautical phenomena, that he is heart and soul in his profession, that he cares for nothing else. Oh, he'll make a sailor! We may be sure of that!"

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Fred sent his young friend and cousin, by way of reply, a big packet of manuscript, the leaves of which were of all sizes, over which he had poured forth torrents of poetry, amorous and descriptive, under the title: At Sea.

Never would he have dared to show her this if the ocean had not lain between them. He was frightened when his packet had been sent. His only comfort was in the thought that he had hypocritically asked Jacqueline for her literary opinion of his verses; but she could not fail, he thought, to understand.

Long before an answer could have been expected, he got another letter, sky-blue this time, much longer than the first, giving him an account of Giselle's wedding.

"Your mother and I went together to Normandy, where the marriage was to take place after the manner of old times, 'in the fashion of the Middle Ages,' as our friends the Wermants said to me, who might perhaps not have laughed at it had they been invited. Madame de Monredon is all for old customs, and she had made it a great point that the wedding should not take place in Paris. Had I been Giselle, I should not have liked it. I know nothing more elegant or more solemn than the entrance of a bridal party into the Madeleine, but we shall have to be content with Saint-Augustin. Still, the toilettes, as they pass up the aisle, even there, are very effective, and the decoration of the tall, high altar is magnificent. Toc! Toc! First come the beadles with their halberds, then the loud notes of the organ, then the wide doors are thrown open, making a noise as they turn on their great hinges, letting the noise of carriages outside be heard in the church; and then comes the bride in a ray of sunshine. I could wish for nothing more. A grand wedding in the country is much more quiet, but it is old-fashioned. In the little village church the guests were very much crowded, and outside there was a great mob of country folk. Carpets had been laid down over the dilapidated pavement, composed principally of tombstones. The rough walls were hung with scarlet. All the clergy of the neighborhood were present. A Monsignor—related to the Talbruns—pronounced the nuptial benediction; his address was a panegyric on the two families. He gave us to understand that if he did not go back quite as far as the Crusades, it was only because time was wanting. "Madame de Monredon was all-glorious, of course. She certainly looked like an old vulture, in a pelisse of gray velvet, with a chinchilla boa round her long, bare neck, and her big beak, with marabouts overshadowing it, of the same color. Monsieur de Talbrun—well! Monsieur de Talbrun was very bald, as bald as he could be. To make up for the want of hair on his head, he has plenty of it on his hands. It is horrid, and it makes him look like an animal. You have no idea how queer he looked when he sat down, with his big, pink head just peeping over the back of

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the crimson velvet chair, which was, however, almost as tall as he is. He is short, you may remember. As to our poor Giselle, the prettiest persons sometimes look badly as brides, and those who are not pretty look ugly. Do you recollect that picture—by Velasquez, is it not? of a fair little Infanta stiffly swathed in cloth of gold, as becomes her dignity, and looking crushed by it? Giselle's gown was of point d'Alencon, old family lace as yellow as ancient parchment, but of inestimable value. Her long corsage, made in the fashion of Anne of Austria, looked on her like a cuirass, and she dragged after her, somewhat awkwardly, a very long train, which impeded her movement as she walked. A lace veil, as hereditary and time-worn as the gown, but which had been worn by all the Monredons at their weddings, the present dowager's included, hid the pretty, light hair of our dear little friend, and was supported by a sort of heraldic comb and some orange-flowers; in short, you can not imagine anything more heavy or more ugly. Poor Giselle, loaded down with it, had red eyes, a face of misery, and the air of a martyr. For all this her grandmother scolded her sharply, which of course did not mend matters. 'Du reste', she seemed absorbed in prayer or thought during the ceremony, in which I took up the offerings, by the way, with a young lieutenant of dragoons just out of the military school at Saint Cyr: a uniform always looks well on such occasions. Nor was Monsieur de Talbrun one of those lukewarm Christians who hear mass with their arms crossed and their noses in the air. He pulled a jewelled prayerbook out of his pocket, which Giselle had given him. Speaking of presents, those he gave her were superb: pearls as big as hazelnuts, a ruby heart that was a marvel, a diamond crescent that I am afraid she will never wear with such an air as it deserves, and two strings of diamonds 'en riviere', which I should suppose she would have reset, for rivières are no longer in fashion. The stones are enormous. "But, poor dear! she could care little for such things. All she wanted was to get back as quickly as she could into her usual clothes. She said to me, again and again: 'Pray God for me that I may be a good wife. I am so afraid I may not be. To belong to Monsieur de Talbrun in this world, and in the next; to give up everything for him, seems so extraordinary. Indeed, I think I hardly knew what I was promising.' I felt sorry for her; I kissed her. I was ready to cry myself, and poor Giselle went on: 'If you knew, dear, how I love you! how I love all my friends! really to love, people must have been brought up together—must have always known each other.' I don't think she was right, but everybody has his or her ideas about such things. I tried, by way of consoling her, to draw her attention to the quantities of presents she had received. They were displayed on several tables in the smaller drawing-room, but her grandmother would not let them put the name

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of the giver upon each, as is the present custom. She said that it humiliated those who had not been able to make gifts as expensive as others. She is right, when one comes to think of it. Nor would she let the trousseau be displayed; she did not think it proper, but I saw enough to know that there were marvels in linen, muslin, silks, and surahs, covered all over with lace. One could see that the great mantua-maker had not consulted the grandmother, who says that women of distinction in her day did not wear paltry trimmings. "Dinner was served under a tent for all the village people during the two mortal hours we had to spend over a repast, in which Madame de Monredon's cook excelled himself. Then came complimentary addresses in the old-fashioned style, composed by the village schoolmaster who, for a wonder, knew what he was about; groups of village children, boys and girls, came bringing their offerings, followed by pet lambs decked with ribbons; it was all in the style of the days of Madame de Genlis. While we danced in the salons there was dancing in the barn, which had been decorated for the occasion. In short; lords and ladies and laborers all seemed to enjoy themselves, or made believe they did. The Parisian gentlemen who danced were not very numerous. There were a few friends of Monsieur de Talbrun's, however—among them, a Monsieur de Cymier, whom possibly you remember having seen last summer at Treport; he led the cotillon divinely. The bride and bridegroom drove away during the evening, as they do in England, to their own house, which is not far off. Monsieur de Talbrun's horses—a magnificent pair, harnessed to a new 'caleche'—carried off Psyche, as an old gentleman in gold spectacles said near me. He was a pretentious old personage, who made a speech at table, very inappropriate and much applauded. Poor Giselle! I have not seen her since, but she has written me one of those little notes which, when she was in the convent, she used to sign *Enfant de Marie*. It begged me again to pray earnestly for her that she might not fail in the fulfilment of her new duties. It seems hard, does it not? Let us hope that Monsieur de Talbrun, on his part, may not find that his new life rather wearies him! Do you know what should have been Giselle's fate—since she has a mania about people being thoroughly acquainted before marriage? What would two or three years more or less have mattered? She would have made an admirable wife for a sailor; she would have spent the months of your absence kneeling before the altar; she would have multiplied the lamentations and the tenderesses of your excellent mother. I have been thinking this ever since the wedding-day—a very sad day, after all. "But how I have let my pen run on. I shall have to put on two stamps, notwithstanding my thin paper. But then you have plenty of time to read on board-ship, and this account may amuse you. Make haste and thank me for it.

"Your old friend,



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"Jacqueline."

Amuse him! How could he be amused by so great an insult? What! thank her for giving him over even in thought to Giselle or to anybody? Oh, how wicked, how ungrateful, how unworthy!

The six pages of foreign-post paper were crumpled up by his angry fingers. Fred tore them with his teeth, and finally made them into a ball which he flung into the sea, hating himself for having been so foolish as to let himself be caught by the first lines, as a foolish fish snaps at the bait, when, apropos to the church in which she would like to be married, she had added "But we should have to be content with Saint-Augustin."

Those words had delighted him as if they had really been meant for himself and Jacqueline. This promise for the future, that seemed to escape involuntarily from her pen, had made him find all the rest of her letter piquant and amusing. As he read, his mind had reverted to that little phrase which he now found he had interpreted wrongly. What a fall! How his hopes now crumbled under his feet! She must have done it on purpose—but no, he need not blacken her! She had written without thought, without purpose, in high spirits; she wanted to be witty, to be droll, to write gossip without any reference to him to whom her letter was addressed. That we who some day would make a triumphal entry into St. Augustin would be herself and some other man—some man with whom her acquaintance had been short, since she did not seem to feel in that matter like Giselle. Some one she did not yet know? Was that sure? She might know her future husband already, even now she might have made her choice—Marcel d'Etaples, perhaps, who looked so well in uniform, or that M. de Cymier, who led the cotillon so divinely. Yes! No doubt it was he—the last-comer. And once more Fred suffered all the pangs of jealousy. It seemed to him that in his loneliness, between sky and sea, those pangs were more acute than he had ever known them. His comrades teased him about his melancholy looks, and made him the butt of all their jokes in the cockpit. He resolved, however, to get over it, and at the next port they put into, Jacqueline's letter was the cause of his entering for the first time some discreditable scenes of dissipation.

At Bermuda he received another letter, dated from Paris, where Jacqueline had rejoined her parents, who had returned from Italy. She sent him a commission. Would he buy her a riding-whip? Bermuda was renowned for its horsewhips, and her father had decided that she must go regularly to the riding-school. They seemed anxious now to give her, as preliminary to her introduction into society, not only such pleasures as horseback exercise, but intellectual enjoyment also. She had been taken to the Institute to hear M. Legouve, and what was better still, in December her stepmother would give a little party every fortnight and would let her sit up till eleven o'clock. She was also to be taken to make some calls. In

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short, she felt herself rising in importance, but the first thing that had made her feel so was Fred's choice of her to be his literary confidant. She was greatly obliged to him, and did not know how she could better prove to him that she was worthy of so great an honor than by telling him quite frankly just what she thought of his verses. They were very, very pretty. He had talent—great talent. Only, as in attending the classes of M. Regis she had acquired some little knowledge of the laws of versification, she would like to warn him against impairing a thought for the benefit of a rhyme, and she pointed out several such places in his compositions, ending thus:

“Bravo! for sunsets, for twilights, for moonshine, for deep silence, for starry nights, and silvery seas—in such things you excel; one feels as if one were there, and one envies you the fairy scenes of ocean. But, I implore you, be not sentimental. That is the feeble part of your poetry, to my thinking, and spoils the rest. By the way, I should like to ask you whose are those soft eyes, that silky hair, that radiant smile, and all that assortment of amber, jet, and coral occurring so often in your visions? Is she—or rather, are they—black, yellow, green, or tattooed, for, of course, you have met everywhere beauties of all colors? Several times when it appeared as if the lady of your dreams were white, I fancied you were drawing a portrait of Isabelle Ray. All the girls, your old friends, to whom I have shown *At Sea*, send you their compliments, to which I join my own. Each of them will beg you to write her a sonnet; but first of all, in virtue of our ancient friendship, I want one myself.

“Jacqueline.”

So! she had shown to others what was meant for her alone; what profanation! And what was more abominable, she had not recognized that he was speaking of herself. Ah! there was nothing to be done now but to forget her. Fred tried to do so conscientiously during all his cruise in the Atlantic, but the moment he got ashore and had seen Jacqueline, he fell again a victim to her charms.

CHAPTER IX

BEAUTY AT THE FAIR

She was more beautiful than ever, and her first exclamation on seeing him was intended to be flattering: “Ah! Fred, how much you have improved! But what a change! What an extraordinary change! Why, look at him! He is still himself, but who would have thought it was Fred!”

He was not disconcerted, for he had acquired aplomb in his journeys round the globe, but he gave her a glance of sad reproach, while Madame de Nailles said, quietly:

“Yes, really—How are you, Fred? The tan on your face is very becoming to you. You have broadened at the shoulders, and are now a man—something more than a man, an experienced sailor, almost an old seadog.”

And she laughed, but only softly, because a frank laugh would have shown little wrinkles under her eyes and above her cheeks, which were getting too large.

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Her toilette, which was youthful, yet very carefully adapted to her person, showed that she was by no means as yet “laid on the shelf,” as Raoul Wermant elegantly said of her. She stood up, leaning over a table covered with toys, which it was her duty to sell at the highest price possible, for the place of a meeting so full of emotions for Fred was a charity bazaar.

The moment he arrived in Paris the young officer had been, so to speak, seized by the collar. He had found a great glazed card, bidding him to attend this fair, in a fashionable quarter, and forthwith he had forgotten his resolution of not going near the Nailles for a long time.

“This is not the same thing,” he said to himself. “One must not let one’s self be supposed to be stingy.” So with these thoughts he went to the bazaar, very glad in his secret heart to have an excuse for breaking his resolution.

The fair was for the benefit of sufferers from a fire—somewhere or other. In our day multitudes of people fall victims to all kinds of dreadful disasters, explosions of boilers, explosions of fire-damp, of everything that can explode, for the agents of destruction seem to be in a state of unnatural excitement as well as human beings. Never before, perhaps, have inanimate things seemed so much in accordance with the spirit of the times. Fred found a superb placard, the work of Cheret, a pathetic scene in a mine, banners streaming in the air, with the words ‘Bazar de Charite’ in gold letters on a red ground, and the courtyard of the mansion where the fair was held filled with more carriages than one sees at a fashionable wedding. In the vestibule many footmen were in attendance, the chasseurs of an Austrian ambassador, the great hulking fellows of the English embassy, the gray-liveried servants of old Rozenkranz, with their powdered heads, the negro man belonging to Madame Azucazillo, *etc.*, *etc.* At each arrival there was a frou-frou of satin and lace, and inside the sales room was a hubbub like the noise in an aviary. Fred, finding himself at once in the full stream of Parisian life, but for the moment not yet part of it, indulged in some of those philosophic reflections to which he had been addicted on shipboard.

Each of the tables showed something of the tastes, the character, the peculiarities of the lady who had it in charge. Madame Stern, who had the most beautiful hands in the world, had undertaken to sell gloves, being sure that the gentlemen would be eager to buy if she would only consent to try them on; Madame de Louisgrif, the ‘chanoiness’, whose extreme emaciation was not perceived under a sort of ecclesiastical cape, had an assortment of embroideries and objects of devotion, intended only for ladies—and indeed for only the most serious among them; for the table that held umbrellas, parasols and canes suited to all ages and both sexes, a good, upright little lady had been chosen. Her only thought was how

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much money she could make by her sales. Madame Strahlberg, the oldest of the Odinskas, obviously expected to sell only to gentlemen; her table held pyramids of cigars and cigarettes, but nothing else was in the corner where she presided, supple and frail, not handsome, but far more dangerous than if she had been, with her unfathomable way of looking at you with her light eyes set deep under her eyebrows, eyes that she kept half closed, but which were yet so keen, and the cruel smile that showed her little sharp teeth. Her dress was of black grenadine embroidered with silver. She wore half mourning as a sort of announcement that she was a widow, in hopes that this might put a stop to any wicked gossip which should assert that Count Strahlberg was still living, having got a divorce and been very glad to get it. Yet people talked about her, but hardly knew what to bring against her, because, though anything might be suspected, nothing was known. She was received and even sought after in the best society, on account of her wonderful talents, which she employed in a manner as perverse as everything else about her, but which led some people to call her the 'Judic des salons'. Wanda Strahlberg was now holding between her lips, which were artificially red, in contrast to the greenish paleness of her face, which caused others to call her a vampire, one of the cigarettes she had for sale. With one hand, she was playing, graceful as a cat, with her last package of regalias, tied with green ribbon, which, when offered to the highest bidder, brought an enormous sum. Her sister Colette was selling flowers, like several other young girls, but while for the most part these waited on their customers in silence, she was full of lively talk, and as unblushing in her eagerness to sell as a 'bouquetiere' by profession. She had grown dangerously pretty. Fred was dazzled when she wanted to fasten a rose into his buttonhole, and then, as he paid for it, gave him another, saying: "And here is another thrown in for old acquaintance' sake."

"Charity seems to cover many things," thought the young man as he withdrew from her smiles and her glances, but yet he had seen nothing so attractive among the black, yellow, green or tattooed ladies about whom Jacqueline had been pleased to tease him.

"Fred!"

It was Jacqueline's voice that arrested him. It was sharp and almost angry. She, too, was selling flowers, while at the same time she was helping Madame de Nailles with her toys; but she was selling with that decorum and graceful reserve which custom prescribes for young girls. "Fred, I do hope you will wear no roses but mine. Those you have are frightful. They make you look like a village bridegroom. Take out those things; come! Here is a pretty boutonniere, and I will fasten it much better in your buttonhole—let me."

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In vain did he try to seem cold to her; his heart thawed in spite of himself. She held him so charmingly by the lapel of his coat, touching his cheek with the tip end of an aigrette which set so charmingly on the top of the most becoming of fur caps which she wore. Her hair was turned up now, showing her beautiful neck, and he could see little rebellious hairs curling at their own will over her pure, soft skin, while she, bending forward, was engaged in his service. He admired, too, her slender waist, only recently subjected to the restraint of a corset. He forgave her on the spot. At this moment a man with brown hair, tall, elegant, and with his moustache turned up at the ends, after the old fashion of the Valois, revived recently, came hurriedly up to the table of Madame de Nailles. Fred felt that that inimitable moustache reduced his not yet abundant beard to nothing.

“Mademoiselle Jacqueline,” said the newcomer, “Madame de Villegrgy has sent me to beg you to help her at the buffet. She can not keep pace with her customers, and is asking for volunteers.”

All this was uttered with a familiar assurance which greatly shocked the young naval man.

“You permit me, Madame?”

The Baroness bowed with a smile, which said, had he chosen to interpret it, “I give you permission to carry her off now—and forever, if you wish it.”

At that moment she was placing in the half-unwilling arms of Hubert Marien an enormous rubber balloon and a jumping-jack, in return for five Louis which he had laid humbly on her table. But Jacqueline had not waited for her stepmother’s permission; she let herself be borne off radiant on the arm of the important personage who had come for her, while Colette, who perhaps had remarked the substitution for her two roses, whispered in Fred’s ear, in atone of great significance “Monsieur de Cymier.”

The poor fellow started, like a man suddenly awakened from a happy dream to face the most unwelcome of realities. Impelled by that natural longing, that we all have, to know the worst, he went toward the buffet, affecting a calmness which it cost him a great effort to maintain. As he went along he mechanically gave money to each of the ladies whom he knew, moving off without waiting for their thanks or stopping to choose anything from their tables. He seemed to feel the floor rock under his feet, as if he had been walking the deck of a vessel. At last he reached a recess decorated with palms, where, in a robe worthy of ‘Peau d’Ane’ in the story, and absolutely a novelty in the world of fashions robe all embroidered with gold and rubies, which glittered with every movement made by the wearer—Madame de Villegrgy was pouring out Russian tea and Spanish chocolate and Turkish coffee, while all kinds of deceitful promises of favor shone in her eyes, which wore a certain tenderness expressive of her interest in charity. A party of young nymphs formed the court of this fair goddess,

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doing their best to lend her their aid. Jacqueline was one of them, and, at the moment Fred approached, she was offering, with the tips of her fingers, a glass of champagne to M. de Cymier, who at the same time was eagerly trying to persuade her to believe something, about which she was gayly laughing, while she shook her head. Poor Fred, that he might hear, and suffer, drank two mouthfuls of sherry which he could hardly swallow.

"One who was really charitable would not hesitate," said M. de Cymier, "especially when every separate hair would be paid for if you chose. Just one little curl—for the sake of the poor. It is very often done: anything is allowable for the sake of the poor."

"Maybe it is because, as you say, that it is very often done that I shall not do it," said Jacqueline, still laughing. "I have made up my mind never to do what others have done before me."

"Well, we shall see," said M. de Cymier, pretending to threaten her.

And her young head was thrown back in a burst of inextinguishable laughter.

Fred fled, that he might not be tempted to make a disturbance. When he found himself again in the street, he asked himself where he should go. His anger choked him; he felt he could not keep his resentment to himself, and yet, however angry he might be with Jacqueline, he would have been unwilling to hear his mother give utterance to the very sentiments that he was feeling, or to harsh judgments, of which he preferred to keep the monopoly. It came into his mind that he would pay a little visit to Giselle, who, of all the people he knew, was the least likely to provoke a quarrel. He had heard that Madame de Talbrun did not go out, being confined to her sofa by much suffering, which, it might be hoped, would soon come to an end; and the certainty that he should find her if he called at once decided him. Since he had been in Paris he had done nothing but leave cards. This time, however, he was sure that the lady upon whom he called would be at home. He was taken at once into the young wife's boudoir, where he found her very feeble, lying back upon her cushions, alone, and working at some little bits of baby-clothes. He was not slow to perceive that she was very glad to see him. She flushed with pleasure as he came into the room, and, dropping her sewing, held out to him two little, thin hands, white as wax. "Take that footstool—sit down there—what a great, great pleasure it is to see you back again!" She was more expansive than she had been formerly; she had gained a certain ease which comes from intercourse with the world, but how delicate she seemed! Fred for a moment looked at her in silence, she seemed so changed as she lay there in a loose robe of pale blue cashmere, whose train drawn over her feet made her look tall as it stretched to the end of the gilded couch, round which Giselle had collected all the little things required by an invalid—bottles, boxes, work-bag, dressing-case, and writing materials.

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"You see," she said, with her soft smile, "I have plenty to occupy me, and I venture to be proud of my work and to think I am creating marvels."

As she spoke she turned round on her closed hand a cap that seemed microscopic to Fred.

"What!" he cried, "do you expect him to be small enough to wear that!"

"Him! you said him; and I am sure you will be right. I know it will be a boy," replied Giselle, eagerly, her fair face brightened by these words. "I have some that are still smaller. Look!" and she lifted up a pile of things trimmed with ribbons and embroidery. "See; these are the first! Ah! I lie here and fancy how he will look when he has them on. He will be sweet enough to eat. Only his papa wants us to give him a name that I think is too long for him, because it has always been in the family—Enguerrand."

"His name will be longer than himself, I should say, judging by the dimensions of this cap," said Fred, trying to laugh.

"Bah!" replied Giselle, gayly, "but we can get over it by calling him Gue-gue or Ra-ra. What do you think? The difficulty is that names of that kind are apt to stick to a boy for fifty years, and then they seem ridiculous. Now a pretty abbreviation like Fred is another matter. But I forget they have brought up my chocolate. Please ring, and let them bring you a cup. We will take our luncheon together, as we used to do."

"Thank you, I have no appetite. I have just come from a certain buffet where I lost it all."

"Oh! I suppose you have been to the Bazaar—the famous Charity Fair! You must have made a sensation there on your return, for I am told that the gentlemen who are expected to spend the most are likely to send their money, and not to show themselves. There are many complaints of it."

"There were plenty of men round certain persons," replied Fred, dryly. "Madame de Villegruy's table was literally besieged."

"Really! What, hers! You surprise me! So it was the good things she gave you that make you despise my poor chocolate," said Giselle, rising on her elbow, to receive the smoking cup that a servant brought her on a little silver salver.

"I didn't take much at her table," said Fred, ready to enter on his grievances. "If you wish to know the reason why, I was too indignant to eat or drink."

"Indignant?"

"Yes, the word is not at all too strong. When one has passed whole months away from what is unwholesome and artificial, such things as make up life in Paris, one becomes a



little like Alceste, Moliere's misanthrope, when one gets back to them. It is ridiculous at my age, and yet if I were to tell you—"

"What?—you puzzle me. What can there be that is unwholesome in selling things for the poor?"

"The poor! A pretty pretext! Was it to benefit the poor that that odious Countess Strahlberg made all those disreputable grimaces? I have seen kermesses got up by actresses, and, upon my word, they were good form in comparison."

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"Oh! Countess Strahlberg! People have heard about her doings until they are tired of them," said Giselle, with that air of knowing everything assumed by a young wife whose husband has told her all the current scandals, as a sort of initiation.

"And her sister seems likely to be as bad as herself before long."

"Poor Colette! She has been so badly brought up. It is not her fault."

"But there's Jacqueline," cried Fred, in a sudden outburst, and already feeling better because he could mention her name.

"Allons, donc! You don't mean to say anything against Jacqueline?" cried Giselle, clasping her hands with an air of astonishment. "What can she have done to scandalize you—poor little dear?"

Fred paused for half a minute, then he drew the stool in the form of an X, on which he was sitting, a little nearer to Giselle's sofa, and, lowering his voice, told her how Jacqueline had acted under his very eyes. As he went on, watching as he spoke the effect his words produced upon Giselle, who listened as if slightly amused by his indignation, the case seemed not nearly so bad as he had supposed, and a delicious sense of relief crept over him when she to whom he told his wrongs after hearing him quietly to the end, said, smiling:

"And what then? There is no great harm in all that. Would you have had her refuse to go with the gentleman Madame de Villegruy had sent to fetch her? And why, may I ask, should she not have done her best to help by pouring out champagne? An air put on to please is indispensable to a woman, if she wishes to sell anything. Good Heavens! I don't approve any more than you do of all these worldly forms of charity, but this kind of thing is considered right; it has come into fashion. Jacqueline had the permission of her parents, and I really can't see any good reason why you should complain of her. Unless—why not tell me the whole truth, Fred? I know it—don't we always know what concerns the people that we care for? And I might possibly some day be of use to you. Say! don't you think you are—a little bit jealous?"

Less encouragement than this would have sufficed to make him open his heart to Giselle. He was delighted that some woman was willing he should confide in her. And what was more, he was glad to have it proved that he had been all wrong. A quarter of an hour later Giselle had comforted him, happy herself that it had been in her power to undertake a task of consolation, a work in which, with sweet humility, she felt herself at ease. On the great stage of life she knew now she should never play any important part, any that would bring her greatly into view. But she felt that she was made to be a confidant, one of those perfect confidants who never attempt to interfere rashly with the course of events, but who wait upon the ways of Providence, removing stones, and

briers and thorns, and making everything turn out for the best in the end. Jacqueline, she said, was so

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young! A little wild, perhaps, but what a treasure! She was all heart! She would need a husband worthy of her, such a man as Fred. Madame d'Argy, she knew, had already said something on the subject to her father. But it would have to be the Baroness that Fred must bring over to their views; the Baroness was acquiring more and more influence over her husband, who seemed to be growing older every day. M. de Nailles had evidently much, very much upon his mind. It was said in business circles that he had for some time past been given to speculation. Oscar said so. If that were the case, many of Jacqueline's suitors might withdraw. Not all men were so disinterested as Fred.

"Oh! As to her dot—what do I care for her dot?" cried the young man. "I have enough for two, if she would only be satisfied to live quietly at Lizerolles!"

"Yes," said the judicious little matron, nodding her head, "but who would like to marry a midshipman? Make haste and be a lieutenant, or an ensign."

She smiled at herself for having made the reward depend upon exertion, with a sort of maternal instinct. It was the same instinct that would lead her in the future to promise Enguerrand a sugar-plum if he said his lesson. "Nobody will steal your Jacqueline till you are ready to carry her off. Besides, if there were any danger I could give you timely warning."

"Ah! Giselle, if she only had your kind heart—your good sense."

"Do you think I am better and more reasonable than other people? In what way? I have done as so many other girls do; I have married without knowing well what I was doing."

She stopped short, fearing she might have said too much, and indeed Fred looked at her anxiously.

"You don't regret it, do you?"

"You must ask Monsieur de Talbrun if he regrets it," she said, with a laugh. "It must be hard on him to have a sick wife, who knows little of what is passing outside of her own chamber, who is living on her reserve fund of resources—a very poor little reserve fund it is, too!"

Then, as if she thought that Fred had been with her long enough, she said: "I would ask you to stay and see Monsieur de Talbrun, but he won't be in, he dines at his club. He is going to see a new play tonight which they say promises to be very good."

"What! Will he leave you alone all the evening?"

“Oh! I am very glad he should find amusement. Just think how long it is that I have been pinned down here! Poor Oscar!”

CHAPTER X

GISELLE’S CONSOLATION

The arrival of the expected Enguerrand hindered Giselle from pleading Fred's cause as soon as she could have wished. Her life for twenty-four hours was in great danger, and when the crisis was past, which M. de Talbrun treated very indifferently, as a matter of course, her first cry was “My baby!” uttered in a tone of tender eagerness such as had never been heard from her lips before.

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The nurse brought him. He lay asleep swathed in his swaddling clothes like a mummy in its wrappings, a motionless, mysterious being, but he seemed to his mother beautiful—more beautiful than anything she had seen in those vague visions of happiness she had indulged in at the convent, which were never to be realized. She kissed his little purple face, his closed eyelids, his puckered mouth, with a sort of respectful awe. She was forbidden to fatigue herself. The wet-nurse, who had been brought from Picardy, drew near with her peasant cap trimmed with long blue streamers; her big, experienced hands took the baby from his mother, she turned him over on her lap, she patted him, she laughed at him. And the mother-happiness that had lighted up Giselle's pale face died away.

"What right," she thought, "has that woman to my child?" She envied the horrid creature, coarse and stout, with her tanned face, her bovine features, her shapeless figure, who seemed as if Nature had predestined her to give milk and nothing more. Giselle would so gladly have been in her place! Why wouldn't they permit her to nurse her baby?

M. de Talbrun said in answer to this question:

"It is never done among people in our position. You have no idea, of all it would entail on you—what slavery, what fatigue! And most probably you would not have had milk enough."

"Oh! who can tell? I am his mother! And when this woman goes he will have to have English nurses, and when he is older he will have to go to school. When shall I have him to myself?"

And she began to cry.

"Come, come!" said M. de Talbrun, much astonished, "all this fuss about that frightful little monkey!"

Giselle looked at him almost as much astonished as he had been at her. Love, with its jealousy, its transports, its anguish, its delights had for the first time come to her—the love that she could not feel for her husband awoke in her for her son. She was ennobled—she was transfigured by a sense of her maternity; it did for her what marriage does for some women—it seemed as if a sudden radiance surrounded her.

When she raised her infant in her arms, to show him to those who came to see her, she always seemed like a most chaste and touching representation of the Virgin Mother. She would say, as she exhibited him: "Is he not superb?" Every one said: "Yes, indeed!" out of politeness, but, on leaving the mother's presence, would generally remark: "He is Monsieur de Talbrun in baby-clothes: the likeness is perfectly horrible!"



The only visitor who made no secret of this impression was Jacqueline, who came to see her cousin as soon as she was permitted—that is, as soon as her friend was able to sit up and be prettily dressed, as became the mother of such a little gentleman as the heir of all the Talbruns. When Jacqueline saw the little creature half-smothered in the lace that trimmed his pillows, she burst out laughing, though it was in the presence of his mother.

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"Oh, mon Dieu!" she cried, "how ugly! I never should have supposed we could have been as ugly as that! Why, his face is all the colors of the rainbow; who would have imagined it? And he crumples up his little face like those things in gutta-percha. My poor Giselle, how can you bear to show him! I never, never could covet a baby!"

Giselle, in consternation, asked herself whether this strange girl, who did not care for children, could be a proper wife for Fred; but her habitual indulgence came to her aid, and she thought:

"She is but a child herself, she does not know what she is saying," and profiting by her first tete-a-tete with Jacqueline's stepmother, she spoke as she had promised to Madame de Nailles.

"A matchmaker already!" said the Baroness, with a smile. "And so soon after you have found out what it costs to be a mother! How good of you, my dear Giselle! So you support Fred as a candidate? But I can't say I think he has much chance; Monsieur de Nailles has his own ideas."

She spoke as if she really thought that M. de Nailles could have any ideas but her own. When the adroit Clotilde was at a loss, she was likely to evoke this chimerical notion of her husband's having an opinion of his own.

"Oh! Madame, you can do anything you like with him!"

The clever woman sighed:

"So you fancy that when people have been long married a wife retains as much influence over her husband as you have kept over Monsieur de Talbrun? You will learn to know better, my dear."

"But I have no influence," murmured Giselle, who knew herself to be her husband's slave.

"Oh! I know better. You are making believe!"

"Well, but we were not talking about me, but—"

"Oh! yes. I understood. I will think about it. I will try to bring over Monsieur de Nailles."

She was not at all disposed to drop the meat for the sake of the shadow, but she was not sure of M. de Cymier, notwithstanding all that Madame de Villegruy was at pains to tell her about his serious intentions. On the other hand, she would have been far from willing to break with a man so brilliant, who made himself so agreeable at her Tuesday receptions.



"Meantime, it would be well if you, dear, were to try to find out what Jacqueline thinks. You may not find it very easy."

"Will you authorize me to tell her how well he loves her? Oh, then, I am quite satisfied!" cried Giselle.

But she was under a mistake. Jacqueline, as soon as she began to speak to her of Fred's suit, stopped her:

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"Poor fellow! Why can't he amuse himself for some time longer and let me do the same? Men seem to me so strange! Now, Fred is one who, just because he is good and serious by nature, fancies that everybody else should be the same; he wishes me to be tethered in the flowery meads of Lizerolles, and browse where he would place me. Such a life would be an end of everything—an end to my life, and I should not like it at all. I should prefer to grow old in Paris, or some other capital, if my husband happened to be engaged in diplomacy. Even supposing I marry—which I do not think an absolute necessity, unless I can not get rid otherwise of an inconvenient chaperon—and to do my stepmother justice, she knows well enough that I will not submit to too much of her dictation!"

"Jacqueline, they say you see too much of the Odinskas."

"There! that's another fault you find in me. I go there because Madame Strahlberg is so kind as to give me some singing-lessons. If you only knew how much progress I am making, thanks to her. Music is a thousand times more interesting, I can tell you, than all that you can do as mistress of a household. You don't think so? Oh! I know Enguerrand's first tooth, his first steps, his first gleams of intelligence, and all that. Such things are not in my line, you know. Of course I think your boy very funny, very cunning, very—anything you like to fancy him, but forgive me if I am glad he does not belong to me. There, don't you see now that marriage is not my vocation, so please give up speaking to me about matrimony."

"As you will," said Giselle, sadly, "but you will give great pain to a good man whose heart is wholly yours."

"I did not ask for his heart. Such gifts are exasperating. One does not know what to do with them. Can't he—poor Fred—love me as I love him, and leave me my liberty?"

"Your liberty!" exclaimed Giselle; "liberty to ruin your life, that's what it will be."

"Really, one would suppose there was only one kind of existence in your eyes—this life of your own, Giselle. To leave one cage to be shut up in another—that is the fate of many birds, I know, but there are others who like to use their wings to soar into the air. I like that expression. Come, little mother, tell me right out, plainly, that your lot is the only one in this world that ought to be envied by a woman."

Giselle answered with a strange smile:

"You seem astonished that I adore my baby; but since he came great things seem to have been revealed to me. When I hold him to my breast I seem to understand, as I never did before, duty and marriage, family ties and sorrows, life itself, in short, its griefs and joys. You can not understand that now, but you will some day. You, too, will gaze upon the horizon as I do. I am ready to suffer; I am ready for self-sacrifice. I know now



whither my life leads me. I am led, as it were, by this little being, who seemed to me at first only a doll, for whom I was embroidering caps and dresses. You ask whether I am satisfied with my lot in life. Yes, I am, thanks to this guide, this guardian angel, thanks to my precious Enguerrand."

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Jacqueline listened, stupefied, to this unexpected outburst, so unlike her cousin's usual language; but the charm was broken by its ending with the tremendously long name of Enguerrand, which always made her laugh, it was in such perfect harmony with the feudal pretensions of the Monredons and the Talbruns.

"How solemn and eloquent and obscure you are, my dear," she answered. "You speak like a sibyl. But one thing I see, and that is that you are not so perfectly happy as you would have us believe, seeing that you feel the need of consolations. Then, why do you wish me to follow your example?"

"Fred is not Monsieur de Talbrun," said the young wife, for the moment forgetting herself.

"Do you mean to say—"

"I meant nothing, except that if you married Fred you would have had the advantage of first knowing him."

"Ah! that's your fixed idea. But I am getting to know Monsieur de Cymier pretty well."

"You have betrayed yourself," cried Giselle, with indignation. "Monsieur de Cymier!"

"Monsieur de Cymier is coming to our house on Saturday evening, and I must get up a Spanish song that Madame Strahlberg has taught me, to charm his ears and those of other people. Oh! I can do it very well. Won't you come and hear me play the castanets, if Monsieur Enguerrand can spare you? There is a young Polish pianist who is to play our accompaniment. Ah, there is nothing like a Polish pianist to play Chopin! He is charming, poor young man! an exile, and in poverty; but he is cared for by those ladies, who take him everywhere. That is the sort of life I should like—the life of Madame Strahlberg—to be a young widow, free to do what I pleased."

"She may be a widow—but some say she is divorced."

"Oh! is it you who repeat such naughty scandals, Giselle? Where shall charity take refuge in this world if not in your heart? I am going—your seriousness may be catching. Kiss me before I go."

"No," said Madame de Talbrun, turning her head away.

After this she asked herself whether she ought not to discourage Fred. She could not resolve on doing so, yet she could not tell him what was false; but by eluding the truth with that ability which kind-hearted women can always show when they try to avoid inflicting pain, she succeeded in leaving the young man hope enough to stimulate his ambition.

CHAPTER XI

FRED ASKS A QUESTION

Time, whatever may be said of it by the calendars, is not to be measured by days, weeks, and months in all cases; expectation, hope, happiness and grief have very different ways of counting hours, and we know from our own experience that some are as short as a minute, and others as long as a century. The love or the suffering of those who can tell just how long they have suffered, or just how long they have been in love, is only moderate and reasonable.

Page 1853

Madame d'Argy found the two lonely years she passed awaiting the return of her son, who was winning his promotion to the rank of ensign, so long, that it seemed to her as if they never would come to an end. She had given a reluctant consent to his notion of adopting the navy as a profession, thinking that perhaps, after all, there might be no harm in allowing her dear boy to pass the most dangerous period of his youth under strict discipline, but she could not be patient forever! She idolized her son too much to be resigned to living without him; she felt that he was hers no longer. Either he was at sea or at Toulon, where she could very rarely join him, being detained at Lizerolles by the necessity of looking after their property. With what eagerness she awaited his promotion, which she did not doubt was all the Nailles waited for to give their consent to the marriage; of their happy half-consent she hastened to remind them in a note which announced the new grade to which he had been promoted. Her indignation was great on finding that her formal request received no decided answer; but, as her first object was Fred's happiness, she placed the reply she had received in its most favorable light when she forwarded it to the person whom it most concerned. She did this in all honesty. She was not willing to admit that she was being put off with excuses; still less could she believe in a refusal.

She accepted the excuse that M. de Nailles gave for returning no decided answer, *viz.*: that "Jacqueline was too young," though she answered him with some vehemence: "Fred was born when I was eighteen." But she had to accept it. Her ensign would have to pass a few more months on the coast of Senegal, a few more months which were made shorter by the encouragement forwarded to him by his mother, who was careful to send him everything she could find out that seemed to be, or that she imagined might be, in his favor; she underlined such things and commented upon them, so as to make the faintest hypothesis seem a certainty. Sometimes she did not even wait for the post. Fred would find, on putting in at some post, a cablegram: "Good news," or "All goes well," and he would be beside himself with joy and excitement until, on receiving his poor, dear mother's next letter, he found out on how slight a foundation her assurance had been founded.

Sometimes, she wrote him disagreeable things about Jacqueline, as if she would like to disenchant him, and then he said to himself: "By this, I am to understand that my affairs are not going on well; I still count for little, notwithstanding my promotion." Ah! if he could only have had, so near the beginning of his career, any opportunity of distinguishing himself! No brilliant deed would have been too hard for him. He would have scaled the very skies. Alas! he had had no chance to win distinction, he had only had to follow in the beaten track of ordinary duty; he had encountered no glorious perils, though at St. Louis he had come very near leaving his bones, but it was only a case of typhoid fever. This fever, however, brought about a scene between M. de Nailles and his mother.

Page 1854

"When," she cried, with all the fury of a lioness, "do you expect to come to the conclusion that my son is a suitable match for Jacqueline? Do you imagine that I shall let him wait till he is a post-captain to satisfy the requirements of Mademoiselle your daughter—provided he does not die in a hospital? Do you think that I shall be willing to go on living—if you can call it living!—all alone and in continual apprehension? Why do you let him keep on in uncertainty? You know his worth, and you know that with him Jacqueline would be happy. Instead of that—instead of saying once for all to this young man, who is more in love with her than any other man will ever be: 'There, take her, I give her to you,' which would be the straightforward, sensible way, you go on encouraging the caprices of a child who will end by wasting, in the life you are permitting her to lead, all the good qualities she has and keeping nothing but the bad ones."

"Mon Dieu! I can't see that Jacqueline leads a life like that!" said M. de Nailles, who felt that he must say something.

"You don't see, you don't see! How can any one see who won't open his eyes? My poor friend, just look for once at what is going on around you, under your own roof—"

"Jacqueline is devoted to music," said her father, good-humoredly. Madame d'Argy in her heart thought he was losing his mind.

And in truth he was growing older day by day, becoming more and more anxious, more and more absorbed in the great struggle—not for life; that might exhaust a man, but at least it was energetic and noble—but for superfluous wealth, for vanity, for luxury, which, for his own part, he cared nothing for, and which he purchased dearly, spurred on to exertion by those near to him, who insisted on extravagances.

"Oh! yes, Jacqueline, I know, is devoted to music," went on Madame d'Argy, with an air of extreme disapproval, "too much so! And when she is able to sing like Madame Strahlberg, what good will it do her? Even now I see more than one little thing about her that needs to be reformed. How can she escape spoiling in that crowd of Slavs and Yankees, people of no position probably in their own countries, with whom you permit her to associate? People nowadays are so imprudent about acquaintances! To be a foreigner is a passport into society. Just think what her poor mother would have said to the bad manners she is adopting from all parts of the globe? My poor, dear Adelaide! She was a genuine Frenchwoman of the old type; there are not many such left now. Ah!" continued Madame d'Argy, without any apparent connection with her subject, "Monsieur de Talbrun's mother, if he had one, would be truly happy to see him married to Giselle!"

"But," faltered M. de Nailles, struck by the truth of some of these remarks, "I make no opposition—quite the contrary—I have spoken several times about your son, but I was not listened to!"

Page 1855

"What can she say against Fred?"

"Nothing. She is very fond of him, that you know as well as I do. But those childish attachments do not necessarily lead to love and marriage."

"Friendship on her side might be enough," said Madame d'Argy, in the tone of a woman who had never known more than that in marriage. "My poor Fred has enthusiasm and all that, enough for two. And in time she will be madly in love with him—she must! It is impossible it should be otherwise."

"Very good, persuade her yourself if you can; but Jacqueline has a pretty strong will of her own."

Jacqueline's will was a reality, though the ideas of M. de Nailles may have been illusion.

"And my wife, too!" resumed the Baron, after a long sigh. "I don't know how it is, but Jacqueline, as she has grown up, has become like an unbroken colt, and those two, who were once all in all to each other, are now seldom of one mind. How am I to act when their two wills cross mine, as they often do? I have so many things on my mind. There are times when—"

"Yes, one can see that. You don't seem to know where you are. And do you think that the disposition she shows to act, as you say, like an unbroken colt, is nothing to me? Do you think I am quite satisfied with my son's choice? I could have wished that he had chosen for his wife—but what is the use of saying what I wished? The important thing is that he should be happy in his own way. Besides, I dare say the young thing will calm down of her own accord. Her mother's daughter must be good at heart. All will come right when she is removed from a circle which is doing her no good; it is injuring her in people's opinion already, you must know. And how will it be by-and-bye? I hear people saying everywhere: 'How can the Nailles let that young girl associate so much with foreigners?' You say they are old school-fellows, they went to the 'cours' together. But see if Madame d'Etaples and Madame Ray, under the same pretext, let Isabelle and Yvonne associate with the Odinskas! As to that foolish woman, Madame d'Avrigny, she goes to their house to look up recruits for her operettas, and Madame Strahlberg has one advantage over regular artists, there is no call to pay her. That is the reason why she invites her. Besides which, she won't find it so easy to marry Dolly."

"Oh! there are several reasons for that," said the Baron, who could see the mote in his neighbor's eye, "Mademoiselle d'Avrigny has led a life so very worldly ever since she was a child, so madly fast and lively, that suitors are afraid of her. Jacqueline, thank heaven, has never yet been in what is called the world. She only visits those with whom she is on terms of intimacy."



“An intimacy which includes all Paris,” said Madame d’Argy, raising her eyes to heaven. “If she does not go to great balls, it is only because her stepmother is bored by them. But with that exception it seems to me she is allowed to do anything. I don’t see the difference. But, to be sure, if Jacqueline is not for us, you have a right to say that I am interfering in what does not concern me.”

Page 1856

"Not at all," said the unfortunate father, "I feel how much I ought to value your advice, and an alliance with your family would please me more than anything."

He said the truth, for he was disturbed by seeing M. de Cymier so slow in making his proposals, and he was also aware that young girls in our day are less sought for in marriage than they used to be. His friend Wermant, rich as he was, had had some trouble in capturing for Berthe a fellow of no account in the Faubourg St. Germain, and the prize was not much to be envied. He was a young man without brains and without a sou, who enjoyed so little consideration among his own people that his wife had not been received as she expected, and no one spoke of Madame de Belvan without adding: "You know, that little Wermant, daughter of the 'agent de change'."

Of course, Jacqueline had the advantage of good birth over Berthe, but how great was her inferiority in point of fortune! M. de Nailles sometimes confided these perplexities to his wife, without, however, receiving much comfort from her. Nor did the Baroness confess to her husband all her own fears. In secret she often asked herself, with the keen insight of a woman of the world well trained in artifice and who possessed a thorough knowledge of mankind, whether there might not be women capable of using a young girl so as to put the world on a wrong scent; whether, in other words, Madame de Villegry did not talk everywhere about M. de Cymier's attentions to Mademoiselle de Nailles in order to conceal his relations to herself? Madame de Villegry indeed cared little about standing well in public opinion, but rather the contrary; she would not, however, for the world have been willing, by too openly favoring one man among her admirers, to run the risk of putting the rest to flight. No doubt M. de Cymier was most assiduous in his attendance on the receptions and dances at Madame de Nailles's, but he was there always at the same time as Madame de Villegry herself. They would hold whispered conferences in corners, which might possibly have been about Jacqueline, but there was no proof that they were so, except what Madame de Villegry herself said. "At any rate," thought Madame de Nailles, "if Fred comes forward as a suitor it may stimulate Monsieur de Cymier. There are men who put off taking a decisive step till the last moment, and are only to be spurred up by competition."

So every opportunity was given to Fred to talk freely with Jacqueline when he returned to Paris. By this time he wore two gold-lace stripes upon his sleeve. But Jacqueline avoided any tete-a-tete with him as if she understood the danger that awaited her. She gave him no chance of speaking alone with her. She was friendly—nay, sometimes affectionate when other people were near them, but more commonly she teased him, bewildered him, excited him. After an hour or two spent in her society he would go home sometimes savage, sometimes desponding, to ponder in his own room, and in his own heart, what interpretation he ought to put upon the things that she had said to him.

Page 1857

The more he thought, the less he understood. He would not have confided in his mother for the world; she might have cast blame on Jacqueline. Besides her, he had no one who could receive his confidences, who would bear with his perplexities, who could assist in delivering him from the network of hopes and fears in which, after every interview with Jacqueline, he seemed to himself to become more and more entangled.

At last, however, at one of the soirees given every fortnight by Madame de Nailles, he succeeded in gaining her attention.

"Give me this quadrille," he said to her.

And, as she could not well refuse, he added, as soon as she had taken his arm: "We will not dance, and I defy you to escape me."

"This is treason!" she cried, somewhat angrily. "We are not here to talk; I can almost guess beforehand what you have to say, and—"

But he had made her sit down in the recess of that bow-window which had been called the young girls' corner years ago. He stood before her, preventing her escape, and half-laughing, though he was deeply moved.

"Since you have guessed what I wanted to say, answer me quickly."

"Must I? Must I, really? Why didn't you ask my father to do your commission? It is so horribly disagreeable to do these things for one's self."

"That depends upon what the things may be that have to be said. I should think it ought to be very agreeable to pronounce the word on which the happiness of a whole life is to depend."

"Oh! what a grand phrase! As if I could be essential to anybody's happiness? You can't make me believe that!"

"You are mistaken. You are indispensable to mine."

"There! my declaration has been made," thought Fred, much relieved that it was over, for he had been afraid to pronounce the decisive words.

"Well, if I thought that were true, I should be very sorry," said Jacqueline, no longer smiling, but looking down fixedly at the pointed toe of her little slipper; "because—"

She stopped suddenly. Her face flushed red.

"I don't know how to explain to you," she said.

"Explain nothing," pleaded Fred; "all I ask is Yes, nothing more. There is nothing else I care for."

She raised her head coldly and haughtily, yet her voice trembled as she said:

"You will force me to say it? Then, no! No!" she repeated, as if to reaffirm her refusal.

Then, alarmed by Fred's silence, and above all by his looks, he who had seemed so gay shortly before and whose face now showed an anguish such as she had never yet seen on the face of man, she added:

"Oh, forgive me!—Forgive me," she repeated in a lower voice, holding out her hand. He did not take it.

"You love some one else?" he asked, through his clenched teeth.

She opened her fan and affected to examine attentively the pink landscape painted on it to match her dress.

Page 1858

"Why should you think so? I wish to be free."

"Free? Are you free? Is a woman ever free?"

Jacqueline shook her head, as if expressing vague dissent.

"Free at least to see a little of the world," she said, "to choose, to use my wings, in short —"

And she moved her slender arms with an audacious gesture which had nothing in common with the flight of that mystic dove upon which she had meditated when holding the card given her by Giselle.

"Free to prefer some other man," said Fred, who held fast to his idea with the tenacity of jealousy.

"Ah! that is different. Supposing there were anyone whom I liked—not more, but differently from the way I like you—it is possible. But you spoke of loving!"

"Your distinctions are too subtle," said Fred.

"Because, much as it seems to astonish you, I am quite capable of seeing the difference," said Jacqueline, with the look and the accent of a person who has had large experience. "I have loved once—a long time ago, a very long time ago, a thousand years and more. Yes, I loved some one, as perhaps you love me, and I suffered more than you will ever suffer. It is ended; it is over—I think it is over forever."

"How foolish! At your age!"

"Yes, that kind of love is ended for me. Others may please me, others do please me, as you said, but it is not the same thing. Would you like to see the man I once loved?" asked Jacqueline, impelled by a juvenile desire to exhibit her experience, and also aware instinctively that to cast a scrap of past history to the curious sometimes turns off their attention on another track. "He is near us now," she added.

And while Fred's angry eyes, under his frowning brows, were wandering all round the salon, she pointed to Hubert Marien with a movement of her fan.

Marien was looking on at the dancing, with his old smile, not so brilliant now as it had been. He now only smiled at beauty collectively, which was well represented that evening in Madame de Nailles's salon. Young girls 'en masse' continued to delight him, but his admiration as an artist became less and less personal.

He had grown stout, his hair and beard were getting gray; he was interested no longer in Savonarola, having obtained, thanks to his picture, the medal of honor, and the Institute some months since had opened its doors to him.

“Marien? You are laughing at me!” cried Fred.

“It is simply the truth.”

Some magnetic influence at that moment caused the painter to turn his eyes toward the spot where they were talking.

“We were speaking of you,” said Jacqueline.

And her tone was so singular that he dared not ask what they were saying. With humility which had in it a certain touch of bitterness he said, still smiling:

“You might find something better to do than to talk good or evil of a poor fellow who counts now for nothing.”

Page 1859

"Counts for nothing! A fellow to be pitied!" cried Fred, "a man who has just been elected to the Institute—you are hard to satisfy!"

Jacqueline sat looking at him like a young sorceress engaged in sticking pins into the heart of a waxen figure of her enemy. She never missed an opportunity of showing her implacable dislike of him.

She turned to Fred: "What I was telling you," she said, "I am quite willing to repeat in his presence. The thing has lost its importance now that he has become more indifferent to me than any other man in the world."

She stopped, hoping that Marien had understood what she was saying and that he resented the humiliating avowal from her own lips that her childish love was now only a memory.

"If that is the only confession you have to make to me," said Fred, who had almost recovered his composure, "I can put up with my former rival, and I pass a sponge over all that has happened in your long past of seventeen years and a half, Jacqueline. Tell me only that at present you like no one better than me."

She smiled a half-smile, but he did not see it. She made no answer.

"Is he here, too—like the other!" he asked, sternly.

And she saw his restless eyes turn for an instant to the conservatory, where Madame de Villegry, leaning back in her armchair, and Gerard de Cymier, on a low seat almost at her feet, were carrying on their platonic flirtation.

"Oh! you must not think of quarrelling with him," cried Jacqueline, frightened at the look Fred fastened on De Cymier.

"No, it would be of no use. I shall go out to Tonquin, that's all."

"Fred! You are not serious."

"You will see whether I am not serious. At this very moment I know a man who will be glad to exchange with me."

"What! go and get yourself killed at Tonquin for a foolish little girl like me, who is very, very fond of you, but hardly knows her own mind. It would be absurd!"

"People are not always killed at Tonquin, but I must have new interests, something to divert my mind from—"

“Fred! my dear Fred”—Jacqueline had suddenly become almost tender, almost suppliant. “Your mother! Think of your mother! What would she say? Oh, my God!”

“My mother must be allowed to think that I love my profession better than all else. But, Jacqueline,” continued the poor fellow, clinging in despair to the very smallest hope, as a drowning man catches at a straw, “if you do not, as you said, know exactly your own mind—if you would like to question your own heart—I would wait—”

Jacqueline was biting the end of her fan—a conflict was taking place within her breast. But to certain temperaments there is pleasure in breaking a chain or in leaping a barrier; she said:

“Fred, I am too much your friend to deceive you.”

At that moment M. de Cymier came toward them with his air of assurance: “Mademoiselle, you forget that you promised me this waltz,” he said.



Page 1860

"No, I never forget anything," she answered, rising.

Fred detained her an instant, saying, in a low voice:

"Forgive me. This moment, Jacqueline, is decisive. I must have an answer. I never shall speak to you again of my sorrow. But decide now—on the spot. Is all ended between us?"

"Not our old friendship, Fred," said Jacqueline, tears rising in her eyes.

"So be it, then, if you so will it. But our friendship never will show itself unless you are in need of friendship, and then only with the discretion that your present attitude toward me has imposed."

"Are you ready, Mademoiselle," said Gerard, who, to allow them to end their conversation, had obligingly turned his attention to some madrigals that Colette Odinska was laughing over.

Jacqueline shook her head resolutely, though at that moment her heart felt as if it were in a vise, and the moisture in her eyes looked like anything but a refusal. Then, without giving herself time for further thought, she whirled away into the dance with M. de Cymier. It was over, she had flung to the winds her chance for happiness, and wounded a heart more cruelly than Hubert Marien had ever wounded hers. The most horrible thing in this unending warfare we call love is that we too often repay to those who love us the harm that has been done us by those whom we have loved. The seeds of mistrust and perversity sown by one man or by one woman bear fruit to be gathered by some one else.

CHAPTER XII

A COMEDY AND A TRAGEDY

The departure of Frederic d'Argy for Tonquin occasioned a break in the intercourse between his mother and the family of De Nailles. The wails of Hecuba were nothing to the lamentations of poor Madame d'Argy; the unreasonableness of her wrath and the exaggeration in her reproaches hindered even Jacqueline from feeling all the remorse she might otherwise have felt for her share in Fred's departure. She told her father, who the first time in her life addressed her with some severity, that she could not be expected to love all the young men who might threaten to go to the wars, or to fling themselves from fourth-story windows, for her sake.

"It was very indelicate and inconsiderate of Fred to tell any one that it was my fault that he was doing anything so foolish," she said, with true feminine deceit, "but he has taken the very worst possible means to make me care for him. Everybody has too much to

say about this matter which concerns only him and me. Even Giselle thought proper to write me a sermon!"

And she gave vent to her feelings in an exclamation of three syllables that she had learned from the Odinskas, which meant: "I don't care!" (je m'en moque).

Page 1861

But this was not true. She cared very much for Giselle's good opinion, and for Madame d'Argy's friendship. She suffered much in her secret heart at the thought of having given so much pain to Fred. She guessed how deep it was by the step to which it had driven him. But there was in her secret soul something more than all the rest, it was a puerile, but delicious satisfaction in feeling her own importance, in having been able to exercise an influence over one heart which might possibly extend to that of M. de Cymier. She thought he might be gratified by knowing that she had driven a young man to despair, if he guessed for whose sake she had been so cruel. He knew it, of course. Madame de Nailles took care that he should not be ignorant of it, and the pleasure he took in such a proof of his power over a young heart was not unlike that pleasure Jacqueline experienced in her coquetry—which crushed her better feelings. He felt proud of the sacrifice this beautiful girl had made for his sake, though he did not consider himself thereby committed to any decision, only he felt more attached to her than ever. Ever since the day when Madame de Villegruy had first introduced him at the house of Madame de Nailles, he had had great pleasure in going there. The daughter of the house was more and more to his taste, but his liking for her was not such as to carry him beyond prudence. "If I chose," he would say to himself after every time he met her, "if I chose I could own that jewel. I have only to stretch out my hand and have it given me." And the next morning, after going to sleep full of that pleasant thought, he would awake glad to find that he was still as free as ever, and able to carry on a flirtation with a woman of the world, which imposed no obligations upon him, and yet at the same time make love to a young girl whom he would gladly have married but for certain reports which were beginning to circulate among men of business concerning the financial position of M. de Nailles.

They said that he was withdrawing money from secure investments to repair (or to increase) considerable losses made by speculation, and that he operated recklessly on the Bourse. These rumors had already withdrawn Marcel d'Etaples from the list of his daughter's suitors. The young fellow was a captain of Hussars, who had no scruple in declaring the reason of his giving up his interest in the young lady. Gerard de Cymier, more prudent, waited and watched, thinking it would be quite time enough to go to the bottom of things when he found himself called upon to make a decision, and greatly interested meantime in the daily increase of Jacqueline's beauty. It was evident she cared for him. After all, it was doing the little thing no harm to let her live on in the intoxication of vanity and hope, and to give her something to dwell upon in her innocent dreams. Never did Gerard allow himself to overstep the line he had marked out for himself; a glance, a slight

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pressure of the hand, which might have been intentional, or have meant nothing, a few ambiguous words in which an active imagination might find something to dream about, a certain way of passing his arm round her slight waist which would have meant much had it not been done in public to the sound of music, were all the proofs the young diplomatist had ever given of an attraction that was real so far as consisted with his complete selfishness, joined to his professional prudence, and that systematic habit of taking up fancies at any time for anything, which prevents each fancy as it occurs from ripening into passion.

He alluded indirectly to Fred's departure in a way that turned it into ridicule. While playing a game of 'boston' he whispered into Jacqueline's ear something about the old-fashionedness and stupidity of Paul and Virginia, and his opinion of "calf-love," as the English call an early attachment, and something about the right of every girl to know a suitor long before she consents to marry him. He said he thought that the days of courtship must be the most delightful in the life of a woman, and that a man who wished to cut them short was a fellow without delicacy or discretion!

From this Jacqueline drew the conclusion that he was not willing to resemble such a fellow, and was more and more persuaded that there was tenderness in the way he pressed her waist, and that his voice had the softness of a caress when he spoke to her. He made many inquiries as to what she liked and what she wished for in the future, as if his great object in all things was to anticipate her wishes. As for his intimacy with Madame de Villegruy, Jacqueline thought nothing of it, notwithstanding her habitual mistrust of those she called old women. In the first place, Madame de Villegruy was her own mistress, nothing hindered them from having been married long ago had they wished it; besides, had not Madame de Villegruy brought the young man to their house and let every one see, even Jacqueline herself, what was her object in doing so? In this matter she was their ally, a most zealous and kind ally, for she was continually advising her young friend as to what was most becoming to her and how she might make herself most attractive to men in general, with little covert allusions to the particular tastes of Gerard, which she said she knew as well as if he had been her brother.

All this was lightly insinuated, but never insisted upon, with the tact which stood Madame de Villegruy in stead of talent, and which had enabled her to perform some marvellous feats upon the tight-rope without losing her balance completely. She, too, made fun of the tragic determination of Fred, which all those who composed the society of the De Nailles had been made aware of by the indiscreet lamentations of Madame d'Argy.

"Is not Jacqueline fortunate?" cried. Colette Odinska, who, herself always on a high horse, looked on love in its tragic aspect, and would have liked to resemble Marie Stuart

as much as she could, "is she not fortunate? She has had a man who has gone abroad to get himself killed—and all for her!"

Page 1863

Colette imagined herself under the same circumstances, making the most of a slain lover, with a crape veil covering her fair hair, her mourning copied from that of her divorced sister, who wore her weeds so charmingly, but who was getting rather tired of a single life.

As for Miss Kate Sparks and Miss Nora, they could not understand why the breaking of half-a-dozen hearts should not be the prelude to every marriage. That, they said with much conviction, was always the case in America, and a girl was thought all the more of who had done so.

Jacqueline, however, thought more than was reasonable about the dangers that the friend of her childhood was going to encounter through her fault. Fred's departure would have lent him a certain prestige, had not a powerful new interest stepped in to divert her thoughts. Madame d'Avrigny was getting up her annual private theatricals, and wanted Jacqueline to take the principal part in the play, saying that she ought to put her lessons in elocution to some use. The piece chosen was to illustrate a proverb, and was entirely new. It was as unexceptionable as it was amusing; the most severe critic could have found no fault with its morality or with its moral, which turned on the eagerness displayed by young girls nowadays to obtain diplomas. *Scylla and Charybdis* was its name. Its story was that of a young bride, who, thinking to please a husband, a stupid and ignorant man, was trying to obtain in secret a high place in the examination at the Sorbonne—'un brevet superieur'. The husband, disquieted by the mystery, is at first suspicious, then jealous, and then is overwhelmed with humiliation when he discovers that his wife knows more of everything than himself. He ends by imploring her to give up her higher education if she wishes to please him. The little play had all the modern loveliness and grace which Octave Feuillet alone can give, and it contained a lesson from which any one might profit; which was by no means always the case with Madame d'Avrigny's plays, which too often were full of risky allusions, of critical situations, and the like; likely, in short, to "sail too close to the wind," as Fred had once described them. But Madame d'Avrigny's prime object was the amusement of society, and society finds pleasure in things which, if innocence understood them, would put her to the blush. This play, however, was an exception. There had been very little to cut out this time. Madame de Nailles had been asked to take the mother's part, but she declined, not caring to act such a character in a house where years before in all her glory she had made a sensation as a young coquette. So Madame d'Avrigny had to take the part herself, not sorry to be able to superintend everything on the stage, and to prompt Dolly, if necessary—Dolly, who had but four words to say, which she always forgot, but who looked lovely in a little cap as a *femme de chambre*.

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People had been surprised that M. de Cymier should have asked for the part of the husband, a local magistrate, stiff and self-important, whom everybody laughed at. Jacqueline alone knew why he had chosen it: it would give him the opportunity of giving her two kisses. Of course those kisses were to be reserved for the representation, but whether intentionally or otherwise, the young husband ventured upon them at every rehearsal, in spite of the general outcry—not, however, very much in earnest, for it is well understood that in private theatricals certain liberties may be allowed, and M. de Cymier had never been remarkable for reserve when he acted at the clubs, where the female parts were taken by ladies from the smaller theatres. In this school he had acquired some reputation as an amateur actor. “Besides,” as he remarked on making his apology, “we shall do it very awkwardly upon the stage if we are not allowed to practise it beforehand.” Jacqueline burst out laughing, and did not make much show of opposition. To play the part of his wife, to hear him say to her, to respond with the affectionate and familiar ‘toi’, was so amusing! It was droll to see her cut out her husband in chemistry, history, and grammar, and make him confound La Fontaine with Corneille. She had such a little air while doing it! And at the close, when he said to her: “If I give you a pony to-morrow, and a good hearty kiss this very minute, shall you be willing to give up getting that degree?” she responded, with such gusto: “Indeed, I shall!” and her manner was so eager, so boyish, so full of fun, that she was wildly applauded, while Gerard embraced her as heartily as he liked, to make up to himself for her having had, as his wife, the upper hand.

All this kissing threw him rather off his balance, and he might soon have sealed his fate, had not a very sad event occurred, which restored his self-possession.

The dress rehearsal was to take place one bright spring day at about four o’clock in the afternoon. A large number of guests was assembled at the house of Madame d’Avrigny. The performance had been much talked about beforehand in society. The beauty, the singing, and the histrionic powers of the principal actress had been everywhere extolled. Fully conscious of what was expected of her, and eager to do herself credit in every way, Jacqueline took advantage of Madame Strahlberg’s presence to run over a little song, which she was to—sing between the acts and in which she could see no meaning whatever. This little song, which, to most of the ladies present, seemed simply idiotic, made the men in the audience cry “Oh!” as if half-shocked, and then “Encore! Encore!” in a sort of frenzy. It was a so-called pastoral effusion, in which Colinette rhymed with herbette, and in which the false innocence of the eighteenth century was a cloak for much indelicate allusion.

“I never,” said Jacqueline in self-defense, before she began the song, “sang anything so stupid. And that is saying much when one thinks of all the nonsensical words that people set to music! It’s a marvel how any one can like this stuff. Do tell me what there is in it?” she added, turning to Gerard, who was charmed by her ignorance.

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Standing beside the grand piano, with her arms waving as she sang, repeating, by the expression of her eyes, the question she had asked and to which she had received no answer, she was singing the verses she considered nonsense with as much point as if she had understood them, thanks to the hints given her by Madame Strahlberg, who was playing her accompaniment, when the entrance of a servant, who pronounced her name aloud, made a sudden interruption. “Mademoiselle de Nailles is wanted at home at once. Modeste has come for her.”

Madame d’Avrigny went out to say to the old servant: “She can not possibly go home with you! It is only half an hour since she came. The rehearsal is just beginning.”

But something Modeste said in answer made her give a little cry, full of consternation. She came quickly back, and going up to Jacqueline:

“My dear,” she said, “you must go home at once—there is bad news, your father is ill.”

“III?”

The solemnity of Madame d’Avrigny’s voice, the pity in her expression, the affection with which she spoke and above all her total indifference to the fate of her rehearsal, frightened Jacqueline. She rushed away, not waiting to say good-by, leaving behind her a general murmur of “Poor thing!” while Madame d’Avrigny, recovering from her first shock, was already beginning to wonder—her instincts as an impresario coming once more to the front—whether the leading part might not be taken by Isabelle Ray. She would have to send out two hundred cards, at least, and put off her play for another fortnight. What a pity! It seemed as if misfortunes always happened just so as to interfere with pleasures.

The fiacre which had brought Modeste was at the door. The old nurse helped her young lady into it.

“What has happened to papa?” cried Jacqueline, impetuously.

There was something horrible in this sudden transition from gay excitement to the sharpest anxiety.

“Nothing—that is to say—he is very sick. Don’t tremble like that, my darling—courage!” stammered Modeste, who was frightened by her agitation.

“He was taken sick, you say. Where? How happened it?”

“In his study. Pierre had just brought him his letters. We thought we heard a noise as if a chair had been thrown down, and a sort of cry. I ran in to see. He was lying at full length on the floor.”

“And now? How is he now?”

“We did what we could for him. Madame came back. He is lying on his bed.”

Modeste covered her face with her hands.

“You have not told me all. What else?”

“Mon Dieu! you knew your poor father had heart disease. The last time the doctor saw him he thought his legs had swelled—”

“Had!” Jacqueline heard only that one word. It meant that the life of her father was a thing of the past. Hardly waiting till the fiacre could be stopped, she sprang out, rushed into the house, opened the door of her father’s chamber, pushing aside a servant who tried to stop her, and fell upon her knees beside the bed where lay the body of her father, white and rigid.



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"Papa! My poor dear—dear papa!"

The hand she pressed to her lips was as cold as ice. She raised her frightened eyes to the face over which the great change from life to death had passed. "What does it mean?" Jacqueline had never looked on death before, but she knew this was not sleep.

"Oh, speak to me, papa! It is I—it is Jacqueline!"

Her stepmother tried to raise her—tried to fold her in her arms.

"Let me alone!" she cried with horror.

It seemed to her as if her father, where he was now, so far from her, so far from everything, might have the power to look into human hearts, and know the perfidy he had known nothing of when he was living. He might see in her own heart, too, her great despair. All else seemed small and of no consequence when death was present.

Oh! why had she not been a better daughter, more loving, more devoted? why had she ever cared for anything but to make him happy?

She sobbed aloud, while Madame de Nailles, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, stood at the foot of the bed, and the doctor, too, was near, whispering to some one whom Jacqueline at first had not perceived—the friend of the family, Hubert Marien.

Marien there? Was it not natural that, so intimate as he had always been with the dead man, he should have hastened to offer his services to the widow?

Jacqueline flung herself upon her father's corpse, as if to protect it from profanation. She had an impulse to bear it away with her to some desert spot where she alone could have wept over it.

She lay thus a long time, beside herself with grief.

The flowers which covered the bed and lay scattered on the floor, gave a festal appearance to the death-chamber. They had been purchased for a fete, but circumstances had changed their destination. That evening there was to have been a reception in the house of M. de Nailles, but the unexpected guest that comes without an invitation had arrived before the music and the dancers.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STORM BREAKS



Monsieur de Nailles was dead, struck down suddenly by what is called indefinitely heart-failure. The trouble in that organ from which he had long suffered had brought on what might have been long foreseen, and yet every one seemed, stupefied by the event. It came upon them like a thunderbolt. It often happens so when people who are really ill persist in doing all that may be done with safety by other persons. They persuaded themselves, and those about them are easily persuaded, that small remedies will prolong indefinitely a state of things which is precarious to the last degree. Friends are ready to believe, when the sufferer complains that his work is too hard for him, that he thinks too much of his ailments and that he exaggerates trifles to which they are well accustomed, but which are best known to him

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alone. When M. de Nailles, several weeks before his death, had asked to be excused and to stay at home instead of attending some large gathering, his wife, and even Jacqueline, would try to convince him that a little amusement would be good for him; they were unwilling to leave him to the repose he needed, prescribed for him by the doctors, who had been unanimous that he must “put down the brakes,” give less attention to business, avoid late hours and over-exertion of all kinds. “And, above all,” said one of the lights of science whom he had consulted recently about certain feelings of faintness which were a bad symptom, “above all, you must keep yourself from mental anxiety.”

How could he, when his fortune, already much impaired, hung on chances as uncertain as those in a game of roulette? What nonsense! The failure of a great financial company had brought about a crisis on the Bourse. The news of the inability of Wermant, the ‘agent de change’, to meet his engagements, had completed the downfall of M. de Nailles. Not only death, but ruin, had entered that house, where, a few hours before, luxury and opulence had seemed to reign.

“We don’t know whether there will be anything left for us to live upon,” cried Madame de Nailles, with anguish, even while her husband’s body lay in the chamber of death, and Jacqueline, kneeling beside it, wept, unwilling to receive comfort or consolation.

She turned angrily upon her stepmother and cried:

“What matter? I have no father—there is nothing else I care for.”

But from that moment a dreadful thought, a thought she was ashamed of, which made her feel a monster of selfishness, rose in her mind, do what she would to hinder it. Jacqueline was sensible that she cared for something else; great as was her sense of loss, a sort of reckless curiosity seemed haunting her, while all the time she felt that her great grief ought not to give place to anything besides. “How would Gerard de Cymier behave in these circumstances?” She thought about it all one dreadful night as she and Modeste, who was telling her beads softly, sat in the faint light of the death-chamber. She thought of it at dawn, when, after one of those brief sleeps which come to the young under all conditions, she resumed with a sigh a sense of surrounding realities. Almost in the same instant she thought: “My dear father will never wake again,” and “Does he love me?—does he now wish me to be his wife?—will he take me away?” The devil, which put this thought into her heart, made her eager to know the answer to these questions. He suggested how dreadful life with her stepmother would be if no means of escape were offered her. He made her foresee that her stepmother would marry again—would marry Marien. “But I shall not be there!” she cried, “I will not countenance such an infamy!” Oh, how she hoped Gerard de Cymier loved her! The hypocritical tears of

Madame de Nailles disgusted her. She could not bear to have such false grief associated with her own.

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Men in black, with solemn faces, came and bore away the body, no longer like the form of the father she had loved. He had gone from her forever. Pompous funeral rites, little in accordance with the crash that soon succeeded them, were superintended by Marien, who, in the absence of near relatives, took charge of everything. He seemed to be deeply affected, and behaved with all possible kindness and consideration to Jacqueline, who could not, however, bring herself to thank him, or even to look at him. She hated him with an increase of resentment, as if the soul of her dead father, who now knew the truth, had passed into her own.

Meantime, M. de Cymier took care to inform himself of the state of things. It was easy enough to do so. All Paris was talking of the shipwreck in which life and fortune had been lost by a man whose kindness as a host at his wife's parties every one had appreciated. That was what came, people said, of striving after big dividends! The house was to be sold, with the horses, the pictures, and the furniture. What a change for his poor wife and daughter! There were others who suffered by the Wermant crash, but those were less interesting than the De Nailles. M. de Belvan found himself left by his father-in-law's failure with a wife on his hands who not only had not a sou, but who was the daughter of an 'agent de change' who had behaved dishonorably.

This was a text for dissertations on the disgrace of marrying for money; those who had done the same thing, minus the same consequences, being loudest in reprobating alliances of that kind. M. de Cymier listened attentively to such talk, looking and saying the right things, and as he heard more and more about the deplorable condition of M. de Nailles's affairs, he congratulated himself that a prudent presentiment had kept him from asking the hand of Jacqueline. He had had vague doubts as to the firm foundation of the opulence which made so charming a frame for her young beauty; it seemed to him as if she were now less beautiful than he had imagined her; the enchantment she had exercised upon him was thrown off by simple considerations of good sense. And yet he gave a long sigh of regret when he thought she was unattainable except by marriage. He, however, thanked heaven that he had not gone far enough to have compromised himself with her. The most his conscience could reproach him with was an occasional imprudence in moments of forgetfulness; no court of honor could hold him bound to declare himself her suitor. The evening that he made up his mind to this he wrote two letters, very nearly alike; one was to Madame d'Avrigny, the other to Madame de Nailles, announcing that, having received orders to join the Embassy to which he was attached at Vienna, he was about to depart at once, with great regret that he should not be able to take leave of any one. To Madame d'Avrigny he made apologies for having to give up his part in her theatricals; he entreated Madame de Nailles to

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accept both for herself and for Mademoiselle Jacqueline his deepest condolences and the assurance of his sympathy. The manner in which this was said was all it ought to have been, except that it might have been rather more brief. M. de Cymier said more than was necessary about his participation in their grief, because he was conscious of a total lack of sympathy. He begged the ladies would forgive him if, from feelings of delicacy and a sense of the respect due to a great sorrow, he did not, before leaving Paris, which he was about to do probably for a long time, personally present to them 'ses hommages attristés'. Then followed a few lines in which he spoke of the pleasant recollections he should always retain of the hospitality he had enjoyed under M. de Nailles's roof, in a way that gave them clearly to understand that he had no expectation of ever entering their family on a more intimate footing.

Madame de Nailles received this letter just as she had had a conversation with a man of business, who had shown her how complete was the ruin for which in a great measure she herself was responsible. She had no longer any illusions as to her position. When the estate had been settled there would be nothing left but poverty, not only for herself, who, having brought her husband no dot, had no right to consider herself wronged by the bankruptcy, but for Jacqueline, whose fortune, derived from her mother, had suffered under her father's management (there are such men—unfaithful guardians of a child's property, but yet good fathers) in every way in which it was possible to evade the provisions of the Code intended to protect the rights of minor children. In the little salon so charmingly furnished, where never before had sorrow or sadness been discussed, Madame de Nailles poured out her complaints to her stepdaughter and insisted upon plans of strict economy, when M. de Cymier's letter was brought in.

"Read!" said the Baroness, handing the strange document to Jacqueline, after she had read it through.

Then she leaned back in her chair with a gesture which signified: "This is the last straw!" and remained motionless, apparently overwhelmed, with her face covered by one hand, but furtively watching the face of the girl so cruelly forsaken.

That face told nothing, for pride supplies some sufferers with necessary courage. Jacqueline sat for some time with her eyes fixed on the decisive adieu which swept away what might have been her secret hope. The paper did not tremble in her hand, a half-smile of contempt passed over her mouth. The answer to the restless question that had intruded itself upon her in the first moments of her grief was now before her. Its promptness, its polished brutality, had given her a shock, but not the pain she had expected. Perhaps her great grief—the real, the true, the grief death brings—recovered its place in her heart, and prevented her from feeling keenly any secondary emotion. Perhaps this man, who could pay court to her in her days of happiness and disappear when the first trouble came, seemed to her not worth caring for.

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She silently handed back the letter to her stepmother.

"No more than I expected," said the Baroness.

"Indeed?" replied Jacqueline with complete indifference. She wished to give no opening to any expressions of sympathy on the part of Madame de Nailles.

"Poor Madame d'Avrigny," she added, "has bad luck; all her actors seem to be leaving her."

This speech was the vain bravado of a young soldier going into action. The poor child betrayed herself to the experienced woman, trained either to detect or to practise artifice, and who found bitter amusement in watching the girl's assumed 'sang-froid'. But the mask fell off at the first touch of genuine sympathy. When Giselle, forgetful of a certain coolness between them ever since Fred's departure, came to clasp her in her arms, she showed only her true self, a girl suffering all the bitterness of a cruel, humiliating desertion. Long talks ensued between the friends, in which Jacqueline poured into Giselle's ear her sad discoveries in the past, her sorrows and anxieties in the present, and her vague plans for the future. "I must go away," she said; "I must escape somewhere; I can not go on living with Madame de Nailles—I should go mad, I should be tempted every day to upbraid her with her conduct."

Giselle made no attempt to curb an excitement which she knew would resist all she could say to calm it. She feigned agreement, hoping thereby to increase her future influence, and advised her friend to seek in a convent the refuge that she needed. But she must do nothing rashly; she should only consider it a temporary retreat whose motive was a wish to remain for a while within reach of religious consolation. In that way she would give people nothing to talk about, and her step mother could not be offended. It was never of any use to get out of a difficulty by breaking all the glass windows with a great noise, and good resolutions are made firmer by being matured in quietness. Such were the lessons Giselle herself had been taught by the Benedictine nuns, who, however deficient they might be in the higher education of women, knew at least how to bring up young girls with a view to making them good wives. Giselle illustrated this day by day in her relations to a husband as disagreeable as a husband well could be, a man of small intelligence, who was not even faithful to her. But she did not cite herself as an example. She never talked about herself, or her own difficulties.

"You are an angel of sense and goodness," sobbed Jacqueline. "I will do whatever you wish me to do."

"Count upon me—count upon all your friends," said Madame de Talbrun, tenderly.

And then, enumerating the oldest and the truest of these friends, she unluckily named Madame d'Argy. Jacqueline drew herself back at once:

“Oh, for pity’s sake!” she cried, “don’t mention them to me!”

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Already a comparison between Fred's faithful affection and Gerard de Cymier's desertion had come into her mind, but she had refused to entertain it, declaring resolutely to herself that she never should repent her refusal. She was sore, she was angry with all men, she wished all were like Cymier or like Marien, that she might hate every one of them; she came to the conclusion in her heart of hearts that all of them, even the best, if put to the proof, would turn out selfish. She liked to think so—to believe in none of them. Thus it happened that an unexpected visit from Fred's mother, among those that she received in her first days of orphanhood, was particularly agreeable to her.

Madame d'Argy, on hearing of the death and of the ruin of M. de Nailles, was divided by two contradictory feelings. She clearly saw the hand of Providence in what had happened: her son was in the squadron on its way to attack Formosa; he was in peril from the climate, in peril from Chinese bullets, and assuredly those who had brought him into peril could not be punished too severely; on the other hand, the last mail from Tonquin had brought her one of those great joys which always incline us to be merciful. Fred had so greatly distinguished himself in a series of fights upon the river Min that he had been offered his choice between the Cross of the Legion of Honor or promotion. He told his mother now that he had quite recovered from a wound he had received which had brought him some glory, but which he assured her had done him no bodily harm, and he repeated to her what he would not tell her at first, some words of praise from Admiral Courbet of more value in his eyes than any reward.

Triumphant herself, and much moved by pity for Jacqueline, Madame d'Argy felt as if she must put an end to a rupture which could not be kept up when a great sorrow had fallen on her old friends, besides which she longed to tell every one, those who had been blind and ungrateful in particular, that Fred had proved himself a hero. So Jacqueline and her stepmother saw her arrive as if nothing had ever come between them. There were kisses and tears, and a torrent of kindly meant questions, affectionate explanations, and offers of service. But Fred's mother could not help showing her own pride and happiness to those in sorrow. They congratulated her with sadness. Madame d'Argy would have liked to think that the value of what she had lost was now made plain to Jacqueline. And if it caused her one more pang—what did it matter? He and his mother had suffered too. It was the turn of others. God was just. Resentment, and kindness, and a strange mixed feeling of forgiveness and revenge contended together in the really generous heart of Madame d'Argy, but that heart was still sore within her. Pity, however, carried the day, and had it not been for the irritating coldness of "that little hard-hearted thing," as she called Jacqueline, she would have entirely forgiven her. She never suspected that the exaggerated reserve of manner that offended her was owing to Jacqueline's dread (commendable in itself) of appearing to wish in her days of misfortune for the return of one she had rejected in the time of prosperity.

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In spite of the received opinion that society abandons those who are overtaken by misfortune, all the friends of the De Nailles flocked to offer their condolences to the widow and the orphan with warm demonstrations of interest. Curiosity, a liking to witness, or to experience, emotion, the pleasure of being able to tell what has been seen and heard, to find out new facts and repeat them again to others, joined to a sort of vague, commonplace, almost intrusive pity, are sentiments, which sometimes in hours of great disaster, produce what appears to wear the look of sympathy. A fortnight after M. de Nailles's death, between the acts of Scylla and Charybdis, the principal parts in which were taken by young d'Etaples and Isabelle Ray, the company, as it ate ices, was glibly discussing the real drama which had produced in their own elegant circle much of the effect a blow has upon an ant-hill—fear, agitation, and a tumultuous rush to the scene of the disaster.

Great indignation was expressed against the man who had risked the fortune of his family in speculation. Oh! the thing had been going on for a long while. His fortune had been gradually melting away; Grandchaux was loaded down with mortgages and would bring almost nothing at a forced sale.

Everybody forgot that had M. de Nailles's speculations been successful they would have been called matters of business, conducted with great ability on a large scale. When a performer falls from the tightrope, who remembers all the times he has not failed? It is simply said that he fell from his own carelessness.

"The poor Baroness is touchingly resigned," said Madame de Villegry, with a deep sigh; "and heaven knows how many other cares she has besides the loss of money! I don't mean only the death of her husband—and you know how much they were attached to each other—I am speaking of that unaccountable resolution of Jacqueline's."

Madame d'Avrigny here came forward with her usual equanimity which nothing disturbed, unless it were something which interfered with the success of her salon.

She was of course very sorry for her friends in trouble, but the vicissitudes that had happened to her theatricals she had more at heart.

"After all," she said, "the first act did not go off badly, did it? The musical part made up for the rest. That divine Strahlberg is ready for any emergency. How well she sang that air of 'La Petite Mariee!' It was exquisite, but I regretted Jacqueline. She was so charming in that lively little part. What a catastrophe!

"What a terrible catastrophe! Were you speaking of the retreat she wishes to make in a convent? Well, I quite understand how she feels about it! I should feel the same myself. In the bewilderment of a first grief one does not care to see anything of the world. 'Mon Dieu!' youth always has these exaggerated notions. She will come back to us. Poor little thing! Of course it was no fault of hers, and I should not think of blaming

Monsieur de Cymier. The exigencies of his career—but you all must own that unexpected things happen so suddenly in this life that it is enough to discourage any one who likes to open her house and provide amusement for her friends.”

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Every one present pitied her for the contretemps over which she had triumphed so successfully. Then she resumed, serenely:

“Don’t you think that Isabelle played the part almost as well as Jacqueline? Up to the last moment I was afraid that something would go wrong. When one gets into a streak of ill-luck—but all went off to perfection, thank heaven!”

Meantime Madame Odinska was whispering to one of those who sat near her her belief that Jacqueline would never get over her father’s loss. “It would not astonish me,” she said, “to hear that the child, who has a noble nature, would remain in the convent and take the veil.”

Any kind of heroic deed seemed natural to this foolish enthusiast, who, as a matter of fact, in her own life, had never shown any tendency to heroic virtues; her mission in life had seemed to be to spoil her daughters in every possible way, and to fling away more money than belonged to her.

“Really? Was she so very fond of her father!” asked Madame Ray, incredulously. “When he was alive, they did not seem to make much of him in his own house. Maybe this retreat is a good way of getting over a little wound to her ‘amour-propre’.”

“The proper thing, I think,” said Madame d’Etaples, “would be for the mother and daughter to keep together, to bear the troubles before them hand in hand. Jacqueline does not seem to think much of the last wishes of the father she pretends to be so fond of. The Baroness showed me, with many tears, a letter he left joined to his will, which was written some years ago, and which now, of course, is of no value. He told mother and daughter to take care of each other and hoped they would always remain friends, loving each other for love of him. Jacqueline’s conduct amazes me; it looks like ingratitude.”

“Oh! she is a hard-hearted little thing! I always thought so!” said Madame de Villegry, carelessly.

Here the rising of the curtain stopped short these discussions, which displayed so much good-nature and perspicacity. But some laid the blame on the influence of that little bigot of a Talbrun, who had secretly blown up the fire of religious enthusiasm in Jacqueline, when Madame d’Avrigny’s energetic “Hush!” put an end to the discussion. It was time to come back to more immediate interests, to the play which went on in spite of wind and tide.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

A mother’s geese are always swans
Bathers, who exhibited themselves in all degrees of ugliness



Fred's verses were not good, but they were full of dejection
Hang out the bush, but keep no tavern
A familiarity which, had he known it, was not flattering
His sleeplessness was not the insomnia of genius
Importance in this world are as easily swept away as the sand
Natural longing, that we all have, to know the worst
Notion of her husband's



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having an opinion of his own

Pride supplies some sufferers with necessary courage

Seemed to enjoy themselves, or made believe they did

This unending warfare we call love

Unwilling to leave him to the repose he needed

JACQUELINE

By *Therese Bentzon (Mme. Blanc)*

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XIV

BITTER DISILLUSION

Some people in this world who turn round and round in a daily circle of small things, like squirrels in a cage, have no idea of the pleasure a young creature, conscious of courage, has in trying its strength; this struggle with fortune loses its charm as it grows longer and longer and more and more difficult, but at the beginning it is an almost certain remedy for sorrow.

To her resolve to make head against misfortune Jacqueline owed the fact that she did not fall into those morbid reveries which might have converted her passing fancy for a man who was simply a male flirt into the importance of a lost love. Is there any human being conscious of energy, and with faith in his or her own powers, who has not wished to know something of adversity in order to rise to the occasion and confront it? To say nothing of the pleasure there is in eating brown bread, when one has been fed only on cake, or of the satisfaction that a child feels when, after strict discipline, he is left to do as he likes, to say nothing of the pleasure ladies boarding in nunneries are sure to feel on reentering the world, at recovering their liberty, Jacqueline by nature loved independence, and she was attracted by the novelty of her situation as larks are attracted by a mirror. She was curious to know what life held for her in reserve, and she was extremely anxious to repair the error she had committed in giving way to a feeling of which she was now ashamed. What could do this better than hard work? To owe everything to herself, to her talents, to her efforts, to her industry, such was Jacqueline's ideal of her future life.

She had, before this, crowned her brilliant reputation in the 'cours' of M. Regis by passing her preliminary examination at the Sorbonne; she was confident of attaining the

highest degree—the ‘brevet superieur’, and while pursuing her own studies she hoped to give lessons in music and in foreign languages, *etc.* Thus assured of making her own living, she could afford to despise the discreditable happiness of Madame de Nailles, who, she had no doubt, would shortly become Madame Marien; also the crooked ways in which M. de Cymier might pursue his fortune-hunting. She said to herself that she should never marry; that she had other objects of interest; that marriage was for those who had nothing better before them; and the world appeared to her under a new aspect, a sphere of useful activity full of possibilities, of infinite variety, and abounding in interests. Marriage might be all very well for rich girls, who unhappily were objects of value to be bought and sold; her semi-poverty gave her the right to break the chains that hampered the career of other well-born women—she would make her own way in the world like a man.

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Thus, at eighteen, youth is ready to set sail in a light skiff on a rough sea, having laid in a good store of imagination and of courage, of childlike ignorance and self-esteem.

No doubt she would meet with some difficulties; that thought did but excite her ardor. No doubt Madame de Nailles would try to keep her with her, and Jacqueline had provided herself beforehand with some double-edged remarks by way of weapons, which she intended to use according to circumstances. But all these preparations for defense or attack proved unnecessary. When she told the Baroness of her plans she met with no opposition. She had expected that her project of separation would highly displease her stepmother; on the contrary, Madame de Nailles discussed her projects quietly, affecting to consider them merely temporary, but with no indication of dissatisfaction or resistance. In truth she was not sorry that Jacqueline, whose companionship became more and more embarrassing every day, had cut the knot of a difficult position by a piece of wilfulness and perversity which seemed to put her in the wrong. The necessity she would have been under of crushing such a girl, who was now eighteen, would have been distasteful and unprofitable; she was very glad to get rid of her stepdaughter, always provided it could be done decently and without scandal. Those two, who had once so loved each other and who were now sharers in the same sorrows, became enemies—two hostile parties, which only skilful strategy could ever again bring together. They tacitly agreed to certain conditions: they would save appearances; they would remain on outwardly good terms with each other whatever happened, and above all they would avoid any explanation. This programme was faithfully carried out, thanks to the great tact of Madame de Nailles.

No one could have been more watchful to appear ignorant of everything which, if once brought to light, would have led to difficulties; for instance, she feigned not to know that her stepdaughter was in possession of a secret which, if the world knew, would forever make them strangers to each other; nor would she seem aware that Hubert Marien, weary to death of the tie that bound him to her, was restrained from breaking it only by a scruple of honor. Thanks to this seeming ignorance, she parted from Jacqueline without any open breach, as she had long hoped to do, and she retained as a friend who supplied her wants a man who was only too happy to be allowed at this price to escape the act of reparation which Jacqueline, in her simplicity, had dreaded.

All those who, having for years dined and danced under the roof of the Nailles, were accounted their friends by society, formed themselves into two parties, one of which lauded to the skies the dignity and resignation of the Baroness, while the other admired the force of character in Jacqueline.

Page 1876

Visitors flocked to the convent which the young girl, by the advice of Giselle, had chosen for her retreat because it was situated in a quiet quarter. She who looked so beautiful in her crape garments, who showed herself so satisfied in her little cell with hardly any furniture, who was grateful for the services rendered her by the lay sisters, content with having no salon but the convent parlor, who was passing examinations to become a teacher, and who seemed to consider it a favor to be sometimes allowed to hear the children in the convent school say their lessons—was surely like a heroine in a novel. And indeed Jacqueline had the agreeable sensation of considering herself one. Public admiration was a great help to her, after she had passed through that crisis in her grief during which she could feel nothing but the horror of knowing she should never see her father again, when she had ceased to weep for him incessantly, to pray for him, and to turn, like a wounded lioness, on those who blamed his reckless conduct, though she herself had been its chief victim.

For three months she hardly left the convent, walking only in the grounds and gardens, which were of considerable extent. From time to time Giselle came for her and took her to drive in the Bois at that hour of the day when few people were there.

Enguerrand, who, thanks to his mother's care, was beginning to be an intelligent and interesting child, though he was still painfully like M. de Talbrun, was always with them in the coupe, kindhearted Giselle thinking that nothing could be so likely to assuage grief as the prattle of a child. She was astonished—she was touched to the heart, by what she called naively the conversion of Jacqueline. It was true that the young girl had no longer any whims or caprices. All the nuns seemed to her amiable, her lodging was all she needed, her food was excellent; her lessons gave her amusement. Possibly the excitement of the entire change had much to do at first with this philosophy, and in fact at the end of six months Jacqueline owned that she was growing tired of dining at the table d'hôte.

There was a little knot of crooked old ladies who were righteous overmuch, and several sour old maids whose only occupation seemed to be to make remarks on any person who had anything different in dress, manners, or appearance from what they considered the type of the becoming. If it is not good that man should live alone, it is equally true that women should not live together. Jacqueline found this out as soon as her powers of observation came back to her. And about the same time she discovered that she was not so free as she had flattered herself she should be. The appearance of a lady, fair and with light hair, very pretty and about her own age, gave her for the first time an inclination to talk at table. She and this young woman met twice a day at their meals, in the morning and in the evening; their rooms were next each other, and at night Jacqueline

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could hear her through the thin partition giving utterance to sighs, which showed that she was unhappy. Several times, too, she came upon her in the garden looking earnestly at a place where the wall had been broken, a spot whence it was said a Spanish countess had been carried off by a bold adventurer. Jacqueline thought there must be something romantic in the history of this newcomer, and would have liked exceedingly to know what it might be. As a prelude to acquaintance, she offered the young stranger some holy water when they met in the chapel, a bow and a smile were interchanged, their fingers touched. They seemed almost friends. After this, Jacqueline contrived to change her seat at table to one next to this unknown person, so prettily dressed, with her hair so nicely arranged, and, though her expression was very sad, with a smile so very winning. She alone represented the world, the world of Paris, among all those ladies, some of whom were looking for places as companions, some having come up from the provinces, and some being old ladies who had seen better days. Her change of place was observed by the nun who presided at the table, and a shade of displeasure passed over her face. It was slight, but it portended trouble. And, indeed, when grace had been said, Mademoiselle de Nailles was sent for by the Mother Superior, who gave her to understand that, being so young, it was especially incumbent on her to be circumspect in her choice of associates. Her place thenceforward was to be between Madame de X-----, an old, deaf lady, and Mademoiselle J-----, a former governess, as cold as ice and exceedingly respectable. As to Madame Saville, she had been received in the convent for especial reasons, arising out of circumstances which did not make her a fit companion for inexperienced girls. The Superior hesitated a moment and then said: "Her husband requested us to take charge of her," in a tone by which Jacqueline quite understood that "take charge" was a synonym for "keep a strict watch upon her." She was spied upon, she was persecuted—unjustly, no doubt.

All this increased the interest that Jacqueline already felt in the lady with the light hair. But she made a low curtsy to the Mother Superior and returned no answer. Her intercourse with her neighbor was thenceforward; however, sly and secret, which only made it more interesting and exciting. They would exchange a few words when they met upon the stairs, in the garden, or in the cloisters, when there was no curious eye to spy them out; and the first time Jacqueline went out alone Madame Saville was on the watch, and, without speaking, slipped a letter into her hand.

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This first time Jacqueline went out was an epoch in her life, as small events are sometimes in the annals of nations; it was the date of her emancipation, it coincided with what she called her choice of a career. Thinking herself sure of possessing a talent for teaching, she had spoken of it to several friends who had come to see her, and who each and all exclaimed that they would like some lessons, a delicate way of helping her quite understood by Jacqueline. Pupils like Belle Ray and Yvonne d'Etaples, who wanted her to come twice a week to play duets with them or to read over new music, were not nearly so interesting as those in her little class who had hardly more than learned their scales! Besides this, Madame d'Avrigny begged her to come and dine with her, when there would be only themselves, on Mondays, and then practise with Dolly, who had not another moment in which she could take a lesson. She should be sent home scrupulously before ten o'clock, that being the hour at the convent when every one must be in. Jacqueline accepted all these kindnesses gratefully. By Giselle's advice she hid her slight figure under a loose cloak and put on her head a bonnet fit for a grandmother, a closed hat with long strings, which, when she first put it on her head, made her burst out laughing. She imagined herself to be going forth in disguise. To walk the streets thus masked she thought would be amusing, so amusing that the moment she set foot on the street pavement she felt that the joy of living was yet strong in her. With a roll of music in her hand, she walked on rather hesitatingly, a little afraid, like a bird just escaped from the cage where it was born; her heart beat, but it was with pleasure; she fancied every one was looking at her, and in fact one old gentleman, not deceived by the cloak, did follow her till she got into an omnibus for the first time in her life—a new experience and a new pleasure. Once seated, and a little out of breath, she remembered Madame Saville's letter, which she had slipped into her pocket. It was sealed and had a stamp on it; it was too highly scented to be in good taste, and it was addressed to a lieutenant of chasseurs with an aristocratic name, in a garrison at Fontainebleau.

Then Jacqueline began vaguely to comprehend that Madame Saville's husband might have had serious reasons for commending his wife to the surveillance of the nuns, and that there might have been some excuse for their endeavoring to hinder all intimacy between herself and the little blonde.

This office of messenger, thrust upon her without asking permission, was not agreeable to Jacqueline, and she resolved as she dropped the missive, which, even on the outside, looked compromising, into the nearest post-box, to be more reserved in future. For which reason she responded coldly to a sign Madame Saville made her when, in the evening, she returned from giving her lessons.

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Those lessons—those excursions which took her abroad in all weathers, though with praiseworthy and serious motives, into the fashionable parts of Paris, from which she had exiled herself by her own will—were greatly enjoyed by Jacqueline. Everything amused her, being seen from a point of view in which she had never before contemplated it. She seemed to be at a play, all personal interests forgotten for the moment, looking at the world of which she was no longer a part with a lively, critical curiosity, without regrets but without cynicism. The world did not seem to her bad—only man's higher instincts had little part in it. Such, at least, was what she thought, so long as people praised her for her courage, so long as the houses in which another Jacqueline de Nailles had been once so brilliant, received her with affection as before, though she had to leave in an anteroom her modest waterproof or wet umbrella. They were even more kind and cordial to her than ever, unless an exaggerated cordiality be one form of impertinence. But the enthusiasm bestowed on splendid instances of energy in certain circles, to which after all such energy is a reproach, is superficial, and not being genuine is sure not to last long. Some people said that Jacqueline's staid manners were put on for effect, and that she was only attempting to play a difficult part to which she was not suited; others blamed her for not being up to concert-pitch in matters of social interest. The first time she felt the pang of exclusion was at Madame d'Avrigny's, who was at the same moment overwhelming her with expressions of regard. In the first place, she could see that the little family dinner to which she had been so kindly invited was attended by so many guests that her deep mourning seemed out of place among them. Then Madame d'Avrigny would make whispered explanations, which Jacqueline was conscious of, and which were very painful to her. Such words as: "Old friend of the family;" "Is giving music lessons to my daughter;" fell more than once upon her ear, followed by exclamations of "Poor thing!" "So courageous!" "Chivalric sentiments!" Of course, everyone added that they excused her toilette. Then when she tried to escape such remarks by wearing a new gown, Dolly, who was always a little fool (there is no cure for that infirmity) cried out in a tone such as she never would have dared to use in the days when Jacqueline was a model of elegance: "Oh, how fine you are!" Then again, Madame d'Avrigny, notwithstanding the good manners on which she prided herself, could not conceal that the obligation of sending home the recluse to the ends of the earth, at a certain hour, made trouble with her servants, who were put out of their way. Jacqueline seized on this pretext to propose to give up the Monday music-lesson, and after some polite hesitation her offer was accepted, evidently to Madame d'Avrigny's relief.

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In this case she had the satisfaction of being the one to propose the discontinuance of the lessons. At Madame Ray's she was simply dismissed. About the close of winter she was told that as Isabelle was soon to be married she would have no time for music till her wedding was over, and about the same time the d'Etaples told her much the same thing. This was not to be wondered at, for Mademoiselle Ray was engaged to an officer of dragoons, the same Marcel d'Etaples who had acted with her in Scylla and Charybdis, and Madame Ray, being a watchful mother, was not long in perceiving that Marcel came to pay court to Isabelle too frequently at the hour for her music-lesson. Madame d'Etaples on her part had made a similar discovery, and both judged that the presence of so beautiful a girl, in Jacqueline's position, might not be desirable in these interviews between lovers.

When Giselle, as she was about to leave town for the country in July, begged Jacqueline, who seemed run down and out of spirits, to come and stay with her, the poor child was very glad to accept the invitation. Her pupils were leaving her one after another, she could not understand why, and she was bored to death in the convent, whose strict rules were drawn tighter on her than before, for the nuns had begun to understand her better, and to discover the real worldliness of her character. At the same time, that retreat within these pious walls no longer seemed like paradise to Jacqueline; her transition from the deepest crape to the softer tints of half mourning, seemed to make her less of an angel in their eyes. They said to each other that Mademoiselle de Nailles was fanciful, and fancies are the very last things wanted in a convent, for fancies can brave bolts, and make their escape beyond stone walls, whatever means may be taken to clip their wings.

"She does not seem like the same person," cried the good sisters, who had been greatly edified at first by her behavior, and who were almost ready now to be shocked at her.

The course of things was coming back rapidly into its natural channel; in obedience to the law which makes a tree, apparently dead, put forth shoots in springtime. And that inevitable re-budding and reblossoming was beautiful to see in this young human plant. M. de Talbrun, Jacqueline's host, could not fail to perceive it. At first he had been annoyed with Giselle for giving the invitation, having a habit of finding fault with everything he had not ordered or suggested, by virtue of his marital authority, and also because he hated above all things, as he said, to have people in his house who were "wobegones." But in a week he was quite reconciled to the idea of keeping Mademoiselle de Nailles all the summer at the Chateau de Fresne. Never had Giselle known him to take so much trouble to be amiable, and indeed Jacqueline saw him much more to advantage at home than in Paris, where, as she had often said, he diffused too strong an odor of the stables. At Fresne,



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it was more easy to forgive him for talking always of his stud and of his kennel, and then he was so obliging! Every day he proposed some new jaunt, an excursion to see some view, to visit all the ruined chateaux or abbeys in the neighborhood. And, with surprising delicacy, M. de Talbrun refrained from inviting too many of his country neighbors, who might perhaps have scared Jacqueline and arrested her gradual return to gayety. They might also have interrupted his tete-a-tete with his wife's guest, for they had many such conversations. Giselle was absorbed in the duty of teaching her son his a, b, c. Besides, being very timid, she had never ridden on horseback, and, naturally, riding was delightful to her cousin. Jacqueline was never tired of it; while she paid as little attention to the absurd remarks Oscar made to her between their gallops as a girl does at a ball to the idle words of her partner. She supposed it was his custom to talk in that manner—a sort of rough gallantry—but with the best intentions. Jacqueline was disposed to look upon her life at Fresne as a feast after a long famine. Everything was to her taste, the whole appearance of this lordly chateau of the time of Louis XIII, the splendid trees in the home park, the gardens laid out 'a la Francais', decorated with art and kept up carefully. Everything, indeed, that pertained to that high life which to Giselle had so little importance, was to her delightful. Giselle's taste was so simple that it was a constant subject of reproach from her husband. To be sure, it was with him a general rule to find fault with her about everything. He did not spare her his reproaches on a multitude of subjects; all day long he was worrying her about small trifles with which he should have had nothing to do. It is a mistake to suppose that a man can not be brutal and fussy at the same time. M. de Talbrun was proof to the contrary.

"You are too patient," said Jacqueline often to Giselle. "You ought to answer him back—to defend yourself. I am sure if you did so you would have him, by-and-bye, at your beck and call."

"Perhaps so. I dare say you could have managed better than I do," replied Giselle, with a sad smile, but without a spark of jealousy. "Oh, you are in high favor. He gave up this week the races at Deauville, the great race week from which he has never before been absent, since our marriage. But you see my ambition has become limited; I am satisfied if he lets me alone." Giselle spoke these words with emphasis, and then she added: "and lets me bring up his son my own way. That is all I ask."

Jacqueline thought in her heart that it was wrong to ask so little, that poor Giselle did not know how to make the best of her husband, and, curious to find out what line of conduct would serve best to subjugate M. de Talbrun, she became herself—that is to say, a born coquette—venturing from one thing to another, like a child playing fearlessly with a bulldog, who is gentle only with him, or a fly buzzing round a spider's web, while the spider lies quietly within.

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She would tease him, contradict him, and make him listen to long pieces of scientific music as she played them on the piano, when she knew he always said that music to him was nothing but a disagreeable noise; she would laugh at his thanks when a final chord, struck with her utmost force, roused him from a brief slumber; in short, it amused her to prove that this coarse, rough man was to her alone no object of fear. She would have done better had she been afraid.

Thus it came to pass that, as they rode together through some of the prettiest roads in the most beautiful part of Normandy, M. de Talbrun began to talk, with an ever-increasing vivacity, of the days when they first met, at Treport, relating a thousand little incidents which Jacqueline had forgotten, and from which it was easy to see that he had watched her narrowly, though he was on the eve of his own marriage. With unnecessary persistence, and stammering as he was apt to do when moved by any emotion, he repeated over and over again, that from the first moment he had seen her he had been struck by her—devilishly struck by her—he had been, indeed! And one day when she answered, in order not to appear to attach any importance to this declaration, that she was very glad of it, he took an opportunity, as their horses stopped side by side before a beautiful sunset, to put his arm suddenly round her waist, and give her a kiss, so abrupt, so violent, so outrageous, that she screamed aloud. He did not remove his arm from her, his coarse, red face drew near her own again with an expression that filled her with horror. She struggled to free herself, her horse began to rear, she screamed for help with all her might, but nothing answered her save an echo. The situation seemed critical for Jacqueline. As to M. de Talbrun, he was quite at his ease, as if he were accustomed to make love like a centaur; while the girl felt herself in peril of being thrown at any moment, and trampled under his horse's feet. At last she succeeded in striking her aggressor a sharp blow across the face with her riding-whip. Blinded for a moment, he let her go, and she took advantage of her release to put her horse to its full speed. He galloped after her, beside himself with wrath and agitation; it was a mad but silent race, until they reached the gate of the Chateau de Fresne, which they entered at the same moment, their horses covered with foam.

"How foolish!" cried Giselle, coming to meet them. "Just see in what a state you have brought home your poor horses."

Jacqueline, pale and trembling, made no answer. M. de Talbrun, as he helped her to dismount, whispered, savagely: "Not a word of this!"

At dinner, his wife remarked that some branch must have struck him on the cheek, there was a red mark right across his face like a blow.

"We were riding through the woods," he answered, shortly.

Then Giselle began to suspect something, and remarked that nobody was talking that evening, asking, with a half-smile, whether they had been quarrelling.

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"We did have a little difference," Oscar replied, quietly.

"Oh, it did not amount to anything," he said, lighting his cigar; "let us make friends again, won't you?" he added, holding out his hand to Jacqueline. She was obliged to give him the tips of her fingers, as she said in her turn, with audacity equal to his own:

"Oh, it was less than nothing. Only, Giselle, I told your husband that I had had some bad news, and shall have to go back to Paris, and he tried to persuade me not to go."

"I beg you not to go," said Oscar, vehemently.

"Bad news?" repeated Giselle, "you did not say a word to me about it!"

"I did not have a chance. My old Modeste is very ill and asks me to come to her. I should never forgive myself if I did not go."

"What, Modeste? So very ill? Is it really so serious? What a pity! But you will come back again?"

"If I can. But I must leave Fresne to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I defy you to leave Fresne!" said M. de Talbrun.

Jacqueline leaned toward him, and said firmly, but in a low voice: "If you attempt to hinder me, I swear I will tell everything."

All that evening she did not leave Giselle's side for a moment, and at night she locked herself into her chamber and barricaded the door, as if a mad dog or a murderer were at large in the chateau.

Giselle came into her room at an early hour.

"Is what you said yesterday the truth, Jacqueline? Is Modeste really ill? Are you sure you have had no reason to complain of anybody in this place?—of any one?"

Then, after a pause, she added:

"Oh, my darling, how hard it is to do good even to those whom we most dearly love."

"I don't understand you," said Jacqueline, with an effort. "Everybody has been kind to me."

They kissed each other with effusion, but M. de Talbrun's leave-taking was icy in the extreme. Jacqueline had made a mortal enemy.



The grand outline of the chateau, built of brick and stone with its wings flanked by towers, the green turf of the great park in which it stood, passed from her sight as she drove away, like some vision in a dream.

"I shall never come back—never come back!" thought Jacqueline. She felt as if she had been thrust out everywhere. For one moment she thought of seeking refuge at Lizerolles, which was not very many miles from the railroad station, and when there of telling Madame d'Argy of her difficulties, and asking her advice; but false pride kept her from doing so—the same false pride which had made her write coldly, in answer to the letters full of feeling and sympathy Fred had written to her on receiving news of her father's death.

CHAPTER XV

TREACHEROUS KINDNESS

The experience through which Jacqueline had just passed was not calculated to fortify her or to elevate her soul. She felt for the first time that her unprotected situation and her poverty exposed her to insult, for what other name could she give to the outrageous behavior of M. de Talbrun, which had degraded her in her own eyes?

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What right had that man to treat her as his plaything? Her pride and all her womanly instincts rose up in rebellion. Her nerves had been so shaken that she sobbed behind her veil all the way to her destination. Paris, when she reached it, offered her almost nothing that could comfort or amuse her. That city is always empty and dull in August, more so than at any other season. Even the poor occupation of teaching her little class of music pupils had been taken away by the holidays. Her sole resource was in Modeste's society. Modeste—who, by the way, had never been ill, and who suffered from nothing but old age—was delighted to receive her dear young lady in her little room far up under the roof, where, though quite infirm, she lived comfortably, on her savings. Jacqueline, sitting beside her as she sewed, was soothed by her old nursery tales, or by anecdotes of former days. Her own relatives were often the old woman's theme. She knew the history of Jacqueline's family from beginning to end; but, wherever her story began, it invariably wound up with:

"If only your poor papa had not made away with all your money!"

And Jacqueline always answered:

"He was quite at liberty to do what he pleased with what belonged to him."

"Belonged to him! Yes, but what belonged to you? And how does it happen that your stepmother seems so well off? Why doesn't some family council interfere? My little pet, to think of your having to work for your living. It's enough to kill me!"

"Bah! Modeste, there are worse things than being poor."

"Maybe so," answered the old nurse, doubtfully, "but when one has money troubles along with the rest, the money troubles make other things harder to bear; whereas, if you have money enough you can bear anything, and you would have had enough, after all, if you had married Monsieur Fred."

At which point Jacqueline insisted that Modeste should be silent, and answered, resolutely: "I mean never to marry at all."

To this Modeste made answer: "That's another of your notions. The worst husband is always better than none; and I know, for I never married."

"That's why you talk such nonsense, my poor dear Modeste! You know nothing about it."

One day, after one of these visits to the only friend, as she believed, who remained to her in the world—for her intimacy with Giselle was spoiled forever—she saw, as she walked with a heavy heart toward her convent in a distant quarter, an open fiacre pull up, in obedience to a sudden cry from a passenger who was sitting inside. The person sprang out, and rushed toward Jacqueline with loud exclamations of joy.



“Madame Strahlberg!”

“Dear Jacqueline! What a pleasure to meet you!” And, the street being nearly empty, Madame Strahlberg heartily embraced her friend.

“I have thought of you so often, darling, for months past—they seem like years, like centuries! Where have you been all that long time?”

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In point of fact, Jacqueline had no proof that the three Odinska ladies had ever remembered her existence, but that might have been partly her own fault, or rather the fault of Giselle, who had made her promise to have as little as possible to do with such compromising personages. She was seized with a kind of remorse when she found such warmth of recognition from the amiable Wanda. Had she not shown herself ungrateful and cowardly? People about whom the world talks, are they not sometimes quite as good as those who have not lost their standing in society, like M. de Talbrun? It seemed to her that, go where she would, she ran risks.

The cynicism that is the result of sad experience was beginning to show itself in Jacqueline.

"Oh, forgive me!" she said, feeling, contrite.

"Forgive you for what, you beautiful creature?" asked Madame Strahlberg, with sincere astonishment.

She had the excellent custom of never observing when people neglected her, or at least, of never showing that she did so, partly because her life was so full of varied interests that she cared little for such trifles, and secondly because, having endured several affronts of that nature, she had ceased to be very sensitive.

"I knew, through the d'Avrignys," she said, "that you were still at the convent. You are not going to take the veil there, are you? It would be a great pity. No? You wish to lead the life of an intelligent woman who is free and independent? That is well; but it was rather an odd idea to begin by going into a cloister. Oh!—I see, public opinion?" And Madame Strahlberg made a little face, expressive of her contempt for public opinion.

"It does not pay to consult other people's opinions—it is useless, believe me. The more we sacrifice to public opinion, the more it asks of us. I cut that matter short long ago. But how glad I am to hear that you don't intend to hide that lovely face in a convent. You are looking better than ever—a little too pale, still, perhaps—a little too interesting. Colette will be so glad to see you, for you must let me take you home with me. I shall carry you off, whether you will or not, now I have caught you. We will have a little music just among ourselves, as we had in the good old times—you know, our dear music; you will feel like yourself again. Ah, art—there is nothing to compare with art in this world, my darling!"

Jacqueline yielded without hesitation, only too glad of the unhoped-for good fortune which relieved her from her ennui and her depression. And soon the hired victoria was on its way to that quarter of the city which is made up of streets with geographical names, and seems as if it were intended to lodge all the nations under heaven. It stopped in the Rue de Naples, before a house that was somewhat showy, but which

showed from its outside, that it was not inhabited by high-bred people. There were pink linings to lace curtains at the windows, and quantities

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of green vines drooped from the balconies, as if to attract attention from the passers-by. Madame Strahlberg, with her ostentatious and undulating walk, which caused men to turn and notice her as she went by, went swiftly up the stairs to the second story. She put one finger on the electric bell, which caused two or three little dogs inside to begin barking, and pushed Jacqueline in before her, crying: "Colette! Mamma! See whom I have brought back to you!" Meantime doors were hurriedly opened, quick steps resounded in the antechamber, and the newcomer found herself received with a torrent of affectionate and delighted exclamations, pressed to the ample bosom of Madame Odinska, covered with kisses by Colette, and fawned upon by the three toy terriers, the most sociable of their kind in all Paris, their mistresses declared.

Jacqueline was passing through one of those moments when one is at the mercy of chance, when the heart which has been closed by sorrow suddenly revives, expands, and softens under the influence of a ray of sunshine. Tears came into her eyes, and she murmured:

"My friends—my kind friends!"

"Yes, your friends, whatever happens, now and always," said Colette, eagerly, though she had probably barely given a thought to Jacqueline for eighteen months. Nevertheless, on seeing her, Colette really thought she had not for a moment ceased to be fond of her. "How you have suffered, you poor pussy! We must set to work and make you feel a little gay, at any price. You see, it is our duty. How lucky you came to-day—"

A sign from her sister stopped her.

They carried Jacqueline into a large and handsome salon, full of dust and without curtains, with all the furniture covered up as if the family were on the eve of going to the country. Madame Strahlberg, nevertheless, was not about to leave Paris, her habit being to remain there in the summer, sometimes for months, picnicking as it were, in her own apartment. What was curious, too, was that the chandelier and all the side-lights had fresh wax candles, and seats were arranged as if in preparation for a play, while near the grand piano was a sort of stage, shut off from the rest of the room by screens.

Colette sat down on one of the front row of chairs and cried: "I am the audience—I am all ears." Her sister hurriedly explained all this to Jacqueline, without waiting to be questioned: "We have been giving some little summer entertainments of late, of which you see the remains." She went at once to the piano, and incited Jacqueline to sing by beginning one of their favorite duets, and Jacqueline, once more in her native element, followed her lead. They went on from one song to another, from the light to the severe, from scientific music to mere tunes and airs, turning over the old music-books together.

Page 1887

"Yes, you are a little out of practice, but all you have to do is to rub off the rust. Your voice is finer than ever—just like velvet." And Madame Strahlberg pretended that she envied the fine mezzo-soprano, speaking disparagingly of her own little thread of a voice, which, however, she managed so skilfully. "What a shame to take up your time teaching, with such a voice as that!" she cried; "you are out of your senses, my dear, you are raving mad. It would be sinful to keep your gifts to yourself! I am very sorry to discourage you, but you have none of the requisites for a teacher. The stage would be best for you—'Mon Dieu! why not? You will see La Rochette this evening; she is a person who would give you good advice. I wish she could hear you!"

"But my dear friend, I can not stay," murmured Jacqueline, for those unexpected words "the stage, why not?" rang in her head, made her heart beat fast, and made lights dance before her eyes. "They are expecting me to dine at home."

"At your convent? I beg your pardon, I'll take care of that. Don't you know me? My claws seldom let go of a prize, especially when that prize is worth the keeping. A little telegram has already been sent, with your excuses. The telegraph is good for that, if not for anything else: it facilitates 'impromptus'."

"Long live impromptus," cried out Colette, "there is nothing like them for fun!" And while Jacqueline was trying to get away, not knowing exactly what she was saying, but frightened, pleased, and much excited, Colette went on: "Oh! I am so glad, so glad you came to-day; now you can see the pantomime! I dreamed, wasn't it odd, only last night, that you were acting it with us. How can one help believing in presentiments? Mine are always delightful—and yours?"

"The pantomime?" repeated Jacqueline in bewilderment, "but I thought your sister told me you were all alone."

"How could we have anything like company in August?" said Madame Strahlberg, interrupting her; "why, it would be impossible, there are not four cats in Paris. No, no, we sha'n't have anybody. A few friends possibly may drop in—people passing through Paris—in their travelling-dresses. Nothing that need alarm you. The pantomime Colette talks about is only a pretext that they may hear Monsieur Szmera."

And who was M. Szmera?

Jacqueline soon learned that he was a Hungarian, second half-cousin of a friend of Kossuth, the most wonderful violinist of the day, who had apparently superseded the famous Polish pianist in these ladies' interest and esteem. As for the latter, they had almost forgotten his name, he had behaved so badly.

"But," said Jacqueline, anxiously, "you know I am obliged to be home by ten o'clock."

“Ah! that’s like Cinderella,” laughed Wanda. “Will the stroke of the clock change all the carriages in Paris into pumpkins? One can get ‘fiacres’ at any hour.”

Page 1888

"But it is a fixed rule: I must be in," repeated Jacqueline, growing very uneasy.

"Must you really? Madame Saville says it is very easy to manage those nuns—"

"What? Do you know Madame Saville, who was boarding at the convent last winter?"

"Yes, indeed; she is a countrywoman of ours, a friend, the most charming of women. You will see her here this evening. She has gained her divorce suit—"

"You are mistaken," said Colette, "she has lost it. But that makes no difference. She has got tired of her husband. Come, say 'Yes,' Jacqueline—a nice, dear 'Yes'—you will stay, will you not? Oh, you darling!"

They dined without much ceremony, on the pretext that the cook had been turned off that morning for impertinence, but immediately after dinner there was a procession of boys from a restaurant, bringing whipped creams, iced drinks, fruits, sweetmeats, and champagne—more than would have been wanted at the buffet of a ball. The Prince, they said, had sent these things. What Prince?

As Jacqueline was asking this question, a gentleman came in whose age it would have been impossible to guess, so disguised was he by his black wig, his dyed whiskers, and the soft bloom on his cheeks, all of which were entirely out of keeping with those parts of his face that he could not change. In one of his eyes was stuck a monocle. He was bedizened with several orders, he bowed with military stiffness, and kissed with much devotion the ladies' hands, calling them by titles, whether they had them or not. His foreign accent made it as hard to detect his nationality as it was to know his age. Two or three other gentlemen, not less decorated and not less foreign, afterward came in. Colette named them in a whisper to Jacqueline, but their names were too hard for her to pronounce, much less to remember. One of them, a man of handsome presence, came accompanied by a sort of female ruin, an old lady leaning on a cane, whose head, every time she moved, glittered with jewels, placed in a very lofty erection of curled hair.

"That gentleman's mother is awfully ugly," Jacqueline could not help saying.

"His mother? What, the Countess? She is neither his mother nor his wife. He is her gentleman-in-waiting—that's all. Don't you understand? Well, imagine a man who is a sort of 'gentleman-companion'; he keeps her accounts, he escorts her to the theatre, he gives her his arm. It is a very satisfactory arrangement."

"The gentleman receives a salary, in such a case?" inquired Jacqueline, much amused.

"Why, what do you find in it so extraordinary?" said Colette. "She adores cards, and there he is, always ready to be her partner. Oh, here comes dear Madame Saville!"

There were fresh cries of welcome, fresh exchanges of affectionate diminutives and kisses, which seemed to make the Prince's mouth water. Jacqueline discovered, to her great surprise, that she, too, was a dear friend of Madame Saville's, who called her her good angel, in reference, no doubt, to the letter she had secretly put into the post. At last she said, trying to make her escape from the party: "But it must be nine o'clock."

Page 1889

“Oh! but—you must hear Szmera.”

A handsome young fellow, stoutly built, with heavy eyebrows, a hooked nose, a quantity of hair growing low upon his forehead, and lips that were too red, the perfect type of a Hungarian gypsy, began a piece of his own composition, which had all the ardor of a mild ‘galopade’ and a Satanic hunt, with intervals of dying sweetness, during which the painted skeleton they called the Countess declared that she certainly heard a nightingale warbling in the moonlight.

This charming speech was forthwith repeated by her “umbra” in all parts of the room, which was now nearly filled with people, a mixed multitude, some of whom were frantic about music, others frantic about Wanda Strahlberg. There were artists and amateurs present, and even respectable women, for Madame d’Avrigny, attracted by the odor of a species of Bohemianism, had come to breathe it with delight, under cover of a wish to glean ideas for her next winter’s receptions.

Then again there were women who had been dropped out of society, like Madame de Versanne, who, with her sunken eyes and faded face, was not likely again to pick up in the street a bracelet worth ten thousand francs. There was a literary woman who signed herself Fraisiline, and wrote papers on fashion—she was so painted and bedizened that some one remarked that the principal establishments she praised in print probably paid her in their merchandise. There was a dowager whose aristocratic name appeared daily on the fourth page of the newspapers, attesting the merits of some kind of quack medicine; and a retired opera-singer, who, having been called Zenaide Rochet till she grew up in Montmartre, where she was born, had had a brilliant career as a star in Italy under the name of Zina Rochette. La Rochette’s name, alas! is unknown to the present generation.

In all, there were about twenty persons, who made more noise with their applause than a hundred ordinary guests, for enthusiasm was exacted by Madame Strahlberg. Profiting by the ovation to the Hungarian musician, Jacqueline made a movement toward the door, but just as she reached it she had the misfortune of falling in with her old acquaintance, Nora Sparks, who was at that moment entering with her father. She was forced to sit down again and hear all about Kate’s marriage. Kate had gone back to New York, her husband being an American, but Nora said she had made up her mind not to leave Europe till she had found a satisfactory match.

“You had better make haste about it, if you expect to keep me here,” said Mr. Sparks, with a peculiar expression in his eye. He was eager to get home, having important business to attend to in the West.

“Oh, papa, be quiet! I shall find somebody at Bellagio. Why, darling, are you still in mourning?”



She had forgotten that Jacqueline had lost her father. Probably she would not have thought it necessary to wear black so long for Mr. Sparks. Meantime, Madame Strahlberg and her sister had left the room.

Page 1890

"When are they coming back?" said Jacqueline, growing very nervous. "It seems to me this clock must be wrong. It says half-past nine. I am sure it must be later than that."

"Half-past nine!—why, it is past eleven," replied Miss Nora, with a giggle. "Do you suppose they pay any attention to clocks in this house? Everything here is topsy-turvy."

"Oh! what shall I do?" sighed poor Jacqueline, on the verge of tears.

"Why, do they keep you such a prisoner as that? Can't you come in a little late—"

"They wouldn't open the doors—they never open the doors on any pretext after ten o'clock," cried Jacqueline, beside herself.

"Then your nuns must be savages? You should teach them better."

"Don't be worried, dear little one, you can sleep on this sofa," said Madame Odinska, kindly.

To whom had she not offered that useful sofa? Wanda and Colette were just as ready to propose that others should spend the night with them as, on the smallest pretext, to accept the same hospitality from others. Wanda, indeed, always slept curled up like a cat on a divan, in a fur wrapper, which she put on early in the evening when she wanted to smoke cigarettes. She went to sleep at no regular hour. A bear's skin was placed always within her reach, so that if she were cold she could draw it over her. Jacqueline, not being accustomed to these Polish fashions, did not seem to be much attracted by the offer of the sofa. She blamed herself bitterly for her own folly in having got herself into a scrape which might lead to serious consequences.

But this was neither time nor place for expressions of anxiety; it would be absurd to trouble every one present with her regrets. Besides, the harm was done—it was irreparable—and while she was turning over in her mind in what manner she could explain to the Mother Superior that the mistake about the hour had been no fault of hers—and the Mother Superior, alas! would be sure to make inquiries as to the friends whom she had visited—the magic violin of M. Szmera played its first notes, accompanied by Madame Odinska on the piano, and by a delicious little flute. They played an overture, the dreamy sweetness of which extorted cries of admiration from all the women.

Suddenly, the screens parted, and upon the little platform that represented a stage bounded a sort of anomalous being, supple and charming, in the traditional dress of Pierrot, whom the English vulgarize and call Harlequin. He had white camellias instead of buttons on his loose white jacket, and the bright eyes of Wanda shone out from his red-and-white face. He held a mandolin, and imitated the most charming of serenades,

before a make-believe window, which, being opened by a white, round arm, revealed Colette, dressed as Colombine.

Page 1891

The little pantomime piece was called 'Pierrot in Love'. It consisted of a series of dainty coquetries, sudden quarrels, fits of jealousy, and tender reconciliations, played by the two sisters. Colette with her beauty, Wanda with her talent, her impishness, her graceful and voluptuous attitudes, electrified the spectators, especially in a long monologue, in which Pierrot contemplated suicide, made more effective by the passionate and heart-piercing strains of the Hungarian's violin, so that old Rochette cried out: "What a pity such a wonder should not be upon the stage!" La Rochette, now retired into private life, wearing an old dress, with her gray hair and her black eyes, like those of a watchful crocodile, took the pleasure in the pantomime that all actors do to the very last in everything connected with the theatre. She cried 'brava' in tones that might reach Italy; she blew kisses to the actors in default of flowers.

Madame d'Avrigny was also transported to the sixth heaven, but Jacqueline's presence somewhat marred her pleasure. When she first perceived her she had shown great surprise. "You here, my dear?" she cried, "I thought you safe with our own excellent Giselle."

"Safe, Madame? It seems to me one can be safe anywhere," Jacqueline answered, though she was tempted to say "safe nowhere;" but instead she inquired for Dolly.

Dolly's mother bit her lips and then replied: "You see I have not brought her. Oh, yes, this house is very amusing—but rather too much so. The play was very pretty, and I am sorry it would not do at my house. It is too—too 'risque', you know;" and she rehearsed her usual speech about the great difficulties encountered by a lady who wished to give entertainments and provide amusement for her friends.

Meantime Pierrot, or rather Madame Strahlberg, had leaped over an imaginary barrier and came dancing toward the company, shaking her large sleeves and settling her little snake-like head in her large quilled collar, dragging after her the Hungarian, who seemed not very willing. She presented him to Madame d'Avrigny, hoping that so fashionable a woman might want him to play at her receptions during the winter, and to a journalist who promised to give him a notice in his paper, provided—and here he whispered something to Pierrot, who, smiling, answered neither yes nor no. The sisters kept on their costumes; Colette was enchanting with her bare neck, her long-waisted black velvet corsage, her very short skirt, and a sort of three-cornered hat upon her head. All the men paid court to her, and she accepted their homage, becoming gayer and gayer at every compliment, laughing loudly, possibly that her laugh might exhibit her beautiful teeth.

Wanda, as Pierrot, sang, with her hands in her pockets, a Russian village song: "Ah! Dounai-li moy Dounai" ("Oh! thou, my Danube"). Then she imperiously called Jacqueline to the piano:—"It is your turn now," she said, "most humble violet."

Page 1892

Up to that moment, Jacqueline's deep mourning had kept the gentlemen present from addressing her, though she had been much stared at. Although she did not wish to sing, for her heart was heavy as she thought of the troubles that awaited her the next day at the convent, she sang what was asked of her without resistance or pretension. Then, for the first time, she experienced the pride of triumph. Szmera, though he was furious at not being the sole lion of the evening, complimented her, bowing almost to the ground, with one hand on his heart; Madame Rochette assured her that she had a fortune in her throat whenever she chose to seek it; persons she had never seen and who did not know her name, pressed her hands fervently, saying that her singing was adorable. All cried "Encore," "Encore!" and, yielding to the pleasure of applause, she thought no more of the flight of time. Dawn was peeping through the windows when the party broke up.

"What kind people!" thought the debutante, whom they had encouraged and applauded; "some perhaps are a little odd, but how much cordiality and warmth there is among them! It is catching. This is the sort of atmosphere in which talent should live."

Being very much fatigued, she fell asleep upon the offered sofa, half-pleased, half-frightened, but with two prominent convictions: one, that she was beginning to return to life; the other, that she stood on the edge of a precipice. In her dreams old Rochette appeared to her, her face like that of an affable frog, her dress the dress of Pierrot, and she croaked out, in a variety of tones: "The stage! Why not? Applauded every night—it would be glorious!" Then she seemed in her dream to be falling, falling down from a great height, as one falls from fairyland into stern reality. She opened her eyes: it was noon. Madame Odinska was waiting for her: she intended herself to take her to the convent, and for that purpose had assumed the imposing air of a noble matron.

Alas! it was in vain! Jacqueline, was made to understand that such an infraction of the rules could not be overlooked. To pass the night without leave out of the convent, and not with her own family, was cause for expulsion. Neither the prayers nor the anger of Madame Odinska had any power to change the sentence. While the Mother Superior calmly pronounced her decree, she was taking the measure of this stout foreigner who appeared in behalf of Jacqueline, a woman overdressed, yet at the same time shabby, who had a far from well-bred or aristocratic air. "Out of consideration for Madame de Talbrun," she said, "the convent consents to keep Mademoiselle de Nailles a few days longer—a few weeks perhaps, until she can find some other place to go. That is all we can do for her."

Jacqueline listened to this sentence as she might have watched a game of dice when her fate hung on the result, but she showed no emotion. "Now," she thought, "my fate has been decided; respectable people will have nothing more to do with me. I will go with the others, who, perhaps, after all are not worse, and who most certainly are more amusing."

Page 1893

A fortnight after this, Madame de Nailles, having come back to Paris, from some watering-place, was telling Marien that Jacqueline had started for Bellagio with Mr. and Miss Sparks, the latter having taken a notion that she wanted that kind of chaperon who is called a companion in England and America.

"But they are of the same age," said Marien.

"That is just what Miss Sparks wants. She does not wish to be hampered by an elderly chaperon, but to be accompanied, as she would have been by her sister."

"Jacqueline will be exposed to see strange things; how could you have consented—"

"Consented? As if she cared for my consent! And then she manages to say such irritating things as soon as one attempts to blame her or advise her. For example, this is one of them: 'Don't you suppose,' she said to me, 'that every one will take the most agreeable chance that offers for a visit to Italy?' What do you think of that allusion? It closed my lips absolutely."

"Perhaps she did not mean what you think she meant."

"Do you think so? And when I warned her against Madame Strahlberg, saying that she might set her a very bad example, she answered: 'I may have had worse.' I suppose that was not meant for impertinence either!"

"I don't know," said Hubert Marien, biting his lips doubtfully, "but—"

He was silent a few moments, his head drooped on his breast, he was in some painful reverie.

"Go on. What are you thinking about?" asked Madame de Nailles, impatiently.

"I beg your pardon. I was only thinking that a certain responsibility might rest on those who have made that young girl what she is."

"I don't understand you," said the stepmother, with an impatient gesture. "Who can do anything to counteract a bad disposition? You don't deny that hers is bad? She is a very devil for pride and obstinacy—she has no affection—she has proved it. I have no inclination to get myself wounded by trying to control her."

"Then you prefer to let her ruin herself?"

"I should prefer not to give the world a chance to talk, by coming to an open rupture with her, which would certainly be the case if I tried to contradict her. After all, the Sparks and Madame Odinska are not yet put out of the pale of good society, and she knew



them long ago. An early intimacy may be a good explanation if people blame her for going too far—”

“So be it, then; if you are satisfied it is not for me to say anything,” replied Marien, coldly.

“Satisfied? I am not satisfied with anything or anybody,” said Madame de Nailles, indignantly. “How could I be satisfied; I never have met with anything but ingratitude.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE SAILOR’S RETURN

Page 1894

Madame D'Argy did not leave her son in ignorance of all the freaks and follies of Jacqueline. He knew every particular of the wrong-doings and the imprudences of his early friend, and even the additions made to them by calumny, ever since the fit of independence which, after her father's death, had led her to throw off all control. She told of her sudden departure from Fresne, where she might have found so safe a refuge with her friend and cousin. Then had not her own imprudence and coquetry led to a rupture with the families of d'Etaples and Ray? She told of the scandalous intimacy with Madame Strahlberg; of her expulsion from the convent, where they had discovered, even before she left, that she had been in the habit of visiting undesirable persons; and finally she informed him that Jacqueline had gone to Italy with an old Yankee and his daughter—he being a man, it was said, who had laid the foundation of his colossal fortune by keeping a bar-room in a mining camp in California. This last was no fiction, the cut of Mr. Sparks's beard and his unpolished manners left no doubt on the subject; and she wound up by saying that Madame d'Avrigny, whom no one could accuse of ill-nature, had been grieved at meeting this unhappy girl in very improper company, among which she seemed quite in her element, like a fish in water. It was said also that she was thinking of studying for the stage with La Rochette—M. de Talbrun had heard it talked about in the foyer of the Opera by an old Prince from some foreign country—she could not remember his name, but he was praising Madame Strahlberg without any reserve as the most delightful of Parisiennes. Thereupon Talbrun had naturally forbidden his wife to have anything to do with Jacqueline, or even to write to her. Fat Oscar, though he was not all that he ought to be himself, had some very strict notions of propriety. No one was more particular about family relations, and really in this case no one could blame him; but Giselle had been very unhappy, and to the very last had tried to stand up for her unhappy friend. Having told him all this, she added, she would say no more on the subject.

Giselle was a model woman in everything, in tact, in goodness, in good sense, and she was very attentive to the poor old mother of Fred, who but for her must have died long ago of loneliness and sorrow. Thereupon ensued the poor lady's usual lamentations over the long, long absence of her beloved son; as usual, she told him she did not think she should live to see him back again; she gave him a full account of her maladies, caused, or at least aggravated, by her mortal, constant, incurable sorrow; and she told how Giselle had been nursing her with all the patience and devotion of a Sister of Charity. Through all Madame d'Argy's letters at this period the angelic figure of Giselle was contrasted with the very different one of that young and incorrigible little devil of a Jacqueline.

Page 1895

Fred at first believed his mother's stories were all exaggeration, but the facts were there, corroborated by the continued silence of the person concerned. He knew his mother to be too good wilfully to blacken the character of one whom for years she had hoped would be her daughter-in-law, the only child of her best friend, the early love of her son. But by degrees he fancied that the love so long living at the bottom of his heart was slowly dying, that it had been extinguished, that nothing remained of it but remembrance, such remembrance as we retain for dead things, a remembrance without hope, whose weight added to the homesickness which with him was increasing every day.

There was no active service to enable him to endure exile. The heroic period of the war had passed. Since a treaty of peace had been signed with China, the fleet, which had distinguished itself in so many small engagements and bombardments, had had nothing to do but to mount guard, as it were, along a conquered coast. All round it in the bay, where it lay at anchor, rose mountains of strange shapes, which seemed to shut it into a kind of prison. This feeling of nothing to be done—of nothing likely to be done, worked in Fred's head like a nightmare. The only thing he thought of was how he could escape, when could he once more kiss the faded cheeks of his mother, who often, when he slept or lay wakeful during the long hours of the siesta, he saw beside him in tears. Hers was the only face that he recalled distinctly; to her and to her only were devoted his long reveries when on watch; that time when he formerly composed his love verses, tender or angry, or full of despair. That was all over! A sort of mournful resignation had succeeded his bursts of excited feeling, his revolt against his fate.

This was Fred's state of mind when he received orders to return home—orders as unexpected as everything seems to be in the life of a naval man. "I am going back to her!" he cried. Her was his mother, her was France. All the rest had disappeared as if into a fog. Jacqueline was a phantom of the past; so many things had happened since the old times when he had loved her. He had crossed the Indian Ocean and the China Sea; he had seen long stretches of interminable coast-line; he had beheld misery, and glory, and all the painful scenes that wait on warfare; he had seen pestilence, and death in every shape, and all this had wrought in him a sort of stoicism, the result of long acquaintance with solitude and danger. He remembered his old love as a flower he had once admired as he passed it, a treacherous flower, with thorns that had wounded him. There are flowers that are beneficent, and flowers that are poisonous, and the last are sometimes the most beautiful. They should not be blamed, he thought; it was their nature to be hurtful; but it was well to pass them by and not to gather them.



Page 1896

By the time he had debarked Fred had made up his mind to let his mother choose a wife for him, a daughter-in-law suited to herself, who would give her the delight of grandchildren, who would bring them up well, and who would not weary of Lizerolles. But a week later the idea of this kind of marriage had gone out of his head, and this change of feeling was partly owing to Giselle. Giselle gave him a smile of welcome that went to his heart, for that poor heart, after all, was only waiting for a chance again to give itself away. She was with Madame d'Argy, who had not been well enough to go to the sea-coast to meet her son, and he saw at the same moment the pale and aged face which had visited him at Tonquin in his dreams, and a fair face that he had never before thought so beautiful, more oval than he remembered it, with blue eyes soft and tender, and a mouth with a sweet infantine expression of sincerity and goodness. His mother stretched out her trembling arms, gave a great cry, and fainted away.

"Don't be alarmed; it is only joy," said Giselle, in her soft voice.

And when Madame d'Argy proved her to be right by recovering very quickly, overwhelming her son with rapid questions and covering him with kisses, Giselle held out her hand to him and said:

"I, too, am very glad you have come home."

"Oh!" cried the sick woman in her excitement, "you must kiss your old playfellow!"

Giselle blushed a little, and Fred, more embarrassed than she, lightly touched with his lips her pretty smooth hair which shone upon her head like a helmet of gold. Perhaps it was this new style of hairdressing which made her seem so much more beautiful than he remembered her, but it seemed to him he saw her for the first time; while, with the greatest eagerness, notwithstanding Giselle's attempts to interrupt her, Madame d'Argy repeated to her son all she owed to that dear friend "her own daughter, the best of daughters, the most patient, the most devoted of daughters, could not have done more! Ah! if there only could be found another one like her!"

Whereupon the object of all these praises made her escape, disclaiming everything.

Why, after this, should she have hesitated to come back to Lizerolles every day, as of late had been her custom? Men know so little about taking care of sick people. So she came, and was present at all the rejoicings and all the talks that followed Fred's return. She took her part in the discussions about Fred's future. "Help me, my pet," said Madame d'Argy, "help me to find a wife for him: all we ask is that she should be like you."

In answer to which Fred declared, half-laughing and half-seriously, that that was his ideal.



She did not believe much of this, but, following her natural instinct, she assumed the dangerous task of consolation, until, as Madame d'Argy grew better, she discontinued her daily visits, and Fred, in his turn, took a habit of going over to Fresne without being invited, and spending there a good deal of his time.

Page 1897

"Don't send me away. You who are always charitable," he said. "If you only knew what a pleasure a Parisian conversation is after coming from Tonquin!"

"But I am so little of a Parisienne, or at least what you mean by that term, and my conversation is not worth coming for," objected Giselle.

In her extreme modesty she did not realize how much she had gained in intellectual culture. Women left to themselves have time to read, and Giselle had done this all the more because she had considered it a duty. Must she not know enough to instruct and superintend the education of her son? With much strong feeling, yet with much simplicity, she spoke to Fred of this great task, which sometimes frightened her; he gave her his advice, and both discussed together the things that make up a good man. Giselle brought up frequently the subject of heredity: she named no one, but Fred could see that she had a secret terror lest Enguerrand, who in person was very like his father, might also inherit his character. Fears on this subject, however, appeared unfounded. There was nothing about the child that was not good; his tastes were those of his mother. He was passionately fond of Fred, climbing on his lap as soon as the latter arrived and always maintaining that he, too, wanted a pretty red ribbon to wear in his buttonhole, a ribbon only to be got by sailing far away over the seas, like sailors.

"A sailor! Heaven forbid!" cried Madame de Talbrun.

"Oh! sailors come back again. He has come back. Couldn't he take me away with him soon? I have some stories about cabin-boys who were not much older than I."

"Let us hope that your friend Fred won't go away," said Giselle. "But why do you wish to be a cabinboy?"

"Because I want to go away with him, if he does not stay here—because I like him," answered Enguerrand in a tone of decision.

Hereupon Giselle kissed her boy with more than usual tenderness. He would not take to the hunting-field, she thought, the boulevard, and the corps de ballet. She would not lose him. "But, oh, Fred!" she cried, "it is not to be wondered at that he is so fond of you! You spoil him! You will be a devoted father some day; your vocation is evidently for marriage."

She thought, in thus speaking, that she was saying what Madame d'Argy would like her to say.

"In the matter of children, I think your son is enough for me," he said, one day; "and as for marriage, you would not believe how all women—I mean all the young girls among whom I should have to make a choice—are indifferent to me. My feeling almost amounts to antipathy."

For the first time she ventured to say: "Do you still care for Jacqueline?"

"About as much as she cares for me," he answered, dryly. "No, I made a mistake once, and that has made me cautious for the future."

Another day he said:

"I know now who was the woman I ought to have loved."

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Giselle did not look up; she was devoting all her attention to Enguerrand.

Fred held certain theories which he used to talk about. He believed in a high, spiritual, disinterested affection which would raise a man above himself, making him more noble, inspiring a disgust for all ignoble pleasures. The woman willing to accept such homage might do anything she pleased with a heart that would be hers alone. She would be the lady who presided over his life, for whose sake all good deeds and generous actions would be done, the idol, higher than a wife or any object of earthly passion, the White Angel whom poets have sung.

Giselle pretended that she did not understand him, but she was divinely happy. This, then, was the reward of her spotless life! She was the object of a worship no less tender than respectful. Fred spoke of the woman he ought to have loved as if he meant to say, "I love you;" he pressed his lips on the auburn curls of little Enguerrand where his mother had just kissed him. Day after day he seemed more attracted to that salon where, dressed with more care than she had ever dressed before, she expected him. Then awoke in her the wish to please, and she was beautiful with that beauty which is not the insipid beauty of St. Agnes, but that which, superior to all other, is seen when the face reflects the soul. All that winter there was a new Giselle—a Giselle who passed away again among the shadows, a Giselle of whom everybody said, even her husband, "Ma foi! but she is beautiful!" Oscar de Talbrun, as he made this remark, never thought of wondering why she was more beautiful. He was ready to take offense and was jealous by nature, but he was perfectly sure of his wife, as he had often said. As to Fred, the idea of being jealous of him would never have entered his mind. Fred was a relative and was admitted to all the privileges of a cousin or a brother; besides, he was a fellow of no consequence in any way.

While this platonic attachment grew stronger and stronger between Fred and Giselle, assisted by the innocent complicity of little Enguerrand, Jacqueline was discovering how hard it is for a girl of good birth, if she is poor, to carry out her plans of honest independence. Possibly she had allowed herself to be too easily misled by the title of "companion," which, apparently more cordial than that of 'demoiselle de compagnie', means in reality the same thing—a sort of half-servile position.

Money is a touchstone which influences all social relations, especially when on one side there is a somewhat morbid susceptibility, and on the other a lack of good breeding and education. The Sparks, father and daughter, Americans of the lower class, though willing to spend any number of dollars for their own pleasure, expected that every penny they disbursed should receive its full equivalent in service; the place therefore offered so gracefully and spontaneously to Mademoiselle de Nailles was far from being a sinecure.

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Jacqueline received her salary on the same footing as Justine, the Parisian maid, received her wages, for, although her position was apparently one of much greater importance and consideration than Justine's, she was really at the beck and call of a girl who, while she called her "darling," gave her orders and paid her for her services. Very often Miss Nora asked her to sew, on the plea that she was as skilful with her fingers as a fairy, but in reality that her employer might feel the superiority of her own position.

Hitherto Miss Nora had been delighted to meet at watering-places a friend of whom she could say proudly, "She is a representative of the old nobility of France" (which was not true, by the way, for the title of Baron borne by M. de Nailles went no farther back than the days of Louis XVIII); and she was still more proud to think that she was now waited on by this same daughter of a nobleman, when her own father had kept a drinking-saloon. She did not acknowledge this feeling to herself, and would certainly have maintained that she never had had such an idea, but it existed all the same, and she was under its influence, being very vain and rather foolish. And, indeed, Jacqueline, would have been very willing to plan trimmings and alter finery from morning to night in her own chamber in a hotel, exactly as Mademoiselle Justine did, if she could by this means have escaped the special duties of her difficult position, which duties were to follow Miss Nora everywhere, like her own shadow, to be her confidant and to act sometimes as her screen, or even as her accomplice, in matters that occasionally involved risks, and were never to her liking.

The young American girl had already said to her father, when he asked her to give up her search for an entirely satisfactory European suitor, which search he feared might drag on forever without any results: "Oh! I shall be sure to find him at Bellagio!" And she made up her mind that there he was to be sought and found at any price. Hotel life offered her opportunities to exercise her instincts for flirtation, for there she met many specimens of men she called chic, with a funny little foreign accent, which seemed to put new life into the wornout word. Twenty times a day she baited her hook, and twenty times a day some fish would bite, or at least nibble, according as he was a fortune-hunter or a dilettante. Miss Nora, being incapable of knowing the difference, was ready to capture good or bad, and went about dragging her slaves at her chariot-wheels. Sometimes she took them rowing, with the Stars and Stripes floating over her boat, by moonlight; sometimes she drove them recklessly in a drag through roads bordered by olive-groves and vineyards; all these expeditions being undertaken under-pretence of admiring the romantic scenery. Her father was not disposed to interfere with what he called "a little harmless dissipation." He was confident his daughter's "companion"

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must know what was proper, she being, as he said, accustomed to good society. Were not all Italian ladies attended by gentlemen? Who could blame a young girl for amusing herself? Meantime Mr. Sparks amused himself after his own fashion, which was to sit comfortably, with his feet up on the piazza rail of the hotel, imbibing strong iced drinks through straws. But in reality Jacqueline had no power whatever to preserve propriety, and only compromised herself by her associations, though her own conduct was irreproachable. Indeed she was considered quite prudish, and the rest of the mad crowd laughed at her for having the manners of a governess. In vain she tried to say words of warning to Nora; what she said was laughed at or resented in a tone that told her that a paid companion had not the right to speak as frankly as a friend.

Her business, she was plainly told one day, was to be on the spot in case any impertinent suitor should venture too far in a *tete-a-tete*, but short of that she was not to “spoilsport.” “I am not doing anything wrong; it is allowable in America,” was Miss Nora’s regular speech on such occasions, and Jacqueline could not dispute the double argument. Nora’s conduct was not wicked, and in America such things might be allowed. Yet Jacqueline tried to demonstrate that a young girl can not pass unscathed through certain adventures, even if they are innocent in the strict sense of the word; which made Nora cry out that all she said was subterfuge and that she had no patience with prejudices.

In vain her young companion pointed out to her charge that other Americans at Bellagio seemed far from approving her conduct. American ladies of a very different class, who were staying at the hotel, held aloof from her, and treated her with marked coldness whenever they met; declaring that her manners would be as objectionable in her own country, in good society, as they were in Italy.

But Miss Sparks was not to be put down by any argument. “Bah! they are stuck-up Bostonians. And do you know, Jacqueline, you are getting very tiresome? You were faster yourself than I when we were the Blue Band at Treport.”

Nora’s admirers, sometimes encouraged, sometimes snubbed, when treated cavalierly by this young lady, would occasionally pay court to the ‘*demoiselle de compagnie*’, who indeed was well worth their pains; but, to their surprise, the subordinate received their attentions with great coldness. Having entered her protest against what was going on, and having resisted the contagion of example, it was natural she should somewhat exaggerate her prudery, for it is hard to hit just the right point in such reaction. The result was, she made herself so disagreeable to Miss Sparks that the latter determined on getting rid of her as tactfully as possible.

Their parting took place on the day after an excursion to the Villa Sommariva, where Miss Sparks and her little court had behaved with their usual noise and rudeness. They

had gone there ostensibly to see the pictures, about which none of them cared anything, for Nora, wherever she was, never liked any one to pay attention to anybody or to look at anything but her own noisy, all-pervading self.



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It so happened that at the most riotous moment of the picnic an old gentleman passed near the lively crowd. He was quite inoffensive, pleasant-mannered, and walked leaning on his cane, yet, had the statue of the Commander in Don Juan suddenly appeared it could not have produced such consternation as his presence did on Jacqueline, when, after a moment's hesitation, he bowed to her. She recognized in him a friend of Madame d'Argy, M. Martel, whom she had often met at her house in Paris and at Lizerolles. When he recognized her, she fancied she had seen pass over his face a look of painful surprise. He would surely tell how he had met her; what would her old friends think of her? What would Fred? For some time past she had thought more than ever before of what Fred would think of her. The more she grew disgusted with the men she met, the more she appreciated his good qualities, and the more she thought of the honest, faithful love he had offered her—love that she had so madly thrown away. She never should meet such love again, she thought. It was the idea of how Fred would blame her when he heard what she pictured to herself the old gentleman would say of her, that suddenly decided her to leave Bellagio.

She told Mr. Sparks that evening that she was not strong enough for such duties as were required of a companion.

He looked at her with pity and annoyance.

"I should have thought you had more energy. How do you expect to live by work if you are not strong enough for pleasure?"

"Pleasure needs strength as well as labor," she said, smiling; "I would rather work in the fields than go on amusing myself as I have been doing."

"My dear, you must not be so difficult to please. When people have to earn their bread, it is a bad plan. I am afraid you will find out before long that there are harder ways of making a living than lunching, dancing, walking, and driving from morning to night in a pretty country—"

Here Mr. Sparks began to laugh as he thought of all he had had to do, without making objections, in the Far West, in the heroic days of his youthful vigor. He was rather fond of recalling how he had carried his pick on his shoulder and his knife in his belt, with two Yankee sayings in his head, and little besides for baggage: "Muscle and pluck!—Muscle and pluck!" and "Go ahead for ever!" That was the sort of thing to be done when a man or a woman had not a cent.

And now, what was Jacqueline to do next? She reflected that in a very short time she had attempted many things. It seemed to her that all she could do now was to follow the advice which, when first given her by Madame Strahlberg, had frightened her, though she had found it so attractive. She would study with Madame Rochette; she would go to the Milan Conservatory, and as soon as she came of age she would go

upon the stage, under a feigned name, of course, and in a foreign country. She would prove to the world, she said

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to herself, that the career of an actress is compatible with self-respect. This resolve that she would never be found wanting in self-respect held a prominent place in all her plans, as she began to understand better those dangers in life which are for the most part unknown to young girls born in her social position. Jacqueline's character, far from being injured by her trials and experiences, had gained in strength. She grew firmer as she gained in knowledge. Never had she been so worthy of regard and interest as at the very time when her friends were saying sadly to themselves, "She is going to the bad," and when, from all appearances, they were right in this conclusion.

CHAPTER XVII

TWIN DEVILS

Jacqueline came to the conclusion that she had better seriously consult Madame Strahlberg. She therefore stopped at Monaco, where this friend, whom she intended to honor with the strange office of Mentor, was passing the winter in a little villa in the Condamine quarter—a cottage surrounded by roses and laurel-bushes, painted in soft colors and looking like a plaything.

Madame Strahlberg had already urged Jacqueline to come and make acquaintance with her "paradise," without giving her any hint of the delights of that paradise, from which that of gambling was not excluded, for Madame Strahlberg was eager for any kind of excitement. Roulette now occupied with her a large part of every night—indeed, her nights had been rarely given to slumber, for her creed was that morning is the time for sleep, for which reason they never took breakfast in the pink villa, but tea, cakes, and confectionery were eaten instead at all hours until the evening. Thus it happened very often that they had no dinner, and guests had to accommodate themselves to the strange ways of the family. Jacqueline, however, did not stay long enough to know much of those ways.

She arrived, poor thing, with weary wing, like some bird, who, escaping from the fowler's net, where it has left its feathers, flies straight to the spot where a sportsman lies ready to shoot it. She was received with the same cries of joy, the same kisses, the same demonstrations of affection, as those which, the summer before, had welcomed her to the Rue de Naples. They told her she could sleep on a sofa, exactly like the one on which she had passed that terrible night which had resulted in her expulsion from the convent; and it was decided that she must stay several days, at least, before she went on to Paris, to begin the life of hard study and courageous work which would make of her a great singer.



Tired?—No, she was hardly tired at all. The journey over the enchanting road of the Corniche had awakened in her a fervor of admiration which prevented her from feeling any bodily needs, and now she seemed to have reached fairyland, where the verdure of the tropics was like the hanging gardens of Babylon, only those had never had a mirror to reflect back their ancient, far-famed splendor, like that before her eyes, as she looked down upon the Mediterranean, with the sun setting in the west in a sky all crimson and gold.

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Notwithstanding the disorder of her travelling-dress, Jacqueline allowed her friend to take her straight from the railway station to the Terrace of Monte Carlo. She fell into ecstasies at sight of the African cacti, the century plants, and the fig-trees of Barbary, covering the low walls whence they looked down into the water; at the fragrance of the evergreens that surrounded the beautiful palace with its balustrades, dedicated to all the worst passions of the human race; with the sharp rocky outline of Turbia; with an almost invisible speck on the horizon which they said was Corsica; with everything, which, whether mirage or reality, lifted her out of herself, and plunged her into that state of excited happiness and indescribable sense of bodily comfort, which exterior impressions so easily produce upon the young.

After exhausting her vocabulary in exclamations and in questions, she stood silent, watching the sun as it sank beneath the waters, thinking that life is well worth living if it can give us such glorious spectacles, notwithstanding all the difficulties that may have to be passed through. Several minutes elapsed before she turned her radiant face and dazzled eyes toward Wanda, or rather toward the spot where Wanda had been standing beside her. "Oh! my dear—how beautiful!" she murmured with a long sigh.

The sigh was echoed by a man, who for a few moments had looked at her with as much admiration as she had looked at the landscape. He answered her by saying, in a low voice, the tones of which made her tremble from head to foot:

"Jacqueline!"

"Monsieur de Cymier!"

The words slipped through her lips as they suddenly turned pale. She had an instinctive, sudden persuasion that she had been led into a snare. If not, why was Madame Strahlberg now absorbed in conversation with three other persons at some little distance.

"Forgive me—you did not expect to see me—you seem quite startled," said the young man, drawing near her. With an effort she commanded herself and looked full in his face. Her anger rose. She had seen the same look in the ugly, brutal face of Oscar de Talbrun. From the Terrace of Monte Carlo her memory flew back to a country road in Normandy, and she clenched her hand round an imaginary riding-whip. She needed coolness and she needed courage. They came as if by miracle.

"It is certain, Monsieur," she answered, slowly, "that I did not expect to meet you here."

"Chance has had pity on me," he replied, bowing low, as she had set him the example of ceremony.

But he had no idea of losing time in commonplace remarks—he wished to take up their intimacy on the terms it had been formerly, to resume the romance he himself had interrupted.

“I knew,” he said in the same low voice, full of persuasion, which gave especial meaning to his words, “I knew that, after all, we should meet again.”

“I did not expect it,” said Jacqueline, haughtily.

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"Because you do not believe in the magnetism of a fixed desire."

"No, I do not believe any such thing, when, opposed to such a desire, there is a strong, firm will," said Jacqueline, her eyes burning.

"Ah!" he murmured, and he might have been supposed to be really moved, so much his look changed, "do not abuse your power over me—do not make me wretched; if you could only understand—"

She made a swift movement to rejoin Madame Strahlberg, but that lady was already coming toward them with the same careless ease with which she had left them together.

"Well! you have each found an old acquaintance," she said, gayly. "I beg your pardon, my loveliest, but I had to speak to some old friends, and ask them to join us to-morrow evening. We shall sup at the restaurant of the Grand Hotel, after the opera—for, I did not tell you before, you will have the good luck to hear Patti. Monsieur de Cymier, we shall expect you. Au revoir."

He had been on the point of asking leave to walk home with them. But there was something in Jacqueline's look, and in her stubborn silence, that deterred him. He thought it best to leave a skilful advocate to plead his cause before he continued a conversation which had not begun satisfactorily. Not that Gerard de Cymier was discouraged by the behavior of Jacqueline. He had expected her to be angry at his defection, and that she would make him pay for it; but a little skill on his part, and a little credulity on hers, backed by the intervention of a third party, might set things right.

One moment he lingered to look at her, admiring her as she stood in the light of the dying sun, as beautiful in her plain dress and her indignant paleness, while she looked far out to sea, that she might not be obliged to look at him, as she had been when he had known her in prosperity.

At that moment he knew she hated him, but it would be an additional delight to overcome that feeling.

The two women, when he left them, continued walking on the terrace side by side, without a word. Wanda watched her companion out of the corners of her eyes, and hummed an air to herself to break the silence. She saw a storm gathering under Jacqueline's black eyebrows, and knew that sharp arrows were likely to shoot forth from those lips which several times had opened, though not a word had been uttered, probably through fear of saying too little or too much.

At last she made some trifling comment on the view, explaining something about pigeon-shooting.

"Wanda," interrupted Jacqueline, "did you not know what happened once?"

“Happened, how? About what?” asked Madame Strahlberg, with an air of innocence.

“I am speaking of the way Monsieur de Cymier treated me.”

“Bah! He was in love with you. Who didn’t know it? Every one could see that. It was all the more reason why you should have been glad to meet him.”

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"He did not act as if he were much in love," said Jacqueline.

"Because he went away when your family thought he was about to make his formal proposal? Not all men are marrying men, my dear, nor have all women that vocation. Men fall in love all the same."

"Do you think, then, that when a man knows he has no intention of marrying he should pay court to a young girl? I think I told you at the time that he had paid court to me, and that he afterward—how shall I say it?—basely deserted me."

The sharp and thrilling tone in which Jacqueline said this amused Madame Strahlberg.

"What big words, my dear! No, I don't remember that you ever said anything of the sort to me before. But you are wrong. As we grow older we lay aside harsh judgments and sharp words. They do no good. In your place I should be touched by the thought that a man so charming had been faithful to me."

"Faithful!" cried Jacqueline, her dark eyes flashing into the cat-like eyes of Madame Strahlberg.

Wanda looked down, and fastened a ribbon at her waist.

"Ever since we have been here," she said, "he has been talking of you."

"Really—for how long?"

"Oh, if you must know, for the last two weeks."

"It is just a fortnight since you wrote and asked me to stay with you," said Jacqueline, coldly and reproachfully.

"Oh, well—what's the harm? Suppose I did think your presence would increase the attractions of Monaco?"

"Why did you not tell me?"

"Because I never write a word more than is necessary; you know how lazy I am. And also because, I may as well confess, it might have scared you off, you are so sensitive."

"Then you meant to take me by surprise?" said Jacqueline, in the same tone.

"Oh! my dear, why do you try to quarrel with me?" replied Madame Strahlberg, stopping suddenly and looking at her through her eyeglass. "We may as well understand what you mean by a free and independent life."



And thereupon ensued an address to which Jacqueline listened, leaning one hand on a balustrade of that enchanted garden, while the voice of the serpent, as she thought, was ringing in her ears. Her limbs shook under her—her brain reeled. All her hopes of success as a singer on the stage Madame Strahlberg swept away, as not worth a thought. She told her that, in her position, had she meant to be too scrupulous, she should have stayed in the convent. Everything to Jacqueline seemed to dance before her eyes. The evening closed around them, the light died out, the landscape, like her life, had lost its glow. She uttered a brief prayer for help, such a prayer as she had prayed in infancy. She whispered it in terror, like a cry in extreme danger. She was more frightened by Wanda's wicked words than she had been by M. de Talbrun or by M. de Cymier. She ceased to know what she was saying till the last words, "You have good sense and you will think about it," met her ear.

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Jacqueline said not a word.

Wanda took her arm. "You may be sure," she said, "that I am thinking only of your good. Come! Would you like to go into the Casino and look at the pictures? No, you are tired? You can see them some evening. The ballroom holds a thousand persons. Yes, if you prefer, we will go home. You can take a nap till dinner-time. We shall dine at eight o'clock."

Conversation languished till they reached the Villa Rosa. Notwithstanding Jacqueline's efforts to appear natural, her own voice rang in her ears in tones quite new to her, a laugh that she uttered without any occasion, and which came near resulting in hysterics. Yet she had power enough over her nerves to notice the surroundings as she entered the house. At the door of the room in which she was to sleep, and which was on the first story, Madame Strahlberg kissed her with one of those equivocal smiles which so long had imposed on her simplicity.

"Till eight o'clock, then."

"Till eight o'clock," repeated Jacqueline, passively.

But when eight o'clock came she sent word that she had a severe headache, and would try to sleep it off.

Suppose, she thought, M. de Cymier should have been asked to dinner; suppose she should be placed next to him at table? Anything in that house seemed possible now.

They brought her a cup of tea. Up to a late hour she heard a confused noise of music and laughter. She did not try to sleep. All her faculties were on the alert, like those of a prisoner who is thinking of escape. She knew what time the night trains left the station, and, abandoning her trunk and everything else that she had with her, she furtively—but ready, if need were, to fight for her liberty with the strength of desperation—slipped down the broad stairs over their thick carpet and pushed open a little glass door. Thank heaven! people came in and went out of that house as if it had been a mill. No one discovered her flight till the next morning, when she was far on her way to Paris in an express train. Modeste, quite unprepared for her young mistress's arrival, was amazed to see her drop down upon her, feverish and excited, like some poor hunted animal, with strength exhausted. Jacqueline flung herself into her nurse's arms as she used to do when, as a little girl, she was in what she fancied some great trouble, and she cried: "Oh, take me in—pray take me in! Keep me safe! Hide me!" And then she told Modeste everything, speaking rapidly and disconnectedly, thankful to have some one to whom she could open her heart. In default of Modeste she would have spoken to stone walls.



“And what will you do now, my poor darling?” asked the old nurse, as soon as she understood that her young lady had come back to her, “with weary foot and broken wing,” from what she had assured her on her departure would be a brilliant excursion.

“Oh! I don’t know,” answered Jacqueline, in utter discouragement; “I am too worn out to think or to do anything. Let me rest; that is all.”

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"Why don't you go to see your stepmother?"

"My stepmother? Oh, no! She is at the bottom of all that has happened to me."

"Or Madame d'Argy? Or Madame de Talbrun? Madame de Talbrun is the one who would give you good advice."

Jacqueline shook her head with a sad smile.

"Let me stay here. Don't you remember—years ago—but it seems like yesterday—all the rest is like a nightmare—how I used to hide myself under your petticoats, and you would say, going on with your knitting: 'You see she is not here; I can't think where she can be.' Hide me now just like that, dear old Modeste. Only hide me."

And Modeste, full of heartfelt pity, promised to hide her "dear child" from every one, which promise, however, did not prevent her, for she was very self-willed, from going, without Jacqueline's knowledge, to see Madame de Talbrun and tell her all that had taken place. She was hurt and amazed at her reception by Giselle, and at her saying, without any offer of help or words of sympathy, "She has only reaped what she has sown." Giselle would have been more than woman had not Fred, and a remembrance of the wrongs that he had suffered through Jacqueline, now stood between them. For months he had been the prime object in her life; her mission of comforter had brought her the greatest happiness she had ever known. She tried to make him turn his attention to some serious work in life; she wanted to keep him at home, for his mother's sake, she thought; she fancied she had inspired him with a taste for home life. If she had examined herself she might have discovered that the task she had undertaken of doing good to this young man was not wholly for his sake but partly for her own. She wanted to see him nearly every day and to occupy a place in his life ever larger and larger. But for some time past the conscientious Giselle had neglected the duty of strict self-examination. She was thankful to be happy—and though Fred was a man little given to self-flattery in his relations with women, he could not but be pleased at the change produced in her by her intercourse with him.

But while Fred and Giselle considered themselves as two friends trying to console each other, people had begun to talk about them. Even Madame d'Argy asked herself whether her son might not have escaped from the cruel claws of a young coquette of the new school to fall into a worse scrape with a married woman. She imagined what might happen if the jealousy of "that wild boar of an Oscar de Talbrun" were aroused; the dangers, far more terrible than the perils of the sea, that might in such a case await her only son, the child for whose safety her mother-love caused her to suffer perpetual torments. "O mothers! mothers!" she often said to herself, "how much they are to be pitied. And they are very blind. If Fred must get into danger and difficulty for any woman, it should not have been for Giselle de Talbrun."

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CHAPTER XVIII

"An affair of honor"

A meeting took place yesterday at Vesinet between the Vicomte de Cymier, secretary of Embassy at Vienna, and M. Frederic d'Argy, ensign in the navy. The parties fought with swords. The seconds of M. de Cymier were the Prince de Moelk and M. d'Etaples, captain in the—th Hussars; those of M. d'Argy Hubert Marien, the painter. M. d'Argy was wounded in the right arm, and for the present the affair is terminated, but it is said it will be resumed on M. d'Argy's recovery, although this seems hardly probable, considering the very slight cause of the quarrel—an altercation at the Cercle de la Rue Boissy d'Anglas, which took place over the card-table.

Such was the announcement in a daily paper that met the eyes of Jacqueline, as she lay hidden in Modeste's lodging, like a fawn in its covert, her eyes and ears on the alert, watching for the least sign of alarm, in fear and trembling. She expected something, she knew not what; she felt that her sad adventure at Monaco could not fail to have its epilogue; but this was one of which she never had dreamed.

"Modeste, give me my hat! Get me a carriage! Quick! Oh, my God, it is my fault!—I have killed him!"

These incoherent cries came from her lips while Modeste, in alarm, picked up the newspaper and adjusted her silver spectacles upon her nose to read the paragraph. "Monsieur Fred wounded! Holy Virgin! His poor mother! That is a new trouble fallen on her, to be sure. But this quarrel had nothing to do with you, my pet; you see they say it was about cards."

And folding up the Figaro, while Jacqueline in all haste was wrapping her head in a veil, Modeste, with the best intentions, went on to say: "Nobody ever dies of a sword-thrust in the arm."

"But you see it says that they are going to fight all over again—don't you understand? You are so stupid! What could they have had to quarrel about but me? O God! Thou art just! This is indeed punishment—too much punishment for me!"

So saying, she ran down the many stairs that led up to Modeste's little lodging in the roof, her feet hardly touching them as she ran, while Modeste followed her more slowly, crying: "Wait for me! Wait for me, Mademoiselle!"

Calling a fiacre, Jacqueline, almost roughly, pushed the old woman into it, and gave the coachman the address of Madame d'Argy, having, in her excitement, first given him that of their old house in the Parc Monceau, so much was she possessed by the idea that this was a repetition of that dreadful day, when with Modeste, just as now, she went to

meet an irreparable loss. She seemed to see before her her dead father—he looked like Fred, and now, as before, Marien had his part in the tragedy. Could he not have prevented the duel? Could he not have done something to prevent Fred from exposing himself? The wound might be no worse than it was said to be in the newspaper—but then a second meeting was to take place. No!—it should not, she would stop it at any price!

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And yet, as the coach drew nearer to the Rue de Varenne, where Madame d'Argy had her winter residence, a little calm, a little sense returned to Jacqueline. She did not see how she could dare to enter that house, where probably they cursed her very name. She would wait in the street with the carriage-blinds pulled down, and Modeste should go in and ask for information. Five minutes passed—ten minutes passed—they seemed ages. How slow Modeste was, slow as a tortoise! How could she leave her there when she knew she was so anxious? What could she be doing? All she had to do was to ask news of M. Fred in just two words!

At last, Jacqueline could bear suspense no longer. She opened the coach-door and jumped out on the pavement. Just at that moment Modeste appeared, brandishing the umbrella that she carried instead of a stick, in a manner that meant something. It might be bad news, she would know in a moment; anything was better than suspense. She sprang forward.

"What did they say, Modeste? Speak!—Why have you been such a time?"

"Because the servants had something else to do than to attend to me. I wasn't the only person there—they were writing in a register. Get back into the carriage, Mademoiselle, or somebody will see you—There are lots of people there who know you—Monsieur and Madame d'Etaples—"

"What do I care?—The truth! Tell me the truth—"

"But didn't you understand my signals? He is going on well. It was only a scratch—Ah! Madame that's only my way of talking. He will be laid up for a fortnight. The doctor was there—he has some fever, but he is not in any danger."

"Oh! what a blessing! Kiss me, Modeste. We have a fortnight in which we may interfere—But how—Oh, how?—Ah! there is Giselle! We will go to Giselle at once!"

And the 'fiacre' was ordered to go as fast as possible to the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. This time Jacqueline herself spoke to the concierge.

"Madame la Comtesse is out."

"But she never goes out at this hour. I wish to see her on important business. I must see her."

And Jacqueline passed the concierge, only to encounter another refusal from a footman, who insisted that Madame la Comtesse was at home to no one.

"But me, she will see me. Go and tell her it is Mademoiselle de Nailles."

Moved by her persistence, the footman went in to inquire, and came back immediately with the answer:

“Madame la Comtesse can not see Mademoiselle.”

“Ah!” thought Jacqueline, “she, too, throws me off, and it is natural. I have no friends left. No one will tell me anything!—I think it will drive me mad?”

Page 1910

She was half-mad already. She stopped at a newsstand and bought all the evening journals; then, up in her garret, in her poor little nest under the roof—which, as she felt bitterly, was her only refuge, she began to look over those printed papers in which she might possibly find out the true cause of the duel. Nearly all related the event in almost the exact terms used by the *Figaro*. Ah!—here was a different one! A reporter who knew something more added, in *Gil Blas*: “We have stated the cause of the dispute as it has been given to the public, but in affairs of this nature more than in any others, it is safe to remember the old proverb: ‘Look for the woman.’ The woman could doubtless have been found enjoying herself on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, while men were drawing swords in her defense.”

Jacqueline went on looking through the newspapers, crumpling up the sheets as she laid them down. The last she opened had the reputation of being a repository of scandals, never to be depended on, as she well knew. Several times it had come to her hand and she had not opened it, remembering what her father had always said of its reputation. But where would she be more likely to find what she wanted than in the columns of a journal whose reporters listened behind doors and peeped through keyholes? Under the heading of ‘*Les Dessous Parisiens*’, she read on the first page:

“Two hens lived in peace; a cock came
And strife soon succeeded to joy;
E’en as love, they say, kindled the flame
That destroyed the proud city of Troy.

“This quarrel was the outcome of a violent rupture between the two hens in question, ending in the flight of one of them, a young and tender pullet, whose voice we trust soon to hear warbling on the boards at one of our theatres. This was the subject of conversation in a low voice at the *Cercle*, at the hour when it is customary to tell such little scandals. M. de C-----was enlarging on the somewhat Bohemian character of the establishment of a lovely foreign lady, who possesses the secret of being always surrounded by delightful friends, young ladies who are self-emancipated, quasi-widows who, by divorce suits, have regained their liberty, etc. He was speaking of one of the beauties who are friends of his friend Madame S——, as men speak of women who have proved themselves careless of public opinion; when M. d’A——, in a loud voice, interrupted him; the lie was given in terms that of course led to the hostile meeting of which the press has spoken, attributing it to a dispute about the Queen of Spades, when it really concerned the Queen of Hearts.”

Then she had made no mistake; it had been her flight from Madame Strahlberg’s which had led to her being attacked by one man, and defended by the other! Jacqueline found it hard to recognize herself in this tissue of lies, insinuations, and half-truths. What did the paper mean its readers to understand by its account? Was it a jealous rivalry between herself and Madame Strahlberg?—Was M. de Cymier meant by the cock? And Fred had heard all this—he had drawn his sword to refute the calumny.

Brave Fred! Alas! he had been prompted only by chivalric generosity. Doubtless he, also, looked upon her as an adventuress.

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All night poor Jacqueline wept with such distress that she wished that she might die. She was dropping off to sleep at last, overpowered by fatigue, when a ring at the bell in the early morning roused her. Then she heard whispering:

“Do you think she is so unhappy?”

It was the voice of Giselle.

“Come in—come in quickly!” she cried, springing out of bed. Wrapped in a dressing-gown, with bare feet, her face pale, her eyelids red, her complexion clouded, she rushed to meet her friend, who was almost as much disordered as herself. It seemed as if Madame de Talbrun might also have passed a night of sleeplessness and tears.

“You have come! Oh! you have come at last!” cried Jacqueline, throwing her arms around her, but Giselle repelled her with a gesture so severe that the poor child could not but understand its meaning. She murmured, pointing to the pile of newspapers: “Is it possible?—Can you have believed all those dreadful things?”

“What things? I have read nothing,” said Giselle, harshly. “I only know that a man who was neither your husband nor your brother, and who consequently was under no obligation to defend you, has been foolish enough to be nearly killed for your sake. Is not that a proof of your downfall? Don’t you know it?”

“Downfall?” repeated Jacqueline, as if she did not understand her. Then, seizing her friend’s hand, she forcibly raised it to her lips: “Ah! what can anything matter to me,” she cried, “if only you remain my friend; and he has never doubted me!”

“Women like you can always find defenders,” said Giselle, tearing her hand from her cousin’s grasp.

Giselle was not herself at that moment. “But, for your own sake, it would have been better he should have abstained from such an act of Quixotism.”

“Giselle! can it be that you think me guilty?”

“Guilty!” cried Madame de Talbrun, her pale face aflame. “A little more and Monsieur de Cymier’s sword-point would have pierced his lungs.”

“Good heavens!” cried Jacqueline, hiding her face in her hands. “But I have done nothing to—”

“Nothing except to set two men against each other; to make them suffer, or to make fools of them, and to be loved by them all the same.”

“I have not been a coquette,” said Jacqueline, with indignation.

“You must have been, to authorize the boasts of Monsieur de Cymier. He had seen Fred so seldom, and Tonquin had so changed him that he spoke in his presence—without supposing any one would interfere. I dare not tell you what he said—”

“Whatever spite or revenge suggested to him, no doubt,” said Jacqueline.

“Listen, Giselle—Oh, you must listen. I shall not be long.”

She forced her to sit down; she crouched on a foot stool at her feet, holding her hands in hers so tightly that Giselle could not draw them away, and began her story, with all its details, of what had happened to her since she left Fresne. She told of her meeting with Wanda; of the fatal evening which had resulted in her expulsion from the convent; her disgust at the Sparks family; the snare prepared for her by Madame Strahlberg. “And I can not tell you all,” she added, “I can not tell you what drove me away from my true friends, and threw me among these people—”

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Giselle's sad smile seemed to answer, "No need—I am aware of it—I know my husband." Encouraged by this, Jacqueline went on with her confession, hiding nothing that was wrong, showing herself just as she had been, a poor, proud child who had set out to battle for herself in a dangerous world. At every step she had been more and more conscious of her own imprudence, of her own weakness, and of an ever-increasing desire to be done with independence; to submit to law, to be subject to any rules which would deliver her from the necessity of obeying no will but her own.

"Ah!" she cried, "I am so disgusted with independence, with amusement, and amusing people! Tell me what to do in future—I am weary of taking charge of myself. I said so the other day to the Abbe Bardin. He is the only person I have seen since my return. It seems to me I am coming back to my old ideas—you remember how I once wished to end my days in the cell of a Carmelite? You might love me again then, perhaps, and Fred and poor Madame d'Argy, who must feel so bitterly against me since her son was wounded, might forgive me. No one feels bitterly against the dead, and it is the same as being dead to be a Carmelite nun. You would all speak of me sometimes to each other as one who had been very unhappy, who had been guilty of great foolishness, but who had repaired her faults as best she could."

Poor Jacqueline! She was no longer a girl of the period; in her grief and humiliation she belonged to the past. Old-fashioned forms of penitence attracted her.

"And what did the Abbe Bardin tell you?" asked Giselle, with a slight movement of her shoulders.

"He only told me that he could not say at present whether that were my vocation."

"Nor can I," said Giselle.

Jacqueline lifted up her face, wet with tears, which she had been leaning on the lap of Giselle.

"I do not see what else I can do, unless you would get me a place as governess somewhere at the ends of the earth," she said. "I could teach children their letters. I should not mind doing anything. I never should complain. Ah! if you lived all by yourself, Giselle, how I should implore you to take me to teach little Enguerrand!"

"I think you might do better than that," said Giselle, wiping her friend's eyes almost as a mother might have done, "if you would only listen to Fred."

Jacqueline's cheeks became crimson.

"Don't mock me—it is cruel—I am too unworthy—it would pain me to see him. Shame—regret—you understand! But I can tell you one thing, Giselle—only you. You may tell it to him when he is quite old, when he has been long married, and when everything



concerning me is a thing of the past. I never had loved any one with all my heart up to the moment when I read in that paper that he had fought for me, that his blood had flowed for me, that after all that had passed he still thought me worthy of being defended by him."

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Her tears flowed fast, and she added: "I shall be proud of that all the rest of my life! If only you, too, would forgive me."

The heart of Giselle was melted by these words.

"Forgive you, my dear little girl? Ah! you have been better than I. I forgot our old friendship for a moment—I was harsh to you; and I have so little right to blame you! But come! Providence may have arranged all for the best, though one of us may have to suffer. Pray for that some one. Good-by—'au revoir!"

She kissed Jacqueline's forehead and was gone, before her cousin had seized the meaning of her last words. But joy and peace came back to Jacqueline. She had recovered her best friend, and had convinced her of her innocence.

CHAPTER XIX

GENTLE CONSPIRATORS

Before Giselle went home to her own house she called on the Abbe Bardin, whom a rather surly servant was not disposed to disturb, as he was just eating his breakfast. The Abbe Bardin was Jacqueline's confessor, and he held the same relation to a number of other young girls who were among her particular friends. He was thoroughly acquainted with all that concerned their delicate and generally childish little souls. He kept them in the right way, had often a share in their marriages, and in general kept an eye upon them all their lives. Even when they escaped from him, as had happened in the case of Jacqueline, he did not give them up. He commended them to God, and looked forward to the time of their repentance with the patience of a father. The Abbe Bardin had never been willing to exercise any function but that of catechist; he had grown old in the humble rank of third assistant in a great parish, when, with a little ambition, he might have been its rector. "Suffer little children to come unto me," had been his motto. These words of his Divine Master seemed more often than any others on his lips—lips so expressive of loving kindness, though sometimes a shrewd smile would pass over them and seem to say: "I know, I can divine." But when this smile, the result of long experience, did not light up his features, the good Abbe Bardin looked like an elderly child; he was short, his walk was a trot, his face was round and ruddy, his eyes, which were short-sighted, were large, wide-open, and blue, and his heavy crop of white hair, which curled and crinkled above his forehead, made him look like a sixty-year-old angel, crowned with a silvery aureole.

Rubbing his hands affably, he came into the little parlor where Madame de Talbrun was waiting for him. There was probably no ecclesiastic in all Paris who had a salon so full of worked cushions, each of which was a keepsake—a souvenir of some first communion. The Abbe did not know his visitor, but the name Talbrun seemed to him

connected with an honorable and well-meaning family. The lady was probably a mother who had come to put her child into

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his hands for religious instruction. He received visits from dozens of such mothers, some of whom were a little tiresome, from a wish to teach him what he knew better than they, and at one time he had set apart Wednesday as his day for receiving such visits, that he might not be too greatly disturbed, as seemed likely to happen to him that day. Not that he cared very much whether he ate his cutlet hot or cold, but his housekeeper cared a great deal. A man may be a very experienced director, and yet be subject to direction in other ways.

The youth of Giselle took him by surprise.

"Monsieur l'Abbe," she said, without any preamble, while he begged her to sit down, "I have come to speak to you of a person in whom you take an interest, Jacqueline de Nailles."

He passed the back of his hand over his brow and said, with a sigh: "Poor little thing!"

"She is even more to be pitied than you think. You have not seen her, I believe, since last week."

"Yes—she came. She has kept up, thank God, some of her religious duties."

"For all that, she has played a leading part in a recent scandal."

The Abbe sprang up from his chair.

"A duel has taken place because of her, and her name is in all men's mouths—whispered, of course—but the quarrel took place at the Club. You know what it is to be talked of at the Club."

"The poison of asps," growled the Abbe; "oh! those clubs—think of all the evil reports concocted in them, of which women are the victims!"

"In the present case the evil report was pure calumny. It was taken up by some one whom you also know—Frederic d'Argy."

"I have had profound respect these many years for his excellent and pious mother."

"I thought so. In that case, Monsieur l'Abbe, you would not object to going to Madame d'Argy's house and asking how her son is."

"No, of course not; but—it is my duty to disapprove—"



"You will tell her that when a young man has compromised a young girl by defending her reputation in a manner too public, there is but one thing he can do afterward—marry her."

"Wait one moment," said the Abbe, who was greatly surprised; "it is certain that a good marriage would be the best thing for Jacqueline. I have been thinking of it. But I do not think I could so suddenly—so soon after—"

"Today at four o'clock, Monsieur l'Abbe. Time presses. You can add that such a marriage is the only way to stop a second duel, which will otherwise take place."

"Is it possible?"

"And it is also the only way to bring Frederic to decide on sending in his resignation. Don't forget that—it is important."

"But how do you know—"

The poor Abbe stammered out his words, and counted on his fingers the arguments he was desired to make use of.

"And you will solemnly assure them that Jacqueline is innocent."

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"Oh! as to that, there are wolves in sheep's clothing, as the Bible tells us; but believe me, when such poor young things are in question, it is more often the sheep which has put on the appearance of a wolf—to seem in the fashion," added the Abbe, "just to seem in the fashion. Fashion will authorize any kind of counterfeiting."

"Well, you will say all that, will you not, to Madame d'Argy? It will be very good of you if you will. She will make no difficulties about money. All she wants is a quietly disposed daughter-in-law who will be willing to pass nine months of the year at Lizerolles, and Jacqueline is quite cured of her Paris fever."

"A fever too often mortal," murmured the Abbe; "oh, for the simplicity of nature! A priest whose lot is cast in the country is fortunate, Madame, but we can not choose our vocation. We may do good anywhere, especially in cities. Are you sure, however, that Jacqueline—"

"She loves Monsieur d'Argy."

"Well, if that is so, we are all right. The great misfortune with many of these poor girls is that they have never learned to love anything; they know nothing but agitations, excitements, curiosities, and fancies. All that sort of thing runs through their heads."

"You are speaking of a Jacqueline before the duel. I can assure you that ever since yesterday, if not before, she has loved Monsieur d'Argy, who on his part for a long time—a very long time—has been in love with her."

Giselle spoke eagerly, as if she forced herself to say the words that cost her pain. Her cheeks were flushed under her veil. The Abbe, who was keen-sighted, observed these signs.

"But," continued Giselle, "if he is forced to forget her he may try to expend elsewhere the affection he feels for her; he may trouble the peace of others, while deceiving himself. He might make in the world one of those attachments—Do not fail to represent all these dangers to Madame d'Argy when you plead the cause of Jacqueline."

"Humph! You are evidently much attached, Madame, to Mademoiselle de Nailles."

"Very much, indeed," she answered, bravely, "very much attached to her, and still more to him; therefore you understand that this marriage must—absolutely must take place."

She had risen and was folding her cloak round her, looking straight into the Abbe's eyes. Small as she was, their height was almost the same; she wanted him to understand thoroughly why this marriage must take place.

He bowed. Up to that time he had not been quite sure that he had not to do with one of those wolves dressed in fleece whose appearance is as misleading as that of sheep disguised as wolves: now his opinion was settled.

“Mon Dieu! Madame,” he said, “your reasons seem to me excellent—a duel to be prevented, a son to be kept by the side of his sick mother, two young people who love each other to be married, the saving, possibly, of two souls—”

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"Say three souls, Monsieur l'Abbe!"

He did not ask whose was the third, nor even why she had insisted that this delicate commission must be executed that same day. He only bowed when she said again: "At four o'clock: Madame d'Argy will be prepared to see you. Thank you, Monsieur l'Abbe." And then, as she descended the staircase, he bestowed upon her silently his most earnest benediction, before returning to the cold cutlet that was on his breakfast table.

Giselle did not breakfast much better than he. In truth, M. de Talbrun being absent, she sat looking at her son, who was eating with a good appetite, while she drank only a cup of tea; after which, she dressed herself, with more than usual care, hiding by rice-powder the trace of recent tears on her complexion, and arranging her fair hair in the way that was most becoming to her, under a charming little bonnet covered with gold net-work which corresponded with the embroidery on an entirely new costume.

When she went into the dining-room Enguerrand, who was there with his nurse finishing his dessert, cried out: "Oh! mamma, how pretty you are!" which went to her heart. She kissed him two or three times—one kiss after another.

"I try to be pretty for your sake, my darling."

"Will you take me with you?"

"No, but I will come back for you, and take you out."

She walked a few steps, and then turned to give him such a kiss as astonished him, for he said:

"Is it really going to be long?"

"What?"

"Before you come back? You kiss me as if you were going for a long time, far away."

"I kissed you to give myself courage."

Enguerrand, who, when he had a hard lesson to learn, always did the same thing, appeared to understand her.

"You are going to do some thing you don't like."

"Yes, but I have to do it, because you see it is my duty."

"Do grown people have duties?"



“Even more than children.”

“But it isn’t your duty to write a copy—your writing is so pretty. Oh! that’s what I hate most. And you always say it is my duty to write my copy. I’ll go and do it while you do your duty. So that will seem as if we were both together doing something we don’t like—won’t it, mamma?”

She kissed him again, even more passionately.

“We shall be always together, we two, my love!”

This word love struck the little ear of Enguerrand as having a new accent, a new meaning, and, boy-like, he tried to turn this excess of tenderness to advantage.

“Since you love me so much, will you take me to see the puppet-show?”

“Anywhere you like—when I come back. Goodby.”

CHAPTER XX

A CHIVALROUS SOUL

Page 1917

Madame D'Argy sat knitting by the window in Fred's chamber, with that resigned but saddened air that mothers wear when they are occupied in repairing the consequences of some rash folly. Fred had seen her in his boyhood knitting in the same way with the same, look on her face, when he had been thrown from his pony, or had fallen from his velocipede. He himself looked ill at ease and worried, as he lay on a sofa with his arm in a sling. He was yawning and counting the hours. From time to time his mother glanced at him. Her look was curious, and anxious, and loving, all at the same time. He pretended to be asleep. He did not like to see her watching him. His handsome masculine face, tanned that pale brown which tropical climates give to fair complexions, looked odd as it rose above a light-blue cape, a very feminine garment which, as it had no sleeves, had been tied round his neck to keep him from being cold. He felt himself, with some impatience, at the mercy of the most tender, but the most sharp-eyed of nurses, a prisoner to her devotion, and made conscious of her power every moment. Her attentions worried him; he knew that they all meant "It is your own fault, my poor boy, that you are in this state, and that your mother is so unhappy." He felt it. He knew as well as if she had spoken that she was asking him to return to reason, to marry, without more delay, their little neighbor in Normandy, Mademoiselle d'Argeville, a niece of M. Martel, whom he persisted in not thinking of as a wife, always calling her a "cider apple," in allusion to her red cheeks.

A servant came in, and said to Madame d'Argy that Madame de Talbrun was in the salon.

"I am coming," she said, rolling up her knitting.

But Fred suddenly woke up:

"Why not ask her to come here?"

"Very good," said his mother, with hesitation. She was distracted between her various anxieties; exasperated against the fatal influence of Jacqueline, alarmed by the increasing intimacy with Giselle, desirous that all such complications should be put an end to by his marriage, but terribly afraid that her "cider apple" would not be sufficient to accomplish it.

"Beg Madame de Talbrun to come in here," she said, repeating the order after her son; but she settled herself in her chair with an air more patient, more resigned than ever, and her lips were firmly closed.

Giselle entered in her charming new gown, and Fred's first words, like those of Enguerrand, were: "How pretty you are! It is charity," he added, smiling, "to present such a spectacle to the eyes of a sick man; it is enough to set him up again."

“Isn’t it?” said Giselle, kissing Madame d’Argy on the forehead. The poor mother had resumed her knitting with a sigh, hardly glancing at the pretty walking-costume, nor at the bonnet with its network of gold.

“Isn’t it pretty?” repeated Giselle. “I am delighted with this costume. It is made after one of Rejane’s. Oscar fell in love with it at a first representation of a vaudeville, and he gave me over into the hands of the same dressmaker, who indeed was named in the play. That kind of advertising seems very effective.”

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She went on chattering thus to put off what she had really come to say. Her heart was beating so fast that its throbs could be seen under the embroidered front of the bodice which fitted her so smoothly. She wondered how Madame d'Argy would receive the suggestion she was about to make.

She went on: "I dressed myself in my best to-day because I am so happy."

Madame d'Argy's long tortoise-shell knitting-needles stopped.

"I am glad to hear it, my dear," she said, coldly, "I am glad anybody can be happy. There are so many of us who are sad."

"But why are you pleased?" asked Fred, looking at her, as if by some instinct he understood that he had something to do with it.

"Our prodigal has returned," answered Giselle, with a little air of satisfaction, very artificial, however, for she could hardly breathe, so great was her fear and her emotion. "My house is in the garb of rejoicing."

"The prodigal? Do you mean your husband?" said Madame d'Argy, maliciously.

"Oh! I despair of him," replied Giselle, lightly. "No, I speak of a prodigal who did not go far, and who made haste to repent. I am speaking of Jacqueline."

There was complete silence. The knitting-needles ticked rapidly, a slight flush rose on the dark cheeks of Fred.

"All I beg," said Madame d'Argy, "is that you will not ask me to eat the fatted calf in her honor. The comings and going of Mademoiselle de Nailles have long ceased to have the slightest interest for me."

"They have for Fred at any rate; he has just proved it, I should say," replied Giselle.

By this time the others were as much embarrassed as Giselle. She saw it, and went on quickly:

"Their names are together in everybody's mouth; you can not hinder it."

"I regret it deeply-and allow me to make one remark: it seems to me you show a want of tact such as I should never have imagined in telling us—"

Giselle read in Fred's eyes, which were steadily fixed on her, that he was, on that point, of his mother's opinion. She went on, however, still pretending to blunder.

“Forgive me—but I have been so anxious about you ever since I heard there was to be a second meeting—”

“A second meeting!” screamed Madame d’Argy, who, as she read no paper but the Gazette de France, or occasionally the Debats, knew nothing of all the rumors that find their echo in the daily papers.

“Oh, ‘mon Dieu’! I thought you knew—”

“You need not frighten my mother,” said Fred, almost angrily; “Monsieur de Cymier has written a letter which puts an end to our quarrel. It is the letter of a man of honor apologizing for having spoken lightly, for having repeated false rumors without verifying them—in short, retracting all that he had said that reflected in any way on Mademoiselle de Nailles, and authorizing me, if I think best, to make public his retraction. After that we can have nothing more to say to each other.”

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"He who makes himself the champion to defend a young girl's character," said Madame d'Argy, sententiously, "injures her as much as those who have spoken evil of her."

"That is exactly what I think," said Giselle. "The self-constituted champion has given the evil rumor circulation."

There was again a painful silence. Then the intrepid little woman resumed: "This step on the part of Monsieur de Cymier seems to have rendered my errand unnecessary. I had thought of a way to end this sad affair; a very simple way, much better, most certainly, than men cutting their own throats or those of other people. But since peace has been made over the ruins of Jacqueline's reputation, I had better say nothing and go away."

"No—no! Let us hear what you had to propose," said Fred, getting up from his couch so quickly that he jarred his bandaged arm, and uttered a cry of pain, which seemed very much like an oath, too.

Giselle was silent. Standing before the hearth, she was warming her small feet, watching, as she did so, Madame d'Argy's profile, which was reflected in the mirror. It was severe—impenetrable. It was Fred who spoke first.

"In the first place," he said, hesitating, "are you sure that Mademoiselle de Nailles has not just arrived from Monaco?"

"I am certain that for a week she has been living quietly with Modeste, and that, though she passed through Monaco, she did not stay there—twenty-four hours, finding that the air of that place did not agree with her."

"But what do you say to what Monsieur Martel saw with his own eyes, and which is confirmed by public rumor?" cried Madame d'Argy, as if she were giving a challenge.

"Monsieur Martel saw Jacqueline in bad company. She was not there of her own will. As to public rumor, we may feel sure that to make it as flattering to her tomorrow as it is otherwise to-day only a marriage is necessary. Yes, a marriage! That is the way I had thought of to settle everything and make everybody happy."

"What man would marry a girl who had compromised herself?" said Madame d'Argy, indignantly.

"He who has done his part to compromise her."

"Then go and propose it to Monsieur de Cymier!"

"No. It is not Monsieur de Cymier whom she loves."

“Ah!” Madame d’Argy was on her feet at once. “Indeed, Giselle, you are losing your senses. If I were not afraid of agitating Fred—”

He was, in truth, greatly agitated. The only hand that he could use was pulling and tearing at the little blue cape crossed on his breast, in which his mother had wrapped him; and this unsuitable garment formed such a queer contrast to the expression of his face that Giselle, in her nervous excitement, burst out laughing, an explosion of merriment which completed the exasperation of Madame d’Argy.

“Never!” she cried, beside herself. “You hear me—never will I consent, whatever happens!”

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At that moment the door was partly opened, and a servant announced "Monsieur l'Abbe Bardin."

Madame d'Argy made a gesture which was anything but reverential.

"Well, to be sure—this is the right moment with a vengeance! What does he want! Does he wish me to assist in some good work—or to undertake to collect money, which I hate."

"Above all, mother," cried Fred, "don't expose me to the fatigue of receiving his visit. Go and see him yourself. Giselle will take care of your patient while you are gone. Won't you, Giselle?"

His voice was soft, and very affectionate. He evidently was not angry at what she had dared to say, and she acknowledged this to herself with an aching heart.

"I don't exactly trust your kind of care," said Madame d'Argy, with a smile that was not gay, and certainly not amiable.

She went, however, because Fred repeated:

"But go and see the Abbe Bardin."

Hardly had she left the room when Fred got up from his sofa and approached Giselle with passionate eagerness.

"Are you sure I am not dreaming," said he. "Is it you—really you who advise me to marry Jacqueline?"

"Who else should it be?" she answered, very calm to all appearance. "Who can know better than I? But first you must oblige me by lying down again, or else I will not say one word more. That is right. Now keep still. Your mother is furiously displeased with me—I am sorry—but she will get over it. I know that in Jacqueline you would have a good wife—a wife far better than the Jacqueline you would have married formerly. She has paid dearly for her experience of life, and has profited by its lessons, so that she is now worthy of you, and sincerely repentant for her childish peccadilloes."

"Giselle," said Fred, "look me full in the face—yes, look into my eyes frankly and hide nothing. Your eyes never told anything but the truth. Why do you turn them away? Do you really and truly wish this marriage?"

She looked at him steadily as long as he would, and let him hold her hand, which was burning inside her glove, and which with a great effort she prevented from trembling. Then her nerves gave way under his long and silent gaze, which seemed to question her, and she laughed, a laugh that sounded to herself very unnatural.



“My poor, dear friend,” she cried, “how easily you men are duped! You are trying to find out, to discover whether, in case you decide upon an honest act, a perfectly sensible act, to which you are strongly inclined—don’t tell me you are not—whether, in short, you marry Jacqueline, I shall be really as glad of it as I pretend. But have you not found out what I have aimed at all along? Do you think I did not know from the very first what it was that made you seek me?”

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"I was not the rope, but I had lived near the rose; I reminded you of her continually. We two loved her; each of us felt we did. Even when you said harm of her, I knew it was merely because you longed to utter her name, and repeat to yourself her perfections. I laughed, yes, I laughed to myself, and I was careful how I contradicted you. I tried to keep you safe for her, to prevent your going elsewhere and forming attachments which might have resulted in your forgetting her. I did my best—do me justice—I did my best; perhaps sometimes I pushed things a little far in her interest, in that of your mother, but in yours more than all; in yours, for God knows I am all for you," said Giselle, with sudden and involuntary fervor.

"Yes, I am all yours as a friend, a faithful friend," she resumed, almost frightened by the tones of her own voice; "but as to the slightest feeling of love between us, love the most spiritual, the most platonic—yes, all men, I fancy, have a little of that kind of self-conceit. Dear Fred, don't imagine it—Enguerrand would never have allowed it."

She was smiling, half laughing, and he looked at her with astonishment, asking himself whether he could believe what she was saying, when he could recollect what seemed to him so many proofs to the contrary. Yet in what she said there was no hesitation, no incoherence, no false note. Pride, noble pride, upheld her to the end. The first falsehood of her life was a masterpiece.

"Ah, Giselle!" he said at last, not knowing what to think, "I adore you! I revere you!"

"Yes," she replied, with a smile, gracious, yet with a touch of sadness, "I know you do. But her you love!"

Might it not have been sweet to her had he answered "No, I loved her once, and remembered that old love enough to risk my life for her, but in reality I now love only you—all the more at this moment when I see you love me more than yourself." But, instead, he murmured only, like a man. and a lover: "And Jacqueline—do you think she loves me?" His anxiety, a thrill that ran through all his frame, the light in his eyes, his sudden pallor, told more than his words.

If Giselle could have doubted his love for Jacqueline before, she would have now been convinced of it. The conviction stabbed her to the heart. Death is not that last sleep in which all our faculties, weakened and exhausted, fail us; it is the blow which annihilates our supreme illusion and leaves us disabused in a cold and empty world. People walk, talk, and smile after this death—another ghost is added to the drama played on the stage of the world; but the real self is dead.

Giselle was too much of a woman, angelic as she was, to have any courage left to say: "Yes, I know she loves you."

She said instead, in a low voice: "That is a question you must ask of her."

Meantime, in the next room they could hear Madame d'Argy vehemently repeating:
"Never! No, I never will consent! Is it a plot between you?"

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They heard also a rumbling monotone preceding each of these vehement interruptions. The Abbe Bardin was pointing out to her that, unmarried, her son would return to Tonquin, that Lizerolles would be left deserted, her house would be desolate without daughter-in-law or grandchildren; and, as he drew these pictures, he came back, again and again, to his main argument:

“I will answer for their happiness: I will answer for the future.”

His authority as a priest gave weight to this assurance, at least Madame d’Argy felt it so. She went on saying never, but less and less emphatically, and apparently she ceased to say it at last, for three months later the d’Etaples, the Rays, the d’Avrignys and the rest, received two wedding announcements in these words:

“Madame d’Argy has the honor to inform you of the marriage of her son, M. Frederic d’Argy, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, to Mademoiselle de Nailles.”

The accompanying card ran thus:

“The Baroness de Nailles has the honor to inform you of the marriage of Mademoiselle Jacqueline de Nailles, her stepdaughter, to M. Frederic d’Argy.”

Congratulations showered down on both mother and stepmother. A love-match is nowadays so rare! It turned out that every one had always wished all kinds of good fortune to young Madame d’Argy, and every one seemed to take a sincere part in the joy that was expressed on the occasion, even Dolly, who, it was said, had in secret set her heart on Fred for herself; even Nora Sparks, who, not having carried out her plans, had gone back to New York, whence she sent a superb wedding present. Madame de Nailles apparently experienced at the wedding all the emotions of a real mother.

The roses at Lizerolles bloomed that year with unusual beauty, as if to welcome the young pair. Modeste sang ‘Nunc Dimittis’. The least demonstrative of all those interested in the event was Giselle.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

As we grow older we lay aside harsh judgments and sharp words
Blow which annihilates our supreme illusion
Death is not that last sleep
Fool (there is no cure for that infirmity)
The worst husband is always better than none

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire Jacqueline:



A familiarity which, had he known it, was not flattering
A mother's geese are always swans
As we grow older we lay aside harsh judgments and sharp words
Bathers, who exhibited themselves in all degrees of ugliness
Blow which annihilates our supreme illusion
Death is not that last sleep
Fool (there is no cure for that infirmity)
Fred's verses were not good, but they were full of dejection
Great interval between a dream and its execution
Hang out the bush, but

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keep no tavern

His sleeplessness was not the insomnia of genius
Importance in this world are as easily swept away as the sand
Music—so often dangerous to married happiness
Natural longing, that we all have, to know the worst
Notion of her husband's having an opinion of his own
Old women—at least thirty years old!
Pride supplies some sufferers with necessary courage
Seemed to enjoy themselves, or made believe they did
Seldom troubled himself to please any one he did not care for
Small women ought not to grow stout
Sympathetic listening, never having herself anything to say
The bandage love ties over the eyes of men
The worst husband is always better than none
This unending warfare we call love
Unwilling to leave him to the repose he needed
Waste all that upon a thing that nobody will ever look at
Women who are thirty-five should never weep

THE INK STAIN BY RENE BAZIN

(Tache d'Encre)

By *Rene Bazin*

Preface by E. LAVISSE

RENE BAZIN

Rene-Nicholas-Marie Bazin was born at Angers, December 26, 1853. He studied for the bar, became a lawyer and professor of jurisprudence at the Catholic University in his native city, and early contributed to 'Le Correspondant, L'Illustration, Journal des Debats, Revue du Deux Mondes,' etc. Although quietly writing fiction for the last fifteen years or so, he was not well known until the dawn of the twentieth century, when his moral studies of provincial life under the form of novels and romances became appreciated. He is a profound psychologist, a force in literature, and his style is very pure and attractive. He advocates resignation and the domestic virtues, yet his books are neither dull, nor tiresome, nor priggish; and as he has advanced in years and experience M. Bazin has shown an increasing ambition to deal with larger problems than are involved for instance, in the innocent love-affairs of 'Ma Tante Giron' (1886), a

book which enraptured Ludovic Halevy. His novel, 'Une Tache d'Encre' (1888), a romance of scholarly life, was crowned by the French Academy, to which he was elected in 1903.

It is safe to say that Bazin will never develop into an author dangerous to morals. His works may be put into the hands of cloistered virgins, and there are not, to my knowledge, many other contemporary French imaginative writers who could endure this stringent test. Some critics, indeed, while praising him, scoff at his chaste and surprising optimism; but it is refreshing to recommend to English readers, in these days of Realism and Naturalism, the works of a recent French writer which do not require maturity of years in the reader. 'Une Tache d'Encre', as I have said, was crowned by the French Academy; and Bazin received from the same exalted body the "Prix Vitet" for the ensemble of his writings in 1896, being finally admitted a member of the Academy in June, 1903. He occupies the chair of Ernest Legouve.

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Bazin's first romance, 'Stephanette', was published under the pseudonym "Bernard Seigny," in 1884; then followed 'Victor Pavie (1887); Noellet (1890); A l'Aventure (1891) and Sicile (1892)', two books on Italy, of which the last mentioned was likewise crowned by the French Academy; 'La Legende de Sainte-Bega (1892); La Sarcelle Bleue (1892); Madame Corentine (1893); Les Italiens d'aujourd'hui (1894); Humble Amour (1894); En Province (1896); De toute son Ame (1897)', a realistic but moderate romance of a workingman's life; 'Les Contes de Perrette (1898); La Terre qui Meurt (1899); Le Guide de l'Empereur (1901); Les Oberle (1902), a tale from Alsace of to-day, sketching the political situation, approximately correct, and lately adapted for the stage; 'Donatienne' (1903).

With Bazin literary life does not become a mirage obscuring the vision of real life. Before being an author Rene Bazin is a man, with a family attached to the country, rooted in the soil; a guaranty of the dignity of his work as well as of the writer, and a safeguard against many extravagances. He has remained faithful to his province. He lives in the attractive city of Angers. When he leaves it, it is for a little tour through France, or a rare journey-once to Sicily and once to Spain. He is seldom to be met on the Parisian boulevards. Not that he has any prejudice against Paris, or fails to appreciate the tone of its society, or the quality of its diversions; but he is conscious that he has nothing to gain from a residence in the capital, but, on the contrary, would run a risk of losing his intense originality and the freshness of his genius.

E. LAVISSE
de l'Academie Francaise.

THE INK-STAIN

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE ACCIDENT

All I have to record of the first twenty-three years of my life is the enumeration of them. A simple bead-roll is enough; it represents their family likeness and family monotony.

I lost my parents when I was very young. I can hardly recall their faces; and I should keep no memories of La Chatre, our home, had I not been brought up quite close to it. It was sold, however, and lost to me, like all the rest. Yes, fate is hard, sometimes. I was born at La Chatre; the college of La Chatre absorbed eighteen years of my life. Our head master used to remark that college is a second home; whereby I have always fancied he did some injustice to the first.

My school-days were hardly over when my uncle and guardian, M. Brutus Mouillard, solicitor, of Bourges, packed me off to Paris to go through my law course. I took three years over it: At the end of that time, just eighteen months ago, I became a licentiate, and “in the said capacity”—as my uncle would say took an oath that transformed me into a probationary barrister. Every Monday, regularly, I go to sign my name among many others on an attendance list, and thereby, it appears, I am establishing a claim upon the confidence of the widow and the orphan.

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In the intervals of my legal studies I have succeeded in taking my Arts Degree. At present I am seeking that of Doctor of Law. My examinations have been passed meritoriously, but without brilliance; my tastes run too much after letters. My professor, M. Flamaran, once told me the truth of the matter: "Law, young man, is a jealous mistress; she allows no divided affection." Are my affections divided? I think not, and I certainly do not confess any such thing to M. Mouillard, who has not yet forgotten what he calls "that freak" of a Degree in Arts. He builds some hopes upon me, and, in return, it is natural that I should build a few upon him.

Really, that sums up all my past: two certificates! A third diploma in prospect and an uncle to leave me his money—that is my future. Can anything more commonplace be imagined?

I may add that I never felt any temptation at all to put these things on record until to-day, the tenth of December, 1884. Nothing had ever happened to me; my history was a blank. I might have died thus. But who can foresee life's sudden transformations? Who can foretell that the skein, hitherto so tranquilly unwound, will not suddenly become tangled? This afternoon a serious adventure befell me. It agitated me at the time, and it agitates me still more upon reflection. A voice within me whispers that this cause will have a series of effects, that I am on the threshold of an epoch, or, as the novelists say, a crisis in my existence. It has struck me that I owe it to myself to write my Memoirs, and that is the reason why I have just purchased this brown memorandum-book in the Odeon Arcade. I intend to make a detailed and particular entry of the event, and, as time goes on, of its consequences, if any should happen to flow from it.

"Flow from it" is just the phrase; for it has to do with a blot of ink.

My blot of ink is hardly dry. It is a large one, too; of abnormal shape, and altogether monstrous, whether one considers it from the physical side or studies it in its moral bearings. It is very much more than an accident; it has something of the nature of an outrage. It was at the National Library that I perpetrated it, and upon—But I must not anticipate.

I often work in the National Library; not in the main hall, but in that reserved for literary men who have a claim, and are provided with a ticket, to use it. I never enter it without a gentle thrill, in which respect is mingled with satisfied vanity. For not every one who chooses may walk in. I must pass before the office of the porter, who retains my umbrella, before I make my way to the solemn beadle who sits just inside the doorway—a double precaution, attesting to the majesty of the place. The beadle knows me. He no longer demands my ticket. To be sure, I am not yet one of those old acquaintances on whom he smiles; but I am no longer reckoned among those novices whose passport he exacts. An inclination of his head makes me free of the temple, and says, as plainly as words, "You are one of us, albeit a trifle young. Walk in, sir."

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And in I walk, and admire on each occasion the vast proportions of the interior, the severe decoration of the walls, traced with broad foliated pattern and wainscoted with books of reference as high as hand can reach; the dread tribunal of librarians and keepers in session down yonder, on a kind of judgment-seat, at the end of the avenue whose carpet deadens all footsteps; and behind again, that holy of holies where work the doubly privileged—the men, I imagine, who are members of two or three academies. To right and left of this avenue are rows of tables and armchairs, where scatters, as caprice has chosen and habit consecrated, the learned population of the library. Men form the large majority. Viewed from the rear, as they bend over their work, they suggest reflections on the ravages wrought by study upon hair-clad cuticles. For every hirsute Southerner whose locks turn gray without dropping off, heavens, what a regiment of bald heads! Visitors who look in through the glass doors see only this aspect of devastation. It gives a wrong impression. Here and there, at haphazard, you may find a few women among these men. George Sand used to come here. I don't know the names of these successors of hers, nor their business; I have merely observed that they dress in sober colors, and that each carries a number of shawls and a thick veil. You feel that love is far from their thoughts. They have left it outside, perhaps—with the porter.

Several of these learned folk lift their heads as I pass, and follow me with the dulled eye of the student, an eye still occupied with the written thought and inattentive to what it looks on. Then, suddenly, remorse seizes them for their distraction, they are annoyed with me, a gloomy impatience kindles in their look, and each plunges anew into his open volume. But I have had time to guess their secret ejaculations: "I am studying the Origin of Trade Guilds!" "I, the Reign of Louis the Twelfth!" "I, the Latin Dialects!" "I, the Civil Status of Women under Tiberius!" "I am elaborating a new translation of Horace!" "I am fulminating a seventh article, for the Gazette of Atheism and Anarchy, on the Russian Serfs!" And each one seems to add, "But what is thy business here, stripling? What canst thou write at thy age? Why troublest thou the peace of these hallowed precincts?" My business, sirs? Alas! it is the thesis for my doctor's degree. My uncle and venerated guardian, M. Brutus Mouillard, solicitor, of Bourges, is urging me to finish it, demands my return to the country, grows impatient over the slow toil of composition. "Have done with theories," he writes, "and get to business! If you must strive for this degree, well and good; but what possessed you to choose such a subject?"

I must own that the subject of my thesis in Roman law has been artistically chosen with a view to prolonging my stay in Paris: "On the 'Latini Juniani.'" Yes, gentle reader, a new subject, almost incapable of elucidation, having no connection—not the remotest—with the exercise of any profession whatsoever, entirely devoid of practical utility. The trouble it gives me is beyond conception.

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It is true that I intersperse my researches with some more attractive studies, and one or two visits to the picture-galleries, and more than an occasional evening at the theatre. My uncle knows nothing of this. To keep him soothed I am careful to get my reader's ticket renewed every month, and every month to send him the ticket just out of date, signed by M. Leopold Delisle. He has a box full of them; and in the simplicity of his heart Monsieur Mouillard has a lurking respect for this nephew, this modern young anchorite, who spends his days at the National Library, his nights with Gaius, wholly absorbed in the Junian Latins, and indifferent to whatsoever does not concern the Junian Latins in this Paris which my uncle still calls the Modern Babylon.

I came down this morning in the most industrious mood, when the misfortune befell. Close by the sanctum where the librarians sit are two desks where you write down the list of the books you want. I was doing so at the right-hand desk, on which abuts the first row of tables. Hence all the mischief. Had I written at the left-hand desk, nothing would have happened. But no; I had just set down as legibly as possible the title, author, and size of a certain work on Roman Antiquities, when, in replacing the penholder, which is attached there by a small brass chain, some inattentiveness, some want of care, my ill-luck, in short, led me to set it down in unstable equilibrium on the edge of the desk. It tumbled—I heard the little chain rattle—it tumbled farther—then stopped short. The mischief was done. The sudden jerk, as it pulled up, had detached an enormous drop of ink from the point of the pen, and that drop—Ah! I can see him yet, as he rose from the shadow of the desk, that small, white-haired man, so thin and so very angry!

“Clumsy idiot! To blot an Early Text!”

I leaned over and looked. Upon the page of folio, close to an illuminated capital, the black drop had flattened itself. Around the original sphere had been shed splashes of all conceivable shapes—rays, rockets, dotted lines, arrowheads, all the freakish impromptu of chaos. Next, the slope lending its aid, the channels had drained into one, and by this time a black rivulet was crawling downward to the margin. One or two readers near had risen, and now eyed me like examining magistrates. I waited for an outbreak, motionless, dazed, muttering words that did not mend the case at all. “What a pity! Oh, I’m so sorry! If I had only known—” The student of the Early Text stood motionless as I. Together we watched the ink trickle. Suddenly, summoning his wits together, he burrowed with feverish haste in his morocco writing-case, pulled out a sheet of blotting-paper, and began to soak up the ink with the carefulness of a Sister of Mercy stanching a wound. I seized the opportunity to withdraw discreetly to the third row of tables, where the attendant had just deposited my books. Fear is so unreasoning. Very likely by saying

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no more about it, by making off and hiding my head in my hands, like a man crushed by the weight of his remorse, I might disarm this wrath. I tried to think so. But I knew well enough that there was more to come. I had hardly taken my seat when, looking up, I could see between my fingers the little man standing up and gesticulating beside one of the keepers. At one moment he rapped the damning page with his forefinger; the next, he turned sidewise and flung out a hand toward me; and I divined, without hearing a word, all the bitterness of his invective. The keeper appeared to take it seriously. I felt myself blushing. "There must be," thought I, "some law against ink-stains, some decree, some regulation, something drawn up for the protection of Early Texts. And the penalty is bound to be terrible, since it has been enacted by the learned; expulsion, no doubt, besides a fine—an enormous fine. They are getting ready over there to fleece me. That book of reference they are consulting is of course the catalogue of the sale where this treasure was purchased. I shall have to replace the Early Text! O Uncle Mouillard!"

I sat there, abandoned to my sad reflections, when one of the attendants, whom I had not seen approaching, touched me on the shoulder.

"The keeper wishes to speak to you."

I rose up and went. The terrible reader had gone back to his seat.

"It was you, sir, I believe, who blotted the folio just now?"

"It was, sir."

"You did not do so on purpose?"

"Most certainly not, sir! I am indeed sorry for the accident."

"You ought to be. The volume is almost unique; and the blot, too, for that matter. I never saw such a blot! Will you, please, leave me your Christian name, surname, profession, and address?"

I wrote down, "Fabien Jean Jacques Mouillard, barrister, 91 Rue de Rennes."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, that is all for the present. But I warn you that Monsieur Charnot is exceedingly annoyed. It might be as well to offer him some apology."

"Monsieur Charnot?"

“Yes. It is Monsieur Charnot, of the Institute, who was reading the Early Text.”

“Merciful Heavens!” I ejaculated, as I went back to my seat; “this must be the man of whom my tutor spoke, the other day! Monsieur Flamaran belongs to the Academy of Moral and Political Science, the other to the Institute of Inscriptions and the Belles-Lettres. Charnot? Yes, I have those two syllables in my ear. The very last time I saw Monsieur Flamaran he let fall ‘my very good friend Charnot, of the ‘Inscriptions.’ They are friends. And I am in a pretty situation; threatened with I don’t know what by the Library—for the keeper told me positively that this was all ‘for the present’—but not for the future; threatened to be disgraced in my tutor’s eyes; and all because this learned man’s temper is upset.

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"I must apologize. Let me see, what could I say to Monsieur Charnot? As a matter of fact, it's to the Early Text that I ought to apologize. I have spilled no ink over Monsieur Charnot. He is spotless, collar and cuffs; the blot, the splashes, all fell on the Text. I will say to him, 'Sir, I am exceedingly sorry to have interrupted you so unfortunately in your learned studies! 'Learned studies' will tickle his vanity, and should go far to appease him."

I was on the point of rising. M. Charnot anticipated me.

Grief is not always keenest when most recent. As he approached I saw he was more irritated and upset than at the moment of the accident. Above his pinched, cleanshaven chin his lips shot out with an angry twitch. The portfolio shook under his arm. He flung me a look full of tragedy and went on his way.

Well, well; go your way, M. Charnot! One doesn't offer apologies to a man in his wrath. You shall have them by-and-bye, when we meet again.

CHAPTER II

THE JUNIAN LATINS

December 28, 1884.

This afternoon I paid M. Flamaran a visit. I had been thinking about it for the last week, as I wanted him to help my Junian Latins out of a mess. I am acquiring a passion for that interesting class of freedmen. And really it is only natural. These Junian Latins were poor slaves, whose liberation was not recognized by the strict and ancient laws of Rome, because their masters chose to liberate them otherwise than by 'vindicta, census, or testamentum'. On this account they lost their privileges, poor victims of the legislative intolerance of the haughty city. You see, it begins to be touching, already. Then came on the scene Junius Norbanus, consul by rank, and a true democrat, who brought in a law, carried it, and gave them their freedom. In exchange, they gave him immortality. Henceforward, did a slave obtain a few kind words from his master over his wine? he was a Junian Latin. Was he described as 'filius meus' in a public document? Junian Latin. Did he wear the cap of liberty, the pileus, at his master's funeral? Junian Latin. Did he disembowel his master's corpse? Junian Latin, once more, for his trouble.

What a fine fellow this Norbanus must have been! What an eye for everything, down to the details of a funeral procession, in which he could find an excuse for emancipation! And that, too, in the midst of the wars of Marius and Sylla in which he took part. I can picture him seated before his tent, the evening after the battle. Pensive, he reclines upon his shield as he watches the slave who is grinding notches out of his sword. His

eyes fill with tears, and he murmurs, "When peace is made, my faithful Stychus, I shall have a pleasant surprise for you. You shall hear talk of the Lex Junia Norband, I promise you!"

Is not this a worthy subject for picture or statue in a competition for the Prix de Rome?

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A man so careful of details must have assigned a special dress to these special freedmen of his creation; for at Rome even freedom had its livery. What was this dress? Was there one at all? No authority that I know of throws any light on the subject. Still one hope remains: M. Flamaran. He knows so many things, he might even know this.

M. Flamaran comes from the south-Marseilles, I think. He is not a specialist in Roman law; but he is encyclopedic, which comes to the same thing. He became known while still young, and deservedly; few lawyers are so clear, so safe, so lucid. He is an excellent lecturer, and his opinions are in demand. Yet he owes much of his fame to the works which he has not written. Our fathers, in their day, used to whisper to one another in the passages of the Law School, "Have you heard the news? Flamaran is going to bring out the second volume of his great work. He means to publish his lectures. He has in the press a treatise which will revolutionize the law of mortgages; he has been working twenty years at it; a masterpiece, I assure you." Day follows day; no book appears, no treatise is published, and all the while M. Flamaran grows in reputation. Strange phenomenon! like the aloe in the Botanical Gardens. The blossoming of the aloe is an event. "Only think!" says the gaping public, "a flower which has taken twenty springs, twenty summers, twenty autumns, and twenty winters to make up its mind to open!" And meanwhile the roses bloom unnoticed by the town. But M. Flamaran's case is still more strange. Every year it is whispered that he is about to bloom afresh; he never does bloom; and his reputation flourishes none the less. People make lists of the books he might have written. Lucky author!

M. Flamaran is a professor of the old school, stern, and at examination a terror to the candidates. Clad in cap and gown, he would reject his own son. Nothing will serve. Recommendations defeat their object. An unquestioned Roumanian ancestry, an extraction indisputably Japanese, find no more favor in his eyes than an assumed stammer, a sham deafness, or a convalescent pallor put on for the occasion. East and west are alike in his sight. The retired registrar, the pensioned usher aspiring late in life to some petty magistrature, are powerless to touch his heart. For him in vain does the youthful volunteer allow his uniform to peep out beneath his student's gown: he will not profit by the patriotic indulgence he counted on inspiring. His sayings in the examination-room are famous, and among them are some ghastly pleasantries. Here is one, addressed to a victim: "And you, sir, are a law student, while our farmers are in want of hands!"

For my own part I won his favor under circumstances that I never shall forget. I was in for my first examination. We were discussing, or rather I was allowing him to lecture on, the law of wardship, and nodding my assent to his learned elucidations. Suddenly he broke off and asked, "How many opinions have been formulated upon this subject?"

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"Two, sir."

"One is absurd. Which? Beware how you give the wrong answer!"

I considered for three agonizing seconds, and hazarded a guess. "The first, sir." I had guessed right. We were friends. At bottom the professor is a capital fellow; kindly, so long as the dignity of the Code is not in question, or the extent of one's legal knowledge; proverbially upright and honorable in his private life.

At home he may be seen at his window tending his canaries, which, he says, is no change of occupation. To get to his house I have only to go by my favorite road through the Luxembourg. I am soon at his door.

"Is Monsieur Flamaran at home?"

The old servant who opened the door eyed me solemnly. So many young freshmen come and pester her master under the pretext of paying their respects. Their respects, indeed! They would bore him to death if he had to see them all. The old woman inferred, probably from my moustache, that I had taken at least my bachelor's degree.

"I think he is."

He was very much at home in his overheated study, where he sat wrapped up in a dressing-gown and keeping one eye shut to strengthen the other.

After a moment's hesitation he recognized me, and held out his hand.

"Ah! my Junian Latin. How are you getting on?"

"I am all right, sir; it's my Junian Latins who are not getting on."

"You don't say so. We must look into that. But before we begin—I forget where you come from. I like to know where people come from."

"From La Chatre. But I spend my vacations at Bourges with my Uncle Mouillard."

"Yes, yes, Mouillard with a t, isn't it?"

"No, with a d."

"I asked, you know, because I once knew a General Mouillard who had been through the Crimea, a charming man. But he can not have been a relative, for his name ended with a t."



My good tutor spoke with a delightful simplicity, evidently wishing to be pleasant and to show some interest in me.

“Are you married, young man?”

“No, sir; but I have no conscientious objections.”

“Marry young. Marriage is the salvation of young men. There must be plenty of pretty heiresses in Bourges.”

“Heiresses, yes. As to their looks, at this distance—”

“Yes, I understand, at this distance of course you can’t tell. You should do as I did; make inquiries, go and see. I went all the way to Forez myself to look for my wife.”

“Madame Flamaran comes from Forez?”

“Just so; I stayed there a fortnight, fourteen days exactly, in the middle of term-time, and brought back Sidonie. Bourges is a nice town.”

“Yes, in summer.”

“Plenty of trees. I remember a grand action I won there. One of my learned colleagues was against me. We had both written opinions, diametrically opposed, of course. But I beat him—my word, yes!”

Page 1932

"I dare say."

"My boy, there was nothing left of him. Do you know the case?"

"No."

"A magnificent case! My notes must be somewhere about; I will get them out for you."

The good man beamed. Evidently he had not had a talk all day, and felt he must expand and let himself out to somebody. I appeared in the nick of time, and came in for all his honey. He rose, went to a bookcase, ran his eye along a shelf, took down a volume, and began, in a low tone: "'Cooperation is the mighty lever upon which an effete society relies to extricate itself from its swaddling-clothes and take a loftier flight.' Tut, tut! What stuff is this? I beg your pardon. I was reading from a work on moral philosophy. Where the deuce is my opinion?"

He found it and, text in hand, began a long account of the action, with names, dates, moments of excitement, and many quotations in extenso.

"Yes, my young friend, two hundred and eighteen thousand francs did I win in that action for Monsieur Prebois, of Bourges; you know Prebois, the manufacturer?"

"By name."

At last he put the note-book back on its shelf, and deigned to remember that I had come about the Junian Latins.

"In which of the authorities do you find a difficulty?"

"My difficulty lies in the want of authorities, sir, I wish to find out whether the Junian Latins had not a special dress."

"To be sure." He scratched his head. "Gaius says nothing on the point?"

"No."

"Papinian?"

"No."

"Justinian?"

"No."

"Then I see only one resource."

“What is that?”

“Go to see Charnot.”

I felt myself growing pale, and stammered, with a piteous look:

“Monsieur Charnot, of the Acad—”

“The Academy of Inscriptions; an intimate friend of mine, who will welcome you like a son, for he has none himself, poor man!”

“But perhaps the question is hardly important enough for me to trouble him like this—”

“Hey? Not important enough? All new questions are important. Charnot specializes on coins. Coins and costumes are all one. I will write to tell him you are coming.”

“I beg, sir—”

“Nonsense; Nonsense; I’ll write him this very evening. He will be delighted to see you. I know him well, you understand. He is like me; he likes industrious young men.”

M. Flamaran held out his hand.

“Good-by, young man. Marry as soon as you have taken your degree.”

I did not recover from the shock till I was halfway across the Luxembourg Gardens, near the Tennis Court, when I sat down, overcome. See what comes of enthusiasm and going to call on your tutor! Ah, young three-and-twenty, when will you learn wisdom?

CHAPTER III

AN APOLOGY



Page 1933

9 P.M.

I have made up my mind. I shall go to see M. Charnot. But before that I shall go to his publisher's and find out something about this famous man's works, of which I know nothing whatever.

December 31st

He lives in the Rue de l'Universite.

I have called. I have seen him. I owe this to an accident, to the servant's forgetting her orders.

As I entered, on the stroke of five, he was spinning a spiral twist of paper beneath the lamplight to amuse his daughter—he a member of the Institute, she a girl of eighteen. So that is how these big-wigs employ their leisure moments!

The library where I found them was full of book cases—open bookcases, bookcases with glass doors, tall bookcases, dwarf bookcases, bookcases standing on legs, bookcases standing on the floor—of statuettes yellow with smoke, of desks crowded with paper-weights, paper-knives, pens, and inkstands of “artistic” patterns. He was seated at the table, with his back to the fire, his arm lifted, and a hairpin between his finger and thumb—the pivot round which his paper twist was spinning briskly. Across the table stood his daughter, leaning forward with her chin on her hands and her white teeth showing as she laughed for laughing's sake, to give play to her young spirits and gladden her old father's heart as he gazed on her, delighted.

I must confess it made a pretty picture; and M. Charnot at that moment was extremely unlike the M. Charnot who had confronted me from behind the desk.

I was not left long to contemplate.

The moment I lifted the ‘portiere’ the girl jumped up briskly and regarded me with a touch of haughtiness, meant, I think, to hide a slight confusion. To compare small things with great, Diana must have worn something of that look at sight of Actaeon. M. Charnot did not rise, but hearing somebody enter, turned half-round in his armchair, while his eyes, still dazzled with the lamplight, sought the intruder in the partial shadow of the room.

I felt myself doubly uneasy in the presence of this reader of the Early Text and of this laughing girl.

“Sir,” I began, “I owe you an apology—”

He recognized me. The girl moved a step.

“Stay, Jeanne, stay. We shall not take long. This gentleman has come to offer an apology.”

This was a cruel beginning.

She thought so, too, perhaps, and withdrew discreetly into a dim corner, near the bookcase at the end of the room.

“I have felt deep regret, sir, for that accident the other day—I set down the penholder clumsily, in equilibrium—unstable equilibrium —besides, I had no notion there was a reader behind the desk. Of course, if I had been aware, I should—I should have acted differently.”

M. Charlot allowed me to flounder on with the contemplative satisfaction of an angler who has got a fish at the end of his line. He seemed to find me so very stupid, that as a matter of fact I became stupid. And then, there was no answer—not a word. Silence, alas! is not the reproof of kings alone. It does pretty well for everybody. I stumbled on two or three more phrases quite as flatly infelicitous, and he received them with the same faint smile and the same silence.



Page 1934

To escape from my embarrassment:

“Sir,” I said, “I came also to ask for a piece of information.”

“I am at your service, sir.”

“Monsieur Flamaran has probably written to you on the matter?”

“Flamaran?”

“Yes, three days ago.”

“I have received no letter; have I, Jeanne?”

“No, father.”

“This is not the first time that my excellent colleague has promised to write a letter and has not written it. Never mind, sir; your own introduction is sufficient.”

“Sir, I am about to take my doctor’s degree.”

“In arts?”

“No, in law; but I have a bachelor’s degree in arts.”

“You will follow it up with a degree in medicine, no doubt?”

“Really, sir—”

“Why—Why not, since you are collecting these things? You have, then, a bent toward literature?”

“So I have been told.”

“A pronounced inclination—hey? to scribble verse.”

“Ah, yes!”

“The old story; the family driving a lad into law; his heart leaning toward letters; the Digest open on the table, and the drawers stuffed with verses! Isn’t that so?”

I bowed. He glanced toward his daughter.

“Well, sir, I confess to you that I don’t understand—don’t understand at all—this behavior of yours. Why not follow your natural bent? You youngsters nowadays—I mean no offence—you youngsters have no longer any mind of your own. Take my

case; I was seventeen when I began to take an interest in numismatics. My family destined me for the Stamp Office; yes, sir, the Stamp Office. I had against me two grandfathers, two grandmothers, my father, my mother, and six uncles—all furious. I held out, and that has led me to the Institute. Hey, Jeanne?”

Mademoiselle Jeanne had returned to the table, where she was standing when I entered, and seemed, after a moment, to busy herself in arranging the books scattered in disarray on the green cloth. But she had a secret object—to regain possession of the paper spiral that lay there neglected, its pin sticking up beside the lamp-stand. Her light hand, hovering hither and thither, had by a series of cunning manoeuvres got the offending object behind a pile of duodecimos, and was now withdrawing it stealthily among the inkstands and paperweights.

M. Charnot interrupted this little stratagem.

She answered very prettily, with a slight toss of the head:

“But, father, not everybody can be in the Institute.”

“Far from it, Jeanne. This gentleman, for instance, devotes himself to one method of inking parchment that never will make him my colleague. Doctor of Laws and Master of Arts,—I presume, sir, you are going to be a notary?”

“Excuse me, an advocate.”

“I was sure of it. Jeanne, my dear, in country families it is a standing dilemma; if not a notary, then an advocate; if not an advocate, then a notary.”

Page 1935

M. Charnot spoke with an exasperating half-smile.

I ought to have laughed, to be sure; I ought to have shown sense enough at any rate to hold my tongue and not to answer the gibes of this vindictive man of learning. Instead, I was stupid enough to be nettled and to lose my head.

"Well," I retorted, "I must have a paying profession. That one or another—what does it matter? Not everybody can belong to the Institute, as your daughter remarked; not everybody can afford himself the luxury of publishing, at his own expense, works that sell twenty-seven copies or so."

I expected a thunderbolt, an explosion. Not a bit of it. M. Charnot smiled outright with an air of extreme geniality.

"I perceive, sir, that you are given to gossiping with the booksellers."

"Why, yes, sir, now and then."

"It's a very pretty trait, at your age, to be already so strong in bibliography. You will permit me, nevertheless, to add something to your present stock of notions. A large sale is one thing to look at, but not the right thing. Twenty-seven copies of a book, when read by twenty-seven men of intelligence, outweigh a popular success. Would you believe that one of my friends had no more than eight copies printed of a mathematical treatise? Three of these he has given away. The other five are still unsold. And that man, sir, is the first mathematician in France!"

Mademoiselle Jeanne had taken it differently. With lifted chin and reddened cheek she shot this sentence at me from the edge of a lip disdainfully puckered:

"There are such things as 'successes of esteem,' sir!"

Alas! I knew that well, and I had no need of this additional lesson to teach me the rudeness of my remark, to make me feel that I was a brute, an idiot, hopelessly lost in the opinion of M. Charnot and his daughter. It was cruel, all the same. Nothing was left for me but to hurry my departure. I got up to go.

"But," said M. Charnot in the smoothest of tones, "I do not think we have yet discussed the question that brought you here."

"I should hesitate, sir, to trespass further on your time."

"Never mind that. Your question concerns?"

"The costume of the Latini Juniani."

“Difficult to answer, like most questions of dress. Have you read the work, in seventeen volumes, by the German, Friedchenhausen?”

“No.”

“You must have read, at any rate, Smith, the Englishman, on ancient costume?”

“Nor that either. I only know Italian.”

“Well, then, look through two or three treatises on numismatics, the ‘Thesaurus Morellianus’, or the ‘Praestantiora Numismata’, of Valliant, or Banduri, or Pembrock, or Pellerin. You may chance upon a scent.”

“Thank you, thank you, sir!”

He saw me to the door.

As I turned to go I noticed that his daughter was standing motionless still, with the face of an angry Diana. She held between her fingers the recovered spiral.

Page 1936

I found myself in the street.

I could not have been more clumsy, more ill-bred, or more unfortunate. I had come to make an apology and had given further offence. Just like my luck! And the daughter, too—I had hurt her feelings. Still, she had stood up for me; she had said to her father, “Not every one can be in the Institute,” evidently meaning, “Why are you torturing this poor young man? He is bashful and ill at ease. I feel sorry for him.” Sorry—yes; no doubt she felt sorry for me at first. But then I came out with that impertinence about the twenty-seven copies, and by this time she hates me beyond a doubt. Yes, she hates me. It is too painful to think of.

Mademoiselle Charnot will probably remain but a stranger to me, a fugitive apparition in my path of life; yet her anger lies heavy upon me, and the thought of those disdainful lips pursues me.

I had rarely been more thoroughly disgusted with myself, and with all about me. I needed something to divert me, to distract me, to make me forget, and so I set off for home by the longest way, going down the Rue de Beaune to the Seine.

I declare, we get some perfect winter days in Paris! Just now, the folks who sit indoors believe that the sun is down and have lighted their lamps; but outside, the sky—a pale, rain-washed blue—is streaked with broad rays of rose-pink. It is freezing, and the frost has sprinkled diamonds everywhere, on the trees, the roofs, the parapets, even on the cabmen’s hats, that gather each a sparkling cockade as they pass along through the mist. The river is running in waves, white-capped here and there. On the penny steamers no one but the helmsman is visible. But what a crowd on the Pont de Carrousel! Fur cuffs and collars pass and repass on the pavements; the roadway trembles beneath the endless line of Batignolles—Clichy omnibuses and other vehicles. Every one seems in a hurry. The pedestrians are brisk, the drivers dexterous. Two lines of traffic meet, mingle without jostling, divide again into fresh lines and are gone like a column of smoke. Although slips are common in this crowd, its intelligent agility is all its own. Every face is ruddy, and almost all are young. The number of young men, young maidens, young wives, is beyond belief, Where are the aged? At home, no doubt, by the chimney-corner. All the city’s youth is out of doors.

Its step is animated; that is the way of it. It is wideeyed, and in its eyes is the sparkle of life. The looks of the young are always full of the future; they are sure of life. Each has settled his position, his career, his dream of commonplace well-being. They are all alike; and they might all be judges, so serious they appear about it. They walk in pairs, bolt upright, looking neither right nor left, talking little as they hurry along toward the old Louvre, and are soon swallowed out of sight in the gathering mist, out of which the gaslights glimmer faintly.

Page 1937

They are all on their way to dine on the right bank.

I am going to dine on the left bank, at Carre's, where one sees many odd customers. Farewell, river! Good night, old Charnot! Blessings on you, Mademoiselle Jeanne!

CHAPTER IV

THE STORY OF SYLVESTRE

8 P.M.

I am back in my study. It is very cold; Madame Menin, my housekeeper, has let the fire out. Hallo! she has left her duster, too, lying on the manuscript of my essay.

Is it an omen, a presage of that dust which awaits my still unfinished work? Who can fathom Dame Fortune's ironic humor?

Eight o'clock.... Counsellor Mouillard has finished his pleadings and must be sitting down to a game of whist with Counsellors Horlet and Hublette, of the Court of Bourges. They wait for me to make up the four. Perish the awful prospect!

And M. Charnot? He, I suppose, is still spinning the paper spiral. How easily serious people are amused! Perhaps I am a serious person. The least thing amuses me. By the way, is Mademoiselle Jeanne fair or dark? Let me try to recollect. Why, fair, of course. I remember the glint of gold in the little curls about her temples, as she stood by the lamp. A pleasant face, too; not exactly classic, but rosy and frank; and then she has that animation which so many pretty women lack.

Madame Menin has forgotten something else. She has forgotten to shut my window. She has designs upon my life!

I have just shut the window. The night is calm, its stars twinkling through a haze. The year ends mournfully.

I remember at school once waking suddenly on such a night as this, to find the moonlight streaming into my eyes. At such a moment it is always a little hard to collect one's scattered senses, and take in the midnight world around, so unhomely, so absolutely still. First I cast my eyes along the two rows of beds that stretched away down the dormitory—two parallel lines in long perspective; my comrades huddled under their blankets in shapeless masses, gray or white according as they lay near or far from the windows; the smoky glimmer of the oil lamp half-way down the room; and at the end, in the deeper shadows, the enclosure of yellow curtains surrounding the usher's bed.



Not a sound about me; all was still. But without, my ear, excited and almost feverishly awake, caught the sound of a strange call, very sweet, again and again repeated—fugitive notes breathing appeal, tender and troubled. Now they grew quite distant, and I heard no more than a phantom of sound; now they came near, passed over my head, and faded again into the distance. The moon's clear rays invited me to clear up the mystery. I sprang from my bed, and ran in my nightshirt to open the window. It was about eleven o'clock. Together the keen night-air and the moonlight wrapped me round, thrilling me with delight. The large courtyard lay deserted with its leafless poplars and spiked railings. Here and there a grain of sand sparkled. I raised my eyes, and from one constellation to another I sought the deep blue of heaven in vain; not a shadow upon it, not one dark wing outlined. Yet all the while the same sad and gentle cry wandered and was lost in air, the chant of an invisible soul which seemed in want of me, and had perhaps awakened me.

Page 1938

The thought came upon me that it was the soul of my mother calling to me—my mother, whose voice was soft and very musical.

"I am caring for thee," said the voice. "I am caring for thee; I can see thee," it said, "I can see thee. I love thee! I love thee!"

"Reveal thyself!" I called back. "Oh, mother, reveal thyself!" And I strove feverishly to catch sight of her, following the voice as it swept around in circles; and seeing nothing, I burst into tears.

Suddenly I was seized roughly by the ear.

"What are you doing here, you young rascal? Are you mad? The wind is blowing right on to my bed. Five hundred lines!"

The usher, in nightdress and slippers, was rolling his angry eyes on me.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir! But don't you hear her?"

"Who is it?"

"My mother."

He looked to see whether I were awake; cocked his head to one side and listened; then shut the window angrily and went off shrugging his shoulders.

"It's only the plovers flying about the moon," said he. "Five hundred lines!"

I did my five hundred lines. They taught me that dreaming was illegal and dangerous, but they neither convinced nor cured me.

I still believe that there are scattered up and down in nature voices that speak, but which few hear; just as there are millions of flowers that bloom unseen by man. It is sad for those who catch a hint of it. Perforce they come back and seek the hidden springs. They waste their youth and vigor upon empty dreams, and in return for the fleeting glimpses they have enjoyed, for the perfect phrase half caught and lost again, will have given up the intercourse of their kind, and even friendship itself. Yes, it is sad for the schoolboys who open their windows to gaze at the moon, and never drop the habit! They will find themselves, all too soon, solitaires in the midst of life, desolate as I am desolate tonight, beside my dead fire.

No friend will come to knock at my door; not one. I have a few comrades to whom I give that name. We do not loathe one another. At need they would help me. But we seldom meet. What should they do here? Dreamers make no confidences; they shrivel up into themselves and are caught away on the four winds of heaven. Politics drive them mad;

gossip fails to interest them; the sorrows they create have no remedy save the joys that they invent; they are natural only when alone, and talk well only to themselves.

The only man who can put up with this moody contrariety of mine is Sylvestre Lampron. He is nearly twenty years older than I. That explains his forbearance. Besides, between an artist like him and a dreamer like myself there is only the difference of handiwork. He translates his dreams. I waste mine; but both dream. Dear old Lampron! Kindly, stalwart heart! He has withstood that hardening of the moral and physical fibre which comes over so many men as they near their fortieth year. He shows a brave front to work and to life. He is cheerful, with the manly cheerfulness of a noble heart resigned to life's disillusion.

Page 1939

When I enter his home, I nearly always find him sitting before a small ground-glass window in the corner of his studio, bent over some engraving. I have leave to enter at all hours. He is free not to stir from his work. "Good-day," he calls out, without raising his head, without knowing for certain who has come in, and goes on with the engraving he has in hand. I settle down at the end of the room, on the sofa with the faded cover, and, until Lampron deigns to grant me audience, I am free to sleep, or smoke, or turn over the wonderful drawings that lean against the walls. Among them are treasures beyond price; for Lampron is a genius whose only mistake is to live and act with modesty, so that as yet people only say that he has "immense talent." No painter or engraver of repute—and he is both—has served a more conscientious apprenticeship, or sets greater store on thoroughness in his art. His drawing is correct beyond reproach—a little stiff, like the early painters. You can guess from his works his partiality for the old masters—Perugino, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Memling, Holbein—who, though not the masters in fashion, will always be masters in vigor of outline, directness, in simple grace, and genuine feeling. He has copied in oils, water-colors, pen, or pencil, nearly all the pictures of these masters in the Louvre, in Germany, in Holland, and especially in Italy, where he lived for many years. With tastes such as his came the habit, or rather the fixed determination, never to paint or engrave any but sacred subjects. Puffs and cliques are his abomination. His ideal is the archaic rendered by modern methods. An artist of this type can but obtain the half-grudging esteem of his own profession, and of the few critics who really understand something about art. Gladly, and with absolute disdain, he leaves to others the applause of the mob, the gilded patronage of American purchasers, and the right to wear lace cuffs. In short, in an age when the artist is often half a manufacturer and half a charlatan, he is an artist only.

Now and then he is rich, but never for long. Half of his earnings goes in alms; half into the pockets of his mendicant brethren. They hear the gold jingle before it is counted, and run with outstretched palms. Each is in the depths of misfortune; on the eve of ascending the fatal slope; lost, unless the helpful hand of Lampron will provide, saved if he will lend wherewithal to buy a block of marble, to pay a model, to dine that evening. He lends—I should say gives; the words mean the same in many societies. Of all that he has gained, fame alone remains, and even this he tries to do without—modest, retiring, shunning all entertainments. I believe he would often be without the wherewithal to live were it not for his mother, whom he supports, and who does him the kindness to need something to live on. Madame Lampron does not hoard; she only fills the place of those dams of cut turf which the peasants build in the channels of the Berry in spring; the water passes over them, beneath them, even through them, but still a little is left for the great droughts.

Page 1940

I love my friend Lampron, though fully aware of his superiority. His energy sets me up, his advice strengthens me, he peoples for me the vast solitude of Paris.

Suppose I go to see him? A lonely watch to-night would be gloomier than usual. The death of the year brings gloomy thoughts, the thirty-first of December, St. Sylvester's day—St. Sylvester! Why, that is his birthday! Ungrateful friend, to give no thought to it! Quick! my coat, my stick, my hat, and let me run to see these two early birds before they seek their roost.

When I entered the studio, Lampron was so deep in his work that he did not hear me. The large room, lighted only in one corner, looked weird enough. Around me, and among the medley of pictures and casts and the piles of canvases stacked against the wall, the eye encountered only a series of cinder-gray tints and undetermined outlines casting long amorphous shadows half-way across the ceiling. A draped lay figure leaning against a door seemed to listen to the whistling of the wind outside; a large glass bay opened upon the night. Nothing was alive in this part of the room, nothing alight except a few rare glints upon the gold of the frames, and the blades of two crossed swords. Only in a corner, at the far end, at a distance exaggerated by the shadows, sat Lampron engraving, solitary, motionless, beneath the light of a lamp. His back was toward me. The lamp's rays threw a strong light on his delicate hand, on the workmanlike pose of his head, which it surrounded with a nimbus, and on a painting—a woman's head—which he was copying. He looked superb like that, and I thought how doubly tempted Rembrandt would have been by the deep significance as well as by the chiaroscuro of this interior.

I stamped my foot. Lampron started, and turned half around, narrowing his eyes as he peered into the darkness.

"Ah, it's you," he said. He rose and came quickly toward me, as if to prevent me from approaching the table.

"You don't wish me to look?"

He hesitated a moment.

"After all, why not?" he answered.

The copper plate was hardly marked with a few touches of the needle. He turned the reflector so as to throw all its rays upon the painting.

"O Lampron, what a charming head!"

It was indeed a lovely head; an Italian girl, three quarter face, painted after the manner of Leonardo, with firm but delicate touches, and lights and shades of infinite subtlety, and possessing, like all that master's portraits of women, a straightforward look that

responds to the gazer's, but which he seeks to interrogate in vain. The hair, brown with golden lights, was dressed in smooth plaits above the temples. The neck, 1351 somewhat long, emerged from a dark robe broadly indicated.

"I do not know this, Sylvestre?"

"No, it's an old thing."

"A portrait, of course?"

"My first."

Page 1941

"You never did better; line, color, life, you have got them all."

"You need not tell me that! In one's young days, look you, there are moments of real inspiration, when some one whispers in the ear and guides the hand; a lightness of touch, the happy audacity of the beginner, a wealth of daring never met with again. Would you believe that I have tried ten times to reproduce that in etching without success?"

"Why do you try?"

"Yes, that is the question. Why? It's a bit foolish."

"You never could find such a model again; that is one reason."

"Ah, no, you are right. I never could find her again."

"An Italian of rank? a princess, eh?"

"Something like it."

"What has become of her?"

"Ah, no doubt what becomes of all princesses. Fabien, my young friend, you who still see life through fairy-tales, doubtless you imagine her happy in her lot—wealthy, spoiled, flattered, speaking with disdainful lips at nightfall, on the terrace of her villa among the great pines, of the barbarian from across the Alps who painted her portrait twenty years since; and, in the same sentence, of her—last new frock from Paris?"

"Yes, I see her so—still beautiful."

"You are good at guessing, Fabien. She is dead, my friend, and that ideal beauty is now a few white bones at the bottom of a grave."

"Poor girl!"

Sylvestre had used a sarcastic tone which was not usual with him. He was contemplating his work with such genuine sadness that I was awed. I divined that in his past, of which I knew but little, Lampron kept a sorrow buried that I had all unwittingly revived.

"My friend," said I, "let that be; I come to wish you many happy returns."

"Many happy returns? Ah, yes, my poor mother wished me that this morning; then I set to work and forgot all about it. I am glad you came. She would feel hurt, dear soul, if I forgot to pass a bit of this evening with her. Let us go and find her."

“With all my heart, Sylvestre, but I, too, have forgotten something.”

“What?”

“I have brought no flowers.”

“Never mind, she has plenty; strong-scented flowers of the south, a whole basketful, enough to keep a hive of bees or kill a man in his sleep, which you will. It is a yearly attention from an unhappy creditor.”

“Debtor, you mean.”

“I mean what I say—a creditor.”

He lifted the lamp. The shadows shifted and ran along the walls like huge spiders, the crossed swords flashed, the Venus of Milo threw us a lofty glance, Polyhymnia stood forth pensive and sank back into shadow. At the door I took the draped lay figure in my arms. “Excuse me,” I said as I moved it—and we left the studio for Madame Lampron’s little sitting-room.

She was seated near a small round table, knitting socks, her feet on a hot-water bottle. Her kind old rough and wrinkled face beamed upon us. She thrust her needles under the black lace cap she always wore, and drew them out again almost immediately.



Page 1942

"It needed your presence, Monsieur Mouillard," said she, "to drag him from his work."

"Saint Sylvester's day, too. It is fearful! Love for his art has changed your son's nature, Madame Lampron."

She gave him a tender look, as on entering the room he bent over the fire and shook out his half-smoked pipe against the bars, a thing he never failed to do the moment he entered his mother's room.

"Dear child!" said she.

Then turning to me:

"You are a good friend, Monsieur Fabien. Never have we celebrated a Saint Sylvester without you since you came to Paris."

"Yet this evening, Madame, I have failed in my traditions, I have no flowers. But Sylvestre tells me that you have just received flowers from the south, from an unfortunate creditor."

My words produced an unusual effect upon her. She, who never stopped knitting to talk or to listen, laid her work upon her knees, and fixed her eyes upon me, filled with anxiety.

"Has he told you?"

Lampron who was poking the fire, his slippared feet stretched out toward the hearth, turned his head.

"No, mother, I merely told him that we had received a basket of flowers. Not much to confide. Yet why should he not know all? Surely he is our friend enough to know all. He should have known it long since were it not cruel to share between three a burden that two can well bear."

She made no answer, and began again to twist the wool between her needles, but nervously and as if her thoughts were sad.

To change the conversation I told them the story of my twofold mishap at the National Library and at M. Charnot's. I tried to be funny, and fancied I succeeded. The old lady smiled faintly. Lampron remained grave, and tossed his head impatiently. I summed my story thus:

"Net gain: two enemies, one of them charming."

“Oh, enemies!” said Sylvestre, “they spring up like weeds. One can not prevent them, and great sorrows do not come from them. Still, beware of charming enemies.”

“She hates me, I swear. If you could have seen her!”

“And you?”

“Me? She is nothing to me.”

“Are you sure?”

He put the question gravely, without looking in my face, as he twisted a paper spill.

I laughed.

“What is the matter with you to-day, misanthrope? I assure you that she is absolutely indifferent to me. But even were it otherwise, Sylvestre, where would be the wrong?”

“Wrong? No wrong at all; but I should be anxious for you; I should be afraid. See here, my friend. I know you well. You are a born man of letters, a dreamer, an artist in your way. You have to help you on entering the redoubtable lists of love neither foresight, nor a cool head, nor determination. You are guided solely by your impressions; by them you rise or fall. You are no more than a child.”

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"I quite agree. What next?"

"What next?" He had risen, and was speaking with unusual vehemence. "I once knew some one like you, whose first passion, rash, but deep as yours would be, broke his heart forever. The heart, my friend, is liable to break, and can not be mended like china."

Lampron's mother interrupted him afresh, reproachfully.

"He came to wish you a happy birthday, my child."

"One day, mother, is as good as another to listen to good advice. Besides, I am only talking of one of my friends. 'Tis but a short story, Fabien, and instructive. I will give it you in very few words. My friend was very young and enthusiastic. He was on his way through the galleries of Italy, brush in hand, his heart full of the ceaseless song of youth in holiday. The world never had played him false, nor balked him. He made the future bend to the fancy of his dreams. He seldom descended among common men from those loftier realms where the contemplation of endless masterpieces kept his spirit as on wings. He admired, copied, filled his soul with the glowing beauty of Italian landscape and Italian art. But one day, without reflection, without knowledge, without foresight, he was rash enough to fall in love with a girl of noble birth whose portrait he was painting; to speak to her and to win her love. He thought then, in the silly innocence of his youth, that art abridges all distance and that love effaces it. Crueller nonsense never was uttered, my poor Fabien. He soon found this; he tried to struggle against the parent's denial, against himself, against her, powerless in all alike, beaten at every point.... The end was—Do you care to learn the end? The girl was carried off, struck down by a brief illness, soon dead; the man, hurled out of heaven, bruised, a fugitive also, is still so weak in presence of his sorrow that even after these long years he can not think of it without weeping."

Lampron actually was weeping, he who was so seldom moved. Down his brown beard, tinged already with gray, a tear was trickling. I noticed that Madame Lampron was stooping lower and lower over her needles. He went on:

"I have kept the portrait, the one you saw, Fabien. They would like to have it over yonder. They are old folk by now. Every year they ask me for this relic of our common sorrow; every year they send me, about this time a basket of white flowers, chiefly lilacs, the dead girl's flower, and their meaning is, 'Give up to us what is left of her, the masterpiece built up of your youth and hers.' But I am selfish, Fabien. I, like them, am jealous of all the sorrows this portrait recalls to me, and I deny them. Come, mother, where are the flowers? I have promised Fabien to show them to him."

But his old mother could not answer. Having no doubt bewept this sorrow too often to find fresh tears, her eyes followed her son with restless compassion. He, beside the

window, was hunting among the chairs and lounges crowded in this corner of the little sitting-room.

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He brought us a box of white wood. "See," said he, "'tis my wedding bouquet."

And he emptied it on the table. Parma violets, lilacs, white camellias and moss rolled out in slightly faded bunches, spreading a sweet smell in which there breathed already a vague scent of death and corruption. A violet fell on my knees. I picked it up.

He looked for a moment at the heap on the table.

"I keep none," said he: "I have too many reminders without them. Cursed flowers!"

With one motion of his arm he swept them all up and cast them upon the coals in the hearth. They shrivelled, crackled, grew limp and discolored, and vanished in smoke.

"Now I am going back to my etching. Good-by, Fabien. Good-night, mother."

Without turning his head, he left the room and went back to his studio.

I made a movement to follow him and bring him back.

Madame Lampron stopped me. "I will go myself," said she, "later—much later."

We sat awhile in silence. When she saw me somewhat recovered from the shock of my feelings she went on:

"You never have seen him like this, but I have seen it often. It is so hard! I knew her whom he loved almost as soon as he, for he never hid anything from me. You can judge from her portrait whether hers was not the face to attract an artist like Sylvestre. I saw at once that it was a trial, in which I could do nothing. They were very great people; different from us, you know."

"They refused to let them marry?"

"Oh, no! Sylvestre did not ask; they never had the opportunity of refusing. No, no; it was I. I said to him: 'Sylvestre, this can never be-never!' He was convinced against his will. Then she spoke to her parents on her own account. They carried her off, and there was an end of it."

"He never saw her again."

"Never; he would not have wished it; and then she lived a very little time. I went back there two years later, when they wanted to buy the picture. We were still living in Italy. That was one of the hardest hours of my life. I was afraid of their reproaches, and I did not feel sure of myself. But no, they suffered for their daughter as I for my son, and that brought us together. Still, I did not give up the portrait; Sylvestre set too great store by it. He insists on keeping it, feeding his eyes on it, reopening his wound day by day.



Poor child! Forget all this, Monsieur Fabien; you can do nothing to help. Be true to your youth, and tell us next time of Monsieur Charnot and Mademoiselle Jeanne.”

Dear Madame Lampron! I tried to console her; but as I never knew my mother, I could find but little to say. All the same, she thanked me and assured me I had done her good.

CHAPTER V

A FRUITLESS SEARCH

January 1, 1885.

The first of January! When one is not yet an uncle and no longer a godson, if one is in no government employ and goes out very little, the number of one's calls on New Year's Day is limited. I shall make five or six this afternoon. It will be “Not at home” in each case; and that will be all my compliments of the season.

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No, I am wrong. I have received the compliments of the season. My porter's wife came up just now, wreathed in smiles.

"Monsieur Mouillard, I wish you a Happy New Year, good health, and Heaven to end your days." She had just said the same to the tenants on the first, second, and third floors. My answer was the same as theirs. I slipped into her palm (with a "Many thanks!" of which she took no notice) a piece of gold, which brought another smile, a curtsy, and she is gone.

This smile comes only once a year; it is not reproduced at any other period, but is a dividend payable in one instalment. This, and a tear on All Souls' Day, when she has been to place a bunch of chrysanthemums on her baby's grave, are the only manifestations of sensibility that I have discovered in her. From the second of January to the second of November she is a human creature tied to a bell-rope, with an immovably stolid face and a monosyllabic vocabulary in which politer terms occur but sparsely.

This morning, contrary to her habits, she has brought up by post two letters; one from my Uncle Mouillard (an answer), and the other—I don't recognize the other. Let's open it first: big envelope, ill-written address, Paris postmark. Hallo! a smaller envelope inside, and on it:

Antoine and Marie Plumet.

Poor souls! they have no visiting-cards. But kind hearts are more than pasteboard.

Ten months ago little Madame Plumet, then still unmarried, was in a terrible bother. I remember our first meeting, on a March day, at the corner of the Rue du Quatre-Septembre and the Rue Richelieu. I was walking along quickly, with a bundle of papers under my arm, on my way back to the office where I was head clerk. Suddenly a dressmaker's errand-girl set down her great oilcloth-covered box in my way. I nearly went head first over it, and was preparing to walk around it, when the little woman, red with haste and blushes, addressed me. "Excuse me, sir, are you a lawyer?"

"No, Mademoiselle, not yet."

"Perhaps, sir, you know some lawyers?"

"To be sure I do; my master, to begin with, Counsellor Boule. He is quite close, if you care to follow me."

"I am in a terrible hurry, but I can spare a minute or two. Thank you very much, Monsieur."



And thus I found myself escorted by a small dressmaker and a box of fashions. I remember that I walked a little ahead for fear of being seen in such company by a fellow-clerk, which would have damaged my reputation.

We got to the office. Down went the box again. The little dressmaker told me that she was engaged to M. Plumet, frame-maker. She told her tale very clearly; a little money put by, you see, out of ten years' wages; one may be careful and yet be taken in; and, alas! all has been lent to a cousin in the cabinetmaking trade, who wanted to set up shop; and now he refuses to pay up. The dowry is in danger, and the marriage in suspense.

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“Do not be alarmed, Mademoiselle; we will summons this atrocious cabinet-maker, and get a judgment against him. We shall not let him go until he has disorged, and you shall be Madame Plumet.”

We kept our word. Less than two months later—thanks to my efforts—the dowry was recovered; the banns were put up; and the little dressmaker paid a second visit to the office, this time with M. Plumet, who was even more embarrassed than she.

“See, Antoine! this is Monsieur Mouillard, who undertook our case! Thank you again and again, Monsieur Mouillard, you really have been too kind! What do I owe you for your trouble?”

“You must ask my master what his fees come to, Mademoiselle.”

“Yes, but you? What can I do for you?”

The whole office, from the messenger to the clerk who came next to me, had their eyes upon me. I rose to the occasion, and in my uncle’s best manner I replied:

“Be happy, Mademoiselle, and remember me.”

We laughed over it for a week.

She has done better, she has remembered it after eight months. But she has not given her address. That is a pity. I should have liked to see them both again. These young married folk are like the birds; you hear their song, but that does not tell you the whereabouts of their nest.

Now, uncle, it’s your turn.

Here it is again, your unfailing letter anticipated, like the return of the comets, but less difficult to analyze than the weird substance of which comets are composed. Every year I write to you on December 28th, and you answer me on the 31st in time for your letter to reach me on New Year’s morning. You are punctual, dear uncle; you are even attentive; there is something affectionate in this precision. But I do not know why your letters leave me unmoved. The eighteen to twenty-five lines of which each is composed are from your head, rather than your heart. Why do you not tell me of my parents, whom you knew; of your daily life; of your old servant Madeleine, who nursed me as a baby; of the Angora cat almost as old as she; of the big garden, so green, so enticing, which you trim with so much care, and which rewards your attention with such luxuriance. It would be so nice, dear uncle, to be a shade more intimate.

Ah, well! let us see what he writes:

“*Bourges*, December 31, 1884.

"My dear nephew:

"The approach of the New Year does not find me with the same sentiments with which it leaves you. I make up my yearly accounts from July 31st, so the advent of the 31st of December finds me as indifferent as that of any other day of the said month. Your repinings appear to me the expressions of a dreamer."It would, however, not be amiss if you made a start in practical life. You come of a family not addicted to dreaming. Three Mouillards have, if I may say so, adorned the legal



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profession at Bourges. You will be the fourth.“As soon as you have taken your doctor’s degree—which I presume should not be long—I shall expect you the very next day, or the day after that at the furthest; and I shall place you under my supervision.“The practice is not falling off, I can assure you. In spite of age, I still possess good eyes and good teeth, the chief qualifications for a lawyer. You will find everything ready and in good order here.

“I am obliged to you for your good wishes, which I entirely reciprocate.

“Your affectionate uncle,

“*Brutus Mouillard.*”

“P. S.—The Lorinet family have been to see me. Mademoiselle Berthe is really quite pretty. They have just inherited 751,351 francs.

“I was employed by them in an action relating thereto.”

Yes, my dear uncle, you were employed, according to the formula, “in virtue of these and subsequent engagements,” and among the “subsequent engagements” you are kind enough to reckon one between Mademoiselle Berthe Lorinet, spinster, of no occupation, and M. Fabien Mouillard, lawyer. “Fabien Mouillard, lawyer”—that I may perhaps endure, but “Fabien Mouillard, son-in-law of Lorinet,” never! One pays too dear for these rich wives. Mademoiselle Berthe is half a foot taller than I, who am moderately tall, and she has breadth in proportion. Moreover, I have heard that her wit is got in proportion. I saw her when she was seventeen, in a short frock of staring blue; she was very thin then, and was escorted by a brother, squeezed inside a schoolboy’s suit; they were out for their first walk alone, both red-faced, flurried, shuffling along the sidewalks of Bourges. That was enough. For me she will always wear that look, that frock, that clumsy gait. Recollections, my good uncle, are not unlike instantaneous photographs; and this one is a distinct negative to your designs.

March 3d.

The year is getting on. My essay is growing. The Junian Latin emerges from the fogs of Tiber.

I have had to return to the National Library. My first visits were not made without trepidation. I fancied that the beadle was colder, and that the keepers were shadowing me like a political suspect. I thought it wise to change my side, so now I make out my list of books at the left-hand desk and occupy a seat on the left side of the room.

M. Charlot remains faithful to his post beneath the right-hand inkstand.



I have been watching him. He is usually one of the first to arrive, with nimble, almost springy, step. His hair, which he wears rather long, is always carefully parted in the middle, and he is always freshly shaven. His habit of filling the pockets of his frock-coat with bundles of notes has made that garment swell out at the top into the shape of a basket. He puts on a pair of spectacles mounted in very thin

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gold, and reads determinedly, very few books it is true, but they are all bound in vellum, and that fixes their date. In his way of turning the leaves there is something sacerdotal. He seems popular with the servants. Some of the keepers worship him. He has very good manners toward every one. Me he avoids. Still I meet him, sometimes in the cloakroom, oftener in the Rue Richelieu on his way to the Seine. He stops, and so do I, near the Fontaine Moliere, to buy chestnuts. We have this taste in common. He buys two sous' worth, I buy one; thus the distinctions of rank are preserved. If he arrives after me, I allow him the first turn to be served; if he is before me, I await my turn with a patience which betokens respect. Yet he never seems to notice it. Once or twice, certainly, I fancied I caught a smile at the corners of his mouth, and a sly twinkle in the corners of his eyes; but these old scholars smile so austere.

He must have guessed that I wish to meet him. For I can not deny it. I am looking out for an opportunity to repair my clumsy mistake and show myself in a less unfavorable light than I did at that ill-starred visit. And she is the reason why I haunt his path!

Ever since M. Mouillard threatened me with Mademoiselle Berthe Lorinet, the graceful outlines of Mademoiselle Jeanne have haunted me with a persistence to which I have no objection.

It is not because I love her. It does not go as far as that. I am leaving her and leaving Paris forever in a few months. No; the height of my desire is to see her again—in the street, at the theatre, no matter where—to show her by my behavior and, if possible, by my words that I am sorry for the past, and implore her forgiveness. Then there will no longer be a gulf betwixt her and me, I shall be able to meet her without confusion, to invoke her image to put to flight that of Mademoiselle Lorinet without the vision of those disdainful lips to dash me. She will be for me at once the type of Parisian grace and of filial affection. I will carry off her image to the country like the remembered perfume of some rare flower; and if ever I sing 'Hymen Hymnae'! it shall be with one who recalls her face to me.

I do not think my feelings overpass these bounds. Yet I am not quite sure. I watch for her with a keenness and determination which surprise me, and the disappointment which follows a fruitless search is a shade too lively to accord with cool reason.

After all, perhaps my reason is not cool.

Let me see, I will make up the account of my ventures.

One January afternoon I walked up and down the Rue de l'Universite eight times in succession, from No. 1 to No. 107, and from No. 107 to No. 1. Jeanne did not come out in spite of the brilliancy of the clear winter day.

On the nineteenth of the same month I went to see Andromache, although the classic writers, whom I swear by, are not the writers I most care to hear. I renewed this attempt on the twenty-seventh. Neither on the first nor on the second occasion did I see Mademoiselle Charnot.

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And yet if the Institute does not escort its daughters in shoals to applaud Andromache, where on earth does it take them?

Perhaps nowhere.

Every time I cross the Tuileries Garden I run my eyes over the groups scattered among the chestnut-trees. I see children playing and falling about; nursemaids who leave them crying; mothers who pick them up again; a vagrant guardsman. No Jeanne.

To wind up, yesterday I spent five hours at the Bon Marche.

The spring show was on, one of the great occasions of the year; and I presumed, not without an apparent foundation of reason, that no young or pretty Parisian could fail to be there. When I arrived, about one o'clock, the crowd already filled the vast bazaar. It was not easy to stand against certain currents that set toward the departments consecrated to spring novelties. Adrift like a floating spar I was swept away and driven ashore amid the baby-linen. There it flung me high and dry among the shop-girls, who laughed at the spectacle of an undergraduate shipwrecked among the necessities of babyhood. I felt shy, and attaching myself to the fortunes of an Englishwoman, who worked her elbows with the vigor of her nation, I was borne around nearly twenty counters. At last, wearied, mazed, dusty as with a long summer walk, I took refuge in the reading-room.

Poor simpleton! I said to myself, you are too early; you might have known that. She can not come with her father before the National Library closes. Even supposing they take an omnibus, they will not get here before a quarter past four.

I had to find something to fill up the somewhat long interval which separated me from that happy moment. I wrote a letter to my Uncle Mouillard, taking seven minutes over the address alone. I had not shown such penmanship since I was nine years old. When the last flourish was completed I looked for a paper; they were all engaged. The directory was free. I took it, and opened it at Ch. I discovered that there were many Charnots in Paris without counting mine: Charnot, grocer; Charnot, upholsterer; Charnot, surgical bandage-maker. I built up a whole family tree for the member of the Institute, choosing, of course, those persons of the name who appeared most worthy to adorn its branches. Of what followed I retain but a vague recollection. I only remember that I felt twice as if some inquisitive individual were looking over my shoulder. The third time I woke up with a start.

"Sir," said a shopwalker, with the utmost politeness, "a gentleman has been waiting three quarters of an hour for the directory. Would you kindly hand it to him if you have quite finished with it?"

It was a quarter to six. I still waited a little while, and then I left, having wasted my day.



O Jeanne! where do you hide yourself? Must I, to meet you, attend mass at St. Germain des Pres? Are you one of those early birds who, before the world is up, are out in the Champs Elysees catching the first rays of the morning, and the country breeze before it is lost in the smoke of Paris? Are you attending lectures at the Sorbonne? Are you learning to sing? and, if so, who is your teacher?



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You sing, Jeanne, of course. You remind me of a bird. You have all the quick and easy graces of the skylark. Why should you not have the skylark's voice?

Fabien, you are dropping into poetry!

CHAPTER VI

THE FLOWER-SHOW

April 3d.

For a month I have written nothing in this brown notebook. But to-day there is plenty to put down, and worth the trouble too.

Let me begin with the first shock. This morning, my head crammed with passages from Latin authors, I leaned my brow against the pane of my window which looks on the garden. The garden is not mine, of course, since I live on the fourth floor; but I have a view of the big weeping-willow in the centre, the sanded path that runs around it, and the four walls lined with borders, one of which separates it from the huge premises of the Carmelites. It is an almost deserted garden. The first-floor tenant hardly ever walks there. His son, a schoolboy of seventeen, was there this morning. He stood two feet from the street wall, motionless, with head thrown back, whistling a monotonous air, which seemed to me like a signal. Before him, however, was nothing but the moss on the old wall gleaming like golden lights. People do not whistle to amuse stones nor yet moss. Farther off, on the other side of the street, the windows of the opposite houses stretched away in long straight lines, most of them standing open.

I thought: "The bird is somewhere there. Some small Abigail with her white cap will look out in a moment."

The suspicion was stupid and ill-natured. How rash are our lightest judgments! Suddenly the school-boy took one step forward, swept his hand quickly along the moss as if he were trying to catch a fly, and ran off to his mother triumphant, delighted, beside himself, with an innocent gray lizard on the tips of his fingers.

"I've got him! I've got him! He was basking in the sun and I charmed him!"

"Basking in the sun!" This was a revelation to me. I flung up the window. Yes, it was true. Warmth and light lay everywhere: on the roofs still glistening with last night's showers; across the sky, whose gay blue proclaimed that winter was done. I looked downward and saw what I had not seen before: the willow bursting into bud; the hepatica in flower at the foot of the camellias, which had ceased to bloom; the pear-trees in the Carmelites' garden flushing red as the sap rose within them; and upon the dead trunk of a fig-tree was a blackbird, escaped from the Luxembourg, who, on tiptoe,



with throat outstretched, drunk with delight, answered some far-off call that the wind brought to him, singing, as if in woodland depths, the rapturous song of the year's new birth. Then, oh! then, I could contain myself no longer. I ran down the stairs four at a time, cursing Paris and the Junian Latins who had been cheating me of the

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spring. What! live there cut off from the world which was created for me, tread an artificial earth of stone or asphalt, live with a horizon of chimneys, see only the sky chopped into irregular strips by roofs smirched with smoke, and allow this exquisite spring to fleet by without drinking in her bountiful delight, without renewing in her youthfulness our youth, always a little staled and overcast by winter! No, that can not be; I mean to see the spring.

And I have seen it, in truth, though cut and tied into bouquets, for my aimless steps led me to the Place St. Sulpice, where the flower-sellers were. There were flowers in plenty, but very few people; it was already late. None the less did I enjoy the sight of all the plants arranged by height and kind, from the double hyacinths, dear to hall-porters, to the first carnations, scarcely in bud, whose pink or white tips just peeped from their green sheaths; then the bouquets, bundles of the same kinds and same shades of flowers wrapped up in paper: lilies-of-the-valley, lilacs, forget-me-nots, mignonette, which being grown under glass has guarded its honey from the bees to scent the air here. Everyone had a look of welcome for those exiles. The girls smiled at them without knowing the reason why. The cabdrivers in line along the sidewalk seemed to enjoy their neighborhood. I heard one of them, with a face like a halfripened strawberry, red, with a white nose, say to a comrade, "Hallo, Francis! that smells good, doesn't it!"

I was walking along slowly, looking into every stall, and when I came to the end I turned right about face.

Great Heavens! Not ten feet off! M. Flamaran, M. Charnot, and Mademoiselle Jeanne!

They had stopped before one of the stalls that I had just left. M. Flamaran was carrying under his arm a pot of cineraria, which made his stomach a perfect bower. M. Charnot was stooping, examining a superb pink carnation. Jeanne was hovering undecided between twenty bunches of flowers, bending her pretty head in its spring hat over each in turn.

"Which, father?"

"Whichever you like; but make up your mind soon; Flamaran is waiting."

A moment more, and the elective affinities carried the day.

"This bunch of mignonette," she said.

I would have wagered on it. She was sure to choose the mignonette—a fair, well-bred, graceful plant like herself. Others choose their camellias and their hyacinths; Jeanne must have something more refined.



She put down her money, caught up the bunch, looked at it for a moment, and held it close to her breast as a mother might hold her child, while all its golden locks drooped over her arm. Then off she ran after her father, who had only changed one carnation for another. They went on toward St. Sulpice—M. Flamaran on the right, M. Charnot in the middle, Jeanne on the left. She brushed past without seeing me. I followed them at a distance. All three were

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laughing. At what? I can guess; she because she was eighteen, they for joy to be with her. At the end of the marketplace they turned to the left, followed the railings of the church, and bent their steps toward the Rue St. Sulpice, doubtless to take home M. Flamaran, whose cineraria blazed amid the crowd. I was about to turn in the same direction when an omnibus of the Batignolles-Clichy line stopped my way. In an instant I was overwhelmed by the flood of passengers which it poured on the pavements.

“Hallo, you here! How goes it? What are you staring at? My stovepipe? Observe it well, my dear fellow—the latest invention of Leon; the patent ventilating, anti-sudorific, and evaporating hat!”

It was Larive who had just climbed down from the knifeboard.

Every one knows Larive, head clerk in Machin’s office. He is to be seen everywhere—a tall, fair man, with little closetrimmed beard, and moustache carefully twisted. He is always perfectly dressed, always in a tall hat and new gloves, full of all the new stories, which he tells as his own. If you believe him, he is at home in all the ministries, whatever party is in power; he has cards for every ball, and tickets for every first night. With all that he never misses a funeral, is a good lawyer, and as solemn when in court as a dozen old mandarins.

“Come, Fabien, will you answer? What are you staring at?”

He turned his head.

“Oh, I see—pretty Mademoiselle Charnot.”

“You know her?”

“Of course I do, and her father, too. A pretty little thing!”

I blushed with pleasure.

“Yes, a very pretty little thing; but wants style—dances poorly.”

“An admirable defect.”

“A little big, too, for her eyes.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Her eyes are a little too small, you understand me?”



"What matters that if they are bright and loving?"

"No matter at all to me; but it seems to have some effect on you. Might you be related?"

"No."

"Or connected by marriage?"

"No."

"So much the better—eh, my boy? And how's uncle? Still going strong?"

"Yes; and longing to snatch me from this Babylon."

"You mean to succeed him?"

"As long hence as possible."

"I had heard you were not enthusiastic. A small practice, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. A matter of a thousand a year!"

"Clear profit?"

"Yes."

"That's good enough. But in the country, my poor fellow, in the country!"

"It would be the death of you, wouldn't it?"

"In forty-eight hours."

"However did you manage to be born there, Larive? I'm surprised at you."

"So am I. I often think about it. Good-by. I must be off."

I caught him by the hand which he held out to me.

"Larive, tell me where you have met Mademoiselle Charnot?"

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"Oh, come!—I see it's serious. My dear fellow, I am so sorry I did not tell you she was perfection. If I had only known!"

"That's not what I asked you. Where have you seen her?"

"In society, of course. Where do you expect me to see young girls except in society? My dear Fabien!"

He went off laughing. When he was about ten yards off he turned, and making a speaking-trumpet of his hands, he shouted through them:

"She's perfection!"

Larive is decidedly an ass. His jokes strike you as funny at first; but there's nothing in him, he's a mere hawker of stale puns; there's nothing but selfishness under his jesting exterior. I have no belief in him. Yet he is an old school friend; the only one of my twenty-eight classmates whose acquaintance I have kept up. Four are dead, twenty-three others are scattered about in obscure country places; lost for want of news, as they say at the private inquiry offices. Larive makes up the twenty-eight. I used to admire him, when we were low in the school, because of his long trousers, his lofty contempt of discipline, and his precocious intimacy with tobacco. I preferred him to the good, well-behaved boys. Whenever we had leave out I used to buy gum-arabic at the druggist's in La Chatre, and break it up with a small hammer at the far end of my room, away from prying eyes. I used there to distribute it into three bags ticketed respectively: "large pieces," "middle-sized pieces," "small pieces." When I returned to school with the three bags in my pocket, I would draw out one or the other to offer them to my friends, according to the importance of the occasion, or the degrees of friendship. Larive always had the big bits, and plenty of them. Yet he was none the more grateful to me, and even did not mind chaffing me about these petty attentions by which he was the gainer. He used to make fun of everything, and I used to look up to him. He still makes fun of everything; but for me the age of gumarabic is past and my faith in Larive is gone.

If he believes that he will disparage this charming girl in my eyes by telling me that she is a bad dancer, he is wrong. Of great importance it is to have a wife who dances well! She does not dance in her own house, nor with her husband from the wardrobe to the cradle, but at others' houses, and with other men. Besides, a young girl who dances much has a lot of nonsense talked to her. She may acquire a taste for Larive's buffooneries, for a neat leg, or a sharp tongue. In that case what welcome can she give to simple, timid affection? She will only laugh at it. But you would not laugh, Jeanne, were I to tell you that I loved you. No, I am quite convinced that you would not laugh. And if you loved me, Jeanne, we should not go into society. That would just suit me. I should protect you, yet not hide you. We should have felicity at home instead of running after it to balls and crushes, where it is never to be found. You could not help being

aware of the fascination you exert; but you would not squander it on a mob of dancers, and bring home only the last remnants of your good spirits, with the last remnants of your train. Jeanne, I am delighted to hear that you dance badly.



Page 1954

Whither away, Fabien, my friend, whither away? You are letting your imagination run away with you again. A hint from it, and off you go. Come, do use your reason a little. You have seen this young lady again, that is true. You admired her; that was for the second time. But she, whom you so calmly speak of as "Jeanne," as if she were something to you, never even noticed you. You know nothing about her but what you suspect from her maiden grace and a dozen words from her lips. You do not know whether she is free, nor how she would welcome the notions you entertain if you gave them utterance, yet here you are saying, "We should go here," "We should do this and that." Keep to the singular, my poor fellow. The plural is far away, very far away, if not entirely beyond your reach.

CHAPTER VII

A WOODLAND SKETCH

April 27th.

The end of April. Students, pack and be off! The first warm breezes burst the buds. Meudon is smiling; Clamart breaks into song; the air in the valley of Chevreuse is heavy with violets; the willows shower their catkins on the banks of the Yvette; and farther yet, over yonder beneath the green domes of the forest of Fontainebleau, the deer prick their ears at the sound of the first riding-parties. Off with you! Flowers line the pathways, the moors are pink with bloom, the undergrowth teems with darting wings. All the town troops out to see the country in its gala dress. The very poorest have a favorite nook, a recollection of the bygone year to be revived and renewed; a sheltered corner that invited sleep, a glade where the shade was grateful, a spot beside the river's brink where the fish used to bite. Each one says, "Don't you remember?" Each one seeks his nest like a home-coming swallow. Does it still hold together? What havoc has been made by the winter's winds, and the rain, and the frost? Will it welcome us, as of old?

I, too, said to Lampron, "Don't you remember?" for we, too, have our nest, and summer days that smile to us in memory. He was in the mood for work, and hesitated. I added in a whisper, "The blackbird's pool!" He smiled, and off we went.

Again, as of old, our destination was St. Germain—not the town, nor the Italian palace, nor yet the terrace whence the view spreads so wide over the Seine, the country dotted with villas, to Montmartre blue in the distance—not these, but the forest. "Our forest," we call it; for we know all its young shoots, all its giant trees, all its paths where poachers and young lovers hide. With my eyes shut I could find the blackbird's pool, the way to which was first shown us by a deer.

Page 1955

Imagine at thirty paces from an avenue, a pool—no, not a pool (the word is incorrect), nor yet a pond—but a fountain hollowed out by the removal of a giant oak. Since the death of this monarch the birches which its branches kept apart have never closed together, and the fountain forms the centre of a little clearing where the moss is thick at all seasons and starred in August with wild pinks. The water, though deep, is deliciously clear. At a depth of more than six feet you can distinguish the dead leaves at the bottom, the grass, the twigs, and here and there a stone's iridescent outline. They all lie asleep there, the waste of seasons gone by, soon to be covered by others in their turn. From time to time out of the depths of these submerged thickets an eft darts up. He comes circling up, quivering his yellowbanded tail, snatches a mouthful of air, and goes down again head first. Save for these alarms the pool is untroubled. It is guarded from the winds by a juniper, which an eglantine has chosen for its guardian and crowns each year with a wreath of roses. Each year, too, a blackbird makes his nest here. We keep his secret. He knows we shall not disturb him. And when I come back to this little nook in the woods, which custom has endeared to us, merely by looking in the water I feel my very heart refreshed.

"What a spot to sleep in!" cried Lampron. "Keep sentry, Fabien; I am going to take a nap."

We had walked fast. It was very hot. He took off his coat, rolled it into a pillow, and placed it beneath his head as he lay down on the grass. I stretched myself prone on a velvety carpet of moss, and gave myself up to a profound investigation of the one square foot of ground which lay beneath my eyes. The number of blades of grass was prodigious. A few, already awned, stood above their fellows, waving like palms—meadowgrass, fescue, foxtail, brome-grass—each slender stalk crowned with a tuft. Others were budding, only half unfolded, amid the darker mass of spongy moss which gave them sustenance. Amid the numberless shafts thus raised toward heaven a thousand paths crisscrossed, each full of obstacles—chips of bark, juniper-berries, beech-nuts, tangled roots, hills raised by burrowing insects, ravines formed by the draining off of the rains. Ants and beetles bustled along them, pressing up hill and down to some mysterious goal. Above them a cunning red spider was tying a blade of grass to an orchid leaf, the pillars it had chosen for its future web; and when the wind shook the leaves and the sun pierced through to this spot, I saw the delicate roof already mapped out.

I do not know how long my contemplation lasted. The woods were still. Save for a swarm of gnats which hummed in a minor key around the sleeping Lampron, nothing stirred, not a leaf even. All nature was silent as it drank in the full sunshine.

A murmur of distant voices stole on my ear. I rose, and crept through the birches and hazels to the edge of the glade.

Page 1956

At the top of the slope, on the green margin of the glade, shaded by the tall trees, two pedestrians were slowly advancing. At the distance they still were I could distinguish very little except that the man wore a frock-coat, and that the girl was dressed in gray, and was young, to judge by the suppleness of her walk. Nevertheless I felt at once that it was she!

I hid at they came near, and saw her pass on her father's arm, chatting in low tones, full of joy to have escaped from the Rue de l'Universite. She was looking before her with wide-open eyes. M. Charnot kept his eyes on his daughter, more interested in her than in all the wealth of spring. He kept well to the right of the path as the sun ate away the edge of the shadows; and asked, from time to time:

"Are you tired?"

"Oh, no!"

"As soon as you are tired, my dear, we will sit down. I am not walking too fast?"

She answered "No" again, and laughed, and they went on.

Soon they left the avenue and were lost in a green alley. Then a sudden twilight seemed to have closed down on me, an infinite sadness swelled in my heart. I closed my eyes, and—God forgive my weakness, but the tears came.

"Hallo! What part do you intend me to play in all this?" said Lampron behind me.

"What part'?"

"Yes. It's an odd notion to invite me to your trysting-place."

"Trysting-place? I haven't one."

"You mean to tell me, perhaps, that you came here by chance?"

"Certainly."

"And chanced upon the very moment and the spot where she was passing?"

"Do you want a proof? That young lady is Mademoiselle Charnot."

"Well?"

"Well, I never have said another word to her since my one visit to her father; I have only seen her once, for a moment, in the street. You see there can be no question of trysting-places in this case. I was wondering at her appearance when you awoke. It is

luck, or a friendly providence, that has used the beauty of the sunlight, the breeze, and all the sweets of April to bring her, as it brought us, to the forest."

"And that is what fetched the tears?"

"Well, no."

"What, then?"

"I don't know."

"My full-grown baby, I will tell you. You are in love with her!"

"Indeed, Sylvestre, I believe you're right. I confess it frankly to you as to my best friend. It is an old story already; as old, perhaps, as the day I first met her. At first her figure would rise in my imagination, and I took pleasure in contemplating it. Soon this phantom ceased to satisfy; I longed to see her in person. I sought her in the streets, the shops, the theatre. I still blinded myself, and pretended that I only wanted to ask her pardon, so as to remove, before I left Paris, the unpleasant impression I had made at our first meeting. But now, Sylvestre, all these false reasons have disappeared, and the true one is clear. I love her!"



Page 1957

"Not a doubt of it, my friend, not a doubt of it. I have been through it myself."

He was silent, and his eyes wandered away to the faroff woods, perhaps back to those distant memories of his. A shadow rested on his strong face, but only for an instant. He shook off his depression, and his old smile came back as he said:

"It's serious, then?"

"Yes, very serious."

"I'm not surprised; she is a very pretty girl."

"Isn't she lovely?"

"Better than that, my friend; she is good. What do you know about her?"

"Only that she is a bad dancer."

"That's something, to be sure."

"But it isn't all."

"Well, no. But never mind, find out the rest, speak to her, declare your passion, ask for her hand, and marry her."

"Good heavens, Sylvestre, you are going ahead!"

"My dear fellow, that is the best and wisest plan; these vague idyls ought to be hurried on, either to a painless separation or an honorable end in wedlock. In your place I should begin to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"How so?"

"Let's catch them up, and see her again at least."

He began to laugh.

"Run after young girls at my age! Well, well, it was my advice. Come along!"

We crossed the avenue, and plunged into the forest.

Lampron had formerly acquired a reputation for tireless agility among the fox-hunters of the Roman Campagna. He still deserves it. In twenty strides he left me behind. I saw him jumping over the heather, knocking off with his cane the young shoots on the oaks,



or turning his head to look at me as I struggled after, torn by brambles and pricked by gorse. A startled pheasant brought him to a halt. The bird rose under his feet and soared into the full light.

"Isn't it beautiful?" said he. "Look out, we must be more careful; we are scaring the game. We should come upon the path they took, about sixty yards ahead."

Five minutes later he was signalling to me from behind the trunk of a great beech.

"Here they are."

Jeanne and M. Charnot were seated on a fallen trunk beside the path, which here was almost lost beneath the green boughs. Their backs were toward us. The old man, with his shoulders bent and his goldknobbed cane stuck into the ground beside him, was reading out of a book which we could not see, while Jeanne, attentive, motionless, her face half turned toward him, was listening. Her profile was outlined against a strip of clear sky. The deep silence of the wood wrapped us round, and we could hear the old scholar's voice; it just reached us.

"Straightway the godlike Odysseus spake these cunning words to the fair Nausicaa: 'Be thou goddess or mortal, O queen, I bow myself before thee! If thou art one of the deities who dwell in boundless heaven, by thy loveliness and grace and height I guess thee to be Artemis, daughter of high Zeus. If thou art a mortal dwelling upon earth, thrice blessed thy father and thy queenly mother, thrice blessed thy dear brothers! Surely their souls ever swell with gladness because of thee, when they see a maiden so lovely step into the circle of the dance. But far the most blessed of all is he who shall prevail on thee with presents and lead thee to his home!'"

Page 1958

I turned to Lampron, who had stopped a few steps in front of me, a little to the right. He had got out his sketch-book, and was drawing hurriedly. Presently he forgot all prudence, and came forth from the shelter of a beech to get nearer to his model. In vain I made sign upon sign, and tried to remind him that we were not thereto paint or sketch. It was useless; the artist within him had broken loose. Sitting down at the required distance on a gnarled root, right in the open, he went on with his work with no thought but for his art.

The inevitable happened. Growing impatient over some difficulty in his sketch, Lampron shuffled his feet; a twig broke, some leaves rustled—Jeanne turned round and saw me looking at her, Lampron sketching her.

What are the feelings of a young girl who in the middle of a forest suddenly discovers that two pairs of eyes are busy with her? A little fright at first; then—when the idea of robbers is dismissed, and a second glance has shown her that it is her beauty, not her life, they want—a touch of satisfied vanity at the compliment, not unmixed with confusion.

This is exactly what we thought we saw. At first she slightly drew back, with brows knitted, on the verge of an exclamation; then her brows unbent, and the pleasure of finding herself admired, confusion at being taken unawares, the desire of appearing at ease, all appeared at once on her rosy cheeks and in her faintly troubled smile.

I bowed. Sylvestre pulled off his cap.

M. Charlot never stirred.

“Another squirrel?” he said.

“Two this time, I think, father,” she answered, in a low voice.

He went on reading.

“‘My guest,’ made answer the fair Nausicaa, ‘for I call thee so since thou seemest not base nor foolish, it is Zeus himself that giveth weal to men—’”

Jeanne was no longer listening. She was thinking. Of what? Of several things, perhaps, but certainly of how to beat a retreat. I guessed it by the movement of her sunshade, which was nervously tracing figures in the turf. I signalled to Lampron. We retired backward. Yet it was in vain; the charm was broken, the peace had been disturbed.

She gave two coughs—musical little coughs, produced at will.

M. Charlot broke off his reading.

“You are cold, Jeanne?”

“Why, no, father.”

“Yes, yes, you’re cold. Why did you not say so before? Lord, Lord, these children! Always the same—think of nothing!”

He rose without delay, put his book in his pocket, buttoned up his coat, and, leaning on his stick, glanced up a moment at the tree-tops. Then, side by side, they disappeared down the path, Jeanne stepping briskly, upright and supple, between the young branches which soon concealed her.

Still Lampron continued to watch the turning in the path down which she had vanished.

“What are you thinking about?” said I.

Page 1959

He stroked his beard, where lurked a few gray hairs.

"I am thinking, my friend, that youth leaves us in this same way, at the time when we love it most, with a faint smile, and without a word to tell us whither. Mine played me this trick."

"What a good idea of yours to sketch them both. Let me see the sketch."

"No!"

"Why not?"

"It can scarcely be called a sketch; it's a mere scratch."

"Show it, all the same."

"My good Fabien, you ought to know that when I am obstinate I have my reasons, like Balaam's ass. You will not see my sketch-book to-day, nor to-morrow, nor the day after."

I answered with foolish warmth:

"Please yourself; I don't care."

Really I was very much annoyed, and I was rather cool with Lampron when we parted on the platform.

What has come to the fellow? To refuse to show me a sketch he had made before my eyes, and a sketch of Jeanne, too!

April 28th, 9 A.M.

Hide your sketches, Sylvestre; stuff them away in your portfolios, or your pockets; I care little, for I bear Jeanne's image in my heart, and can see it when I will, and I love her, I love her, I love her!

What is to become of her and of me I can not tell. I hope without knowing what or why, or when, and hope alone is comforting.

9 P.M.

This afternoon, at two o'clock, I met Lampron in the Boulevard St. Michel. He was walking fast with a portfolio under his arm. I went up to him. He looked annoyed, and hardly seemed pleased when I offered to accompany him. I grew red and angry.

"Oh, very well," I said; "good-by, then, since you don't care to be seen with me."



He pondered a moment.

"Oh, come along if you like; I am going to my framemaker's."

"A picture?"

"Something of the kind."

"And that's all the mystery! Yesterday it was a sketch I mustn't look at; to-day it's a picture. It is not nice of you, Sylvestre; no, decidedly it is not nice."

He gave me a look of friendly compassion.

"Poor little chap!" said he.

Then, in his usual clear, strong voice:

"I am in a great hurry; but come if you like. I would rather it were four days later; but as it is, never mind; it is never too soon to be happy."

When Lampron chooses to hold his tongue it is useless to ask him questions. I gave myself up to meditating on the words, "It is never too soon to be happy."

We went down the boulevard, past the beer-houses. There is distinction in my friend's walk; he is not to be confused with the crowd through which he passes. You can tell, from the simple seriousness of the man, his indifference to the noise and petty incidents of the streets, that he is a stout and noble soul. Among the passers-by he is a somebody. I heard from a group of students seated before a cafe the following words, which Sylvestre did not seem to notice:

Page 1960

"Look, do you see the taller of those two there? That's Sylvestre Lampron."

"Prix du Salon two years ago?"

"A great gun, you know."

"He looks it."

"To the left," said Lampron.

We turned to the left, and found ourselves in the Rue Hautefeuille, before a shabby house, within the porch of which hung notices of apartments to let; this was the framemaker's. The passage was dark, the walls were chipped by the innumerable removals of furniture they had witnessed. We went upstairs. On the fourth floor a smell of glue and sour paste on the landing announced the tenant's profession. To make quite certain there was a card nailed to the door with "Plumet, Frame-Maker."

"Plumet? A newly-married couple?"

But already Madame Plumet is at the door. It is the same little woman who came to Boule's office. She recognizes me in the dim light of the staircase.

"What, Monsieur Lampron, do you know Monsieur Mouillard?"

"As you apparently do, too, Madame Plumet."

"Oh, yes! I know him well; he won my action, you know."

"Ah, to be sure-against the cabinet-maker. Is your husband in?"

"Yes, sir, in the workshop. Plumet!"

Through the half-opened door giving access to an inner room we could see in the midst of his molders, gilders, burnishers, and framers—a little dark man with a beard, who looked up and hurriedly undid the strings of his working-apron.

"Coming, Marie!"

Little Madame Plumet was a trifle upset at having to receive us in undress, before she had tidied up her rooms. I could see it by her blushes and by the instinctive movement she made to smooth her disordered curls.

The husband had hardly answered her call before she left us and went off to the end of the room, into the obscure recesses of an alcove overcrowded with furniture. There she

bent over an oblong object, which I could not quite see at first, and rocked it with her hand.

“Monsieur Mouillard,” said she, looking up to me—“Monsieur Mouillard, this is my son, Pierre!”

What tender pride in those words, and the smile which accompanied them! With a finger she drew one of the curtains aside. Under the blue muslin, between the pillow and the white coverlet, I discovered two little black eyes and a tuft of golden hair.

“Isn’t he a little rogue!” she went on, and began to caress the waking baby.

Meanwhile Sylvestre had been talking to Plumet at the other end of the room.

“Out of the question,” said the frame-maker; “we are up to our knees in arrears; twenty orders waiting.”

“I ask you to oblige me as a friend.”

“I wish I could oblige you, Monsieur Lampron; but if I made you a promise, I should not be able to keep it.”

“What a pity! All was so well arranged, too. The sketch was to have been hung with my two engravings. Poor Fabien! I was saving up a surprise for you. Come and look here.”

Page 1961

I went across. Sylvestre opened his portfolio.

"Do you recognize it?"

At once I recognized them. M. Charnot's back; Jeanne's profile, exactly like her; a forest nook; the parasol on the ground; the cane stuck into the grass; a bit of genre, perfect in truth and execution.

"When did you do that?"

"Last night."

"And you want to exhibit it?"

"At the Salon."

"But, Sylvestre, it is too late to send in to the Salon. The Ides of March are long past."

"Yes, for that very reason I have had the devil of a time, intriguing all the morning. With a large picture I never should have succeeded; but with a bit of a sketch, six inches by nine—"

"Bribery of officials, then?"

"Followed by substitution, which is strictly forbidden. I happened to have hung there between two engravings a little sketch of underwoods not unlike this; one comes down, the other is hung instead—a little bit of jobbery of which I am still ashamed. I risked it all for you, in the hope that she would come and recognize the subject."

"Of course she will recognize it, and understand; how on earth could she help it? My dear Sylvestre, how can I thank you?"

I seized my friend's hand and begged his forgiveness for my foolish haste of speech.

He, too, was a little touched and overcome by the pleasure his surprise had given me.

"Look here, Plumet," he said to the frame-maker, who had taken the sketch over to the light, and was studying it with a professional eye. "This young man has even a greater interest than I in the matter. He is a suitor for the lady's hand, and you can be very useful to him. If you do not frame the picture his happiness is blighted."

The frame-maker shook his head.

"Let's see, Antoine," said a coaxing little voice, and Madame Plumet left the cradle to come to our aid.

I considered our cause as won. Plumet repeated in vain, as he pulled his beard, that it was impossible; she declared it was not. He made a move for his workshop; she pulled him back by the sleeve, made him laugh and give his consent.

“Antoine,” she insisted, “we owe our marriage to Monsieur Mouillard; you must at least pay what you owe.”

I was delighted. Still, a doubt seized me.

“Sylvestre,” I said to Lampron, who already had his hand upon the door-handle, “do you really think she will come?”

“I hope so; but I will not answer for it. To make certain, some one must send word to her: ‘Mademoiselle Jeanne, your portrait is at the Salon.’ If you know any one who would not mind taking this message to the Rue de l’Universite—”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“Come on, then, and trust to luck.”

“Rue de l’Universite, did you say?” broke in little Madame Plumet, who certainly took the liveliest interest in my cause.

“Yes; why?”

Page 1962

"Because I have a friend in the neighborhood, and perhaps—"

I risked giving her the number and name under the seal of secrecy; and it was a good thing I did so.

In three minutes she had concocted a plan. It was like this: her friend lived near the hotel in the Rue de l'Universite, a porter's wife of advanced years, and quite safe; by means of her it might be possible to hint to Mademoiselle Jeanne that her portrait, or something like it, was to be seen at the Salon—discreetly, of course, and as if it were the merest piece of news.

What a plucky, clever little woman it is! Surely I was inspired when I did her that service. I never thought I should be repaid. And here I am repaid both capital and interest.

Yet I hesitated. She snatched my consent.

"No, no," said she, "leave me to act. I promise you, Monsieur Mouillard, that she shall hear of it, and you, Monsieur Lampron, that the picture shall be framed."

She showed us to the top of the stairs, did little Madame Plumet, pleased at having won over her husband, at having shown herself so cunning, and at being employed in a conspiracy of love. In the street Lampron shook me by the hand. "Good-by, my friend," he said; "happy men don't need company. Four days hence, at noon, I shall come to fetch you, and we will pay our first visit to the Salon together."

Yes, I was a happy man! I walked fast, without seeing anything, my eyes lost in day dreams, my ears listening to celestial harmonies. I seemed to wear a halo. It abashed me somewhat; for there is something insolent in proclaiming on the housetops: "Look up at me, my heart is full, Jeanne is going to love me!" Decidedly, my brain was affected.

Near the fountain in the Luxembourg, in front of the old palace where the senate sits, two little girls were playing. One pushed the other, who fell down crying,

"Naughty Jeanne, naughty girl!" I rushed to pick her up, and kissed her before the eyes of her astonished nurse, saying, "No, Mademoiselle, she is the most charming girl in the world!"

And M. Legrand! I still blush when I think of my conversation with M. Legrand. He was standing in a dignified attitude at the door of his shop.

*"Italianwarehouse; dressed provisions;
specialty in colonial produce."*



He and I are upon good terms; I buy oranges, licorice from him, and rum when I want to make punch. But there are distinctions. Well, to-day I called him "Dear Monsieur Legrand;" I addressed him, though I had nothing to buy; I asked after his business; I remarked to him, "What a heavenly day, Monsieur Legrand! We really have got fine weather at last!"

He looked up to the top of the street, and looked down again at me, but refrained from differing, out of respect.

And, as a matter of fact, I noticed afterward that there was a most unpleasant drizzle.

Page 1963

To wind up with, just now as I was coming home after dinner, I passed a workman and his family in the Rue Bonaparte, and the man pointed after me, saying:

“Look! there goes a poet.”

He was right. In me the lawyer’s clerk is in abeyance, the lawyer of to-morrow has disappeared, only the poet is left—that is to say, the essence of youth freed from the parasitic growths of everyday life. I feel it roused and stirring. How sweet life is, and what wonderful instruments we are, that Hope can make us thus vibrate by a touch of her little finger!

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

Happy men don’t need company
Lends—I should say gives
Natural only when alone, and talk well only to themselves
One doesn’t offer apologies to a man in his wrath
Silence, alas! is not the reproof of kings alone
The looks of the young are always full of the future
You a law student, while our farmers are in want of hands

THE INK STAIN BY RENE BAZIN

(Tache d’Encre)

By *Rene Bazin*

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VIII

JOY AND MADNESS

May 1st.

These four days have seemed as if they never would end—especially the last. But now it wants only two minutes of noon. In two minutes, if Lampron is not late—

Rat-a-tat-tat!

“Come in.”

“It is twelve o’clock, my friend; are you coming?”

It was Lampron.

For the last hour I had had my hat on my head, my stick between my legs, and had been turning over my essay with gloved hands. He laughed at me. I don't care. We walked, for the day was clear and warm. All the world was out and about. Who can stay indoors on May Day? As we neared the Chamber of Deputies, perambulators full of babies in white capes came pouring from all the neighboring streets, and made their resplendent way toward the Tuileries. Lampron was in a talkative mood. He was pleased with the hanging of his pictures, and his plan of campaign against Mademoiselle Jeanne.

"She is sure to have heard of it, Fabien, and perhaps is there already. Who can tell?"

"Oh, cease your humbug! Yes, very possibly she is there before us. I have had a feeling that she would be for these last four days."

"You don't say so!"

"I have pictured her a score of times ascending the staircase on her father's arm. We are at the foot, lost in the crowd. Her noble, clear-cut profile stands out against the Gobelin tapestries which frame it with their embroidered flowers; one would say some maiden of bygone days had come to life, and stepped down from her tapestried panel."

"Gentlemen!" said Lampron, with a sweep of his arm which took in the whole of the Place de la Concorde, "allow me to present to you the intending successor of Counsellor Mouillard, lawyer, of Bourges. Every inch of him a man of business!"

Page 1964

We were getting near. Crowds were on their way to the exhibition from all sides, women in spring frocks, many of the men in white waistcoats, one hand in pocket, gayly flourishing their canes with the other, as much as to say, "Look at me—well-to-do, jaunty, and out in fine weather." The turnstiles were crowded, but at last we got through. We made but one step across the gravel court, the realm of sculpture where antique gods in every posture formed a mythological circle round the modern busts in the central walk. There was no loitering here, for my heart was elsewhere. We cast a look at an old wounded Gaul, an ancestor unhonored by the crowd, and started up the staircase—no Jeanne to lead the way. We came to the first room of paintings. Sylvestre beamed like a man who feels at home.

"Quick, Sylvestre, where is the sketch? Let's hurry to it."

But he dragged me with him around several rooms.

Have you ever experienced the intoxication of color which seizes the uninitiated at the door of a picture-gallery? So many staring hues impinge upon the eyes, so many ideas take confused shape and struggle together in the brain, that the eyes grow weary and the brain harassed. It hovers undecided like an insect in a meadow full of flowers. The buzzing remarks of the crowd add to the feeling of intoxication. They distract one's attention before it can settle anywhere, and carry it off to where some group is gathered before a great name, a costly frame, an enormous canvas, or an outrage on taste; twenty men on a gallows against a yellow sky, with twenty crows hovering over them, or an aged antediluvian, some mighty hunter, completely nude and with no property beyond a loaded club. One turns away, and the struggle begins again between the eye, attracted by a hundred subjects, and the brain, which would prefer to study one.

With Lampron this danger has no existence; he takes in a room at a glance. He has the sportsman's eye which, in a covey of partridges, marks its bird at a glance. He never hesitates. "That is the thing to make for," he says, "come along"—and we make for it. He plants himself right in front of the picture, with both hands in his overcoat pockets, and his chin sunk in his collar; says nothing, but is quite happy developing an idea which has occurred to him on his way to it; comparing the picture before him with some former work by the same artist which he remembers. His whole soul is concentrated on the picture. And when he considers that I have understood and penetrated the meaning of the work, he gives his opinion in few words, but always the right ones, summing up a long sequence of ideas which I must have shared with him, since I see exactly as he does.

In this way we halted before the "Martyrdom of Saint Denis," by Bonnat, the two "Adorations," by Bouguereau, a landscape of Bernier's, some other landscapes, sea pieces, and portraits.

At last we left the oil paintings.

Page 1965

In the open gallery, which runs around the inside of the huge oblong and looks on the court, the watercolors, engravings, and drawings slumbered, neglected. Lampron went straight to his works. I should have awarded them the medaille d'honneur; an etching of a man's head, a large engraving of the Virgin and Infant Jesus from the Salon Carre at the Louvre, and the drawing which represents—

"Great Heavens! Sylvestre, she's perfectly lovely; she will make a great mistake if she does not come and see herself!"

"She will come, my dear sir; but I shall not be there to see her."

"Are you going?"

"I leave you to stalk your game; be patient, and do not forget to come and tell me the news this evening."

"I promise."

And Lampron vanished.

The drawing was hung about midway between two doorways draped with curtains, that opened into the big galleries. I leaned against the woodwork of one of them, and waited. On my left stretched a solitude seldom troubled by the few visitors who risk themselves in the realms of pen and pencil. These, too, only came to get fresh air, or to look down on the many-colored crowd moving among the white statues below.

At my right, on the contrary, the battling currents of the crowd kept passing and repassing, the provincial element easily distinguished by its jaded demeanor. Stout, exhausted matrons, breathless fathers of families, crowded the sofas, raising discouraged glances to the walls, while around them turned and tripped, untiring as at a dance, legions of Parisiennes, at ease, on their high heels, equally attentive to the pictures, their own carriage, and their neighbors' gowns.

O peaceful functionaries, you whose business it is to keep an eye upon this ferment! unless the ceaseless flux of these human phenomena lull you to a trance, what a quantity of silly speeches you must hear! I picked up twenty in as many minutes.

Suddenly there came a sound of little footsteps in the gallery. Two little girls had just come in, two sisters, doubtless, for both had the same black eyes, pink dresses, and white feathers in their hats. Hesitating, with outstretched necks, like fawns on the border of a glade, they seemed disappointed at the unexpected length of the gallery. They looked at each other and whispered. Then both smiled, and turning their backs on each other, they set off, one to the right, the other to the left, to examine the drawings which covered the walls. They made a rapid examination, with which art had obviously little to do; they were looking for something, and I thought it might be for Jeanne's

portrait. And so it turned out; the one on my side soon came to a stop, pointed a finger to the wall, and gave a little cry. The other ran up; they clapped their hands.

“Bravo, bravo!”

Then off they went again through the farther door.

I guessed what they were about to do.

Page 1966

I trembled from head to foot, and hid myself farther behind the curtains.

Not a minute elapsed before they were back, not two this time, but three, and the third was Jeanne, whom they were pulling along between them.

They brought her up to Lampron's sketch, and curtsied neatly to her.

Jeanne bent down, smiled, and seemed pleased. Then, a doubt seizing her, she turned her head and saw me. The smile died away; she blushed, a tear seemed ready to start to her eyes. Oh, rapture! Jeanne, you are touched; Jeanne, you understand!

A deep joy surged across my soul, so deep that I never have felt its like.

Alas! at that instant some one called, "Jeanne!"

She stood up, took the two little girls by the hand, and was gone.

Far better had it been had I too fled, carrying with me that dream of delight!

But no, I leaned forward to look after them. In the doorway beyond I saw M. Charnot. A young man was with him, who spoke to Jeanne. She answered him. Three words reached me:

"It's nothing, George."

The devil! She loves another!

May 2d.

In what a state of mind did I set out this morning to face my examiners! Downhearted, worn out by a night of misery, indifferent to all that might befall me, whether for good or for evil.

I considered myself, and indeed I was, very wretched, but I never thought that I should return more wretched than I went.

It was lovely weather when at half past eleven I started for the Law School with an annotated copy of my essay under my arm, thinking more of the regrets for the past and plans for the future with which I had wrestled all night, than of the ordeal I was about to undergo. I met in the Luxembourg the little girl whom I had kissed the week before. She stopped her hoop and stood in my way, staring with wideopen eyes and a coaxing, cunning look, which meant, "I know you, I do!" I passed by without noticing. She pouted her lip, and I saw that she was thinking, "What's the matter with him?"



What was the matter? My poor little golden-locks, when you are grown a fair woman I trust you may know as little of it as you do to-day.

I went up the Rue Soufliot, and entered the stuffy courtyard on the stroke of noon.

The morning lectures were over. Beneath the arcades a few scattered students were walking up and down. I avoided them for fear of meeting a friend and having to talk. Several professors came running from their lunch, rather red in the face, at the summons of the secretary. These were my examiners.

It was time to get into costume, for the candidate, like the criminal, has his costume. The old usher, who has dressed me up I don't know how many times in his hired gowns, saw that I was downcast, and thought I must be suffering from examination fever, a peculiar malady, which is like what a young soldier feels the first time he is under fire.

Page 1967

We were alone in the dark robing-room; he walked round me, brushing and encouraging me; doctors of law have a moral right to this touch of the brush.

"It will be all right, Monsieur Mouillard, never fear. No one has been refused a degree this morning."

"I am not afraid, Michu."

"When I say 'no one,' there was one refused—you never heard the like. Just imagine—a little to the right, please, Monsieur Mouillard—imagine, I say, a candidate who knew absolutely nothing. That is nothing extraordinary. But this fellow, after the examination was over, recommended himself to mercy. 'Have compassion on me, gentlemen,' he said, 'I only wish to be a magistrate!' Capital, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes."

"You don't seem to think so. You don't look like laughing this morning."

"No, Michu, every one has his bothers, you know."

"I said to myself as I looked at you just now, Monsieur Mouillard has some bother. Button up all the way, if you please, for a doctor's essay; if-you-please. It's a heartache, then?"

"Something of the kind."

He shrugged his shoulders and went before me, struggling with an asthmatic chuckle, until we came to the room set apart for the examination.

It was the smallest and darkest of all, and borrowed its light from a street which had little enough to spare, and spared as little as it could. On the left against the wall is a raised desk for the candidate. At the end, on a platform before a bookcase, sit the six examiners in red robes, capes with three bands of ermine, and gold-laced caps. Between the candidate's desk and the door is a little enclosure for spectators, of whom there were about thirty when I entered.

My performance, which had a chance of being brilliant, was only fair.

The three first examiners had read my essay, especially M. Flamaran, who knew it well and had enjoyed its novel and audacious propositions. He pursed up his mouth preparatory to putting the first question, like an epicure sucking a ripe fruit. And when at length he opened it, amid the general silence, it was to carry the discussion at once up to such heights of abstraction that a good number of the audience, not understanding a word of it, stealthily made for the door.

Each successive answer put fresh spirit into him.

“Very good,” he murmured, “very good; let us carry it a step farther. Now supposing—”

And, the demon of logic at his heels, we both went off like inspired lunatics into a world of hypotheses where never man had set foot. He was examining no longer, he was inventing and intoxicating himself with deductions. No one was right or wrong. We were reasoning about chimeras, he radiant, I cool, before his gently tickled colleagues. I never realized till then what imagination a jurist’s head could contain.

Perspiring freely, he set down a white mark, having exceeded by ten minutes the recognized time for examination.

Page 1968

The second examiner was less enthusiastic. He made very few suppositions, and devoted all his art to convicting me of a contradiction between page seventeen and page seventy-nine. He kept repeating, "It's a serious matter, sir, very serious." But, nevertheless, he bestowed a second white mark on me. I only got half white from the third. The rest of the examination was taken up in matters extraneous to the subject of my essay, a commonplace trial of strength, in which I replied with threadbare arguments to outworn objections.

And then it ended. Two hours had passed.

I left the room while the examiners made up their minds.

A few friends came up to me.

"Congratulations, old man, I bet on six whites."

"Hallo, Larive! I never noticed you."

"I quite believe you; you didn't notice anybody, you still look bewildered. Is it the emotion inseparable from—"

"I dare say."

"The candidate is requested to return to the examination room!" said the usher.

And old Michu added, in a whisper, "You have passed. I told you so. You won't forget old Michu, sir."

M. Flamaran conferred my degree with a paternal smile, and a few kind words for "this conscientious study, full of fresh ideas on a difficult subject."

I bowed to the examiners. Larive was waiting for me in the courtyard, and seized me by the arm.

"Uncle Mouillard will be pleased."

"I suppose so."

"Better pleased than you."

"That's very likely."

"He might easily be that. Upon my word I can't understand you. These two years you have been working like a gang of niggers for your degree, and now you have got it you don't seem to care a bit. You have won a smile from Flamaran and do not consider



yourself a spoiled child of Fortune! What more did you want? Did you expect that Mademoiselle Charnot would come in person—”

“Look here, Larive—”

“To look on at your examination, and applaud your answers with her neatly gloved hands? Surely you know, my dear fellow, that that is no longer possible, and that she is going to be married.”

“Going to be married?”

“Don’t pretend you didn’t know it.”

“I have suspected as much since yesterday; I met her at the Salon, and saw a young man with her.”

“Fair?”

“Yes.”

“Tall?”

“Rather.”

“Good-looking?”

“H’m—well”

“Dufilleul, old chap, friend Dufilleul. Don’t you know Dufilleul?”

“No.”

“Oh, yes you do—a bit of a stockjobber, great at ecarte, studied law in our year, and is always to be seen at the Opera with little Tigra of the Bouffes.”

“Poor girl!”

“You pity her?”

“It’s too awful.”

“What is?”

“To see an unhappy child married to a rake who—”

“She will not be the first.”



Page 1969

"A gambler!"

"Yes, there is that, to be sure."

"A fool, as it seems, who, in exchange for her beauty, grace, and youth, can offer only an assortment of damaged goods! Yes, I do pity girls duped thus, deceived and sacrificed by the very purity that makes them believe in that of others."

"You've some queer notions! It's the way of the world. If the innocent victims were only to marry males of equal innocence, under the guardianship of virtuous parents, the days of this world would be numbered, my boy. I assure you that Dufilleul is a good match, handsome for one thing—"

"That's worth a deal!"

"Rich."

"The deuce he is!"

"And then a name which can be divided."

"Divided?"

"With all the ease in the world. A very rare quality. At his marriage he describes himself as Monsieur du Filleul. A year later he is Baron du Filleul. At the death of his father, an old cad, he becomes Comte du Filleul. If the young wife is pretty and knows how to cajole her husband, she may even become a marquise."

"Ugh!"

"You are out of spirits, my poor fellow; I will stand you an absinthe, the only beverage that will suit the bitterness of your heart."

"No, I shall go home."

"Good-by, then. You don't take your degree cheerfully."

"Good-by."

He spun round on his heels and went down the Boulevard St. Michel.

So all is over forever between her and me, and, saddest of all, she is even more to be pitied than I. Poor girl! I loved her deeply, but I did it awkwardly, as I do everything, and missed my chance of speaking. The mute declaration which I risked, or rather which a friend risked for me, found her already engaged to this beast who has brought more skill

to the task, who has made no blots at the National Library, who has dared all when he had everything to fear—

I have allowed myself to be taken by her maiden witchery. All the fault, all the folly is mine. She has given me no encouragement, no sign of liking me. If she smiled at St. Germain it was because she was surprised and flattered. If she came near to tears at the Salon it was because she pitied me. I have not the shadow of a reproach to make her.

That is all I shall ever get from her—a tear, a smile. That's all; never mind, I shall contrive to live on it. She has been my first love, and I shall keep her a place in my heart from which no other shall drive her. I shall now set to work to shut this poor heart which did so wrong to open.... I thought to be happy to-night, and I am full of sorrow. Henceforward I think I shall understand Sylvestre better. Our sorrows will bring us nearer. I will go to see him at once, and will tell him so.

But first I must write to my uncle to tell him that his nephew is a Doctor of Law. All the rest, my plans, my whole future can be put off till to-morrow, or the day after, unless I get disgusted at the very thought of a future and decide to conjugate my life in the present indicative only. That is what I feel inclined to do.



Page 1970

May 4th.

Lampron has gone to the country to pass a fortnight in an out-of-the-way place with an old relative, where he goes into hiding when he wishes to finish an engraving.

But Madame Lampron was at home. After a little hesitation I told her all, and I am glad I did so. She found in her simple, womanly heart just the counsel that I needed. One feels that she is used to giving consolation. She possesses the secret of that feminine deftness which is the great set-off to feminine weakness. Weak? Yes, women perhaps are weak, yet less weak than we, the strong sex, for they can raise us to our feet. She called me, "My dear Monsieur Fabien," and there was balm in the very way she said the words. I used to think she wanted refinement; she does not, she only lacks reading, and lack of reading may go with the most delicate and lofty feelings. No one ever taught her certain turns of expression which she used. "If your mother was alive," said she, "this is what she would say." And then she spoke to me of God, who alone can determinate man's trials, either by the end He ordains, or the resignation He inspires. I felt myself carried with her into the regions where our sorrows shrink into insignificance as the horizon broadens around them. And I remember she uttered this fine thought, "See how my son has suffered! It makes one believe, Monsieur Fabien, that the elect of the earth are the hardest tried, just as the stones that crown the building are more deeply cut than their fellows."

I returned from Madame Lampron's, softened, calmer, wiser.

CHAPTER IX

A VISIT FROM MY UNCLE

May 5th.

A letter from M. Mouillard breathing fire and fury. Were I not so low spirited I could laugh at it.

He would have liked me, after taking my degree at two in the afternoon, to take the train for Bourges the same evening, where my uncle, his practice, and provincial bliss awaited me. M. Mouillard's friends had had due notice, and would have come to meet me at the station. In short, I am an ungrateful wretch. At least I might have fixed the hour of my imminent arrival, for I can not want to stop in Paris with nothing there to detain me. But no, not a sign, not a word of returning; simply the announcement that I have passed. This goes beyond the bounds of mere folly and carelessness. M. Mouillard, his most elementary notions of life shaken to their foundations, concludes in these words:



"Fabien, I have long suspected it; some creature has you in bondage. I am coming to break the bonds!

"BrutusMouillard."

I know him well; he will be here tomorrow.

May 6th.
No uncle as yet.

May 7th.
No more uncle than yesterday.

May 8th.
Total eclipse continues. No news of M. Mouillard. This is very strange.

May 9th.
This evening at seven o'clock, just as I was going out to dine, I saw, a few yards away, a tall, broad-brimmed hat surmounting a head of lank white hair, a long neck throttled in a white neckcloth, a frock-coat flapping about a pair of attenuated legs. I lifted up my voice:



Page 1971

"Uncle!"

He opened his arms to me and I fell into them. His first remark was:

"I trust at least that you have not yet dined."

"No, uncle."

"To Foyot's, then!"

When you expect to meet a man in his wrath and get an invitation to dinner, you feel almost as if you had been taken in. You are heated, your arguments are at your fingers' ends, your stock of petulance is ready for immediate use; and all have to be stored in bond.

When I had recovered from my surprise, I said:

"I expected you sooner, from your letter."

"Your suppositions were correct. I have been two days here, at the Grand Hotel. I went there on account of the dining-room, for my friend Hublette (you remember Hublette at Bourges) told me: 'Mouillard, you must see that room before you retire from business.'"

"I should have gone to see you there, uncle, if I had known it."

"You would not have found me. Business before pleasure, Fabien. I had to see three barristers and five solicitors. You know that business of that kind can not wait. I saw them. Business over, I can indulge my feelings. Here I am. Does Foyot suit you?"

"Certainly, uncle."

"Come on, then nephew, quick, march! Paris, makes one feel quite young again!"

And really Uncle Mouillard did look quite young, almost as young as he looked provincial. His tall figure, and the countrified cut of his coat, made all who passed him turn to stare, accustomed as Parisians are to curiosities. He tapped the wood pavement with his stick, admired the effects of Wallace's philanthropy, stopped before the enamelled street-signs, and grew enthusiastic over the traffic in the Rue de Vaugirard.

The dinner was capital—just the kind a generous uncle will give to a blameless nephew. M. Mouillard, who has a long standing affection for chambertin, ordered two bottles to begin with. He drank the whole of one and half of the other, eating in proportion, and talked unceasingly and positively at the top of his voice, as his wont was. He told me the story of two of his best actions this year, a judicial separation—my



uncle is very strong in judicial separations—and the abduction of a minor. At first I looked out for personal allusions. But no, he told the story from pure love of his art, without omitting an interlocutory judgment, or a judgment reserved, just as he would have told the story of Helen and Paris, if he had been employed in that well-known case. Not a word about myself. I waited, yet nothing came but the successive steps in the action.

After the ice, M. Mouillard called for a cigar.

“Waiter, what cigars have you got?”

“Londres, conchas, regalias, cacadores, partagas, esceptionales. Which would you like, sir?”

“Damn the name! a big one that will take some time to smoke.”

Page 1972

Emile displayed at the bottom of a box an object closely resembling a distaff with a straw through the middle, doubtless some relic of the last International Exhibition, abandoned by all, like the Great Eastern, on account of its dimensions. My uncle seized it, stuck it in the amber mouthpiece that is so familiar to me, lighted it, and under the pretext that you must always first get the tobacco to burn evenly, went out trailing behind him a cloud of smoke, like a gunboat at full speed.

We “did” the arcades round the Odeon, where my uncle spent an eternity thumbing the books for sale. He took them all up one after another, from the poetry of the decedents to the Veterinary Manual, gave a glance at the author’s name, shrugged his shoulders, and always ended by turning to me with:

“You know that writer?”

“Why, yes, uncle.”

“He must be quite a new author; I can’t recall that name.”

M. Mouillard forgot that it was forty-five years since he had last visited the bookstalls under the Odeon.

He thought he was a student again, loafing along the arcades after dinner, eager for novelty, careless of draughts. Little by little he lost himself in dim reveries. His cigar never left his lips. The ash grew longer and longer yet, a lovely white ash, slightly swollen at the tip, dotted with little black specks, and connected with the cigar by a thin red band which alternately glowed and faded as he drew his breath.

M. Mouillard was so lost in thought, and the ash was getting so long, that a young student—of the age that knows no mercy—was struck by these twin phenomena. I saw him nudge a friend, hastily roll a cigarette, and, doffing his hat, accost my uncle.

“Might I trouble you for a light, sir!”

M. Mouillard emitted a sigh, turned slowly round, and bent two terrible eyes upon the intruder, knocked off the ash with an angry gesture, and held out the ignited end at arm’s length.

“With pleasure, sir!”

Then he replaced the last book he had taken up—a copy of Musset—and called me.

“Come, Fabien.”

Arm in arm we strolled up the Rue de Medicis along the railings of the Luxembourg.



I felt the crisis approaching. My uncle has a pet saying: "When a thing is not clear to me, I go straight to the heart of it like a ferret."

The ferret began to work.

"Now, Fabien, about these bonds I mentioned? Did I guess right?"

"Yes, uncle, I have been in bondage."

"Quite right to make a clean breast of it, my boy; but we must break your bonds."

"They are broken."

"How long ago?"

"Some days ago."

"On your honor?"

"Yes."

"That's quite right. You'd have done better to keep out of bondage. But there, you took your uncle's advice; you saw the abyss, and drew back from it. Quite right of you."

Page 1973

"Uncle, I will not deceive you. Your letter arrived after the event. The cause of the rupture was quite apart from that."

"And the cause was?"

"The sudden shattering of my illusions."

"Men still have illusions about these creatures?"

"She was a perfect creature, and worthy of all respect."

"Come, come!"

"I must ask you to believe me. I thought her affections free."

"And she was—"

"Betrothed."

"Really now, that's very funny!"

"I did not find it funny, uncle. I suffered bitterly, I assure you."

"I dare say, I dare say. The illusions you spoke of anyhow, it's all over now?"

"Quite over."

"Well, that being the case, Fabien, I am ready to help you. Confess frankly to me. How much is required?"

"How much?"

"Yes, you want something, I dare say, to close the incident. You know what I mean, eh? to purchase what I might call the veil of oblivion. How much?"

"Why, nothing at all, uncle."

"Don't be afraid, Fabien; I've got the money with me."

"You have quite mistaken the case, uncle; there is no question of money. I must tell you again that the young lady is of the highest respectability."

My uncle stared.

"I assure you, uncle. I am speaking of Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot."



"I dare say."

"The daughter of a member of the Institute."

"What!"

My uncle gave a jump and stood still.

"Yes, of Mademoiselle Charnot, whom I was in love with and wished to marry. Do you understand?"

He leaned against the railing and folded his arms.

"Marry! Well, I never! A woman you wanted to marry?"

"Why, yes; what's the matter?"

"To marry! How could I have imagined such a thing? Here were matters of the utmost importance going on, and I knew nothing about them. Marry! You might be announcing your betrothal to me at this moment if you'd-Still you are quite sure she is betrothed?"

"Larive told me so."

"Who's Larive?"

"A friend of mine."

"Oh, so you have only heard it through a friend?"

"Yes, uncle. Do you really think there may still be hope, that I still have a chance?"

"No, no; not the slightest. She is sure to be betrothed, very much betrothed. I tell you I am glad she is. The Mouillards do not come to Paris for their wives, Fabien—we do not want a Parisienne to carry on the traditions of the family, and the practice. A Parisienne! I shudder at the thought of it. Fabien, you will leave Paris with me tomorrow. That's understood."

"Certainly not, uncle."

"Your reasons?"

"Because I can not leave my friends without saying goodbye, and because I have need to reflect before definitely binding myself to the legal profession."

Page 1974

"To reflect! You want to reflect before taking over a family practice, which has been destined for you since you were an infant, in view of which you have been working for five years, and which I have nursed for you, I, your uncle, as if you had been my son?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Don't be a fool! You can reflect at Bourges quite as well as here. Your object in staying here is to see her again."

"It is not."

"To wander like a troubled spirit up and down her street. By the way, which is her street?"

"Rue de l'Universite."

My uncle took out his pocketbook and made a note, "Charnot, Rue de l'Universite." Then all his features expanded. He gave a snort, which I understood, for I had often heard it in court at Bourges, where it meant, "There is no escape now. Old Mouillard has cornered his man."

My uncle replaced his pencil in its case, and his notebook in his pocket, and merely added:

"Fabien, you're not yourself to-night. We'll talk of the matter another time. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten." He was counting on his fingers. "These return tickets are very convenient; I need not leave before to-morrow evening. And, what's more, you'll go with me, my boy."

M. Mouillard talked only on indifferent subjects during our brief walk from the Rue Soufflot to catch the omnibus at the Odeon. There he shook me by the hand and sprang nimbly into the first bus. A lady in black, with veil tightly drawn over a little turned up nose, seeing my uncle burst in like a bomb, and make for the seat beside her, hurriedly drew in the folds of her dress, which were spread over the seat. My uncle noticed her action, and, fearing he had been rude, bent over toward her with an affable expression. "Do not disturb yourself, Madame. I am not going all the way to Batignolles; no farther, indeed, than the Boulevards. I shall inconvenience you for a few moments only, a very few moments, Madame." I had time to remark that the lady, after giving her neighbor a glance of Juno-like disdain, turned her back upon him, and proceeded to study the straps hanging from the roof.

The brake was taken off, the conductor whistled, the three horses, their hoofs hammering the pavement, strained for an instant amid showers of sparks, and the long vehicle vanished down the Rue de Vaugirard, bearing with it Brutus and his fortunes.

CHAPTER X

A FAMILY BREACH

May 10th.

It is an awful fate to be the nephew of M. Mouillard! I always knew he was obstinate, capable alike of guile and daring, but I little imagined what his intentions were when he left me!

My refusal to start, and my prayer for a respite before embarking in his practice, drove him wild. He lost his head, and swore to drag me off, 'per fas et nefas'. He has mentally begun a new action—Mouillard v. Mouillard, and is already tackling the brief; which is as much as to say that he is fierce, unbridled, heartless, and without remorse.

Page 1975

Some might have bent. I preferred to break.

We are strangers for life. I have just seen him to the landing of my staircase.

He came here about a quarter of an hour ago, proud, and, I may say, swaggering, as he does over his learned friends when he has found a flaw in one of their pleadings.

"Well, nephew?"

"Well, uncle?"

"I've got some news for you."

"Indeed?"

M. Mouillard banged his hat down furiously upon my table.

"Yes, you know my maxim: when anything does not seem quite clear to me—"

"You ferret it out."

"Quite so; I have always found it answer. Your business did not seem clear to me. Was Mademoiselle Charnot betrothed, or was she not? To what extent had she encouraged your attentions? You never would have told me the story correctly, and I never should have known. That being so, I put my maxim into practice, and went to see her father."

"You did that?"

"Certainly I did."

"You have been to see Monsieur Charnot?"

"In the Rue de l'Universite. Wasn't it the simplest thing to do? Besides, I was not sorry to make the acquaintance of a member of the Institute. And I must admit that he behaved very nicely to me—not a bit stuck up."

"And you told him?"

"My name to begin with: Brutus Mouillard. He reflected a bit, just a moment, and recalled your appearance: a shy youth, a bachelor of arts, wearing an eyeglass."

"Was that all his description?"

"Yes, he remembered seeing you at the National Library, and once at his house. I said to him, 'That is my nephew, Monsieur Charnot.' He replied, 'I congratulate you, sir; he seems a youth of parts.'—'That he is, but his heart is very inflammable.'—'At his age,



sir, who is not liable to take fire?' That was how we began. Your friend Monsieur Charnot has a pretty wit. I did not want to be behindhand with him, so I answered, 'Well, sir, it caught fire in your house.' He started with fright and looked all round the room. I was vastly amused. Then we came to explanations. I put the case before him, that you were in love with his daughter, without my consent, but with perfectly honorable intentions; that I had guessed it from your letters, from your unpardonable neglect of your duties to your family, and that I hurried hither from Bourges to take in the situation. With that I concluded, and waited for him to develop. There are occasions when you must let people develop. I could not jump down his throat with, 'Sir, would you kindly tell me whether your daughter is betrothed or not?' You follow me? He thought, no doubt, I had come to ask for his daughter's hand, and passing one hand over his forehead, he replied, 'Sir, I feel greatly flattered by your proposal, and I should certainly give it my serious attention, were it not that my daughter's hand is already sought by

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the son of an old schoolfellow of mine, which circumstance, as you will readily understand, does not permit of my entertaining an offer which otherwise should have received the most mature consideration.' I had learned what I came for without risking anything. Well, I didn't conceal from him that, so far as I was concerned, I would rather you took your wife from the country than that you brought home the most charming Parisienne; and that the Mouillards from father to son had always taken their wives from Bourges. He entered perfectly into my sentiments, and we parted the best of friends. Now, my boy, the facts are ascertained: Mademoiselle Charnot is another's; you must get your mourning over and start with me to-night. To-morrow morning we shall be in Bourges, and you'll soon be laughing over your Parisian delusions, I warrant you!"

I had heard my uncle out without interrupting him, though wrath, astonishment, and my habitual respect for M. Mouillard were struggling for the mastery within me. I needed all my strength of mind to answer, with apparent calm.

"Yesterday, uncle, I had not made up my mind; today I have."

"You are coming?"

"I am not. Your action in this matter, uncle—I do not know if you are aware of it—has been perfectly unheard-of. I can not acknowledge your right to act thus. It puts between you and me two hundred miles of rail, and that forever. Do you understand me? You have taken the liberty of disclosing a secret which was not yours to tell; you have revealed a passion which, as it was hopeless, should not have been further mentioned, and certainly not exposed to such humiliation. You went to see Monsieur Charnot without reflecting whether you were not bringing trouble into his household; without reflecting, further, whether such conduct as yours, which may perhaps be usual among your business acquaintances, was likely to succeed with me. Perhaps you thought it would. You have merely completed an experiment, begun long ago, which proves that we do not understand life in the same way, and that it will be better for both of us if I continue to live in Paris, and you continue to live at Bourges."

"Ha! that's how you take it, young man, is it? You refuse to come? you try to bully me?"

"Yes."

"Consider carefully before you let me leave here alone. You know the amount of your fortune—fourteen hundred francs a year, which means poverty in Paris."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then, attend to what I am about to say. For years past I have been saving my practice for you—that is, an honorable and lucrative position all ready for you to step

into. But I am tired at length of your fads and your fancies. If you do not take up your quarters at Bourges within a fortnight from now, the Mouillard practice will change its name within three weeks!" My uncle sniffed with emotion as he looked at me, expecting to see me totter beneath his threats. I made no answer for a moment; but a thought which had been harassing me from the beginning of our interview compelled me to say:

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"I have only one thing to ask you, Monsieur Mouillard."

"Further respite, I suppose? Time to reflect and fool me again? No, a hundred times no! I've had enough of you; a fortnight, not a day more!"

"No, sir; I do not ask for respite."

"So much the better, for I should refuse it. What do you want?"

"Monsieur Mouillard, I trust that Jeanne was not present at the interview, that she heard none of it, that she was not forced to blush—"

My uncle sprang to his feet, seized his gloves, which lay spread out on the table, bundled them up, flung them passionately into his hat, clapped the whole on his head, and made for the door with angry strides.

I followed him; he never looked back, never made answer to my "Good-by, uncle." But, at the sixth step, just before turning the corner, he raised his stick, gave the banisters a blow fit to break them, and went on his way downstairs exclaiming:

"Damnation!"

May 20th.

And so we have parted with an oath, my uncle and I! That is how I have broken with the only relative I possess. It is now ten days since then. I now have five left in which to mend the broken thread of the family tradition, and become a lawyer. But nothing points to such conversion. On the contrary, I feel relieved of a heavy weight, pleased to be free, to have no profession. I feel the thrill of pleasure that a fugitive from justice feels on clearing the frontier. Perhaps I was meant for a different course of life than the one I was forced to follow. As a child I was brought up to worship the Mouillard practice, with the fixed idea that this profession alone could suit me; heir apparent to a lawyer's stool—born to it, brought up to it, without any idea, at any rate for a long time, that I could possibly free myself from the traditions of the law's sacred jargon.

I have quite got over that now. The courts, where I have been a frequent spectator, seem to me full of talented men who fine down and belittle their talents in the practice of law. Nothing uses up the nobler virtues more quickly than a practice at the bar. Generosity, enthusiasm, sensibility, true and ready sympathy—all are taken, leaving the man, in many instances nothing but a skilful actor, who apes all the emotions while feeling none. And the comedy is none the less repugnant to me because it is played through with a solemn face, and the actors are richly recompensed.

Lampron is not like this. He has given play to all the noble qualities of his nature. I envy him. I admire his disinterestedness, his broad views of life, his faith in good in



spite of evil, his belief in poetry in spite of prose, his unspoiled capacity for receiving new impressions and illusions—a capacity which, amid the crowds that grow old in mind before they are old in body, keeps him still young and boyish. I think I might have been devoted to his profession, or to literature, or to anything but law.

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We shall see. For the present I have taken a plunge into the unknown. My time is all my own, my freedom is absolute, and I am enjoying it.

I have hidden nothing from Lampron. As my friend he is pleased, I can see, at a resolve which keeps me in Paris; but his prudence cries out upon it.

"It is easy enough to refuse a profession," he said; "harder to find another in its place. What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know."

"My dear fellow, you seem to be trusting to luck. At sixteen that might be permissible, at twenty-four it's a mistake."

"So much the worse, for I shall make the mistake. If I have to live on little—well, you've tried that before now; I shall only be following you."

"That's true; I have known want, and even now it attacks me sometimes; it's like influenza, which does not leave its victims all at once; but it is hard, I can tell you, to do without the necessities of life; as for its luxuries—"

"Oh, of course, no one can do without its luxuries."

"You are incorrigible," he answered, with a laugh. Then he said no more. Lampron's silence is the only argument which struggles in my heart in favor of the Mouillard practice. Who can guess from what quarter the wind will blow?

CHAPTER XI

IN THE BEATEN PATH

June 5th.

The die is cast; I will not be a lawyer.

The tradition of the Mouillards is broken for good, Sylvestre is defeated for good, and I am free for good—and quite uncertain of my future.

I have written my uncle a calm, polite, and clearly worded letter to confirm my decision. He has not answered it, nor did I expect an answer.

I expected, however, that he would be avenged by some faint regret on my part, by one of those light mists that so often arise and hang about our firmest resolutions. But no such mist has arisen.

Still, Law has had her revenge. Abandoned at Bourges, she has recaptured me at Paris, for a time. I realized that it was impossible for me to live on an income of fourteen hundred francs. The friends whom I discreetly questioned, in behalf of an unnamed acquaintance, as to the means of earning money, gave me various answers. Here is a fairly complete list of their expedients:

“If your friend is at all clever, he should write a novel.”

“If he is not, there is the catalogue of the National Library: ten hours of indexing a day.”

“If he has ambition, let him become a wine-merchant.”

“No; ‘Old Clo,’ and get his hats gratis.”

“If he is very plain, and has no voice, he can sing in the chorus at the opera.”

“Shorthand writer in the Senate is a peaceful occupation.”

“Teacher of Volapuk is the profession of the future.”

“Try ‘Hallo, are you there?’ in the telephones.”

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“Wants to earn money? Advise him first not to lose any!”

The most sensible one, who guessed the name of the acquaintance I was interested in, said:

“You have been a managing clerk; go back to it.”

And as the situation chanced to be vacant, I went back to my old master. I took my old seat and den as managing clerk between the outer office and Counsellor Boule's glass cage. I correct the drafts of the inferior clerks; I see the clients and instruct them how to proceed. They often take me for the counsellor himself. I go to the courts nearly every day, and hang about chief clerks' and judges' chambers; and go to the theatre once a week with the “paper” supplied to the office.

Do I call this a profession? No, merely a stop-gap which allows me to live and wait for something to turn up. I sometimes have forebodings that I shall go on like this forever, waiting for something which will never turn up; that this temporary occupation may become only too permanent.

There is an old clerk in the office who has never had any other occupation, whose appearance is a kind of warning to me. He has a red face—the effect of the office stove, I think—straight, white hair, the expression when spoken to of a startled sheep—gentle, astonished, slightly flurried. His attenuated back is rounded off with a stoop between the neck and shoulders. He can hardly keep his hands from shaking. His signature is a work of art. He can stick at his desk for six hours without stirring. While we lunch at a restaurant, he consumes at the office some nondescript provisions which he brings in the morning in a paper bag. On Sundays he fishes, for a change; his rod takes the place of his pen, and his can of worms serves instead of inkstand.

He and I have already one point of resemblance. The old clerk was once crossed in love with a flowergirl, one Mademoiselle Elodie. He has told me this one tragedy of his life. In days gone by I used to think this thirty-year-old love-story dull and commonplace; to-day I understand M. Jupille; I relish him even. He and I have become sympathetic. I no longer make him move from his seat by the fire when I want to ask him a question: I go to him. On Sundays, on the quays by the Seine, I pick him out from the crowd intent upon the capture of tittlebats, because he is seated upon his handkerchief. I go up to him and we have a talk.

“Fish biting, Monsieur Jupille?”

“Hardly at all.”

“Sport is not what it used to be?”

“Ah! Monsieur Mouillard, if you could have seen it thirty years ago!”



This date is always cropping up with him. Have we not all our own date, a few months, a few days, perhaps a single hour of full-hearted joy, for which half our life has been a preparation, and of which the other half must be a remembrance?

June 5th.

“Monsieur Mouillard, here is an application for leave to sign judgment in a fresh matter.”

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"Very well, give it me."

"To the President of the Civil Court:

"Monsieur Plumet, of 27 Rue Hauteville, in the city of Paris, by Counsellor Boule, his advocate, craves leave—"

It was a proceeding against a refractory debtor, the commonest thing in the world.

"Monsieur Massinot!"

"Yes, sir."

"Who brought these papers?"

"A very pretty little woman brought them this morning while you were out, sir."

"Monsieur Massinot, whether she was pretty or not, it is no business of yours to criticise the looks of the clients."

"I did not mean to offend you, Monsieur Mouillard."

"You have not offended me, but you have no business to talk of a 'pretty client.' That epithet is not allowed in a pleading, that's all. The lady is coming back, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

Little Madame Plumet soon called again, tricked out from head to foot in the latest fashion. She was a little flurried on entering a room full of jocular clerks. Escorted by Massinot, both of them with their eyes fixed on the ground, she reached my office. I closed the door after her. She recognized me.

"Monsieur Mouillard! What a pleasant surprise!"

She held out her hand to me so frankly and gracefully that I gave her mine, and felt sure, from the firm, expressive way in which she clasped it, that Madame Plumet was really pleased to see me. Her ruddy cheeks and bright eyes recalled my first impression of her, the little dressmaker running from the workshop to the office, full of her love for M. Plumet and her grievances against the wicked cabinetmaker.

"What, you are back again with Counsellor Boule? I am surprised!"

"So am I, Madame Plumet, very much surprised. But such is life! How is Master Pierre progressing?"

“Not quite so well, poor darling, since I weaned him. I had to wean him, Monsieur Mouillard, because I have gone back to my old trade.”

“Dressmaking?”

“Yes, on my own account this time. I have taken the flat opposite to ours, on the same floor. Plumet makes frames, while I make gowns. I have already three workgirls, and enough customers to give me a start. I do not charge them very dear to begin with.

“One of my customers was a very nice young lady—you know who! I have not talked to her of you, but I have often wanted to. By the way, Monsieur Mouillard, did I do my errand well?”

“What errand?”

“The important one, about the portrait at the Salon.”

“Oh, yes; very well indeed. I must thank you.”

“She came?”

“Yes, with her father.”

“She must have been pleased! The drawing was so pretty. Plumet, who is not much of a talker, is never tired of praising it. I tell you, he and I did not spare ourselves. He made a bit of a fuss before he would take the order; he was in a hurry—such a hurry; but when he saw that I was bent on it he gave in. And it is not the first time he has given in. Plumet is a good soul, Monsieur Mouillard. When you know him better you will see what a good soul he is. Well, while he was cutting out the frame, I went to the porter’s wife. What a business it was! I am glad my errand was successful!”

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"It was too good of you, Madame Plumet; but it was useless, alas! she is to marry another."

"Marry another? Impossible!"

I thought Madame Plumet was about to faint. Had she heard that her son Pierre had the croup, she could not have been more upset. Her bosom heaved, she clasped her hands, and gazed at me with sorrowful compassion.

"Poor Monsieur Mouillard!"

And two tears, two real tears, coursed down Madame Plumet's cheeks. I should have liked to catch them. They were the only tears that had been shed for me by a living soul since my mother died.

I had to tell her all, every word, down to my rival's name. When she heard that it was Baron Duffileul, her indignation knew no bounds. She exclaimed that the Baron was an awful man; that she knew all sorts of things about him! Know him? she should think so! That such a union was impossible, that it could never take place, that Plumet, she knew, would agree with her:

"Madame Plumet," I said, "we have strayed some distance from the business which brought you here. Let us return to your affairs; mine are hopeless, and you can not remedy them."

She got up trembling, her eyes red and her feelings a little hurt.

"My action? Oh, no! I can't attend to it to-day. I've no heart to talk about my business. What you've told me has made me too unhappy. Another day, Monsieur Mouillard, another day."

She left me with a look of mystery, and a pressure of the hand which seemed to say: "Rely on me!"

Poor woman!

CHAPTER XII

I GO TO ITALY

June 10th.

In the train. We have passed the fortifications. The stuccoed houses of the suburbs, the factories, taverns, and gloomy hovels in the debatable land round Paris are so many

points of sunshine in the far distance. The train is going at full speed. The fields of green or gold are being unrolled like ribbons before my eyes. Now and again a metallic sound and a glimpse of columns and advertisements show that we are rushing through a station in a whirlwind of dust. A flash of light across our path is a tributary of the river. I am off, well on my way, and no one can stop me—not Lampron, nor Counsellor Boule, nor yet Plum et. The dream of years is about to be realized. I am going to see Italy—merely a corner of it; but what a pleasure even that is, and what unlooked-for luck!

A few days ago, Counsellor Boule called me into his office.

“Monsieur Mouillard, you speak Italian fluently, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir.” “Would you like a trip at a client’s expense?”

“With pleasure, wherever you like.”

“To Italy?”

“With very great pleasure.”

“I thought so, and gave your name to the court without asking your consent. It’s a commission to examine documents at Milan, to prove some copies of deeds and other papers, put in by a supposititious Italian heir to establish his rights to a rather large property. You remember the case of Zampini against Veldon and others?”

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"Quite well."

"It is Zampini's copies of the deeds on which he bases his claim which you will have to compare with the originals, with the help of a clerk from the Record Office and a sworn translator. You can go by Switzerland or by the Corniche route, as you please. You will be allowed six hundred francs and a fortnight's holiday. Does that suit you?"

"I should think so!"

"Then pack up and be off. You must be at Milan by the morning of the eighteenth."

I ran to tell the news to Lampron, who was filled with surprise and not a little emotion at the mention of Italy. And here I am flying along in the Lyons express, without a regret for Paris. All my heart leaps forward toward Switzerland, where I shall be to-morrow. I have chosen this green route to take me to the land of blue skies. Up to the last moment I feared that some obstacle would arise, that the ill-luck which dogs my footsteps would keep me back, and I am quite surprised that it has let me off. True, I nearly lost the train, and the horse of cab No. 7382 must have been a retired racer to make up for the loss of time caused by M. Plumet.

Counsellor Boule sent me on a business errand an hour before I started. On my way back, just as I was crossing the Place de l'Opera in the aforesaid cab, a voice hailed me:

"Monsieur Mouillard!"

I looked first to the right and then to the left, till, on a refuge, I caught sight of M. Plumet struggling to attract my attention. I stopped the cab, and a smile of satisfaction spread over M. Plumet's countenance. He stepped off the refuge. I opened the cab-door. But a brougham passed, and the horse pushed me back into the cab with his nose. I opened the door a second time; another brougham came by; then a third; finally two serried lines of traffic cut me off from M. Plumet, who kept shouting something to me which the noise of the wheels and the crowd prevented me from hearing. I signalled my despair to M. Plumet. He rose on tiptoe. I could not hear any better.

Five minutes lost! Impossible to wait any longer! Besides, who could tell that it was not a trap to prevent my departure, though in friendly guise? I shuddered at the thought and shouted:

"Gare de Lyon, cabby, as fast as you can drive!"

My orders were obeyed. We got to the station to find the train made up and ready to start, and I was the last to take a ticket.

I suppose M. Plumet managed to escape from his refuge.

Geneva.

On my arrival I found, keeping order on the way outside the station, the drollest policeman that ever stepped out of a comic opera. At home we should have had to protect him against the boys; here he protects others.

Well, it shows that I am really abroad.

I have only two hours to spare in this town. What shall I see? The country; that is always beautiful, whereas many so-called "sights" are not. I will make for the shores of the lake, for the spot where the Rhone leaves it, to flow toward France. The Rhone, which is so muddy at Avignon, is clean here; deep and clear as a creek of the sea. It rushes along in a narrow blue torrent compressed between a quay and a line of houses.

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The river draws me after it. We leave the town together, and I am soon in the midst of those market-gardens where the infant Topffer lost himself, and, overtaken by nightfall, fell to making his famous analysis of fear. The big pumping wheels still overtop the willows, and cast their shadows over the lettuce-fields. In the distance rise slopes of woodland, on Sundays the haunt of holiday-makers. The Rhone leaps and eddies, singing over its gravel beds. Two trout-fishers are taxing all their strength to pull a boat up stream beneath the shelter of the bank.

Perhaps I was wrong in not waiting to hear what M. Plumet had to tell me. He is not the kind of man to gesticulate wildly without good reason.

On the lake.

The steamer is gaining the open water and Geneva already lies far behind. Not a ripple on the blue water that shades into deep blue behind us. Ahead the scene melts into a milky haze. A little boat, with idle sails embroidered with sunlight, vanishes into it. On the right rise the mountains of Savoy, dotted with forests, veiled in clouds which cast their shadows on the broken slopes. The contrast is happy, and I can not help admiring Leman's lovely smile at the foot of these rugged mountains.

At the bend in the banks near St. Maurice-en-Valais, the wind catches us, quite a squall. The lake becomes a sea. At the first roll an Englishwoman becomes seasick. She casts an expiring glance upon Chillon, the ancient towers of which are being lashed by the foam. Her husband does not think it worth his while to cease reading his guide-book or focusing his field-glass for so trifling a matter.

On the diligence

I am crossing the Simplon at daybreak, with rosepink glaciers on every side. We are trotting down the Italian slope. How I have longed for the sight of Italy! Hardly had the diligence put on the brake, and begun bowling down the mountain-side, before I discovered a change on the face of all things. The sky turned to a brighter blue. At the very first glance I seemed to see the dust of long summers on the leaves of the firs, six thousand feet above the sea, in the virgin atmosphere of the mountain-tops: and I was very near taking the creaking of my loosely fixed seat for the southern melody of the first grasshopper.

BAVENO

No one could be mistaken; this shaven, obsequious, suavely jovial innkeeper is a Neapolitan. He takes his stand in his mosaic-paved hall, and is at the service of all who wish for information about Lago Maggiore, the list of its sights; in a word, the programme of the piece.

Isola Bella, Isola Madre.

Yes, they are scraped clean, carefully tended, pretty, all a-blowing and a-growing; but unreal. The palm trees are unhomely, the tropical plants seem to stand behind footlights. Restore them to their homes, or give me back Lake Lemano, so simply grand.

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MENAGGIO.

After the sky-blue of Maggiore and the vivid green of Lugano, comes the violet-blue of Como, with its luminous landscape, its banks covered with olives, Roman ruins, and modern villas. Never have I felt the air so clear. Here for the first time I said to myself: "This is the spot where I would choose to dwell." I have even selected my house; it peeps out from a mass of pomegranates, evergreens, and citrons, on a peninsula around which the water swells with gentle murmur, and whence the view is perfect across lake, mountain, and sky.

A nightingale is singing, and I can not help reflecting that his fellows here are put to death in thousands. Yes, the reapers, famed in poems and lithographs, are desperate bird-catchers. At the season of migration they capture thousands of these weary travellers with snares or limed twigs; on Maggiore alone sixty thousand meet their end. We have but those they choose to leave us to charm our summer nights.

Perhaps they will kill my nightingale in the Carmelite garden. The idea fills me with indignation.

Then my thoughts run back to my rooms in the Rue de Rennes, and I see Madame Menin, with a dejected air, dusting my slumbering furniture; Lampron at work, his mother knitting; the old clerk growing sleepy with the heat and lifting his pen as he fancies he has got a bite; Madame Plumet amid her covey of workgirls, and M. Plumet blowing away with impatient breath the gold dust which the gum has failed to fix on the mouldings of a newly finished frame.

M. Plumet is pensive. He is burdened with a secret. I am convinced I did wrong in not waiting longer on the Place de L'Opera.

Milan.

At last I am in Milan, an ancient city, but full of ideas and energy, my destination, and the cradle of the excellent Porfirio Zampini, suspected forger. The examination of documents does not begin till the day after to-morrow, so I am making the best of the time in seeing the sights.

There are four sights to see at Milan if you are a musician, and three if you are not: the Duomo, 'vulgo', cathedral; "The Marriage of the Virgin," by Raphael; "The Last Supper," by Leonardo; and, if it suits your tastes, a performance at La Scala.

I began with the Duomo, and on leaving it I received the news that still worries me.

But first of all I must make a confession. When I ascended through the tropical heat to the marble roof of the cathedral, I expected so much that I was disappointed. Surprise goes for so much in what we admire. Neither this mountain of marble, nor the lacework



and pinnacles which adorn the enormous mass, nor the amazing number of statues, nor the sight of men smaller than flies on the Piazza del Duomo, nor the vast stretch of flat country which spreads for miles on every side of the city—none of these sights kindled the spark of enthusiasm within me which has often glowed for much less. No, what pleased me was something quite different, a detail not noticed in the guide-books, I suppose.

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I had come down from the roof and was wandering in the vast nave from pillar to pillar, when I found myself beneath the lantern. I raised my eyes, but the flood of golden light compelled me to close them. The sunlight passing through the yellow glass of the windows overhead encircled the mighty vault of the lantern with a fiery crown, and played around the walls of its cage in rays which, growing fainter as they fell, flooded the floor with their expiring flames, a mysterious dayspring, a diffused glory, through which litany and sacred chant winged their way up toward the Infinite.

I left the cathedral tired out, dazed with weariness and sunlight, and fell asleep in a chair as soon as I got back to my room, on the fifth floor of the Albergo dell' Agnello.

I had been asleep for about an hour, perhaps, when I thought I heard a voice near me repeating "Illustre Signore!"

I did not wake. The voice continued with a murmur of sibilants:

"Illustrissimo Signore!"

This drew me from my sleep, for the human ear is very susceptible to superlatives.

"What is it?"

"A letter for your lordship. As it is marked 'Immediate,' I thought I might take the liberty of disturbing your lordship's slumbers."

"You did quite right, Tomaso."

"You owe me eight sous, signore, which I paid for the postage."

"There's half a franc, keep the change."

He retired calling me Monsieur le Comte; and all for two sous—O fatherland of Brutus! The letter was from Lampron, who had forgotten to put a stamp on it.

"My dear friend:

"Madame Plumet, to whom I believe you have given no instructions so to do, is at present busying herself considerably about your affairs. I felt I ought to warn you, because she is all heart and no brains, and I have often seen before the trouble into which an overzealous friend may get one, especially if the friend be a woman.

"I fear some serious indiscretion has been committed, for the following reasons.

“Yesterday evening Monsieur Plumet came to see me, and stood pulling furiously at his beard, which I know from experience is his way of showing that the world is not going around the right way for him. By means of questions, I succeeded, after some difficulty, in dragging from him about half what he had to tell me. The only thing which he made quite clear was his distress on finding that Madame Plumet was a woman whom it was hard to silence or to convince by argument.

“It appears that she has gone back to her old trade of dress-making, and that one of her first customers—God knows how she got there!—was Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot.

“Well, last Monday Mademoiselle Jeanne was selecting a hat. She was blithe as dawn, while the dressmaker was gloomy as night.

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“Is your little boy ill, Madame Plumet?”

“No, Mademoiselle.”

“You look so sad.”

“Then, according to her husband’s words, Madame Plumet took her courage in her two hands, and looking her pretty customer in the face, said:

“Mademoiselle, why are you marrying?”

“What a funny question! Why, because I am old enough; because I have had an offer; because all young girls marry, or else they go into convents, or become old maids. Well, Madame Plumet, I never have felt a religious vocation, and I never expected to become an old maid. Why do you ask such a question?”

“Because, Mademoiselle, married life may be very happy, but it may be quite the reverse!”

“After giving expression to this excellent aphorism, Madame Plumet, unable to contain herself any longer, burst into tears.

“Mademoiselle Jeanne, who had been laughing before, was now amazed and presently grew rather anxious.

“Still, her pride kept her from asking any further questions, and Madame Plumet was too much frightened to add a word to her answer. But they will meet again the day after to-morrow, on account of the hat, as before.

“Here the story grew confused, and I understood no more of it.

“Clearly there is more behind this. Monsieur Plumet never would have gone out of his way merely to inform me that his wife had given him a taste of her tongue, nor would he have looked so upset about it. But you know the fellow’s way; whenever it’s important for him to make himself clear he loses what little power of speech he has, becomes worse than dumb-unintelligible. He sputtered inconsequent ejaculations at me in this fashion:

“To think of it, to-morrow, perhaps! And you know what a business! Oh, damnation! Anyhow, that must not be! Ah! Monsieur Lampron, how women do talk!”

“And with this Monsieur Plumet left me.



"I must confess, old fellow, that I am not burning with desire to get mixed up in this mess, or to go and ask Madame Plumet for the explanation which her husband was unable to give me. I shall bide my time. If anything turns up to-morrow, they are sure to tell me, and I will write you word.

"My mother sends you her love, and begs you to wrap up warmly in the evening; she says the twilight is the winter of hot climates.

"The dear woman has been a little out of sorts for the last two days. Today she is keeping her bed. I trust it is nothing but a cold.

"Your affectionate friend,

"SylvestreLampron."

CHAPTER XIII

STARTLING NEWS FROM SYLVESTRE

Milan, June 18th.

The examination of documents began this morning. I never thought we should have such a heap to examine, nor papers of such a length. The first sitting passed almost entirely in classifying, in examining signatures, in skirmishes of all kinds around this main body.

Page 1987

My colleagues and I are working in a room in the municipal Palazzo del Marino, a vast deserted building used, I believe, as a storehouse. Our leathern armchairs and the table on which the documents are arranged occupy the middle of the room. Along the walls are several cupboards, nests of registers and rats; a few pictures with their faces to the wall; some carved wood scutcheons, half a dozen flagstaffs and a triumphal arch in cardboard, now taken to pieces and rotting—gloomy apparatus of bygone festivals.

The persons taking part in the examination besides the three Frenchmen, are, in the first place, a little Italian judge, with a mean face, wrinkled like a winter apple, whose eyelids always seem heavy with sleep; secondly, a clerk, shining with fat, his dress, hair, and countenance expressive of restrained jollity, as he dreams voluptuous dreams of the cool drinks he means to absorb through a straw when the hour of deliverance shall sound from the frightful cuckoo clock, a relic of the French occupation, which ticks at the end of the room; thirdly, a creature whose position is difficult to determine—I think he must be employed in some registry; he is here as a mere manual laborer. This third person gives me the idea of being very much interested in the fortunes of Signore Porfirio Zampini, for on each occasion, when his duties required him to bring us documents, he whispered in my ear:

“If you only knew, my lord, what a man Zampini is! what a noble heart, what a paladin!”

Take notice that this “paladin” is a macaroni-seller, strongly suspected of trying to hoodwink the French courts.

Amid the awful heat which penetrated the windows, the doors, even the sun-baked walls, we had to listen to, read, and compare documents. Gnats of a ferocious kind, hatched by thousands in the hangings of this hothouse, flew around our perspiring heads. Their buzzing got the upper hand at intervals when the clerk’s voice grew weary and, diminishing in volume, threatened to fade away into snores.

The little judge rapped on the table with his paperknife and urged the reader afresh upon his wild career. My colleague from the Record Office showed no sign of weariness. Motionless, attentive, classing the smallest papers in his orderly mind, he did not even feel the gnats swooping upon the veins in his hands, stinging them, sucking them, and flying off red and distended with his blood.

I sat, both literally and metaphorically, on hot coals. Just as I came into the room, the man from the Record Office handed me a letter which had arrived at the hotel while I was out at lunch. It was a letter from Lampron, in a large, bulky envelope. Clearly something important must have happened.

Page 1988

My fate, perhaps, was settled, and was in the letter, while I knew it not. I tried to get it out of my inside pocket several times, for to me it was a far more interesting document than any that concerned Zampini's action. I pined to open it furtively, and read at least the first few lines. A moment would have sufficed for me to get at the point of this long communication. But at every attempt the judge's eyes turned slowly upon me between their half-closed lids, and made me desist. No—a thousand times no! This smooth-tongued, wily Italian shall have no excuse for proving that the French, who have already such a reputation for frivolity, are a nation without a conscience, incapable of fulfilling the mission with which they are charged.

And yet.... there came a moment when he turned his back and began to sort a fresh bundle with the man of records. Here was an unlooked-for opportunity. I cut open the envelope, unfolded the letter, and found eight pages! Still I began:

"My dear friend:

"In spite of my anxiety about my mother, and the care her illness demands (to-day it is found to be undoubted congestion of the lungs), I feel bound to tell you the story of what has happened in the Rue Hautefeuille, as it is very important—"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Mou-il-ard," said the little judge, half turning toward me, "does the paper you have there happen to be number twenty-seven, which we are looking for?"

"Oh, dear, no; it's a private letter."

"A private letter? I ask pardon for interrupting you."

He gave a faint smile, closed his eyes to show his pity for such frivolity, and turned away again satisfied, while the other members of the Zampini Commission looked at me with interest.

The letter was important. So much the worse, I must finish it:

"I will try to reconstruct the scene for you, from the details which I have gathered.

"The time is a quarter to ten in the morning. There is a knock at Monsieur Plumet's door. The door opposite is opened half-way and Madame Plumet looks out. She withdraws in a hurry, 'with her heart in her mouth,' as she says; the plot she has formed is about to succeed or fail, the critical moment is at hand; the visitor is her enemy, your rival Dufilleul.

"He is full of self-confidence and comes in plump and flourishing, with light gloves, and a terrier at his heels.

“My portrait framed, Plumet?’

“Yes, my lord-yes, to be sure.’

“Let’s see it.’

“I have seen the famous portrait: a miniature of the newly created baron, in fresh butter, I think, done cheap by some poor girl who gains her living by coloring photographs. It is intended for Mademoiselle Tigra of the Bouffes. A delicate attention from Dufilleul, isn’t it? While Jeanne in her innocence is dreaming of the words of love he has ventured to utter to her, and cherishes but one thought, one image in her heart, he is exerting his ingenuity to perpetuate the recollection of that image’s adventures elsewhere.

“He is pleased with the elaborate and costly frame which Plumet has made for him.

Page 1989

“‘Very nice. How much?’

“‘One hundred and twenty francs.’

“‘Six louis? very dear.’

“‘That’s my price for this kind of work, my lord; I am very busy just now, my lord.’

“‘Well, let it be this once. I don’t often have a picture framed; to tell the truth, I don’t care for pictures.’

“Dufilleul admires and looks at himself in the vile portrait which he holds outstretched in his right hand, while his left hand feels in his purse. Monsieur Plumet looks very stiff, very unhappy, and very nervous. He evidently wants to get his customer off the premises.“The rustling of skirts is heard on the staircase. Plumet turns pale, and glancing at the half-opened door, through which the terrier is pushing its nose, steps forward to close it. It is too late.“Some one has noiselessly opened it, and on the threshold stands Mademoiselle Jeanne in walking-dress, looking, with bright eyes and her most charming smile, at Plumet, who steps back in a fright, and Dufilleul, who has not yet seen her.

“‘Well, sir, and so I’ve caught you!’

“Dufilleul starts, and involuntarily clutches the portrait to his waistcoat.

“‘Mademoiselle—No, really, you have come—?’

“‘To see Madame Plumet. What wrong is there in that?’

“‘None whatever—of course not.’

“‘Not the least in the world, eh? Ha, ha! What a trifle flurries you. Come now, collect yourself. There is nothing to be frightened at. As I was coming upstairs, your dog put his muzzle out; I guessed he was not alone, so I left my maid with Madame Plumet, and came in at the right-hand door instead of the left. Do you think it improper?’

“‘Oh, no, Mademoiselle.’

“‘However, I am inquisitive, and I should like to see what you are hiding there.’

“‘It’s a portrait.’



“Hand it to me.’

“With pleasure; unfortunately it’s only a portrait of myself.’

“Why unfortunately? On the contrary, it flatters you—the nose is not so long as the original; what do you say, Monsieur Plumet?’

“Do you think it good?’

“Very.’

“How do you like the frame?’

“It’s very pretty.’

“Then I make you a present of it, Mademoiselle.’

“Why! wasn’t it intended for me?’

“I mean—well! to tell the truth, it wasn’t; it’s a wedding present, a souvenir—there’s nothing extraordinary in that, is there?’

“Nothing whatever. You can tell me whom it’s for, I suppose?’

“Don’t you think that you are pushing your curiosity too far?’

“Well, really!’

“Yes, I mean it.’

“Since you make such a secret of it, I shall ask Monsieur Plumet to tell me. Monsieur Plumet, for whom is this portrait?’

Page 1990

"Plumet, pale as death, fumbled at his workman's cap, like a naughty child.

"Why, you see, Mademoiselle—I am only a poor framemaker.'

"Very well! I shall go to Madame Plumet, who is sure to know, and will not mind telling me.'

"Madame Plumet, who must have been listening at the door, came in at that moment, trembling like a leaf, and prepared to dare all.

"I beg you won't, Mademoiselle,' broke in Dufilleul; 'there is no secret. I only wanted to tease you. The portrait is for a friend of mine who lives at Fontainebleau.'

"His name?'

"Gonin—he's a solicitor.'

"It was time you told me. How wretched you both looked. Another time tell me straight out, and frankly, anything you have no reason to conceal. Promise you won't act like this again.'

"I promise.'

"Then, let us make peace.'

"She held out her hand to him. Before he could grasp it, Madame Plumet broke in:

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle, I can not have you deceived like this in my house. Mademoiselle, it is not true!

"What is not true, Madame?'

"That this portrait is for Monsieur Gonin, or anybody else at Fontainebleau.'

"Mademoiselle Charlot drew back in surprise.

"For whom, then?'

"An actress.'

"Take care what you are saying, Madame.'

“‘For Mademoiselle Tigra of the Bouffes.’

“‘Lies!’ cried Dufilleul. ‘Prove it, Madame; prove your story, please!’

“‘Look at the back,’ answered Madame Plumet, quietly.

“‘Mademoiselle Jeanne, who had not put down the miniature, turned it over, read what was on the back, grew deathly pale, and handed it to her lover.

“‘What does it say?’ said Dufilleul, stooping over it.

“‘It said: ‘From Monsieur le Baron D-----to Mademoiselle T-----, Boulevard Haussmann. To be delivered on Thursday.’

“‘You can see at once, Mademoiselle, that this is not my writing. It’s an abominable conspiracy. Monsieur Plumet, I call upon you to give your wife the lie. She has written what is false; confess it!’

“‘The frame-maker hid his face in his hands and made no reply.

“‘What, Plumet, have you nothing to say for me?’

“‘Mademoiselle Charnot was leaving the room.

“‘Where are you going, Mademoiselle? Stay, you will soon see that they lie!’

“‘She was already half-way across the landing when Dufilleul caught her and seized her by the hand.

“‘Stay, Jeanne, stay!’

“‘Let me go, sir!’

“‘No, hear me first; this is some horrible mistake. I swear’

“‘At this moment a high-pitched voice was heard on the staircase.

Page 1991

“Well, George, how much longer are you going to keep me?”

“Dufilleul suddenly lost countenance and dropped Mademoiselle Charnot’s hand.

“The young girl bent over the banisters, and saw, at the bottom of the staircase, exactly underneath her, a woman looking up, with head thrown back and mouth still half-opened. Their eyes met. Jeanne at once turned away her gaze.

“Then, turning to Madame Plumet, who leaned motionless against the wall:

“Come, Madame,’ she said, ‘we must go and choose a hat.’ And she closed the dressmaker’s door behind her.

“This, my friend, is the true account of what happened in the Rue Hautefeuille. I learned the details from Madame Plumet in person, who could not contain herself for joy as she described the success of her conspiracy, and how her little hand had guided old Dame Fortune’s. For, as you will doubtless have guessed, the meeting between Jeanne and her lover, so dreaded by the framemaker, had been arranged by Madame Plumet unknown to all, and the damning inscription was also in her handwriting. “I need not add that Mademoiselle Charnot, upset by the scene, had a momentary attack of faintness. However, she soon regained her usual firm and dignified demeanor, which seems to show that she is a woman of energy.” But the interest of the story does not cease here. I think the betrothal is definitely at an end. A betrothal is always a difficult thing to renew, and after the publicity which attended the rupture of this one, I do not see how they can make it up again. One thing I feel sure of is, that Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot will never change her name to Madame Dufilleul. “Do not, however, exaggerate your own chances. They will be less than you think for some time yet. I do not believe that a young girl who has thus been wounded and deceived can forget all at once. There is even the possibility of her never forgetting—of living with her sorrow, preferring certain peace of mind, and the simple joys of filial devotion, to all those dreams of married life by which so many simple-hearted girls have been cruelly taken in.

“In any case do not think of returning yet, for I know you are capable of any imprudence. Stay where you are, examine your documents, and wait.

“My mother and I are passing through a bitter trial. She is ill, I may say seriously ill. I would sooner bear the illness than my present anxiety.

“Your friend,



“Sylvestre Lampron.

“P. S.—Just as I was about to fasten up this letter, I got a note from Madame Plumet to tell me that Monsieur and Mademoiselle Charnot have left Paris. She does not know where they have gone.”

I became completely absorbed over this letter. Some passages I read a second time; and the state of agitation into which it threw me did not at once pass away. I remained for an indefinite time without a notion of what was going on around me, entirely wrapped up in the past or the future.

Page 1992

The Italian attendant brought me back to the present with a jerk of his elbow. He was replacing the last register in the huge drawers of the table. He and I were alone. My colleagues had left, and our first sitting had come to an end without my assistance, though before my eyes. They could not have gone far, so, somewhat ashamed of my want of attention, I put on my hat, and went to find them and apologize. The little attendant caught me by the sleeve, and gave a knowing smile at the letter which I was slipping into my pocketbook.

“E d’una donna?” he asked.

“What’s that to you?”

“I am sure of it; a letter from a man would never take so long to read; and, ‘per Bacco’, you were a time about it! ‘Oh, le donne, illustre signore, le downe!’”

“That’s enough, thank you.”

I made for the door, but he threw himself nimbly in my way, grimacing, raising his eyebrows, one finger on his ribs. “Listen, my lord, I can see you are a true scholar, a man whom fame alone can tempt. I could get your lordship such beautiful manuscripts—Italian, Latin, German manuscripts that never have been edited, my noble lord!”

“Stolen, too!” I replied, and pushed past him.

I went out, and in the neighboring square, amicably seated at the same table, under the awning of a cafe, I found my French colleagues and the Italian judge. At a table a little apart the clerk was sucking something through a straw. And they all laughed as they saw me making my way toward them through the still scorching glare of the sun.

Milan, June 25th.

Our mission was concluded to-day. Zampini is a mere rogue. Brought face to face with facts he could not escape from, he confessed that he had intended to “have a lark” with the French heirs by claiming to be the rightful heir himself, though he lacked two degrees of relationship to establish his claim.

We explained to him that this little “lark” was a fraudulent act which exposed him at least to the consequence of having to pay the costs of the action. He accepted our opinion in the politest manner possible. I believe he is hopelessly insolvent. He will pay the usher in macaroni, and the barrister in jests.

My colleagues, the record man and the translator, leave Milan to-morrow. I shall go with them.

CHAPTER XIV

A SURPRISING ENCOUNTER

Milan, June 26th.

I have just had another letter from Sylvestre. My poor friend is very miserable; his mother is dead—a saint if ever there was one. I was very deeply touched by the news, although I knew this lovable woman very slightly—too slightly, indeed, not having been a son, or related in any way to her, but merely a passing stranger who found his way within the horizon of her heart, that narrow limit within which she spread abroad the treasures of her tenderness and wisdom. How terribly her son must feel her loss!

Page 1993

He described in his letter her last moments, and the calmness with which she met death, and added:

“One thing, which perhaps you will not understand, is the remorse which is mingled with my sorrow. I lived with her forty years, and have some right to be called ‘a good son.’ But, when I compare the proofs of affection I gave her with those she gave me, the sacrifices I made for her with those she made for me; when I think of the egoism which found its way into our common life, on which I founded my claims to merit, of the wealth of tenderness and sympathy with which she repaid a few walks on my arm, a few kind words, and of her really great forbearance in dwelling beneath the same roof with me—I feel that I was ungrateful, and not worthy of the happiness I enjoyed.” “I am tortured by the thought that it is impossible for me to repair all my neglect, to pay a debt the greatness of which I now recognize for the first time. She is gone. All is over. My prayers alone can reach her, can tell her that I loved her, that I worshipped her, that I might have been capable of doing all that I have left undone for her.

“Oh, my friend, what pleasant duties have I lost! I mean, at least, to fulfil her last wishes, and it is on account of one of them that I am writing to you.

“You know that my mother was never quite pleased at my keeping at home the portrait of her who was my first and only love. She would have preferred that my eyes did not recall so often to my heart the recollection of my long-past sorrows. I withstood her. On her death-bed she begged me to give up the picture to, those who should have had it long ago. ‘So long as I was here to comfort you in the sorrows which the sight of it revived in you,’ she said, ‘I did not press this upon you; but soon you will be left alone, with no one to raise you when your spirits fail you. They have often begged you to give up the picture to them. The time is come for you to grant their prayers.’

“I promised.

“And now, dear friend, help me to keep my promise. I do not wish to write to them. My hand would tremble, and they would tremble when they saw my writing. Go and see them.

“They live about nine miles from Milan, on the Monza road, but beyond that town, close to the village of Desio. The villa is called Dannegianti, after its owners. It used to be hidden among poplars, and its groves were famous for their shade. You must send in your card to the old lady of the house together with mine. They will receive you. Then you must break the news to them as you think best, that, in accordance with the dying wish of Sylvestre Lampron’s mother, the portrait of Rafaella is to be given in perpetuity to the Villa Dannegianti. Given, you understand.

“You may even tell them that it is on its way. I have just arranged with Plumet about packing it. He is a good workman, as you know. To-morrow all will be ready, and my home an absolute void.

Page 1994

"I intend to take refuge in hard work, and I count upon you to alleviate to some extent the hardships of such a method of consolation.

"Sylvestre Lampron."

When I got Lampron's letter, at ten in the morning, I went at once to see the landlord of the Albergo dell' Agnello.

"You can get me a carriage for Desio, can't you?"

"Oh, your lordship thinks of driving to Desio? That is quite right. It is much more picturesque than going by train. A little way beyond Monza. Monza, sir, is one of our richest jewels; you will see there—"

"Yes," said I, repeating my Baedeker as accurately as he, "the Villa Reale, and the Iron Crown of the Emperors of the West."

"Exactly so, sir, and the cathedral built—"

"By Theodolinda, Queen of the Lombards, A.D. 595, restored in the sixteenth century. I know; I only asked whether you could get me a decent carriage."

"A matchless one! At half-past three, when the heat is less intense, your lordship will find the horses harnessed. You will have plenty of time to get to Desio before sunset, and be back in time for supper."

At the appointed time I received notice. My host had more than kept his word, for the horses sped through Milan at a trot which they did not relinquish when we got into the Como road, amid the flat and fertile country which is called the garden of Italy.

After an hour and a half, including a brief halt at Monza, the coachman drew up his horses before the first house in Desio—an inn.

It was a very poor inn, situated at the corner of the main street and of a road which branched off into the country. In front of it a few plane-trees, trained into an arbor, formed an arch of shade. A few feet of vine clambered about their trunks. The sun was scorching the leaves and the heavy bunches of grapes which hung here and there. The shutters were closed, and the little house seemed to have been lulled to sleep by the heat and light of the atmosphere and the buzzing of the gnats.

"Oh, go in; they'll wake up at once," said the coachman, who had divined my thoughts.

Then, without waiting for my answer, like a man familiar with the customs of the country, he took his horses down the road to the stable.



I went in. A swarm of bees and drones were buzzing like a whirlwind beneath the plane-trees; a frightened white hen ran cackling from her nest in the dust. No one appeared. I opened the door; still nobody was to be seen. Inside I found a passage, with rooms to right and left and a wooden staircase at the end. The house, having been kept well closed, was cool and fresh. As I stood on the threshold striving to accustom my eyes to the darkness of the interior, I heard the sound of voices to my right:

“Picturesque as you please, but the journey has been a failure! These people are no better than savages; introductions, distinctions, and I may say even fame, had no effect upon them!”

Page 1995

"Do you think they have even read your letters?" "That would be still worse, to refuse to read letters addressed to them! No, I tell you, there's no excuse."

"They have suffered great trouble, I hear, and that is some excuse for them, father."

"No, my dear, there is no possible excuse for their keeping hidden treasures of such scientific interest. I do not consider that even an Italian nobleman, were he orphan from his cradle, and thrice a widower, has any right to keep locked up from the investigation of scholars an unequalled collection of Roman coins, and a very presentable show of medallions and medals properly so-called. Are you aware that this boorish patrician has in his possession the eight types of medal of the gens Attilia?"

"Really?"

"I am certain of it, and he has the thirty-seven of the gens Cassia, one hundred and eighteen to one hundred and twenty-one of the gens Cornelia, the eleven Farsuleia, and dozens of Numitoria, Pompeia, and Scribonia, all in perfect condition, as if fresh from the die. Besides these, he has some large medals of the greatest rarity; the Marcus Aurelius with his son on the reverse side, Theodora bearing the globe, and above all the Annia Faustina with Heliogabalus on the reverse side, an incomparable treasure, of which there is only one other example, and that an imperfect one, in the world—a marvel which I would give a day of my life to see; yes, my dear, a day of my life!"

Such talk as this, in French, in such an inn as this!

I felt a presentiment, and stepped softly to the right-hand door.

In the darkened room, lighted only by a few rays filtered between the slats of the shutters, sat a young girl. Her hat was hung upon a nail above her head; one arm rested on a wretched white wood table; her head was bent forward in mournful resignation. On the other side of the table, her father was leaning back in his chair against the whitewashed wall, with folded arms, heightened color, and every sign of extreme disgust. Both rose as I entered—Jeanne first, M. Charnot after her. They were astonished at seeing me.

I was no less astounded than they.

We stood and stared at each other for some time, to make sure that we were not dreaming.

M. Charnot was the first to break the silence. He did not seem altogether pleased at my appearance, and turned to his daughter, whose face had grown very red and yet rather chilling:

"Jeanne, put your hat on; it is time to go to the station." Then he addressed me:



“We shall leave you the room to yourself, sir; and since the most extraordinary coincidence”—he emphasized the words—“has brought you to this damnable village, I hope you will enjoy your visit.”

“Have you been here long, Monsieur?”

“Two hours, Monsieur, two mortal hours in this inn, fried by the sun, bored to death, murdered piecemeal by flies, and infuriated by the want of hospitality in this out-of-the-way hole in Lombardy.”

Page 1996

"Yes, I noticed that the host was nowhere to be seen, and that is the reason why I came in here; I had no idea that I should have the honor of meeting you."

"Good God! I'm not complaining of him! He's asleep in his barn over there. You can wake him up; he doesn't mind showing himself; he even makes himself agreeable when he has finished his siesta."

"I only wish to ask him one question, which perhaps you could answer, Monsieur; then I need not waken him. Could you tell me the way to the Villa Dannegianti?"

M. Charnot walked up to me, looked me straight in the eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and burst out laughing.

"The Villa Dannegianti!"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Are you going to the Villa Dannegianti?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then you may as well turn round and go home again."

"Why?"

"Because there's no admission."

"But I have a letter of introduction."

"I had two, Monsieur, without counting the initials after my name, which are worth something and have opened the doors of more than one foreign collection for me; yet they denied me admission! Think of it! The porter of that insolent family denied me admission! Do you expect to succeed after that?"

"I do, Monsieur."

My words seemed to him the height of presumption.

"Come, Jeanne," he said, "let us leave this gentleman to his youthful illusions. They will soon be shattered—very soon."

He gave me an ironical smile and made for the door.

At this moment Jeanne dropped her sunshade. I picked it up for her.

"Thank you, Monsieur," she said.



Of course these words were no more than ordinarily polite. She would have said the same to the first comer. Nothing in her attitude or her look displayed any emotion which might put a value on this common form of speech. But it was her voice, that music I so often dream of. Had it spoken insults, I should have found it sweet. It inspired me with the sudden resolution of detaining this fugitive apparition, of resting, if possible, another hour near her to whose side an unexpected stroke of fortune had brought me.

M. Charnot had already left the room; his rotund shadow rested on the wall of the passage. He held a travelling-bag in his hand.

"Monsieur," said I, "I am sorry that you are obliged to return already to Milan. I am quite certain of admission to the Villa Dannegianti, and it would have given me pleasure to repair a mistake which is clearly due only to the stupidity of the servants."

He stopped; the stroke had told.

"It is certainly quite possible that they never looked at my card or my letters. But allow me to ask, since my card did not reach the host, what secret you possess to enable yours to get to him?"

"No secret at all, still less any merit of my own. I am the bearer of news of great importance to the owners of the villa, news of a purely private nature. They will be obliged to see me. My first care, when I had fulfilled my mission, would have been to mention your name. You would have been able to go over the house, and inspect a collection of medals which, I have heard, is a very fine one."

Page 1997

"Unique, Monsieur!"

"Unfortunately you are going away, and to-morrow I have to leave Milan myself, for Paris."

"You have been some time in Italy, then?"

"Nearly a fortnight."

M. Charnot gave his daughter a meaning look, and suddenly became more friendly.

"I thought you had just come. We have not been here so long," he added; "my daughter has been a little out of sorts, and the doctor advised us to travel for change of air. Paris is not healthful in this very hot weather."

He looked hard at me to see whether his fib had taken me in. I replied, with an air of the utmost conviction, "That is putting it mildly. Paris, in July, is uninhabitable."

"That's it, Monsieur, uninhabitable; we were forced to leave it. We soon made up our minds, and, in spite of the time of the year, we turned our steps toward the home of the classics, to Italy, the museum of Europe. And you really think, then, that by means of your good offices we should have been admitted to the villa?"

"Yes, Monsieur, but owing only to the missive with which I am entrusted."

M. Charnot hesitated. He was probably thinking of the blot of ink, and certainly of M. Mouillard's visit. But he doubtless reflected that Jeanne knew nothing of the old lawyer's proceedings, that we were far from Paris, that the opportunity was not to be lost; and in the end his passion for numismatics conquered at once his resentment as a bookworm and his scruples as a father.

"There is a later train at ten minutes to eight, father," said Jeanne.

"Well, dear, do you care to try your luck again, and return to the assault of that Annia Faustina?"

"As you please, father."

We left the inn together by the by-road down the hill. I could not believe my eyes. This old man with refined features who walked on my left, leaning on his malacca cane, was M. Charnot. The same man who received me so discourteously the day after I made my blot was now relying on me to introduce him to an Italian nobleman; on me, a lawyer's clerk. I led him on with confidence, and both of us, carried away by our divers hopes, he dreaming of medals, I of the reopened horizon full of possibilities, conversed on indifferent subjects with a freedom hitherto unknown between us.

And this charming Parisienne, whose presence I divined rather than saw, whom I dared not look in the face, who stepped along by her father's side, light of foot, her eyes seeking the vault of heaven, her ear attentive though her thoughts were elsewhere, catching her Parisian sunshade in the hawthorns of Desio, was Jeanne, Jeanne of the flower-market, Jeanne whom Lampron had sketched in the woods of St. Germain! It did not seem possible.

Yet it was so, for we arrived together at the gates of the Villa Dannegianti, which is hardly a mile from the inn.

I rang the bell. The fat, idle, insolent Italian porter was beginning to refuse me admission, with the same words and gestures which he had so often used. But I explained, in my purest Tuscan, that I was not of the ordinary kind of importunate tourist. I told him that he ran a serious risk if he did not immediately hand my card and my letter—Lampron's card in an envelope—to the Comtesse Dannegianti.

Page 1998

From his stony glare I could not tell whether I had produced any impression, nor even whether he had understood. He turned on his heel with his keys in one hand and the letter in the other, and went on his way through the shady avenue, rolling his broad back from side to side, attired in a jacket which might have fitted in front, but was all too short behind.

The shady precincts of which Lampron wrote did not seem to have been pruned. The park was cool and green. At the end of the avenue of plane-trees, alternating with secular hawthorns cut into pyramids, we could see the square mass of the villa just peeping over the immense clumps of trees. Beyond it the tops and naked trunks of a group of umbrella pines stood silhouetted against the sky.

The porter returned, solemn and impassive. He opened the gate without a word. We all passed through—M. Charnot somewhat uneasy at entering under false pretenses, as I guessed from the way he suddenly drew up his head. Jeanne seemed pleased; she smoothed down a fold which the wind had raised in her frock, spread out a flounce, drew herself up, pushed back a hairpin which her fair tresses had dragged out of its place, all in quick, deft, and graceful movements, like a goldfinch preening its feathers.

We reached the terrace, and arranged that M. and Mademoiselle Charnot should wait in an alley close at hand till I received permission to visit the collections.

I entered the house, and following a lackey, crossed a large mosaic-paved hall, divided by columns of rare marbles into panels filled with mediocre frescoes on a very large scale. At the end of this hall was the Countess's room, which formed a striking contrast, being small, panelled with wood, and filled with devotional knick-knacks that gave it the look of a chapel.

As I entered, an old lady half rose from an armchair, which she could have used as a house, the chair was so large and she was so small. At first I could distinguish only two bright, anxious eyes. She looked at me like a prisoner awaiting a verdict. I began by telling her of the death of Lampron's mother. Her only answer was an attentive nod. She guessed something else was coming and stood on guard, so to speak. I went on and told her that the portrait of her daughter was on its way to her. Then she forgot everything—her age, her rank, and the mournful reserve which had hitherto hedged her about. Her motherly heart alone spoke within her; a ray of light had come to brighten the incurable gloom which was killing her; she rushed toward me and fell into my arms, and I felt against my heart her poor aged body shaking with sobs. She thanked me in a flood of words which I did not catch. Then she drew back and gazed at me, seeking to read in my eyes some emotion responsive to her own, and her eyes, red and swollen and feverishly bright, questioned me more clearly than her words.

Page 1999

"How good are you, sir! and how generous is he! What life does he lead? Has he ever lived down the sorrow which blasted his youth here? Men forget more easily, happily for them. I had given up all hope of obtaining the portrait. Every year I sent him flowers which meant, 'Restore to us all that is left of our dead Rafaella.' Perhaps it was unkind. I did reproach myself at times for it. But I was her mother, you know; the mother of that peerless girl! And the portrait is so good, so like! He has never altered it? tell me; never retouched it? Time has not marred the lifelike coloring? I shall now have the mournful consolation I have so long desired; I shall always have before me the counterpart of my lost darling, and can gaze upon that face which none could depict save he who loved her; for, dreadful though it be to think of, the image of the best beloved will change and fade away even in a mother's heart, and at times I doubt whether my old memory is still faithful, and recalls all her grace and beauty as clearly as it used to do when the wound was fresh in my heart and my eyes were still filled with the loveliness of her. Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur! to think that I shall see that face once more!"

She left me as quickly as she had come, and went to open a door on the left, into an adjoining room, whose red hangings threw a ruddy glow upon the polished floor.

"Cristoforo!" she cried, "Cristoforo! come and see a French gentleman who brings us great news. The portrait of our Rafaella, Cristoforo, the portrait we have so long desired, is at last to be given to us!"

I heard a chair move, and a slow footstep. Cristoforo appeared, with white hair and black moustache, his tall figure buttoned up in an old-fashioned frockcoat, the petrified, mummified remains of a once handsome man. He walked up to me, took both my hands and shook them ceremoniously. His face showed no traces of emotion; his eyes were dry, and he had not a word to say. Did he understand? I really do not know. He seemed to think the affair was an ordinary introduction. As I looked at him his wife's words came back to me, "Men forget sooner." She gazed at him as if she would put blood into his veins, where it had long ceased to flow.

"Cristoforo, I know this will be a great joy to you, and you will join with me in thanking Monsieur Lampron for his generosity. You, sir, will express to him all the Count's gratitude and my own, and also the sympathy we feel for him in his recent loss. Besides, we shall write to him. Is Monsieur Lampron rich?"

"I had forgotten to tell you, Madame, that my friend will accept nothing but thanks."

"Ah, that is truly noble of him, is it not, Cristoforo?"

All the answer the old Count made was to take my hands and shake them again.

I used the opportunity to put forward my request in behalf of M. Charnot. He listened attentively.

“I will give orders. You shall see everything—everything.”

Page 2000

Then, considering our interview at an end, he bowed and withdrew to his own apartments.

I looked for the Countess Dannegianti. She had sunk into her great armchair, and was weeping hot tears.

Ten minutes later, M. Charnot and Jeanne entered with me into the jealously guarded museum.

Museum was the only name to give to a collection of such artistic value, occupying, as it did, the whole of the ground floor to the right of the hall. Two rooms ran parallel to each other, filled with pictures, medals, and engravings, and were connected by a narrow gallery devoted to sculpture.

Hardly was the door opened when M. Charnot sought the famous medals with his eye. There they were in the middle of the room in two rows of cases. He was deeply moved. I thought he was about to make a raid upon them, attracted after his kind by the 'auri sacra fames', by the yellow gleam of those ancient coins, the names, family, obverse and reverse of which he knew by heart. But I little understood the enthusiast.

He drew out his handkerchief and spectacles, and while he was wiping the glasses he gave a rapid and impatient glance at the works that adorned the walls. None of them could charm the numismatist's heart. After he had enjoyed the pleasure of proving how feeble in comparison were the charms of a Titian or a Veronese, then only did M. Charnot walk step by step to the first case and bend reverently over it.

Yet the collection of paintings was unworthy of such disdain. The pictures were few, but all were signed with great names, most of them Italian, a few Dutch, Flemish, or German. I began to work systematically through them, pleased at the want of a catalogue and the small number of inscriptions on the frames. To be your own guide doubles your pleasure; you can get your impression of a picture entirely at first hand; you are filled with admiration without any one having told you that you are bound to go into ecstasies. You can work out for yourself from a picture, by induction and comparison, its subject, its school, and its author, unless it proclaims, in every stroke of the brush, "I am a Hobbema," "a Perugino," or "a Giotto."

I was somewhat distracted, however, by the voice of the old numismatist, as he peered into the cases, and constrained his daughter to share in the exuberance of his learned enthusiasm.

"Jeanne, look at this; crowned head of Cleopatra, Mark Antony on the reverse; in perfect condition, isn't it? See, an Italian 'as-Iguvium Umbriae', which my friend Pousselot has sought these thirty years! Oh, my dear, this is important: Annius Verus on the reverse of Commodus, both as children, a rare example—yet not as rare as—Jeanne, you must

engrave this gold medal in your heart, it is priceless: head of Augustus with laurel, Diana walking on the reverse. You ought to take an interest in her. Diana the fair huntress.

“This collection is heavenly! Wait a minute; we shall soon come to the Annia Faustina.”

Page 2001

Jeanne made no objection, but smiled softly upon the Cleopatra, the Umbrian 'as', and the fair huntress.

Little by little her father's enthusiasm expanded over the vast collection of treasures. He took out his pocketbook and began to make notes. Jeanne raised her eyes to the walls, took one glance, then a second, and, not being called back to the medals, stepped softly up to the picture at which I had begun.

She went quickly from one to another having evidently no more than a child's untutored taste for pictures. As I, on the contrary, was getting on very slowly, she was bound to overtake me. You may be sure I took no steps to prevent it, and so in a very short time we were both standing before the same picture, a portrait of Holbein the younger. A subject of conversation was ready to hand.

"Mademoiselle," said I, "do you like this Holbein?"

"You must admit, sir, that the old gentleman is exceedingly plain."

"Yes, but the painting is exquisite. See how powerful is the drawing of the head, how clear and deep the colors remain after more than three hundred years. What a good likeness it must have been! The subject tells his own story: he must have been a nobleman of the court of Henry VIII, a Protestant in favor with the King, wily but illiterate, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that he were back with the companions of his youth at home in his country house, hunting and drinking at his ease. It is really the study of a man's character. Look at this Rubens beside it, a mere mass of flesh scarcely held together by a spirit, a style that is exuberantly material, all color and no expression. Here you have spirituality on one side and materialism on the other, unconscious, perhaps, but unmistakable. Compare, again, with these two pictures this little drawing, doubtless by Perugino, just a sketch of an angel for an Annunciation; notice the purity of outline, the ideal atmosphere in which the painter lives and with which he impregnates his work. You see he comes of a school of poets and mystics, gifted with a second sight which enabled them to beautify this world and raise themselves above it."

I was pleased with my little lecture, and so was Jeanne. I could tell it by her surprised expression, and by the looks she cast toward her father, who was still taking notes, to see whether she might go on with her first lesson in art.

He smiled in a friendly way, which meant:

"I'm happy here, my dear, thank you; 'va piano va sano'."

This was as good as permission. We went on our way, saluting, as we passed, Tintoretto and Titian, Veronese and Andrea Solari, old Cimabue, and a few early paintings of angular virgins on golden backgrounds.

Jeanne was no longer bored.

“And is this,” she would say, “another Venetian, or a Lombard, or a Florentine?”

We soon completed the round of the first room, and made our way into the gallery beyond, devoted to sculpture. The marble gods and goddesses, the lovely fragments of frieze or cornice from the excavations at Rome, Pompeii, or Greece, had but a moderate interest for Mademoiselle Charnot. She never gave more than one glance to each statue, to some none at all.

Page 2002

We soon came to the end of the gallery, and the door which gave access into the second room of paintings.

Suddenly Jeanne gave an exclamation of surprise.

“What is that?” she said.

Beneath the large and lofty window, fanned on the outside by leafy branches, a wooden panel, bearing an inscription, stood upright against the wall. The words were painted in black on a white ground, and arranged with considerable skill, after the style of the classic epitaphs which the Italians still cultivate.

I drew aside the folds of a curtain:

“It is one of those memorial tablets, Mademoiselle, such as people hang up in this part of the country upon the church doors on the day of the funeral. It means:

“To thee, Rafaella Dannegianti—who, aged twenty years and few months—having fully experienced the sorrows and illusions of this world—on January 6—like an angel longing for its heavenly home—didst wing thy way to God in peace and happiness—the clergy of Desio and the laborers and artificers of the noble house of Dannegianti—tender these last solemn offices.”

“This Rafaella, then, was the Count’s daughter?”

“His only child, a girl lovely and gracious beyond rivalry.”

“Oh, of course, beyond rivalry. Are not all only daughters lovely and perfect when once they are dead?” she replied with a bitter smile. “They have their legend, their cult, and usually a flattering portrait. I am surprised that Rafaella’s is not here. I imagine her portrait as representing a tall girl, with long, well-arched eyebrows, and brown eyes—”

“Greenish-brown.”

“Green, if you prefer it; a small nose, cherry lips, and a mass of light brown hair.”

“Golden brown would be more correct.”

“Have you seen it, then? Is there one?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle, and it lacks no perfection that you could imagine, not even that smile of happy youth which was a falsehood ere the paint had yet dried on the canvas. Here, before this relic, which recalls it to my thoughts, I must confess that I am touched.”

She looked at me in astonishment.

“Where is the portrait? Not here?”

“No, it is at Paris, in my friend Lampron’s studio.”

“O—oh!” She blushed slightly.

“Yes, Mademoiselle, it is at once a masterpiece and a sad reminder. The story is very simple, and I am sure my friend would not mind my telling it to you—to you if to no other—before these relics of the past.

“When Lampron was a young man travelling in Italy he fell in love with this young girl, whose portrait he was painting. He loved her, perhaps without confessing it to himself, certainly without avowing it to her. Such is the way of timid and humble men of heart, men whose love is nearly always misconstrued when it ceases to be unnoticed. My friend risked the happiness of his life, fearlessly, without calculation—and lost it. A day came when Rafaella Dannegianti was carried off by her parents, who shuddered at the thought of her stooping to a painter, even though he were a genius.”

Page 2003

“So she died?”

“A year later. He never got over it. Even while I speak to you, he in his loneliness is pondering and weeping over these very lines which you have just read without a suspicion of the depth of their bitterness.”

“He has known bereavement,” said she; “I pity him with all my heart.”

Her eyes filled with tears. She repeated the words, whose meaning was now clear to her, “A to Rafaella.” Then she knelt down softly before the mournful inscription. I saw her bow her head. Jeanne was praying.

It was touching to see the young girl, whom chance had placed before this simple testimony of a sorrow now long past, deeply moved by the sad tale of love, filled with tender pity for the dead Rafaella, her fellow in youth and beauty and perhaps in destiny, finding in her heart the tender impulse to kneel without a word, as if beside the grave of a friend. The daylight’s last rays streaming in through the window illumined her bowed head.

I drew back, with a touch of awe.

M. Charnot appeared.

He went up to his daughter and tapped her on the shoulder. She rose with a blush.

“What are you doing there?” he said.

Then he adjusted his glasses and read the Italian inscription.

“You really take unnecessary trouble in kneeling down to decipher a thing like that. You can see at once that it’s a modern panel, and of no value. Monsieur,” he added, turning to me, “I do not know what your plans are, but unless you intend to sleep at Desio, we must be off, for the night is falling.”

We left the villa.

Out of doors it was still light, but with the afterglow. The sun was out of sight, but the earth was still enveloped, as it were, in a haze of luminous dust.

M. Charnot pulled out his watch.

“Seven minutes past eight. What time does the last train start, Jeanne?”

“At ten minutes to eight.”

“Confusion! we are stranded in Desio! The mere thought of passing the night in that inn gives me the creeps. I see no way out of it unless Monsieur Mouillard can get us one of the Count’s state coaches. There isn’t a carriage to be got in this infernal village!”

“There is mine, Monsieur, which luckily holds four, and is quite at your service.”

“Upon my word, I am very much obliged to you. The drive by moonlight will be quite romantic.”

He drew near to Jeanne and whispered in her ear:

“Are you sure you’ve wraps enough? a shawl, or a cape, or some kind of pelisse?”

She gave a merry nod of assent.

“Don’t worry yourself, father; I am prepared for all emergencies.”

At half-past eight we left Desio together, and I silently blessed the host of the Albergo dell’ Agnello, who had assured me that the carriage road was “so much more picturesque.” I found it so, indeed.

Page 2004

M. Charnot and Jeanne faced the horses. I sat opposite to M. Charnot, who was in the best of spirits after all the medals he had seen. Comfortably settled in the cushions, careless of the accidents of the road, with graphic and untiring forefinger, he undertook to describe his travels in Greece, whither he had been sent on some learned enterprise by the Minister of Education, and had carried an imagination already prepossessed and dazzled with Homeric visions. He told his story well and with detail, combining the recollections of the scholar with the impressions of an artist. The pediment of the Parthenon, the oleanders of the Ilissus, the stream “that runs in rain-time,” the naked peak of Parnassus, the green slopes of Helicon, the blue gulf of Argus, the pine forest beside Alpheus, where the ancients worshipped “Death the Gentle”—all of them passed in recount upon his learned lips.

I must acknowledge, to my shame, that I did not listen to all he said, but, in a favorite way I have, reserved some of my own freedom of thought, while I gave him complete freedom of speech. And I am bound to say he did not abuse it, but consented to pause at the frontiers of Thessaly. Then followed silence. I gave him room to stretch. Soon, lulled by the motion of the carriage, the stream of reminiscence ran more slowly—then ran dry. M. Charnot slept.

We bowled at a good pace, without jolting, over the white road. A warm mist rose around us laden with the smell of vegetation, ripe corn, and clover from the overheated earth and the neighboring fields, which had drunk their full of sunlight. Now and again a breath of fresh air was blown to us from the mountains. As the darkness deepened the country grew to look like a vast chessboard, with dark and light squares of grass and corn land, melting at no great distance into a colorless and unbroken horizon. But as night blotted out the earth, the heaven lighted up its stars. Never have I seen them so lustrous nor in such number. Jeanne reclined with her eyes upturned toward those limitless fields of prayer and vision; and their radiance, benignly gentle, rested on her face. Was she tired or downcast, or merely dreaming? I knew not. But there was something so singularly poetic in her look and attitude that she seemed to me to epitomize in herself all the beauty of the night.

I was afraid to speak. Her father’s sleep, and our consequent isolation, made me ill at ease. She, too, seemed so careless of my presence, so far away in dreamland, that I had to await opportunity, or rather her leave, to recall her from it.

Finally she broke the silence herself. A little beyond Monza she drew closer her shawl, that the night wind had ruffled, and bent over toward me:

“You must excuse my father; he is rather tired this evening, for he has been on his feet since five o’clock.”

“The day has been so hot, too, Mademoiselle, and the medals ‘came not in single spies, but in battalions’; he has a right to sleep after the battle.”

Page 2005

"Dear old father! You gave him a real treat, for which he will always be obliged to you."

"I trust the recollection of to-day will efface that of the blot of ink, for which I am still filled with remorse."

"Remorse is rather a serious word."

"No, Mademoiselle, I really mean remorse, for I wounded the feelings of a gentleman who has every claim on my respect. I never have dared to speak of this before. But if you would be kind enough to tell Monsieur Charnot how sorry I have been for it, you would relieve me of a burden."

I saw her eyes fixed upon me for a moment with a look of attention not previously granted to me. She seemed pleased.

"With all my heart," she said.

There was a moment's silence.

"Was this Rafaella, whose story you have told me, worthy of your friend's long regret?"

"I must believe so."

"It is a very touching story. Are you fond of Monsieur Lampron?"

"Beyond expression, Mademoiselle; he is so openhearted, so true a friend, he has the soul of the artist and the seer. I am sure you would rate him very highly if you knew him."

"But I do know him, at least by his works. Where am I to be seen now, by the way? What has become of my portrait?"

"It's at Lampron's house, in his mother's room, where Monsieur Charnot can go and see it if he likes."

"My father does not know of its existence," she said, with a glance at the slumbering man of learning.

"Has he not seen it?"

"No, he would have made so much ado about nothing. So Monsieur Lampron has kept the sketch? I thought it had been sold long ago."

"Sold! you did not think he would sell it!"

"Why not? Every artist has the right to sell his works."

“Not work of that kind.”

“Just as much as any other kind.”

“No, he could not have done that. He would no more sell it than he would sell the portrait of Rafaella Dannegianti. They are two similar relics, two precious reminiscences.”

Mademoiselle Charnot turned, without a reply, to look at the country which was flying past us in the darkness.

I could just see her profile, and the nervous movement of her eyelids.

As she made no attempt to speak, her silence emboldened me.

“Yes, Mademoiselle, two similar relics, yet sometimes in my hours of madness—as to-day, for instance, here, with you near me—I dare to think that I might be less unfortunate than my friend—that his dream is gone forever—but that mine might return to me—if you were willing.”

She quickly turned toward me, and in the darkness I saw her eyes fixed on mine.

Did the darkness deceive me as to the meaning of this mute response? Was I the victim of a fresh delusion? I fancied that Jeanne looked sad, that perhaps she was thinking of the oaths sworn only to be broken by her former lover, but that she was not quite displeased.

Page 2006

However, it lasted only for a second. When she spoke, it was in a higher key:

“Don’t you think the breeze is very fresh this evening?”

A long-drawn sigh came from the back part of the carriage. M. Charnot was waking up.

He wished to prove that he had only been meditating.

“Yes, my dear, it’s a charming evening,” he replied; “these Italian nights certainly keep up their reputation.”

Ten minutes later the carriage drew up, and M. Charnot shook hands with me before the door of his hotel.

“Many thanks, my dear young sir, for this delightful drive home! I hope we shall meet again. We are off to Florence to-morrow; is there anything I can do for you there?”

“No, thank you.”

Mademoiselle Charnot gave me a slight bow. I watched her mount the first few steps of the staircase, with one hand shading her eyes from the glare of the gaslights, and the other holding up her wraps, which had come unfolded and were falling around her.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Came not in single spies, but in battalions
Men forget sooner
Skilful actor, who apes all the emotions while feeling none
Sorrows shrink into insignificance as the horizon broadens
Surprise goes for so much in what we admire
To be your own guide doubles your pleasure
You must always first get the tobacco to burn evenly

THE INK STAIN BY RENE BAZIN

(Tache d'Encre)

By *Rene Bazin*

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XV

BACK TO PARIS

Milan, June 27th. Before daybreak.

He asked me whether there was anything he could do for me at Florence. There is something, but he would refuse to do it; for I wish him to inform his charming daughter that my thoughts are all of her; that I have spent the night recalling yesterday's trip—now the roads of Desio and the galleries of the villa, now the drive back to Milan. M. Charnot only figured in my dreams as sleeping. I seemed to have found my tongue, and to be pouring forth a string of well-turned speeches which I never should have ready at real need. If I could only see her again now that all my plans are weighed and thought out and combined! Really, it is hard that one can not live one's life over twice—at least certain passages in it—this episode, for instance . . .

Page 2007

What is her opinion of me? When her eyes fixed themselves on mine I thought I could read in their depths a look of inquiry, a touch of surprise, a grain of disquiet. But her answer? She is going to Florence bearing with her the answer on which my life depends. They are leaving by the early express. Shall I take it, too? Florence, Rome, Naples—why not? Italy is free to all, and particularly to lovers. I will toss my cap over the mill for the second time. I will get money from somewhere. If I am not allowed to show myself, I will look on from a distance, hidden in the crowd. At a pinch I will disguise myself—as a guide at Pompeii, a lazzarone at Naples. She shall find a sonnet in the bunch of fresh flowers offered her by a peasant at the door of her hotel. And at least I shall bask in her smile, the sound of her voice, the glints of gold about her temples, and the pleasure of knowing that she is near even when I do not see her.

On second thoughts; no; I will not go to Florence. As I always distrust first impulses, which so often run reason to a standstill, I had recourse to a favorite device of mine. I asked myself: What would Lampron advise? And at once I conjured up his melancholy, noble face, and heard his answer: “Come back, my dear boy.”

Paris, July 2d.

When you arrive by night, and from the windows of the flying train, as it whirls past the streets at full speed, you see Paris enveloped in red steam, pierced by starry lines of gas-lamps crisscrossing in every direction, the sight is weird, and almost beautiful. You might fancy it the closing scene of some gigantic gala, where strings upon strings of colored lanterns brighten the night above a moving throng, passing, repassing, and raising a cloud of dust that reddens in the glow of expiring Bengal lights.

Moreover, the illusion is in part a reality, for the great city is in truth lighted for its nightly revel. Till one o'clock in the morning it is alight and riotous with the stir and swing of life.

But the dawn is bleak enough.

That, delicious hour which puts a spirit of joy into green field and hedgerow is awful to look upon in Paris. You leave the train half-frozen, to find the porters red-eyed from their watch. The customs officials, in a kind of stupor, scrawl cabalistic signs upon your trunk. You get outside the station, to find a few scattered cabs, their drivers asleep inside, their lamps blinking in the mist.

“Cabby, are you disengaged?”

“Depends where you want to go.”

“No. 91 Rue de Rennes.”

“Jump in!”

Page 2008

The blank streets stretch out interminably, gray and silent; the shops on either hand are shuttered; in the squares you will find only a dog or a scavenger; theatre bills hang in rags around the kiosks, the wind sweeps their tattered fragments along the asphalt in yesterday's dust, with here and there a bunch of faded flowers. The Seine washes around its motionless boats; two great-coated policemen patrol the bank and wake the echoes with their tramp. The fountains have ceased to play, and their basins are dry. The air is chilly, and sick with evil odors. The whole drive is like a bad dream. Such was my drive from the Gare de Lyon to my rooms. When I was once at home, installed in my own domains, this unpleasant impression gradually wore off. There was friendliness in my sticks of furniture. I examined those silent witnesses, my chair, my table, and my books. What had happened while I was away? Apparently nothing important. The furniture had a light coating of dust, which showed that no one had touched it, not even Madame Menin. It was funny, but I wished to see Madame Menin. A sound, and I heard my opposite neighbor getting to work. He is a hydrographer, and engraves maps for a neighboring publisher. I never could get up as early as he. The willow seemed to have made great progress during the summer. I flung up the window and said "Good-morning!" to the wallflowers, to the old wall of the Carmelites, and the old black tower. Then the sparrows began. What o'clock could it be? They came all together with a rush, chirping, the hungry thieves, wheeling about, skirting the walls in their flight, quick as lightning, borne on their pointed wings. They had seen the sun—day had broken!

And almost immediately I heard a cart pass, and a hawker crying:

"Ground-SEL! Groundsel for your dickey-birds!"

To think that there are people who get up at that unearthly hour to buy groundsel for their canaries! I looked to see whether any one had called in my absence; their cards should be on my table. Two were there: "Monsieur Lorinet, retired solicitor, town councillor, of Bourbonnoux-les-Bourges, deputy-magistrate"; "Madame Lorinet, nee Poupard."

I was surprised not to find a third card: "Berthe Lorinet, of no occupation, anxious to change her name." Berthe will be difficult to get rid of. I presume she didn't dare to leave a card on a young man, it wouldn't have been proper. But I have no doubt she was here. I scent a trick of my uncle's, one of those Atlantic cables he takes for spider's threads and makes his snares of. The Lorinet family have been here, with the twofold intention of taking news of me to my "dear good uncle," and discreetly recalling to my forgetful heart the charms of Berthe of the big feet.

"Good-morning, Monsieur Mouillard!"

"Hallo! Madame Menin! Good-morning, Madame Menin!"

“So you are back at last, sir! How brown you have got—quite sunburnt. You are quite well, I hope, sir?”



Page 2009

"Very well, thank you; has any one been here in my absence?"

"I was going to tell you, sir; the plumber has been here, because the tap of your cistern came off in my hand. It wasn't my fault; there had been a heavy rain that morning. So —"

"Never mind, it's only a tap to pay for. We won't say any more about it. But did any one come to see me?"

"Ah, let me see—yes. A big gentleman, rather red-faced, with his wife, a fat lady, with a small voice; a fine woman, rather in my style, and their daughter—but perhaps you know her, sir?"

"Yes, Madame Menin, you need not describe her. You told them that I was away, and they said they were very sorry."

"Especially the lady. She puffed and panted and sighed: 'Dear Monsieur Mouillard! How unlucky we are, Madame Menin; we have just come to Paris as he has gone to Italy. My husband and I would have liked so much to see him! You may think it fanciful, but I should like above all things to look round his rooms. A student's rooms must be so interesting. Stay there, Berthe, my child.' I told them there was nothing very interesting, and that their daughter might just as well come in too, and then I showed them everything."

"They didn't stay long, I suppose?"

"Quite long enough. They were an age looking at your photograph album. I suppose they haven't got such things where they come from. Madame Lorinet couldn't tear herself away from it. 'Nothing but men,' she said, 'have you noticed that, Jules?'—'Well, Madame,' I said, 'that's just how it is here; except for me, and I don't count, only gentlemen come here. I've kept house for bachelors where—well, there are not many —'

"That will do, Madame Menin; that will do. I know you always think too highly of me. Hasn't Lampron been here?"

"Yes, sir; the day before yesterday. He was going off for a fortnight or three weeks into the country to paint a portrait of some priest—a bishop, I think."

July 15th.

"Midi, roi des etes." I know by heart that poem by "Monsieur le Comte de l'Isle," as my Uncle Mouillard calls him. Its lines chime in my ears every day when I return from luncheon to the office I have left an hour before. Merciful heaven, how hot it is! I am just back from a hot climate, but it was nothing compared to Paris in July. The asphalt



melts underfoot; the wood pavement is simmering in a viscous mess of tar; the ideal is forced to descend again and again to iced lager beer; the walls beat back the heat in your face; the dust in the public gardens, ground to atoms beneath the tread of many feet, rises in clouds from under the water-cart to fall, a little farther on, in white showers upon the passers-by. I wonder that, as a finishing stroke, the cannon in the Palais Royal does not detonate all day long.

To complete my misery, all my acquaintances are out of town: the Boule family is bathing at Trouville; the second clerk has not returned from his holiday; the fourth only waited for my arrival to get away himself; Lampron, detained by my Lord Bishop and the forest shades, gives no sign of his existence; even Monsieur and Madame Plumet have locked up their flat and taken the train for Barbizon.

Page 2010

Thus it happens that the old clerk Jupille and I have been thrown together. I enjoy his talk. He is a simplehearted, honorable man, with a philosophy that I am sure can not be in the least German, because I can understand it. I have gradually told him all my secrets. I felt the need of a confidant, for I was stifling, metaphorically as well as literally. Now, when he hands me a deed, instead of saying "All right," as I used to, I say, "Take a chair, Monsieur Jupille"; I shut the door, and we talk. The clerks think we're talking law, but the clerks are mistaken.

Yesterday, for instance, he whispered to me:

"I have come down the Rue de l'Universite. They will soon be back."

"How did you learn that?"

"I saw a man carrying coals into the house, and asked for whom they were, that's all."

Again, we had a talk, just now, which shows what progress I have made in the old clerk's heart. He had just submitted a draft to me. I had read it through and grunted my approval, yet M. Jupille did not go.

"Anything further, Monsieur Jupille?"

"Something to ask of you—to do me a kindness, or, rather, an honor."

"Let's hear what it is."

"This weather, Monsieur Mouillard, is very good for fishing, though rather warm."

"Rather warm, Monsieur Jupille!"

"It is not too warm. It was much hotter than this in 1844, yet the fish bit, I can tell you! Will you join us next Sunday in a fishing expedition? I say 'us,' because one of your friends is coming, a great amateur of the rod who honors me with his friendship, too."

"Who is he?"

"A secret, Monsieur Mouillard, a little secret. You will be surprised. It is settled then—next Sunday?"

"Where shall I meet you?"

"Hush, the office-boy is listening. That boy is too sharp; I'll tell you some other time."

"As you please, Monsieur Jupille; I accept the invitation unconditionally."

"I am so glad you will come, Monsieur Mouillard. I only wish we could have a little storm between this and then."

He spoke the truth; his satisfaction was manifest, for I never have seen him rub the tip of his nose with the feathers of his quill pen so often as he did that afternoon, which was with him the sign of exuberant joy, all his gestures having subdued themselves long since to the limits of his desk.

July 20th.

I have seen Lampron once more. He bears his sorrow bravely. We spoke for a few moments of his mother. I spoke some praise of that humble soul for the good she had done me, which led him to enlarge upon her virtues.

"Ah," he said, "if you had only seen more of her! My dear fellow, if I am an honest man; if I have passed without failing through the trials of my life and my profession; if I have placed my ideal beyond worldly success; in a word, if I am worth anything in heart or brain, it is to her I owe it. We never had been parted before; this is our first separation, and it is the final one. I was not prepared for it."

Page 2011

Then he changed the subject brusquely:

“What about your love-affair?”

“Fresher than ever.”

“Did it survive half an hour’s conversation?”

“It grew the stronger for it.”

“Does she still detest you?”

I told him the story of our trip to Desio, and our conversation in the carriage, without omitting a detail.

He listened in silence. At the end he said:

“My dear Fabien, there must be no delay. She must hear your proposal within a week.”

“Within a week! Who is to make it for me?”

“Whoever you like. That’s your business. I have been making inquiries while you were away; she seems a suitable match for you. Besides, your present position is ridiculous; you are without a profession; you have quarrelled, for no reason, with your only relative; you must get out of the situation with credit, and marriage will compel you to do so.”

CHAPTER XVI

A FISHING-TRIP AND AN OLD FRIEND

July 21st.

M. Jupille had written to tell me where I was to meet him on the Sunday, giving me the most minute directions. I might take the train to Massy, or to Bievres. However, I preferred to take the train to Sceaux and walk from there, leaving Chatenay on my left, striking across the woods of Verrieres toward the line of forts, coming out between Igny and Amblainvilliers, and finally reaching a spot where the Bievre broadens out between two wooded banks into a pool as clear as a spring and as full of fish as a nursery-pond.

“Above all things, tell nobody where it is!” begged Jupille. “It is our secret; I discovered it myself.”

When I left Sceaux to meet Jupille, who had started before daybreak, the sun was already high. There was not a cloud nor a breath of wind; the sway of summer lay over

all things. But, though the heat was broiling, the walk was lovely. All about me was alive with voice or perfume. Clouds of linnets fluttered among the branches, golden beetles crawled upon the grass, thousands of tiny whirring wings beat the air—flies, gnats, gadflies, bees—all chorusing the life—giving warmth of the day and the sunshine that bathed and penetrated all nature. I halted from time to time in the parched glades to seek my way, and again pushed onward through the forest paths overarched with heavy-scented leafage, onward over the slippery moss up toward the heights, below which the Bievre stole into view.

There it lay, at my feet, gliding between banks of verdure which seemed a season younger than the grass I stood on. I began to descend the slope, knowing that M. Jupille was awaiting me somewhere in the valley. I broke into a run. I heard the murmur of water in the hollows, and caught glimpses of forget-me-not tufts in low-lying grassy corners. Suddenly a rod outlined itself against the sky, between two trees. It was he, the old clerk; he nodded to me and laid down his line.



Page 2012

"I thought you never were coming."

"That shows you don't know me. Any sport?"

"Not so loud! Yes, capital sport. I'll bait a line for you."

"And where is your friend, Monsieur Jupille?"

"There he is."

"Where?"

"Staring you in the face; can't you see him?"

Upon my word, I could see nobody, until he directed my gaze with his fishing-rod, when I perceived, ten yards away, a large back view of white trousers and brown, unbuckled waistcoat, a straw hat which seemed to conceal a head, and a pair of shirt-sleeves hanging over the water.

This mass was motionless.

"He must have got a bite," said Jupille, "else he would have been here before now. Go and see him."

Not knowing whom I was about to address, I gave a warning cough as I came near him.

The unknown drew a loud breath, like a man who wakes with a start.

"That you, Jupille?" he said, turning a little way; "are you out of bait?"

"No, my dear tutor, it is I."

"Monsieur Mouillard, at last!"

"Monsieur Flamaran! Jupille told the truth when he said I should be surprised. Are you fond of fishing?"

"It's a passion with me. One must keep one or two for one's old age, young man."

"You've been having sport, I hear."

"Well, this morning, between eight and nine, there were a few nibbles; but since then the sport has been very poor. However, I'm very glad to see you again, Mouillard. That essay of yours was extremely good."

The eminent professor had risen, displaying a face still red from his having slept with his head on his chest, but beaming with good-will. He grasped my hand with heartiness and vigor.

"Here's rod and line for you, Monsieur Mouillard, all ready baited," broke in Jupille. "If you'll come with me I'll show you a good place."

"No, no, Jupille, I'm going to keep him," answered M. Flamaran; "I haven't uttered a syllable for three hours. I must let myself out a little. We will fish side by side, and chat."

"As you please, Monsieur Flamaran; but I don't call that fishing."

He handed me the implement, and sadly went his way.

M. Flamaran and I sat down together on the bank, our feet resting on the soft sand strewn with dead branches. Before us spread the little pool I have mentioned, a slight widening of the stream of the Bievre, once a watering-place for cattle. The sun, now at high noon, massed the trees' shadow close around their trunks. The unbroken surface of the water reflected its rays back in our eyes. The current was barely indicated by the gentle oscillation of a few water-lily leaves. Two big blue dragonflies poised and quivered upon our floats, and not a fish seemed to care to disturb them.

"Well," said M. Flamaran, "so you are still managing clerk to Counsellor Boule?"

Page 2013

"For the time."

"Do you like it?"

"Not particularly."

"What are you waiting for?"

"For something to turn up."

"And carry you back to Italy, I suppose?"

"Then you know I have just been there?"

"I know all about it. Charnot told me of your meeting, and your romantic drive by moonlight. By the way, he's come back with a bad cold; did you know that?"

I assumed an air of sympathy:

"Poor man! When did he get back?"

"The day before yesterday. Of course I was the first to hear of it, and we spent yesterday evening together. It may surprise you, Mouillard, and you may think I exaggerate, but I think Jeanne has come back prettier than she went."

"Do you really think so?"

"I really do. That southern sun—look out, my dear Mouillard, your line is half out of water—has brought back her roses (they're brighter than ever, I declare), and the good spirits she had lost, too, poor girl. She is cheerful again now, as she used to be. I was very anxious about her at one time. You know her sad story?"

"Yes."

"The fellow was a scoundrel, my dear Mouillard, a regular scoundrel! I never was in favor of the match, myself. Charnot let himself be drawn into it by an old college friend. I told him over and over again, 'It's Jeanne's dowry he's after, Charnot—I'm convinced of it. He'll treat Jeanne badly and make her miserable, mark my words.' But I wasted my breath; he wouldn't listen to a word. Anyhow, it's quite off now. But it was no slight shock, I can tell you; and it gave me great pain to witness the poor child's sufferings."

"You are so kind-hearted, Monsieur Flamaran!"

"It's not that, Mouillard; but I have known Jeanne ever since she was born. I watched her grow up, and I loved her when she was still a little mite; she's as good as my

adoptive daughter. You understand me when I say adoptive. I do not mean that there exists between us that legal bond in imitation of nature which is permitted by our codes —'adoptio imitatur naturam'; not that, but that I love her like a daughter—Sidonie never having presented me with a daughter, nor with a son either, for that matter."

A cry from Jupille interrupted M. Flamaran:

"Can't you hear it rattle?"

The good man was tearing to us, waving his arms like a madman, the folds of his trousers flapping about his thin legs like banners in the wind.

We leaped to our feet, and my first idea, an absurd one enough, was that a rattlesnake was hurrying through the grass to our attack.

I was very far from the truth. The matter really was a new line, invented by M. Jupille, cast a little further than an ordinary one, and rigged up with a float like a raft, carrying a little clapper. The fish rang their own knell as they took the hook.

"It's rattling like mad!" cried Jupille, "and you don't stir! I couldn't have thought it of you, Monsieur Flamaran."

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He ran past us, brandishing a landing-net as a warrior his lance; he might have been a youth of twenty-five. We followed, less keen and also less confident than he. He was right, though; when he drew up his line, the float of which was disappearing in jerks, carrying the bell along with it beneath the water, he brought out a fair-sized jack, which he declared to be a giant.

He let it run for some time, to tire it, and to prolong the pleasure of playing it.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "it is cutting my finger off!"

A stroke from the landing-net laid the monster at our feet, its strength all spent. It weighed rather under four pounds. Jupille swore to six.

My learned tutor and I sat down again side by side, but the thread of our conversation had been broken past mending. I tried to talk of her, but M. Flamaran insisted on talking of me, of Bourges, of his election as professor, and of the radically distinct characteristics by which you can tell the bite of a gudgeon from that of a stickleback.

The latter part of this lecture was, however, purely theoretical, for he got up two hours before sunset without having hooked a fish.

"A good day, all the same," he said. "It's a good place, and the fish were biting this morning. We'll come here again some day, Jupille; with an east wind you ought to catch any quantity of gudgeons." He kept pace beside me on our way home, but wearied, no doubt, with long sitting, with the heat, and the glare from the water, fell into a reverie, from which the incidents of the walk were unable to rouse him.

Jupille trotted before us, carrying his rod in one hand, a luncheon-basket and a fish-bag in the other. He turned round and gave us a look at each cross-road, smiled beneath his heavy moustache, and went on faster than before. I felt sure that something out of the way was about to happen, and that the silent quill-driver was tasting a quiet joke.

I had not guessed the whole truth.

At a turn of the road M. Flamaran suddenly pulled up, looked all around him, and drew a deep breath.

"Hallo, Jupille! My good sir, where are you taking us? If I can believe my eyes, this is the Chestnut Knoll, down yonder is Plessis Piquet, and we are two miles from the station and the seven o'clock train!"

There was no denying it. A donkey emerged from the wood, hung with tassels and bells, carrying in its panniers two little girls, whose parents toiled behind, goad in hand. The woods had become shrubberies, through which peeped the thatched roofs of rustic summerhouses, mazes, artificial waterfalls, grottoes, and ruins; all the dread handiwork



of the rustic decorator burst, superabundant, upon our sight, with shy odors of beer and cooking. Broken bottles strewed the paths; the bushes all looked weary, harassed, and overworked; a confused murmur of voices and crackers floated toward us upon the breeze. I knew full well from these

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signs that we were nearing "*Robinson Crusoe*," the land of rustic inns. And, sure enough, here they all were: "*The old Robinson*," "*The new Robinson*," "*The real original Robinson*," "*The only genuine Robinson*," "ROBINSON's *chestnut grove*," "*Robinson's paradise*," each unique and each authentic. All alike have thatched porches, sanded paths, transparencies lighted with petroleum lamps, tinsel stars, summerhouses, arrangements for open-air illumination and highly colored advertisements, in which are set forth all the component elements of a "*Robinson*," such as shooting-galleries, bowling-alleys, swings, private arbors, Munich beer, and dinner in a tree.

"Jupille!" exclaimed M. Flamaran, "you have shipwrecked us! This is Crusoe's land; and what the dickens do you mean by it?"

The old clerk, utterly discomfited, and wearing that hangdog look which he always assumed at the slightest rebuke from Counsellor Boule, pulled a face as long as his arm, went up to M. Flamaran and whispered a word in his ear.

"Upon my word! Really, Jupille, what are you thinking of? And I a professor, too! Thirty years ago it would have been excusable, but to-day! Besides, Sidonie expects me home to dinner—"

He stopped for a moment, undecided, looking at his watch.

Jupille, who was eying him intently, saw his distinguished friend gradually relax his frown and burst into a hearty laugh.

"By Jove! it's madness at my age, but I don't care. We'll renew our youth for an hour or so. My dear Mouillard, Jupille has ordered dinner for us here. Had I been consulted I should have chosen any other place. Yet what's to be done? Hunger, friendship, and the fact that I can't catch the train, combine to silence my scruples. What do you say?"

"That we are in for it now."

"So be it, then." And led by Jupille, still carrying his catch, we entered *the only genuine Robinson*.

M. Flamaran, somewhat ill at ease, cast inquiring glances on the clearings in the scrubberies. I thought I heard stifled laughter behind the trees.

"You have engaged Chestnut Number Three, gentlemen," said the proprietor. "Up these stairs, please."

We ascended a staircase winding around the trunk. Chestnut Number 3 is a fine old tree, a little bent, its sturdy lower branches supporting a platform surrounded by a



balustrade, six rotten wooden pillars, and a thatched roof, shaped like a cocked hat, to shelter the whole. All the neighboring trees contain similar constructions, which look from a little distance like enormous nests. They are greatly in demand at the dinner hour; you dine thirty feet up in the air, and your food is brought up by a rope and pulley.

When M. Flamaran appeared on the platform he took off his hat, and leaned with both hands on the railing to give a look around. The attitude suggested a public speaker. His big gray head was conspicuous in the light of the setting sun.



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"He's going to make a speech!" cried a voice. "Bet you he isn't," replied another.

This was the signal. A rustling was heard among the leaves, and numbers of inquisitive faces peeped out from all corners of the garden. A general rattling of glasses announced that whole parties were leaving the tables to see what was up. The waiters stopped to stare at Chestnut Number 3. The whole population of Juan Fernandez was staring up at Flamaran without in the least knowing the reason why.

"Gentlemen," said a voice from an arbor, "Professor Flamaran will now begin his lecture."

A chorus of shouts and laughter rose around our tree.

"Hi, old boy, wait till we're gone!"

"Ladies, he will discourse to you on the law of husband and wife!"

"No, on the foreclosure of mortgages!"

"No, on the payment of debts!"

"Oh, you naughty old man! You ought to be shut up!"

M. Flamaran, though somewhat put out of countenance for the moment, was seized with a happy inspiration. He stretched out an arm to show that he was about to speak. He opened his broad mouth with a smile of fatherly humor, and the groves, attentive, heard him thunder forth these words:

"Boys, I promise to give you all white marks if you let me dine in peace!"

The last words were lost in a roar of applause.

"Three cheers for old Flamaran!"

Three cheers were given, followed by clapping of hands from various quarters, then all was silence, and no one took any further notice of our tree.

M. Flamaran left the railing and unfolded his napkin.

"You may be sure of my white marks, young men," he said, as he sat down.

He was delighted at his success as an orator, and laughed gayly. Jupille, on the other hand, was as pale as if he had been in a street riot, and seemed rooted to the spot where he stood.

"It's all right, Jupille; it's all right, man! A little ready wit is all you need, dash my wig!"

The old clerk gradually regained his composure, and the dinner grew very merry. Flamaran's spirits, raised by this little incident, never flagged. He had a story for every glass of wine, and told them all with a quiet humor of his own.

Toward the end of dinner, by the time the waiter came to offer us "almonds and raisins, pears, peaches, preserves, meringues, brandy cherries," we had got upon the subject of Sidonie, the pearl of Forez. M. Flamaran narrated to us, with dates, how a friend of his one day depicted to him a young girl at Montbrison, of fresh and pleasing appearance, a good housekeeper, and of excellent family; and how he—M. Flamaran—had forthwith started off to find her, had recognized her before she was pointed out to him, fell in love with her at first sight, and was not long in obtaining her affection in return. The marriage had taken place at St. Galmier.

"Yes, my dear Mouillard," he added, as if pointing a moral, "thirty years ago last May I became a happy man; when do you think of following my example?"

Page 2017

At this point, Jupille suddenly found himself one too many, and vanished down the corkscrew stair.

"We once spoke of an heiress at Bourges," M. Flamaran went on.

"Apparently that's all off?"

"Quite off."

"You were within your rights; but now, why not a Parisienne?"

"Yes, indeed; why not?"

"Perhaps you are prejudiced in some way against Parisiennes?"

"I? Not the least."

"I used to be, but I've got over it now. They have a charm of their own, a certain style of dressing, walking, and laughing which you don't find outside the fortifications. For a long time I used to think that these qualities stood them in lieu of virtues. That was a slander; there are plenty of Parisiennes endowed with every virtue; I even know a few who are angels."

At this point, M. Flamaran looked me straight in the eyes, and, as I made no reply, he added:

"I know one, at least: Jeanne Charriot. Are you listening?"

"Yes, Monsieur Flamaran."

"Isn't she a paragon?"

"She is."

"As sensible as she is tender-hearted?"

"So I believe."

"And as clever as she is sensible?"

"That is my opinion."

"Well, then, young man, if that's your opinion—excuse my burning my boats, all my boats—if that's your opinion, I don't understand why—Do you suppose she has no money?"



"I know nothing about her means."

"Don't make any mistake; she's a rich woman. Do you think you're too young to marry?"

"No."

"Do you fancy, perhaps, that she is still bound by that unfortunate engagement?"

"I trust she is not."

"I'm quite sure she is not. She is free, I tell you, as free as you. Well, why don't you love her?"

"But I do love her, Monsieur Flamaran!"

"Why, then, I congratulate you, my boy!"

He leaned across the table and gave me a hearty grasp of the hand. He was so agitated that he could not speak—choking with joyful emotion, as if he had been Jeanne's father, or mine.

After a minute or so, he drew himself up in his chair, reached out, put a hand on each of my shoulders and kept it there as if he feared I might fly away.

"So you love her, you love her! Good gracious, what a business I've had to get you to say so! You are quite right to love her, of course, of course—I could not have understood your doing otherwise; but I must say this, my boy, that if you tarry too long, with her attractions, you know what will happen."

"Yes, I ought to ask for her at once."

"To be sure you ought."

"Alas! Monsieur Flamaran, who is there that I can send on such a mission for me? You know that I am an orphan."

"But you have an uncle."

"We have quarrelled."

"You might make it up again, on an occasion like this."

Page 2018

"Out of the question; we quarrelled on her account; my uncle hates Parisiennes."

"Damn it all, then! send a friend—a friend will do under the circumstances."

"There's Lampron."

"The painter?"

"Yes, but he doesn't know Monsieur Charnot. It would only be one stranger pleading for another. My chances would be small. What I want—"

"Is a friend of both parties, isn't it? Well, what am I?"

"The very man!"

"Very well. I undertake to ask for her hand! I shall ask for the hand of the charming Jeanne for both of us; for you, who will make her happy; and for myself, who will not entirely lose her if she marries one of my pupils, one of my favorite graduates—my friend, Fabien Mouillard. And I won't be refused—no, damme, I won't!"

He brought down his fist upon the table with a tremendous blow which made the glasses ring and the decanters stagger.

"Coming!" cried a waiter from below, thinking he was summoned.

"All right, my good fellow!" shouted M. Flamaran, leaning over the railings. "Don't trouble. I don't want anything."

He turned again toward me, still filled with emotion, but somewhat calmer than he had been.

"Now," said he, "let us talk, and do you tell me all."

And we began a long and altogether delightful talk.

A more genuine, a finer fellow never breathed than this professor let loose from school and giving his heart a holiday—a simple, tender heart, preserved beneath the science of the law like a grape in sawdust. Now he would smile as I sang Jeanne's praises; now he would sit and listen to my objections with a truculent air, tightening his lips till they broke forth in vehement denial. "What! You dare to say! Young man, what are you afraid of?" His overflowing kindness discharged itself in the sincerest and most solemn asseverations.

We had left Juan Fernandez far behind us; we were both far away in that Utopia where mind penetrates mind, heart understands heart. We heard neither the squeaking of a



swing beneath us, nor the shouts of laughter along the promenades, nor the sound of a band tuning up in a neighboring pavilion. Our eyes, raised to heaven, failed to see the night descending upon us, vast and silent, piercing the foliage with its first stars. Now and again a warm breath passed over us, blown from the woods; I tasted its strangely sweet perfume; I saw in glimpses the flying vision of a huge dark tulip, striped with gold, unfolding its petals on the moist bank of a dyke, and I asked myself whether a mysterious flower had really opened in the night, or whether it was but a new feeling, slowly budding, unfolding, blossoming within my heart.

CHAPTER XVII

PLEASURES OF EAVESDROPPING

July 22d.

At two o'clock to-day I went to see Sylvestre, to tell him all the great events of yesterday. We sat down on the old covered sofa in the shadow of the movable curtain which divides the studio, as it were, into two rooms, among the lay figures, busts, varnish-bottles, and paint-boxes. Lampron likes this chiaroscuro. It rests his eyes.



Page 2019

Some one knocked at the door.

"Stay where you are," said Sylvestre; "it's a customer come for the background of an engraving. I'll be with you in two minutes. Come in!" As he was speaking he drew the curtain in front of me, and through the thin stuff I could see him going toward the door, which had just opened.

"Monsieur Lampron?"

"I am he, Monsieur."

"You don't recognize me, Monsieur?"

"No, Monsieur."

"I'm surprised at that."

"Why so? I have never seen you."

"You have taken my portrait!"

"Really!"

I was watching Lampron, who was plainly angered at this brusque introduction. He left the chair which he had begun to push forward, let it stand in the middle of the studio, and went and sat down on his engraving-stool in the corner, with a somewhat haughty look, and a defiant smile lurking behind his beard. He rested his elbow on the table and began to drum with his fingers.

"What I have had the honor to inform you is the simple truth, Monsieur. I am Monsieur Charnot of the Institute."

Lampron gave a glance in my direction, and his frown melted away.

"Excuse me, Monsieur; I only know you by your back. Had you shown me that side of you I might perhaps have recognized—"

"I have not come here to listen to jokes, Monsieur; and I should have come sooner to demand an explanation, but that it was only this morning I heard of what I consider a deplorable abuse of your talents. But picture-shows are not in my line. I did not see myself there. My friend Flamaran had to tell me that I was to be seen at the last Salon, together with my daughter, sitting on a tree-trunk in the forest of Saint-Germain. Is it true, Monsieur, that you drew me sitting on a trunk?"

"Quite true."

"That's a trifle too rustic for a man who does not go outside of Paris three times a year. And my daughter you drew in profile—a good likeness, I believe."

"It was as like as I could make it."

"Then you confess that you drew both my daughter and myself?"

"Yes, I do, Monsieur."

"It may not be so easy for you to explain by what right you did so; I await your explanation, Monsieur."

"I might very well give you no explanation whatever," replied Lampron, who was beginning to lose patience. "I might also reply that I no more needed to ask your permission to sketch you than to ask that of the beeches, oaks, elms, and willows. I might tell you that you formed part of the landscape, that every artist who sketches a bit of underwood has the right to stick a figure in—"

"A figure, Monsieur! do you call me a figure?"

"A gentleman, I mean. Artists call it figure. Well, I might give you this reason, which is quite good enough for you, but it is not the real one. I prefer to tell you frankly what passed. You have a very beautiful daughter, Monsieur."

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M. Charnot made his customary bow.

“One of my friends is in love with her. He is shy, and dares not tell his love. We met you by chance in the wood, and I was seized with the idea of making a sketch of Mademoiselle Jeanne, so like that she could not mistake it, and then exhibiting it with the certainty of her seeing it and guessing its meaning. I trusted she would recall to her mind, not myself, for my youth is past, but a young friend of mine who is of the age and build of a lover. If this was a crime, Monsieur, I am ready to take the blame for it upon myself, for I alone committed it.”

“It certainly was criminal, Monsieur; criminal in you, at any rate—you who are a man of weight, respected for your talent and your character—to aid and abet in a frivolous love-affair.”

“It was the deepest and most honorable sentiment, Monsieur.”

“A blaze of straw!”

“Nothing of the sort!”

“Don’t tell me! Your friend’s a mere boy.”

“So much the better for him, and for her, too! If you want a man of middle age for your son-in-law, just try one and see what they are worth. You may be sorry that you ever refused this boy, who, it is true, is only twenty-four, has little money, no decided calling, nor yet that gift of self-confidence which does instead of merit for so many people; but who is a brave and noble soul, whom I can answer for as for myself. Go, Monsieur, you will find your daughter great names, fat purses, gold lace, long beards, swelling waistbands, reputations, pretensions, justified or not, everything, in short, in which he is poor; but him you will never find again! That is all I have to tell you.”

Lampron had become animated and spoke with heat. There was the slightest flash of anger in his eyes.

I saw M. Charnot get up, approach him, and hold out his hand.

“I did not wish you to say anything else, Monsieur; that is enough for me. Flamaran asked my daughter’s hand for your friend only this morning. Flamaran loses no time when charged with a commission. He, too, told me much that was good of your friend. I also questioned Counsellor Boule. But however flattering characters they might give him, I still needed another, that of a man who had lived in complete intimacy with Monsieur Mouillard, and I could find no one but you.”

Lampron stared astonished at this little thin-lipped man who had just changed his tone and manner so unexpectedly.

“Well, Monsieur,” he answered, “you might have got his character from me with less trouble; there was no need to make a scene.”

“Excuse me. You say I should have got his character; that is exactly what I did not want; characters are always good. What I wanted was a cry from the heart of a friend outraged and brought to bay. That is what I got, and it satisfies me. I am much obliged to you, Monsieur, and beg you will excuse my conduct.”

“But, since we are talking sense at present, allow me to put you a question in my turn. I am not in the habit of going around the point. Is my friend’s proposal likely to be accepted or not?”

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"Monsieur Lampron, in these delicate matters I have decided for the future to leave my daughter entirely free. Although my happiness is at stake almost as entirely as hers, I shall not say a word save to advise. In accordance with this resolve I communicated Flamaran's proposal to her."

"Well?"

"I expected she would refuse it."

"But she said 'Yes'?"

"She did not say 'No;' if she had, you can guess that I should not be here."

At this reply I quite lost my head, and was very near tearing aside the curtain, and bursting forth into the studio with a shout of gratitude.

But M. Charnot added:

"Don't be too sure, though. There are certain serious, and, perhaps, insurmountable obstacles. I must speak to my daughter again. I will let your friend know of our final decision as soon as I can. Good-by, Monsieur."

Lampron saw him to the street, and I heard their steps grow distant in the passage. A moment later Sylvestre returned and held out both hands to me, saying:

"Well, are you happy now?"

"Of course I am, to a certain extent."

"To a certain extent"! Why, she loves you."

"But the obstacles, Sylvestre!"

"Nonsense!"

"Perhaps insurmountable—those were his words."

"Why, obstacles are the salt of all our joys. What a deal you young men want before you can be called happy! You ask Life for certainties, as if she had any to give you!"

And he began to discuss my fears, but could not quite disperse them, for neither of us could guess what the obstacles could be.

August 2d.

After ten days of waiting, during which I have employed Lampron and M. Flamaran to intercede for me, turn and turn about; ten days passed in hovering between mortal anguish and extravagant hopes, during which I have formed, destroyed, taken up again and abandoned more plans than I ever made in all my life before, yesterday, at five o'clock, I got a note from M. Charnot, begging me to call upon him the same evening.

I went there in a state of nervous collapse. He received me in his study, as he had done seven months before, at our first interview, but with a more solemn politeness; and I noticed that the paper-knife, which he had taken up from the table as he resumed his seat, shook between his fingers. I sat in the same chair in which I had felt so ill at ease. To tell the truth, I felt very much the same, yesterday. M. Charnot doubtless noticed it, and wished to reassure me.

"Monsieur," said he, "I receive you as a friend. Whatever may be the result of our interview, you may be assured of my esteem. Therefore do not fear to answer me frankly."

He put several questions to me concerning my family, my tastes, and my acquaintance in Paris. Then he requested me to tell the simple story of my boyhood and my youth, the recollections of my home, of the college at La Chatre, of my holidays at Bourges, and of my student life.

Page 2022

He listened without interruption, playing with the ivory paperknife. When I reached the date—it was only last December—when I saw Jeanne for the first time—

“That’s enough,” said he, “I know or guess the rest. Young man, I promised you an answer; this is it—”

For the moment, I ceased to breathe; my very heart seemed to stop beating.

“My daughter,” went on M. Charnot, “has at this moment several proposals of marriage to choose from. You see I hide nothing from you. I have left her time to reflect; she has weighed and compared them all, and communicated to me yesterday the result of her reflections. To richer and more brilliant matches she prefers an honest man who loves her for herself, and you, Monsieur, are that honest man.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you, Monsieur!” I cried.

“Wait a moment, there are two conditions.”

“Were there ten, I would accept them without question!”

“Don’t hurry. You will see; one is my daughter’s, the other comes from both of us.”

“You wish me to have some profession, perhaps?”

“No, that’s not it. Clearly my son-in-law will never sit idle. Besides, I have some views on that subject, which I will tell you later if I have the chance. No, the first condition exacted by my daughter, and dictated by a feeling which is very pleasant to me, is that you promise never to leave Paris.”

“That I swear to, with all the pleasure in life!”

“Really? I feared you had some ties.”

“Not one.”

“Or dislike for Paris.”

“No, Monsieur; only a preference for Paris, with freedom to indulge it. Your second condition?”

“The second, to which my daughter and I both attach importance, is that you should make your peace with your uncle. Flamaran tells me you have quarrelled.”

“That is true.”

“I hope it is not a serious difference. A mere cloud, isn’t it?”

“Unfortunately not. My uncle is very positive—”

“But at the same time his heart is in the right place, so far as I could judge from what I saw of him—in June, I think it was.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t mind taking the first step?”

“I will take as many as may be needed.”

“I was sure you would. You can not remain on bad terms with your father’s brother, the only relative you have left. In our eyes this reconciliation is a duty, a necessity. You should desire it as much as, and even more than, we.”

“I shall use every effort, Monsieur, I promise you.”

“And in that case you will succeed, I feel sure.”

M. Charnot, who had grown very pale, held out his hand to me, and tried hard to smile.

“I think, Monsieur Fabien, that we are quite at one, and that the hour has come—”

He did not finish the sentence, but rose and went to open a door between two bookcases at the end of the room.

Page 2023

“Jeanne,” he said, “Monsieur Fabien accepts the two conditions, my dear.”

And I saw Jeanne come smiling toward me.

And I, who had risen trembling, I, who until then had lost my head at the mere thought of seeing her, I, who had many a time asked myself in terror what I should say on meeting her, if ever she were mine, I felt myself suddenly bold, and the words rushed to my lips to thank her, to express my joy.

My happiness, however, was evident, and I might have spared my words.

For the first half-hour all three of us talked together.

Then M. Charlot pushed back his armchair, and we two were left to ourselves.

He had taken up a newspaper, but I am pretty sure he held it upside down. In any case he must have been reading between the lines, for he did not turn the page the whole evening.

He often cast a glance over the top of the paper, folded in four, to the corner where we were sitting, and from us his eyes travelled to a pretty miniature of Jeanne as a child, which hung over the mantelpiece.

What comparisons, what memories, what regrets, what hopes were struggling in his mind? I know not, but I know he sighed, and had not we been there I believe he would have wept.

To me Jeanne showed herself simple as a child, wise and thoughtful as a woman. A new feeling was growing every instant within me, of perfect rest of heart; the certainty of happiness for all my life to come.

Yes, my happiness travelled beyond the present, as I looked into the future and saw along series of days passed by her side; and while she spoke to me, tranquil, confident, and happy too, I thought I saw the great wings of my dream closing over and enfolding us.

We spoke in murmurs. The open window let in the warm evening air and the confused roar of the city.

“I am to be your friend and counsellor?” said she.

“Always.”

“You promise that you will ask my advice in all things, and that we shall act in concert?”



"I do."

"If this very first evening I ask you for a proof of this, you won't be angry?"

"On the contrary."

"Well, from what you have told me of your uncle, you seem to have accepted the second condition, of making up your quarrel, rather lightly."

"I have only promised to do my best."

"Yes, but my father counts upon your success. How do you intend to act?"

"I haven't yet considered."

"That's just what I foresaw, and I thought it would perhaps be a good thing if we considered it together."

"Mademoiselle, I am listening; compose the plan of campaign, and I will criticise it."

Jeanne clasped her hands over her knees and assumed a thoughtful look.

"Suppose you wrote to him."

"There is every chance that he would not answer."

"Reply paid?"

"Mademoiselle, you are laughing; you are no counsellor any longer."

Page 2024

"Yes, I am. Let us be serious. Suppose you go to see him."

"That's a better idea. He may perhaps receive me."

"In that case you will capture him. If you can only get a man to listen—"

"Not my uncle, Mademoiselle. He will listen, and do you know what his answer will be?"

"What?"

"This, or something like it: 'My worthy nephew, you have come to tell me two things, have you not? First, that you are about to marry a Parisienne; secondly, that you renounce forever the family practice. You merely confirm and aggravate our difference. You have taken a step further backward. It was not worth while your coming out of your way to tell me this, and you may return as soon as you please.'"

"You surprise me. There must be some way of getting at him, if he is really good-hearted, as you say. If I could see your uncle I should soon find out a way."

"If you could see him! Yes, that would be the best way of all; it couldn't help succeeding. He imagines you as a flighty Parisienne; he is afraid of you; he is more angry with me for loving you than for refusing to carry on his practice. If he could only see you, he would soon forgive me."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Do you think that if I were to look him in the face, as I now look at you, and to say to him: 'Monsieur Mouillard, will you not consent to my becoming your niece?' do you think that then he would give in?"

"Alas! Mademoiselle, why can not it be tried?"

"It certainly is difficult, but I won't say it can not."

We explained, or rather Jeanne explained, the case to M. Charnot, who is assuredly her earliest and most complete conquest. At first he cried out against the idea. He said it was entirely my business, a family matter in which he had no right to interfere. She insisted. She carried his scruples by storm. She boldly proposed a trip to Bourges, and a visit to M. Mouillard. She overflowed with reasons, some of them rather weak, but all so prettily urged! A trip to Bourges would be delightful—something so novel and refreshing! Had M. Charnot complained on the previous evening, or had he not, of having to stop in Paris in the heat of August? Yes, he had complained, and quite right too, for his colleagues did not hesitate to leave their work and rush off to the country.

Then she cited examples: one off to the Vosges, another at Arcachon, yet another at Deauville. And she reminded him, too, that a certain old lady, one of his old friends of the Faubourg St. Germain, lived only a few miles out of Bourges, and had invited him to come and see her, she didn't know how many times, and that he had promised and promised and never kept his word. Now he could take the opportunity of going on from Bourges to her chateau. Finally, as M. Charnot continued to urge the singularity of such behavior, she replied:

"My dear father! not at all; in visiting Monsieur Mouillard you will be only fulfilling a social duty."

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"How so, I should like to know?"

"He paid you a visit, and you will be returning it!"

M. Charnot tossed his head, like a father who, though he may not be convinced, yet admits that he is beaten.

As for me, Jeanne, I'm beginning to believe in the fairies again.

CHAPTER XVIII

A COOL RECEPTION

August 3d.

I have made another visit to the Rue de l'Universite. They have decided to make the trip. I leave for Bourges tomorrow, a day in advance of M. and Mademoiselle Charnot, who will arrive on the following morning.

I am sent on first to fulfil two duties: to engage comfortable rooms at the hotel—first floor with southern aspect—and then to see my uncle and prepare him for his visitors.

I am to prepare him without ruffling him. Jeanne has sketched my plan of campaign. I am to be the most affectionate of nephews, though he show himself the crustiest of uncles; to prevent him from recurring to the past, to speak soberly of the present, to confess that Mademoiselle Charnot is aware of my feelings for her, and shows herself not entirely insensible to them; but I am to avoid giving details, and must put off a full explanation until later, when we can study the situation together. M. Mouillard can not fail to be appeased by such deference, and to observe a truce while I hint at the possibility of a family council. Then, if these first advances are well received, I am to tell him that M. Charnot is actually travelling in the neighborhood, and, without giving it as certain, I may add that if he stops at Bourges he may like to return my uncle's visit.

There my role ends. Jeanne and M. Charnot will do the rest. It is with Jeanne, by the light of her eyes and her smile, that M. Mouillard is "to study the situation;" he will have to struggle against the redoubtable arguments of her youth and beauty. Poor man!

Jeanne is full of confidence. Her father, who has learned his lesson from her, feels sure that my uncle will give in. Even I, who can not entirely share this optimism, feel that I incline to the side of hope.

When I reached home, the porter handed me two cards from Larive. On the first I read:



Ch. Larive,
Managing Clerk.
P. P. C.

The second, on glazed cardboard, announced, likewise in initials, another piece of news:

Ch. Larive,
Formerly Managing Clerk.
P. F. P. M.

So the Parisian who swore he could not exist two days in the country is leaving Paris. That was fated. He is about to be married; I'm sure I don't object. The only consequence to me is that we never shall meet again, and I shall not weep over that.

Bourges, August 4th.

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If you have ever been in Bourges, you may have seen the little Rue Sous-les-Ceps, the Cours du Bat d'Argent and de la Fleur-de-lys, the Rues de la Merede-Dieu, des Verts-Galants, Mausecret, du Moulin-le-Roi, the Quai Messire-Jacques, and other streets whose ancient names, preserved by a praiseworthy sentiment or instinctive conservatism, betoken an ancient city still inhabited by old-fashioned people, by which I mean people attached to the soil, strongly marked with the stamp of the provincial in manners as in language; people who understand all that a name is to a street—its honor, its spouse if you will, from which it must not be divorced.

My Uncle Mouillard, most devoted and faithful citizen of Bourges, naturally lives in one of these old streets, the Rue du Four, within the shadow of the cathedral, beneath the swing of its chimes.

Within fifteen minutes after my arrival at Bourges I was pulling the deer's foot which hangs, depilated with long use, beside his door. It was five o'clock, and I knew for certain that he would not be at home. When the courts rise, one of the clerks carries back his papers to the office, while he moves slowly off, his coat-tails flapping in the breeze, either to visit a few friends and clients, respectable dames who were his partners in the dance in the year 1840, or more often to take a "constitutional" along the banks of the Berry Canal, where, in the poplar shade, files of little gray donkeys are towing string after string of big barges.

So I was sure not to meet him.

Madeleine opened the door to me, and started as if shot.

"Monsieur Fabien!"

"Myself, Madeleine. My uncle is not at home?"

"No, Monsieur. Do you really mean to come in, Monsieur?"

"Why not?"

"The master's so changed since his visit to Paris, Monsieur Fabien!"

Madeleine stood still, with one hand holding up her apron, the other hanging, and gazed at me with reproachful anxiety.

"I must come in, Madeleine. I have a secret to tell you."

She made no answer, but turned and walked before me into the house.

It was not thus that I used to be welcomed in days gone by! Then Madeleine used to meet me at the station. She used to kiss me, and tell me how well I looked, promising

the while a myriad sweet dishes which she had invented for me. Hardly did I set foot in the hall before my uncle, who had given up his evening walk for my sake, would run out of his study, heart and cravat alike out of their usual order at seeing me—me, a poor, awkward, gaping schoolboy: Today that is ancient history. To-day I am afraid to meet my uncle, and Madeleine is afraid to let me in.

She told me not a word of it, but I easily guessed that floods of tears had streamed from her black eyes down her thin cheeks, now pale as wax. Her face is quite transparent, and looks as if a tiny lamp were lighting it from within. There are strong feelings, too, beneath that impassive mask. Madeleine comes from Bayonne, and has Spanish blood in her. I have heard that she was lovely as a girl of twenty. With age her features have grown austere. She looks like a widow who is a widow indeed, and her heart is that of a grandmother.

Page 2027

She glided before me in her slippers to that realm of peace and silence, her kitchen. I followed her in. Two things that never found entrance there are dust and noise. A lonely goldfinch hangs in a wicker cage from the rafters, and utters from time to time a little shrill call. His note and the metallic tick-tick of Madeleine's clock alone enliven the silent flight of time. She sat down in the low chair where she knits after dinner.

"Madeleine, I am about to be married; did you know it?"

She slowly shook her head.

"Yes, in Paris, Monsieur Fabien; that's what makes the master so unhappy."

"You will soon see her whom I have chosen, Madeleine."

"I do not think so, Monsieur Fabien."

"Yes, yes, you will; and you will see that it is my uncle who is in the wrong."

"I have not often known him in the wrong."

"That has nothing to do with it. My marriage is fully decided upon, and all I want is to get my uncle's consent to it. Do you understand? I want to make friends with him."

Madeleine shook her head again.

"You won't succeed."

"My dear Madeleine!"

"No, Monsieur Fabien, you won't succeed."

"He must be very much changed, then!"

"So much that you could hardly believe it; so much that I can hardly keep myself from changing too. He, who had such a good appetite, now has nothing but fads. It's no good my cooking him dainties, or buying him early vegetables; he never notices them, but looks out of the window as I come in at the door with a surprise for him. In the evening he often forgets to go out in the garden, and sits at table, his elbows on his rumpled napkin, his head between his hands, and what he thinks of he keeps to himself. If I try to talk of you—and I have tried, Monsieur Fabien—he gets up in a rage, and forbids me to open my mouth on the subject. The house is not cheerful, Monsieur Fabien. Every one notices how he has changed; Monsieur Lorinet and his lady never enter the doors; Monsieur Hublette and Monsieur Horlet come and play dummy, looking all the time as if they had come for a funeral, thinking it will please the master. Even the clients say that the master treats them like dogs, and that he ought to sell his practice."

"Then it isn't sold?"

"Not yet, but I think it will be before long."

"Listen to me, Madeleine; you have always been good and devoted to me; I am sure you still are fond of me; do me one last service. You must manage to put me up here without my uncle knowing it."

"Without his knowing it, Monsieur Fabien!"

"Yes, say in the library; he never goes in there. From there I can study him, and watch him, without his seeing me, since he is so irritable and so easily upset, and as soon as you see an opportunity I shall make use of it. A sign from you, and down I come."

"Really, Monsieur Fabien—"

Page 2028

"It must be done, Madeleine; I must manage to speak to him before ten o'clock to-morrow morning, for my bride is coming."

"The Parisienne? She coming here!"

"Yes, with her father, by the train which gets in at six minutes past nine to-morrow."

"Good God! is it possible?"

"To see you, Madeleine; to see my uncle, to make my peace with him. Isn't it kind of her?"

"Kind? Monsieur Fabien! I tremble to think of what will happen. All the same, I shall be glad to have a sight of your young lady, of course."

And so we settled that Madeleine was not to say a word to my uncle about my being in Bourges, within a few feet of him. If she perceived any break in the gloom which enveloped M. Mouillard, she was to let me know; if I were obliged to put off my interview to the morrow, and to pass the night on the sofa-bed in the library, she was to bring me something to eat, a rug, and "the pillow you used in your holidays when you were a boy."

I was installed then in the big library on the first-floor, adjoining the drawing-room, its other door opening on the passage opposite M. Mouillard's door, and its two large windows on the garden. What a look of good antique middle-class comfort there was about it, from the floor of bees'-waxed oak, with its inequalities of level, to the four bookcases with glass doors, surmounted by four bronzed busts of Herodotus, Homer, Socrates, and Marmontel! Nothing had been moved; the books were still in the places where I had known them for twenty years; Voltaire beside Rousseau, the Dictionary of Useful Knowledge, and Rollin's Ancient History, the slim, well bound octavos of the Meditations of St. Ignatius, side by side with an enormous quarto on veterinary surgery.

The savage arrows, said to be poisoned, which always used to frighten me so much, were still arranged like a peacock's tail over the mantel-shelf, each end of which was adorned by the same familiar lumps of white coral. The musical-box, which I was not allowed to touch till I was eighteen, still stood in the left-hand corner, and on the writing-table, near the little blotting-book that held the note-paper, rose, still majestic, still turning obedient to the touch within its graduated belts, the terrestrial globe "on which are marked the three voyages of Captain Cook, both outward and homeward." Ah, captain, how often have we sailed those voyages together! What grand headway we made as we scoured the tropics in the heel of the trade-wind, our ship threading archipelagoes whose virgin forests stared at us in wonder, all their strange flowers opening toward us, seeking to allure us and put us to sleep with their dangerous perfumes. But we always guessed the snare, we saw the points of the assegais

gleaming amid the tall grasses; you gave the word in your full, deep voice, and our way lay infinite before us; we followed it, always on the track of new lands, new discoveries, until we reached the fatal isle of Owhyhee, the spot where this terrestrial globe is spotted with a tear—for I wept over you, my captain, at the age when tears unlock themselves and flow easily from a heart filled with enchantment!

Page 2029

Seven o'clock sounded from the cathedral; the garden door slammed to; my uncle was returning.

I saw him coming down the winding path, hat in hand, with bowed head. He did not stop before his graftings; he passed the clump of petunias without giving them that all-embracing glance I know so well, the glance of the rewarded gardener. He gave no word of encouragement to the Chinese duck which waddled down the path in front of him.

Madeleine was right. The time was not ripe for reconciliation; and more, it would need a great deal of sun to ripen it. O Jeanne, if only you were here!

"Any one called while I've been out?"

This, by the way, is the old formula to which my uncle has always been faithful. I heard Madeleine answer, with a quaver in her voice:

"No, nobody for you, sir."

"Someone for you, then? A lover, perhaps, my faithful Madeleine? The world is so foolish nowadays that even you might take it into your head to marry and leave me. Come, serve my dinner quickly, and if the gentleman with the decoration calls—you know whom I mean?"

"The tall, thin gentleman?"

"Yes. Show him into the drawing-room."

"A gentleman by himself into the drawing-room?"

"No, sir, no. The floor was waxed only yesterday, and the furniture's not yet in order."

"Very well! I'll see him in here."

My uncle went into the dining-room underneath me, and for twenty minutes I heard nothing more of him, save the ring of his wineglass as he struck on it to summon Madeleine.

He had hardly finished dinner when there came a ring at the street door. Some one asked for M. Mouillard, the gentleman with the decoration, I suppose, for Madeleine showed him in, and I could tell by the noise of his chair that my uncle had risen to receive his visitor.

They sat down and entered into conversation. An indistinct murmur reached me through the ceiling. Occasionally a clearer sound struck my ear, and I thought I knew

that high, resonant voice. It was no doubt delusion, still it beset me there in the silence of the library, haunting my thoughts as they wandered restlessly in search of occupation. I tried to recollect all the men with fluty voices that I had ever met in Bourges: a corn-factor from the Place St. Jean; Rollet, the sacristan; a fat manufacturer, who used to get my uncle to draw up petitions for him claiming relief from taxation. I hunted feverishly in my memory as the light died away from the windows, and the towers of St. Stephen's gradually lost the glowing aureole conferred on them by the setting sun.

After about an hour the conversation grew heated.

My uncle coughed, the flute became shrill. I caught these fragments of their dialogue.

"No, Monsieur!"

"Yes, Monsieur!"

"But the law?"

"Is as I tell you."

"But this is tyranny!"

Page 2030

"Then our business is at an end."

Apparently it was not, though; for the conversation gradually sank down the scale to a monotonous murmur. A second hour passed, and yet a third. What could this interminable visit portend?

It was near eleven o'clock. A ray from the rising moon shone between the trees in the garden. A big black cat crept across the lawn, shaking its wet paws. In the darkness it looked like a tiger. In my mind's eye I saw Madeleine sitting with her eyes fixed on her dead hearth, telling her beads, her thoughts running with mine: "It is years since Monsieur Mouillard was up at such an hour." Still she waited, for never had any hand but hers shot the bolt of the street door; the house would not be shut if shut by any other than herself.

At last the dining-room door opened. "Let me show you a light; take care of the stairs."

Then followed the "Good-nights" of two weary voices, the squeaking of the big key turning in the lock, a light footstep dying away in the distance, and my uncle's heavy tread as he went up to his bedroom. The business was over.

How slowly my uncle went upstairs! The burden of sorrow was no metaphor in his case. He, who used to be as active as a boy, could now hardly-support his own weight.

He crossed the landing and went into his room. I thought of following, him; only a few feet lay between us. No doubt it was late, but his excited state might have predisposed him in my favor. Suddenly I heard a sigh—then a sob. He was weeping; I determined to risk all and rush to his assistance.

But just as I was about to leave the library a skirt rustled against the wall, though I had heard no sound of footsteps preceding it. At the same instant a little bit of paper was slipped in under the door—a letter from the silent Madeleine. I unfolded the paper and saw the following words written across from one corner to the other, with a contempt for French spelling, which was thoroughly Spanish:

"Ni allais pat ceux soire."

Very well, Madeleine, since that's your advice, I'll refrain.

I lay down to sleep on the sofa. Yet I was very sorry for the delay. I hated to let the night go by without being reconciled to the poor old man, or without having attempted it at least. He was evidently very wretched to be affected to tears, for I had never known him to weep, even on occasions when my own tears had flowed freely. Yet I followed my old and faithful friend's advice, for I knew that she had the peace of the household as much at heart as I; but I felt that I should seek long and vainly before I could discover what this latest trouble was, and what part I had in it.

CHAPTER XIX

JEANNE THE ENCHANTRESS

Bourges, August 5th.

I woke up at seven; my first thought was for M. Mouillard. Where could he be? I listened, but could hear no sound. I went to the window; the office-boy was lying flat on the lawn, feeding the goldfish in the fountain. This proved beyond a doubt that my uncle was not in.

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I went downstairs to the kitchen.

“Well, Madeleine, has he gone out?”

“He went at six o’clock, Monsieur Fabien.”

“Why didn’t you wake me?”

“How could I guess? Never, never does he go out before breakfast. I never have seen him like this before, not even when his wife died.”

“What can be the matter with him?”

“I think it’s the sale of the practice. He said to me last night, at the foot of the staircase: ‘I am a brokenhearted man, Madeleine, a broken-hearted man. I might have got over it, but that monster of ingratitude, that cannibal’—saving your presence, Monsieur Fabien—‘would not have it so. If I had him here I don’t know what I should do to him.’”

“Didn’t he tell you what he would do to the cannibal?”

“No. So I slipped a little note under your door when I went upstairs.”

“Yes. I am much obliged to you for it. Is he any calmer this morning?”

“He doesn’t look angry any longer, only I noticed that he had been weeping.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know at all. Besides, you might as well try to catch up with a deer as with him.”

“That’s true. I’d better wait for him. When will he be in?”

“Not before ten. I can tell you that it’s not once a year that he goes out like this in the morning.”

“But, Madeleine, Jeanne will be here by ten!”

“Oh, is Jeanne her name?”

“Yes. Monsieur Charnot will be here, too. And my uncle, whom I was to have prepared for their visit, will know nothing about it, nor even that I slept last night beneath his roof.”

“To tell the truth, Monsieur Fabien, I don’t think you’ve managed well. Still, there is Dame Fortune, who often doesn’t put in her word till the last moment.”

“Entreat her for me, Madeleine, my dear.”

But Dame Fortune was deaf to prayers. My uncle did not return, and I could find no fresh expedient. As I made my way, vexed and unhappy, to the station, I kept asking myself the question that I had been turning over in vain for the last hour:

"I have said nothing to Monsieur Mouillard. Had I better say anything now to Monsieur Charnot?"

My fears redoubled when I saw Jeanne and M. Charnot at the windows of the train, as it swept past me into the station.

A minute later she stepped on to the platform, dressed all in gray, with roses in her cheeks, and a pair of gull's wings in her hat.

M. Charnot shook me by the hand, thoroughly delighted at having escaped from the train and being able to shake himself and tread once more the solid earth. He asked after my uncle, and when I replied that he was in excellent health, he went to get his luggage.

"Well!" said Jeanne. "Is all arranged?"

"On the contrary, nothing is."

"Have you seen him?"

"Not even that. I have been watching for a favorable opportunity without finding one. Yesterday evening he was busy with a visitor; this morning he went out at six. He doesn't even know that I am in Bourges."

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"And yet you were in his house?"

"I slept on a sofa in his library."

She gave me a look which was as much as to say, "My poor boy, how very unpractical you are!"

"Go on doing nothing," she said; "that's the best you can do. If my father didn't think he was expected he would beat a retreat at once."

At this instant, M. Charnot came back to us, having seen his two trunks and a hatbox placed on top of the omnibus of the Hotel de France.

"That is where you have found rooms for us?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is now twelve minutes past nine; tell Monsieur Mouillard that we shall call upon him at ten o'clock precisely."

I went a few steps with them, and saw them into the omnibus, which was whirled off at a fast trot by its two steeds.

When I had lost them from my sight I cast a look around me, and noticed three people standing in line beneath the awning, and gazing upon me with interest. I recognized Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Lorinet. They were all smiling with the same look of contemptuous mockery. I bowed. The man alone returned my salute, raising his hat. By some strange freak of fate, Berthe was again wearing a blue dress.

I went back in the direction of the Rue du Four, happy, though at my wits' end, forming projects that were mutually destructive; now expatiating in the seventh heaven, now loading myself with the most appalling curses. I slipped along the streets, concealed beneath my umbrella, for the rain was falling; a great storm-cloud had burst over Bourges, and I blessed the rain which gave me a chance to hide my face.

From the banks of the Voizelle to the old quarter around the cathedral is a rather long walk. When I turned from the Rue Moyenne, the Boulevard des Italiens of Bourges, into the Rue du Four, a blazing sun was drying the rain on the roofs, and the cuckoo clock at M. Festuquet's—a neighbor of my uncle—was striking the hour of meeting.

I had not been three minutes at the garden door, a key to which had been given me by Madeleine, when M. Charnot appeared with Jeanne on his arm.

"To think that I've forgotten my overshoes, which I never fail to take with me to the country!"

“The country, father?” said Jeanne, “why, Bourges is a city!—”

“To be sure—to be sure,” answered M. Charnot, who feared he had hurt my feelings.

He put on his spectacles and began to study the old houses around him.

“Yes, a city; really quite a city.”

I do not remember what commonplace I stammered.

Little did I care for M. Charnot’s overshoes or the honor of Bourges at that moment! On the other side of the wall, a few feet off, I felt the presence of M. Mouillard. I reflected that I should have to open the door and launch the Academician, without preface, into the presence of the lawyer, stake my life’s happiness, perhaps, on my uncle’s first impressions, play at any rate the decisive move in the game which had been so disastrously opened.

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Jeanne, though she did her best to hide it, was extremely nervous. I felt her hand tremble in mine as I took it.

“Trust in God!” she whispered, and aloud: “Open the door.”

I turned the key in the lock. I had arranged that Madeleine should go at once to M. Mouillard and tell him that there were some strangers waiting in the garden. But either she was not on the lookout, or she did not at once perceive us, and we had to wait a few minutes at the bottom of the lawn before any one came.

I hid myself behind the trees whose leafage concealed the wall.

M. Charnot was evidently pleased with the view before him, and turned from side to side, gently smacking his lips like an epicure. And, in truth, my uncle’s garden was perfection; the leaves, washed by the rain, were glistening in the fulness of their verdure, great drops were falling from the trees with a silvery tinkle, the petunias in the beds were opening all their petals and wrapping us in their scent; the birds, who had been mute while the shower lasted, were now fluttering, twittering, and singing beneath the branches. I was like one bewitched, and thought these very birds were discussing us. The greenfinch said:

“Old Mouillard, look! Here’s Princess Goldenlocks at your garden gate.”

The tomtit said:

“Look out, old man, or she’ll outwit you.”

The blackbird said:

“I have heard of her from my grandfather, who lived in the Champs Elysees. She was much admired there.”

The swallow said:

“Jeanne will have your heart in the time it takes me to fly round the lawn.”

The rook, who was a bit of a lawyer, came swooping down from the cathedral tower, crying:

“Caw, caw, caw! Let her show cause—cause!”

And all took up the chorus:

“If you had our eyes, Monsieur Mouillard, you would see her looking at your study; if you had our ears, you would hear her sigh; if you had our wings, you would fly to Jeanne.”

No doubt it was this unwonted concert which attracted Madeleine's attention. We saw her making her way, stiffly and slowly, toward the study, which stood in the corner of the garden.

M. Mouillard's tall figure appeared on the threshold, filling up the entire doorway.

"In the garden, did you say? Whatever is your idea in showing clients into the garden? Why did you let them in?"

"I didn't let them in; they came in of themselves."

"Then the door can't have been shut. Nothing is shut here. I'll have them coming in next by the drawing-room chimney. What sort of people are they?"

"There's a gentleman and a young lady whom I don't know."

"A young lady whom you don't know—a judicial separation, I'll warrant—it's indecent, upon my word it is. To think that there are people who come to me about judicial separations and bring their young ladies with them!"

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As Madeleine fled before the storm and found shelter in her kitchen, my uncle smoothed back his white hair with both his hands—a surviving touch of personal vanity—and started down the walk around the grass-plot.

I effaced myself behind the trees. M. Charnot, thinking I was just behind him, stepped forward with airy freedom.

My uncle came down the path with a distracted air, like a man overwhelmed with business, only too pleased to snatch a moment's leisure between the parting and the coming client. He always loved to pass for being overwhelmed with work.

On his way he flipped a rosebud covered with blight, kicked off a snail which was crawling on the path; then, halfway down the path, he suddenly raised his head and gave a look at his disturber.

His bent brows grew smooth, his eyes round with the stress of surprise.

"Is it possible? Monsieur Charnot of the Institute!"

"The same, Monsieur Mouillard."

"And this is Mademoiselle Jeanne?"

"Just so; she has come with me to repay your kind visit."

"Really, that's too good of you, much too good, to come such a way to see me!"

"On the contrary, the most natural thing in the world, considering what the young people are about."

"Oh! is your daughter about to be married?"

"Certainly, that's the idea," said M. Charnot, with a laugh.

"I congratulate you, Mademoiselle!"

"I have brought her here to introduce her to you, Monsieur Mouillard, as is only right."

"Right! Excuse me, no."

"Indeed it is."

"Excuse me, sir. Politeness is all very well in its way, but frankness is better. I went to Paris chiefly to get certain information which you were good enough to give me. But, really, it was not worth your while to come from Paris to Bourges to thank me, and to bring your daughter too."



“Excuse me in my turn! There are limits to modesty, Monsieur Mouillard, and as my daughter is to marry your nephew, and as my daughter was in Bourges, it was only natural that I should introduce her to you.”

“Monsieur, I have no longer a nephew.”

“He is here.”

“And I never asked for your daughter.”

“No, but you have received your nephew beneath your roof, and consequently—”

“Never!”

“Monsieur Fabien has been in your house since yesterday; he told you we were coming.”

“No, I have not seen him; I never should have received him! I tell you I no longer have a nephew! I am a broken man, a—a—a—”

His speech failed him, his face became purple, he staggered and fell heavily, first in a sitting posture, then on his back, and lay motionless on the sanded path.

I rushed to the rescue.

When I got up to him Jeanne had already returned from the little fountain with her handkerchief dripping, and was bathing his temples with fresh water. She was the only one who kept her wits about her. Madeleine had raised her master’s head and was wailing aloud.

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"Alas!" she said, "it's that dreadful colic he had ten years ago which has got him again. Dear heart! how ill he was! I remember how it came on, just like this, in the garden."

I interrupted her lamentations by saying:

"Monsieur Charnot, I think we had better take Monsieur Mouillard up to bed."

"Then why don't you do it?" shouted the numismatist, who had completely lost his temper. "I didn't come here to act at an ambulance; but, since I must, do you take his head."

I took his head, Madeleine walked in front, Jeanne behind. My uncle's vast proportions swayed between M. Charnot and myself. M. Charnot, who had skilfully gathered up the legs, looked like a hired pallbearer.

As we met with some difficulty in getting upstairs, M. Charnot said, with clenched teeth:

"You've managed this trip nicely, Monsieur Fabien; I congratulate you sincerely!"

I saw that he intended to treat me to several variations on this theme.

But there was no time for talk. A moment later my uncle was laid, still unconscious, upon his bed, and Jeanne and Madeleine were preparing a mustard-plaster together, in perfect harmony. M. Charnot and I waited in silence for the doctor whom we had sent the office-boy to fetch. M. Charnot studied alternately my deceased aunt's wreath of orange-blossoms, preserved under a glass in the centre of the chimney-piece, and a painting of fruit and flowers for which it would have been hard to find a buyer at an auction. Our wait for the doctor lasted ten long minutes. We were very anxious, for M. Mouillard showed no sign of returning consciousness. Gradually, however, the remedies began to act upon him. The eyelids fluttered feebly; and just as the doctor opened the door, my uncle opened his eyes.

We rushed to his bedside.

"My old friend," said the doctor, "you have had plenty of people to look after you. Let me feel your pulse—rather weak; your tongue? Say a word or two."

"A shock—rather sudden—" said my uncle.

The doctor, following the direction of the invalid's eyes, which were fixed on Jeanne, upright at the foot of the bed, bowed to the young girl, whom he had not at first noticed; turned to me, who blushed like an idiot; then looked again at my uncle, only to see two big tears running down his cheeks.

“Yes, I understand; a pretty stiff shock, eh? At our age we should only be stirred by our recollections, emotions of bygone days, something we’re used to; but our children take care to provide us with fresh ones, eh?”

M. Mouillard’s breast heaved.

“Come, my dear fellow,” proceeded the doctor; “I give you leave to give your future niece one kiss, and that in my presence, that I may be quite sure you don’t abuse the license. After that you must be left quite alone; no more excitement, perfect rest.”

Jeanne came forward and raised the invalid’s head.



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"Will you give me a kiss, uncle?"

She offered him her rosy cheek.

"With all my heart," said my uncle as he kissed her; "good girl—dear girl."

Then he melted into tears, and hid his face in his pillow.

"And now we must be left alone," said the doctor.

He came down himself in a moment, and gave us an encouraging account of the patient.

Hardly had the street door closed behind him when we heard the lawyer's powerful voice thundering down the stairs.

"Charnot!"

The old numismatist flew up the flight of stairs.

"Did you call me, Monsieur?"

"Yes, to invite you to dinner. I couldn't say the words just now, but it was in my mind."

"It is very kind of you, but we leave at nine o'clock."

"I dine at seven; that's plenty of time."

"It will tire you too much."

"Tire me? Why, don't you think I dine everyday?"

"I promise to come and inquire after you before leaving."

"I can tell you at once that I am all right again. No, no, it shall never be said that you came all the way from Paris to Bourges only to see me faint. I count upon you and Mademoiselle Jeanne."

"On all three of us?"

"That makes three, with me; yes, sir."

"Excuse me, four."

"I hope the fourth will have the sense to go and dine elsewhere."



"Come, come, Monsieur Mouillard; your nephew, your ward—"

"I ceased to be his guardian four years ago, and his uncle three weeks ago."

"He longs to put an end to this ill feeling—"

"Allow me to rest a little," said M. Mouillard, "in order that I may be in a better condition to receive my guests."

He lay down again, and showed clearly his intention of saying not another word on the subject.

During the conversation between M. Charnot and my uncle, to which we had listened from the foot of the staircase, Jeanne, who had a moment before been rejoicing over the completeness of the victory which she thought she had achieved, grew quite downhearted.

"I thought he had forgiven you when he kissed me," she said. "What can we do now? Can't you help us, Madeleine?"

Madeleine, whose heart was beginning to warm to Jeanne, sought vainly for an expedient, and shook her head.

"Ought he to go and see his uncle?" asked Jeanne.

"No," said Madeleine.

"Well, suppose you write to him, Fabien?"

Madeleine nodded approval, and drew from the depths of her cupboard a little glass inkstand, a rusty penholder, and a sheet of paper, at the top of which was a dove with a twig in its beak.

"My cousin at Romorantin died just before last New Year's Day," she explained; "so I had one sheet more than I needed."

I sat down at the kitchen table with Jeanne leaning over me, reading as I wrote. Madeleine stood upright and attentive beside the clock, forgetting all about her kitchen fire as she watched us with her black eyes.

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This is what I wrote beneath the dove:

"My dear uncle:

"I left Paris with the intention of putting an end to the misunderstanding between us, which has lasted only too long, and which has given me more pain than you can guess. I had no possible opportunity of speaking to you between five o'clock yesterday afternoon, when I arrived here, and ten o'clock this morning. If I had been able to speak with you, you would not have refused to restore me to your affection, which, I confess, I ought to have respected more than I have. You would have given your consent to my, union, on which depends your own happiness, my dear uncle, and that of your nephew,

"Fabien."

"Rather too formal," said Jeanne. "Now, let me try."

And the enchantress added, with ready pen:

"It is I, Monsieur Mouillard, who am chiefly in need of forgiveness. Mine is the greater fault by far. You forbade Monsieur Fabien to love me, and I took no steps to prevent his doing so. Even yesterday, when he came to your house, it was my doing. I had assured him that your kind heart would not be proof against his loving confession.

"Was I really wrong in that?

"The words that you spoke just now have led me to hope that I was not.

"But if I was wrong, visit your anger on me alone. Forgive your nephew, invite him to dinner instead of us, and let me depart, regretting only that I was not judged worthy of calling you uncle, which would have been so pleasant and easy a name to speak.

"Jeanne."

I read the two letters over aloud. Madeleine broke into sobs as she listened.

A smile flickered about the corners of Jeanne's mouth.

We left the house, committing to Madeleine the task of choosing a favorable moment to hand M. Mouillard our joint entreaty.

And here I may as well confess that from the instant we got out of the house, all through breakfast at the hotel, and for a quarter of an hour after it, M. Charnot treated me, in his best style, to the very hottest "talking-to" that I had experienced since my earliest youth. He ended with these words: "If you have not made your peace with your uncle by nine o'clock this evening, Monsieur, I withdraw my consent, and we shall return to Paris."

I strove in vain to shake his decision. Jeanne made a little face at me, which warned me I was on the wrong track.

“Very well,” I said to her, “I leave the matter in your hands.”

“And I leave it in the hands of God,” she answered. “Be a man. If trouble awaits us, hope will at any rate steal us a happy hour or two.”

We were just then in front of the gardens of the Archbishop’s palace, so M. Charnot walked in. The current of his reflections was soon changed by the freshness of the air, the groups of children playing around their mothers—whom he studied ethnologically and with reference to the racial divisions of ancient Gaul—by the beauty of the landscape—its foreground of flowers, the Place St. Michel beyond, and further yet, above the barrack-roofs, the line of poplars lining the Auron. He ceased to be a father-in-law, and became a tourist again.

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Jeanne stepped with airy grace among the groups of strollers, and the murmurs which followed her path, though often envious, sounded none the less sweetly in my ears for that. I hoped to meet Mademoiselle Lorinet.

After we had seen the gardens, we had to visit the Place Seraucourt, the Cours Chanzy, the cathedral, Saint-Pierre-le-Guillard, and the house of Jacques-Coeur. It was six o'clock by the time we got back to the Hotel de France.

A letter was waiting for us in the small and badly furnished entrance—hall. It was addressed to Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot.

I recognized at once the ornate hand of M. Mouillard, and grew as white as the envelope.

M. Charnot cried, excitedly:

"Read it, Jeanne. Read it, can't you!"

Jeanne alone of us three kept a brave face.

She read:

"My dear child:

"I treated you perhaps with undue familiarity this morning, at a moment when I was not quite myself. Nevertheless, now that I have regained my senses, I do not withdraw the expressions of which I made use—I love you with all my heart; you are a dear girl.

"You will not get an old stager like me to give up his prejudices against the capital. Let it suffice that I have surrendered to a Parisienne. My niece, I forgive him for your sake.

"Come this evening, all three of you.

"I have several things to tell you, and several questions to ask you. My news is not all good. But I trust that all regrets will be overwhelmed in the gladness you will bring to my old heart.

"BrutusMouillard."

When we rang at M. Mouillard's door, it was opened to us by Baptiste, the office-boy, who waits at table on grand occasions.



My uncle received us in the large drawing-room, in full dress, with his whitest cravat and his most camphorous frock-coat: "not a moth in ten years," is Madeleine's boast concerning this garment.

He saluted us all solemnly, without his usual effusiveness; bearing himself with simple and touching dignity. Strong emotion, which excites most natures, only served to restrain his. He said not a word of the past, nor of our marriage. This, the decisive engagement, opened with polite formalities.

I have often noticed this phenomenon; people meeting to "have it out" usually begin by saying nothing at all.

M. Mouillard offered his arm to Jeanne, to escort her to the dining-room. Jeanne was in high spirits. She asked him question after question about Bourges, its dances, fashions, manufactures, even about the procedure of its courts.

"I am sure you know that well, uncle," she said.

"Uncle" smiled at each question, his face illumined with a glow like that upon a chimney-piece when someone is blowing the fire. He answered her questions, but presently fell into a state of dejection, which even his desire to do honor to his guests could not entirely conceal. His thoughts betrayed themselves in the looks he kept casting upon me, no longer of anger, but of suffering, almost pleading, affection.



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M. Charnot, who was rather tired, and also absorbed in Madeleine's feats of cookery, cast disjointed remarks and ejaculations into the gaps in the conversation.

I knew my uncle well enough to feel sure that the end of the dinner would be quite unlike the beginning.

I was right. During dessert, just as the Academician was singing the praises of a native delicacy, 'la forestine', my uncle, who had been revolving a few drops of some notable growth of Medoc in his glass for the last minute or two, stopped suddenly, and put down his glass on the table.

"My dear Monsieur Charnot," said he, "I have a painful confession to make to you."

"Eh? What? My dear friend, if it's painful to you, don't make it."

"Fabien," my uncle went on, "has behaved badly to me on certain occasions. But I say no more of it. His faults are forgotten. But I have not behaved to him altogether as I should."

"You, uncle?"

"Alas! It is so, my dear child. My practice, the family practice, which I faithfully promised your father to keep for you—"

"You have sold it?"

My uncle buried his face in his hands.

"Last night, my poor child, only last night!"

"I thought so."

"I was weak I listened to the prompting of anger; I have compromised your future. Fabien, forgive me in your turn."

He rose from the table, and came and put a trembling hand on my shoulder.

"No, uncle, you've not compromised anything, and I've nothing to forgive you."

"You wouldn't take the practice if I could still offer it to you?"

"No, uncle."

"Upon your word?"

"Upon my word!"



M. Mouillard drew himself up, beaming:

“Ah! Thank you for that speech, Fabien; you have relieved me of a great weight.”

With one corner of his napkin he wiped away two tears, which, having arisen in time of war, continued to flow in time of peace.

“If Mademoiselle Jeanne, in addition to all her other perfections, brings you fortune, Fabien, if your future is assured—”

“My dear Monsieur Mouillard,” broke in the Academician with ill-concealed satisfaction. “My colleagues call me rich. They slander me. Works on numismatics do not make a man rich. Monsieur Fabien, who made some investigations into the subject, can prove it to you. No; I possess no more than an honorable competence, which does not give me everything, but lets me lack nothing.”

“Aurea mediocritas,” exclaimed my uncle, delighted with his quotation. “Oh, that Horace! What a fellow he was!”

“He was indeed. Well, as I was saying, our daily bread is assured; but that’s no reason why my son-in-law should vegetate in idleness which I do not consider my due, even at my age.”

“Quite right.”

“So he must work.”

“But what is he to work at?”

Page 2040

"There are other professions besides the law, Monsieur Mouillard. I have studied Fabien. His temperament is somewhat wayward. With special training he might have become an artist. Lacking that early moulding into shape, he never will be anything more than a dreamer."

"I should not have expressed it so well, but I have often thought the same."

"With a temperament like your nephew's," continued M. Charnot, "the best he can do is to enter upon a career in which the ideal has some part; not a predominant, but a sufficient part, something between prose and poetry."

"Let him be a notary, then."

"No, that's wholly prose; he shall be a librarian."

"A librarian?"

"Yes, Monsieur Mouillard; there are a few little libraries in Paris, which are as quiet as groves, and in which places are to be got that are as snug as nests. I have some influence in official circles, and that can do no harm, you know."

"Quite so."

"We will put our Fabien into one of those nests, where he will be protected against idleness by the little he will do, and against revolutions by the little he will be. It's a charming profession; the very smell of books is improving; merely by breathing it you live an intellectual life."

"An intellectual life!" exclaimed my uncle with enthusiasm. "Yes, an intellectual life!"

"And cataloguing books, Monsieur Mouillard, looking through them, preserving them as far as possible from worms and readers. Don't you think that's an enviable lot?"

"Yes, more so than mine has been, or my successor's will be."

"By the way, uncle, you haven't told us who your successor is to be."

"Haven't I, really? Why, you know him; it's your friend Larive."

"Oh! That explains a great deal."

"He is a young man who takes life seriously."

"Very seriously, uncle. Isn't he about to be married?"

"Why, yes; to a rich wife."



"To whom?"

"My dear boy, he is picking up all your leavings; he is going to marry Mademoiselle Lorinet."

"He was always enterprising! But, uncle, it wasn't with him you were engaged yesterday evening?"

"Why not, pray?"

"You told Madeleine to admit a gentleman with a decoration."

"He has one."

"Good heavens! What is it?"

"The Nicham Iftikar, if it please you."

[A Tunisian order, which can be obtained for a very moderate sum.]

"It doesn't displease me, uncle, and surprises me still less. Larive will die with his breast more thickly plastered with decorations than an Odd Fellow's; he will be a member of all the learned societies in the department, respected and respectable, the more thoroughly provincial for having been outrageously Parisian. Mothers will confide their anxieties to him, and fathers their interests; but when his old acquaintances pass this way they will take the liberty of smiling in his face."

Page 2041

"What, jealous? Are you jealous of his bit of ribbon?"

"No, uncle, I regret nothing; not even Larive's good fortune."

M. Mouillard fixed his eyes on the cloth, and began again, after a moment's silence:

"I, Fabien, do regret some things. It will be mournful at times, growing old alone here. Yet, after all, it will be some consolation to me to think that you others are satisfied with life, to welcome you here for your holidays."

"You can do better than that," said M. Charnot. "Come and grow old among us. Your years will be the lighter to bear, Monsieur Mouillard. Doubtless we must always bear them, and they weigh upon us and bend our backs. But youth, which carries its own burden so lightly, can always give us a little help in bearing ours."

I looked to hear my uncle break out with loud objections.

"It is a fine night," he said, simply; "let us go into the garden, and do you decide whether I can leave roses like mine."

M. Mouillard took us into the garden, pleased with himself, with me, with Jeanne, with everybody, and with the weather.

It was too dark to see the roses, but we could smell them as we passed. I had taken Jeanne's arm in mine, and we went on in front, in the cool dusk, choosing all the little winding paths.

The birds were all asleep. But the grasshoppers, crickets, and all manner of creeping things hidden in the grass, or in the moss on the trees, were singing and chattering in their stead.

Behind us, at some distance—in fact, as far off as we could manage—the gravel crackled beneath the equal tread of the two elders, and in a murmur we could catch occasional scraps of sentences:

"A granddaughter like Jeanne, Monsieur Charnot . . ."

"A grandson like Fabien, Monsieur Mouillard . . ."

CHAPTER XX

A HAPPY FAMILY

Paris, September 18th.

We are married. We are just back from the church. We have said good-by to all our friends, not without a quick touch or two of sadness, as quickly swallowed up in the joy which for the first time in the history of my heart is surging there at full tide, and widening to a limitless horizon. In the two hours I have to spare before starting for Italy, I am writing the last words in this brown diary, which I do not intend to take with me.

Jeanne, my own Jeanne, is leaning upon me and reading over my shoulder, which distracts the flow of my recollections.

There were crowds at the church. The papers had put us down among the fashionable marriages of the week. The Institute, the army, men of letters, public officials, had come out of respect for M. Charnot; lawyers of Bourges and Paris had come out of respect for my uncle. But the happiest, the most radiant, next to ourselves, were the people who came only for Jeanne's sake and mine; Sylvestre Lampron, painter-in-ordinary to Mademoiselle Charnot, bringing his pretty sketch as a wedding-present; M. Flamaran and Sidonie; Jupille, who wept as he used to "thirty years ago;" and M. and Madame Plumet, who took it in turns to carry their white-robed infant.

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Jeanne and I certainly shook hands with a good many persons, but not with nearly as many as M. Mouillard. Clean-shaven, his cravat tied with exquisite care, he spun round in the crowd like a top, always dragging with him some one who was to introduce him to some one else. "One should make acquaintances immediately on arrival," he kept saying.

Yes, Uncle Mouillard has just arrived in Paris; he has settled down near us on the Quai Malaquais, in a pretty set of rooms which Jeanne chose for him. He thinks them perfect because she thought they would do. The tastes and interests of old student days have suddenly reawakened within him, and will not be put to sleep again. He already knows the omnibus and tramway lines better than I; he talks of Bourges as if it were twenty years since he left it: "When I used to live in the country, Fabien—"

My father-in-law has found in him a whole-hearted admirer, perhaps even a future pupil in numismatics. Their friendship makes me think of that—

["You don't mind, Jeanne?"

"Of course not, my dear; the brown diary is for our two selves alone." J.]

—of that of the town mouse and the country mouse. Just now, on their way back to the house, they had a conversation, by turns pathetic and jovial, in which their different temperaments met in the same feeling, but at opposite ends of the scale of its shades.

I caught this fragment of their talk:

"My dear Charnot, can you guess what I'm thinking about?"

"No, I haven't the least idea."

"I think it is very queer."

"What is queer?"

"To see a librarian begin his career with a blot of ink. For you can not deny that Fabien's marriage and situation, and my return to the capital, are all due to that. It must have been sympathetic ink—eh?"

"'Felix culpa', as you say, Monsieur Mouillard. There are some blunders that are lucky; but you can't tell which they are, and that's never any excuse for committing them."

I could hardly get hold of Lampron for a moment in the crowd he so dislikes. He was more uncouth and more devoted than ever.

"Well, are you happy?" he said.

"Quite."

"When you're less happy, come and see me."

"We shall always be just as happy as we are now," said Jeanne.

And I think she is right.

Lampron smiled.

"Yes, I am quite happy, Sylvestre, and I owe my happiness to you, to her, and to others. I have done nothing myself to deserve happiness beyond letting myself drift on the current of life. Whenever I tried to row a stroke the boat nearly upset. Everything that others tried to do for me succeeded. I can't get over it. Just think of it yourself. I owed my introduction to Jeanne to Monsieur Flamaran, who drove me to call on her father; his friend; you courted her for me by painting her portrait; Madame

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Plumet told her you had done so, and also removed the obstacle in my path. I met her in Italy, thanks entirely to you; and you clinched the proposal which had been begun by Flamaran. To crown all, the very situation I desired has been obtained for me by my father-in-law. What have I had to do? I have loved, sorrowed, and suffered, nothing more; and now I tremble at the thought that I owe my happiness to every one I know except myself."

"Cease to tremble, my friend; don't be surprised at it, and don't alter your system in the least. Your happiness is your due; what matter how God chooses to grant it? Suppose it is an income for life paid to you by your relatives, your friends, the world in general, and the natural order of things? Well, draw your dividends, and don't bother about where they come from."

Since Lampron said so, and he is a philosopher, I think I had better follow his advice. If you don't mind, Jeanne, I will cherish no ambition beyond your love, and refrain from running after any increase in wealth or reputation which might prove a decrease in happiness. If you agree, Jeanne, we shall see little of society, and much of our friends; we shall not open our windows wide enough for Love, who is winged, to fly out of them. If such is your pleasure, Jeanne, you shall direct the household of your own sweet will—I should say, of your sweet wisdom; you shall be queen in all matters of domestic economy, you shall rule our goings-out and our comings-in, our visits, our travels. I shall leave you to guide me, as a child, along the joyous path in which I follow your footsteps. I am looking up at Jeanne. She has not said "No."

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

All that a name is to a street—its honor, its spouse
Distrust first impulse
Felix culpa
Hard that one can not live one's life over twice
He always loved to pass for being overwhelmed with work
I don't call that fishing
If trouble awaits us, hope will steal us a happy hour or two
Obstacles are the salt of all our joys
People meeting to "have it out" usually say nothing at first
The very smell of books is improving
There are some blunders that are lucky; but you can't tell
You ask Life for certainties, as if she had any to give you

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire ink stain:



All that a name is to a street—its honor, its spouse
Came not in single spies, but in battalions
Distrust first impulse
Felix culpa
Happy men don't need company
Hard that one can not live one's life over twice
He always loved to pass for being overwhelmed with work
I don't call that fishing
If trouble awaits us, hope will steal us a happy hour or two
Lends—I should say gives

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Men forget sooner
Natural only when alone, and talk well only to themselves
Obstacles are the salt of all our joys
One doesn't offer apologies to a man in his wrath
People meeting to "have it out" usually say nothing at first
Silence, alas! is not the reproof of kings alone
Skilful actor, who apes all the emotions while feeling none
Sorrows shrink into insignificance as the horizon broadens
Surprise goes for so much in what we admire
The very smell of books is improving
The looks of the young are always full of the future
There are some blunders that are lucky; but you can't tell
To be your own guide doubles your pleasure
You a law student, while our farmers are in want of hands
You must always first get the tobacco to burn evenly
You ask Life for certainties, as if she had any to give you

FROMMONT AND RISLER

By Alphonse daudet

With a Preface by *Leconte de Lisle*, of the French Academy

ALPHONSE DAUDET

Nominally Daudet, with the Goncourts and Zola, formed a trio representing Naturalism in fiction. He adopted the watchwords of that school, and by private friendship, no less than by a common profession of faith, was one of them. But the students of the future, while recognizing an obvious affinity between the other two, may be puzzled to find Daudet's name conjoined with theirs.

Decidedly, Daudet belonged to the Realistic School. But, above all, he was an impressionist. All that can be observed—the individual picture, scene, character—Daudet will render with wonderful accuracy, and all his novels, especially those written after 1870, show an increasing firmness of touch, limpidity of style, and wise simplicity in the use of the sources of pathetic emotion, such as befit the cautious Naturalist. Daudet wrote stories, but he had to be listened to. Feverish as his method of writing was—true to his Southern character he took endless pains to write well, revising every

manuscript three times over from beginning to end. He wrote from the very midst of the human comedy; and it is from this that he seems at times to have caught the bodily warmth and the taste of the tears and the very ring of the laughter of men and women. In the earlier novels, perhaps, the transitions from episode to episode or from scene to scene are often abrupt, suggesting the manner of the Goncourts. But to Zola he forms an instructive contrast, of the same school, but not of the same family. Zola is methodical, Daudet spontaneous. Zola works with documents, Daudet from the living fact. Zola is objective, Daudet with equal scope and fearlessness shows more personal feeling and hence more delicacy. And in style also Zola is vast, architectural; Daudet slight, rapid, subtle, lively, suggestive. And finally, in their philosophy of life, Zola may inspire a hate of vice and wrong, but Daudet wins a love for what is good and true.

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Alphonse Daudet was born in Nîmes, Provence, May 13, 1840. His father had been a well-to-do silk manufacturer, but, while Alphonse was still a child, lost his property. Poverty compelled the son to seek the wretched post of usher (*pion*) in a school at Alais. In November, 1857, he settled in Paris and joined his almost equally penniless brother Ernest. The autobiography, *'Le Petit Chose'* (1868), gives graphic details about this period. His first years of literary life were those of an industrious Bohemian, with poetry for consolation and newspaper work for bread. He had secured a secretaryship with the Duc de Morny, President of the Corps Legislatif, and had won recognition for his short stories in the *'Figaro'*, when failing health compelled him to go to Algiers. Returning, he married toward that period a lady (Julia Allard, born 1847), whose literary talent comprehended, supplemented, and aided his own. After the death of the Duc de Morny (1865) he consecrated himself entirely to literature and published *'Lettres de mon Moulin'* (1868), which also made his name favorably known. He now turned from fiction to the drama, and it was not until after 1870 that he became fully conscious of his vocation as a novelist, perhaps through the trials of the siege of Paris and the humiliation of his country, which deepened his nature without souring it. Daudet's genial satire, *'Tartarin de Tarascon'*, appeared in 1872; but with the Parisian romance *'Fromont jeune et Risler aîné'*, crowned by the Academy (1874), he suddenly advanced into the foremost rank of French novelists; it was his first great success, or, as he puts it, "the dawn of his popularity."

How numberless editions of this book were printed, and rights of translations sought from other countries, Daudet has told us with natural pride. The book must be read to be appreciated. "Risler, a self-made, honest man, raises himself socially into a society against the corruptness of which he has no defence and from which he escapes only by suicide. Sidonie Chebe is a peculiarly French type, a vain and heartless woman; Delobelle, the actor, a delectable figure; the domestic simplicity of Desirée Delobelle and her mother quite refreshing."

Success followed now after success. *'Jack'* (1876); *Le Nabab* (1877); *Les Rois en exil* (1879); *Numa Roumestan* (1882); *L'Évangéliste* (1883); *Sapho* (1884); *Tartarin sur des Alpes* (1886); *L'Immortel* (1888); *Port Tarascon* (1890); *Rose et Ninette* (1892); *La petite Parvise* (1895); and *Soutien de Famille* (1899); such is the long list of the great life-artist. In *Le Nabab* we find obvious traces of Daudet's visits to Algiers and Corsica—Mora is the Duc de Morny. *Sapho* is the most concentrated of his novels, with never a divergence, never a break, in its development. And of the theme—legitimate marriage contra common-law—what need be said except that he handled it in a manner most acceptable to the aesthetic and least offensive to the moral sense?



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L'Immortel is a satire springing from personal reasons; L'Evangeliste and Rose et Ninette—the latter on the divorce problem—may be classed as clever novels; but had Daudet never written more than 'Fromont et Risler', 'Tartarin sur les Alces', and 'Port Tarascon', these would keep him in lasting remembrance.

We must not omit to mention also many 'contes' and his 'Trente ans de Paris (A travers ma vie et mes livres), Souvenirs d'un Homme de lettres (1888), and Notes sur la Vie (1899)'.

Alphonse Daudet died in Paris, December 16, 1897

Leconte de Lisle
de l'Academie Francaise.

FROMONT AND RISLER

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

A WEDDING-PARTY AT THE CAFE VEFOUR

"Madame Chebe!"

"My boy—"

"I am so happy!"

This was the twentieth time that day that the good Risler had said that he was happy, and always with the same emotional and contented manner, in the same low, deep voice—the voice that is held in check by emotion and does not speak too loud for fear of suddenly breaking into violent tears.

Not for the world would Risler have wept at that moment—imagine a newly-made husband giving way to tears in the midst of the wedding-festival! And yet he had a strong inclination to do so. His happiness stifled him, held him by the throat, prevented the words from coming forth. All that he could do was to murmur from time to time, with a slight trembling of the lips, "I am happy; I am happy!"

Indeed, he had reason to be happy.

Since early morning the poor man had fancied that he was being whirled along in one of those magnificent dreams from which one fears lest he may awake suddenly with

blinded eyes; but it seemed to him as if this dream would never end. It had begun at five o'clock in the morning, and at ten o'clock at night, exactly ten o'clock by Vefour's clock, he was still dreaming.

How many things had happened during that day, and how vividly he remembered the most trivial details.

He saw himself, at daybreak, striding up and down his bachelor quarters, delight mingled with impatience, clean-shaven, his coat on, and two pairs of white gloves in his pocket. Then there were the wedding-coaches, and in the foremost one—the one with white horses, white reins, and a yellow damask lining—the bride, in her finery, floated by like a cloud. Then the procession into the church, two by two, the white veil in advance, ethereal, and dazzling to behold. The organ, the vergers, the cure's sermon, the tapers casting their light upon jewels and spring gowns, and the throng of people in the sacristy, the tiny white cloud swallowed up, surrounded, embraced, while the bridegroom distributed hand-shakes among all the

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leading tradesmen of Paris, who had assembled to do him honor. And the grand crash from the organ at the close, made more solemn by the fact that the church door was thrown wide open, so that the whole street took part in the family ceremony—the music passing through the vestibule at the same time with the procession—the exclamations of the crowd, and a burnisher in an ample lute-string apron remarking in a loud voice, “The groom isn’t handsome, but the bride’s as pretty as a picture.” That is the kind of thing that makes you proud when you happen to be the bridegroom.

And then the breakfast at the factory, in a workroom adorned with hangings and flowers; the drive in the Bois—a concession to the wishes of his mother-in-law, Madame Chebe, who, being the petty Parisian bourgeoisie that she was, would not have deemed her daughter legally married without a drive around the lake and a visit to the Cascade. Then the return for dinner, as the lamps were being lighted along the boulevard, where people turned to look after the wedding-party, a typical well-to-do bourgeois wedding-party, as it drove up to the grand entrance at Vefour’s with all the style the livery horses could command.

Risler had reached that point in his dream.

And now the worthy man, dazed with fatigue and well-being, glanced vaguely about that huge table of twenty-four covers, curved in the shape of a horseshoe at the ends, and surrounded by smiling, familiar faces, wherein he seemed to see his happiness reflected in every eye. The dinner was drawing near its close. The wave of private conversation flowed around the table. Faces were turned toward one another, black sleeves stole behind waists adorned with bunches of asclepias, a childish face laughed over a fruit ice, and the dessert at the level of the guests’ lips encompassed the cloth with animation, bright colors, and light.

Ah, yes! Risler was very happy.

Except his brother Frantz, everybody he loved was there. First of all, sitting opposite him, was Sidonie—yesterday little Sidonie, to-day his wife. For the ceremony of dinner she had laid aside her veil; she had emerged from her cloud. Now, above the smooth, white silk gown, appeared a pretty face of a less lustrous and softer white, and the crown of hair-beneath that other crown so carefully bestowed—would have told you of a tendency to rebel against life, of little feathers fluttering for an opportunity to fly away. But husbands do not see such things as those.

Next to Sidonie and Frantz, the person whom Risler loved best in the world was Madame Georges Fromont, whom he called “Madame Chorche,” the wife of his partner and the daughter of the late Fromont, his former employer and his god. He had placed her beside him, and in his manner of speaking to her one could read affection and

deference. She was a very young woman, of about the same age as Sidonie, but of a more regular, quiet and placid type of beauty. She talked little, being out of her element in that conglomerate assemblage; but she tried to appear affable.

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On Risler's other side sat Madame Chebe, the bride's mother, radiant and gorgeous in her green satin gown, which gleamed like a shield. Ever since the morning the good woman's every thought had been as brilliant as that robe of emblematic hue. At every moment she said to herself: "My daughter is marrying Fromont Jeune and Risler Aine, of Rue des Vieilles Haudriettes!" For, in her mind, it was not Risler alone whom her daughter took for her husband, but the whole sign of the establishment, illustrious in the commercial annals of Paris; and whenever she mentally announced that glorious event, Madame Chebe sat more erect than ever, stretching the silk of the bodice until it almost cracked.

What a contrast to the attitude of Monsieur Chebe, who was seated at a short distance. In different households, as a general rule, the same causes produce altogether different results. That little man, with the high forehead of a visionary, as inflated and hollow as a ball, was as fierce in appearance as his wife was radiant. That was nothing unusual, by the way, for Monsieur Chebe was in a frenzy the whole year long. On this particular evening, however, he did not wear his customary woe-begone, lack-lustre expression, nor the full-skirted coat, with the pockets sticking out behind, filled to repletion with samples of oil, wine, truffles, or vinegar, according as he happened to be dealing in one or the other of those articles. His black coat, new and magnificent, made a fitting pendant to the green gown; but unfortunately his thoughts were of the color of his coat. Why had they not seated him beside the bride, as was his right? Why had they given his seat to young Fromont? And there was old Gardinois, the Fromonts' grandfather, what business had he by Sidonie's side? Ah! that was how it was to be! Everything for the Fromonts and nothing for the Chebes! And yet people are amazed that there are such things as revolutions!

Luckily the little man had by his side, to vent his anger upon, his friend Delobelle, an old, retired actor, who listened to him with his serene and majestic holiday countenance.

Strangely enough, the bride herself had something of that same expression. On that pretty and youthful face, which happiness enlivened without making glad, appeared indications of some secret preoccupation; and, at times, the corners of her lips quivered with a smile, as if she were talking to herself.

With that same little smile she replied to the somewhat pronounced pleasantries of Grandfather Gardinois, who sat by her side.

"This Sidonie, on my word!" said the good man, with a laugh. "When I think that not two months ago she was talking about going into a convent. We all know what sort of convents such minxes as she go to! As the saying is in our province: The Convent of Saint Joseph, four shoes under the bed!"

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And everybody at the table laughed heartily at the rustic jests of the old Berrichon peasant, whose colossal fortune filled the place of manliness, of education, of kindness of heart, but not of wit; for he had plenty of that, the rascal—more than all his bourgeois fellow-guests together. Among the very rare persons who inspired a sympathetic feeling in his breast, little Chebe, whom he had known as an urchin, appealed particularly to him; and she, for her part, having become rich too recently not to venerate wealth, talked to her right-hand neighbor with a very perceptible air of respect and coquetry.

With her left-hand-neighbor, on the contrary, Georges Fromont, her husband's partner, she exhibited the utmost reserve. Their conversation was restricted to the ordinary courtesies of the table; indeed there was a sort of affectation of indifference between them.

Suddenly there was that little commotion among the guests which indicates that they are about to rise: the rustling of silk, the moving of chairs, the last words of conversations, the completion of a laugh, and in that half-silence Madame Chebe, who had become communicative, observed in a very loud tone to a provincial cousin, who was gazing in an ecstasy of admiration at the newly made bride's reserved and tranquil demeanor, as she stood with her arm in Monsieur Gardinois's:

"You see that child, cousin—well, no one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were."

Thereupon the whole party rose and repaired to the grand salon.

While the guests invited for the ball were arriving and mingling with the dinner-guests, while the orchestra was tuning up, while the cavaliers, eyeglass in position, strutted before the impatient, white-gowned damsels, the bridegroom, awed by so great a throng, had taken refuge with his friend Planus—Sigismond Planus, cashier of the house of Fromont for thirty years—in that little gallery decorated with flowers and hung with a paper representing shrubbery and clambering vines, which forms a sort of background of artificial verdure to Vefour's gilded salons.

"Sigismond, old friend—I am very happy."

And Sigismond too was happy; but Risler did not give him time to say so. Now that he was no longer in dread of weeping before his guests, all the joy in his heart overflowed.

"Just think of it, my friend!—It's so extraordinary that a young girl like Sidonie would consent to marry me. For you know I'm not handsome. I didn't need to have that impudent creature tell me so this morning to know it. And then I'm forty-two—and she such a dear little thing! There were so many others she might have chosen, among the youngest and the richest, to say nothing of my poor Frantz, who loved her so. But, no,

she preferred her old Risler. And it came about so strangely. For a long time I noticed that she was sad, greatly changed. I felt sure there was some disappointment in love at

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the bottom of it. Her mother and I looked about, and we cudgelled our brains to find out what it could be. One morning Madame Chebe came into my room weeping, and said, 'You are the man she loves, my dear friend!'—And I was the man—I was the man! Bless my soul! Whoever would have suspected such a thing? And to think that in the same year I had those two great pieces of good fortune—a partnership in the house of Fromont and married to Sidonie—Oh!"

At that moment, to the strains of a giddy, languishing waltz, a couple whirled into the small salon. They were Risler's bride and his partner, Georges Fromont. Equally young and attractive, they were talking in undertones, confining their words within the narrow circle of the waltz.

"You lie!" said Sidonie, slightly pale, but with the same little smile.

And the other, paler than she, replied:

"I do not lie. It was my uncle who insisted upon this marriage. He was dying—you had gone away. I dared not say no."

Risler, at a distance, gazed at them in admiration.

"How pretty she is! How well they dance!"

But, when they spied him, the dancers separated, and Sidonie walked quickly to him.

"What! You here? What are you doing? They are looking everywhere for you. Why aren't you in there?"

As she spoke she retied his cravat with a pretty, impatient gesture. That enchanted Risler, who smiled at Sigismond from the corner of his eye, too overjoyed at feeling the touch of that little gloved hand on his neck, to notice that she was trembling to the ends of her slender fingers.

"Give me your arm," she said to him, and they returned together to the salons. The white bridal gown with its long train made the badly cut, awkwardly worn black coat appear even more uncouth; but a coat can not be retied like a cravat; she must needs take it as it was. As they passed along, returning the salutations of all the guests who were so eager to smile upon them, Sidonie had a momentary thrill of pride, of satisfied vanity. Unhappily it did not last. In a corner of the room sat a young and attractive woman whom nobody invited to dance, but who looked on at the dances with a placid eye, illumined by all the joy of a first maternity. As soon as he saw her, Risler walked straight to the corner where she sat and compelled Sidonie to sit beside her. Needless to say that it was Madame "Chorche." To whom else would he have spoken with such

affectionate respect? In what other hand than hers could he have placed his little Sidonie's, saying: "You will love her dearly, won't you? You are so good. She needs your advice, your knowledge of the world."

"Why, my dear Risler," Madame Georges replied, "Sidonie and I are old friends. We have reason to be fond of each other still."

And her calm, straightforward glance strove unsuccessfully to meet that of her old friend.

With his ignorance of women, and his habit of treating Sidonie as a child, Risler continued in the same tone:

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"Take her for your model, little one. There are not two people in the world like Madame Chorche. She has her poor father's heart. A true Fromont!"

Sidonie, with her eyes cast down, bowed without replying, while an imperceptible shudder ran from the tip of her satin shoe to the topmost bit of orange-blossom in her crown. But honest Risler saw nothing. The excitement, the dancing, the music, the flowers, the lights made him drunk, made him mad. He believed that every one breathed the same atmosphere of bliss beyond compare which enveloped him. He had no perception of the rivalries, the petty hatreds that met and passed one another above all those bejewelled foreheads.

He did not notice Delobelle, standing with his elbow on the mantel, one hand in the armhole of his waistcoat and his hat upon his hip, weary of his eternal attitudinizing, while the hours slipped by and no one thought of utilizing his talents. He did not notice M. Chebe, who was prowling darkly between the two doors, more incensed than ever against the Fromonts. Oh! those Fromonts!—How large a place they filled at that wedding! They were all there with their wives, their children, their friends, their friends' friends. One would have said that one of themselves was being married. Who had a word to say of the Rislers or the Chebes? Why, he—he, the father, had not even been presented!—And the little man's rage was redoubled by the attitude of Madame Chebe, smiling maternally upon one and all in her scarab-hued dress.

Furthermore, there were at this, as at almost all wedding-parties, two distinct currents which came together but without mingling. One of the two soon gave place to the other. The Fromonts, who irritated Monsieur Chebe so much and who formed the aristocracy of the ball, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the syndic of the solicitors, a famous chocolate-manufacturer and member of the Corps Legislatif, and the old millionaire Gardinois, all retired shortly after midnight. Georges Fromont and his wife entered their carriage behind them. Only the Risler and Chebe party remained, and the festivity at once changed its aspect, becoming more uproarious.

The illustrious Delobelle, disgusted to see that no one called upon him for anything, decided to call upon himself for something, and began in a voice as resonant as a gong the monologue from Ruy Blas: "Good appetite, Messieurs!" while the guests thronged to the buffet, spread with chocolate and glasses of punch. Inexpensive little costumes were displayed upon the benches, overjoyed to produce their due effect at last; and here and there divers young shop-clerks, consumed with conceit, amused themselves by venturing upon a quadrille.

The bride had long wished to take her leave. At last she disappeared with Risler and Madame Chebe. As for Monsieur Chebe, who had recovered all his importance, it was impossible to induce him to go. Some one must be there to do the honors, deuce take it! And I assure you that the little man assumed the responsibility! He was flushed,

lively, frolicsome, noisy, almost seditious. On the floor below he could be heard talking politics with Vefour's headwaiter, and making most audacious statements.

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Through the deserted streets the wedding-carriage, the tired coachman holding the white reins somewhat loosely, rolled heavily toward the Marais.

Madame Chebe talked continuously, enumerating all the splendors of that memorable day, rhapsodizing especially over the dinner, the commonplace menu of which had been to her the highest display of magnificence. Sidonie mused in the darkness of the carriage, and Risler, sitting opposite her, even though he no longer said, "I am very happy," continued to think it with all his heart. Once he tried to take possession of a little white hand that rested against the closed window, but it was hastily withdrawn, and he sat there without moving, lost in mute admiration.

They drove through the Halles and the Rue de Rambuteau, thronged with kitchen-gardeners' wagons; and, near the end of the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, they turned the corner of the Archives into the Rue de Braque. There they stopped first, and Madame Chebe alighted at her door, which was too narrow for the magnificent green silk frock, so that it vanished in the hall with rustlings of revolt and with all its folds muttering. A few minutes later, a tall, massive portal on the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes, bearing on the escutcheon that betrayed the former family mansion, beneath half-effaced armorial bearings, a sign in blue letters, Wall Papers, was thrown wide open to allow the wedding-carriage to pass through.

Thereupon the bride, hitherto motionless and like one asleep, seemed to wake suddenly, and if all the lights in the vast buildings, workshops or storehouses, which surrounded the courtyard, had not been extinguished, Risler might have seen that pretty, enigmatical face suddenly lighted by a smile of triumph. The wheels revolved less noisily on the fine gravel of a garden, and soon stopped before the stoop of a small house of two floors. It was there that the young Fromonts lived, and Risler and his wife were to take up their abode on the floor above. The house had an aristocratic air. Flourishing commerce avenged itself therein for the dismal street and the out-of-the-way quarter. There was a carpet on the stairway leading to their apartment, and on all sides shone the gleaming whiteness of marble, the reflection of mirrors and of polished copper.

While Risler was parading his delight through all the rooms of the new apartment, Sidonie remained alone in her bedroom. By the light of the little blue lamp hanging from the ceiling, she glanced first of all at the mirror, which gave back her reflection from head to foot, at all her luxurious surroundings, so unfamiliar to her; then, instead of going to bed, she opened the window and stood leaning against the sill, motionless as a statue.

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The night was clear and warm. She could see distinctly the whole factory, its innumerable unshaded windows, its glistening panes, its tall chimney losing itself in the depths of the sky, and nearer at hand the lovely little garden against the ancient wall of the former mansion. All about were gloomy, miserable roofs and squalid streets. Suddenly she started. Yonder, in the darkest, the ugliest of all those attics crowding so closely together, leaning against one another, as if overweighted with misery, a fifth-floor window stood wide open, showing only darkness within. She recognized it at once. It was the window of the landing on which her parents lived.

The window on the landing!

How many things the mere name recalled! How many hours, how many days she had passed there, leaning on that damp sill, without rail or balcony, looking toward the factory. At that moment she fancied that she could see up yonder little Chebe's ragged person, and in the frame made by that poor window, her whole child life, her deplorable youth as a Parisian street arab, passed before her eyes.

CHAPTER II

LITTLE CHEBE'S STORY

In Paris the common landing is like an additional room, an enlargement of their abodes, to poor families confined in their too small apartments. They go there to get a breath of air in summer, and there the women talk and the children play.

When little Chebe made too much noise in the house, her mother would say to her: "There there! you bother me, go and play on the landing." And the child would go quickly enough.

This landing, on the upper floor of an old house in which space had not been spared, formed a sort of large lobby, with a high ceiling, guarded on the staircase side by a wrought-iron rail, lighted by a large window which looked out upon roofs, courtyards, and other windows, and, farther away, upon the garden of the Fromont factory, which was like a green oasis among the huge old walls.

There was nothing very cheerful about it, but the child liked it much better than her own home. Their rooms were dismal, especially when it rained and Ferdinand did not go out.

With his brain always smoking with new ideas, which unfortunately never came to anything, Ferdinand Chebe was one of those slothful, project-devising bourgeois of when there are so many in Paris. His wife, whom he had dazzled at first, had soon detected his utter insignificance, and had ended by enduring patiently and with

unchanged demeanor his continual dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed them.

Of the dot of eighty thousand francs which she had brought him, and which he had squandered in his absurd schemes, only a small annuity remained, which still gave them a position of some importance in the eyes of their neighbors, as did Madame Chebe's cashmere, which had been rescued from every wreck, her wedding laces and two diamond studs, very tiny and very modest, which Sidonie sometimes begged her mother to show her, as they lay in the drawer of the bureau, in an old-fashioned white velvet case, on which the jeweller's name, in gilt letters, thirty years old, was gradually fading. That was the only bit of luxury in that poor annuitant's abode.

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For a very long time M. Chebe had sought a place which would enable him to eke out their slender income. But he sought it only in what he called standing business, his health forbidding any occupation that required him to be seated.

It seemed that, soon after his marriage, when he was in a flourishing business and had a horse and tilbury of his own, the little man had had one day a serious fall. That fall, to which he referred upon every occasion, served as an excuse for his indolence.

One could not be with M. Chebe five minutes before he would say in a confidential tone:

“You know of the accident that happened to the Duc d’Orleans?”

And then he would add, tapping his little bald pate “The same thing happened to me in my youth.”

Since that famous fall any sort of office work made him dizzy, and he had found himself inexorably confined to standing business. Thus, he had been in turn a broker in wines, in books, in truffles, in clocks, and in many other things beside. Unluckily, he tired of everything, never considered his position sufficiently exalted for a former business man with a tilbury, and, by gradual degrees, by dint of deeming every sort of occupation beneath him, he had grown old and incapable, a genuine idler with low tastes, a good-for-nothing.

Artists are often rebuked for their oddities, for the liberties they take with nature, for that horror of the conventional which impels them to follow by-paths; but who can ever describe all the absurd fancies, all the idiotic eccentricities with which a bourgeois without occupation can succeed in filling the emptiness of his life? M. Chebe imposed upon himself certain rules concerning his goings and comings, and his walks abroad. While the Boulevard Sebastopol was being built, he went twice a day “to see how it was getting on.”

No one knew better than he the fashionable shops and the bargains; and very often Madame Chebe, annoyed to see her husband’s idiotic face at the window while she was energetically mending the family linen, would rid herself of him by giving him an errand to do. “You know that place, on the corner of such a street, where they sell such nice cakes. They would be nice for our dessert.”

And the husband would go out, saunter along the boulevard by the shops, wait for the omnibus, and pass half the day in procuring two cakes, worth three sous, which he would bring home in triumph, wiping his forehead.

M. Chebe adored the summer, the Sundays, the great footraces in the dust at Clamart or Romainville, the excitement of holidays and the crowd. He was one of those who



went about for a whole week before the fifteenth of August, gazing at the black lamps and their frames, and the scaffoldings. Nor did his wife complain. At all events, she no longer had that chronic grumbler prowling around her chair for whole days, with schemes for gigantic enterprises, combinations that missed fire in advance, lamentations concerning the past, and a fixed determination not to work at anything to earn money.

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She no longer earned anything herself, poor woman; but she knew so well how to save, her wonderful economy made up so completely for everything else, that absolute want, although a near neighbor of such impecuniosity as theirs, never succeeded in making its way into those three rooms, which were always neat and clean, or in destroying the carefully mended garments or the old furniture so well concealed beneath its coverings.

Opposite the Chebes' door, whose copper knob gleamed in bourgeois fashion upon the landing, were two other and smaller ones.

On the first, a visiting-card, held in place by four nails, according to the custom in vogue among industrial artists, bore the name of

Risler
designer of patterns.

On the other was a small square of leather, with these words in gilt letters:

Mesdames Delobelle
birds and insects for ornament.

The Delobelles' door was often open, disclosing a large room with a brick floor, where two women, mother and daughter, the latter almost a child, each as weary and as pale as the other, worked at one of the thousand fanciful little trades which go to make up what is called the 'Articles de Paris'.

It was then the fashion to ornament hats and ballgowns with the lovely little insects from South America that have the brilliant coloring of jewels and reflect the light like diamonds. The Delobelles had adopted that specialty.

A wholesale house, to which consignments were made directly from the Antilles, sent to them, unopened, long, light boxes from which, when the lid was removed, arose a faint odor, a dust of arsenic through which gleamed the piles of insects, impaled before being shipped, the birds packed closely together, their wings held in place by a strip of thin paper. They must all be mounted—the insects quivering upon brass wire, the humming-birds with their feathers ruffled; they must be cleansed and polished, the beak in a bright red, claw repaired with a silk thread, dead eyes replaced with sparkling pearls, and the insect or the bird restored to an appearance of life and grace. The mother prepared the work under her daughter's direction; for Desiree, though she was still a mere girl, was endowed with exquisite taste, with a fairy-like power of invention, and no one could, insert two pearl eyes in those tiny heads or spread their lifeless wings so deftly as she. Happy or unhappy, Desiree always worked with the same energy. From dawn until well into the night the table was covered with work. At the last ray of daylight, when the factory bells were ringing in all the neighboring yards, Madame Delobelle lighted the lamp, and after a more than frugal repast they returned to their work. Those two

indefatigable women had one object, one fixed idea, which prevented them from feeling the burden of enforced vigils. That idea was the dramatic renown of the illustrious Delobelle. After he had left the provincial theatres to pursue his profession in Paris, Delobelle waited for an intelligent manager, the ideal and providential manager who discovers geniuses, to seek him out and offer him a role suited to his talents. He might, perhaps, especially at the beginning, have obtained a passably good engagement at a theatre of the third order, but Delobelle did not choose to lower himself.

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He preferred to wait, to struggle, as he said! And this is how he awaited the struggle.

In the morning in his bedroom, often in his bed, he rehearsed roles in his former repertory; and the Delobelle ladies trembled with emotion when they heard behind the partition tirades from 'Antony' or the 'Medecin des Enfants', declaimed in a sonorous voice that blended with the thousand-and-one noises of the great Parisian bee-hive. Then, after breakfast, the actor would sally forth for the day; would go to "do his boulevard," that is to say, to saunter to and fro between the Chateau d'Eau and the Madeline, with a toothpick in the corner of his mouth, his hat a little on one side—always gloved, and brushed, and glossy.

That question of dress was of great importance in his eyes. It was one of the greatest elements of success, a bait for the manager—the famous, intelligent manager—who never would dream of engaging a threadbare, shabbily dressed man.

So the Delobelle ladies took good care that he lacked nothing; and you can imagine how many birds and insects it required to fit out a blade of that temper! The actor thought it the most natural thing in the world.

In his view, the labors, the privations of his wife and daughter were not, strictly speaking, for his benefit, but for the benefit of that mysterious and unknown genius, whose trustee he considered himself to be.

There was a certain analogy between the position of the Chebe family and that of the Delobelles. But the latter household was less depressing. The Chebes felt that their petty annuitant existence was fastened upon them forever, with no prospect of amelioration, always the same; whereas, in the actor's family, hope and illusion often opened magnificent vistas.

The Chebes were like people living in a blind alley; the Delobelles on a foul little street, where there was no light or air, but where a great boulevard might some day be laid out. And then, too, Madame Chebe no longer believed in her husband, whereas, by virtue of that single magic word, "Art!" her neighbor never had doubted hers.

And yet for years and years Monsieur Delobelle had been unavailingly drinking vermouth with dramatic agents, absinthe with leaders of claque, bitters with vaudevillists, dramatists, and the famous what's-his-name, author of several great dramas. Engagements did not always follow. So that, without once appearing on the boards, the poor man had progressed from jeune premier to grand premier roles, then to the financiers, then to the noble fathers, then to the buffoons—

He stopped there!



On two or three occasions his friends had obtained for him a chance to earn his living as manager of a club or a cafe as an inspector in great warehouses, at the 'Phares de la Bastille' or the 'Colosse de Rhodes.' All that was necessary was to have good manners. Delobelle was not lacking in that respect, God knows! And yet every suggestion that was made to him the great man met with a heroic refusal.

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"I have no right to abandon the stage!" he would then assert.

In the mouth of that poor devil, who had not set foot on the boards for years, it was irresistibly comical. But one lost the inclination to laugh when one saw his wife and his daughter swallowing particles of arsenic day and night, and heard them repeat emphatically as they broke their needles against the brass wire with which the little birds were mounted:

"No! no! Monsieur Delobelle has no right to abandon the stage."

Happy man, whose bulging eyes, always smiling condescendingly, and whose habit of reigning on the stage had procured for him for life that exceptional position of a spoiled and admired child-king! When he left the house, the shopkeepers on the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, with the predilection of the Parisian for everything and everybody connected with the theatre, saluted him respectfully. He was always so well dressed! And then he was so kind, so obliging! When you think that every Saturday night, he, Ruy Blas, Antony, Raphael in the 'Filles de Maybre,' Andres in the 'Pirates de la Savane,' sallied forth, with a bandbox under his arm, to carry the week's work of his wife and daughter to a flower establishment on the Rue St.-Denis!

Why, even when performing such a commission as that, this devil of a fellow had such nobility of bearing, such native dignity, that the young woman whose duty it was to make up the Delobelle account was sorely embarrassed to hand to such an irreproachable gentleman the paltry stipend so laboriously earned.

On those evenings, by the way, the actor did not return home to dinner. The women were forewarned.

He always met some old comrade on the boulevard, some unlucky devil like himself—there are so many of them in that sacred profession!—whom he entertained at a restaurant or cafe. Then, with scrupulous fidelity—and very grateful they were to him—he would carry the rest of the money home, sometimes with a bouquet for his wife or a little present for Desiree, a nothing, a mere trifle. What would you have? Those are the customs of the stage. It is such a simple matter in a melodrama to toss a handful of louis through the window!

"Ho! varlet, take this purse and hie thee hence to tell thy mistress I await her coming."

And so, notwithstanding their marvellous courage, and although their trade was quite lucrative, the Delobelles often found themselves in straitened circumstances, especially in the dull season of the 'Articles de Paris.'

Luckily the excellent Risler was at hand, always ready to accommodate his friends.

Guillaume Risler, the third tenant on the landing, lived with his brother Frantz, who was fifteen years his junior. The two young Swiss, tall and fair, strong and ruddy, brought into the dismal, hard-working house glimpses of the country and of health. The elder was a draughtsman at the Fromont factory and was paying for the education of his brother, who attended Chaptal's lectures, pending his admission to the Ecole Centrale.

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On his arrival at Paris, being sadly perplexed as to the installation of his little household, Guillaume had derived from his neighbors, Mesdames Chebe and Delobelle, advice and information which were an indispensable aid to that ingenuous, timid, somewhat heavy youth, embarrassed by his foreign accent and manner. After a brief period of neighborhood and mutual services, the Risler brothers formed a part of both families.

On holidays places were always made for them at one table or the other, and it was a great satisfaction to the two exiles to find in those poor households, modest and straitened as they were, a taste of affection and family life.

The wages of the designer, who was very clever at his trade, enabled him to be of service to the Delobelles on rent-day, and to make his appearance at the Chebes' in the guise of the rich uncle, always laden with surprises and presents, so that the little girl, as soon as she saw him, would explore his pockets and climb on his knees.

On Sunday he would take them all to the theatre; and almost every evening he would go with Messieurs Chebe and Delobelle to a brewery on the Rue Blondel, where he regaled them with beer and pretzels. Beer and pretzels were his only vice.

For his own part, he knew no greater bliss than to sit before a foaming tankard, between his two friends, listening to their talk, and taking part only by a loud laugh or a shake of the head in their conversation, which was usually a long succession of grievances against society.

A childlike shyness, and the Germanisms of speech which he never had laid aside in his life of absorbing toil, embarrassed him much in giving expression to his ideas. Moreover, his friends overawed him. They had in respect to him the tremendous superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works; and M. Chebe, less generous than Delobelle, did not hesitate to make him feel it. He was very lofty with him, was M. Chebe! In his opinion, a man who worked, as Risler did, ten hours a day, was incapable, when he left his work, of expressing an intelligent idea. Sometimes the designer, coming home worried from the factory, would prepare to spend the night over some pressing work. You should have seen M. Chebe's scandalized expression then!

"Nobody could make me follow such a business!" he would say, expanding his chest, and he would add, looking at Risler with the air of a physician making a professional call, "Just wait till you've had one severe attack."

Delobelle was not so fierce, but he adopted a still loftier tone. The cedar does not see a rose at its foot. Delobelle did not see Risler at his feet.

When, by chance, the great man deigned to notice his presence, he had a certain air of stooping down to him to listen, and to smile at his words as at a child's; or else he would amuse himself by dazzling him with stories of actresses, would give him lessons in

department and the addresses of outfitters, unable to understand why a man who earned so much money should always be dressed like an usher at a primary school. Honest Risler, convinced of his inferiority, would try to earn forgiveness by a multitude of little attentions, obliged to furnish all the delicacy, of course, as he was the constant benefactor.

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Among these three households living on the same floor, little Chebe, with her goings and comings, formed the bond of union.

At all times of day she would slip into the workroom of the Delobelles, amuse herself by watching their work and looking at all the insects, and, being already more coquettish than playful, if an insect had lost a wing in its travels, or a humming-bird its necklace of down, she would try to make herself a headdress of the remains, to fix that brilliant shaft of color among the ripples of her silky hair. It made Desiree and her mother smile to see her stand on tiptoe in front of the old tarnished mirror, with affected little shrugs and grimaces. Then, when she had had enough of admiring herself, the child would open the door with all the strength of her little fingers, and would go demurely, holding her head perfectly straight for fear of disarranging her headdress, and knock at the Rislers' door.

No one was there in the daytime but Frantz the student, leaning over his books, doing his duty faithfully. But when Sidonie enters, farewell to study! Everything must be put aside to receive that lovely creature with the humming-bird in her hair, pretending to be a princess who had come to Chaptal's school to ask his hand in marriage from the director.

It was really a strange sight to see that tall, overgrown boy playing with that little girl of eight, humoring her caprices, adoring her as he yielded to her, so that later, when he fell genuinely in love with her, no one could have said at what time the change began.

Petted as she was in those two homes, little Chebe was very fond of running to the window on the landing. There it was that she found her greatest source of entertainment, a horizon always open, a sort of vision of the future toward which she leaned with eager curiosity and without fear, for children are not subject to vertigo.

Between the slated roofs sloping toward one another, the high wall of the factory, the tops of the plane-trees in the garden, the many-windowed workshops appeared to her like a promised land, the country of her dreams.

That Fromont establishment was to her mind the highest ideal of wealth.

The place it occupied in that part of the Marais, which was at certain hours enveloped by its smoke and its din, Risler's enthusiasm, his fabulous tales concerning his employer's wealth and goodness and cleverness, had aroused that childish curiosity; and such portions as she could see of the dwelling-houses, the carved wooden blinds, the circular front steps, with the garden-seats before them, a great white bird-house with gilt stripes glistening in the sun, the blue-lined coupe standing in the courtyard, were to her objects of continual admiration.

She knew all the habits of the family: At what hour the bell was rung, when the workmen went away, the Saturday payday which kept the cashier's little lamp lighted late in the evening, and the long Sunday afternoon, the closed workshops, the smokeless chimney, the profound silence which enabled her to hear Mademoiselle Claire at play in the garden, running about with her cousin Georges. From Risler she obtained details.

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“Show me the salon windows,” she would say to him, “and Claire’s room.”

Risler, delighted by this extraordinary interest in his beloved factory, would explain to the child from their lofty position the arrangement of the buildings, point out the print-shop, the gilding-shop, the designing-room where he worked, the engine-room, above which towered that enormous chimney blackening all the neighboring walls with its corrosive smoke, and which never suspected that a young life, concealed beneath a neighboring roof, mingled its inmost thoughts with its loud, indefatigable panting.

At last one day Sidonie entered that paradise of which she had heretofore caught only a glimpse.

Madame Fromont, to whom Risler often spoke of her little neighbor’s beauty and intelligence, asked him to bring her to the children’s ball she intended to give at Christmas. At first Monsieur Chebe replied by a curt refusal. Even in those days, the Fromonts, whose name was always on Rider’s lips, irritated and humiliated him by their wealth. Moreover, it was to be a fancy ball, and M. Chebe—who did not sell wallpapers, not he!—could not afford to dress his daughter as a circus-dancer. But Risler insisted, declared that he would get everything himself, and at once set about designing a costume.

It was a memorable evening.

In Madame Chebe’s bedroom, littered with pieces of cloth and pins and small toilet articles, Desiree Delobelle superintended Sidonie’s toilet. The child, appearing taller because of her short skirt of red flannel with black stripes, stood before the mirror, erect and motionless, in the glittering splendor of her costume. She was charming. The waist, with bands of velvet laced over the white stomacher, the lovely, long tresses of chestnut hair escaping from a hat of plaited straw, all the trivial details of her Savoyard’s costume were heightened by the intelligent features of the child, who was quite at her ease in the brilliant colors of that theatrical garb.

The whole assembled neighborhood uttered cries of admiration. While some one went in search of Delobelle, the lame girl arranged the folds of the skirt, the bows on the shoes, and cast a final glance over her work, without laying aside her needle; she, too, was excited, poor child! by the intoxication of that festivity to which she was not invited. The great man arrived. He made Sidonie rehearse two or three stately curtseys which he had taught her, the proper way to walk, to stand, to smile with her mouth slightly open, and the exact position of the little finger. It was truly amusing to see the precision with which the child went through the drill.

“She has dramatic blood in her veins!” exclaimed the old actor enthusiastically, unable to understand why that stupid Frantz was strongly inclined to weep.

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A year after that happy evening Sidonie could have told you what flowers there were in the reception rooms, the color of the furniture, and the music they were playing as she entered the ballroom, so deep an impression did her enjoyment make upon her. She forgot nothing, neither the costumes that made an eddying whirl about her, nor the childish laughter, nor all the tiny steps that glided over the polished floors. For a moment, as she sat on the edge of a great red-silk couch, taking from the plate presented to her the first sherbet of her life, she suddenly thought of the dark stairway, of her parents' stuffy little rooms, and it produced upon her mind the effect of a distant country which she had left forever.

However, she was considered a fascinating little creature, and was much admired and petted. Claire Fromont, a miniature Cauchoise dressed in lace, presented her to her cousin Georges, a magnificent hussar who turned at every step to observe the effect of his sabre.

"You understand, Georges, she is my friend. She is coming to play with us Sundays. Mamma says she may."

And, with the artless impulsiveness of a happy child, she kissed little Chebe with all her heart.

But the time came to go. For a long time, in the filthy street where the snow was melting, in the dark hall, in the silent room where her mother awaited her, the brilliant light of the salons continued to shine before her dazzled eyes.

"Was it very fine? Did you have a charming time?" queried Madame Chebe in a low tone, unfastening the buckles of the gorgeous costume, one by one.

And Sidonie, overcome with fatigue, made no reply, but fell asleep standing, beginning a lovely dream which was to last throughout her youth and cost her many tears.

Claire Fromont kept her word. Sidonie often went to play in the beautiful gravelled garden, and was able to see at close range the carved blinds and the dovecot with its threads of gold. She came to know all the corners and hiding-places in the great factory, and took part in many glorious games of hide-and-seek behind the printing-tables in the solitude of Sunday afternoon. On holidays a plate was laid for her at the children's table.

Everybody loved her, although she never exhibited much affection for any one. So long as she was in the midst of that luxury, she was conscious of softer impulses, she was happy and felt that she was embellished by her surroundings; but when she returned to her parents, when she saw the factory through the dirty panes of the window on the landing, she had an inexplicable feeling of regret and anger.

And yet Claire Fromont treated her as a friend.

Sometimes they took her to the Bois, to the Tuileries, in the famous blue-lined carriage, or into the country, to pass a whole week at Grandfather Gardinois's chateau, at Savigny-sur-Orge. Thanks to the munificence of Risler, who was very proud of his little one's success, she was always presentable and well dressed. Madame Chebe made it a point of honor, and the pretty, lame girl was always at hand to place her treasures of unused coquetry at her little friend's service.



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But M. Chebe, who was always hostile to the Fromonts, looked frowningly upon this growing intimacy. The true reason was that he himself never was invited; but he gave other reasons, and would say to his wife:

“Don’t you see that your daughter’s heart is sad when she returns from that house, and that she passes whole hours dreaming at the window?”

But poor Madame Chebe, who had been so unhappy ever since her marriage, had become reckless. She declared that one should make the most of the present for fear of the future, should seize happiness as it passes, as one often has no other support and consolation in life than the memory of a happy childhood.

For once it happened that M. Chebe was right.

CHAPTER III

THE FALSE PEARLS

After two or three years of intimacy with Claire, of sharing her amusements, years during which Sidonie acquired the familiarity with luxury and the graceful manners of the children of the wealthy, the friendship was suddenly broken.

Cousin Georges, whose guardian M. Fromont was, had entered college some time before. Claire in her turn took her departure for the convent with the outfit of a little queen; and at that very time the Chebes were discussing the question of apprenticing Sidonie to some trade. They promised to love each other as before and to meet twice a month, on the Sundays that Claire was permitted to go home.

Indeed, little Chebe did still go down sometimes to play with her friends; but as she grew older she realized more fully the distance that separated them, and her clothes began to seem to her very simple for Madame Fromont’s salon.

When the three were alone, the childish friendship which made them equals prevented any feeling of embarrassment; but visitors came, girl friends from the convent, among others a tall girl, always richly dressed, whom her mother’s maid used to bring to play with the little Fromonts on Sunday.

As soon as she saw her coming up the steps, resplendent and disdainful, Sidonie longed to go away at once. The other embarrassed her with awkward questions. Where did she live? What did her parents do? Had she a carriage?

As she listened to their talk of the convent and their friends, Sidonie felt that they lived in a different world, a thousand miles from her own; and a deathly sadness seized her, especially when, on her return home, her mother spoke of sending her as an apprentice

to Mademoiselle Le Mire, a friend of the Delobelles, who conducted a large false-pearl establishment on the Rue du Roi-Dore.

Risler insisted upon the plan of having the little one serve an apprenticeship. "Let her learn a trade," said the honest fellow. "Later I will undertake to set her up in business."

Indeed, this same Mademoiselle Le Mire spoke of retiring in a few years. It was an excellent opportunity.

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One morning, a dull day in November, her father took her to the Rue du Rio-Dore, to the fourth floor of an old house, even older and blacker than her own home.

On the ground floor, at the entrance to the hall, hung a number of signs with gilt letters: Depot for Travelling-Bags, Plated Chains, Children's Toys, Mathematical Instruments in Glass, Bouquets for Brides and Maids of Honor, Wild Flowers a Specialty; and above was a little dusty show-case, wherein pearls, yellow with age, glass grapes and cherries surrounded the pretentious name of Angelina Le Mire.

What a horrible house!

It had not even a broad landing like that of the Chebes, grimy with old age, but brightened by its window and the beautiful prospect presented by the factory. A narrow staircase, a narrow door, a succession of rooms with brick floors, all small and cold, and in the last an old maid with a false front and black thread mitts, reading a soiled copy of the 'Journal pour Tous,' and apparently very much annoyed to be disturbed in her reading.

Mademoiselle Le Mire (written in two words) received the father and daughter without rising, discoursed at great length of the rank she had lost, of her father, an old nobleman of Le Rouergue—it is most extraordinary how many old noblemen Le Rouergue has produced!—and of an unfaithful steward who had carried off their whole fortune. She instantly aroused the sympathies of M. Chebe, for whom decayed gentlefolk had an irresistible charm, and he went away overjoyed, promising his daughter to call for her at seven o'clock at night in accordance with the terms agreed upon.

The apprentice was at once ushered into the still empty workroom. Mademoiselle Le Mire seated her in front of a great drawer filled with pearls, needles, and bodkins, with instalments of four-sou novels thrown in at random among them.

It was Sidonie's business to sort the pearls and string them in necklaces of equal length, which were tied together to be sold to the small dealers. Then the young women would soon be there and they would show her exactly what she would have to do, for Mademoiselle Le Mire (always written in two words!) did not interfere at all, but overlooked her business from a considerable distance, from that dark room where she passed her life reading newspaper novels.

At nine o'clock the work-women arrived, five tall, pale-faced, faded girls, wretchedly dressed, but with their hair becomingly arranged, after the fashion of poor working-girls who go about bare-headed through the streets of Paris.

Two or three were yawning and rubbing their eyes, saying that they were dead with sleep.



At last they went to work beside a long table where each had her own drawer and her own tools. An order had been received for mourning jewels, and haste was essential. Sidonie, whom the forewoman instructed in her task in a tone of infinite superiority, began dismally to sort a multitude of black pearls, bits of glass, and wisps of crape.

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The others, paying no attention to the little girl, chatted together as they worked. They talked of a wedding that was to take place that very day at St. Gervais.

"Suppose we go," said a stout, red-haired girl, whose name was Malvina. "It's to be at noon. We shall have time to go and get back again if we hurry."

And, at the lunch hour, the whole party rushed downstairs four steps at a time.

Sidonie had brought her luncheon in a little basket, like a school-girl; with a heavy heart she sat at a corner of the table and ate alone for the first time in her life. Great God! what a sad and wretched thing life seemed to be; what a terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings there!

At one o'clock the girls trooped noisily back, highly excited.

"Did you see the white satin gown? And the veil of point d'Angleterre? There's a lucky girl!"

Thereupon they repeated in the workroom the remarks they had made in undertones in the church, leaning against the rail, throughout the ceremony. That question of a wealthy marriage, of beautiful clothes, lasted all day long; nor did it interfere with their work-far from it.

These small Parisian industries, which have to do with the most trivial details of the toilet, keep the work-girls informed as to the fashions and fill their minds with thoughts of luxury and elegance. To the poor girls who worked on Mademoiselle Le Mire's fourth floor, the blackened walls, the narrow street did not exist. They were always thinking of something else and passed their lives asking one another:

"Malvina, if you were rich what would you do? For my part, I'd live on the Champs-Elysees." And the great trees in the square, the carriages that wheeled about there, coquettishly slackening their pace, appeared momentarily before their minds, a delicious, refreshing vision.

Little Chebe, in her corner, listened without speaking, industriously stringing her black grapes with the precocious dexterity and taste she had acquired in Desiree's neighborhood. So that in the evening, when M. Chebe came to fetch his daughter, they praised her in the highest terms.

Thereafter all her days were alike. The next day, instead of black pearls, she strung white pearls and bits of false coral; for at Mademoiselle Le Mire's they worked only in what was false, in tinsel, and that was where little Chebe was to serve her apprenticeship to life.



For some time the new apprentice-being younger and better bred than the others——found that they held aloof from her. Later, as she grew older, she was admitted to their friendship and their confidence, but without ever sharing their pleasures. She was too proud to go to see weddings at midday; and when she heard them talking of a ball at Vauxhall or the 'Delices du Marais,' or of a nice little supper at Bonvalet's or at the 'Quatre Sergents de la Rochelle,' she was always very disdainful.

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We looked higher than that, did we not, little Chebe?

Moreover, her father called for her every evening. Sometimes, however, about the New Year, she was obliged to work late with the others, in order to complete pressing orders. In the gaslight those pale-faced Parisians, sorting pearls as white as themselves, of a dead, unwholesome whiteness, were a painful spectacle. There was the same fictitious glitter, the same fragility of spurious jewels. They talked of nothing but masked balls and theatres.

“Have you seen Adele Page, in ‘Les Trois Mousquetaires?’ And Melingue? And Marie Laurent? Oh! Marie Laurent!”

The actors’ doublets, the embroidered costumes of the queens of melodrama, appeared before them in the white light of the necklaces forming beneath their fingers.

In summer the work was less pressing. It was the dull season. In the intense heat, when through the drawn blinds fruit-sellers could be heard in the street, crying their mirabelles and Queen Claudes, the workgirls slept heavily, their heads on the table. Or perhaps Malvina would go and ask Mademoiselle Le Mire for a copy of the ‘Journal pour Tous,’ and read aloud to the others.

But little Chebe did not care for the novels. She carried one in her head much more interesting than all that trash.

The fact is, nothing could make her forget the factory. When she set forth in the morning on her father’s arm, she always cast a glance in that direction. At that hour the works were just stirring, the chimney emitted its first puff of black smoke. Sidonie, as she passed, could hear the shouts of the workmen, the dull, heavy blows of the bars of the printing-press, the mighty, rhythmical hum of the machinery; and all those sounds of toil, blended in her memory with recollections of fetes and blue-lined carriages, haunted her persistently.

They spoke louder than the rattle of the omnibuses, the street cries, the cascades in the gutters; and even in the workroom, when she was sorting the false pearls even at night, in her own home, when she went, after dinner, to breathe the fresh air at the window on the landing and to gaze at the dark, deserted factory, that murmur still buzzed in her ears, forming, as it were, a continual accompaniment to her thoughts.

“The little one is tired, Madame Chebe. She needs diversion. Next Sunday I will take you all into the country.”

These Sunday excursions, which honest Risler organized to amuse Sidonie, served only to sadden her still more.



On those days she must rise at four o'clock in the morning; for the poor must pay for all their enjoyments, and there was always a ribbon to be ironed at the last moment, or a bit of trimming to be sewn on in an attempt to rejuvenate the everlasting little lilac frock with white stripes which Madame Chebe conscientiously lengthened every year.

They would all set off together, the Chebes, the Rislers, and the illustrious Delobelle. Only Desiree and her mother never were of the party. The poor, crippled child, ashamed of her deformity, never would stir from her chair, and Mamma Delobelle stayed behind to keep her company. Moreover, neither possessed a suitable gown in which to show herself out-of-doors in their great man's company; it would have destroyed the whole effect of his appearance.

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When they left the house, Sidonie would brighten up a little. Paris in the pink haze of a July morning, the railway stations filled with light dresses, the country flying past the car windows, and the healthful exercise, the bath in the pure air saturated with the water of the Seine, vivified by a bit of forest, perfumed by flowering meadows, by ripening grain, all combined to make her giddy for a moment. But that sensation was soon succeeded by disgust at such a commonplace way of passing her Sunday.

It was always the same thing.

They stopped at a refreshment booth, in close proximity to a very noisy and numerous attended rustic festival, for there must be an audience for Delobelle, who would saunter along, absorbed by his chimera, dressed in gray, with gray gaiters, a little hat over his ear, a light top coat on his arm, imagining that the stage represented a country scene in the suburbs of Paris, and that he was playing the part of a Parisian sojourning in the country.

As for M. Chebe, who prided himself on being as fond of nature as the late Jean Jacques Rousseau, he did not appreciate it without the accompaniments of shooting-matches, wooden horses, sack races, and a profusion of dust and penny-whistles, which constituted also Madame Chebe's ideal of a country life.

But Sidonie had a different ideal; and those Parisian Sundays passed in strolling through noisy village streets depressed her beyond measure. Her only pleasure in those throngs was the consciousness of being stared at. The veriest boor's admiration, frankly expressed aloud at her side, made her smile all day; for she was of those who disdain no compliment.

Sometimes, leaving the Chebes and Delobelle in the midst of the fete, Risler would go into the fields with his brother and the "little one" in search of flowers for patterns for his wall-papers. Frantz, with his long arms, would pull down the highest branches of a hawthorn, or would climb a park wall to pick a leaf of graceful shape he had spied on the other side. But they reaped their richest harvests on the banks of the stream.

There they found those flexible plants, with long swaying stalks, which made such a lovely effect on hangings, tall, straight reeds, and the volubilis, whose flower, opening suddenly as if in obedience to a caprice, resembles a living face, some one looking at you amid the lovely, quivering foliage. Risler arranged his bouquets artistically, drawing his inspiration from the very nature of the plants, trying to understand thoroughly their manner of life, which can not be divined after the withering of one day.

Then, when the bouquet was completed, tied with a broad blade of grass as with a ribbon, and slung over Frantz's back, away they went. Risler, always engrossed in his art, looked about for subjects, for possible combinations, as they walked along.

“Look there, little one—see that bunch of lily of the valley, with its white bells, among those eglantines. What do you think? Wouldn’t that be pretty against a sea-green or pearl-gray background?”

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But Sidonie cared no more for lilies of the valley than for eglantine. Wild flowers always seemed to her like the flowers of the poor, something like her lilac dress.

She remembered that she had seen flowers of a different sort at the house of M. Gardinois, at the Chateau de Savigny, in the hothouses, on the balconies, and all about the gravelled courtyard bordered with tall urns. Those were the flowers she loved; that was her idea of the country!

The little stations in the outskirts of Paris are so terribly crowded and stuffy on those Sunday evenings in summer! Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter, such doleful ballads, sung in whispers by voices that no longer have the strength to roar! That was the time when M. Chebe was in his element.

He would elbow his way to the gate, scold about the delay of the train, declaim against the station-agent, the company, the government; say to Delobelle in a loud voice, so as to be overheard by his neighbors:

"I say—suppose such a thing as this should happen in America!" Which remark, thanks to the expressive by-play of the illustrious actor, and to the superior air with which he replied, "I believe you!" gave those who stood near to understand that these gentlemen knew exactly what would happen in America in such a case. Now, they were equally and entirely ignorant on that subject; but upon the crowd their words made an impression.

Sitting beside Frantz, with half of his bundle of flowers on her knees, Sidonie would seem to be blotted out, as it were, amid the uproar, during the long wait for the evening trains. From the station, lighted by a single lamp, she could see the black clumps of trees outside, lighted here and there by the last illuminations of the fete, a dark village street, people continually coming in, and a lantern hanging on a deserted pier.

From time to time, on the other side of the glass doors, a train would rush by without stopping, with a shower of hot cinders and the roar of escaping steam. Thereupon a tempest of shouts and stamping would arise in the station, and, soaring above all the rest, the shrill treble of M. Chebe, shrieking in his sea-gull's voice: "Break down the doors! break down the doors!"—a thing that the little man would have taken good care not to do himself, as he had an abject fear of gendarmes. In a moment the storm would abate. The tired women, their hair disarranged by the wind, would fall asleep on the benches. There were torn and ragged dresses, low-necked white gowns, covered with dust.

The air they breathed consisted mainly of dust. It lay upon their clothes, rose at every step, obscured the light of the lamp, vexed one's eyes, and raised a sort of cloud before the tired faces. The cars which they entered at last, after hours of waiting, were saturated with it also. Sidonie would open the window, and look out at the dark fields,

an endless line of shadow. Then, like innumerable stars, the first lanterns of the outer boulevards appeared near the fortifications.

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So ended the ghastly day of rest of all those poor creatures. The sight of Paris brought back to each one's mind the thought of the morrow's toil. Dismal as her Sunday had been, Sidonie began to regret that it had passed. She thought of the rich, to whom all the days of their lives were days of rest; and vaguely, as in a dream, the long park avenues of which she had caught glimpses during the day appeared to her thronged with those happy ones of earth, strolling on the fine gravel, while outside the gate, in the dust of the highroad, the poor man's Sunday hurried swiftly by, having hardly time to pause a moment to look and envy.

Such was little Chebe's life from thirteen to seventeen.

The years passed, but did not bring with them the slightest change. Madame Chebe's cashmere was a little more threadbare, the little lilac frock had undergone a few additional repairs, and that was all. But, as Sidonie grew older, Frantz, now become a young man, acquired a habit of gazing at her silently with a melting expression, of paying her loving attentions that were visible to everybody, and were unnoticed by none save the girl herself.

Indeed, nothing aroused the interest of little Chebe. In the work-room she performed her task regularly, silently, without the slightest thought of the future or of saving. All that she did seemed to be done as if she were waiting for something.

Frantz, on the other hand, had been working for some time with extraordinary energy, the ardor of those who see something at the end of their efforts; so that, at the age of twenty-four, he graduated second in his class from the Ecole Centrale, as an engineer.

On that evening Risler had taken the Chebe family to the Gymnase, and throughout the evening he and Madame Chebe had been making signs and winking at each other behind the children's backs. And when they left the theatre Madame Chebe solemnly placed Sidonie's arm in Frantz's, as if she would say to the lovelorn youth, "Now settle matters—here is your chance."

Thereupon the poor lover tried to settle matters.

It is a long walk from the Gymnase to the Marais. After a very few steps the brilliancy of the boulevard is left behind, the streets become darker and darker, the passers more and more rare. Frantz began by talking of the play. He was very fond of comedies of that sort, in which there was plenty of sentiment.

"And you, Sidonie?"

"Oh! as for me, Frantz, you know that so long as there are fine costumes—"

In truth she thought of nothing else at the theatre. She was not one of those sentimental creatures; à la Madame Bovary, who return from the play with love-phrases

ready-made, a conventional ideal. No! the theatre simply made her long madly for luxury and fine raiment; she brought away from it nothing but new methods of arranging the hair, and patterns of gowns. The new, exaggerated toilettes of the actresses, their gait, even the spurious elegance of their speech, which seemed to her of the highest distinction, and with it all the tawdry magnificence of the gilding and the lights, the gaudy placard at the door, the long line of carriages, and all the somewhat unwholesome excitement that springs up about a popular play; that was what she loved, that was what absorbed her thoughts.

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"How well they acted their love-scene!" continued the lover.

And, as he uttered that suggestive phrase, he bent fondly toward a little face surrounded by a white woollen hood, from which the hair escaped in rebellious curls.

Sidonie sighed:

"Oh! yes, the love-scene. The actress wore beautiful diamonds."

There was a moment's silence. Poor Frantz had much difficulty in explaining himself. The words he sought would not come, and then, too, he was afraid. He fixed the time mentally when he would speak:

"When we have passed the Porte Saint-Denis—when we have left the boulevard."

But when the time arrived, Sidonie began to talk of such indifferent matters that his declaration froze on his lips, or else it was stopped by a passing carriage, which enabled their elders to overtake them.

At last, in the Marais, he suddenly took courage:

"Listen to me, Sidonie—I love you!"

That night the Delobelles had sat up very late.

It was the habit of those brave-hearted women to make their working-day as long as possible, to prolong it so far into the night that their lamp was among the last to be extinguished on the quiet Rue de Braque. They always sat up until the great man returned home, and kept a dainty little supper warm for him in the ashes on the hearth.

In the days when he was an actor there was some reason for that custom; actors, being obliged to dine early and very sparingly, have a terrible gnawing at their vitals when they leave the theatre, and usually eat when they go home. Delobelle had not acted for a long time; but having, as he said, no right to abandon the stage, he kept his mania alive by clinging to a number of the strolling player's habits, and the supper on returning home was one of them, as was his habit of delaying his return until the last footlight in the boulevard theatres was extinguished. To retire without supping, at the hour when all other artists supped, would have been to abdicate, to abandon the struggle, and he would not abandon it, *sacre bleu!*

On the evening in question the actor had not yet come in and the women were waiting for him, talking as they worked, and with great animation, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. During the whole evening they had done nothing but talk of Frantz, of his success, of the future that lay before him.

“Now,” said Mamma Delobelle, “the only thing he needs is to find a good little wife.”

That was Desiree’s opinion, too. That was all that was lacking now to Frantz’s happiness, a good little wife, active and brave and accustomed to work, who would forget everything for him. And if Desiree spoke with great confidence, it was because she was intimately acquainted with the woman who was so well adapted to Frantz Risler’s needs. She was only a year younger than he, just enough to make her younger than her husband and a mother to him at the same time.

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Pretty?

No, not exactly, but attractive rather than ugly, notwithstanding her infirmity, for she was lame, poor child! And then she was clever and bright, and so loving! No one but Desiree knew how fondly that little woman loved Frantz, and how she had thought of him night and day for years. He had not noticed it himself, but seemed to have eyes for nobody but Sidonie, a gamine. But no matter! Silent love is so eloquent, such a mighty power lies hid in restrained feelings. Who knows? Perhaps some day or other:

And the little cripple, leaning over her work, started upon one of those long journeys to the land of chimeras of which she had made so many in her invalid's easychair, with her feet resting on the stool; one of those wonderful journeys from which she always returned happy and smiling, leaning on Frantz's arm with all the confidence of a beloved wife. As her fingers followed her thought, the little bird she had in her hand at the moment, smoothing his ruffled wings, looked as if he too were of the party and were about to fly far, far away, as joyous and light of heart as she.

Suddenly the door flew open.

"I do not disturb you?" said a triumphant voice.

The mother, who was slightly drowsy, suddenly raised her head.

"Ah! it's Monsieur Frantz. Pray come in, Monsieur Frantz. We're waiting for father, as you see. These brigands of artists always stay out so late! Take a seat—you shall have supper with him."

"Oh! no, thank you," replied Frantz, whose lips were still pale from the emotion he had undergone, "I can't stop. I saw a light and I just stepped in to tell you—to tell you some great news that will make you very happy, because I know that you love me—"

"Great heavens, what is it?"

"Monsieur Frantz Risler and Mademoiselle Sidonie are engaged to be married."

"There! didn't I say that all he needed was a good little wife," exclaimed Mamma Delobelle, rising and throwing her arms about his neck.

Desiree had not the strength to utter a word. She bent still lower over her work, and as Frantz's eyes were fixed exclusively upon his happiness, as Mamma Delobelle did nothing but look at the clock to see whether her great man would return soon, no one noticed the lame girl's emotion, nor her pallor, nor the convulsive trembling of the little bird that lay in her hands with its head thrown back, like a bird with its death-wound.



CHAPTER IV

The glow-worms of Savigny
"Savigny-sur-Orge."

"Dear SMONIE:—We were sitting at table yesterday in the great dining-room which you remember, with the door wide open leading to the terrace, where the flowers are all in bloom. I was a little bored. Dear grandpapa had been cross all the morning, and poor mamma dared not say a word, being afraid of those frowning eyebrows which have always laid down the law for her. I was thinking what a pity it was to be so entirely alone, in the middle of the summer, in such a lovely spot, and that I should be very glad, now that I have left the convent, and am destined to pass whole seasons in the country, to have as in the old day, some one to run about the woods and paths with me.

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"To be sure, Georges comes occasionally, but he always arrives very late, just in time for dinner, and is off again with my father in the morning before I am awake. And then he is a serious-minded man now, is Monsieur Georges. He works at the factory, and business cares often bring frowns to his brow.

"I had reached that point in my reflections when suddenly dear grandpapa turned abruptly to me:

"What has become of your little friend Sidonie? I should be glad to have her here for a time.'

"You can imagine my delight. What happiness to meet again, to renew the pleasant friendship that was broken off by the fault of the events of life rather than by our own! How many things we shall have to tell each other! You, who alone had the knack of driving the frowns from my terrible grandpapa's brow, will bring us gayety, and I assure you we need it.

"This lovely Savigny is so lonely! For instance, sometimes in the morning I choose to be a little coquettish. I dress myself, I make myself beautiful with my hair in curls and put on a pretty gown; I walk through all the paths, and suddenly I realize that I have taken all this trouble for the swans and ducks, my dog Kiss, and the cows, who do not even turn to look at me when I pass. Thereupon, in my wrath, I hurry home, put on a thick gown and busy myself on the farm, in the servants' quarters, everywhere. And really, I am beginning to believe that ennui has perfected me, and that I shall make an excellent housekeeper.

"Luckily the hunting season will soon be here, and I rely upon that for a little amusement. In the first place, Georges and father, both enthusiastic sportsmen, will come oftener. And then you will be here, you know. For you will reply at once that you will come, won't you? Monsieur Risler said not long ago that you were not well. The air of Savigny will do you worlds of good.

"Everybody here expects you. And I am dying with impatience.

"Claire."

Her letter written, Claire Fromont donned a large straw hat for the first days of August were warm and glorious—and went herself to drop it in the little box from which the postman collected the mail from the chateau every morning.

It was on the edge of the park, at a turn in the road. She paused a moment to look at the trees by the roadside, at the neighboring meadows sleeping in the bright sunlight. Over yonder the reapers were gathering the last sheaves. Farther on they were

ploughing. But all the melancholy of the silent toil had vanished, so far as the girl was concerned, so delighted was she at the thought of seeing her friend once more.

No breeze came from the hills in the distance, no voice from the trees, to warn her by a presentiment, to prevent her from sending that fatal letter. And immediately upon her return she gave her attention to the preparation of a pretty bedroom for Sidonie adjoining her own.

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The letter did its errand faithfully. From the little green, vine-embowered gate of the chateau it found its way to Paris, and arrived that same evening, with its Savigny postmark and impregnated with the odor of the country, at the fifth-floor apartment on the Rue de Braque.

What an event that was! They read it again and again; and for a whole week, until Sidonie's departure, it lay on the mantel-shelf beside Madame Chebe's treasures, the clock under a glass globe and the Empire cups. To Sidonie it was like a wonderful romance filled with tales of enchantment and promises, which she read without opening it, merely by gazing at the white envelope whereon Claire Fromont's monogram was engraved in relief.

Little she thought of marriage now. The important question was, What clothes should she wear at the chateau? She must give her whole mind to that, to cutting and planning, trying on dresses, devising new ways of arranging her hair. Poor Frantz! How heavy his heart was made by these preparations! That visit to Savigny, which he had tried vainly to oppose, would cause a still further postponement of their wedding, which Sidonie-why, he did not know—persisted in putting off from day to day. He could not go to see her; and when she was once there, in the midst of festivities and pleasures, who could say how long she would remain?

The lover in his despair always went to the Delobelles to confide his sorrows, but he never noticed how quickly Desiree rose as soon as he entered, to make room for him by her side at the work-table, and how she at once sat down again, with cheeks as red as fire and shining eyes.

For some days past they had ceased to work at birds and insects for ornament. The mother and daughter were hemming pink flounces destined for Sidonie's frock, and the little cripple never had plied her needle with such good heart.

In truth little Desiree was not Delobelle's daughter to no purpose.

She inherited her father's faculty of retaining his illusions, of hoping on to the end and even beyond.

While Frantz was dilating upon his woe, Desiree was thinking that, when Sidonie was gone, he would come every day, if it were only to talk about the absent one; that she would have him there by her side, that they would sit up together waiting for "father," and that, perhaps, some evening, as he sat looking at her, he would discover the difference between the woman who loves you and the one who simply allows herself to be loved.

Thereupon the thought that every stitch taken in the frock tended to hasten the departure which she anticipated with such impatience imparted. extraordinary activity to

her needle, and the unhappy lover ruefully watched the flounces and ruffles piling up about her, like little pink, white-capped waves.

When the pink frock was finished, Mademoiselle Chebe started for Savigny.

The chateau of M. Gardinois was built in the valley of the Orge, on the bank of that capriciously lovely stream, with its windmills, its little islands, its dams, and its broad lawns that end at its shores.

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The chateau, an old Louis-Quinze structure, low in reality, although made to appear high by a pointed roof, had a most depressing aspect, suggestive of aristocratic antiquity; broad steps, balconies with rusty balustrades, old urns marred by time, wherein the flowers stood out vividly against the reddish stone. As far as the eye could see, the walls stretched away, decayed and crumbling, descending gradually toward the stream. The chateau overlooked them, with its high, slated roofs, the farmhouse, with its red tiles, and the superb park, with its lindens, ash-trees, poplars and chestnuts growing confusedly together in a dense black mass, cut here and there by the arched openings of the paths.

But the charm of the old place was the water, which enlivened its silence and gave character to its beautiful views. There were at Savigny, to say nothing of the river, many springs, fountains, and ponds, in which the sun sank to rest in all his glory; and they formed a suitable setting for that venerable mansion, green and mossy as it was, and slightly worn away, like a stone on the edge of a brook.

Unluckily, at Savigny, as in most of those gorgeous Parisian summer palaces, which the parvenus in commerce and speculation have made their prey, the chatelains were not in harmony with the chateau.

Since he had purchased his chateau, old Gardinois had done nothing but injure the beauty of the beautiful property chance had placed in his hands; cut down trees "for the view," filled his park with rough obstructions to keep out trespassers, and reserved all his solicitude for a magnificent kitchen-garden, which, as it produced fruit and vegetables in abundance, seemed to him more like his own part of the country—the land of the peasant.

As for the great salons, where the panels with paintings of famous subjects were fading in the autumn fogs, as for the ponds overrun with water-lilies, the grottoes, the stone bridges, he cared for them only because of the admiration of visitors, and because of such elements was composed that thing which so flattered his vanity as an ex-dealer in cattle—a chateau!

Being already old, unable to hunt or fish, he passed his time superintending the most trivial details of that large property. The grain for the hens, the price of the last load of the second crop of hay, the number of bales of straw stored in a magnificent circular granary, furnished him with matter for scolding for a whole day; and certain it is that, when one gazed from a distance at that lovely estate of Savigny, the chateau on the hillside, the river, like a mirror, flowing at its feet, the high terraces shaded by ivy, the supporting wall of the park following the majestic slope of the ground, one never would have suspected the proprietor's niggardliness and meanness of spirit.

In the idleness consequent upon his wealth, M. Gardinois, being greatly bored in Paris, lived at Savigny throughout the year, and the Fromonts lived with him during the summer.

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Madame Fromont was a mild, dull woman, whom her father's brutal despotism had early molded to passive obedience for life. She maintained the same attitude with her husband, whose constant kindness and indulgence never had succeeded in triumphing over that humiliated, taciturn nature, indifferent to everything, and, in some sense, irresponsible. Having passed her life with no knowledge of business, she had become rich without knowing it and without the slightest desire to take advantage of it. Her fine apartments in Paris, her father's magnificent chateau, made her uncomfortable. She occupied as small a place as possible in both, filling her life with a single passion, order—a fantastic, abnormal sort of order, which consisted in brushing, wiping, dusting, and polishing the mirrors, the gilding and the door-knobs, with her own hands, from morning till night.

When she had nothing else to clean, the strange woman would attack her rings, her watch-chain, her brooches, scrubbing the cameos and pearls, and, by dint of polishing the combination of her own name and her husband's, she had effaced all the letters of both. Her fixed idea followed her to Savigny. She picked up dead branches in the paths, scratched the moss from the benches with the end of her umbrella, and would have liked to dust the leaves and sweep down the old trees; and often, when in the train, she looked with envy at the little villas standing in a line along the track, white and clean, with their gleaming utensils, the pewter ball, and the little oblong gardens, which resemble drawers in a bureau. Those were her ideal of a country-house.

M. Fromont, who came only occasionally and was always absorbed by his business affairs, enjoyed Savigny little more than she. Claire alone felt really at home in that lovely park. She was familiar with its smallest shrub. Being obliged to provide her own amusements, like all only children, she had become attached to certain walks, watched the flowers bloom, had her favorite path, her favorite tree, her favorite bench for reading. The dinner-bell always surprised her far away in the park. She would come to the table, out of breath but happy, flushed with the fresh air. The shadow of the hornbeams, stealing over that youthful brow, had imprinted a sort of gentle melancholy there, and the deep, dark green of the ponds, crossed by vague rays, was reflected in her eyes.

Those lovely surroundings had in very truth shielded her from the vulgarity and the abjectness of the persons about her. M. Gardinois might deplore in her presence, for hours at a time, the perversity of tradesmen and servants, or make an estimate of what was being stolen from him each month, each week, every day, every minute; Madame Fromont might enumerate her grievances against the mice, the maggots, dust and dampness, all desperately bent upon destroying her property, and engaged in a conspiracy against her wardrobes; not a word of their foolish talk remained in Claire's mind. A run around the lawn, an hour's reading on the river-bank, restored the tranquillity of that noble and intensely active mind.

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Her grandfather looked upon her as a strange being, altogether out of place in his family. As a child she annoyed him with her great, honest eyes, her straightforwardness on all occasions, and also because he did not find in her a second edition of his own passive and submissive daughter.

“That child will be a proud chit and an original, like her father,” he would say in his ugly moods.

How much better he liked that little Chebe girl who used to come now and then and play in the avenues at Savigny! In her, at least, he detected the strain of the common people like himself, with a sprinkling of ambition and envy, suggested even in those early days by a certain little smile at the corner of the mouth. Moreover, the child exhibited an ingenuous amazement and admiration in presence of his wealth, which flattered his parvenu pride; and sometimes, when he teased her, she would break out with the droll phrases of a Paris gamine, slang redolent of the faubourgs, seasoned by her pretty, piquant face, inclined to pallor, which not even superficiality could deprive of its distinction. So he never had forgotten her.

On this occasion above all, when Sidonie arrived at Savigny after her long absence, with her fluffy hair, her graceful figure, her bright, mobile face, the whole effect emphasized by mannerisms suggestive of the shop-girl, she produced a decided sensation. Old Gardinois, wondering greatly to see a tall young woman in place of the child he was expecting to see, considered her prettier and, above all, better dressed than Claire.

It was a fact that, when Mademoiselle Chebe had left the train and was seated in the great wagonette from the chateau, her appearance was not bad; but she lacked those details that constituted her friend's chief beauty and charm—a distinguished carriage, a contempt for poses, and, more than all else, mental tranquillity. Her prettiness was not unlike her gowns, of inexpensive materials, but cut according to the style of the day-rags, if you will, but rags of which fashion, that ridiculous but charming fairy, had regulated the color, the trimming, and the shape. Paris has pretty faces made expressly for costumes of that sort, very easy to dress becomingly, for the very reason that they belong to no type, and Mademoiselle Sidonie's face was one of these.

What bliss was hers when the carriage entered the long avenue, bordered with velvety grass and primeval elms, and at the end Savigny awaiting her with its great gate wide open!

And how thoroughly at ease she felt amid all those refinements of wealth! How perfectly that sort of life suited her! It seemed to her that she never had known any other.



Suddenly, in the midst of her intoxication, arrived a letter from Frantz, which brought her back to the realities of her life, to her wretched fate as the future wife of a government clerk, which transported her, whether she would or no, to the mean little apartment they would occupy some day at the top of some dismal house, whose heavy atmosphere, dense with privation, she seemed already to breathe.

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Should she break her betrothal promise?

She certainly could do it, as she had given no other pledge than her word. But when he had left her, who could say that she would not wish him back?

In that little brain, turned by ambition, the strangest ideas chased one another. Sometimes, while Grandfather Gardinois, who had laid aside in her honor his old-fashioned hunting-jackets and swanskin waistcoats, was jesting with her, amusing himself by contradicting her in order to draw out a sharp reply, she would gaze steadily, coldly into his eyes, without replying. Ah! if only he were ten years younger! But the thought of becoming Madame Gardinois did not long occupy her. A new personage, a new hope came into her life.

After Sidonie's arrival, Georges Fromont, who was seldom seen at Savigny except on Sundays, adopted the habit of coming to dinner almost every day.

He was a tall, slender, pale youth, of refined appearance. Having no father or mother, he had been brought up by his uncle, M. Fromont, and was looked upon by him to succeed him in business, and probably to become Claire's husband. That ready-made future did not arouse any enthusiasm in Georges. In the first place business bored him. As for his cousin, the intimate good-fellowship of an education in common and mutual confidence existed between them, but nothing more, at least on his side.

With Sidonie, on the contrary, he was exceedingly embarrassed and shy, and at the same time desirous of producing an effect—a totally different man, in short. She had just the spurious charm, a little free, which was calculated to attract a superficial nature, and it was not long before she discovered the impression that she produced upon him.

When the two girls were walking together in the park, it was always Sidonie who remembered that it was time for the train from Paris to arrive. They would go together to the gate to meet the travellers, and Georges's first glance was always for Mademoiselle Chebe, who remained a little behind her friend, but with the poses and airs that go halfway to meet the eyes. That manoeuvring between them lasted some time. They did not mention love, but all the words, all the smiles they exchanged were full of silent avowals.

One cloudy and threatening summer evening, when the two friends had left the table as soon as dinner was at an end and were walking in the long, shady avenue, Georges joined them. They were talking upon indifferent subjects, crunching the gravel beneath their idling footsteps, when Madame Fromont's voice, from the chateau, called Claire away. Georges and Sidonie were left alone. They continued to walk along the avenue, guided by the uncertain whiteness of the path, without speaking of drawing nearer to each other.

A warm wind rustled among the leaves. The ruffled surface of the pond lapped softly against the arches of the little bridge; and the blossoms of the acacias and lindens, detached by the breeze, whirled about in circles, perfuming the electricity-laden air. They felt themselves surrounded by an atmosphere of storm, vibrant and penetrating. Dazzling flashes of heat passed before their troubled eyes, like those that played along the horizon.

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“Oh! what lovely glow-worms!” exclaimed Sidonie, embarrassed by the oppressive silence broken by so many mysterious sounds.

On the edge of the greensward a blade of grass here and there was illuminated by a tiny, green, flickering light. She stooped to lift one on her glove. Georges knelt close beside her; and as they leaned down, their hair and cheeks touching, they gazed at each other for a moment by the light of the glow-worms. How weird and fascinating she seemed to him in that green light, which shone upon her face and died away in the fine network of her waving hair! He put his arm around her waist, and suddenly, feeling that she abandoned herself to him, he clasped her in a long, passionate embrace.

“What are you looking for?” asked Claire, suddenly coming up in the shadow behind them.

Taken by surprise, and with a choking sensation in his throat, Georges trembled so that he could not reply. Sidonie, on the other hand, rose with the utmost coolness, and said as she shook out her skirt:

“The glow-worms. See how many of them there are tonight. And how they sparkle.”

Her eyes also sparkled with extraordinary brilliancy.

“The storm makes them, I suppose,” murmured Georges, still trembling.

The storm was indeed near. At brief intervals great clouds of leaves and dust whirled from one end of the avenue to the other. They walked a few steps farther, then all three returned to the house. The young women took their work, Georges tried to read a newspaper, while Madame Fromont polished her rings and M. Gardinois and his son-in-law played billiards in the adjoining room.

How long that evening seemed to Sidonie! She had but one wish, to be alone-alone with her thoughts.

But, in the silence of her little bedroom, when she had put out her light, which interferes with dreams by casting too bright an illumination upon reality, what schemes, what transports of delight! Georges loved her, Georges Fromont, the heir of the factory! They would marry; she would be rich. For in that mercenary little heart the first kiss of love had awakened no ideas save those of ambition and a life of luxury.

To assure herself that her lover was sincere, she tried to recall the scene under the trees to its most trifling details, the expression of his eyes, the warmth of his embrace, the vows uttered brokenly, lips to lips, in that weird light shed by the glow-worms, which one solemn moment had fixed forever in her heart.

Oh! the glow-worms of Savigny!

All night long they twinkled like stars before her closed eyes. The park was full of them, to the farthest limits of its darkest paths. There were clusters of them all along the lawns, on the trees, in the shrubbery. The fine gravel of the avenues, the waves of the river, seemed to emit green sparks, and all those microscopic flashes formed a sort of holiday illumination in which Savigny seemed to be enveloped in her honor, to celebrate the betrothal of Georges and Sidonie.

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When she rose the next day, her plan was formed. Georges loved her; that was certain. Did he contemplate marrying her? She had a suspicion that he did not, the clever minx! But that did not frighten her. She felt strong enough to triumph over that childish nature, at once weak and passionate. She had only to resist him, and that is exactly what she did.

For some days she was cold and indifferent, wilfully blind and devoid of memory. He tried to speak to her, to renew the blissful moment, but she avoided him, always placing some one between them.

Then he wrote to her.

He carried his notes himself to a hollow in a rock near a clear spring called "The Phantom," which was in the outskirts of the park, sheltered by a thatched roof. Sidonie thought that a charming episode. In the evening she must invent some story, a pretext of some sort for going to "The Phantom" alone. The shadow of the trees across the path, the mystery of the night, the rapid walk, the excitement, made her heart beat deliciously. She would find the letter saturated with dew, with the intense cold of the spring, and so white in the moonlight that she would hide it quickly for fear of being surprised.

And then, when she was alone, what joy to open it, to decipher those magic characters, those words of love which swam before her eyes, surrounded by dazzling blue and yellow circles, as if she were reading her letter in the bright sunlight.

"I love you! Love me!" wrote Georges in every conceivable phrase.

At first she did not reply; but when she felt that he was fairly caught, entirely in her power, she declared herself concisely:

"I never will love any one but my husband."

Ah! she was a true woman already, was little Chebe.

CHAPTER V

HOW LITTLE CHEBE'S STORY ENDED

Meanwhil September arrived. The hunting season brought together a large, noisy, vulgar party at the chateau. There were long dinners at which the wealthy bourgeois lingered slothfully and wearily, prone to fall asleep like peasants. They went in carriages to meet the returning hunters in the cool air of the autumn evening. The mist arose from the fields, from which the crops had been gathered; and while the frightened game flew

along the stubble with plaintive cries, the darkness seemed to emerge from the forests whose dark masses increased in size, spreading out over the fields.

The carriage lamps were lighted, the hoods raised, and they drove quickly homeward with the fresh air blowing in their faces. The dining-hall, brilliantly illuminated, was filled with gayety and laughter.

Claire Fromont, embarrassed by the vulgarity of those about her, hardly spoke at all. Sidonie was at her brightest. The drive had given animation to her pale complexion and Parisian eyes. She knew how to laugh, understood a little too much, perhaps, and seemed to the male guests the only woman in the party. Her success completed Georges's intoxication; but as his advances became more pronounced, she showed more and more reserve. Thereupon he determined that she should be his wife. He swore it to himself, with the exaggerated emphasis of weak characters, who seem always to combat beforehand the difficulties to which they know that they must yield some day.

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It was the happiest moment of little Chebe's life. Even aside from any ambitious project, her coquettish, false nature found a strange fascination in this intrigue, carried on mysteriously amid banquets and merry-makings.

No one about them suspected anything. Claire was at that healthy and delightful period of youth when the mind, only partly open, clings to the things it knows with blind confidence, in complete ignorance of treachery and falsehood. M. Fromont thought of nothing but his business. His wife polished her jewels with frenzied energy. Only old Gardinois and his little, gimlet-like eyes were to be feared; but Sidonie entertained him, and even if he had discovered anything, he was not the man to interfere with her future.

Her hour of triumph was near, when a sudden, unforeseen disaster blasted her hopes.

One Sunday morning M. Fromont was brought back fatally wounded from a hunting expedition. A bullet intended for a deer had pierced his temple. The chateau was turned upside-down.

All the hunters, among them the unknown bungler that had fired the fatal shot, started in haste for Paris. Claire, frantic with grief, entered the room where her father lay on his deathbed, there to remain; and Risler, being advised of the catastrophe, came to take Sidonie home.

On the night before her departure she had a final meeting with Georges at The Phantom,—a farewell meeting, painful and stealthy, and made solemn by the proximity of death. They vowed, however, to love each other always; they agreed upon a method of writing to each other. Then they parted.

It was a sad journey home.

Sidonie returned abruptly to her every-day life, escorted by the despairing grief of Risler, to whom his dear master's death was an irreparable loss. On her arrival, she was compelled to describe her visit to the smallest detail; discuss the inmates of the chateau, the guests, the entertainments, the dinners, and the final catastrophe. What torture for her, when, absorbed as she was by a single, unchanging thought, she had so much need of silence and solitude! But there was something even more terrible than that.

On the first day after her return Frantz resumed his former place; and the glances with which he followed her, the words he addressed to her alone, seemed to her exasperating beyond endurance.

Despite all his shyness and distrust of himself, the poor fellow believed that he had some rights as an accepted and impatient lover, and little Chebe was obliged to emerge

from her dreams to reply to that creditor, and to postpone once more the maturity of his claim.

A day came, however, when indecision ceased to be possible. She had promised to marry Frantz when he had obtained a good situation; and now an engineer's berth in the South, at the smelting-furnaces of Grand Combe, was offered to him. That was sufficient for the support of a modest establishment.

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There was no way of avoiding the question. She must either keep her promise or invent an excuse for breaking it. But what excuse could she invent?

In that pressing emergency, she thought of Desiree. Although the lame little girl had never confided in her, she knew of her great love for Frantz. Long ago she had detected it, with her coquette's eyes, bright and changing mirrors, which reflected all the thoughts of others without betraying any of her own. It may be that the thought that another woman loved her betrothed had made Frantz's love more endurable to her at first; and, just as we place statues on tombstones to make them appear less sad, Desiree's pretty, little, pale face at the threshold of that uninviting future had made it seem less forbidding to her.

Now it provided—her with a simple and honorable pretext for freeing herself from her promise.

"No! I tell you, mamma," she said to Madame Chebe one day, "I never will consent to make a friend like her unhappy. I should suffer too much from remorse,—poor Desiree! Haven't you noticed how badly she looks since I came home; what a beseeching way she has of looking at me? No, I won't cause her that sorrow; I won't take away her Frantz."

Even while she admired her daughter's generous spirit, Madame Chebe looked upon that as a rather exaggerated sacrifice, and remonstrated with her.

"Take care, my child; we aren't rich. A husband like Frantz doesn't turn up every day."

"Very well! then I won't marry at all," declared Sidonie flatly, and, deeming her pretext an excellent one, she clung persistently to it. Nothing could shake her determination, neither the tears shed by Frantz, who was exasperated by her refusal to fulfil her promise, enveloped as it was in vague reasons which she would not even explain to him, nor the entreaties of Risler, in whose ear Madame Chebe had mysteriously mumbled her daughter's reasons, and who in spite of everything could not but admire such a sacrifice.

"Don't revile her, I tell you! She's an angel!" he said to his brother, striving to soothe him.

"Ah! yes, she is an angel," assented Madame Chebe with a sigh, so that the poor betrayed lover had not even the right to complain. Driven to despair, he determined to leave Paris, and as Grand Combe seemed too near in his frenzied longing for flight, he asked and obtained an appointment as overseer on the Suez Canal at Ismailia. He went away without knowing, or caring to know aught of, Desiree's love; and yet, when he went to bid her farewell, the dear little cripple looked up into his face with her shy, pretty eyes, in which were plainly written the words:

"I love you, if she does not."

But Frantz Risler did not know how to read what was written in those eyes.

Fortunately, hearts that are accustomed to suffer have an infinite store of patience. When her friend had gone, the lame girl, with her charming morsel of illusion, inherited from her father and refined by her feminine nature, returned bravely to her work, saying to herself:

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"I will wait for him."

And thereafter she spread the wings of her birds to their fullest extent, as if they were all going, one after another, to Ismailia in Egypt. And that was a long distance!

Before sailing from Marseilles, young Risler wrote Sidonie a farewell letter, at once laughable and touching, wherein, mingling the most technical details with the most heartrending adieux, the unhappy engineer declared that he was about to set sail, with a broken heart, on the transport Sahib, "a sailing-ship and steamship combined, with engines of fifteen-hundred-horse power," as if he hoped that so considerable a capacity would make an impression on his ungrateful betrothed, and cause her ceaseless remorse. But Sidonie had very different matters on her mind.

She was beginning to be disturbed by Georges's silence. Since she left Savigny she had heard from him only once. All her letters were left unanswered. To be sure, she knew through Risler that Georges was very busy, and that his uncle's death had thrown the management of the factory upon him, imposing upon him a responsibility that was beyond his strength. But to abandon her without a word!

From the window on the landing, where she had resumed her silent observations—for she had so arranged matters as not to return to Mademoiselle Le Mire—little Chebe tried to distinguish her lover, watched him as he went to and fro across the yards and among the buildings; and in the afternoon, when it was time for the train to start for Savigny, she saw him enter his carriage to go to his aunt and cousin, who were passing the early months of their period of mourning at the grandfather's chateau in the country.

All this excited and alarmed her; and the proximity of the factory rendered Georges's avoidance of her even more apparent. To think that by raising her voice a little she could make him turn toward the place where she stood! To think that they were separated only by a wall! And yet, at that moment they were very far apart.

Do you remember, little Chebe, that unhappy winter evening when the excellent Risler rushed into your parents' room with an extraordinary expression of countenance, exclaiming, "Great news!"?

Great news, indeed! Georges Fromont had just informed him that, in accordance with his uncle's last wishes, he was to marry his cousin Claire, and that, as he was certainly unequal to the task of carrying on the business alone, he had resolved to take him, Risler, for a partner, under the firm name of *Fromont jeune and Risler aine*.

How did you succeed, little Chebe, in maintaining your self-possession when you learned that the factory had eluded your grasp and that another woman had taken your place? What a terrible evening!—Madame Chebe sat by the table mending; M. Chebe before the fire drying his clothes, which were wet through by his having walked a long



distance in the rain. Oh! that miserable room, overflowing with gloom and ennui! The lamp gave a dim light. The supper, hastily prepared, had left in the room the odor of the poor man's kitchen. And Risler, intoxicated with joy, talking with increasing animation, laid great plans!

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All these things tore your heart, and made the treachery still more horrible by the contrast between the riches that eluded your outstretched hand and the ignoble mediocrity in which you were doomed to pass your life.

Sidonie was seriously ill for a long while. As she lay in bed, whenever the window-panes rattled behind the curtains, the unhappy creature fancied that Georges's wedding-coaches were driving through the street; and she had paroxysms of nervous excitement, without words and inexplicable, as if a fever of wrath were consuming her.

At last, time and youthful strength, her mother's care, and, more than all, the attentions of Desiree, who now knew of the sacrifice her friend had made for her, triumphed over the disease. But for a long while Sidonie was very weak, oppressed by a deadly melancholy, by a constant longing to weep, which played havoc with her nervous system.

Sometimes she talked of travelling, of leaving Paris. At other times she insisted that she must enter a convent. Her friends were sorely perplexed, and strove to discover the cause of that singular state of mind, which was even more alarming than her illness; when she suddenly confessed to her mother the secret of her melancholy.

She loved the elder Risler! She never had dared to whisper it; but it was he whom she had always loved and not Frantz.

This news was a surprise to everybody, to Risler most of all; but little Chebe was so pretty, her eyes were so soft when she glanced at him, that the honest fellow instantly became as fond of her as a fool! Indeed, it may be that love had lain in his heart for a long time without his realizing it.

And that is how it happened that, on the evening of her wedding-day, young Madame Risler, in her white wedding-dress, gazed with a smile of triumph at the window on the landing which had been the narrow setting of ten years of her life. That haughty smile, in which there was a touch of profound pity and of scorn as well, such scorn as a parvenu feels for his poor beginnings, was evidently addressed to the poor sickly child whom she fancied she saw up at that window, in the depths of the past and the darkness. It seemed to say to Claire, pointing at the factory:

"What do you say to this little Chebe? She is here at last, you see!"

CHAPTER VI

Noon. The Marais is breakfasting.

Sitting near the door, on a stone which once served as a horse-block for equestrians, Risler watches with a smile the exit from the factory. He never loses his enjoyment of

the outspoken esteem of all these good people whom he knew when he was insignificant and humble like themselves. The "Good-day, Monsieur Risler," uttered by so many different voices, all in the same affectionate tone, warms his heart. The children accost him without fear, the long-bearded designers, half-workmen, half-artists,

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shake hands with him as they pass, and address him familiarly as “thou.” Perhaps there is a little too much familiarity in all this, for the worthy man has not yet begun to realize the prestige and authority of his new station; and there was some one who considered this free-and-easy manner very humiliating. But that some one can not see him at this moment, and the master takes advantage of the fact to bestow a hearty greeting upon the old bookkeeper, Sigismond, who comes out last of all, erect and red-faced, imprisoned in a high collar and bareheaded—whatever the weather—for fear of apoplexy.

He and Risler are fellow-countrymen. They have for each other a profound esteem, dating from their first employment at the factory, from that time, long, long ago, when they breakfasted together at the little creamery on the corner, to which Sigismond Planus goes alone now and selects his refreshment for the day from the slate hanging on the wall.

But stand aside! The carriage of Fromont Jeune drives through the gateway. He has been out on business all the morning; and the partners, as they walk toward the pretty little house in which they both live at the end of the garden, discuss matters of business in a friendly way.

“I have been at Prochasson’s,” says Fromont. “They showed me some new patterns, pretty ones too, I assure you. We must be on our guard. They are dangerous rivals.”

But Risler is not at all anxious. He is strong in his talent, his experience; and then—but this is strictly confidential—he is on the track of a wonderful invention, an improved printing-press, something that—but we shall see. Still talking, they enter the garden, which is as carefully kept as a public park, with round-topped acacias almost as old as the buildings, and magnificent ivies that hide the high, black walls.

Beside Fromont jeune, Risler Aine has the appearance of a clerk making his report to his employer. At every step he stops to speak, for his gait is heavy, his mind works slowly, and words have much difficulty in finding their way to his lips. Oh, if he could see the little flushed face up yonder, behind the window on the second floor, watching everything so attentively!

Madame Risler is waiting for her husband to come to breakfast, and waxes impatient over the good man’s moderation. She motions to him with her hand:

“Come, come!” but Risler does not notice it. His attention is engrossed by the little Fromont, daughter of Claire and Georges, who is taking a sun-bath, blooming like a flower amid her lace in her nurse’s arms. How pretty she is! “She is your very picture, Madame Chorche.”

“Do you think so, my dear Risler? Why, everybody says she looks like her father.”

“Yes, a little. But—”

And there they all stand, the father and mother, Risler and the nurse, gravely seeking resemblances in that miniature model of a human being, who stares at them out of her little eyes, blinking with the noise and glare. Sidonie, at her open window, leans out to see what they are doing, and why her husband does not come up.

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At that moment Risler has taken the tiny creature in his arms, the whole fascinating bundle of white draperies and light ribbons, and is trying to make it laugh and crow with baby-talk and gestures worthy of a grandfather. How old he looks, poor man! His tall body, which he contorts for the child's amusement, his hoarse voice, which becomes a low growl when he tries to soften it, are absurd and ridiculous.

Above, the wife taps the floor with her foot and mutters between her teeth:

"The idiot!"

At last, weary of waiting, she sends a servant to tell Monsieur that breakfast is served; but the game is so far advanced that Monsieur does not see how he can go away, how he can interrupt these explosions of laughter and little bird-like cries. He succeeds at last, however, in giving the child back to its nurse, and enters the hall, laughing heartily. He is laughing still when he enters the dining-room; but a glance from his wife stops him short.

Sidonie is seated at table before the chafing-dish, already filled. Her martyr-like attitude suggests a determination to be cross.

"Oh! there you are. It's very lucky!"

Risler took his seat, a little ashamed.

"What would you have, my love? That child is so—"

"I have asked you before now not to speak to me in that way. It isn't good form."

"What, not when we're alone?"

"Bah! you will never learn to adapt yourself to our new fortune. And what is the result? No one in this place treats me with any respect. Pere Achille hardly touches his hat to me when I pass his lodge. To be sure, I'm not a Fromont, and I haven't a carriage."

"Come, come, little one, you know perfectly well that you can use Madame Chorche's coupe. She always says it is at our disposal."

"How many times must I tell you that I don't choose to be under any obligation to that woman?"

"O Sidonie"

"Oh! yes, I know, it's all understood. Madame Fromont is the good Lord himself. Every one is forbidden to touch her. And I must make up my mind to be a nobody in my own house, to allow myself to be humiliated, trampled under foot."

“Come, come, little one—”

Poor Risler tries to interpose, to say a word in favor of his dear Madame “Chorche.” But he has no tact. This is the worst possible method of effecting a reconciliation; and Sidonie at once bursts forth:

“I tell you that that woman, with all her calm airs, is proud and spiteful. In the first place, she detests me, I know that. So long as I was poor little Sidonie and she could toss me her broken dolls and old clothes, it was all right, but now that I am my own mistress as well as she, it vexes her and humiliates her. Madame gives me advice with a lofty air, and criticises what I do. I did wrong to have a maid. Of course! Wasn’t I in the habit of waiting on myself? She never loses a chance to wound me. When I call on her

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on Wednesdays, you should hear the tone in which she asks me, before everybody, how 'dear Madame Chebe' is. Oh! yes. I'm a Chebe and she's a Fromont. One's as good as the other, in my opinion. My grandfather was a druggist. What was hers? A peasant who got rich by money-lending. I'll tell her so one of these days, if she shows me too much of her pride; and I'll tell her, too, that their little imp, although they don't suspect it, looks just like that old Pere Gardinois, and heaven knows he isn't handsome."

"Oh!" exclaims Risler, unable to find words to reply.

"Oh! yes, of course! I advise you to admire their child. She's always ill. She cries all night like a little cat. It keeps me awake. And afterward, through the day, I have mamma's piano and her scales—tra, la la la! If the music were only worth listening to!"

Risler has taken the wise course. He does not say a word until he sees that she is beginning to calm down a little, when he completes the soothing process with compliments.

"How pretty we are to-day! Are we going out soon to make some calls, eh?"

He resorts to this mode of address to avoid the more familiar form, which is so offensive to her.

"No, I am not going to make calls," Sidonie replies with a certain pride. "On the contrary, I expect to receive them. This is my day."

In response to her husband's astounded, bewildered expression she continues:

"Why, yes, this is my day. Madame Fromont has one; I can have one also, I fancy."

"Of course, of course," said honest Risler, looking about with some little uneasiness. "So that's why I saw so many flowers everywhere, on the landing and in the drawing-room."

"Yes, my maid went down to the garden this morning. Did I do wrong? Oh! you don't say so, but I'm sure you think I did wrong. 'Dame'! I thought the flowers in the garden belonged to us as much as to the Fromonts."

"Certainly they do—but you—it would have been better perhaps—"

"To ask leave? That's it—to humble myself again for a few paltry chrysanthemums and two or three bits of green. Besides, I didn't make any secret of taking the flowers; and when she comes up a little later—"

“Is she coming? Ah! that’s very kind of her.”

Sidonie turned upon him indignantly.

“What’s that? Kind of her? Upon my word, if she doesn’t come, it would be the last straw. When I go every Wednesday to be bored to death in her salon with a crowd of affected, simpering women!”

She did not say that those same Wednesdays of Madame Fromont’s were very useful to her, that they were like a weekly journal of fashion, one of those composite little publications in which you are told how to enter and to leave a room, how to bow, how to place flowers in a jardiniere and cigars in a case, to say nothing of the engravings, the procession of graceful, faultlessly attired men and women, and the names of the best modistes. Nor did Sidonie add that she had entreated all those friends of Claire’s, of whom she spoke so scornfully, to come to see her on her own day, and that the day was selected by them.

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Will they come? Will Madame Fromont Jeune insult Madame Risler Aine by absenting herself on her first Friday? The thought makes her almost feverish with anxiety.

“For heaven’s sake, hurry!” she says again and again. “Good heavens! how long you are at your, breakfast!”

It is a fact that it is one of honest Risler’s ways to eat slowly, and to light his pipe at the table while he sips his coffee. To-day he must renounce these cherished habits, must leave the pipe in its case because of the smoke, and, as soon as he has swallowed the last mouthful, run hastily and dress, for his wife insists that he must come up during the afternoon and pay his respects to the ladies.

What a sensation in the factory when they see Risler Aine come in, on a week-day, in a black frock-coat and white cravat!

“Are you going to a wedding, pray?” cries Sigismond, the cashier, behind his grating.

And Risler, not without a feeling of pride, replies:

“This is my wife’s reception day!”

Soon everybody in the place knows that it is Sidonie’s day; and Pere Achille, who takes care of the garden, is not very well pleased to find that the branches of the winter laurels by the gate are broken.

Before taking his seat at the table upon which he draws, in the bright light from the tall windows, Risler has taken off his fine frock-coat, which embarrasses him, and has turned up his clean shirt-sleeves; but the idea that his wife is expecting company preoccupies and disturbs him; and from time to time he puts on his coat and goes up to her.

“Has no one come?” he asks timidly.

“No, Monsieur, no one.”

In the beautiful red drawing-room—for they have a drawing-room in red damask, with a console between the windows and a pretty table in the centre of the light-flowered carpet—Sidonie has established herself in the attitude of a woman holding a reception, a circle of chairs of many shapes around her. Here and there are books, reviews, a little work-basket in the shape of a gamebag, with silk tassels, a bunch of violets in a glass vase, and green plants in the jardinières. Everything is arranged exactly as in the Fromonts’ apartments on the floor below; but the taste, that invisible line which separates the distinguished from the vulgar, is not yet refined. You would say it was a passable copy of a pretty genre picture. The hostess’s attire, even, is too new; she looks more as if she were making a call than as if she were at home. In Risler’s eyes

everything is superb, beyond reproach; he is preparing to say so as he enters the salon, but, in face of his wife's wrathful glance, he checks himself in terror.

"You see, it's four o'clock," she says, pointing to the clock with an angry gesture. "No one will come. But I take it especially ill of Claire not to come up. She is at home—I am sure of it—I can hear her."

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Indeed, ever since noon, Sidonie has listened intently to the slightest sounds on the floor below, the child's crying, the closing of doors. Risler attempts to go down again in order to avoid a renewal of the conversation at breakfast; but his wife will not allow him to do so. The very least he can do is to stay with her when everybody else abandons her, and so he remains there, at a loss what to say, rooted to the spot, like those people who dare not move during a storm for fear of attracting the lightning. Sidonie moves excitedly about, going in and out of the salon, changing the position of a chair, putting it back again, looking at herself as she passes the mirror, and ringing for her maid to send her to ask Pere Achille if no one has inquired for her. That Pere Achille is such a spiteful creature! Perhaps when people have come, he has said that she was out.

But no, the concierge has not seen any one.

Silence and consternation. Sidonie is standing at the window on the left, Risler at the one on the right. From there they can see the little garden, where the darkness is gathering, and the black smoke which the chimney emits beneath the lowering clouds. Sigismond's window is the first to show a light on the ground floor; the cashier trims his lamp himself with painstaking care, and his tall shadow passes in front of the flame and bends double behind the grating. Sidonie's wrath is diverted a moment by these familiar details.

Suddenly a small coupe drives into the garden and stops in front of the door. At last some one is coming. In that pretty whirl of silk and flowers and jet and flounces and furs, as it runs quickly up the step, Sidonie has recognized one of the most fashionable frequenters of the Fromont salon, the wife of a wealthy dealer in bronzes. What an honor to receive a call from such an one! Quick, quick! the family takes its position, Monsieur in front of the hearth, Madame in an easychair, carelessly turning the leaves of a magazine. Wasted pose! The fair caller did not come to see Sidonie; she has stopped at the floor below.

Ah! if Madame Georges could hear what her neighbor says of her and her friends!

At that moment the door opens and "Mademoiselle Planus" is announced. She is the cashier's sister, a poor old maid, humble and modest, who has made it her duty to make this call upon the wife of her brother's employer, and who is amazed at the warm welcome she receives. She is surrounded and made much of. "How kind of you to come! Draw up to the fire." They overwhelm her with attentions and show great interest in her slightest word. Honest Risler's smiles are as warm as his thanks. Sidonie herself displays all her fascinations, overjoyed to exhibit herself in her glory to one who was her equal in the old days, and to reflect that the other, in the room below, must hear that she has had callers. So she makes as much noise as possible, moving chairs, pushing the table around; and when the lady takes her leave, dazzled, enchanted, bewildered, she escorts her to the landing with a great rustling of flounces,

and calls to her in a very loud voice, leaning over the rail, that she is at home every Friday. "You understand, every Friday."

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Now it is dark. The two great lamps in the salon are lighted. In the adjoining room they hear the servant laying the table. It is all over. Madame Fromont Jeune will not come.

Sidonie is pale with rage.

“Just fancy, that minx can’t come up eighteen steps! No doubt Madame thinks we’re not grand enough for her. Ah! but I’ll have my revenge.”

As she pours forth her wrath in unjust words, her voice becomes coarse, takes on the intonations of the faubourg, an accent of the common people which betrays the ex-apprentice of Mademoiselle Le Mire.

Risler is unlucky enough to make a remark.

“Who knows? Perhaps the child is ill.”

She turns upon him in a fury, as if she would like to bite him.

“Will you hold your tongue about that brat? After all, it’s your fault that this has happened to me. You don’t know how to make people treat me with respect.”

And as she closed the door of her bedroom violently, making the globes on the lamps tremble, as well as all the knick-knacks on the etageres, Risler, left alone, stands motionless in the centre of the salon, looking with an air of consternation at his white cuffs, his broad patent-leather shoes, and mutters mechanically:

“My wife’s reception day!”

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

Affectation of indifference
Always smiling condescendingly
Convent of Saint Joseph, four shoes under the bed!
Deeming every sort of occupation beneath him
Dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed
He fixed the time mentally when he would speak
Little feathers fluttering for an opportunity to fly away
No one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were
Pass half the day in procuring two cakes, worth three sous
She was of those who disdain no compliment
Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter
Superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works
Terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings
The groom isn’t handsome, but the bride’s as pretty as a picture
The poor must pay for all their enjoyments



FROMONT AND RISLER

By Alphonse daudet

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRUE PEARL AND THE FALSE

"What can be the matter? What have I done to her?" Claire Fromont very often wondered when she thought of Sidonie.

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She was entirely ignorant of what had formerly taken place between her friend and Georges at Savigny. Her own life was so upright, her mind so pure, that it was impossible for her to divine the jealous, mean-spirited ambition that had grown up by her side within the past fifteen years. And yet the enigmatical expression in that pretty face as it smiled upon her gave her a vague feeling of uneasiness which she could not understand. An affectation of politeness, strange enough between friends, was suddenly succeeded by an ill-dissembled anger, a cold, stinging tone, in presence of which Claire was as perplexed as by a difficult problem. Sometimes, too, a singular presentiment, the ill-defined intuition of a great misfortune, was mingled with her uneasiness; for all women have in some degree a kind of second sight, and, even in the most innocent, ignorance of evil is suddenly illumined by visions of extraordinary lucidity.

From time to time, as the result of a conversation somewhat longer than usual, or of one of those unexpected meetings when faces taken by surprise allow their real thoughts to be seen, Madame Fromont reflected seriously concerning this strange little Sidonie; but the active, urgent duties of life, with its accompaniment of affections and preoccupations, left her no time for dwelling upon such trifles.

To all women comes a time when they encounter such sudden windings in the road that their whole horizon changes and all their points of view become transformed.

Had Claire been a young girl, the falling away of that friendship bit by bit, as if torn from her by an unkindly hand, would have been a source of great regret to her. But she had lost her father, the object of her greatest, her only youthful affection; then she had married. The child had come, with its thrice welcome demands upon her every moment. Moreover, she had with her her mother, almost in her dotage, still stupefied by her husband's tragic death. In a life so fully occupied, Sidonie's caprices received but little attention; and it had hardly occurred to Claire Fromont to be surprised at her marriage to Risler. He was clearly too old for her; but, after all, what difference did it make, if they loved each other?

As for being vexed because little Chebe had attained that lofty position, had become almost her equal, her superior nature was incapable of such pettiness. On the contrary, she would have been glad with all her heart to know that that young wife, whose home was so near her own, who lived the same life, so to speak, and had been her playmate in childhood, was happy and highly esteemed. Being most kindly disposed toward her, she tried to teach her, to instruct her in the ways of society, as one might instruct an attractive provincial, who fell but little short of being altogether charming.

Advice is not readily accepted by one pretty young woman from another. When Madame Fromont gave a grand dinner-party, she took Madame Risler to her bedroom, and said to her, smiling frankly in order not to vex her: "You have put on too many jewels, my dear. And then, you know, with a high dress one doesn't wear flowers in the

hair.” Sidonie blushed, and thanked her friend, but wrote down an additional grievance against her in the bottom of her heart.

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In Claire's circle her welcome was decidedly cold. The Faubourg Saint-Germain has its pretensions; but do not imagine that the Marais has none! Those wives and daughters of mechanics, of wealthy manufacturers, knew little Chebe's story; indeed, they would have guessed it simply by her manner of making her appearance and by her demeanor among them.

Sidonie's efforts were unavailing. She retained the manners of a shop-girl. Her slightly artificial amiability, sometimes too humble, was as unpleasant as the spurious elegance of the shop; and her disdainful attitudes recalled the superb airs of the head saleswomen in the great dry-goods establishments, arrayed in black silk gowns, which they take off in the dressing-room when they go away at night—who stare with an imposing air, from the vantage-point of their mountains of curls, at the poor creatures who venture to discuss prices.

She felt that she was being examined and criticised, and her modesty was compelled to place itself upon a war footing. Of the names mentioned in her presence, the amusements, the entertainments, the books of which they talked to her, she knew nothing. Claire did her best to help her, to keep her on the surface, with a friendly hand always outstretched; but many of these ladies thought Sidonie pretty; that was enough to make them bear her a grudge for seeking admission to their circle. Others, proud of their husbands' standing and of their wealth, could not invent enough unspoken affronts and patronizing phrases to humiliate the little parvenue.

Sidonie included them all in a single phrase: "Claire's friends—that is to say, my enemies!" But she was seriously incensed against but one.

The two partners had no suspicion of what was taking place between their wives. Risler, continually engrossed in his press, sometimes remained at his draughting-table until midnight. Fromont passed his days abroad, lunched at his club, was almost never at the factory. He had his reasons for that.

Sidonie's proximity disturbed him. His capricious passion for her, that passion that he had sacrificed to his uncle's last wishes, recurred too often to his memory with all the regret one feels for the irreparable; and, conscious that he was weak, he fled. His was a pliable nature, without sustaining purpose, intelligent enough to appreciate his failings, too weak to guide itself. On the evening of Risler's wedding—he had been married but a few months himself—he had experienced anew, in that woman's presence, all the emotion of the stormy evening at Savigny. Thereafter, without self-examination, he avoided seeing her again or speaking with her. Unfortunately, as they lived in the same house, as their wives saw each other ten times a day, chance sometimes brought them together; and this strange thing happened—that the husband, wishing to remain virtuous, deserted his home altogether and sought distraction elsewhere.

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Claire was not astonished that it was so. She had become accustomed, during her father's lifetime, to the constant comings and goings of a business life; and during her husband's absences, zealously performing her duties as wife and mother, she invented long tasks, occupations of all sorts, walks for the child, prolonged, peaceful tarryings in the sunlight, from which she would return home, overjoyed with the little one's progress, deeply impressed with the gleeful enjoyment of all infants in the fresh air, but with a touch of their radiance in the depths of her serious eyes.

Sidonie also went out a great deal. It often happened, toward night, that Georges's carriage, driving through the gateway, would compel Madame Risler to step hastily aside as she was returning in a gorgeous costume from a triumphal promenade. The boulevard, the shop-windows, the purchases, made after long deliberation as if to enjoy to the full the pleasure of purchasing, detained her very late. They would exchange a bow, a cold glance at the foot of the staircase; and Georges would hurry into his apartments, as into a place of refuge, concealing beneath a flood of caresses, bestowed upon the child his wife held out to him, the sudden emotion that had seized him.

Sidonie, for her part, seemed to have forgotten everything, and to have retained no other feeling but contempt for that weak, cowardly creature. Moreover, she had many other things to think about.

Her husband had just had a piano placed in her red salon, between the windows.

After long hesitation she had decided to learn to sing, thinking that it was rather late to begin to play the piano; and twice a week Madame Dobson, a pretty, sentimental blonde, came to give her lessons from twelve o'clock to one. In the silence of the neighborhood the a-a-a and o-oo, persistently prolonged, repeated again and again, with windows open, gave the factory the atmosphere of a boarding-school.

And it was in reality a schoolgirl who was practising these exercises, an inexperienced, wavering little soul, full of unconfessed longings, with everything to learn and to find out in order to become a real woman. But her ambition confined itself to a superficial aspect of things.

"Claire Fromont plays the piano; I will sing. She is considered a refined and distinguished woman, and I intend that people shall say the same of me."

Without a thought of improving her education, Sidonie passed her life running about among milliners and dressmakers. "What are people going to wear this winter?" was her cry. She was attracted by the gorgeous displays in the shop-windows, by everything that caught the eye of the passers-by.

The one thing that Sidonie envied Claire more than all else was the child, the luxurious plaything, beribboned from the curtains of its cradle to its nurse's cap. She did not think



of the sweet, maternal duties, demanding patience and self-abnegation, of the long rockings when sleep would not come, of the laughing awakenings sparkling with fresh water. No! she saw in the child naught but the daily walk. It is such a pretty sight, the little bundle of finery, with floating ribbons and long feathers, that follows young mothers through the crowded streets.

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When she wanted company she had only her parents or her husband. She preferred to go out alone. The excellent Risler had such an absurd way of showing his love for her, playing with her as if she were a doll, pinching her chin and her cheek, capering about her, crying, "Hou! hou!" or staring at her with his great, soft eyes like an affectionate and grateful dog. That senseless love, which made of her a toy, a mantel ornament, made her ashamed. As for her parents, they were an embarrassment to her in presence of the people she wished to know, and immediately after her marriage she almost got rid of them by hiring a little house for them at Montrouge. That step had cut short the frequent invasions of Monsieur Chebe and his long frock-coat, and the endless visits of good Madame Chebe, in whom the return of comfortable circumstances had revived former habits of gossip and of indolence.

Sidonie would have been very glad to rid herself of the Delobelles in the same way, for their proximity annoyed her. But the Marais was a central location for the old actor, because the boulevard theatres were so near; then, too, Desiree, like all sedentary persons, clung to the familiar outlook, and her gloomy courtyard, dark at four o'clock in winter, seemed to her like a friend, like a familiar face which the sun lighted up at times as if it were smiling at her. As she was unable to get rid of them, Sidonie had adopted the course of ceasing to visit them.

In truth, her life would have been lonely and depressing enough, had it not been for the distractions which Claire Fromont procured for her. Each time added fuel to her wrath. She would say to herself:

"Must everything come to me through her?"

And when, just at dinner-time, a box at the theatre or an invitation for the evening was sent to her from the floor below, while she was dressing, overjoyed at the opportunity to exhibit herself, she thought of nothing but crushing her rival. But such opportunities became more rare as Claire's time was more and more engrossed by her child. When Grandfather Gardinois came to Paris, however, he never failed to bring the two families together. The old peasant's gayety, for its freer expansion, needed little Sidonie, who did not take alarm at his jests. He would take them all four to dine at Philippe's, his favorite restaurant, where he knew all the patrons, the waiters and the steward, would spend a lot of money, and then take them to a reserved box at the Opera-Comique or the Palais-Royal.

At the theatre he laughed uproariously, talked familiarly with the box-openers, as he did with the waiters at Philippe's, loudly demanded footstools for the ladies, and when the performance was over insisted on having the topcoats and fur wraps of his party first of all, as if he were the only three-million parvenu in the audience.

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For these somewhat vulgar entertainments, from which her husband usually excused himself, Claire, with her usual tact, dressed very plainly and attracted no attention. Sidonie, on the contrary, in all her finery, in full view of the boxes, laughed with all her heart at the grandfather's anecdotes, happy to have descended from the second or third gallery, her usual place in the old days, to that lovely proscenium box, adorned with mirrors, with a velvet rail that seemed made expressly for her light gloves, her ivory opera-glass, and her spangled fan. The tawdry glitter of the theatre, the red and gold of the hangings, were genuine splendor to her. She bloomed among them like a pretty paper flower in a filigree jardiniere.

One evening, at the performance of a successful play at the Palais-Royal, among all the noted women who were present, painted celebrities wearing microscopic hats and armed with huge fans, their rouge-besmeared faces standing out from the shadow of the boxes in the gaudy setting of their gowns, Sidonie's behavior, her toilette, the peculiarities of her laugh and her expression attracted much attention. All the opera-glasses in the hall, guided by the magnetic current that is so powerful under the great chandeliers, were turned one by one upon the box in which she sat. Claire soon became embarrassed, and modestly insisted upon changing places with her husband, who, unluckily, had accompanied them that evening.

Georges, youthful and elegant, sitting beside Sidonie, seemed her natural companion, while Risler Alle, always so placid and self-effacing, seemed in his proper place beside Claire Fromont, who in her dark clothes suggested the respectable woman incog. at the Bal de l'Opera.

Upon leaving the theatre each of the partners offered his arm to his neighbor. A box-opener, speaking to Sidonie, referred to Georges as "your husband," and the little woman beamed with delight.

"Your husband!"

That simple phrase was enough to upset her and set in motion a multitude of evil currents in the depths of her heart. As they passed through the corridors and the foyer, she watched Risler and Madame "Chorche" walking in front of them. Claire's refinement of manner seemed to her to be vulgarized and annihilated by Risler's shuffling gait. "How ugly he must make me look when we are walking together!" she said to herself. And her heart beat fast as she thought what a charming, happy, admired couple they would have made, she and this Georges Fromont, whose arm was trembling beneath her own.

Thereupon, when the blue-lined carriage drove up to the door of the theatre, she began to reflect, for the first time, that, when all was said, Claire had stolen her place and that she would be justified in trying to recover it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BREWERY ON THE RUE BLONDEL

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After his marriage Risler had given up the brewery. Sidonie would have been glad to have him leave the house in the evening for a fashionable club, a resort of wealthy, well-dressed men; but the idea of his returning, amid clouds of pipe-smoke, to his friends of earlier days, Sigismond, Delobelle, and her own father, humiliated her and made her unhappy. So he ceased to frequent the place; and that was something of a sacrifice. It was almost a glimpse of his native country, that brewery situated in a remote corner of Paris. The infrequent carriages, the high, barred windows of the ground floors, the odor of fresh drugs, of pharmaceutical preparations, imparted to that narrow little Rue Blondel a vague resemblance to certain streets in Basle or Zurich.

The brewery was managed by a Swiss and crowded with men of that nationality. When the door was opened, through the smoke-laden atmosphere, dense with the accents of the North, one had a vision of a vast, low room with hams hanging from the rafters, casks of beer standing in a row, the floor ankle-deep with sawdust, and on the counter great salad-bowls filled with potatoes as red as chestnuts, and baskets of pretzels fresh from the oven, their golden knots sprinkled with white salt.

For twenty years Risler had had his pipe there, a long pipe marked with his name in the rack reserved for the regular customers. He had also his table, at which he was always joined by several discreet, quiet compatriots, who listened admiringly, but without comprehending them, to the endless harangues of Chebe and Delobelle. When Risler ceased his visits to the brewery, the two last-named worthies likewise turned their backs upon it, for several excellent reasons. In the first place, M. Chebe now lived a considerable distance away. Thanks to the generosity of his children, the dream of his whole life was realized at last.

"When I am rich," the little man used to say in his cheerless rooms in the Marais, "I will have a house of my own, at the gates of Paris, almost in the country, a little garden which I will plant and water myself. That will be better for my health than all the excitement of the capital."

Well, he had his house now, but he did not enjoy himself in it. It was at Montrouge, on the road that runs around the city. "A small chalet, with garden," said the advertisement, printed on a placard which gave an almost exact idea of the dimensions of the property. The papers were new and of rustic design, the paint perfectly fresh; a water-butt planted beside a vine-clad arbor played the part of a pond. In addition to all these advantages, only a hedge separated this paradise from another "chalet with garden" of precisely the same description, occupied by Sigismond Planus the cashier, and his sister. To Madame Chebe that was a most precious circumstance. When the good woman was bored, she would take a stock of knitting and darning and go and sit in the old maid's arbor, dazzling her with the tale of her past splendors. Unluckily, her husband had not the same source of distraction.

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However, everything went well at first. It was midsummer, and M. Chebe, always in his shirt-sleeves, was busily employed in getting settled. Each nail to be driven in the house was the subject of leisurely reflections, of endless discussions. It was the same with the garden. He had determined at first to make an English garden of it, lawns always green, winding paths shaded by shrubbery. But the trouble of it was that it took so long for the shrubbery to grow.

"I have a mind to make an orchard of it," said the impatient little man.

And thenceforth he dreamed of nothing but vegetables, long lines of beans, and peach-trees against the wall. He dug for whole mornings, knitting his brows in a preoccupied way and wiping his forehead ostentatiously before his wife, so that she would say:

"For heaven's sake, do rest a bit—you're killing yourself."

The result was that the garden was a mixture: flowers and fruit, park and kitchen garden; and whenever he went into Paris M. Chebe was careful to decorate his buttonhole with a rose from his rose-bushes.

While the fine weather lasted, the good people did not weary of admiring the sunsets behind the fortifications, the long days, the bracing country air. Sometimes, in the evening, when the windows were open, they sang duets; and in presence of the stars in heaven, which began to twinkle simultaneously with the lanterns on the railway around the city, Ferdinand would become poetical. But when the rain came and he could not go out, what misery! Madame Chebe, a thorough Parisian, sighed for the narrow streets of the Marais, her expeditions to the market of Blancs-Manteaux, and to the shops of the quarter.

As she sat by the window, her usual place for sewing and observation, she would gaze at the damp little garden, where the volubilis and the nasturtiums, stripped of their blossoms, were dropping away from the lattices with an air of exhaustion, at the long, straight line of the grassy slope of the fortifications, still fresh and green, and, a little farther on, at the corner of a street, the office of the Paris omnibuses, with all the points of their route inscribed in enticing letters on the green walls. Whenever one of the omnibuses lumbered away on its journey, she followed it with her eyes, as a government clerk at Cayenne or Noumea gazes after the steamer about to return to France; she made the trip with it, knew just where it would stop, at what point it would lurch around a corner, grazing the shop-windows with its wheels.

As a prisoner, M. Chebe became a terrible trial. He could not work in the garden. On Sundays the fortifications were deserted; he could no longer strut about among the workingmen's families dining on the grass, and pass from group to group in a neighborly way, his feet encased in embroidered slippers, with the authoritative demeanor of a wealthy landowner of the vicinity. This he missed more than anything else, consumed



as he was by the desire to make people think about him. So that, having nothing to do, having no one to pose before, no one to listen to his schemes, his stories, the anecdote of the accident to the Duc d'Orleans—a similar accident had happened to him in his youth, you remember—the unfortunate Ferdinand overwhelmed his wife with reproaches.

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"Your daughter banishes us—your daughter is ashamed of us!"

She heard nothing but that "Your daughter—your daughter—your daughter!" For, in his anger with Sidonie, he denied her, throwing upon his wife the whole responsibility for that monstrous and unnatural child. It was a genuine relief for poor Madame Chebe when her husband took an omnibus at the office to go and hunt up Delobelle—whose hours for lounging were always at his disposal—and pour into his bosom all his rancor against his son-in-law and his daughter.

The illustrious Delobelle also bore Risler a grudge, and freely said of him: "He is a dastard."

The great man had hoped to form an integral part of the new household, to be the organizer of festivities, the 'arbiter elegantiarum'. Instead of which, Sidonie received him very coldly, and Risler no longer even took him to the brewery. However, the actor did not complain too loud, and whenever he met his friend he overwhelmed him with attentions and flattery; for he had need of him.

Weary of awaiting the discerning manager, seeing that the engagement he had longed for so many years did not come, it had occurred to Delobelle to purchase a theatre and manage it himself. He counted upon Risler for the funds. Opportunely enough, a small theatre on the boulevard happened to be for sale, as a result of the failure of its manager. Delobelle mentioned it to Risler, at first very vaguely, in a wholly hypothetical form—"There would be a good chance to make a fine stroke." Risler listened with his usual phlegm, saying, "Indeed, it would be a good thing for you." And to a more direct suggestion, not daring to answer, "No," he took refuge behind such phrases as "I will see"—"Perhaps later"—"I don't say no"—and finally uttered the unlucky words "I must see the estimates."

For a whole week the actor had delved away at plans and figures, seated between his wife and daughter, who watched him in admiration, and intoxicated themselves with this latest dream. The people in the house said, "Monsieur Delobelle is going to buy a theatre." On the boulevard, in the actors' cafes, nothing was talked of but this transaction. Delobelle did not conceal the fact that he had found some one to advance the funds; the result being that he was surrounded by a crowd of unemployed actors, old comrades who tapped him familiarly on the shoulder and recalled themselves to his recollection—"You know, old boy." He promised engagements, breakfasted at the cafe, wrote letters there, greeted those who entered with the tips of his fingers, held very animated conversations in corners; and already two threadbare authors had read to him a drama in seven tableaux, which was "exactly what he wanted" for his opening piece. He talked about "my theatre!" and his letters were addressed, "Monsieur Delobelle, Manager."

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When he had composed his prospectus and made his estimates, he went to the factory to see Risler, who, being very busy, made an appointment to meet him in the Rue Blondel; and that same evening, Delobelle, being the first to arrive at the brewery, established himself at their old table, ordered a pitcher of beer and two glasses, and waited. He waited a long while, with his eye on the door, trembling with impatience. Whenever any one entered, the actor turned his head. He had spread his papers on the table, and pretended to be reading them, with animated gestures and movements of the head and lips.

It was a magnificent opportunity, unique in its way. He already fancied himself acting—for that was the main point—acting, in a theatre of his own, roles written expressly for him, to suit his talents, in which he would produce all the effect of—

Suddenly the door opened, and M. Chebe made his appearance amid the pipe-smoke. He was as surprised and annoyed to find Delobelle there as Delobelle himself was by his coming. He had written to his son-in-law that morning that he wished to speak with him on a matter of very serious importance, and that he would meet him at the brewery. It was an affair of honor, entirely between themselves, from man to man. The real fact concerning this affair of honor was that M. Chebe had given notice of his intention to leave the little house at Montrouge, and had hired a shop with an entresol in the Rue du Mail, in the midst of a business district. A shop? Yes, indeed! And now he was a little alarmed regarding his hasty step, anxious to know how his son-in-law would take it, especially as the shop cost much more than the Montrouge house, and there were some repairs to be made at the outset. As he had long been acquainted with his son-in-law's kindness of heart, M. Chebe had determined to appeal to him at once, hoping to lead him into his game and throw upon him the responsibility for this domestic change. Instead of Risler he found Delobelle.

They looked askance at each other, with an unfriendly eye, like two dogs meeting beside the same dish. Each divined for whom the other was waiting, and they did not try to deceive each other.

"Isn't my son-in-law here?" asked M. Chebe, eying the documents spread over the table, and emphasizing the words "my son-in-law," to indicate that Risler belonged to him and to nobody else.

"I am waiting for him," Delobelle replied, gathering up his papers.

He pressed his lips together, as he added with a dignified, mysterious, but always theatrical air:

"It is a matter of very great importance."

"So is mine," declared M. Chebe, his three hairs standing erect like a porcupine's quills.

As he spoke, he took his seat on the bench beside Delobelle, ordered a pitcher and two glasses as the former had done, then sat erect with his hands in his pockets and his back against the wall, waiting in his turn. The two empty glasses in front of them, intended for the same absentee, seemed to be hurling defiance at each other.

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But Risler did not come.

The two men, drinking in silence, lost their patience and fidgeted about on the bench, each hoping that the other would tire of waiting.

At last their ill-humor overflowed, and naturally poor Risler received the whole flood.

"What an outrage to keep a man of my years waiting so long!" began M. Chebe, who never mentioned his great age except upon such occasions.

"I believe, on my word, that he is making sport of us," replied M. Delobelle.

And the other:

"No doubt Monsieur had company to dinner."

"And such company!" scornfully exclaimed the illustrious actor, in whose mind bitter memories were awakened.

"The fact is—" continued M. Chebe.

They drew closer to each other and talked. The hearts of both were full in respect to Sidonie and Risler. They opened the flood-gates. That Risler, with all his good-nature, was an egotist pure and simple, a parvenu. They laughed at his accent and his bearing, they mimicked certain of his peculiarities. Then they talked about his household, and, lowering their voices, they became confidential, laughed familiarly together, were friends once more.

M. Chebe went very far: "Let him beware! he has been foolish enough to send the father and mother away from their daughter; if anything happens to her, he can't blame us. A girl who hasn't her parents' example before her eyes, you understand—"

"Certainly—certainly," said Delobelle; "especially as Sidonie has become a great flirt. However, what can you expect? He will get no more than he deserves. No man of his age ought to—Hush! here he is!"

Risler had entered the room, and was walking toward them, distributing hand-shakes all along the benches.

There was a moment of embarrassment between the three friends. Risler excused himself as well as he could. He had been detained at home; Sidonie had company—Delobelle touched M. Chebe's foot under the table—and, as he spoke, the poor man, decidedly perplexed by the two empty glasses that awaited him, wondered in front of which of the two he ought to take his seat.

Delobelle was generous.

“You have business together, Messieurs; do not let me disturb you.”

He added in a low tone, winking at Risler:

“I have the papers.”

“The papers?” echoed Risler, in a bewildered tone.

“The estimates,” whispered the actor.

Thereupon, with a great show of discretion, he withdrew within himself, and resumed the reading of his documents, his head in his hands and his fingers in his ears.

The two others conversed by his side, first in undertones, then louder, for M. Chebe’s shrill, piercing voice could not long be subdued.—He wasn’t old enough to be buried, deuce take it!—He should have died of ennui at Montrouge.—What he must have was the bustle and life of the Rue de Mail or the Rue du Sentier—of the business districts.

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“Yes, but a shop? Why a shop?” Risler timidly ventured to ask.

“Why a shop?—why a shop?” repeated M. Chebe, red as an Easter egg, and raising his voice to its highest pitch. “Why, because I’m a merchant, Monsieur Risler, a merchant and son of a merchant. Oh! I see what you’re coming at. I have no business. But whose fault is it? If the people who shut me up at Montrouge, at the gates of Bicetre, like a paralytic, had had the good sense to furnish me with the money to start in business—”

At that point Risler succeeded in silencing him, and thereafter only snatches of the conversation could be heard: “a more convenient shop—high ceilings—better air—future plans—enormous business—I will speak when the time comes—many people will be astonished.”

As he caught these fragments of sentences, Delobelle became more and more absorbed in his estimates, presenting the eloquent back of the man who is not listening. Risler, sorely perplexed, slowly sipped his beer from time to time to keep himself, in countenance.

At last, when M. Chebe had grown calm, and with good reason, his son-in-law turned with a smile to the illustrious Delobelle, and met the stern, impassive glance which seemed to say, “Well! what of me?”

“Ah! Mon Dieu!—that is true,” thought the poor fellow.

Changing at once his chair and his glass, he took his seat opposite the actor. But M. Chebe had not Delobelle’s courtesy. Instead of discreetly moving away, he took his glass and joined the others, so that the great man, unwilling to speak before him, solemnly replaced his documents in his pocket a second time, saying to Risler:

“We will talk this over later.”

Very much later, in truth, for M. Chebe had reflected:

“My son-in-law is so good-natured! If I leave him with this swindler, who knows what he may get out of him?”

And he remained on guard. The actor was furious. It was impossible to postpone the matter to some other day, for Risler told them that he was going the next day to spend the next month at Savigny.

“A month at Savigny!” exclaimed M. Chebe, incensed at the thought of his son-in-law escaping him. “How about business?”

“Oh! I shall come to Paris every day with Georges. Monsieur Gardinois is very anxious to see his little Sidonie.”

M. Chebe shook his head. He considered it very imprudent. Business is business. A man ought to be on the spot, always on the spot, in the breach. Who could say?—the factory might take fire in the night. And he repeated sententiously: “The eye of the master, my dear fellow, the eye of the master,” while the actor—who was little better pleased by this intended departure—opened his great eyes; giving them an expression at once cunning and authoritative, the veritable expression of the eye of the master.

At last, about midnight, the last Montrouge omnibus bore away the tyrannical father-in-law, and Delobelle was able to speak.

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"Let us first look at the prospectus," he said, preferring not to attack the question of figures at once; and with his eyeglasses on his nose, he began, in a declamatory tone, always upon the stage: "When one considers coolly the decrepitude which dramatic art has reached in France, when one measures the distance that separates the stage of Moliere—"

There were several pages like that. Risler listened, puffing at his pipe, afraid to stir, for the reader looked at him every moment over his eyeglasses, to watch the effect of his phrases. Unfortunately, right in the middle of the prospectus, the cafe closed. The lights were extinguished; they must go.—And the estimates?—It was agreed that they should read them as they walked along. They stopped at every gaslight. The actor displayed his figures. So much for the hall, so much for the lighting, so much for poor-rates, so much for the actors. On that question of the actors he was firm.

"The best point about the affair," he said, "is that we shall have no leading man to pay. Our leading man will be Bibi." (When Delobelle mentioned himself, he commonly called himself Bibi.) "A leading man is paid twenty thousand francs, and as we have none to pay, it's just as if you put twenty thousand francs in your pocket. Tell me, isn't that true?"

Risler did not reply. He had the constrained manner, the wandering eyes of the man whose thoughts are elsewhere. The reading of the estimates being concluded, Delobelle, dismayed to find that they were drawing near the corner of the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes, put the question squarely. Would Risler advance the money, yes or no?

"Well!—no," said Risler, inspired by heroic courage, which he owed principally to the proximity of the factory and to the thought that the welfare of his family was at stake.

Delobelle was astounded. He had believed that the business was as good as done, and he stared at his companion, intensely agitated, his eyes as big as saucers, and rolling his papers in his hand.

"No," Risler continued, "I can't do what you ask, for this reason."

Thereupon the worthy man, slowly, with his usual heaviness of speech, explained that he was not rich. Although a partner in a wealthy house, he had no available funds. Georges and he drew a certain sum from the concern each month; then, when they struck a balance at the end of the year they divided the profits. It had cost him a good deal to begin housekeeping: all his savings. It was still four months before the inventory. Where was he to obtain the 30,000 francs to be paid down at once for the theatre? And then, beyond all that, the affair could not be successful.

“Why, it must succeed. Bibi will be there!” As he spoke, poor Bibi drew himself up to his full height; but Risler was determined, and all Bibi’s arguments met the same refusal—
“Later, in two or three years, I don’t say something may not be done.”

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The actor fought for a long time, yielding his ground inch by inch. He proposed revising his estimates. The thing might be done cheaper. "It would still be too dear for me," Risler interrupted. "My name doesn't belong to me. It is a part of the firm. I have no right to pledge it. Imagine my going into bankruptcy!" His voice trembled as he uttered the word.

"But if everything is in my name," said Delobelle, who had no superstition. He tried everything, invoked the sacred interests of art, went so far as to mention the fascinating actresses whose alluring glances—Risler laughed aloud.

"Come, come, you rascal! What's that you're saying? You forget that we're both married men, and that it is very late and our wives are expecting us. No ill-will, eh?—This is not a refusal, you understand.—By the way, come and see me after the inventory. We will talk it over again. Ah! there's Pere Achille putting out his gas.—I must go in. Good-night."

It was after one o'clock when the actor returned home. The two women were waiting for him, working as usual, but with a sort of feverish activity which was strange to them. Every moment the great scissors that Mamma Delobelle used to cut the brass wire were seized with strange fits of trembling, and Desiree's little fingers, as she mounted an insect, moved so fast that it made one dizzy to watch them. Even the long feathers of the little birds scattered about on the table before her seemed more brilliant, more richly colored, than on other days. It was because a lovely visitor named Hope had called upon them that evening. She had made the tremendous effort required to climb five dark flights of stairs, and had opened the door of the little room to cast a luminous glance therein. However much you may have been deceived in life, those magic gleams always dazzle you.

"Oh! if your father could only succeed!" said Mamma Delobelle from time to time, as if to sum up a whole world of happy thoughts to which her reverie abandoned itself.

"He will succeed, mamma, never fear. Monsieur Risler is so kind, I will answer for him. And Sidonie is very fond of us, too, although since she was married she does seem to neglect her old friends a little. But we must make allowance for the difference in our positions. Besides, I never shall forget what she did for me."

And, at the thought of what Sidonie had done for her, the little cripple applied herself with even more feverish energy to her work. Her electrified fingers moved with redoubled swiftness. You would have said that they were running after some fleeing, elusive thing, like happiness, for example, or the love of some one who loves you not.

"What was it that she did for you?" her mother would naturally have asked her; but at that moment she was only slightly interested in what her daughter said. She was thinking exclusively of her great man.

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"No! do you think so, my dear? Just suppose your father should have a theatre of his own and act again as in former days. You don't remember; you were too small then. But he had tremendous success, no end of recalls. One night, at Alencon, the subscribers to the theatre gave him a gold wreath. Ah! he was a brilliant man in those days, so lighthearted, so glad to be alive. Those who see him now don't know him, poor man, misfortune has changed him so. Oh, well! I feel sure that all that's necessary is a little success to make him young and happy again. And then there's money to be made managing theatres. The manager at Nantes had a carriage. Can you imagine us with a carriage? Can you imagine it, I say? That's what would be good for you. You could go out, leave your armchair once in a while. Your father would take us into the country. You would see the water and the trees you have had such a longing to see."

"Oh! the trees," murmured the pale little recluse, trembling from head to foot.

At that moment the street door of the house was closed violently, and M. Delobelle's measured step echoed in the vestibule. There was a moment of speechless, breathless anguish. The women dared not look at each other, and mamma's great scissors trembled so that they cut the wire crooked.

The poor devil had unquestionably received a terrible blow. His illusions crushed, the humiliation of a refusal, the jests of his comrades, the bill at the cafe where he had breakfasted on credit during the whole period of his managership, a bill which must be paid—all these things occurred to him in the silence and gloom of the five flights he had to climb. His heart was torn. Even so, the actor's nature was so strong in him that he deemed it his duty to envelop his distress, genuine as it was, in a conventional tragic mask.

As he entered, he paused, cast an ominous glance around the work-room, at the table covered with work, his little supper waiting for him in a corner, and the two dear, anxious faces looking up at him with glistening eyes. He stood a full minute without speaking—and you know how long a minute's silence seems on the stage; then he took three steps forward, sank upon a low chair beside the table, and exclaimed in a hissing voice:

"Ah! I am accursed!"

At the same time he dealt the table such a terrible blow with his fist that the "birds and insects for ornament" flew to the four corners of the room. His terrified wife rose and timidly approached him, while Desiree half rose in her armchair with an expression of nervous agony that distorted all her features.

Lolling in his chair, his arms hanging despondently by his sides, his head on his chest, the actor soliloquized—a fragmentary soliloquy, interrupted by sighs and dramatic hiccoughs, overflowing with imprecations against the pitiless, selfish bourgeois, those monsters to whom the artist gives his flesh and blood for food and drink.

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Then he reviewed his whole theatrical life, his early triumphs, the golden wreath from the subscribers at Alençon, his marriage to this “sainted woman,” and he pointed to the poor creature who stood by his side, with tears streaming from her eyes, and trembling lips, nodding her head dotingly at every word her husband said.

In very truth, a person who never had heard of the illustrious Delobelle could have told his history in detail after that long monologue. He recalled his arrival in Paris, his humiliations, his privations. Alas! he was not the one who had known privation. One had but to look at his full, rotund face beside the thin, drawn faces of the two women. But the actor did not look so closely.

“Oh!” he said, continuing to intoxicate himself with declamatory phrases, “oh! to have struggled so long. For ten years, fifteen years, have I struggled on, supported by these devoted creatures, fed by them.”

“Papa, papa, hush,” cried Desiree, clasping her hands.

“Yes, fed by them, I say—and I do not blush for it. For I accept all this devotion in the name of sacred art. But this is too much. Too much has been put upon me. I renounce the stage!”

“Oh! my dear, what is that you say?” cried Mamma Delobelle, rushing to his side.

“No, leave me. I have reached the end of my strength. They have slain the artist in me. It is all over. I renounce the stage.”

If you had seen the two women throw their arms about him then, implore him to struggle on, prove to him that he had no right to give up, you could not have restrained your tears. But Delobelle resisted.

He yielded at last, however, and promised to continue the fight a little while, since it was their wish; but it required many an entreaty and caress to carry the point.

CHAPTER IX

AT SAVIGNY

It was a great misfortune, that sojourn of the two families at Savigny for a month.

After an interval of two years Georges and Sidonie found themselves side by side once more on the old estate, too old not to be always like itself, where the stones, the ponds, the trees, always the same, seemed to cast derision upon all that changes and passes away. A renewal of intercourse under such circumstances must have been disastrous

to two natures that were not of a very different stamp, and far more virtuous than those two.

As for Claire, she never had been so happy; Savigny never had seemed so lovely to her. What joy to walk with her child over the greensward where she herself had walked as a child; to sit, a young mother, upon the shaded seats from which her own mother had looked on at her childish games years before; to go, leaning on Georges's arm, to seek out the nooks where they had played together. She felt a tranquil contentment, the overflowing happiness of placid lives which enjoy their bliss in silence; and all day long her skirts swept along the paths, guided by the tiny footsteps of the child, her cries and her demands upon her mother's care.

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Sidonie seldom took part in these maternal promenades. She said that the chatter of children tired her, and therein she agreed with old Gardinois, who seized upon any pretext to annoy his granddaughter. He believed that he accomplished that object by devoting himself exclusively to Sidonie, and arranging even more entertainments for her than on her former visit. The carriages that had been shut up in the carriage-house for two years, and were dusted once a week because the spiders spun their webs on the silk cushions, were placed at her disposal. The horses were harnessed three times a day, and the gate was continually turning on its hinges. Everybody in the house followed this impulse of worldliness. The gardener paid more attention to his flowers because Madame Risler selected the finest ones to wear in her hair at dinner. And then there were calls to be made. Luncheon parties were given, gatherings at which Madame Fromont Jeune presided, but at which Sidonie, with her lively manners, shone supreme. Indeed, Claire often left her a clear field. The child had its hours for sleeping and riding out, with which no amusements could interfere. The mother was compelled to remain away, and it often happened that she was unable to go with Sidonie to meet the partners when they came from Paris at night.

"You will make my excuses," she would say, as she went up to her room.

Madame Risler was triumphant. A picture of elegant indolence, she would drive away behind the galloping horses, unconscious of the swiftness of their pace, without a thought in her mind.

Other carriages were always waiting at the station. Two or three times she heard some one near her whisper, "That is Madame Fromont Jeune," and, indeed, it was a simple matter for people to make the mistake, seeing the three return together from the station, Sidonie sitting beside Georges on the back seat, laughing and talking with him, and Risler facing them, smiling contentedly with his broad hands spread flat upon his knees, but evidently feeling a little out of place in that fine carriage. The thought that she was taken for Madame Fromont made her very proud, and she became a little more accustomed to it every day. On their arrival at the chateau, the two families separated until dinner; but, in the presence of his wife sitting tranquilly beside the sleeping child, Georges Fromont, too young to be absorbed by the joys of domesticity, was continually thinking of the brilliant Sidonie, whose voice he could hear pouring forth triumphant roulades under the trees in the garden.

While the whole chateau was thus transformed in obedience to the whims of a young woman, old Gardinois continued to lead the narrow life of a discontented, idle, impotent 'parvenu'. The most successful means of distraction he had discovered was espionage. The goings and comings of his servants, the remarks that were made about him in the kitchen, the basket of fruit and vegetables brought every morning from the kitchen-garden to the pantry, were objects of continual investigation.

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For the purposes of this constant spying upon his household, he made use of a stone bench set in the gravel behind an enormous Paulownia. He would sit there whole days at a time, neither reading nor thinking, simply watching to see who went in or out. For the night he had invented something different. In the great vestibule at the main entrance, which opened upon the front steps with their array of bright flowers, he had caused an opening to be made leading to his bedroom on the floor above. An acoustic tube of an improved type was supposed to convey to his ears every sound on the ground floor, even to the conversation of the servants taking the air on the steps.

Unluckily, the instrument was so powerful that it exaggerated all the noises, confused them and prolonged them, and the powerful, regular ticking of a great clock, the cries of a paroquet kept in one of the lower rooms, the clucking of a hen in search of a lost kernel of corn, were all Monsieur Gardinois could hear when he applied his ear to the tube. As for voices, they reached him in the form of a confused buzzing, like the muttering of a crowd, in which it was impossible to distinguish anything. He had nothing to show for the expense of the apparatus, and he concealed his wonderful tube in a fold of his bed-curtains.

One night Gardinois, who had fallen asleep, was awakened suddenly by the creaking of a door. It was an extraordinary thing at that hour. The whole house hold was asleep. Nothing could be heard save the footsteps of the watch-dogs on the sand, or their scratching at the foot of a tree in which an owl was screeching. An excellent opportunity to use his listening-tube! Upon putting it to his ear, M. Gardinois was assured that he had made no mistake. The sounds continued. One door was opened, then another. The bolt of the front door was thrown back with an effort. But neither Pyramus nor Thisbe, not even Kiss, the formidable Newfoundland, had made a sign. He rose softly to see who those strange burglars could be, who were leaving the house instead of entering it; and this is what he saw through the slats of his blind:

A tall, slender young man, with Georges's figure and carriage, arm-in-arm with a woman in a lace mantilla. They stopped first at the bench by the Paulownia, which was in full bloom.

It was a superb moonlight night. The moon, silvering the treetops, made numberless flakes of light amid the dense foliage. The terraces, white with moonbeams, where the Newfoundlands in their curly coats went to and fro, watching the night butterflies, the smooth, deep waters of the ponds, all shone with a mute, calm brilliance, as if reflected in a silver mirror. Here and there glow-worms twinkled on the edges of the greensward.

The two promenaders remained for a moment beneath the shade of the Paulownia, sitting silent on the bench, lost in the dense darkness which the moon makes where its rays do not reach. Suddenly they appeared in the bright light, wrapped in a languishing embrace; then walked slowly across the main avenue, and disappeared among the trees.

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"I was sure of it!" said old Gardinois, recognizing them. Indeed, what need had he to recognize them? Did not the silence of the dogs, the aspect of the sleeping house, tell him more clearly than anything else could, what species of impudent crime, unknown and unpunished, haunted the avenues in his park by night? Be that as it may, the old peasant was overjoyed by his discovery. He returned to bed without a light, chuckling to himself, and in the little cabinet filled with hunting-implements, whence he had watched them, thinking at first that he had to do with burglars, the moon's rays shone upon naught save the fowling-pieces hanging on the wall and the boxes of cartridges of all sizes.

Sidonie and Georges had taken up the thread of their love at the corner of the same avenue. The year that had passed, marked by hesitation, by vague struggles, by fruitless resistance, seemed to have been only a preparation for their meeting. And it must be said that, when once the fatal step was taken, they were surprised at nothing so much as the fact that they had postponed it so long. Georges Fromont especially was seized by a mad passion. He was false to his wife, his best friend; he was false to Risler, his partner, the faithful companion of his every hour.

He felt a constant renewal, a sort of overflow of remorse, wherein his passion was intensified by the magnitude of his sin. Sidonie became his one engrossing thought, and he discovered that until then he had not lived. As for her, her love was made up of vanity and spite. The thing that she relished above all else was Claire's degradation in her eyes. Ah! if she could only have said to her, "Your husband loves me—he is false to you with me," her pleasure would have been even greater. As for Risler, in her view he richly deserved what had happened to him. In her old apprentice's jargon, in which she still thought, even if she did not speak it, the poor man was only "an old fool," whom she had taken as a stepping-stone to fortune. "An old fool" is made to be deceived!

During the day Savigny belonged to Claire, to the child who ran about upon the gravel, laughing at the birds and the clouds, and who grew apace. The mother and child had for their own the daylight, the paths filled with sunbeams. But the blue nights were given over to sin, to that sin firmly installed in the chateau, which spoke in undertones, crept noiselessly behind the closed blinds, and in face of which the sleeping house became dumb and blind, and resumed its stony impassibility, as if it were ashamed to see and hear.

CHAPTER X

SIGISMOND PLANUS TREMBLES FOR HIS CASH-BOX

"Carriage, my dear Chorche?—I—have a carriage? What for?"

"I assure you, my dear Risler, that it is quite essential for you. Our business, our relations, are extending every day; the coupe is no longer enough for us. Besides, it doesn't look well to see one of the partners always in his carriage and the other on foot. Believe me, it is a necessary outlay, and of course it will go into the general expenses of the firm. Come, resign yourself to the inevitable."

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It was genuine resignation. It seemed to Risler as if he were stealing something in taking the money for such an unheard-of luxury as a carriage; however, he ended by yielding to Georges's persistent representations, thinking as he did so:

"This will make Sidonie very happy!"

The poor fellow had no suspicion that Sidonie herself, a month before, had selected at Binder's the coupe which Georges insisted upon giving her, and which was to be charged to expense account in order not to alarm the husband.

Honest Risler was so plainly created to be deceived. His inborn uprightness, the implicit confidence in men and things, which was the foundation of his transparent nature, had been intensified of late by preoccupation resulting from his pursuit of the Risler Press, an invention destined to revolutionize the wall-paper industry and representing in his eyes his contribution to the partnership assets. When he laid aside his drawings and left his little work-room on the first floor, his face invariably wore the absorbed look of the man who has his life on one side, his anxieties on another. What a delight it was to him, therefore, to find his home always tranquil, his wife always in good humor, becomingly dressed and smiling.

Without undertaking to explain the change to himself, he recognized that for some time past the "little one" had not been as before in her treatment of him. She allowed him to resume his old habits: the pipe at dessert, the little nap after dinner, the appointments at the brewery with Chebe and Delobelle. Their apartments also were transformed, embellished.

A grand piano by a famous maker made its appearance in the salon in place of the old one, and Madame Dobson, the singing-teacher, came no longer twice a week, but every day, music-roll in hand.

Of a curious type was that young woman of American extraction, with hair of an acid blond, like lemon-pulp, over a bold forehead and metallic blue eyes. As her husband would not allow her to go on the stage, she gave lessons, and sang in some bourgeois salons. As a result of living in the artificial world of compositions for voice and piano, she had contracted a species of sentimental frenzy.

She was romance itself. In her mouth the words "love" and "passion" seemed to have eighty syllables, she uttered them with so much expression. Oh, expression! That was what Mistress Dobson placed before everything, and what she tried, and tried in vain, to impart to her pupil.

'Ay Chiquita,' upon which Paris fed for several seasons, was then at the height of its popularity. Sidonie studied it conscientiously, and all the morning she could be heard singing:

“On dit que tu te maries,
Tu sais que j’en puis mourir.”

[They say that thou’rt to marry
Thou know’st that I may die.]

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“Mouri-i-i-i-r!” the expressive Madame Dobson would interpose, while her hands wandered feebly over the piano-keys; and die she would, raising her light blue eyes to the ceiling and wildly throwing back her head. Sidonie never could accomplish it. Her mischievous eyes, her lips, crimson with fulness of life, were not made for such AEolian-harp sentimentalities. The refrains of Offenbach or Herve, interspersed with unexpected notes, in which one resorts to expressive gestures for aid, to a motion of the head or the body, would have suited her better; but she dared not admit it to her sentimental instructress. By the way, although she had been made to sing a great deal at Mademoiselle Le Mire’s, her voice was still fresh and not unpleasing.

Having no social connections, she came gradually to make a friend of her singing-mistress. She would keep her to breakfast, take her to drive in the new coupe and to assist in her purchases of gowns and jewels. Madame Dobson’s sentimental and sympathetic tone led one to repose confidence in her. Her continual repinings seemed too long to attract other repinings. Sidonie told her of Georges, of their relations, attempting to palliate her offence by blaming the cruelty of her parents in marrying her by force to a man much older than herself. Madame Dobson at once showed a disposition to assist them; not that the little woman was venal, but she had a passion for passion, a taste for romantic intrigue. As she was unhappy in her own home, married to a dentist who beat her, all husbands were monsters in her eyes, and poor Risler especially seemed to her a horrible tyrant whom his wife was quite justified in hating and deceiving.

She was an active confidant and a very useful one. Two or three times a week she would bring tickets for a box at the Opera or the Italiens, or some one of the little theatres which enjoy a temporary vogue, and cause all Paris to go from one end of Paris to the other for a season. In Risler’s eyes the tickets came from Madame Dobson; she had as many as she chose to the theatres where operas were given. The poor wretch had no suspicion that one of those boxes for an important “first night” had often cost his partner ten or fifteen Louis.

In the evening, when his wife went away, always splendidly attired, he would gaze admiringly at her, having no suspicion of the cost of her costumes, certainly none of the man who paid for them, and would await her return at his table by the fire, busy with his drawings, free from care, and happy to be able to say to himself, “What a good time she is having!”

On the floor below, at the Fromonts’, the same comedy was being played, but with a transposition of parts. There it was the young wife who sat by the fire. Every evening, half an hour after Sidonie’s departure, the great gate swung open to give passage to the Fromont coupe conveying Monsieur to his club. What would you have? Business has its demands. All the great deals are arranged

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at the club, around the bouillotte table, and a man must go there or suffer the penalty of seeing his business fall off. Claire innocently believed it all. When her husband had gone, she felt sad for a moment. She would have liked so much to keep him with her or to go out leaning on his arm, to seek enjoyment with him. But the sight of the child, cooing in front of the fire and kicking her little pink feet while she was being undressed, speedily soothed the mother. Then the eloquent word “business,” the merchant’s reason of state, was always at hand to help her to resign herself.

Georges and Sidonie met at the theatre. Their feeling at first when they were together was one of satisfied vanity. People stared at them a great deal. She was really pretty now, and her irregular but attractive features, which required the aid of all the eccentricities of the prevailing style in order to produce their full effect, adapted themselves to them so perfectly that you would have said they were invented expressly for her. In a few moments they went away, and Madame Dobson was left alone in the box. They had hired a small suite on the Avenue Gabriel, near the ‘rond-point’ of the Champs Elysees—the dream of the young women at the Le Mire establishment—two luxuriously furnished, quiet rooms, where the silence of the wealthy quarter, disturbed only by passing carriages, formed a blissful surrounding for their love.

Little by little, when she had become accustomed to her sin, she conceived the most audacious whims. From her old working-days she had retained in the depths of her memory the names of public balls, of famous restaurants, where she was eager to go now, just as she took pleasure in causing the doors to be thrown open for her at the establishments of the great dressmakers, whose signs only she had known in her earlier days. For what she sought above all else in this liaison was revenge for the sorrows and humiliations of her youth. Nothing delighted her so much, for example, when returning from an evening drive in the Bois, as a supper at the Cafe Anglais with the sounds of luxurious vice around her. From these repeated excursions she brought back peculiarities of speech and behavior, equivocal songs, and a style of dress that imported into the bourgeois atmosphere of the old commercial house an accurate reproduction of the most advanced type of the Paris cocotte of that period.

At the factory they began to suspect something. The women of the people, even the poorest, are so quick at picking a costume to pieces! When Madame Risler went out, about three o’clock, fifty pairs of sharp, envious eyes, lying in ambush at the windows of the polishing-shop, watched her pass, penetrating to the lowest depths of her guilty conscience through her black velvet dolman and her cuirass of sparkling jet.

Although she did not suspect it, all the secrets of that mad brain were flying about her like the ribbons that played upon her bare neck; and her daintily-shod feet, in their bronzed boots with ten buttons, told the story of all sorts of clandestine expeditions, of the carpeted stairways they ascended at night on their way to supper, and the warm fur

robes in which they were wrapped when the coupe made the circuit of the lake in the darkness dotted with lanterns.

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The work-women laughed sneeringly and whispered:

“Just look at that Tata Bebelle! A fine way to dress to go out. She don’t rig herself up like that to go to mass, that’s sure! To think that it ain’t three years since she used to start for the shop every morning in an old waterproof, and two sous’ worth of roasted chestnuts in her pockets to keep her fingers warm. Now she rides in her carriage.”

And amid the talc dust and the roaring of the stoves, red-hot in winter and summer alike, more than one poor girl reflected on the caprice of chance in absolutely transforming a woman’s existence, and began to dream vaguely of a magnificent future which might perhaps be in store for herself without her suspecting it.

In everybody’s opinion Risler was a dishonored husband. Two assistants in the printing-room—faithful patrons of the Folies Dramatiques—declared that they had seen Madame Risler several times at their theatre, accompanied by some escort who kept out of sight at the rear of the box. Pere Achille, too, told of amazing things. That Sidonie had a lover, that she had several lovers, in fact, no one entertained a doubt. But no one had as yet thought of Fromont jeune.

And yet she showed no prudence whatever in her relations with him. On the contrary, she seemed to make a parade of them; it may be that that was what saved them. How many times she accosted him boldly on the steps to agree upon a rendezvous for the evening! How many times she had amused herself in making him shudder by looking into his eyes before every one! When the first confusion had passed, Georges was grateful to her for these exhibitions of audacity, which he attributed to the intensity of her passion. He was mistaken.

What she would have liked, although she did not admit it to herself, would have been to have Claire see them, to have her draw aside the curtain at her window, to have her conceive a suspicion of what was passing. She needed that in order to be perfectly happy: that her rival should be unhappy. But her wish was ungratified; Claire Fromont noticed nothing and lived, as did Risler, in imperturbable serenity.

Only Sigismond, the old cashier, was really ill at ease. And yet he was not thinking of Sidonie when, with his pen behind his ear, he paused a moment in his work and gazed fixedly through his grating at the drenched soil of the little garden. He was thinking solely of his master, of Monsieur “Chorche,” who was drawing a great deal of money now for his current expenses and sowing confusion in all his books. Every time it was some new excuse. He would come to the little wicket with an unconcerned air:

“Have you a little money, my good Planus? I was worsted again at bouillotte last night, and I don’t want to send to the bank for such a trifle.”



Sigismond Planus would open his cash-box, with an air of regret, to get the sum requested, and he would remember with terror a certain day when Monsieur Georges, then only twenty years old, had confessed to his uncle that he owed several thousand francs in gambling debts. The elder man thereupon conceived a violent antipathy for the club and contempt for all its members. A rich tradesman who was a member happened to come to the factory one day, and Sigismond said to him with brutal frankness:

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"The devil take your 'Cercle du Chateau d'Eau!' Monsieur Georges has left more than thirty thousand francs there in two months."

The other began to laugh.

"Why, you're greatly mistaken, Pere Planus—it's at least three months since we have seen your master."

The cashier did not pursue the conversation; but a terrible thought took up its abode in his mind, and he turned it over and over all day long.

If Georges did not go to the club, where did he pass his evenings? Where did he spend so much money?

There was evidently a woman at the bottom of the affair.

As soon as that idea occurred to him, Sigismond Planus began to tremble seriously for his cash-box. That old bear from the canton of Berne, a confirmed bachelor, had a terrible dread of women in general and Parisian women in particular. He deemed it his duty, first of all, in order to set his conscience at rest, to warn Risler. He did it at first in rather a vague way.

"Monsieur Georges is spending a great deal of money," he said to him one day.

Risler exhibited no surprise.

"What do you expect me to do, my old Sigismond? It is his right."

And the honest fellow meant what he said. In his eyes Fromont jeune was the absolute master of the establishment. It would have been a fine thing, and no mistake, for him, an ex-draughtsman, to venture to make any comments. The cashier dared say no more until the day when a messenger came from a great shawl-house with a bill for six thousand francs for a cashmere shawl.

He went to Georges in his office.

"Shall I pay it, Monsieur?"

Georges Fromont was a little annoyed. Sidonie had forgotten to tell him of this latest purchase; she used no ceremony with him now.

"Pay it, pay it, Pere Planus," he said, with a shade of embarrassment, and added: "Charge it to the account of Fromont jeune. It is a commission intrusted to me by a friend."

That evening, as Sigismond was lighting his little lamp, he saw Risler crossing the garden, and tapped on the window to call him.

“It’s a woman,” he said, under his breath. “I have the proof of it now.”

As he uttered the awful words “a woman” his voice shook with alarm and was drowned in the great uproar of the factory. The sounds of the work in progress had a sinister meaning to the unhappy cashier at that moment. It seemed to him as if all the whirring machinery, the great chimney pouring forth its clouds of smoke, the noise of the workmen at their different tasks—as if all this tumult and bustle and fatigue were for the benefit of a mysterious little being, dressed in velvet and adorned with jewels.

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Risler laughed at him and refused to believe him. He had long been acquainted with his compatriot's mania for detecting in everything the pernicious influence of woman. And yet Planus's words sometimes recurred to his thoughts, especially in the evening when Sidonie, after all the commotion attendant upon the completion of her toilette, went away to the theatre with Madame Dobson, leaving the apartment empty as soon as her long train had swept across the threshold. Candles burning in front of the mirrors, divers little toilette articles scattered about and thrown aside, told of extravagant caprices and a reckless expenditure of money. Risler thought nothing of all that; but, when he heard Georges's carriage rolling through the courtyard, he had a feeling of discomfort at the thought of Madame Fromont passing her evenings entirely alone. Poor woman! Suppose what Planus said were true!

Suppose Georges really had a second establishment! Oh, it would be frightful!

Thereupon, instead of beginning to work, he would go softly downstairs and ask if Madame were visible, deeming it his duty to keep her company.

The little girl was always in bed, but the little cap, the blue shoes, were still lying in front of the fire. Claire was either reading or working, with her silent mother beside her, always rubbing or dusting with feverish energy, exhausting herself by blowing on the case of her watch, and nervously taking the same thing up and putting it down again ten times in succession, with the obstinate persistence of mania. Nor was honest Risler a very entertaining companion; but that did not prevent the young woman from welcoming him kindly. She knew all that was said about Sidonie in the factory; and although she did not believe half of it, the sight of the poor man, whom his wife left alone so often, moved her heart to pity. Mutual compassion formed the basis of that placid friendship, and nothing could be more touching than these two deserted ones, one pitying the other and each trying to divert the other's thoughts.

Seated at the small, brightly lighted table in the centre of the salon, Risler would gradually yield to the influence of the warmth of the fire and the harmony of his surroundings. He found there articles of furniture with which he had been familiar for twenty years, the portrait of his former employer; and his dear Madame Chorche, bending over some little piece of needle work at his side, seemed to him even younger and more lovable among all those old souvenirs. From time to time she would rise to go and look at the child sleeping in the adjoining room, whose soft breathing they could hear in the intervals of silence. Without fully realizing it, Risler felt more comfortable and warmer there than in his own apartment; for on certain days those attractive rooms, where the doors were forever being thrown open for hurried exits or returns, gave him the impression of a hall without doors or windows, open to the four winds. His rooms were a camping-ground; this was a home. A care-taking hand caused order and refinement to reign everywhere. The chairs seemed to be talking together in undertones, the fire burned with a delightful sound, and Mademoiselle Fromont's little

cap retained in every bow of its blue ribbons suggestions of sweet smiles and baby glances.

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And while Claire was thinking that such an excellent man deserved a better companion in life, Risler, watching the calm and lovely face turned toward him, the intelligent, kindly eyes, asked himself who the hussy could be for whom Georges Fromont neglected such an adorable woman.

CHAPTER XI

THE INVENTORY

The house in which old Planus lived at Montrouge adjoined the one which the Chebes had occupied for some time. There was the same ground floor with three windows, and a single floor above, the same garden with its latticework fence, the same borders of green box. There the old cashier lived with his sister. He took the first omnibus that left the office in the morning, returned at dinner-time, and on Sundays remained at home, tending his flowers and his poultry. The old maid was his housekeeper and did all the cooking and sewing. A happier couple never lived.

Celibates both, they were bound together by an equal hatred of marriage. The sister abhorred all men, the brother looked upon all women with suspicion; but they adored each other, each considering the other an exception to the general perversity of the sex.

In speaking of him she always said: "Monsieur Planus, my brother!"—and he, with the same affectionate solemnity, interspersed all his sentences with "Mademoiselle Planus, my sister!" To those two retiring and innocent creatures, Paris, of which they knew nothing, although they visited it every day, was a den of monsters of two varieties, bent upon doing one another the utmost possible injury; and whenever, amid the gossip of the quarter, a conjugal drama came to their ears, each of them, beset by his or her own idea, blamed a different culprit.

"It is the husband's fault," would be the verdict of "Mademoiselle Planus, my sister."

"It is the wife's fault," "Monsieur Planus, my brother," would reply.

"Oh! the men—"

"Oh! the women—"

That was their one never-failing subject of discussion in those rare hours of idleness which old Sigismond set aside in his busy day, which was as carefully ruled off as his account-books. For some time past the discussions between the brother and sister had been marked by extraordinary animation. They were deeply interested in what was taking place at the factory. The sister was full of pity for Madame Fromont and considered her husband's conduct altogether outrageous; as for Sigismond, he could find no words bitter enough for the unknown trollop who sent bills for six-thousand-franc

shawls to be paid from his cashbox. In his eyes, the honor and fair fame of the old house he had served since his youth were at stake.

“What will become of us?” he repeated again and again. “Oh! these women—”

One day Mademoiselle Planus sat by the fire with her knitting, waiting for her brother.

The table had been laid for half an hour, and the old lady was beginning to be worried by such unheard-of tardiness, when Sigismond entered with a most distressed face, and without a word, which was contrary to all his habits.

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He waited until the door was shut tight, then said in a low voice, in response to his sister's disturbed and questioning expression:

"I have some news. I know who the woman is who is doing her best to ruin us."

Lowering his voice still more, after glancing about at the silent walls of their little dining-room, he uttered a name so unexpected that Mademoiselle Planus made him repeat it.

"Is it possible?"

"It is the truth."

And, despite his grief, he had almost a triumphant air.

His old sister could not believe it. Such a refined, polite person, who had received her with so much cordiality!—How could any one imagine such a thing?

"I have proofs," said Sigismond Planus.

Thereupon he told her how Pere Achille had met Sidonie and Georges one night at eleven o'clock, just as they entered a small furnished lodging-house in the Montmartre quarter; and he was a man who never lied. They had known him for a long while. Besides, others had met them. Nothing else was talked about at the factory. Risler alone suspected nothing.

"But it is your duty to tell him," declared Mademoiselle Planus.

The cashier's face assumed a grave expression.

"It is a very delicate matter. In the first place, who knows whether he would believe me? There are blind men so blind that—And then, by interfering between the two partners, I risk the loss of my place. Oh! the women—the women! When I think how happy Risler might have been. When I sent for him to come to Paris with his brother, he hadn't a sou; and to-day he is at the head of one of the first houses in Paris. Do you suppose that he would be content with that? Oh! no, of course not! Monsieur must marry. As if any one needed to marry! And, worse yet, he marries a Parisian woman, one of those frowsy-haired chits that are the ruin of an honest house, when he had at his hand a fine girl, of almost his own age, a countrywoman, used to work, and well put together, as you might say!"

"Mademoiselle Planus, my sister," to whose physical structure he alluded, had a magnificent opportunity to exclaim, "Oh! the men, the men!" but she was silent. It was a very delicate question, and perhaps, if Risler had chosen in time, he might have been the only one.

Old Sigismond continued:

“And this is what we have come to. For three months the leading wall-paper factory in Paris has been tied to the petticoats of that good-for-nothing. You should see how the money flies. All day long I do nothing but open my wicket to meet Monsieur Georges’s calls. He always applies to me, because at his banker’s too much notice would be taken of it, whereas in our office money comes and goes, comes in and goes out. But look out for the inventory! We shall have some pretty figures to show at the end of the year. The worst part of the whole business is that Risler won’t listen to anything. I have warned him several times: ‘Look out, Monsieur Georges is making a fool of himself for some woman.’ He either turns away with a shrug, or else he tells me that it is none of his business and that Fromont Jeune is the master. Upon my word, one would almost think—one would almost think—”

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The cashier did not finish his sentence; but his silence was pregnant with unspoken thoughts.

The old maid was appalled; but, like most women under such circumstances, instead of seeking a remedy for the evil, she wandered off into a maze of regrets, conjectures, and retrospective lamentations. What a misfortune that they had not known it sooner when they had the Chebes for neighbors. Madame Chebe was such an honorable woman. They might have put the matter before her so that she would keep an eye on Sidonie and talk seriously to her.

"Indeed, that's a good idea," Sigismond interrupted. "You must go to the Rue du Mail and tell her parents. I thought at first of writing to little Frantz. He always had a great deal of influence over his brother, and he's the only person on earth who could say certain things to him. But Frantz is so far away. And then it would be such a terrible thing to do. I can't help pitying that unlucky Risler, though. No! the best way is to tell Madame Chebe. Will you undertake to do it, sister?"

It was a dangerous commission. Mademoiselle Planus made some objections, but she never had been able to resist her brother's wishes, and the desire to be of service to their old friend Risler assisted materially in persuading her.

Thanks to his son-in-law's kindness, M. Chebe had succeeded in gratifying his latest whim. For three months past he had been living at his famous warehouse on the Rue du Mail, and a great sensation was created in the quarter by that shop without merchandise, the shutters of which were taken down in the morning and put up again at night, as in wholesale houses. Shelves had been placed all around the walls, there was a new counter, a safe, a huge pair of scales. In a word, M. Chebe possessed all the requisites of a business of some sort, but did not know as yet just what business he would choose.

He pondered the subject all day as he walked to and fro across the shop, encumbered with several large pieces of bedroom furniture which they had been unable to get into the back room; he pondered it, too, as he stood on his doorstep, with his pen behind his ear, and feasted his eyes delightedly on the hurly-burly of Parisian commerce. The clerks who passed with their packages of samples under their arms, the vans of the express companies, the omnibuses, the porters, the wheelbarrows, the great bales of merchandise at the neighboring doors, the packages of rich stuffs and trimmings which were dragged in the mud before being consigned to those underground regions, those dark holes stuffed with treasures, where the fortune of business lies in embryo—all these things delighted M. Chebe.

He amused himself guessing at the contents of the bales and was first at the fray when some passer-by received a heavy package upon his feet, or the horses attached to a dray, spirited and restive, made the long vehicle standing across the street an obstacle

to circulation. He had, moreover, the thousand-and-one distractions of the petty tradesman without customers, the heavy showers, the accidents, the thefts, the disputes.

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At the end of the day M. Chebe, dazed, bewildered, worn out by the labor of other people, would stretch himself out in his easy-chair and say to his wife, as he wiped his forehead:

“That’s the kind of life I need—an active life.”

Madame Chebe would smile softly without replying. Accustomed as she was to all her husband’s whims, she had made herself as comfortable as possible in a back room with an outlook upon a dark yard, consoling herself with reflections on the former prosperity of her parents and her daughter’s wealth; and, being always neatly dressed, she had succeeded already in acquiring the respect of neighbors and tradesmen.

She asked nothing more than not to be confounded with the wives of workingmen, often less poor than herself, and to be allowed to retain, in spite of everything, a petty bourgeois superiority. That was her constant thought; and so the back room in which she lived, and where it was dark at three in the afternoon, was resplendent with order and cleanliness. During the day the bed became a couch, an old shawl did duty as a tablecloth, the fireplace, hidden by a screen, served as a pantry, and the meals were cooked in modest retirement on a stove no larger than a foot-warmer. A tranquil life—that was the dream of the poor woman, who was continually tormented by the whims of an uncongenial companion.

In the early days of his tenancy, M. Chebe had caused these words to be inscribed in letters a foot long on the fresh paint of his shop-front:

&nb
sp;*Commission—exportation*

No specifications. His neighbors sold tulle, broadcloth, linen; he was inclined to sell everything, but could not make up his mind just what. With what arguments did his indecision lead him to favor Madame Chebe as they sat together in the evening!

“I don’t know anything about linen; but when you come to broadcloth, I understand that. Only, if I go into broadcloths I must have a man to travel; for the best kinds come from Sedan and Elbeuf. I say nothing about calicoes; summer is the time for them. As for tulle, that’s out of the question; the season is too far advanced.”

He usually brought his discourse to a close with the words:

“The night will bring counsel—let us go to bed.”

And to bed he would go, to his wife’s great relief.

After three or four months of this life, M. Chebe began to tire of it. The pains in the head, the dizzy fits gradually returned. The quarter was noisy and unhealthy: besides,

business was at a standstill. Nothing was to be done in any line, broadcloths, tissues, or anything else.

It was just at the period of this new crisis that “Mademoiselle Planus, my sister,” called to speak about Sidonie.

The old maid had said to herself on the way, “I must break it gently.” But, like all shy people, she relieved herself of her burden in the first words she spoke after entering the house.

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It was a stunning blow. When she heard the accusation made against her daughter, Madame Chebe rose in indignation. No one could ever make her believe such a thing. Her poor Sidonie was the victim of an infamous slander.

M. Chebe, for his part, adopted a very lofty tone, with significant phrases and motions of the head, taking everything to himself as was his custom. How could any one suppose that his child, a Chebe, the daughter of an honorable business man known for thirty years on the street, was capable of Nonsense!

Mademoiselle Planus insisted. It was a painful thing to her to be considered a gossip, a hawker of unsavory stories. But they had incontestable proofs. It was no longer a secret to anybody.

“And even suppose it were true,” cried M. Chebe, furious at her persistence. “Is it for us to worry about it? Our daughter is married. She lives a long way from her parents. It is for her husband, who is much older than she, to advise and guide her. Does he so much as think of doing it?”

Upon that the little man began to inveigh against his son-in-law, that cold-blooded Swiss, who passed his life in his office devising machines, refused to accompany his wife into society, and preferred his old-bachelor habits, his pipe and his brewery, to everything else.

You should have seen the air of aristocratic disdain with which M. Chebe pronounced the word “brewery!” And yet almost every evening he went there to meet Risler, and overwhelmed him with reproaches if he once failed to appear at the rendezvous.

Behind all this verbiage the merchant of the Rue du Mail—“Commission-Exportation”—had a very definite idea. He wished to give up his shop, to retire from business, and for some time he had been thinking of going to see Sidonie, in order to interest her in his new schemes. That was not the time, therefore, to make disagreeable scenes, to prate about paternal authority and conjugal honor. As for Madame Chebe, being somewhat less confident than before of her daughter’s virtue, she took refuge in the most profound silence. The poor woman wished that she were deaf and blind—that she never had known Mademoiselle Planus.

Like all persons who have been very unhappy, she loved a benumbed existence with a semblance of tranquillity, and ignorance seemed to her preferable to everything. As if life were not sad enough, good heavens! And then, after all, Sidonie had always been a good girl; why should she not be a good woman?

Night was falling. M. Chebe rose gravely to close the shutters of the shop and light a gas-jet which illumined the bare walls, the empty, polished shelves, and the whole extraordinary place, which reminded one strongly of the day following a failure. With his



lips closed disdainfully, in his determination to remain silent, he seemed to say to the old lady, "Night has come—it is time for you to go home." And all the while they could hear Madame Chebe sobbing in the back room, as she went to and fro preparing supper.

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Mademoiselle Planus got no further satisfaction from her visit.

"Well?" queried old Sigismond, who was impatiently awaiting her return.

"They wouldn't believe me, and politely showed me the door."

She had tears in her eyes at the thought of her humiliation.

The old man's face flushed, and he said in a grave voice, taking his sister's hand:

"Mademoiselle Planus, my sister, I ask your pardon for having made you take this step; but the honor of the house of Fromont was at stake."

From that moment Sigismond became more and more depressed. His cash-box no longer seemed to him safe or secure. Even when Fromont Jeune did not ask him for money, he was afraid, and he summed up all his apprehensions in four words which came continually to his lips when talking with his sister:

"I ha no gonfidence," he would say, in his hoarse Swiss patois.

Thinking always of his cash-box, he dreamed sometimes that it had broken apart at all the joints, and insisted on remaining open, no matter how much he turned the key; or else that a high wind had scattered all the papers, notes, cheques, and bills, and that he ran after them all over the factory, tiring himself out in the attempt to pick them up.

In the daytime, as he sat behind his grating in the silence of his office, he imagined that a little white mouse had eaten its way through the bottom of the box and was gnawing and destroying all its contents, growing plumper and prettier as the work of destruction went on.

So that, when Sidonie appeared on the steps about the middle of the afternoon, in her pretty Parisian plumage, old Sigismond shuddered with rage. In his eyes it was the ruin of the house that stood there, ruin in a magnificent costume, with its little coupe at the door, and the placid bearing of a happy coquette.

Madame Risler had no suspicion that, at that window on the ground floor, sat an untiring foe who watched her slightest movements, the most trivial details of her life, the going and coming of her music-teacher, the arrival of the fashionable dressmaker in the morning, all the boxes that were brought to the house, and the laced cap of the employe of the Magasin du Louvre, whose heavy wagon stopped at the gate with a jingling of bells, like a diligence drawn by stout horses which were dragging the house of Fromont to bankruptcy at break-neck speed.

Sigismond counted the packages, weighed them with his eye as they passed, and gazed inquisitively into Risler's apartments through the open windows. The carpets that

were shaken with a great noise, the jardinieres that were brought into the sunlight filled with fragile, unseasonable flowers, rare and expensive, the gorgeous hangings—none of these things escaped his notice.

The new acquisitions of the household stared him in the face, reminding him of some request for a large amount.

But the one thing that he studied more carefully than all else was Risler's countenance.

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In his view that woman was in a fair way to change his friend, the best, the most upright of men, into a shameless villain. There was no possibility of doubt that Risler knew of his dishonor, and submitted to it. He was paid to keep quiet.

Certainly there was something monstrous in such a supposition. But it is the tendency of innocent natures, when they are made acquainted with evil for the first time, to go at once too far, beyond reason. When he was once convinced of the treachery of Georges and Sidonie, Risler's degradation seemed to the cashier less impossible of comprehension. On what other theory could his indifference, in the face of his partner's heavy expenditures, be explained?

The excellent Sigismond, in his narrow, stereotyped honesty, could not understand the delicacy of Risler's heart. At the same time, the methodical bookkeeper's habit of thought and his clear-sightedness in business were a thousand leagues from that absent-minded, flighty character, half-artist, half-inventor. He judged him by himself, having no conception of the condition of a man with the disease of invention, absorbed by a fixed idea. Such men are somnambulists. They look, but do not see, their eyes being turned within.

It was Sigismond's belief that Risler did see. That belief made the old cashier very unhappy. He began by staring at his friend whenever he entered the counting-room; then, discouraged by his immovable indifference, which he believed to be wilful and premeditated, covering his face like a mask, he adopted the plan of turning away and fumbling among his papers to avoid those false glances, and keeping his eyes fixed on the garden paths or the interlaced wires of the grating when he spoke to him. Even his words were confused and distorted, like his glances. No one could say positively to whom he was talking.

No more friendly smiles, no more reminiscences as they turned over the leaves of the cash-book together.

"This was the year you came to the factory. Your first increase of pay. Do you remember? We dined at Douix's that day. And then the Cafe des Aveugles in the evening, eh? What a debauch!"

At last Risler noticed the strange coolness that had sprung up between Sigismond and himself. He mentioned it to his wife.

For some time past she had felt that antipathy prowling about her. Sometimes, as she crossed the courtyard, she was oppressed, as it were, by malevolent glances which caused her to turn nervously toward the old cashier's corner. This estrangement between the friends alarmed her, and she very quickly determined to put her husband on his guard against Planus's unpleasant remarks.

“Don’t you see that he is jealous of you, of your position? A man who was once his equal, now his superior, he can’t stand that. But why bother one’s head about all these spiteful creatures? Why, I am surrounded by them here.”

Risler looked at her with wide-open eyes:—“You?”

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"Why, yes, it is easy enough to see that all these people detest me. They bear little Chebe a grudge because she has become Madame Risler Aine. Heaven only knows all the outrageous things that are said about me! And your cashier doesn't keep his tongue in his pocket, I assure you. What a spiteful fellow he is!"

These few words had their effect. Risler, indignant, but too proud to complain, met coldness with coldness. Those two honest men, each intensely distrustful of the other, could no longer meet without a painful sensation, so that, after a while, Risler ceased to go to the counting-room at all. It was not difficult for him, as Fromont Jeune had charge of all financial matters. His month's allowance was carried to him on the thirtieth of each month. This arrangement afforded Sidonie and Georges additional facilities, and opportunity for all sorts of underhand dealing.

She thereupon turned her attention to the completion of her programme of a life of luxury. She lacked a country house. In her heart she detested the trees, the fields, the country roads that cover you with dust. "The most dismal things on earth," she used to say. But Claire Fromont passed the summer at Savigny. As soon as the first fine days arrived, the trunks were packed and the curtains taken down on the floor below; and a great furniture van, with the little girl's blue bassinet rocking on top, set off for the grandfather's chateau. Then, one morning, the mother, grandmother, child, and nurse, a medley of white gowns and light veils, would drive away behind two fast horses toward the sunny lawns and the pleasant shade of the avenues.

At that season Paris was ugly, depopulated; and although Sidonie loved it even in the summer, which heats it like a furnace, it troubled her to think that all the fashion and wealth of Paris were driving by the seashore under their light umbrellas, and would make their outing an excuse for a thousand new inventions, for original styles of the most risque sort, which would permit one to show that one has a pretty ankle and long, curly chestnut hair of one's own.

The seashore bathing resorts! She could not think of them; Risler could not leave Paris.

How about buying a country house? They had not the means. To be sure, there was the lover, who would have asked nothing better than to gratify this latest whim; but a country house cannot be concealed like a bracelet or a shawl. The husband must be induced to accept it. That was not an easy matter; however, they might venture to try it with Risler.

To pave the way, she talked to him incessantly about a little nook in the country, not too expensive, very near Paris. Risler listened with a smile. He thought of the high grass, of the orchard filled with fine fruit-trees, being already tormented by the longing to possess which comes with wealth; but, as he was prudent, he said:

"We will see, we will see. Let us wait till the end of the year."

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The end of the year, that is to say, the striking of the balance-sheet.

The balance-sheet! That is the magic word. All through the year we go on and on in the eddying whirl of business. Money comes and goes, circulates, attracts other money, vanishes; and the fortune of the firm, like a slippery, gleaming snake, always in motion, expands, contracts, diminishes, or increases, and it is impossible to know our condition until there comes a moment of rest. Not until the inventory shall we know the truth, and whether the year, which seems to have been prosperous, has really been so.

The account of stock is usually taken late in December, between Christmas and New Year's Day. As it requires much extra labor to prepare it, everybody works far into the night. The whole establishment is alert. The lamps remain lighted in the offices long after the doors are closed, and seem to share in the festal atmosphere peculiar to that last week of the year, when so many windows are illuminated for family gatherings. Every one, even to the least important 'employe' of the firm, is interested in the results of the inventory. The increases of salary, the New Year's presents, depend upon those blessed figures. And so, while the vast interests of a wealthy house are trembling in the balance, the wives and children and aged parents of the clerks, in their fifth-floor tenements or poor apartments in the suburbs, talk of nothing but the inventory, the results of which will make themselves felt either by a greatly increased need of economy or by some purchase, long postponed, which the New Year's gift will make possible at last.

On the premises of Fromont Jeune and Risler Aine, Sigismond Planus is the god of the establishment at that season, and his little office a sanctuary where all the clerks perform their devotions. In the silence of the sleeping factory, the heavy pages of the great books rustle as they are turned, and names called aloud cause search to be made in other books. Pens scratch. The old cashier, surrounded by his lieutenants, has a businesslike, awe-inspiring air. From time to time Fromont Jeune, on the point of going out in his carriage, looks in for a moment, with a cigar in his mouth, neatly gloved and ready for the street. He walks slowly, on tiptoe, puts his face to the grating:

"Well!—are you getting on all right?"

Sigismond gives a grunt, and the young master takes his leave, afraid to ask any further questions. He knows from the cashier's expression that the showing will be a bad one.

In truth, since the days of the Revolution, when there was fighting in the very courtyard of the factory, so pitiable an inventory never had been seen in the Fromont establishment. Receipts and expenditures balanced each other. The general expense account had eaten up everything, and, furthermore, Fromont Jeune was indebted to the firm in a large sum. You should have seen old Planus's air of consternation when, on the 31st of December, he went up to Georges's office to make report of his labors.

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Georges took a very cheerful view of the matter. Everything would go better next year. And to restore the cashier's good humor he gave him an extraordinary bonus of a thousand francs, instead of the five hundred his uncle used always to give. Everybody felt the effects of that generous impulse, and, in the universal satisfaction, the deplorable results of the yearly accounting were very soon forgotten. As for Risler, Georges chose to take it upon himself to inform him as to the situation.

When he entered his partner's little closet, which was lighted from above by a window in the ceiling, so that the light fell directly upon the subject of the inventor's meditations, Fromont hesitated a moment, filled with shame and remorse for what he was about to do.

The other, when he heard the door, turned joyfully toward his partner.

"Chorche, Chorche, my dear fellow—I have got it, our press. There are still a few little things to think out. But no matter! I am sure now of my invention: you will see—you will see! Ah! the Prochassons can experiment all they choose. With the Risler Press we will crush all rivalry."

"Bravo, my comrade!" replied Fromont Jeune. "So much for the future; but you don't seem to think about the present. What about this inventory?"

"Ah, yes! to be sure. I had forgotten all about it. It isn't very satisfactory, is it?"

He said that because of the somewhat disturbed and embarrassed expression on Georges's face.

"Why, yes, on the contrary, it is very satisfactory indeed," was the reply. "We have every reason to be satisfied, especially as this is our first year together. We have forty thousand francs each for our share of the profits; and as I thought you might need a little money to give your wife a New Year's present—"

Ashamed to meet the eyes of the honest man whose confidence he was betraying, Fromont jeune placed a bundle of cheques and notes on the table.

Risler was deeply moved for a moment. So much money at one time for him! His mind dwelt upon the generosity of these Fromonts, who had made him what he was; then he thought of his little Sidonie, of the longing which she had so often expressed and which he would now be able to gratify.

With tears in his eyes and a happy smile on his lips, he held out both hands to his partner.

"I am very happy! I am very happy!"

That was his favorite phrase on great occasions. Then he pointed to the bundles of bank notes spread out before him in the narrow bands which are used to confine those fugitive documents, always ready to fly away.

“Do you know what that is?” he said to Georges, with an air of triumph. “That is Sidonie’s house in the country!”

CHAPTER XII

A LETTER

“To M. Frantz Risler,

*“Engineer of the Compagnie Francaise,
“Ismailia, Egypt.*



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"Frantz, my boy, it is old Sigismond who is writing to you. If I knew better how to put my ideas on paper, I should have a very long story to tell you. But this infernal French is too hard, and Sigismond Planus is good for nothing away from his figures. So I will come to the point at once. "Affairs in your brother's house are not as they should be. That woman is false to him with his partner. She has made her husband a laughing-stock, and if this goes on she will cause him to be looked upon as a rascal. Frantz, my boy, you must come home at once. You are the only one who can speak to Risler and open his eyes about that little Sidonie. He would not believe any of us. Ask leave of absence at once, and come. "I know that you have your bread to earn out there, and your future to assure; but a man of honor should think more of the name his parents gave him than of anything else. And I tell you that if you do not come at once, a time will come when the name of Risler will be so overwhelmed with shame that you will not dare to bear it.

"Sigismond Planus,
"Cashier."

CHAPTER XIII

THE JUDGE

Those persons who live always in doors, confined by work or infirmity to a chair by the window, take a deep interest in the people who pass, just as they make for themselves a horizon of the neighboring walls, roofs, and windows.

Nailed to their place, they live in the life of the streets; and the busy men and women who pass within their range of vision, sometimes every day at the same hour, do not suspect that they serve as the mainspring of other lives, that interested eyes watch for their coming and miss them if they happen to go to their destination by another road.

The Delobelles, left to themselves all day, indulged in this sort of silent observation. Their window was narrow, and the mother, whose eyes were beginning to weaken as the result of hard usage, sat near the light against the drawn muslin curtain; her daughter's large armchair was a little farther away. She announced the approach of their daily passers-by. It was a diversion, a subject of conversation; and the long hours of toil seemed shorter, marked off by the regular appearance of people who were as busy as they. There were two little sisters, a gentleman in a gray overcoat, a child who was taken to school and taken home again, and an old government clerk with a wooden leg, whose step on the sidewalk had a sinister sound.

They hardly ever saw him; he passed after dark, but they heard him, and the sound always struck the little cripple's ears like a harsh echo of her own mournful thoughts. All

these street friends unconsciously occupied a large place in the lives of the two women. If it rained, they would say:

“They will get wet. I wonder whether the child got home before the shower.” And when the season changed, when the March sun inundated the sidewalks or the December snow covered them with its white mantle and its patches of black mud, the appearance of a new garment on one of their friends caused the two recluses to say to themselves, “It is summer,” or, “winter has come.”

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Now, on a certain evening in May, one of those soft, luminous evenings when life flows forth from the houses into the street through the open windows, Desiree and her mother were busily at work with needles and fingers, exhausting the daylight to its last ray, before lighting the lamp. They could hear the shouts of children playing in the yards, the muffled notes of pianos, and the voice of a street peddler, drawing his half-empty wagon. One could smell the springtime in the air, a vague odor of hyacinth and lilac.

Mamma Delobelle had laid aside her work, and, before closing the window, leaned upon the sill listening to all these noises of a great toiling city, taking delight in walking through the streets when its day's work was ended. From time to time she spoke to her daughter, without turning her head.

"Ah! there's Monsieur Sigismond. How early he leaves the factory to-night! It may be because the days are lengthening so fast, but I don't think it can be seven o'clock. Who can that man be with the old cashier?—What a funny thing!—One would say—Why, yes!—One would say it was Monsieur Frantz. But that isn't possible. Monsieur Frantz is a long way from here at this moment; and then he had no beard. That man looks like him all the same! Just look, my dear."

But "my dear" does not leave her chair; she does not even stir. With her eyes staring into vacancy, her needle in the air, arrested in its pretty, industrious movement, she has gone away to the blue country, that wonderful country whither one may go at will, without thought of any infirmity. The name "Frantz," uttered mechanically by her mother, because of a chance resemblance, represented to her a whole lifetime of illusions, of fervent hopes, ephemeral as the flush that rose to her cheeks when, on returning home at night, he used to come and chat with her a moment. How far away that was already! To think that he used to live in the little room near hers, that they used to hear his step on the stairs and the noise made by his table when he dragged it to the window to draw! What sorrow and what happiness she used to feel when he talked to her of Sidonie, sitting on the low chair at her knees, while she mounted her birds and her insects.

As she worked, she used to cheer and comfort him, for Sidonie had caused poor Frantz many little griefs before the last great one. His tone when he spoke of Sidonie, the sparkle in his eyes when he thought of her, fascinated Desiree in spite of everything, so that when he went away in despair, he left behind him a love even greater than that he carried with him—a love which the unchanging room, the sedentary, stagnant life, kept intact with all its bitter perfume, whereas his would gradually fade away and vanish in the fresh air of the outer world.

It grows darker and darker. A great wave of melancholy envelops the poor girl with the falling darkness of that balmy evening. The blissful gleam from the past dies away as the last glimmer of daylight vanishes in the narrow recess of the window, where her mother still stands leaning on the sill.

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Suddenly the door opens. Some one is there whose features can not be distinguished. Who can it be? The Delobelles never receive calls. The mother, who has turned her head, thinks at first that some one has come from the shop to get the week's work.

"My husband has just gone to your place, Monsieur. We have nothing here. Monsieur Delobelle has taken everything."

The man comes forward without speaking, and as he approaches the window his features can be distinguished. He is a tall, solidly built fellow with a bronzed face, a thick, red beard, and a deep voice, and is a little slow of speech.

"Ah! so you don't know me, Mamma Delobelle?"

"Oh! I knew you at once, Monsieur Frantz," said Desiree, very calmly, in a cold, sedate tone.

"Merciful heavens! it's Monsieur Frantz."

Quickly Mamma Delobelle runs to the lamp, lights it, and closes the window.

"What! it is you, is it, my dear Frantz?" How coolly she says it, the little rascal! "I knew you at once." Ah, the little iceberg! She will always be the same.

A veritable little iceberg, in very truth. She is very pale, and her hand as it lies in Frantz's is white and cold.

She seems to him improved, even more refined than before. He seems to her superb, as always, with a melancholy, weary expression in the depths of his eyes, which makes him more of a man than when he went away.

His weariness is due to his hurried journey, undertaken immediately on his receipt of Sigismond's letter. Spurred on by the word dishonor, he had started instantly, without awaiting his leave of absence, risking his place and his future prospects; and, hurrying from steamships to railways, he had not stopped until he reached Paris. Reason enough for being weary, especially when one has travelled in eager haste to reach one's destination, and when one's mind has been continually beset by impatient thoughts, making the journey ten times over in incessant doubt and fear and perplexity.

His melancholy began further back. It began on the day when the woman he loved refused to marry him, to become, six months later, the wife of his brother; two terrible blows in close succession, the second even more painful than the first. It is true that, before entering into that marriage, Risler had written to him to ask his permission to be happy, and had written in such touching, affectionate terms that the violence of the blow was somewhat diminished; and then, in due time, life in a strange country, hard work, and long journeys had softened his grief. Now only a vast background of melancholy

remains; unless, indeed, the hatred and wrath by which he is animated at this moment against the woman who is dishonoring his brother may be a remnant of his former love.

But no! Frantz Risler thinks only of avenging the honor of the Rislers. He comes not as a lover, but as a judge; and Sidonie may well look to herself.

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The judge had gone straight to the factory on leaving the train, relying upon the surprise, the unexpectedness, of his arrival to disclose to him at a glance what was taking place.

Unluckily he had found no one. The blinds of the little house at the foot of the garden had been closed for two weeks. Pere Achille informed him that the ladies were at their respective country seats where the partners joined them every evening.

Fromont Jeune had left the factory very early; Risler Aine had just gone. Frantz decided to speak to old Sigismond. But it was Saturday, the regular pay-day, and he must needs wait until the long line of workmen, extending from Achille's lodge to the cashier's grated window, had gradually dispersed.

Although very impatient and very depressed, the excellent youth, who had lived the life of a Paris workingman from his childhood, felt a thrill of pleasure at finding himself once more in the midst of the animated scenes peculiar to that time and place. Upon all those faces, honest or vicious, was an expression of satisfaction that the week was at an end. You felt that, so far as they were concerned, Sunday began at seven o'clock Saturday evening, in front of the cashier's little lamp.

One must have lived among workingmen to realize the full charm of that one day's rest and its solemnity. Many of these poor creatures, bound fast to unhealthful trades, await the coming of the blessed Sunday like a puff of refreshing air, essential to their health and their life. What an overflow of spirits, therefore, what a pressing need of noisy mirth! It seems as if the oppression of the week's labor vanishes with the steam from the machinery, as it escapes in a hissing cloud of vapor over the gutters.

One by one the workmen moved away from the grating, counting the money that glistened in their black hands. There were disappointments, mutterings, remonstrances, hours missed, money drawn in advance; and above the tinkling of coins, Sigismond's voice could be heard, calm and relentless, defending the interests of his employers with a zeal amounting to ferocity.

Frantz was familiar with all the dramas of pay-day, the false accents and the true. He knew that one man's wages were expended for his family, to pay the baker and the druggist, or for his children's schooling.

Another wanted his money for the wine-shop or for something even worse. And the melancholy, downcast shadows passing to and fro in front of the factory gateway—he knew what they were waiting for—that they were all on the watch for a father or a husband, to hurry him home with complaining or coaxing words.



Oh! the barefooted children, the tiny creatures wrapped in old shawls, the shabby women, whose tear-stained faces were as white as the linen caps that surmounted them.

Oh! the lurking vice that prowls about on pay-day, the candles that are lighted in the depths of dark alleys, the dirty windows of the wine-shops where the thousand-and-one poisonous concoctions of alcohol display their alluring colors.

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Frantz was familiar with all these forms of misery; but never had they seemed to him so depressing, so harrowing as on that evening.

When the last man was paid, Sigismond came out of his office. The two friends recognized each other and embraced; and in the silence of the factory, at rest for twenty-four hours and deathly still in all its empty buildings, the cashier explained to Frantz the state of affairs. He described Sidonie's conduct, her mad extravagance, the total wreck of the family honor. The Rislers had bought a country house at Asnieres, formerly the property of an actress, and had set up a sumptuous establishment there. They had horses and carriages, and led a luxurious, gay life. The thing that especially disturbed honest Sigismond was the self restraint of Fromont jeune. For some time he had drawn almost no money from the strong-box, and yet Sidonie was spending more than ever.

"I haf no gonfidence!" said the unhappy cashier, shaking his head, "I haf no gonfidence!"

Lowering his voice he added:

"But your brother, my little Frantz, your brother? Who can explain his actions? He goes about through it all with his eyes in the air, his hands in his pockets, his mind on his famous invention, which unfortunately doesn't move fast. Look here! do you want me to give you my opinion?—He's either a knave or a fool."

They were walking up and down the little garden as they talked, stopping for a moment, then resuming their walk. Frantz felt as if he were living in a horrible dream. The rapid journey, the sudden change of scene and climate, the ceaseless flow of Sigismond's words, the new idea that he had to form of Risler and Sidonie—the same Sidonie he had loved so dearly—all these things bewildered him and almost drove him mad.

It was late. Night was falling. Sigismond proposed to him to go to Montrouge for the night; he declined on the plea of fatigue, and when he was left alone in the Marais, at that dismal and uncertain hour when the daylight has faded and the gas is still unlighted, he walked instinctively toward his old quarters on the Rue de Braque.

At the hall door hung a placard: Bachelor's Chamber to let.

It was the same room in which he had lived so long with his brother. He recognized the map fastened to the wall by four pins, the window on the landing, and the Delobelles' little sign: 'Birds and Insects for Ornament.'

Their door was ajar; he had only to push it a little in order to enter the room.

Certainly there was not in all Paris a surer refuge for him, a spot better fitted to welcome and console his perturbed spirit, than that hard-working familiar fireside. In his present agitation and perplexity it was like the harbor with its smooth, deep water, the sunny,

peaceful quay, where the women work while awaiting their husbands and fathers, though the wind howls and the sea rages. More than all else, although he did not realize that it was so, it was a network of steadfast affection, that miraculous love-kindness which makes another's love precious to us even when we do not love that other.

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That dear little iceberg of a Desiree loved him so dearly. Her eyes sparkled so even when talking of the most indifferent things with him. As objects dipped in phosphorus shine with equal splendor, so the most trivial words she said illuminated her pretty, radiant face. What a blissful rest it was for him after Sigismond's brutal disclosures!

They talked together with great animation while Mamma Delobelle was setting the table.

"You will dine with us, won't you, Monsieur Frantz? Father has gone to take back the work; but he will surely come home to dinner."

He will surely come home to dinner!

The good woman said it with a certain pride.

In fact, since the failure of his managerial scheme, the illustrious Delobelle no longer took his meals abroad, even on the evenings when he went to collect the weekly earnings. The unlucky manager had eaten so many meals on credit at his restaurant that he dared not go there again. By way of compensation, he never failed, on Saturday, to bring home with him two or three unexpected, famished guests—"old comrades"—"unlucky devils." So it happened that, on the evening in question, he appeared upon the stage escorting a financier from the Metz theatre and a comique from the theatre at Angers, both waiting for an engagement.

The comique, closely shaven, wrinkled, shrivelled by the heat from the footlights, looked like an old street-arab; the financier wore cloth shoes, and no linen, so far as could be seen.

"Frantz!—my Frantz!" cried the old strolling player in a melodramatic voice, clutching the air convulsively with his hands. After a long and energetic embrace he presented his guests to one another.

"Monsieur Robricart, of the theatre at Metz.

"Monsieur Chaudezon, of the theatre at Angers.

"Frantz Risler, engineer."

In Delobelle's mouth that word "engineer" assumed vast proportions!

Desiree pouted prettily when she saw her father's friends. It would have been so nice to be by themselves on a day like to-day. But the great man snapped his fingers at the thought. He had enough to do to unload his pockets. First of all, he produced a superb pie "for the ladies," he said, forgetting that he adored pie. A lobster next made its appearance, then an Arles sausage, marrons glaces and cherries, the first of the season!

While the financier enthusiastically pulled up the collar of his invisible shirt, while the comique exclaimed “gnouf! gnouf!” with a gesture forgotten by Parisians for ten years, Desiree thought with dismay of the enormous hole that impromptu banquet would make in the paltry earnings of the week, and Mamma Delobelle, full of business, upset the whole buffet in order to find a sufficient number of plates.

It was a very lively meal. The two actors ate voraciously, to the great delight of Delobelle, who talked over with them old memories of their days of strolling. Fancy a collection of odds and ends of scenery, extinct lanterns, and mouldy, crumbling stage properties.

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In a sort of vulgar, meaningless, familiar slang, they recalled their innumerable triumphs; for all three of them, according to their own stories, had been applauded, laden with laurel-wreaths, and carried in triumph by whole cities.

While they talked they ate as actors usually eat, sitting with their faces turned three-fourths toward the audience, with the unnatural haste of stage guests at a pasteboard supper, alternating words and mouthfuls, seeking to produce an effect by their manner of putting down a glass or moving a chair, and expressing interest, amazement, joy, terror, surprise, with the aid of a skilfully handled knife and fork. Madame Delobelle listened to them with a smiling face.

One can not be an actor's wife for thirty years without becoming somewhat accustomed to these peculiar mannerisms.

But one little corner of the table was separated from the rest of the party as by a cloud which intercepted the absurd remarks, the hoarse laughter, the boasting. Frantz and Desiree talked together in undertones, hearing naught of what was said around them. Things that happened in their childhood, anecdotes of the neighborhood, a whole ill-defined past which derived its only value from the mutual memories evoked, from the spark that glowed in the eyes of both-those were the themes of their pleasant chat.

Suddenly the cloud was torn aside, and Delobelle's terrible voice interrupted the dialogue.

"Have you not seen your brother?" he asked, in order to avoid the appearance of neglecting him too much. "And you have not seen his wife, either? Ah! you will find her a Madame. Such toilettes, my dear fellow, and such chic! I assure you. They have a genuine chateau at Asnieres. The Chebes are there also. Ah! my old friend, they have all left us behind. They are rich, they look down on old friends. Never a word, never a call. For my part, you understand, I snap my fingers at them, but it really wounds these ladies."

"Oh, papa!" said Desiree hastily, "you know very well that we are too fond of Sidonie to be offended with her."

The actor smote the table a violent blow with his fist.

"Why, then, you do wrong. You ought to be offended with people who seek always to wound and humiliate you."

He still had upon his mind the refusal to furnish funds for his theatrical project, and he made no secret of his wrath.

"If you knew," he said to Frantz, "if you knew how money is being squandered over yonder! It is a great pity. And nothing substantial, nothing sensible. I who speak to

you, asked your brother for a paltry sum to assure my future and himself a handsome profit. He flatly refused. Parbleu! Madame requires too much. She rides, goes to the races in her carriage, and drives her husband at the same rate as her little phaeton on the quay at Asnieres. Between you and me, I don't think that our good friend Risler is very happy. That woman makes him believe black is white."

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The ex-actor concluded his harangue with a wink at the comique and the financier, and for a moment the three exchanged glances, conventional grimaces, 'ha-has!' and 'hum-hums!' and all the usual pantomime expressive of thoughts too deep for words.

Frantz was struck dumb. Do what he would, the horrible certainty assailed him on all sides. Sigismond had spoken in accordance with his nature, Delobelle with his. The result was the same.

Fortunately the dinner was drawing near its close. The three actors left the table and betook themselves to the brewery on the Rue Blondel. Frantz remained with the two women.

As he sat beside her, gentle and affectionate in manner, Desiree was suddenly conscious of a great outflow of gratitude to Sidonie. She said to herself that, after all, it was to her generosity that she owed this semblance of happiness, and that thought gave her courage to defend her former friend.

"You see, Monsieur Frantz, you mustn't believe all my father told you about your sister-in-law. Dear papa! he always exaggerates a little. For my own part, I am very sure that Sidonie is incapable of all the evil she is accused of. I am sure that her heart has remained the same; and that she is still fond of her friends, although she does neglect them a little. Such is life, you know. Friends drift apart without meaning to. Isn't that true, Monsieur Frantz?"

Oh! how pretty she was in his eyes, while she talked in that strain. He never had taken so much notice of the refined features, the aristocratic pallor of her complexion; and when he left her that evening, deeply touched by the warmth she had displayed in defending Sidonie, by all the charming feminine excuses she put forward for her friend's silence and neglect, Frantz Risler reflected, with a feeling of selfish and ingenuous pleasure, that the child had loved him once, and that perhaps she loved him still, and kept for him in the bottom of her heart that warm, sheltered spot to which we turn as to the sanctuary when life has wounded us.

All night long in his old room, lulled by the imaginary movement of the vessel, by the murmur of the waves and the howling of the wind which follow long sea voyages, he dreamed of his youthful days, of little Chebe and Desiree Delobelle, of their games, their labors, and of the Ecole Centrale, whose great, gloomy buildings were sleeping near at hand, in the dark streets of the Marais.

And when daylight came, and the sun shining in at his bare window vexed his eyes and brought him back to a realization of the duty that lay before him and to the anxieties of the day, he dreamed that it was time to go to the School, and that his brother, before going down to the factory, opened the door and called to him:



"Come, lazybones! Come!"

That dear, loving voice, too natural, too real for a dream, made him open his eyes without more ado.

Risler was standing by his bed, watching his awakening with a charming smile, not untinged by emotion; that it was Risler himself was evident from the fact that, in his joy at seeing his brother Frantz once more, he could find nothing better to say than, "I am very happy, I am very happy!"

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Although it was Sunday, Risler, as was his custom, had come to the factory to avail himself of the silence and solitude to work at his press. Immediately on his arrival, Pere Achille had informed him that his brother was in Paris and had gone to the old house on the Rue de Braque, and he had hastened thither in joyful surprise, a little vexed that he had not been forewarned, and especially that Frantz had defrauded him of the first evening. His regret on that account came to the surface every moment in his spasmodic attempts at conversation, in which everything that he wanted to say was left unfinished, interrupted by innumerable questions on all sorts of subjects and explosions of affection and joy. Frantz excused himself on the plea of fatigue, and the pleasure it had given him to be in their old room once more.

“All right, all right,” said Risler, “but I sha’n’t let you alone now—you are coming to Asnieres at once. I give myself leave of absence today. All thought of work is out of the question now that you have come, you understand. Ah! won’t the little one be surprised and glad! We talk about you so often! What joy! what joy!”

The poor fellow fairly beamed with happiness; he, the silent man, chattered like a magpie, gazed admiringly at his Frantz and remarked upon his growth. The pupil of the Ecole Centrale had had a fine physique when he went away, but his features had acquired greater firmness, his shoulders were broader, and it was a far cry from the tall, studious-looking boy who had left Paris two years before, for Ismailia, to this handsome, bronzed corsair, with his serious yet winning face.

While Risler was gazing at him, Frantz, on his side, was closely scrutinizing his brother, and, finding him the same as always, as ingenuous, as loving, and as absent-minded as times, he said to himself:

“No! it is not possible—he has not ceased to be an honest man.”

Thereupon, as he reflected upon what people had dared to imagine, all his wrath turned against that hypocritical, vicious woman, who deceived her husband so impudently and with such absolute impunity that she succeeded in causing him to be considered her confederate. Oh! what a terrible reckoning he proposed to have with her; how pitilessly he would talk to her!

“I forbid you, Madame—understand what I say—I forbid you to dishonor my brother!”

He was thinking of that all the way, as he watched the still leafless trees glide along the embankment of the Saint-Germain railway. Sitting opposite him, Risler chattered, chattered without pause. He talked about the factory, about their business. They had gained forty thousand francs each the last year; but it would be a different matter when the Press was at work. “A rotary press, my little Frantz, rotary and dodecagonal, capable of printing a pattern in twelve to fifteen colors at a single turn of the wheel—red on pink, dark green on light green, without the least running together or absorption,

without a line lapping over its neighbor, without any danger of one shade destroying or overshadowing another. Do you understand that, little brother? A machine that is an artist like a man. It means a revolution in the wallpaper trade."

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"But," queried Frantz with some anxiety, "have you invented this Press of yours yet, or are you still hunting for it?"

"Invented!—perfected! To-morrow I will show you all my plans. I have also invented an automatic crane for hanging the paper on the rods in the drying-room. Next week I intend to take up my quarters in the factory, up in the garret, and have my first machine made there secretly, under my own eyes. In three months the patents must be taken out and the Press must be at work. You'll see, my little Frantz, it will make us all rich—you can imagine how glad I shall be to be able to make up to these Fromonts for a little of what they have done for me. Ah! upon my word, the Lord has been too good to me."

Thereupon he began to enumerate all his blessings. Sidonie was the best of women, a little love of a wife, who conferred much honor upon him. They had a charming home. They went into society, very select society. The little one sang like a nightingale, thanks to Madame Dobson's expressive method. By the way, this Madame Dobson was another most excellent creature. There was just one thing that disturbed poor Risler, that was his incomprehensible misunderstanding with Sigismond. Perhaps Frantz could help him to clear up that mystery.

"Oh! yes, I will help you, brother," replied Frantz through his clenched teeth; and an angry flush rose to his brow at the idea that any one could have suspected the open-heartedness, the loyalty, that were displayed before him in all their artless spontaneity. Luckily he, the judge, had arrived; and he proposed to restore everything to its proper place.

Meanwhile, they were drawing near the house at Asnieres. Frantz had noticed at a distance a fanciful little turreted affair, glistening with a new blue slate roof. It seemed to him to have been built expressly for Sidonie, a fitting cage for that capricious, gaudy-plumaged bird.

It was a chalet with two stories, whose bright mirrors and pink-lined curtains could be seen from the railway, shining resplendent at the far end of a green lawn, where an enormous pewter ball was suspended.

The river was near at hand, still wearing its Parisian aspect, filled with chains, bathing establishments, great barges, and multitudes of little, skiffs, with a layer of coaldust on their pretentious, freshly-painted names, tied to the pier and rocking to the slightest motion of the water. From her windows Sidonie could see the restaurants on the beach, silent through the week, but filled to overflowing on Sunday with a motley, noisy crowd, whose shouts of laughter, mingled with the dull splash of oars, came from both banks to meet in midstream in that current of vague murmurs, shouts, calls, laughter, and singing that floats without ceasing up and down the Seine on holidays for a distance of ten miles.

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During the week she saw shabbily-dressed idlers sauntering along the shore, men in broad-brimmed straw hats and flannel shirts, women who sat on the worn grass of the sloping bank, doing nothing, with the dreamy eyes of a cow at pasture. All the peddlers, handorgans, harpists; travelling jugglers, stopped there as at a quarantine station. The quay was crowded with them, and as they approached, the windows in the little houses near by were always thrown open, disclosing white dressing-jackets, half-buttoned, heads of dishevelled hair, and an occasional pipe, all watching these paltry strolling shows, as if with a sigh of regret for Paris, so near at hand. It was a hideous and depressing sight.

The grass, which had hardly begun to grow, was already turning yellow beneath the feet of the crowd. The dust was black; and yet, every Thursday, the cocotte aristocracy passed through on the way to the Casino, with a great show of rickety carriages and borrowed postilions. All these things gave pleasure to that fanatical Parisian, Sidonie; and then, too, in her childhood, she had heard a great deal about Asnieres from the illustrious Delobelle, who would have liked to have, like so many of his profession, a little villa in those latitudes, a cozy nook in the country to which to return by the midnight train, after the play is done.

All these dreams of little Chebe, Sidonie Risler had realized.

The brothers went to the gate opening on the quay, in which the key was usually left. They entered, making their way among trees and shrubs of recent growth. Here and there the billiard-room, the gardener's lodge, a little greenhouse, made their appearance, like the pieces of one of the Swiss chalets we give to children to play with; all very light and fragile, hardly more than resting on the ground, as if ready to fly away at the slightest breath of bankruptcy or caprice: the villa of a cocotte or a pawnbroker.

Frantz looked about in some bewilderment. In the distance, opening on a porch surrounded by vases of flowers, was the salon with its long blinds raised. An American easy-chair, folding-chairs, a small table from which the coffee had not been removed, could be seen near the door. Within they heard a succession of loud chords on the piano and the murmur of low voices.

"I tell you Sidonie will be surprised," said honest Risler, walking softly on the gravel; "she doesn't expect me until tonight. She and Madame Dobson are practising together at this moment."

Pushing the door open suddenly, he cried from the threshold in his loud, good-natured voice:

"Guess whom I've brought."



Madame Dobson, who was sitting alone at the piano, jumped up from her stool, and at the farther end of the grand salon Georges and Sidonie rose hastily behind the exotic plants that reared their heads above a table, of whose delicate, slender lines they seemed a prolongation.

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"Ah! how you frightened me!" said Sidonie, running to meet Risler.

The flounces of her white peignoir, through which blue ribbons were drawn, like little patches of blue sky among the clouds, rolled in billows over the carpet, and, having already recovered from her embarrassment, she stood very straight, with an affable expression and her everlasting little smile, as she kissed her husband and offered her forehead to Frantz, saying:

"Good morning, brother."

Risler left them confronting each other, and went up to Fromont Jeune, whom he was greatly surprised to find there.

"What, Chorche, you here? I supposed you were at Savigny."

"Yes, to be sure, but—I came—I thought you stayed at Asnieres Sundays. I wanted to speak to you on a matter of business."

Thereupon, entangling himself in his words, he began to talk hurriedly of an important order. Sidonie had disappeared after exchanging a few unmeaning words with the impassive Frantz. Madame Dobson continued her tremolos on the soft pedal, like those which accompany critical situations at the theatre.

In very truth, the situation at that moment was decidedly strained. But Risler's good-humor banished all constraint. He apologized to his partner for not being at home, and insisted upon showing Frantz the house. They went from the salon to the stable, from the stable to the carriage-house, the servants' quarters, and the conservatory. Everything was new, brilliant, gleaming, too small, and inconvenient.

"But," said Risler, with a certain pride, "it cost a heap of money!"

He persisted in compelling admiration of Sidonie's purchase even to its smallest details, exhibited the gas and water fixtures on every floor, the improved system of bells, the garden seats, the English billiard-table, the hydropathic arrangements, and accompanied his exposition with outbursts of gratitude to Fromont Jeune, who, by taking him into partnership, had literally placed a fortune in his hands.

At each new effusion on Risler's part, Georges Fromont shrank visibly, ashamed and embarrassed by the strange expression on Frantz's face.

The breakfast was lacking in gayety.

Madame Dobson talked almost without interruption, overjoyed to be swimming in the shallows of a romantic love-affair. Knowing, or rather believing that she knew her friend's story from beginning to end, she understood the lowering wrath of Frantz, a



former lover furious at finding his place filled, and the anxiety of Georges, due to the appearance of a rival; and she encouraged one with a glance, consoled the other with a smile, admired Sidonie's tranquil demeanor, and reserved all her contempt for that abominable Risler, the vulgar, uncivilized tyrant. She made an effort to prevent any of those horrible periods of silence, when the clashing knives and forks mark time in such an absurd and embarrassing way.

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As soon as breakfast was at an end Fromont Jeune announced that he must return to Savigny. Risler did not venture to detain him, thinking that his dear Madame Chorché would pass her Sunday all alone; and so, without an opportunity to say a word to his mistress, the lover went away in the bright sunlight to take an afternoon train, still attended by the husband, who insisted upon escorting him to the station.

Madame Dobson sat for a moment with Frantz and Sidonie under a little arbor which a climbing vine studded with pink buds; then, realizing that she was in the way, she returned to the salon, and as before, while Georges was there, began to play and sing softly and with expression. In the silent garden, that muffled music, gliding between the branches, seemed like the cooing of birds before the storm.

At last they were alone. Under the lattice of the arbor, still bare and leafless, the May sun shone too bright. Sidonie shaded her eyes with her hand as she watched the people passing on the quay. Frantz likewise looked out, but in another direction; and both of them, affecting to be entirely independent of each other, turned at the same instant with the same gesture and moved by the same thought.

"I have something to say to you," he said, just as she opened her mouth.

"And I to you," she replied gravely; "but come in here; we shall be more comfortable."

And they entered together a little summer-house at the foot of the garden.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Charm of that one day's rest and its solemnity
Clashing knives and forks mark time
Faces taken by surprise allow their real thoughts to be seen
Make for themselves a horizon of the neighboring walls and roofs
Wiping his forehead ostentatiously

FROMONT AND RISLER

By Alphonse daudet

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XIV

EXPLANATION

By slow degrees Sidonie sank to her former level, yes, even lower. From the rich, well-considered bourgeoisie to which her marriage had raised her, she descended the ladder to the rank of a mere toy. By dint of travelling in railway carriages with fantastically dressed courtesans, with their hair worn over their eyes like a terrier's, or falling over the back 'à la Genevieve de Brabant', she came at last to resemble them. She transformed herself into a blonde for two months, to the unbounded amazement of Rizer, who could not understand how his doll was so changed. As for Georges, all these eccentricities amused him; it seemed to him that he had ten women in one. He was the real husband, the master of the house.

To divert Sidonie's thoughts, he had provided a simulacrum of society for her—his bachelor friends, a few fast tradesmen, almost no women, women have too sharp eyes. Madame Dobson was the only friend of Sidonie's sex.

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They organized grand dinner-parties, excursions on the water, fireworks. From day to day Risler's position became more absurd, more distressing. When he came home in the evening, tired out, shabbily dressed, he must hurry up to his room to dress.

"We have some people to dinner," his wife would say. "Make haste."

And he would be the last to take his place at the table, after shaking hands all around with his guests, friends of Fromont Jeune, whom he hardly knew by name. Strange to say, the affairs of the factory were often discussed at that table, to which Georges brought his acquaintances from the club with the tranquil self-assurance of the gentleman who pays.

"Business breakfasts and dinners!" To Risler's mind that phrase explained everything: his partner's constant presence, his choice of guests, and the marvellous gowns worn by Sidonie, who beautified herself in the interests of the firm. This coquetry on his mistress's part drove Fromont Jeune to despair. Day after day he came unexpectedly to take her by surprise, uneasy, suspicious, afraid to leave that perverse and deceitful character to its own devices for long.

"What in the deuce has become of your husband?"

Pere Gardinois would ask his grand-daughter with a cunning leer. "Why doesn't he come here oftener?"

Claire apologized for Georges, but his continual neglect began to disturb her. She wept now when she received the little notes, the despatches which arrived daily at the dinner-hour: "Don't expect me to-night, dear love. I shall not be able to come to Savigny until to-morrow or the day after by the night-train."

She ate her dinner sadly, opposite an empty chair, and although she did not know that she was betrayed, she felt that her husband was becoming accustomed to living away from her. He was so absent-minded when a family gathering or some other unavoidable duty detained him at the chateau, so silent concerning what was in his mind. Claire, having now only the most distant relations with Sidonie, knew nothing of what was taking place at Asnieres: but when Georges left her, apparently eager to be gone, and with smiling face, she tormented her loneliness with unavowed suspicions, and, like all those who anticipate a great sorrow, she suddenly became conscious of a great void in her heart, a place made ready for disasters to come.

Her husband was hardly happier than she. That cruel Sidonie seemed to take pleasure in tormenting him. She allowed everybody to pay court to her. At that moment a certain Cazabon, alias Cazaboni, an Italian tenor from Toulouse, introduced by Madame Dobson, came every day to sing disturbing duets. Georges, jealous beyond words, hurried to Asnieres in the afternoon, neglecting everything, and was already beginning

to think that Risler did not watch his wife closely enough. He would have liked him to be blind only so far as he was concerned.

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Ah! if he had been her husband, what a tight rein he would have kept on her! But he had no power over her and she was not at all backward about telling him so. Sometimes, too, with the invincible logic that often occurs to the greatest fools, he reflected that, as he was deceiving his friend, perhaps he deserved to be deceived. In short, his was a wretched life. He passed his time running about to jewellers and dry-goods dealers, inventing gifts and surprises. Ah! he knew her well. He knew that he could pacify her with trinkets, yet not retain his hold upon her, and that, when the day came that she was bored—

But Sidonie was not bored as yet. She was living the life that she longed to live; she had all the happiness she could hope to attain. There was nothing passionate or romantic about her feeling for Georges. He was like a second husband to her, younger and, above all, richer than the other. To complete the vulgarization of their liaison, she had summoned her parents to Asnieres, lodged them in a little house in the country, and made of that vain and wilfully blind father and that affectionate, still bewildered mother a halo of respectability of which she felt the necessity as she sank lower and lower.

Everything was shrewdly planned in that perverse little brain, which reflected coolly upon vice; and it seemed to her as if she might continue to live thus in peace, when Frantz Risler suddenly arrived.

Simply from seeing him enter the room, she had realized that her repose was threatened, that an interview of the gravest importance was to take place between them.

Her plan was formed on the instant. She must at once put it into execution.

The summer-house that they entered contained one large, circular room with four windows, each looking out upon a different landscape; it was furnished for the purposes of summer siestas, for the hot hours when one seeks shelter from the sunlight and the noises of the garden. A broad, very low divan ran all around the wall. A small lacquered table, also very low, stood in the middle of the room, covered with odd numbers of society journals.

The hangings were new, and the Persian pattern-birds flying among bluish reeds—produced the effect of a dream in summer, ethereal figures floating before one's languid eyes. The lowered blinds, the matting on the floor, the Virginia jasmine clinging to the trellis-work outside, produced a refreshing coolness which was enhanced by the splashing in the river near by, and the lapping of its wavelets on the shore.

Sidonie sat down as soon as she entered the room, pushing aside her long white skirt, which sank like a mass of snow at the foot of the divan; and with sparkling eyes and a smile playing about her lips, bending her little head slightly, its saucy coquettishness heightened by the bow of ribbon on the side, she waited.

Frantz, pale as death, remained standing, looking about the room. After a moment he began:

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"I congratulate you, Madame; you understand how to make yourself comfortable."

And in the next breath, as if he were afraid that the conversation, beginning at such a distance, would not arrive quickly enough at the point to which he intended to lead it, he added brutally:

"To whom do you owe this magnificence, to your lover or your husband?"

Without moving from the divan, without even raising her eyes to his, she answered:

"To both."

He was a little disconcerted by such self-possession.

"Then you confess that that man is your lover?"

"Confess it!—yes!"

Frantz gazed at her a moment without speaking. She, too, had turned pale, notwithstanding her calmness, and the eternal little smile no longer quivered at the corners of her mouth.

He continued:

"Listen to me, Sidonie! My brother's name, the name he gave his wife, is mine as well. Since Risler is so foolish, so blind as to allow the name to be dishonored by you, it is my place to defend it against your attacks. I beg you, therefore, to inform Monsieur Georges Fromont that he must change mistresses as soon as possible, and go elsewhere to ruin himself. If not—"

"If not?" queried Sidonie, who had not ceased to play with her rings while he was speaking.

"If not, I shall tell my brother what is going on in his house, and you will be surprised at the Risler whose acquaintance you will make then—a man as violent and ungovernable as he usually is inoffensive. My disclosure will kill him perhaps, but you can be sure that he will kill you first."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well! let him kill me. What do I care for that?"

This was said with such a heartbroken, despondent air that Frantz, in spite of himself, felt a little pity for that beautiful, fortunate young creature, who talked of dying with such self-abandonment.

“Do you love him so dearly?” he said, in an indefinably milder tone. “Do you love this Fromont so dearly that you prefer to die rather than renounce him?”

She drew herself up hastily.

“I? Love that fop, that doll, that silly girl in men’s clothes? Nonsense!—I took him as I would have taken any other man.”

“Why?”

“Because I couldn’t help it, because I was mad, because I had and still have in my heart a criminal love, which I am determined to tear out, no matter at what cost.”

She had risen and was speaking with her eyes in his, her lips near his, trembling from head to foot.

A criminal love?—Whom did she love, in God’s name?

Frantz was afraid to question her.

Although suspecting nothing as yet, he had a feeling that that glance, that breath, leaning toward him, were about to make some horrible disclosure.

But his office of judge made it necessary for him to know all.

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"Who is it?" he asked.

She replied in a stifled voice:

"You know very well that it is you."

She was his brother's wife.

For two years he had not thought of her except as a sister. In his eyes his brother's wife in no way resembled his former fiancée, and it would have been a crime to recognize in a single feature of her face the woman to whom he had formerly so often said, "I love you."

And now it was she who said that she loved him.

The unhappy judge was thunderstruck, dazed, could find no words in which to reply.

She, standing before him, waited.

It was one of those spring days, full of heat and light, to which the moisture of recent rains imparts a strange softness and melancholy. The air was warm, perfumed by fresh flowers which, on that first day of heat, gave forth their fragrance eagerly, like violets hidden in a muff. Through its long, open windows the room in which they were inhaled all those intoxicating odors. Outside, they could hear the Sunday organs, distant shouts on the river, and nearer at hand, in the garden, Madame Dobson's amorous, languishing voice, sighing:

"On dit que tu te maries;
Tu sais que j'en puis mouri-i-i-r!"

"Yes, Frantz, I have always loved you," said Sidonie. "That love which I renounced long ago because I was a young girl—and young girls do not know what they are doing—that love nothing has ever succeeded in destroying or lessening. When I learned that Desiree also loved you, the unfortunate, penniless child, in a great outburst of generosity I determined to assure her happiness for life by sacrificing my own, and I at once turned you away, so that you should go to her. Ah! as soon as you had gone, I realized that the sacrifice was beyond my strength. Poor little Desiree! How I cursed her in the bottom of my heart! Will you believe it? Since that time I have avoided seeing her, meeting her. The sight of her caused me too much pain."

"But if you loved me," asked Frantz, in a low voice, "if you loved me, why did you marry my brother?"

She did not waver.

“To marry Risler was to bring myself nearer to you. I said to myself: ‘I could not be his wife. Very well, I will be his sister. At all events, in that way it will still be allowable for me to love him, and we shall not pass our whole lives as strangers.’ Alas! those are the innocent dreams a girl has at twenty, dreams of which she very soon learns the impossibility. I could not love you as a sister, Frantz; I could not forget you, either; my marriage prevented that. With another husband I might perhaps have succeeded, but with Risler it was terrible. He was forever talking about you and your success and your future—Frantz said this; Frantz did that—He loves you so well, poor fellow! And then the most cruel thing to me is that your brother looks like you. There is a sort of family resemblance in your features,

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in your gait, in your voices especially, for I have often closed my eyes under his caresses, saying to myself, 'It is he, it is Frantz.' When I saw that that wicked thought was becoming a source of torment to me, something that I could not escape, I tried to find distraction, I consented to listen to this Georges, who had been pestering me for a long time, to transform my life to one of noise and excitement. But I swear to you, Frantz, that in that whirlpool of pleasure into which I then plunged, I never have ceased to think of you, and if any one had a right to come here and call me to account for my conduct, you certainly are not the one, for you, unintentionally, have made me what I am."

She paused. Frantz dared not raise his eyes to her face. For a moment past she had seemed to him too lovely, too alluring. She was his brother's wife!

Nor did he dare speak. The unfortunate youth felt that the old passion was despotically taking possession of his heart once more, and that at that moment glances, words, everything that burst forth from it would be love.

And she was his brother's wife!

"Ah! wretched, wretched creatures that we are!" exclaimed the poor judge, dropping upon the divan beside her.

Those few words were in themselves an act of cowardice, a beginning of surrender, as if destiny, by showing itself so pitiless, had deprived him of the strength to defend himself. Sidonie had placed her hand on his. "Frantz—Frantz!" she said; and they remained there side by side, silent and burning with emotion, soothed by Madame Dobson's romance, which reached their ears by snatches through the shrubbery:

"Ton amour, c'est ma folie.
Helas! je n'en puis guei-i-i-r."

Suddenly Risler's tall figure appeared in the doorway.

"This way, Chebe, this way. They are in the summerhouse."

As he spoke the husband entered, escorting his father-in-law and mother-in-law, whom he had gone to fetch.

There was a moment of effusive greetings and innumerable embraces. You should have seen the patronizing air with which M. Chebe scrutinized the young man, who was head and shoulders taller than he.

"Well, my boy, does the Suez Canal progress as you would wish?"

Madame Chebe, in whose thoughts Frantz had never ceased to be her future son-in-law, threw her arms around him, while Risler, tactless as usual in his gayety and his enthusiasm, waved his arms, talked of killing several fatted calves to celebrate the return of the prodigal son, and roared to the singing-mistress in a voice that echoed through the neighboring gardens:

“Madame Dobson, Madame Dobson—if you’ll allow me, it’s a pity for you to be singing there. To the devil with sadness for to-day! Play us something lively, a good waltz, so that I can take a turn with Madame Chebe.”

“Risler, Risler, are you crazy, my son-in-law?”



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"Come, come, mamma! We must dance."

And up and down the paths, to the strains of an automatic six-step waltz—a genuine valse de Vaucanson—he dragged his breathless mamma-in-law, who stopped at every step to restore to their usual orderliness the dangling ribbons of her hat and the lace trimming of her shawl, her lovely shawl bought for Sidonie's wedding.

Poor Risler was intoxicated with joy.

To Frantz that was an endless, indelible day of agony. Driving, rowing on the river, lunch on the grass on the Ile des Ravageurs—he was spared none of the charms of Asnieres; and all the time, in the dazzling sunlight of the roads, in the glare reflected by the water, he must laugh and chatter, describe his journey, talk of the Isthmus of Suez and the great work undertaken there, listen to the whispered complaints of M. Chebe, who was still incensed with his children, and to his brother's description of the Press. "Rotary, my dear Frantz, rotary and dodecagonal!" Sidonie left the gentlemen to their conversation and seemed absorbed in deep thought. From time to time she said a word or two to Madame Dobson, or smiled sadly at her, and Frantz, not daring to look at her, followed the motions of her blue-lined parasol and of the white flounces of her skirt.

How she had changed in two years! How lovely she had grown!

Then horrible thoughts came to his mind. There were races at Longchamps that day. Carriages passed theirs, rubbed against it, driven by women with painted faces, closely veiled. Sitting motionless on the box, they held their long whips straight in the air, with doll-like gestures, and nothing about them seemed alive except their blackened eyes, fixed on the horses' heads. As they passed, people turned to look. Every eye followed them, as if drawn by the wind caused by their rapid motion.

Sidonie resembled those creatures. She might herself have driven Georges' carriage; for Frantz was in Georges' carriage. He had drunk Georges' wine. All the luxurious enjoyment of that family party came from Georges.

It was shameful, revolting! He would have liked to shout the whole story to his brother. Indeed, it was his duty, as he had come there for that express purpose. But he no longer felt the courage to do it. Ah! the unhappy judge!

That evening after dinner, in the salon open to the fresh breeze from the river, Risler begged his wife to sing. He wished her to exhibit all her newly acquired accomplishments to Frantz.

Sidonie, leaning on the piano, objected with a melancholy air, while Madame Dobson ran her fingers over the keys, shaking her long curls.

"But I don't know anything. What do you wish me to sing?"



She ended, however, by being persuaded. Pale, disenchanted, with her mind upon other things, in the flickering light of the candles which seemed to be burning incense, the air was so heavy with the odor of the hyacinths and lilacs in the garden, she began a Creole ballad very popular in Louisiana, which Madame Dobson herself had arranged for the voice and piano:

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“Pauv’ pitit Mam’zelle Zizi,
C’est l’amou, l’amou qui tourne la tete a li.”

[“Poor little Mam’zelle Zizi,
'Tis love, 'tis love that turns her head.”]

And as she told the story of the ill-fated little Zizi, who was driven mad by passion, Sidonie had the appearance of a love-sick woman. With what heartrending expression, with the cry of a wounded dove, did she repeat that refrain, so melancholy and so sweet, in the childlike patois of the colonies:

“C’est l’amou, l’amou qui tourne la tete....”

It was enough to drive the unlucky judge mad as well.

But no! The siren had been unfortunate in her choice of a ballad. For, at the mere name of Mam’zelle Zizi, Frantz was suddenly transported to a gloomy chamber in the Marais, a long way from Sidonie’s salon, and his compassionate heart evoked the image of little Desiree Delobelle, who had loved him so long. Until she was fifteen, she never had been called anything but Ziree or Zizi, and she was the pauv’ pitit of the Creole ballad to the life, the ever-neglected, ever-faithful lover. In vain now did the other sing. Frantz no longer heard her or saw her. He was in that poor room, beside the great armchair, on the little low chair on which he had sat so often awaiting the father’s return. Yes, there, and there only, was his salvation. He must take refuge in that child’s love, throw himself at her feet, say to her, “Take me, save me!” And who knows? She loved him so dearly. Perhaps she would save him, would cure him of his guilty passion.

“Where are you going?” asked Risler, seeing that his brother rose hurriedly as soon as the last flourish was at an end.

“I am going back. It is late.”

“What? You are not going to sleep here? Why your room is ready for you.”

“It is all ready,” added Sidonie, with a meaning glance.

He refused resolutely. His presence in Paris was necessary for the fulfilment of certain very important commissions intrusted to him by the Company. They continued their efforts to detain him when he was in the vestibule, when he was crossing the garden in the moonlight and running to the station, amid all the divers noises of Asnieres.

When he had gone, Risler went up to his room, leaving Sidonie and Madame Dobson at the windows of the salon. The music from the neighboring Casino reached their ears, with the “Yo-ho!” of the boatmen and the footsteps of the dancers like a rhythmical, muffled drumming on the tambourine.



"There's a kill-joy for you!" observed Madame Dobson.

"Oh, I have checkmated him," replied Sidonie; "only I must be careful. I shall be closely watched now. He is so jealous. I am going to write to Cazaboni not to come again for some time, and you must tell Georges to-morrow morning to go to Savigny for a fortnight."

CHAPTER XV

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POOR LITTLE MAM'ZELLE ZIZI

Oh, how happy Desiree was!

Frantz came every day and sat at her feet on the little low chair, as in the good old days, and he no longer came to talk of Sidonie.

As soon as she began to work in the morning, she would see the door open softly. "Good morning, Mam'zelle Zizi." He always called her now by the name she had borne as a child; and if you could know how prettily he said it: "Good morning, Mam'zelle Zizi."

In the evening they waited for "the father" together, and while she worked he made her shudder with the story of his adventures.

"What is the matter with you? You're not the same as you used to be," Mamma Delobelle would say, surprised to see her in such high spirits and above all so active. For instead of remaining always buried in her easy-chair, with the self-renunciation of a young grandmother, the little creature was continually jumping up and running to the window as lightly as if she were putting out wings; and she practised standing erect, asking her mother in a whisper:

"Do you notice *it* when I am not walking?"

From her graceful little head, upon which she had previously concentrated all her energies in the arrangement of her hair, her coquetry extended over her whole person, as did her fine, waving tresses when she unloosed them. Yes, she was very, very coquettish now; and everybody noticed it. Even the "birds and insects for ornament" assumed a knowing little air.

Ah, yes! Desiree Delobelle was happy. For some days M. Frantz had been talking of their all going into the country together; and as the father, kind and generous as always, graciously consented to allow the ladies to take a day's rest, all four set out one Sunday morning.

Oh! the lovely drive, the lovely country, the lovely river, the lovely trees!

Do not ask her where they went; Desiree never knew. But she will tell you that the sun was brighter there than anywhere else, the birds more joyous, the woods denser; and she will not lie.

The bouquet that the little cripple brought back from that beautiful excursion made her room fragrant for a week. Among the hyacinths, the violets, the white-thorn, was a multitude of nameless little flowers, those flowers of the lowly which grow from nomadic seed scattered everywhere along the roads.



Gazing at the slender, pale blue and bright pink blossoms, with all the delicate shades that flowers invented before colorists, many and many a time during that week Desiree took her excursion again. The violets reminded her of the little moss-covered mound on which she had picked them, seeking them under the leaves, her fingers touching Frantz's. They had found these great water-lilies on the edge of a ditch, still damp from the winter rains, and, in order to reach them, she had leaned very heavily on Frantz's arm. All these memories occurred to her as she worked. Meanwhile the sun, shining in at the open window, made the feathers of the hummingbirds glisten. The springtime, youth, the songs of the birds, the fragrance of the flowers, transfigured that dismal fifth-floor workroom, and Desiree said in all seriousness to Mamma Delobelle, putting her nose to her friend's bouquet:

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"Have you noticed how sweet the flowers smell this year, mamma?"

And Frantz, too, began to fall under the charm. Little by little Mam'zelle Zizi took possession of his heart and banished from it even the memory of Sidonie. To be sure, the poor judge did all that he could to accomplish that result. At every hour in the day he was by Desiree's side, and clung to her like a child. Not once did he venture to return to Asnieres. He feared the other too much.

"Pray come and see us once in a while; Sidonie keeps asking for you," Risler said to him from time to time, when his brother came to the factory to see him. But Frantz held firm, alleging all sorts of business engagements as pretexts for postponing his visit to the next day. It was easy to satisfy Risler, who was more engrossed than ever with his press, which they had just begun to build.

Whenever Frantz came down from his brother's closet, old Sigismond was sure to be watching for him, and would walk a few steps with him in his long, lute-string sleeves, quill and knife in hand. He kept the young man informed concerning matters at the factory. For some time past, things seemed to have changed for the better. Monsieur Georges came to his office regularly, and returned to Savigny every night. No more bills were presented at the counting-room. It seemed, too, that Madame over yonder was keeping more within bounds.

The cashier was triumphant.

"You see, my boy, whether I did well to write to you. Your arrival was all that was needed to straighten everything out. And yet," the good man would add by force of habit, "and yet I haf no gonfidence."

"Never fear, Monsieur Sigismond, I am here," the judge would reply.

"You're not going away yet, are you, my dear Frantz?"

"No, no—not yet. I have an important matter to finish up first."

"Ah! so much the better."

The important matter to which Frantz referred was his marriage to Desiree Delobelle. He had not yet mentioned it to any one, not even to her; but Mam'zelle Zizi must have suspected something, for she became prettier and more lighthearted from day to day, as if she foresaw that the day would soon come when she would need all her gayety and all her beauty.

They were alone in the workroom one Sunday afternoon. Mamma Delobelle had gone out, proud enough to show herself for once in public with her great man, and leaving friend Frantz with her daughter to keep her company. Carefully dressed, his whole

person denoting a holiday air, Frantz had a singular expression on his face that day, an expression at once timid and resolute, emotional and solemn, and simply from the way in which the little low chair took its place beside the great easy-chair, the easy-chair understood that a very serious communication was about to be made to it in confidence, and it had some little suspicion as to what it might be.

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The conversation began with divers unimportant remarks, interspersed with long and frequent pauses, just as, on a journey, we stop at every baiting-place to take breath, to enable us to reach our destination.

"It is a fine day to-day."

"Oh! yes, beautiful."

"Our flowers still smell sweet."

"Oh! very sweet."

And even as they uttered those trivial sentences, their voices trembled at the thought of what was about to be said.

At last the little low chair moved a little nearer the great easy-chair; their eyes met, their fingers were intertwined, and the two, in low tones, slowly called each other by their names.

"Desiree!"

"Frantz!"

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

It was the soft little tap of a daintily gloved hand which fears to soil itself by the slightest touch.

"Come in!" said Desiree, with a slight gesture of impatience; and Sidonie appeared, lovely, coquettish, and affable. She had come to see her little Zizi, to embrace her as she was passing by. She had been meaning to come for so long.

Frantz's presence seemed to surprise her greatly, and, being engrossed by her delight in talking with her former friend, she hardly looked at him. After the effusive greetings and caresses, after a pleasant chat over old times, she expressed a wish to see the window on the landing and the room formerly occupied by the Rislers. It pleased her thus to live all her youth over again.

"Do you remember, Frantz, when the Princess Hummingbird entered your room, holding her little head very straight under a diadem of birds' feathers?"

Frantz did not reply. He was too deeply moved to reply. Something warned him that it was on his account, solely on his account, that the woman had come, that she was determined to see him again, to prevent him from giving himself to another, and the poor wretch realized with dismay that she would not have to exert herself overmuch to

accomplish her object. When he saw her enter the room, his whole heart had been caught in her net once more.

Desiree suspected nothing, not she! Sidonie's manner was so frank and friendly. And then, they were brother and sister now. Love was no longer possible between them.

But the little cripple had a vague presentiment of woe when Sidonie, standing in the doorway and ready to go, turned carelessly to her brother-in-law and said:

"By the way, Frantz, Risler told me to be sure to bring you back to dine with us to-night. The carriage is below. We will pick him up as we pass the factory."

Then she added, with the prettiest smile imaginable:

"You will let us have him, won't you, Ziree? Don't be afraid; we will send him back."

And he had the courage to go, the ungrateful wretch!

He went without hesitation, without once turning back, whirled away by his passion as by a raging sea, and neither on that day nor the next nor ever after could Mam'zelle Zizi's great easy-chair learn what the interesting communication was that the little low chair had to make to it.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE WAITING-ROOM

"Well, yes, I love you, I love you, more than ever and for ever! What is the use of struggling and fighting against fate? Our sin is stronger than we. But, after all, is it a crime for us to love? We were destined for each other. Have we not the right to come together, although life has parted us? So, come! It is all over; we will go away. Meet me to-morrow evening, Lyon station, at ten o'clock. The tickets are secured and I shall be there awaiting you.

"Frantz."

For a month past Sidonie had been hoping for that letter, a month during which she had brought all her coaxing and cunning into play to lure her brother-in-law on to that written revelation of passion. She had difficulty in accomplishing it. It was no easy matter to pervert an honest young heart like Frantz's to the point of committing a crime; and in that strange contest, in which the one who really loved fought against his own cause, she had often felt that she was at the end of her strength and was almost discouraged. When she was most confident that he was conquered, his sense of right would suddenly rebel, and he would be all ready to flee, to escape her once more.

What a triumph it was for her, therefore, when that letter was handed to her one morning. Madame Dobson happened to be there. She had just arrived, laden with complaints from Georges, who was horribly bored away from his mistress, and was beginning to be alarmed concerning this brother-in-law, who was more attentive, more jealous, more exacting than a husband.

"Oh! the poor, dear fellow, the poor, dear, fellow," said the sentimental American, "if you could see how unhappy he is!"

And, shaking her curls, she unrolled her music-roll and took from it the poor, dear fellow's letters, which she had carefully hidden between the leaves of her songs, delighted to be involved in this love-story, to give vent to her emotion in an atmosphere of intrigue and mystery which melted her cold eyes and suffused her dry, pale complexion.

Strange to say, while lending her aid most willingly to this constant going and coming of love-letters, the youthful and attractive Dobson had never written or received a single one on her own account.

Always on the road between Asnieres and Paris with an amorous message under her wing, that odd carrier-pigeon remained true to her own dovecot and cooed for none but unselfish motives.

When Sidonie showed her Frantz's note, Madame Dobson asked:

"What shall you write in reply?"

"I have already written. I consented."

"What! You will go away with that madman?"

Sidonie laughed scornfully.

"Ha! ha! well, hardly! I consented so that he may go and wait for me at the station. That is all. The least I can do is to give him a quarter of an hour of agony. He has made me miserable enough for the last month. Just consider that I have changed my whole life for my gentleman! I have had to close my doors and give up seeing my friends and everybody I know who is young and agreeable, beginning with Georges and ending with you. For you know, my dear, you weren't agreeable to him, and he would have liked to dismiss you with the rest."

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The one thing that Sidonie did not mention—and it was the deepest cause of her anger against Frantz—was that he had frightened her terribly by threatening to tell her husband her guilty secret. From that moment she had felt decidedly ill at ease, and her life, her dear life, which she so petted and coddled, had seemed to her to be exposed to serious danger. Yes, the thought that her husband might some day be apprized of her conduct positively terrified her.

That blessed letter put an end to all her fears. It was impossible now for Frantz to expose her, even in the frenzy of his disappointment, knowing that she had such a weapon in her hands; and if he did speak, she would show the letter, and all his accusations would become in Risler's eyes calumny pure and simple. Ah, master judge, we have you now!

"I am born again—I am born again!" she cried to Madame Dobson. She ran out into the garden, gathered great bouquets for her salon, threw the windows wide open to the sunlight, gave orders to the cook, the coachman, the gardener. The house must be made to look beautiful, for Georges was coming back, and for a beginning she organized a grand dinner-party for the end of the week.

The next evening Sidonie, Risler, and Madame Dobson were together in the salon. While honest Risler turned the leaves of an old handbook of mechanics, Sidonie sang to Madame Dobson's accompaniment. Suddenly she stopped in the middle of her aria and burst into a peal of laughter. The clock had just struck ten.

Risler looked up quickly.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing—an idea that came into my head," replied Sidonie, winking of Madame Dobson and pointing at the clock.

It was the hour appointed for the meeting, and she was thinking of her lover's torture as he waited for her to come.

Since the return of the messenger bringing from Sidonie the "yes" he had so feverishly awaited, a great calm had come over his troubled mind, like the sudden removal of a heavy burden. No more uncertainty, no more clashing between passion and duty.

Not once did it occur to him that on the other side of the landing some one was weeping and sighing because of him. Not once did he think of his brother's despair, of the ghastly drama they were to leave behind them. He saw a sweet little pale face resting beside his in the railway train, a blooming lip within reach of his lip, and two fathomless eyes looking at him by the soft light of the lamp, to the soothing accompaniment of the wheels and the steam.



Two hours before the opening of the gate for the designated train, Frantz was already at the Lyon station, that gloomy station which, in the distant quarter of Paris in which it is situated, seems like a first halting-place in the provinces. He sat down in the darkest corner and remained there without stirring, as if dazed.

Instinctively, although the appointed hour was still distant, he looked among the people who were hurrying along, calling to one another, to see if he could not discern that graceful figure suddenly emerging from the crowd and thrusting it aside at every step with the radiance of her beauty.

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After many departures and arrivals and shrill whistles, the station suddenly became empty, as deserted as a church on weekdays. The time for the ten o'clock train was drawing near. There was no other train before that. Frantz rose. In a quarter of an hour, half an hour at the least, she would be there.

Frantz went hither and thither, watching the carriages that arrived. Each new arrival made him start. He fancied that he saw her enter, closely veiled, hesitating, a little embarrassed. How quickly he would be by her side, to comfort her, to protect her!

The hour for the departure of the train was approaching. He looked at the clock. There was but a quarter of an hour more. It alarmed him; but the bell at the wicket, which had now been opened, summoned him. He ran thither and took his place in the long line.

"Two first-class for Marseilles," he said. It seemed to him as if that were equivalent to taking possession.

He made his way back to his post of observation through the luggage-laden wagons and the late-comers who jostled him as they ran. The drivers shouted, "Take care!" He stood there among the wheels of the cabs, under the horses' feet, with deaf ears and staring eyes. Only five minutes more. It was almost impossible for her to arrive in time.

At last she appeared.

Yes, there she is, it is certainly she—a woman in black, slender and graceful, accompanied by another shorter woman—Madame Dobson, no doubt.

But a second glance undeceived him. It was a young woman who resembled her, a woman of fashion like her, with a happy face. A man, also young, joined them. It was evidently a wedding-party; the mother accompanied them, to see them safely on board the train.

Now there is the confusion of departure, the last stroke of the bell, the steam escaping with a hissing sound, mingled with the hurried footsteps of belated passengers, the slamming of doors and the rumbling of the heavy omnibuses. Sidonie comes not. And Frantz still waits.

At that moment a hand is placed on his shoulder.

Great God!

He turns. The coarse face of M. Gardinois, surrounded by a travelling-cap with ear-pieces, is before him.

"I am not mistaken, it is Monsieur Risler. Are you going to Marseilles by the express? I am not going far."

He explains to Frantz that he has missed the Orleans train, and is going to try to connect with Savigny by the Lyon line; then he talks about Risler Aine and the factory.

“It seems that business hasn’t been prospering for some time. They were caught in the Bonnardel failure. Ah! our young men need to be careful. At the rate they’re sailing their ship, the same thing is likely to happen to them that happened to Bonnardel. But excuse me, I believe they’re about to close the gate. Au revoir.”

Frantz has hardly heard what he has been saying. His brother’s ruin, the destruction of the whole world, nothing is of any further consequence to him. He is waiting, waiting.

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But now the gate is abruptly closed like a last barrier between him and his persistent hope. Once more the station is empty. The uproar has been transferred to the line of the railway, and suddenly a shrill whistle falls upon the lover's ear like an ironical farewell, then dies away in the darkness.

The ten o'clock train has gone!

He tries to be calm and to reason. Evidently she missed the train from Asmeres; but, knowing that he is waiting for her, she will come, no matter how late it may be. He will wait longer. The waiting-room was made for that.

The unhappy man sits down on a bench. The prospect of a long vigil brings to his mind a well-known room in which at that hour the lamp burns low on a table laden with humming-birds and insects, but that vision passes swiftly through his mind in the chaos of confused thoughts to which the delirium of suspense gives birth.

And while he thus lost himself in thought, the hours passed. The roofs of the buildings of Mazas, buried in darkness, were already beginning to stand out distinctly against the brightening sky. What was he to do? He must go to Asnieres at once and try to find out what had happened. He wished he were there already.

Having made up his mind, he descended the steps of the station at a rapid pace, passing soldiers with their knapsacks on their backs, and poor people who rise early coming to take the morning train, the train of poverty and want.

In front of one of the stations he saw a crowd collected, rag-pickers and countrywomen. Doubtless some drama of the night about to reach its denouement before the Commissioner of Police. Ah! if Frantz had known what that drama was! but he could have no suspicion, and he glanced at the crowd indifferently from a distance.

When he reached Asnieres, after a walk of two or three hours, it was like an awakening. The sun, rising in all its glory, set field and river on fire. The bridge, the houses, the quay, all stood forth with that matutinal sharpness of outline which gives the impression of a new day emerging, luminous and smiling, from the dense mists of the night. From a distance he descried his brother's house, already awake, the open blinds and the flowers on the window-sills. He wandered about some time before he could summon courage to enter.

Suddenly some one hailed him from the shore:

"Ah! Monsieur Frantz. How early you are today!"

It was Sidonie's coachman taking his horses to bathe in the river.

"Has anything happened at the house?" inquired Frantz tremblingly.

“No, Monsieur Frantz.”

“Is my brother at home?”

“No, Monsieur slept at the factory.”

“No one sick?”

“No, Monsieur Frantz, no one, so far as I know.”

Thereupon Frantz made up his mind to ring at the small gate. The gardener was raking the paths. The house was astir; and, early as it was, he heard Sidonie’s voice as clear and vibrating as the song of a bird among the rose-bushes of the facade.

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She was talking with animation. Frantz, deeply moved, drew near to listen.

“No, no cream. The ‘cafe parfait’ will be enough. Be sure that it’s well frozen and ready at seven o’clock. Oh! about an entree—let us see—”

She was holding council with her cook concerning the famous dinner-party for the next day. Her brother-in-law’s sudden appearance did not disconcert her.

“Ah! good-morning, Frantz,” she said very coolly. “I am at your service directly. We’re to have some people to dinner to-morrow, customers of the firm, a grand business dinner. You’ll excuse me, won’t you?”

Fresh and smiling, in the white ruffles of her trailing morning-gown and her little lace cap, she continued to discuss her menu, inhaling the cool air that rose from the fields and the river. There was not the slightest trace of chagrin or anxiety upon that tranquil face, which was a striking contrast to the lover’s features, distorted by a night of agony and fatigue.

For a long quarter of an hour Frantz, sitting in a corner of the salon, saw all the conventional dishes of a bourgeois dinner pass before him in their regular order, from the little hot pates, the sole Normande and the innumerable ingredients of which that dish is composed, to the Montreuil peaches and Fontainebleau grapes.

At last, when they were alone and he was able to speak, he asked in a hollow voice:

“Didn’t you receive my letter?”

“Why, yes, of course.”

She had risen to go to the mirror and adjust a little curl or two entangled with her floating ribbons, and continued, looking at herself all the while:

“Yes, I received your letter. Indeed, I was charmed to receive it. Now, should you ever feel inclined to tell your brother any of the vile stories about me that you have threatened me with, I could easily satisfy him that the only source of your lying tale-bearing was anger with me for repulsing a criminal passion as it deserved. Consider yourself warned, my dear boy—and au revoir.”

As pleased as an actress who has just delivered a telling speech with fine effect, she passed him and left the room smiling, with a little curl at the corners of her mouth, triumphant and without anger. And he did not kill her!

CHAPTER XVII

AN ITEM OF NEWS

In the evening preceding that ill-omened day, a few moments after Frantz had stealthily left his room on Rue de Braque, the illustrious Delobelle returned home, with downcast face and that air of lassitude and disillusionment with which he always met untoward events.

“Oh! mon Dieu, my poor man, what has happened?” instantly inquired Madame Delobelle, whom twenty years of exaggerated dramatic pantomime had not yet surfeited.

Before replying, the ex-actor, who never failed to precede his most trivial words with some facial play, learned long before for stage purposes, dropped his lower lip, in token of disgust and loathing, as if he had just swallowed something very bitter.

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"The matter is that those Rislers are certainly ingrates or egotists, and, beyond all question, exceedingly ill-bred. Do you know what I just learned downstairs from the concierge, who glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, making sport of me? Well, Frantz Risler has gone! He left the house a short time ago, and has left Paris perhaps ere this, without so much as coming to shake my hand, to thank me for the welcome he has received here. What do you think of that? For he didn't say good-bye to you two either, did he? And yet, only a month ago, he was always in our rooms, without any remonstrance from us."

Mamma Delobelle uttered an exclamation of genuine surprise and grief. Desiree, on the contrary, did not say a word or make a motion. She was always the same little iceberg.

Oh! wretched mother, turn your eyes upon your daughter. See that transparent pallor, those tearless eyes which gleam unwaveringly, as if their thoughts and their gaze were concentrated on some object visible to them alone. Cause that poor suffering heart to open itself to you. Question your child. Make her speak, above all things make her weep, to rid her of the burden that is stifling her, so that her tear-dimmed eyes can no longer distinguish in space that horrible unknown thing upon which they are fixed in desperation now.

For nearly a month past, ever since the day when Sidonie came and took Frantz away in her coupe, Desiree had known that she was no longer loved, and she knew her rival's name. She bore them no ill-will, she pitied them rather. But, why had he returned? Why had he so heedlessly given her false hopes? How many tears had she devoured in silence since those hours! How many tales of woe had she told her little birds! For once more it was work that had sustained her, desperate, incessant work, which, by its regularity and monotony, by the constant recurrence of the same duties and the same motions, served as a balance-wheel to her thoughts.

Lately Frantz was not altogether lost to her. Although he came but rarely to see her, she knew that he was there, she could hear him go in and out, pace, the floor with restless step, and sometimes, through the half-open door, see his loved shadow hurry across the landing. He did not seem happy. Indeed, what happiness could be in store for him? He loved his brother's wife. And at the thought that Frantz was not happy, the fond creature almost forgot her own sorrow to think only of the sorrow of the man she loved.

She was well aware that it was impossible that he could ever love her again. But she thought that perhaps she would see him come in some day, wounded and dying, that he would sit down on the little low chair, lay his head on her knees, and with a great sob tell her of his suffering and say to her, "Comfort me."

That forlorn hope kept her alive for three weeks. She needed so little as that.

But no. Even that was denied her. Frantz had gone, gone without a glance for her, without a parting word. The lover's desertion was followed by the desertion of the friend. It was horrible!

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At her father's first words, she felt as if she were hurled into a deep, ice-cold abyss, filled with darkness, into which she plunged swiftly, helplessly, well knowing that she would never return to the light. She was suffocating. She would have liked to resist, to struggle, to call for help.

Who was there who had the power to sustain her in that great disaster?

God? The thing that is called Heaven?

She did not even think of that. In Paris, especially in the quarters where the working class live, the houses are too high, the streets too narrow, the air too murky for heaven to be seen.

It was Death alone at which the little cripple was gazing so earnestly. Her course was determined upon at once: she must die. But how?

Sitting motionless in her easy-chair, she considered what manner of death she should choose. As she was almost never alone, she could not think of the brazier of charcoal, to be lighted after closing the doors and windows. As she never went out she could not think either of poison to be purchased at the druggist's, a little package of white powder to be buried in the depths of the pocket, with the needle-case and the thimble. There was the phosphorus on the matches, too, the verdigris on old sous, the open window with the paved street below; but the thought of forcing upon her parents the ghastly spectacle of a self-inflicted death-agony, the thought that what would remain of her, picked up amid a crowd of people, would be so frightful to look upon, made her reject that method.

She still had the river. At all events, the water carries you away somewhere, so that nobody finds you and your death is shrouded in mystery.

The river! She shuddered at the mere thought. But it was not the vision of the deep, black water that terrified her. The girls of Paris laugh at that. You throw your apron over your head so that you can't see, and pouf! But she must go downstairs, into the street, all alone, and the street frightened her.

Yes, it was a terrible thing to go out into the street alone. She must wait until the gas was out, steal softly downstairs when her mother had gone to bed, pull the cord of the gate, and make her way across Paris, where you meet men who stare impertinently into your face, and pass brilliantly lighted cafes. The river was a long distance away. She would be very tired. However, there was no other way than that.

"I am going to bed, my child; are you going to sit up any longer?"

With her eyes on her work, "my child" replied that she was. She wished to finish her dozen.

“Good-night, then,” said Mamma Delobelle, her enfeebled sight being unable to endure the light longer. “I have put father’s supper by the fire. Just look at it before you go to bed.”

Desire did not lie. She really intended to finish her dozen, so that her father could take them to the shop in the morning; and really, to see that tranquil little head bending forward in the white light of the lamp, one would never have imagined all the sinister thoughts with which it was thronged.

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At last she takes up the last bird of the dozen, a marvellously lovely little bird whose wings seem to have been dipped in sea-water, all green as they are with a tinge of sapphire.

Carefully, daintily, Desiree suspends it on a piece of brass wire, in the charming attitude of a frightened creature about to fly away.

Ah! how true it is that the little blue bird is about to fly away! What a desperate flight into space! How certain one feels that this time it is the great journey, the everlasting journey from which there is no return!

By and by, very softly, Desiree opens the wardrobe and takes a thin shawl which she throws over her shoulders; then she goes. What? Not a glance at her mother, not a silent farewell, not a tear? No, nothing! With the terrible clearness of vision of those who are about to die, she suddenly realizes that her childhood and youth have been sacrificed to a vast self-love. She feels very sure that a word from their great man will comfort that sleeping mother, with whom she is almost angry for not waking, for allowing her to go without a quiver of her closed eyelids.

When one dies young, even by one's own act, it is never without a rebellious feeling, and poor Desiree bids adieu to life, indignant with destiny.

Now she is in the street. Where is she going? Everything seems deserted already. Desiree walks rapidly, wrapped in her little shawl, head erect, dry-eyed. Not knowing the way, she walks straight ahead.

The dark, narrow streets of the Marais, where gas-jets twinkle at long intervals, cross and recross and wind about, and again and again in her feverish course she goes over the same ground. There is always something between her and the river. And to think that, at that very hour, almost in the same quarter, some one else is wandering through the streets, waiting, watching, desperate! Ah! if they could but meet. Suppose she should accost that feverish watcher, should ask him to direct her:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur. How can I get to the Seine?"

He would recognize her at once.

"What! Can it be you, Mam'zelle Zizi? What are you doing out-of-doors at this time of night?"

"I am going to die, Frantz. You have taken away all my pleasure in living."

Thereupon he, deeply moved, would seize her, press her to his heart and carry her away in his arms, saying:

“Oh! no, do not die. I need you to comfort me, to cure all the wounds the other has inflicted on me.”

But that is a mere poet’s dream, one of the meetings that life can not bring about.

Streets, more streets, then a square and a bridge whose lanterns make another luminous bridge in the black water. Here is the river at last. The mist of that damp, soft autumn evening causes all of this huge Paris, entirely strange to her as it is, to appear to her like an enormous confused mass, which her ignorance of the landmarks magnifies still more. This is the place where she must die.

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Poor little Desiree!

She recalls the country excursion which Frantz had organized for her. That breath of nature, which she breathed that day for the first time, falls to her lot again at the moment of her death. "Remember," it seems to say to her; and she replies mentally, "Oh! yes, I remember."

She remembers only too well. When it arrives at the end of the quay, which was bedecked as for a holiday, the furtive little shadow pauses at the steps leading down to the bank.

Almost immediately there are shouts and excitement all along the quay:

"Quick—a boat—grappling-irons!" Boatmen and policemen come running from all sides. A boat puts off from the shore with a lantern in the bow.

The flower-women awake, and, when one of them asks with a yawn what is happening, the woman who keeps the cafe that crouches at the corner of the bridge answers coolly:

"A woman just jumped into the river."

But no. The river has refused to take that child. It has been moved to pity by so great gentleness and charm. In the light of the lanterns swinging to and fro on the shore, a black group forms and moves away. She is saved! It was a sand-hauler who fished her out. Policemen are carrying her, surrounded by boatmen and lightermen, and in the darkness a hoarse voice is heard saying with a sneer: "That water-hen gave me a lot of trouble. You ought to see how she slipped through my fingers! I believe she wanted to make me lose my reward." Gradually the tumult subsides, the bystanders disperse, and the black group moves away toward a police-station.

Ah! poor girl, you thought that it was an easy matter to have done with life, to disappear abruptly. You did not know that, instead of bearing you away swiftly to the oblivion you sought, the river would drive you back to all the shame, to all the ignominy of unsuccessful suicide. First of all, the station, the hideous station, with its filthy benches, its floor where the sodden dust seems like mud from the street. There Desiree was doomed to pass the rest of the night.

At last day broke with the shuddering glare so distressing to invalids. Suddenly aroused from her torpor, Desiree sat up in her bed, threw off the blanket in which they had wrapped her, and despite fatigue and fever tried to stand, in order to regain full possession of her faculties and her will. She had but one thought—to escape from all those eyes that were opening on all sides, to leave that frightful place where the breath of sleep was so heavy and its attitudes so distorted.

"I implore you, messieurs," she said, trembling from head to foot, "let me return to mamma."

Hardened as they were to Parisian dramas, even those good people realized that they were face to face with something more worthy of attention, more affecting than usual. But they could not take her back to her mother as yet. She must go before the commissioner first. That was absolutely necessary. They called a cab from compassion for her; but she must go from the station to the cab, and there was a crowd at the door to stare at the little lame girl with the damp hair glued to her temples, and her policeman's blanket which did not prevent her shivering. At headquarters she was conducted up a dark, damp stairway where sinister figures were passing to and fro.

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When Desiree entered the room, a man rose from the shadow and came to meet her, holding out his hand.

It was the man of the reward, her hideous rescuer at twenty-five francs.

“Well, little-mother,” he said, with his cynical laugh, and in a voice that made one think of foggy nights on the water, “how are we since our dive?”

The unhappy girl was burning red with fever and shame; so bewildered that it seemed to her as if the river had left a veil over her eyes, a buzzing in her ears. At last she was ushered into a smaller room, into the presence of a pompous individual, wearing the insignia of the Legion of Honor, Monsieur le Commissaire in person, who was sipping his ‘café au lait’ and reading the ‘Gazette des Tribunaux.’

“Ah! it’s you, is it?” he said in a surly tone and without raising his eyes from his paper, as he dipped a piece of bread in his cup; and the officer who had brought Desiree began at once to read his report:

“At quarter to twelve, on Quai de la Megisserie, in front of No. 17, the woman Delobelle, twenty-four years old, flower-maker, living with her parents on Rue de Braque, tried to commit suicide by throwing herself into the Seine, and was taken out safe and sound by Sieur Parcheminet, sand-hauler of Rue de la Butte-Chaumont.”

Monsieur le Commissaire listened as he ate, with the listless, bored expression of a man whom nothing can surprise; at the end he gazed sternly and with a pompous affectation of virtue at the woman Delobelle, and lectured her in the most approved fashion. It was very wicked, it was cowardly, this thing that she had done. What could have driven her to such an evil act? Why did she seek to destroy herself? Come, woman Delobelle, answer, why was it?

But the woman Delobelle obstinately declined to answer. It seemed to her that it would put a stigma upon her love to avow it in such a place. “I don’t know—I don’t know,” she whispered, shivering.

Testy and impatient, the commissioner decided that she should be taken back to her parents, but only on one condition: she must promise never to try it again.

“Come, do you promise?”

“Oh! yes, Monsieur.”

“You will never try again?”

“Oh! no, indeed I will not, never—never!”

Notwithstanding her protestations, Monsieur le Commissaire de Police shook his head, as if he did not trust her oath.

Now she is outside once more, on the way to her home, to a place of refuge; but her martyrdom was not yet at an end.

In the carriage, the officer who accompanied her was too polite, too affable. She seemed not to understand, shrank from him, withdrew her hand. What torture! But the most terrible moment of all was the arrival in Rue de Braque, where the whole house was in a state of commotion, and the inquisitive curiosity of the neighbors must be endured. Early in the morning the whole quarter had been informed of her disappearance.

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It was rumored that she had gone away with Frantz Risler. The illustrious Delobelle had gone forth very early, intensely agitated, with his hat awry and rumpled wristbands, a sure indication of extraordinary preoccupation; and the concierge, on taking up the provisions, had found the poor mother half mad, running from one room to another, looking for a note from the child, for any clew, however unimportant, that would enable her at least to form some conjecture.

Suddenly a carriage stopped in front of the door. Voices and footsteps echoed through the hall.

“M’ame Delobelle, here she is! Your daughter’s been found.”

It was really Desiree who came toiling up the stairs on the arm of a stranger, pale and fainting, without hat or shawl, and wrapped in a great brown cape. When she saw her mother she smiled at her with an almost foolish expression.

“Do not be alarmed, it is nothing,” she tried to say, then sank to the floor. Mamma Delobelle would never have believed that she was so strong. To lift her daughter, take her into the room, and put her to bed was a matter of a moment; and she talked to her and kissed her.

“Here you are at last. Where have you come from, you bad child? Tell me, is it true that you tried to kill yourself? Were you suffering so terribly? Why did you conceal it from me?”

When she saw her mother in that condition, with tear-stained face, aged in a few short hours, Desiree felt a terrible burden of remorse. She remembered that she had gone away without saying good-by to her, and that in the depths of her heart she had accused her of not loving her.

Not loving her!

“Why, it would kill me if you should die,” said the poor mother. “Oh! when I got up this morning and saw that your bed hadn’t been slept in and that you weren’t in the workroom either!—I just turned round and fell flat. Are you warm now? Do you feel well? You won’t do it again, will you—try to kill yourself?”

And she tucked in the bed-clothes, rubbed her feet, and rocked her upon her breast.

As she lay in bed with her eyes closed, Desiree saw anew all the incidents of her suicide, all the hideous scenes through which she had passed in returning from death to life. In the fever, which rapidly increased, in the intense drowsiness which began to

overpower her, her mad journey across Paris continued to excite and torment her. Myriads of dark streets stretched away before her, with the Seine at the end of each.

That ghastly river, which she could not find in the night, haunted her now.

She felt that she was besmirched with its slime, its mud; and in the nightmare that oppressed her, the poor child, powerless to escape the obsession of her recollections, whispered to her mother: "Hide me—hide me—I am ashamed!"

CHAPTER XVIII

SHE PROMISED NOT TO TRY AGAIN

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Oh! no, she will not try it again. Monsieur le Commissaire need have no fear. In the first place how could she go as far as the river, now that she can not stir from her bed? If Monsieur le Commissaire could see her now, he would not doubt her word. Doubtless the wish, the longing for death, so unmistakably written on her pale face the other morning, are still visible there; but they are softened, resigned. The woman Delobelle knows that by waiting a little, yes, a very little time, she will have nothing more to wish for.

The doctors declare that she is dying of pneumonia; she must have contracted it in her wet clothes. The doctors are mistaken; it is not pneumonia. Is it her love, then, that is killing her? No. Since that terrible night she no longer thinks of Frantz, she no longer feels that she is worthy to love or to be loved. Thenceforth there is a stain upon her spotless life, and it is of the shame of that and of nothing else that she is dying.

Mamma Delobelle sits by Desiree's bed, working by the light from the window, and nursing her daughter. From time to time she raises her eyes to contemplate that mute despair, that mysterious disease, then hastily resumes her work; for it is one of the hardest trials of the poor that they can not suffer at their ease.

Mamma Delobelle had to work alone now, and her fingers had not the marvellous dexterity of Desiree's little hands; medicines were dear, and she would not for anything in the world have interfered with one of "the father's" cherished habits. And so, at whatever hour the invalid opened her eyes, she would see her mother, in the pale light of early morning, or under her night lamp, working, working without rest.

Between two stitches the mother would look up at her child, whose face grew paler and paler:

"How do you feel?"

"Very well," the sick girl would reply, with a faint, heartbroken smile, which illumined her sorrowful face and showed all the ravages that had been wrought upon it, as a sunbeam, stealing into a poor man's lodging, instead of brightening it, brings out more clearly its cheerlessness and nudity.

The illustrious Delobelle was never there. He had not changed in any respect the habits of a strolling player out of an engagement. And yet he knew that his daughter was dying: the doctor had told him so. Moreover, it had been a terrible blow to him, for, at heart, he loved his child dearly; but in that singular nature the most sincere and the most genuine feelings adopted a false and unnatural mode of expression, by the same law which ordains that, when a shelf is placed awry, nothing that you place upon it seems to stand straight.

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Delobelle's natural tendency was, before everything, to air his grief, to spread it abroad. He played the role of the unhappy father from one end of the boulevard to the other. He was always to be found in the neighborhood of the theatres or at the actors' restaurant, with red eyes and pale cheeks. He loved to invite the question, "Well, my poor old fellow, how are things going at home?" Thereupon he would shake his head with a nervous gesture; his grimace held tears in check, his mouth imprecations, and he would stab heaven with a silent glance, overflowing with wrath, as when he played the 'Medecin des Enfants;' all of which did not prevent him, however, from bestowing the most delicate and thoughtful attentions upon his daughter.

He also maintained an unalterable confidence in himself, no matter what happened. And yet his eyes came very near being opened to the truth at last. A hot little hand laid upon that pompous, illusion-ridden head came very near expelling the bee that had been buzzing there so long. This is how it came to pass.

One night Desiree awoke with a start, in a very strange state. It should be said that the doctor, when he came to see her on the preceding evening, had been greatly surprised to find her suddenly brighter and calmer, and entirely free from fever. Without attempting to explain this un hoped-for resurrection, he had gone away, saying, "Let us wait and see"; he relied upon the power of youth to throw off disease, upon the resistless force of the life-giving sap, which often engrafts a new life upon the very symptoms of death. If he had looked under Desiree's pillow, he would have found there a letter postmarked Cairo, wherein lay the secret of that happy change. Four pages signed by Frantz, his whole conduct confessed and explained to his dear little Zizi.

It was the very letter of which the sick girl had dreamed. If she had dictated it herself, all the phrases likely to touch her heart, all the delicately worded excuses likely to pour balm into her wounds, would have been less satisfactorily expressed. Frantz repented, asked forgiveness, and without making any promises, above all without asking anything from her, described to his faithful friend his struggles, his remorse, his sufferings.

What a misfortune that that letter had not arrived a few days earlier. Now, all those kind words were to Desiree like the dainty dishes that are brought too late to a man dying of hunger.

Suddenly she awoke, and, as we said a moment since, in an extraordinary state.

In her head, which seemed to her lighter than usual, there suddenly began a grand procession of thoughts and memories. The most distant periods of her past seemed to approach her. The most trivial incidents of her childhood, scenes that she had not then understood, words heard as in a dream, recurred to her mind.

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From her bed she could see her father and mother, one by her side, the other in the workroom, the door of which had been left open. Mamma Delobelle was lying back in her chair in the careless attitude of long-continued fatigue, heeded at last; and all the scars, the ugly sabre cuts with which age and suffering brand the faces of the old, manifested themselves, ineffaceable and pitiful to see, in the relaxation of slumber. Desiree would have liked to be strong enough to rise and kiss that lovely, placid brow, furrowed by wrinkles which did not mar its beauty.

In striking contrast to that picture, the illustrious Delobelle appeared to his daughter through the open door in one of his favorite attitudes. Seated before the little white cloth that bore his supper, with his body at an angle of sixty-seven and a half degrees, he was eating and at the same time running through a pamphlet which rested against the carafe in front of him.

For the first time in her life Desiree noticed the striking lack of harmony between her emaciated mother, scantily clad in little black dresses which made her look even thinner and more haggard than she really was, and her happy, well-fed, idle, placid, thoughtless father. At a glance she realized the difference between the two lives. What would become of them when she was no longer there? Either her mother would work too hard and would kill herself; or else the poor woman would be obliged to cease working altogether, and that selfish husband, forever engrossed by his theatrical ambition, would allow them both to drift gradually into abject poverty, that black hole which widens and deepens as one goes down into it.

Suppose that, before going away—something told her that she would go very soon—before going away, she should tear away the thick bandage that the poor man kept over his eyes wilfully and by force?

Only a hand as light and loving as hers could attempt that operation. Only she had the right to say to her father:

“Earn your living. Give up the stage.”

Thereupon, as time was flying, Desire Delobelle summoned all her courage and called softly:

“Papa-papa”

At his daughter’s first summons the great man hurried to her side. He entered Desiree’s bedroom, radiant and superb, very erect, his lamp in his hand and a camellia in his buttonhole.

“Good evening, Zizi. Aren’t you asleep?”



His voice had a joyous intonation that produced a strange effect amid the prevailing gloom. Desiree motioned to him not to speak, pointing to her sleeping mother.

“Put down your lamp—I have something to say to you.”

Her voice, broken by emotion, impressed him; and so did her eyes, for they seemed larger than usual, and were lighted by a piercing glance that he had never seen in them.

He approached with something like awe.

“Why, what’s the matter, Bichette? Do you feel any worse?”



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Desiree replied with a movement of her little pale face that she felt very ill and that she wanted to speak to him very close, very close. When the great man stood by her pillow, she laid her burning hand on the great man's arm and whispered in his ear. She was very ill, hopelessly ill. She realized fully that she had not long to live.

"Then, father, you will be left alone with mamma. Don't tremble like that. You knew that this thing must come, yes, that it was very near. But I want to tell you this. When I am gone, I am terribly afraid mamma won't be strong enough to support the family just see how pale and exhausted she is."

The actor looked at his "sainted wife," and seemed greatly surprised to find that she did really look so badly. Then he consoled himself with the selfish remark:

"She never was very strong."

That remark and the tone in which it was made angered Desiree and strengthened her determination. She continued, without pity for the actor's illusions:

"What will become of you two when I am no longer here? Oh! I know that you have great hopes, but it takes them a long while to come to anything. The results you have waited for so long may not arrive for a long time to come; and until then what will you do? Listen! my dear father, I would not willingly hurt you; but it seems to me that at your age, as intelligent as you are, it would be easy for you—I am sure Monsieur Risler Aine would ask nothing better."

She spoke slowly, with an effort, carefully choosing her words, leaving long pauses between every two sentences, hoping always that they might be filled by a movement, an exclamation from her father. But the actor did not understand.

"I think that you would do well," pursued Desiree, timidly, "I think that you would do well to give up—"

"Eh?—what?—what's that?"

She paused when she saw the effect of her words. The old actor's mobile features were suddenly contracted under the lash of violent despair; and tears, genuine tears which he did not even think of concealing behind his hand as they do on the stage, filled his eyes but did not flow, so tightly did his agony clutch him by the throat. The poor devil began to understand.

She murmured twice or thrice:

"To give up—to give up—"

Then her little head fell back upon the pillow, and she died without having dared to tell him what he would do well to give up.

CHAPTER XIX

APPROACHING CLOUDS

One night, near the end of January, old Sigismond Planus, cashier of the house of Fromont Jeune and Risler Aine, was awakened with a start in his little house at Montrouge by the same teasing voice, the same rattling of chains, followed by that fatal cry:

“The notes!”

“That is true,” thought the worthy man, sitting up in bed; “day after to-morrow will be the last day of the month. And I have the courage to sleep!”

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In truth, a considerable sum of money must be raised: a hundred thousand francs to be paid on two obligations, and at a moment when, for the first time in thirty years, the strong-box of the house of Fromont was absolutely empty. What was to be done? Sigismond had tried several times to speak to Fromont Jeune, but he seemed to shun the burdensome responsibility of business, and when he walked through the offices was always in a hurry, feverishly excited, and seemed neither to see nor hear anything about him. He answered the old cashier's anxious questions, gnawing his moustache:

"All right, all right, my old Planus. Don't disturb yourself; I will look into it." And as he said it, he seemed to be thinking of something else, to be a thousand leagues away from his surroundings. It was rumored in the factory, where his liaison with Madame Risler was no longer a secret to anybody, that Sidonie deceived him, made him very unhappy; and, indeed, his mistress's whims worried him much more than his cashier's anxiety. As for Risler, no one ever saw him; he passed his days shut up in a room under the roof, overseeing the mysterious, interminable manufacture of his machines.

This indifference on the part of the employers to the affairs of the factory, this absolute lack of oversight, had led by slow degrees to general demoralization. Some business was still done, because an established house will go on alone for years by force of the first impetus; but what ruin, what chaos beneath that apparent prosperity?

Sigismond knew it better than any one, and as if to see his way more clearly amid the multitude of painful thoughts which whirled madly through his brain, the cashier lighted his candle, sat down on his bed, and thought, "Where were they to find that hundred thousand francs?"

"Take the notes back. I have no funds to meet them."

No, no! That was not possible. Any sort of humiliation was preferable to that.

"Well, it's decided. I will go to-morrow," sighed the poor cashier.

And he tossed about in torture, unable to close an eye until morning.

Notwithstanding the late hour, Georges Fromont had not yet retired. He was sitting by the fire, with his head in his hands, in the blind and dumb concentration due to irreparable misfortune, thinking of Sidonie, of that terrible Sidonie who was asleep at that moment on the floor above. She was positively driving him mad. She was false to him, he was sure of it,—she was false to him with the Toulousan tenor, that Cazabon, alias Cazaboni, whom Madame Dobson had brought to the house. For a long time he had implored her not to receive that man; but Sidonie would not listen to him, and on that very day, speaking of a grand ball she was about to give, she had declared explicitly that nothing should prevent her inviting her tenor.

“Then he’s your lover!” Georges had exclaimed angrily, his eyes gazing into hers.

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She had not denied it; she had not even turned her eyes away.

And to think that he had sacrificed everything to that woman—his fortune, his honor, even his lovely Claire, who lay sleeping with her child in the adjoining room—a whole lifetime of happiness within reach of his hand, which he had spurned for that vile creature! Now she had admitted that she did not love him, that she loved another. And he, the coward, still longed for her. In heaven's name, what potion had she given him?

Carried away by indignation that made the blood boil in his veins, Georges Fromont started from his armchair and strode feverishly up and down the room, his footsteps echoing in the silence of the sleeping house like living insomnia. The other was asleep upstairs. She could sleep by favor of her heedless, remorseless nature. Perhaps, too, she was thinking of her Cazaboni.

When that thought passed through his mind, Georges had a mad longing to go up, to wake Risler, to tell him everything and destroy himself with her. Really that deluded husband was too idiotic! Why did he not watch her more closely? She was pretty enough, yes, and vicious enough, too, for every precaution to be taken with her.

And it was while he was struggling amid such cruel and unfruitful reflections as these that the devil of anxiety whispered in his ear:

"The notes! the notes!"

The miserable wretch! In his wrath he had entirely forgotten them. And yet he had long watched the approach of that terrible last day of January. How many times, between two assignments, when his mind, free for a moment from thoughts of Sidonie, recurred to his business, to the realities of life—how many times had he said to himself, "That day will be the end of everything!" But, as with all those who live in the delirium of intoxication, his cowardice convinced him that it was too late to mend matters, and he returned more quickly and more determinedly to his evil courses, in order to forget, to divert his thoughts.

But that was no longer possible. He saw the impending disaster clearly, in its full meaning; and Sigismond Planus's wrinkled, solemn face rose before him with its sharply cut features, whose absence of expression softened their harshness, and his light German-Swiss eyes, which had haunted him for many weeks with their impassive stare.

Well, no, he had not the hundred thousand francs, nor did he know where to get them.

The crisis which, a few hours before, seemed to him a chaos, an eddying whirl in which he could see nothing distinctly and whose very confusion was a source of hope, appeared to him at that moment with appalling distinctness. An empty cash-box, closed

doors, notes protested, ruin, are the phantoms he saw whichever way he turned. And when, on top of all the rest, came the thought of Sidonie's treachery, the wretched, desperate man, finding nothing to cling to in that shipwreck, suddenly uttered a sob, a cry of agony, as if appealing for help to some higher power.

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“Georges, Georges, it is I. What is the matter?”

His wife stood before him, his wife who now waited for him every night, watching anxiously for his return from the club, for she still believed that he passed his evenings there. That night she had heard him walking very late in his room. At last her child fell asleep, and Claire, hearing the father sob, ran to him.

Oh! what boundless, though tardy remorse overwhelmed him when he saw her before him, so deeply moved, so lovely and so loving! Yes, she was in very truth the true companion, the faithful friend. How could he have deserted her? For a long, long time he wept upon her shoulder, unable to speak. And it was fortunate that he did not speak, for he would have told her all, all. The unhappy man felt the need of pouring out his heart—an irresistible longing to accuse himself, to ask forgiveness, to lessen the weight of the remorse that was crushing him.

She spared him the pain of uttering a word:

“You have been gambling, have you not? You have lost—lost heavily?”

He moved his head affirmatively; then, when he was able to speak, he confessed that he must have a hundred thousand francs for the day after the morrow, and that he did not know how to obtain them.

She did not reproach him. She was one of those women who, when face to face with disaster, think only of repairing it, without a word of recrimination. Indeed, in the bottom of her heart she blessed this misfortune which brought him nearer to her and became a bond between their two lives, which had long lain so far apart. She reflected a moment. Then, with an effort indicating a resolution which had cost a bitter struggle, she said:

“Not all is lost as yet. I will go to Savigny tomorrow and ask my grandfather for the money.”

He would never have dared to suggest that to her. Indeed, it would never have occurred to him. She was so proud and old Gardinois so hard! Surely that was a great sacrifice for her to make for him, and a striking proof of her love.

“Claire, Claire—how good you are!” he said.

Without replying, she led him to their child’s cradle.

“Kiss her,” she said softly; and as they stood there side by side, their heads leaning over the child, Georges was afraid of waking her, and he embraced the mother passionately.

CHAPTER XX

REVELATIONS

“Ah! here’s Sigismond. How goes the world, Pere Sigismond? How is business? Is it good with you?”

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The old cashier smiled affably, shook hands with the master, his wife, and his brother, and, as they talked, looked curiously about. They were in a manufactory of wallpapers on Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the establishment of the little Prochassons, who were beginning to be formidable rivals. Those former employes of the house of Fromont had set up on their own account, beginning in a very, small way, and had gradually succeeded in making for themselves a place on 'Change. Fromont the uncle had assisted them for a long while with his credit and his money; the result being most friendly relations between the two firms, and a balance—between ten or fifteen thousand francs—which had never been definitely adjusted, because they knew that money was in good hands when the Prochassons had it.

Indeed, the appearance of the factory was most reassuring. The chimneys proudly shook their plumes of smoke. The dull roar of constant toil indicated that the workshops were full of workmen and activity. The buildings were in good repair, the windows clean; everything had an aspect of enthusiasm, of good-humor, of discipline; and behind the grating in the counting-room sat the wife of one of the brothers, simply dressed, with her hair neatly arranged, and an air of authority on her youthful face, deeply intent upon a long column of figures.

Old Sigismond thought bitterly of the difference between the house of Fromont, once so wealthy, now living entirely upon its former reputation, and the ever-increasing prosperity of the establishment before his eyes. His stealthy glance penetrated to the darkest corners, seeking some defect, something to criticise; and his failure to find anything made his heart heavy and his smile forced and anxious.

What embarrassed him most of all was the question how he should approach the subject of the money due his employers without betraying the emptiness of the strongbox. The poor man assumed a jaunty, unconcerned air which was truly pitiful to see. Business was good—very good. He happened to be passing through the quarter and thought he would come in a moment—that was natural, was it not? One likes to see old friends.

But these preambles, these constantly expanding circumlocutions, did not bring him to the point he wished to reach; on the contrary, they led him away from his goal, and imagining that he detected surprise in the eyes of his auditors, he went completely astray, stammered, lost his head, and, as a last resort, took his hat and pretended to go. At the door he suddenly bethought himself:

“Ah! by the way, so long as I am here—”

He gave a little wink which he thought sly, but which was in reality heartrending.

“So long as I am here, suppose we settle that old account.”

The two brothers and the young woman in the counting-room gazed at one another a second, unable to understand.

“Account? What account, pray?”

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Then all three began to laugh at the same moment, and heartily too, as if at a joke, a rather broad joke, on the part of the old cashier. "Go along with you, you sly old Pere Planus!" The old man laughed with them! He laughed without any desire to laugh, simply to do as the others did.

At last they explained. Fromont Jeune had come in person, six months before, to collect the balance in their hands.

Sigismond felt that his strength was going. But he summoned courage to say:

"Ah! yes; true. I had forgotten. Sigismond Planus is growing old, that is plain. I am failing, my children, I am failing."

And the old man went away wiping his eyes, in which still glistened great tears caused by the hearty laugh he had just enjoyed. The young people behind him exchanged glances and shook their heads. They understood.

The blow he had received was so crushing that the cashier, as soon as he was out-of-doors, was obliged to sit down on a bench. So that was the reason why Georges did not come to the counting-room for money. He made his collections in person. What had taken place at the Prochassons' had probably been repeated everywhere else. It was quite useless, therefore, for him to subject himself to further humiliation. Yes, but the notes, the notes!—that thought renewed his strength. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead and started once more to try his luck with a customer in the faubourg. But this time he took his precautions and called to the cashier from the doorway, without entering:

"Good-morning, Pere So-and-So. I want to ask you a question."

He held the door half open, his hand upon the knob.

"When did we settle our last bill? I forgot to enter it."

Oh! it was a long while ago, a very long while, that their last bill was settled. Fromont Jeune's receipt was dated in September. It was five months ago.

The door was hastily closed. Another! Evidently it would be the same thing everywhere.

"Ah! Monsieur Chorche, Monsieur Chorche," muttered poor Sigismond; and while he pursued his journey, with bowed head and trembling legs, Madame Fromont Jeune's carriage passed him close, on its way to the Orleans station; but Claire did not see old Planus, any more than she had seen, when she left her house a few moments earlier, Monsieur Chebe in his long frock-coat and the illustrious Delobelle in his stovepipe hat, turning into the Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes at opposite ends, each with the factory and

Risler's wallet for his objective point. The young woman was much too deeply engrossed by what she had before her to look into the street.

Think of it! It was horrible. To go and ask M. Gardinois for a hundred thousand francs —M. Gardinois, a man who boasted that he had never borrowed or loaned a sou in his life, who never lost an opportunity to tell how, on one occasion, being driven to ask his father for forty francs to buy a pair of trousers, he had repaid the loan in small amounts. In his dealings with everybody, even with his children, M. Gardinois followed those traditions of avarice which the earth, the cruel earth, often ungrateful to those who till it, seems to inculcate in all peasants. The old man did not intend that any part of his colossal fortune should go to his children during his lifetime.



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"They'll find my property when I am dead," he often said.

Acting upon that principle, he had married off his daughter, the elder Madame Fromont, without one sou of dowry, and he never forgave his son-in-law for having made a fortune without assistance from him. For it was one of the peculiarities of that nature, made up of vanity and selfishness in equal parts, to wish that every one he knew should need his help, should bow before his wealth. When the Fromonts expressed in his presence their satisfaction at the prosperous turn their business was beginning to take, his sharp, cunning, little blue eye would smile ironically, and he would growl, "We shall see what it all comes to in the end," in a tone that made them tremble. Sometimes, too, at Savigny, in the evening, when the park, the avenues, the blue slates of the chateau, the red brick of the stables, the ponds and brooks shone resplendent, bathed in the golden glory of a lovely sunset, this eccentric parvenu would say aloud before his children, after looking about him:

"The one thing that consoles me for dying some day is that no one in the family will ever be rich enough to keep a chateau that costs fifty thousand francs a year to maintain."

And yet, with that latter-day tenderness which even the sternest grandfathers find in the depths of their hearts, old Gardinois would gladly have made a pet of his granddaughter. But Claire, even as a child, had felt an invincible repugnance for the former peasant's hardness of heart and vainglorious selfishness. And when affection forms no bonds between those who are separated by difference in education, such repugnance is increased by innumerable trifles. When Claire married Georges, the grandfather said to Madame Fromont:

"If your daughter wishes, I will give her a royal present; but she must ask for it."

But Claire received nothing, because she would not ask for anything.

What a bitter humiliation to come, three years later, to beg a hundred thousand francs from the generosity she had formerly spurned, to humble herself, to face the endless sermons, the sneering raillery, the whole seasoned with Berrichon jests, with phrases smacking of the soil, with the taunts, often well-deserved, which narrow, but logical, minds can utter on occasion, and which sting with their vulgar patois like an insult from an inferior!

Poor Claire! Her husband and her father were about to be humiliated in her person. She must necessarily confess the failure of the one, the downfall of the house which the other had founded and of which he had been so proud while he lived. The thought that she would be called upon to defend all that she loved best in the world made her strong and weak at the same time.

It was eleven o'clock when she reached Savigny. As she had given no warning of her visit, the carriage from the chateau was not at the station, and she had no choice but to walk.

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It was a cold morning and the roads were dry and hard. The north wind blew freely across the arid fields and the river, and swept unopposed through the leafless trees and bushes. The chateau appeared under the low-hanging clouds, with its long line of low walls and hedges separating it from the surrounding fields. The slates on the roof were as dark as the sky they reflected; and that magnificent summer residence, completely transformed by the bitter, silent winter, without a leaf on its trees or a pigeon on its roofs, showed no life save in its rippling brooks and the murmuring of the tall poplars as they bowed majestically to one another, shaking the magpies' nests hidden among their highest branches.

At a distance Claire fancied that the home of her youth wore a surly, depressed air. It seemed to her that Savigny watched her approach with the cold, aristocratic expression which it assumed for passengers on the highroad, who stopped at the iron bars of its gateways.

Oh! the cruel aspect of everything!

And yet not so cruel after all. For, with its tightly closed exterior, Savigny seemed to say to her, "Begone—do not come in!" And if she had chosen to listen, Claire, renouncing her plan of speaking to her grandfather, would have returned at once to Paris to maintain the repose of her life. But she did not understand, poor child! and already the great Newfoundland dog, who had recognized her, came leaping through the dead leaves and sniffed at the gate.

"Good-morning, Francoise. Where is grandpapa?" the young woman asked the gardener's wife, who came to open the gate, fawning and false and trembling, like all the servants at the chateau when they felt that the master's eye was upon them.

Grandpapa was in his office, a little building independent of the main house, where he passed his days fumbling among boxes and pigeonholes and great books with green backs, with the rage for bureaucracy due to his early ignorance and the strong impression made upon him long before by the office of the notary in his village.

At that moment he was closeted there with his keeper, a sort of country spy, a paid informer who apprised him as to all that was said and done in the neighborhood.

He was the master's favorite. His name was Fouinat (polecat), and he had the flat, crafty, blood-thirsty face appropriate to his name.

When Claire entered, pale and trembling under her furs, the old man understood that something serious and unusual had happened, and he made a sign to Fouinat, who disappeared, gliding through the half-open door as if he were entering the very wall.

“What’s the matter, little one? Why, you’re all ‘perlute’,” said the grandfather, seated behind his huge desk.



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Perlute, in the Berrichon dictionary, signifies troubled, excited, upset, and applied perfectly to Claire's condition. Her rapid walk in the cold country air, the effort she had made in order to do what she was doing, imparted an unwonted expression to her face, which was much less reserved than usual. Without the slightest encouragement on his part, she kissed him and seated herself in front of the fire, where old stumps, surrounded by dry moss and pine needles picked up in the paths, were smouldering with occasional outbursts of life and the hissing of sap. She did not even take time to shake off the frost that stood in beads on her veil, but began to speak at once, faithful to her resolution to state the object of her visit immediately upon entering the room, before she allowed herself to be intimidated by the atmosphere of fear and respect which encompassed the grandfather and made of him a sort of awe-inspiring deity.

She required all her courage not to become confused, not to interrupt her narrative before that piercing gaze which transfixed her, enlivened from her first words by a malicious joy, before that savage mouth whose corners seemed tightly closed by premeditated reticence, obstinacy, a denial of any sort of sensibility. She went on to the end in one speech, respectful without humility, concealing her emotion, steadying her voice by the consciousness of the truth of her story. Really, seeing them thus face to face, he cold and calm, stretched out in his armchair, with his hands in the pockets of his gray swansdown waistcoat, she carefully choosing her words, as if each of them might condemn or absolve her, you would never have said that it was a child before her grandfather, but an accused person before an examining magistrate.

His thoughts were entirely engrossed by the joy, the pride of his triumph. So they were conquered at last, those proud upstarts of Fromonts! So they needed old Gardinois at last, did they? Vanity, his dominating passion, overflowed in his whole manner, do what he would. When she had finished, he took the floor in his turn, began naturally enough with "I was sure of it—I always said so—I knew we should see what it would all come to"—and continued in the same vulgar, insulting tone, ending with the declaration that, in view of his principles, which were well known in the family, he would not lend a sou.

Then Claire spoke of her child, of her husband's name, which was also her father's, and which would be dishonored by the failure. The old man was as cold, as implacable as ever, and took advantage of her humiliation to humiliate her still more; for he belonged to the race of worthy rustics who, when their enemy is down, never leave him without leaving on his face the marks of the nails in their sabots.

"All I can say to you, little one, is that Savigny is open to you. Let your husband come here. I happen to need a secretary. Very well, Georges can do my writing for twelve hundred francs a year and board for the whole family. Offer him that from me, and come."

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She rose indignantly. She had come as his child and he had received her as a beggar. They had not reached that point yet, thank God!

“Do you think so?” queried M. Gardinois, with a savage light in his eye.

Claire shuddered and walked toward the door without replying. The old man detained her with a gesture.

“Take care! you don’t know what you’re refusing. It is in your interest, you understand, that I suggest bringing your husband here. You don’t know the life he is leading up yonder. Of course you don’t know it, or you’d never come and ask me for money to go where yours has gone. Ah! I know all about your man’s affairs. I have my police at Paris, yes, and at Asnieres, as well as at Savigny. I know what the fellow does with his days and his nights; and I don’t choose that my crowns shall go to the places where he goes. They’re not clean enough for money honestly earned.”

Claire’s eyes opened wide in amazement and horror, for she felt that a terrible drama had entered her life at that moment through the little low door of denunciation. The old man continued with a sneer:

“That little Sidonie has fine, sharp teeth.”

“Sidonie!”

“Faith, yes, to be sure. I have told you the name. At all events, you’d have found it out some day or other. In fact, it’s an astonishing thing that, since the time—But you women are so vain! The idea that a man can deceive you is the last idea to come into your head. Well, yes, Sidonie’s the one who has got it all out of him—with her husband’s consent, by the way.”

He went on pitilessly to tell the young wife the source of the money for the house at Asnieres, the horses, the carriages, and how the pretty little nest in the Avenue Gabriel had been furnished. He explained everything in detail. It was clear that, having found a new opportunity to exercise his mania for espionage, he had availed himself of it to the utmost; perhaps, too, there was at the bottom of it all a vague, carefully concealed rage against his little Chebe, the anger of a senile passion never declared.

Claire listened to him without speaking, with a smile of incredulity. That smile irritated the old man, spurred on his malice. “Ah! you don’t believe me. Ah! you want proofs, do you?” And he gave her proofs, heaped them upon her, overpowered her with knife-thrusts in the heart. She had only to go to Darches, the jeweller in the Rue de la Paix. A fortnight before, Georges had bought a diamond necklace there for thirty thousand francs. It was his New Year’s gift to Sidonie. Thirty thousand francs for diamonds at the moment of becoming bankrupt!

He might have talked the entire day and Claire would not have interrupted him. She felt that the slightest effort would cause the tears that filled her eyes to overflow, and she was determined to smile to the end, the sweet, brave woman. From time to time she cast a sidelong glance at the road. She was in haste to go, to fly from the sound of that spiteful voice, which pursued her pitilessly.



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At last he ceased; he had told the whole story. She bowed and walked toward the door.

“Are you going? What a hurry you’re in!” said the grandfather, following her outside.

At heart he was a little ashamed of his savagery.

“Won’t you breakfast with me?”

She shook her head, not having strength to speak.

“At least wait till the carriage is ready—some one will drive you to the station.”

No, still no.

And she walked on, with the old man close behind her. Proudly, and with head erect, she crossed the courtyard, filled with souvenirs of her childhood, without once looking behind. And yet what echoes of hearty laughter, what sunbeams of her younger days were imprinted in the tiniest grain of gravel in that courtyard!

Her favorite tree, her favorite bench, were still in the same place. She had not a glance for them, nor for the pheasants in the aviary, nor even for the great dog Kiss, who followed her docilely, awaiting the caress which she did not give him. She had come as a child of the house, she went away as a stranger, her mind filled with horrible thoughts which the slightest reminder of her peaceful and happy past could not have failed to aggravate.

“Good-by, grandfather.”

“Good-by, then.”

And the gate closed upon her harshly. As soon as she was alone, she began to walk swiftly, swiftly, almost to run. She was not merely going away, she was escaping. Suddenly, when she reached the end of the wall of the estate, she found herself in front of the little green gate, surrounded by nasturtiums and honeysuckle, where the chateau mail-box was. She stopped instinctively, struck by one of those sudden awakenings of the memory which take place within us at critical moments and place before our eyes with wonderful clearness of outline the most trivial acts of our lives bearing any relation to present disasters or joys. Was it the red sun that suddenly broke forth from the clouds, flooding the level expanse with its oblique rays in that winter afternoon as at the sunset hour in August? Was it the silence that surrounded her, broken only by the harmonious sounds of nature, which are almost alike at all seasons?

Whatever the cause she saw herself once more as she was, at that same spot, three years before, on a certain day when she placed in the post a letter inviting Sidonie to come and pass a month with her in the country. Something told her that all her

misfortunes dated from that moment. “Ah! had I known—had I only known!” And she fancied that she could still feel between her fingers the smooth envelope, ready to drop into the box.

Thereupon, as she reflected what an innocent, hopeful, happy child she was at that moment, she cried out indignantly, gentle creature that she was, against the injustice of life. She asked herself: “Why is it? What have I done?”

Then she suddenly exclaimed: “No! it isn’t true. It can not be possible. Grandfather lied to me.” And as she went on toward the station, the unhappy girl tried to convince herself, to make herself believe what she said. But she did not succeed.

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The truth dimly seen is like the veiled sun, which tires the eyes far more than its most brilliant rays. In the semi-obscurity which still enveloped her misfortune, the poor woman's sight was keener than she could have wished. Now she understood and accounted for certain peculiar circumstances in her husband's life, his frequent absences, his restlessness, his embarrassed behavior on certain days, and the abundant details which he sometimes volunteered, upon returning home, concerning his movements, mentioning names as proofs which she did not ask. From all these conjectures the evidence of his sin was made up. And still she refused to believe it, and looked forward to her arrival in Paris to set her doubts at rest.

No one was at the station, a lonely, cheerless little place, where no traveller ever showed his face in winter. As Claire sat there awaiting the train, gazing vaguely at the station-master's melancholy little garden, and the debris of climbing plants running along the fences by the track, she felt a moist, warm breath on her glove. It was her friend Kiss, who had followed her and was reminding her of their happy romps together in the old days, with little shakes of the head, short leaps, capers of joy tempered by humility, concluding by stretching his beautiful white coat at full length at his mistress's feet, on the cold floor of the waiting-room. Those humble caresses which sought her out, like a hesitating offer of devotion and sympathy, caused the sobs she had so long restrained to break forth as last. But suddenly she felt ashamed of her weakness. She rose and sent the dog away, sent him away pitilessly with voice and gesture, pointing to the house in the distance, with a stern face which poor Kiss had never seen. Then she hastily wiped her eyes and her moist hands; for the train for Paris was approaching and she knew that in a moment she should need all her courage.

Claire's first thought on leaving the train was to take a cab and drive to the jeweller in the Rue de la Paix, who had, as her grandfather alleged, supplied Georges with a diamond necklace. If that should prove to be true, then all the rest was true. Her dread of learning the truth was so great that, when she reached her destination and alighted in front of that magnificent establishment, she stopped, afraid to enter. To give herself countenance, she pretended to be deeply interested in the jewels displayed in velvet cases; and one who had seen her, quietly but fashionably dressed, leaning forward to look at that gleaming and attractive display, would have taken her for a happy wife engaged in selecting a bracelet, rather than an anxious, sorrow-stricken soul who had come thither to discover the secret of her life.

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It was three o'clock in the afternoon. At that time of day, in winter, the Rue de la Paix presents a truly dazzling aspect. In that luxurious neighborhood, life moves quickly between the short morning and the early evening. There are carriages moving swiftly in all directions, a ceaseless rumbling, and on the sidewalks a coquettish haste, a rustling of silks and furs. Winter is the real Parisian season. To see that devil's own Paris in all its beauty and wealth and happiness one must watch the current of its life beneath a lowering sky, heavy with snow. Nature is absent from the picture, so to speak. No wind, no sunlight. Just enough light for the duldest colors, the faintest reflections to produce an admirable effect, from the reddish-gray tone of the monuments to the gleams of jet which bespangle a woman's dress. Theatre and concert posters shine resplendent, as if illumined by the effulgence of the footlights. The shops are crowded. It seems that all those people must be preparing for perpetual festivities. And at such times, if any sorrow is mingled with that bustle and tumult, it seems the more terrible for that reason. For five minutes Claire suffered martyrdom worse than death. Yonder, on the road to Savigny, in the vast expanse of the deserted fields, her despair spread out as it were in the sharp air and seemed to enfold her less closely. Here she was stifling. The voices beside her, the footsteps, the heedless jostling of people who passed, all added to her torture.

At last she entered the shop.

"Ah! yes, Madame, certainly—Monsieur Fromont. A necklace of diamonds and roses. We could make you one like it for twenty-five thousand francs."

That was five thousand less than for him.

"Thanks, Monsieur," said Claire, "I will think it over."

A mirror in front of her, in which she saw her dark-ringed eyes and her deathly pallor, frightened her. She went out quickly, walking stiffly in order not to fall.

She had but one idea, to escape from the street, from the noise; to be alone, quite alone, so that she might plunge headlong into that abyss of heartrending thoughts, of black things dancing madly in the depths of her mind. Oh! the coward, the infamous villain! And to think that only last night she was speaking comforting words to him, with her arms about him!

Suddenly, with no knowledge of how it happened, she found herself in the courtyard of the factory. Through what streets had she come? Had she come in a carriage or on foot? She had no remembrance. She had acted unconsciously, as in a dream. The sentiment of reality returned, pitiless and poignant, when she reached the steps of her little house. Risler was there, superintending several men who were carrying potted plants up to his wife's apartments, in preparation for the magnificent party she was to give that very evening. With his usual tranquillity he directed the work, protected the tall

branches which the workmen might have broken: "Not like that. Bend it over. Take care of the carpet."

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The atmosphere of pleasure and merry-making which had so revolted her a moment before pursued her to her own house. It was too much, after all the rest! She rebelled; and as Risler saluted her, affectionately and with deep respect as always, her face assumed an expression of intense disgust, and she passed without speaking to him, without seeing the amazement that opened his great, honest eyes.

From that moment her course was determined. Wrath, a wrath born of uprightness and sense of justice, guided her actions. She barely took time to kiss her child's rosy cheeks before running to her mother's room.

"Come, mamma, dress yourself quickly. We are going away. We are going away."

The old lady rose slowly from the armchair in which she was sitting, busily engaged in cleaning her watch-chain by inserting a pin between every two links with infinite care.

"Come, come, hurry. Get your things ready."

Her voice trembled, and the poor monomaniac's room seemed a horrible place to her, all glistening as it was with the cleanliness that had gradually become a mania. She had reached one of those fateful moments when the loss of one illusion causes you to lose them all, enables you to look to the very depths of human misery. The realization of her complete isolation, between her half-mad mother, her faithless husband, her too young child, came upon her for the first time; but it served only to strengthen her in her resolution.

In a moment the whole household was busily engaged in making preparations for this abrupt, unexpected departure. Claire hurried the bewildered servants, and dressed her mother and the child, who laughed merrily amid all the excitement. She was in haste to go before Georges' return, so that he might find the cradle empty and the house deserted. Where should she go? She did not know as yet. Perhaps to her aunt at Orleans, perhaps to Savigny, no matter where. What she must do first of all was-go, fly from that atmosphere of treachery and falsehood.

At that moment she was in her bedroom, packing a trunk, making a pile of her effects—a heartrending occupation. Every object that she touched set in motion whole worlds of thoughts, of memories. There is so much of ourselves in anything that we use. At times the odor of a sachet-bag, the pattern of a bit of lace, were enough to bring tears to her eyes. Suddenly she heard a heavy footstep in the salon, the door of which was partly open; then there was a slight cough, as if to let her know that some one was there. She supposed that it was Risler: for no one else had the right to enter her apartments so unceremoniously. The idea of having to endure the presence of that hypocritical face, that false smile, was so distasteful to her that she rushed to close the door.

"I am not at home to any one."

The door resisted her efforts, and Sigismond's square head appeared in the opening.

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"It is I, Madame," he said in an undertone. "I have come to get the money."

"What money?" demanded Claire, for she no longer remembered why she had gone to Savigny.

"Hush! The funds to meet my note to-morrow. Monsieur Georges, when he went out, told me that you would hand it to me very soon."

"Ah! yes—true. The hundred thousand francs."

"I haven't them, Monsieur Planus; I haven't anything."

"Then," said the cashier, in a strange voice, as if he were speaking to himself, "then it means failure."

And he turned slowly away.

Failure! She sank on a chair, appalled, crushed. For the last few hours the downfall of her happiness had caused her to forget the downfall of the house; but she remembered now.

So her husband was ruined! In a little while, when he returned home, he would learn of the disaster, and he would learn at the same time that his wife and child had gone; that he was left alone in the midst of the wreck.

Alone—that weak, easily influenced creature, who could only weep and complain and shake his fist at life like a child! What would become of the miserable man?

She pitied him, notwithstanding his great sin.

Then the thought came to her that she would perhaps seem to have fled at the approach of bankruptcy, of poverty.

Georges might say to himself:

"Had I been rich, she would have forgiven me!"

Ought she to allow him to entertain that doubt?

To a generous, noble heart like Claire's nothing more than that was necessary to change her plans. Instantly she was conscious that her feeling of repugnance, of revolt, began to grow less bitter, and a sudden ray of light seemed to make her duty clearer to her. When they came to tell her that the child was dressed and the trunks ready, her mind was made up anew.



“Never mind,” she replied gently. “We are not going away.”

ETEXT *editor's bookmarks:*

Abundant details which he sometimes volunteered
Exaggerated dramatic pantomime
Void in her heart, a place made ready for disasters to come
Would have liked him to be blind only so far as he was concerned

FROMONT AND RISLER

By Alphonse daudet

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DAY OF RECKONING

The great clock of Saint-Gervais struck one in the morning. It was so cold that the fine snow, flying through the air, hardened as it fell, covering the pavements with a slippery, white blanket.

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Risler, wrapped in his cloak, was hastening home from the brewery through the deserted streets of the Marais. He had been celebrating, in company with his two faithful borrowers, Chebe and Delobelle, his first moment of leisure, the end of that almost endless period of seclusion during which he had been superintending the manufacture of his press, with all the searchings, the joys, and the disappointments of the inventor. It had been long, very long. At the last moment he had discovered a defect. The crane did not work well; and he had had to revise his plans and drawings. At last, on that very day, the new machine had been tried. Everything had succeeded to his heart's desire. The worthy man was triumphant. It seemed to him that he had paid a debt, by giving the house of Fromont the benefit of a new machine, which would lessen the labor, shorten the hours of the workmen, and at the same time double the profits and the reputation of the factory. He indulged in beautiful dreams as he plodded along. His footsteps rang out proudly, emphasized by the resolute and happy trend of his thoughts.

Quickening his pace, he reached the corner of Rue des Vieilles-Haudriettes. A long line of carriages was standing in front of the factory, and the light of their lanterns in the street, the shadows of the drivers seeking shelter from the snow in the corners and angles that those old buildings have retained despite the straightening of the sidewalks, gave an animated aspect to that deserted, silent quarter.

"Yes, yes! to be sure," thought the honest fellow, "we have a ball at our house." He remembered that Sidonie was giving a grand musical and dancing party, which she had excused him from attending, by the way, knowing that he was very busy.

Shadows passed and repassed behind the fluttering veil of the curtains; the orchestra seemed to follow the movements of those stealthy apparitions with the rising and falling of its muffled notes. The guests were dancing. Risler let his eyes rest for a moment on that phantasmagoria of the ball, and fancied that he recognized Sidonie's shadow in a small room adjoining the salon.

She was standing erect in her magnificent costume, in the attitude of a pretty woman before her mirror. A shorter shadow behind her, Madame Dobson doubtless, was repairing some accident to the costume, retieing the knot of a ribbon tied about her neck, its long ends floating down to the flounces of the train. It was all very indistinct, but the woman's graceful figure was recognizable in those faintly traced outlines, and Risler tarried long admiring her.

The contrast on the first floor was most striking. There was no light visible, with the exception of a little lamp shining through the lilac hangings of the bedroom. Risler noticed that circumstance, and as the little girl had been ailing a few days before, he felt anxious about her, remembering Madame Georges's strange agitation when she passed him so hurriedly in the afternoon; and he retraced his steps as far as Pere Achille's lodge to inquire.

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The lodge was full. Coachmen were warming themselves around the stove, chatting and laughing amid the smoke from their pipes. When Risler appeared there was profound silence, a cunning, inquisitive, significant silence. They had evidently been speaking of him.

"Is the Fromont child still sick?" he asked.

"No, not the child, Monsieur."

"Monsieur Georges sick?"

"Yes, he was taken when he came home to-night. I went right off to get the doctor. He said that it wouldn't amount to anything—that all Monsieur needed was rest."

As Risler closed the door Pere Achille added, under his breath, with the half-fearful, half-audacious insolence of an inferior, who would like to be listened to and yet not distinctly heard:

"Ah! 'dame', they're not making such a show on the first floor as they are on the second."

This is what had happened.

Fromont jeune, on returning home during the evening, had found his wife with such a changed, heartbroken face, that he at once divined a catastrophe. But he had become so accustomed in the past two years to sin with impunity that it did not for one moment occur to him that his wife could have been informed of his conduct. Claire, for her part, to avoid humiliating him, was generous enough to speak only of Savigny.

"Grandpapa refused," she said.

The miserable man turned frightfully pale.

"I am lost—I am lost!" he muttered two or three times in the wild accents of fever; and his sleepless nights, a last terrible scene which he had had with Sidonie, trying to induce her not to give this party on the eve of his downfall, M. Gardinois' refusal, all these maddening things which followed so closely on one another's heels and had agitated him terribly, culminated in a genuine nervous attack. Claire took pity on him, put him to bed, and established herself by his side; but her voice had lost that affectionate intonation which soothes and persuades. There was in her gestures, in the way in which she arranged the pillow under the patient's head and prepared a quieting draught, a strange indifference, listlessness.

“But I have ruined you!” Georges said from time to time, as if to rouse her from that apathy which made him uncomfortable. She replied with a proud, disdainful gesture. Ah! if he had done only that to her!

At last, however, his nerves became calmer, the fever subsided, and he fell asleep.

She remained to attend to his wants.

“It is my duty,” she said to herself.

Her duty. She had reached that point with the man whom she had adored so blindly, with the hope of a long and happy life together.

At that moment the ball in Sidonie’s apartments began to become very animated. The ceiling trembled rhythmically, for Madame had had all the carpets removed from her salons for the greater comfort of the dancers. Sometimes, too, the sound of voices reached Claire’s ears in waves, and frequent tumultuous applause, from which one could divine the great number of the guests, the crowded condition of the rooms.

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Claire was lost in thought. She did not waste time in regrets, in fruitless lamentations. She knew that life was inflexible and that all the arguments in the world will not arrest the cruel logic of its inevitable progress. She did not ask herself how that man had succeeded in deceiving her so long—how he could have sacrificed the honor and happiness of his family for a mere caprice. That was the fact, and all her reflections could not wipe it out, could not repair the irreparable. The subject that engrossed her thoughts was the future. A new existence was unfolding before her eyes, dark, cruel, full of privation and toil; and, strangely enough, the prospect of ruin, instead of terrifying her, restored all her courage. The idea of the change of abode made necessary by the economy they would be obliged to practise, of work made compulsory for Georges and perhaps for herself, infused an indefinable energy into the distressing calmness of her despair. What a heavy burden of souls she would have with her three children: her mother, her child, and her husband! The feeling of responsibility prevented her giving way too much to her misfortune, to the wreck of her love; and in proportion as she forgot herself in the thought of the weak creatures she had to protect she realized more fully the meaning of the word “sacrifice,” so vague on careless lips, so serious when it becomes a rule of life.

Such were the poor woman’s thoughts during that sad vigil, a vigil of arms and tears, while she was preparing her forces for the great battle. Such was the scene lighted by the modest little lamp which Risler had seen from below, like a star fallen from the radiant chandeliers of the ballroom.

Reassured by Pere Achille’s reply, the honest fellow thought of going up to his bedroom, avoiding the festivities and the guests, for whom he cared little.

On such occasions he used a small servants’ staircase communicating with the counting-room. So he walked through the many-windowed workshops, which the moon, reflected by the snow, made as light as at noonday. He breathed the atmosphere of the day of toil, a hot, stifling atmosphere, heavy with the odor of boiled talc and varnish. The papers spread out on the dryers formed long, rustling paths. On all sides tools were lying about, and blouses hanging here and there ready for the morrow. Risler never walked through the shops without a feeling of pleasure.

Suddenly he spied a light in Planus’s office, at the end of that long line of deserted rooms. The old cashier was still at work, at one o’clock in the morning! That was really most extraordinary.

Risler’s first impulse was to retrace his steps. In fact, since his unaccountable falling-out with Sigismond, since the cashier had adopted that attitude of cold silence toward him, he had avoided meeting him. His wounded friendship had always led him to shun an explanation; he had a sort of pride in not asking Planus why he bore him ill-will. But, on that evening, Risler felt so strongly the need of cordial sympathy, of pouring out his

heart to some one, and then it was such an excellent opportunity for a tete-a-tete with his former friend, that he did not try to avoid him but boldly entered the counting-room.

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The cashier was sitting there, motionless, among heaps of papers and great books, which he had been turning over, some of which had fallen to the floor. At the sound of his employer's footsteps he did not even lift his eyes. He had recognized Risler's step. The latter, somewhat abashed, hesitated a moment; then, impelled by one of those secret springs which we have within us and which guide us, despite ourselves, in the path of our destiny, he walked straight to the cashier's grating.

"Sigismond," he said in a grave voice.

The old man raised his head and displayed a shrunken face down which two great tears were rolling, the first perhaps that that animate column of figures had ever shed in his life.

"You are weeping, old man? What troubles you?"

And honest Risler, deeply touched, held out his hand to his friend, who hastily withdrew his. That movement of repulsion was so instinctive, so brutal, that all Risler's emotion changed to indignation.

He drew himself up with stern dignity.

"I offer you my hand, Sigismond Planus!" he said.

"And I refuse to take it," said Planus, rising.

There was a terrible pause, during which they heard the muffled music of the orchestra upstairs and the noise of the ball, the dull, wearing noise of floors shaken by the rhythmic movement of the dance.

"Why do you refuse to take my hand?" demanded Risler simply, while the grating upon which he leaned trembled with a metallic quiver.

Sigismond was facing him, with both hands on his desk, as if to emphasize and drive home what he was about to say in reply.

"Why? Because you have ruined the house; because in a few hours a messenger from the Bank will come and stand where you are, to collect a hundred thousand francs; and because, thanks to you, I haven't a sou in the cash-box—that's the reason why!"

Risler was stupefied.

"I have ruined the house—I?"

"Worse than that, Monsieur. You have allowed it to be ruined by your wife, and you have arranged with her to benefit by our ruin and your dishonor. Oh! I can see your

game well enough. The money your wife has wormed out of the wretched Fromont, the house at Asnieres, the diamonds and all the rest is invested in her name, of course, out of reach of disaster; and of course you can retire from business now."

"Oh—oh!" exclaimed Risler in a faint voice, a restrained voice rather, that was insufficient for the multitude of thoughts it strove to express; and as he stammered helplessly he drew the grating toward him with such force that he broke off a piece of it. Then he staggered, fell to the floor, and lay there motionless, speechless, retaining only, in what little life was still left in him, the firm determination not to die until he had justified himself. That determination must have been very powerful; for while his temples throbbed madly, hammered by the blood that turned his face purple, while his ears were ringing and his glazed eyes seemed already turned toward the terrible unknown, the unhappy man muttered to himself in a thick voice, like the voice of a shipwrecked man speaking with his mouth full of water in a howling gale: "I must live! I must live!"

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When he recovered consciousness, he was sitting on the cushioned bench on which the workmen sat huddled together on pay-day, his cloak on the floor, his cravat untied, his shirt open at the neck, cut by Sigismond's knife. Luckily for him, he had cut his hands when he tore the grating apart; the blood had flowed freely, and that accident was enough to avert an attack of apoplexy. On opening his eyes, he saw on either side old Sigismond and Madame Georges, whom the cashier had summoned in his distress. As soon as Risler could speak, he said to her in a choking voice:

"Is this true, Madame Chorche—is this true that he just told me?"

She had not the courage to deceive him, so she turned her eyes away.

"So," continued the poor fellow, "so the house is ruined, and I—"

"No, Risler, my friend. No, not you."

"My wife, was it not? Oh! it is horrible! This is how I have paid my debt of gratitude to you. But you, Madame Chorche, you could not have believed that I was a party to this infamy?"

"No, my friend, no; be calm. I know that you are the most honorable man on earth."

He looked at her a moment, with trembling lips and clasped hands, for there was something child-like in all the manifestations of that artless nature.

"Oh! Madame Chorche, Madame Chorche," he murmured. "When I think that I am the one who has ruined you."

In the terrible blow which overwhelmed him, and by which his heart, overflowing with love for Sidonie, was most deeply wounded, he refused to see anything but the financial disaster to the house of Fromont, caused by his blind devotion to his wife. Suddenly he stood erect.

"Come," he said, "let us not give way to emotion. We must see about settling our accounts."

Madame Fromont was frightened.

"Risler, Risler—where are you going?"

She thought that he was going up to Georges' room.

Risler understood her and smiled in superb disdain.

“Never fear, Madame. Monsieur Georges can sleep in peace. I have something more urgent to do than avenge my honor as a husband. Wait for me here. I will come back.”

He darted toward the narrow staircase; and Claire, relying upon his word, remained with Planus during one of those supreme moments of uncertainty which seem interminable because of all the conjectures with which they are thronged.

A few moments later the sound of hurried steps, the rustling of silk filled the dark and narrow staircase. Sidonie appeared first, in ball costume, gorgeously arrayed and so pale that the jewels that glistened everywhere on her dead-white flesh seemed more alive than she, as if they were scattered over the cold marble of a statue. The breathlessness due to dancing, the trembling of intense excitement and her rapid descent, caused her to shake from head to foot, and her floating ribbons, her ruffles, her flowers, her rich and fashionable attire drooped tragically about her. Risler followed her, laden with jewel-cases, caskets, and papers. Upon reaching his apartments he had pounced upon his wife's desk, seized everything valuable that it contained, jewels, certificates, title-deeds of the house at Asnieres; then, standing in the doorway, he had shouted into the ballroom:

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“Madame Risler!”

She had run quickly to him, and that brief scene had in no wise disturbed the guests, then at the height of the evening’s enjoyment. When she saw her husband standing in front of the desk, the drawers broken open and overturned on the carpet with the multitude of trifles they contained, she realized that something terrible was taking place.

“Come at once,” said Risler; “I know all.”

She tried to assume an innocent, dignified attitude; but he seized her by the arm with such force that Frantz’s words came to her mind: “It will kill him perhaps, but he will kill you first.” As she was afraid of death, she allowed herself to be led away without resistance, and had not even the strength to lie.

“Where are we going?” she asked, in a low voice.

Risler did not answer. She had only time to throw over her shoulders, with the care for herself that never failed her, a light tulle veil, and he dragged her, pushed her, rather, down the stairs leading to the counting-room, which he descended at the same time, his steps close upon hers, fearing that his prey would escape.

“There!” he said, as he entered the room. “We have stolen, we make restitution. Look, Planus, you can raise money with all this stuff.” And he placed on the cashier’s desk all the fashionable plunder with which his arms were filled—feminine trinkets, trivial aids to coquetry, stamped papers.

Then he turned to his wife:

“Take off your jewels! Come, be quick.”

She complied slowly, opened reluctantly the clasps of bracelets and buckles, and above all the superb fastening of her diamond necklace on which the initial of her name—a gleaming S—resembled a sleeping serpent, imprisoned in a circle of gold. Risler, thinking that she was too slow, ruthlessly broke, the fragile fastenings. Luxury shrieked beneath his fingers, as if it were being whipped.

“Now it is my turn,” he said; “I too must give up everything. Here is my portfolio. What else have I? What else have I?”

He searched his pockets feverishly.

“Ah! my watch. With the chain it will bring four-thousand francs. My rings, my wedding-ring. Everything goes into the cash-box, everything. We have a hundred thousand francs to pay this morning. As soon as it is daylight we must go to work, sell out and

pay our debts. I know some one who wants the house at Asnieres. That can be settled at once.”

He alone spoke and acted. Sigismond and Madame Georges watched him without speaking. As for Sidonie, she seemed unconscious, lifeless. The cold air blowing from the garden through the little door, which was opened at the time of Risler’s swoon, made her shiver, and she mechanically drew the folds of her scarf around her shoulders, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her thoughts wandering. Did she not hear the violins of her ball, which reached their ears in the intervals of silence, like bursts of savage irony, with the heavy thud of the dancers shaking the floors? An iron hand, falling upon her, aroused her abruptly from her torpor. Risler had taken her by the arm, and, leading her before his partner’s wife, he said:

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"Down on your knees!"

Madame Fromont drew back, remonstrating:

"No, no, Risler, not that."

"It must be," said the implacable Risler. "Restitution, reparation! Down on your knees then, wretched woman!" And with irresistible force he threw Sidonie at Claire's feet; then, still holding her arm;

"You will repeat after me, word for word, what I say: Madame—"

Sidonie, half dead with fear, repeated faintly: "Madame—"

"A whole lifetime of humility and submission—"

"A whole lifetime of humil—No, I can not!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet with the agility of a deer; and, wresting herself from Risler's grasp, through that open door which had tempted her from the beginning of this horrible scene, luring her out into the darkness of the night to the liberty obtainable by flight, she rushed from the house, braving the falling snow and the wind that stung her bare shoulders.

"Stop her, stop her!—Risler, Planus, I implore you! In pity's name do not let her go in this way," cried Claire.

Planus stepped toward the door.

Risler detained him.

"I forbid you to stir! I ask your pardon, Madame, but we have more important matters than this to consider. Madame Risler concerns us no longer. We have to save the honor of the house of Fromont, which alone is at stake, which alone fills my thoughts at this moment."

Sigismond put out his hand.

"You are a noble man, Risler. Forgive me for having suspected you."

Risler pretended not to hear him.

"A hundred thousand francs to pay, you say? How much is there left in the strong-box?"

He sat bravely down behind the gratin, looking over the books of account, the certificates of stock in the funds, opening the jewel-cases, estimating with Planus,

whose father had been a jeweller, the value of all those diamonds, which he had once so admired on his wife, having no suspicion of their real value.

Meanwhile Claire, trembling from head to foot, looked out through the window at the little garden, white with snow, where Sidonie's footsteps were already effaced by the fast-falling flakes, as if to bear witness that that precipitate departure was without hope of return.

Up-stairs they were still dancing. The mistress of the house was supposed to be busy with the preparations for supper, while she was flying, bare-headed, forcing back sobs and shrieks of rage.

Where was she going? She had started off like a mad woman, running across the garden and the courtyard of the factory, and under the dark arches, where the cruel, freezing wind blew in eddying circles. Pere Achille did not recognize her; he had seen so many shadows wrapped in white pass his lodge that night.

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The young woman's first thought was to join the tenor Cazaboni, whom at the last she had not dared to invite to her ball; but he lived at Montmartre, and that was very far away for her to go, in that garb; and then, would he be at home? Her parents would take her in, doubtless; but she could already hear Madame Chebe's lamentations and the little man's sermon under three heads. Thereupon she thought of Delobelle, her old Delobelle. In the downfall of all her splendors she remembered the man who had first initiated her into fashionable life, who had given her lessons in dancing and deportment when she was a little girl, laughed at her pretty ways, and taught her to look upon herself as beautiful before any one had ever told her that she was so. Something told her that that fallen star would take her part against all others. She entered one of the carriages standing at the gate and ordered the driver to take her to the actor's lodgings on the Boulevard Beaumarchais.

For some time past Mamma Delobelle had been making straw hats for export—a dismal trade if ever there was one, which brought in barely two francs fifty for twelve hours' work.

And Delobelle continued to grow fat in the same degree that his "sainted wife" grew thin. At the very moment when some one knocked hurriedly at his door he had just discovered a fragrant soup 'au fromage', which had been kept hot in the ashes on the hearth. The actor, who had been witnessing at Beaumarchais some dark-browed melodrama drenched with gore even to the illustrated headlines of its poster, was startled by that knock at such an advanced hour.

"Who is there?" he asked in some alarm.

"It is I, Sidonie. Open the door quickly."

She entered the room, shivering all over, and, throwing aside her wrap, went close to the stove where the fire was almost extinct. She began to talk at once, to pour out the wrath that had been stifling her for an hour, and while she was describing the scene in the factory, lowering her voice because of Madame Delobelle, who was asleep close by, the magnificence of her costume in that poor, bare, fifth floor, the dazzling whiteness of her disordered finery amid the heaps of coarse hats and the wisps of straw strewn about the room, all combined to produce the effect of a veritable drama, of one of those terrible upheavals of life when rank, feelings, fortunes are suddenly jumbled together.

"Oh! I never shall return home. It is all over. Free—I am free!"

"But who could have betrayed you to your husband?" asked the actor.

"It was Frantz! I am sure it was Frantz. He wouldn't have believed it from anybody else. Only last evening a letter came from Egypt. Oh! how he treated me before that

woman! To force me to kneel! But I'll be revenged. Luckily I took something to revenge myself with before I came away."

And the smile of former days played about the corners of her pale lips.

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The old strolling player listened to it all with deep interest. Notwithstanding his compassion for that poor devil of a Risler, and for Sidonie herself, for that matter, who seemed to him, in theatrical parlance, “a beautiful culprit,” he could not help viewing the affair from a purely scenic standpoint, and finally cried out, carried away by his hobby:

“What a first-class situation for a fifth act!”

She did not bear him. Absorbed by some evil thought, which made her smile in anticipation, she stretched out to the fire her dainty shoes, saturated with snow, and her openwork stockings.

“Well, what do you propose to do now?” Delobelle asked after a pause.

“Stay here till daylight and get a little rest. Then I will see.”

“I have no bed to offer you, my poor girl. Mamma Delobelle has gone to bed.”

“Don’t you worry about me, my dear Delobelle. I’ll sleep in that armchair. I won’t be in your way, I tell you!”

The actor heaved a sigh.

“Ah! yes, that armchair. It was our poor Zizi’s. She sat up many a night in it, when work was pressing. Ah, me! those who leave this world are much the happiest.”

He had always at hand such selfish, comforting maxims. He had no sooner uttered that one than he discovered with dismay that his soup would soon be stone-cold. Sidonie noticed his movement.

“Why, you were just eating your supper, weren’t you? Pray go on.”

“‘Dame’! yes, what would you have? It’s part of the trade, of the hard existence we fellows have. For you see, my girl, I stand firm. I haven’t given up. I never will give up.”

What still remained of Desiree’s soul in that wretched household in which she had lived twenty years must have shuddered at that terrible declaration. He never would give up!

“No matter what people may say,” continued Delobelle, “it’s the noblest profession in the world. You are free; you depend upon nobody. Devoted to the service of glory and the public! Ah! I know what I would do in your place. As if you were born to live with all those bourgeois—the devil! What you need is the artistic life, the fever of success, the unexpected, intense emotion.”

As he spoke he took his seat, tucked his napkin in his neck, and helped himself to a great plateful of soup.

“To say nothing of the fact that your triumphs as a pretty woman would in no wise interfere with your triumph as an actress. By the way, do you know, you must take a few lessons in elocution. With your voice, your intelligence, your charms, you would have a magnificent prospect.”

Then he added abruptly, as if to initiate her into the joys of the dramatic art:

“But it occurs to me that perhaps you have not supped! Excitement makes one hungry; sit there, and take this soup. I am sure that you haven’t eaten soup ‘au fromage’ for a long while.”

He turned the closet topsy-turvy to find her a spoon and a napkin; and she took her seat opposite him, assisting him and laughing a little at the difficulties attending her entertainment. She was less pale already, and there was a pretty sparkle in her eyes, composed of the tears of a moment before and the present gayety.

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The strolling actress! All her happiness in life was lost forever: honor, family, wealth. She was driven from her house, stripped, dishonored. She had undergone all possible humiliations and disasters. That did not prevent her supping with a wonderful appetite and joyously holding her own under Delobelle's jocose remarks concerning her vocation and her future triumphs. She felt light-hearted and happy, fairly embarked for the land of Bohemia, her true country. What more would happen to her? Of how many ups and downs was her new, unforeseen, and whimsical existence to consist? She thought about that as she fell asleep in Desiree's great easy-chair; but she thought of her revenge, too—her cherished revenge which she held in her hand, all ready for use, and so unerring, so fierce!

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEW EMPLOYEE OF THE HOUSE OF FROMONT

It was broad daylight when Fromont Jeune awoke. All night long, between the drama that was being enacted below him and the festivity in joyous progress above, he slept with clenched fists, the deep sleep of complete prostration like that of a condemned man on the eve of his execution or of a defeated General on the night following his disaster; a sleep from which one would wish never to awake, and in which, in the absence of all sensation, one has a foretaste of death.

The bright light streaming through his curtains, made more dazzling by the deep snow with which the garden and the surrounding roofs were covered, recalled him to the consciousness of things as they were. He felt a shock throughout his whole being, and, even before his mind began to work, that vague impression of melancholy which misfortunes, momentarily forgotten, leave in their place. All the familiar noises of the factory, the dull throbbing of the machinery, were in full activity. So the world still existed! and by slow degrees the idea of his own responsibility awoke in him.

"To-day is the day," he said to himself, with an involuntary movement toward the dark side of the room, as if he longed to bury himself anew in his long sleep.

The factory bell rang, then other bells in the neighborhood, then the Angelus.

"Noon! Already! How I have slept!"

He felt some little remorse and a great sense of relief at the thought that the drama of settling-day had passed off without him. What had they done downstairs? Why did they not call him?

He rose, drew the curtains aside, and saw Risler and Sigismond talking together in the garden. And it was so long since they had spoken to each other! What in heaven's



name had happened? When he was ready to go down he found Claire at the door of his room.

“You must not go out,” she said.

“Why not?”

“Stay here. I will explain it to you.”

“But what’s the matter? Did any one come from the Bank?”

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"Yes, they came—the notes are paid."

"Paid?"

"Risler obtained the money. He has been rushing about with Planus since early morning. It seems that his wife had superb jewels. The diamond necklace alone brought twenty thousand francs. He has also sold their house at Asnieres with all it contained; but as time was required to record the deed, Planus and his sister advanced the money."

She turned away from him as she spoke. He, on his side, hung his head to avoid her glance.

"Risler is an honorable man," she continued, "and when he learned from whom his wife received all her magnificent things—"

"What!" exclaimed Georges in dismay. "He knows?"

"All," Claire replied, lowering her voice.

The wretched man turned pale, stammered feebly:

"Why, then—you?"

"Oh! I knew it all before Risler. Remember, that when I came home last night, I told you I had heard very cruel things down at Savigny, and that I would have given ten years of my life not to have taken that journey."

"Claire!"

Moved by a mighty outburst of affection, he stepped toward his wife; but her face was so cold, so sad, so resolute, her despair was so plainly written in the stern indifference of her whole bearing, that he dared not take her in his arms as he longed to do, but simply murmured under his breath:

"Forgive!—forgive!"

"You must think me strangely calm," said the brave woman; "but I shed all my tears yesterday. You may have thought that I was weeping over our ruin; you were mistaken. While one is young and strong as we are, such cowardly conduct is not permissible. We are armed against want and can fight it face to face. No, I was weeping for our departed happiness, for you, for the madness that led you to throw away your only, your true friend."

She was lovely, lovelier than Sidonie had ever been, as she spoke thus, enveloped by a pure light which seemed to fall upon her from a great height, like the radiance of a fathomless, cloudless sky; whereas the other's irregular features had always seemed to owe their brilliancy, their saucy, insolent charm to the false glamour of the footlights in some cheap theatre. The touch of statuesque immobility formerly noticeable in Claire's face was vivified by anxiety, by doubt, by all the torture of passion; and like those gold ingots which have their full value only when the Mint has placed its stamp upon them, those beautiful features stamped with the effigy of sorrow had acquired since the preceding day an ineffaceable expression which perfected their beauty.

Georges gazed at her in admiration. She seemed to him more alive, more womanly, and worthy of adoration because of their separation and all the obstacles that he now knew to stand between them. Remorse, despair, shame entered his heart simultaneously with this new love, and he would have fallen on his knees before her.

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"No, no, do not kneel," said Claire; "if you knew of what you remind me, if you knew what a lying face, distorted with hatred, I saw at my feet last night!"

"Ah! but I am not lying," replied Georges with a shudder. "Claire, I implore you, in the name of our child—"

At that moment some one knocked at the door.

"Rise, I beg of you! You see that life has claims upon us," she said in a low voice and with a bitter smile; then she asked what was wanted.

Monsieur Risler had sent for Monsieur to come down to the office.

"Very well," she said; "say that he will come."

Georges approached the door, but she stopped him.

"No, let me go. He must not see you yet."

"But—"

"I wish you to stay here. You have no idea of the indignation and wrath of that poor man, whom you have deceived. If you had seen him last night, crushing his wife's wrists!"

As she said it she looked him in the face with a curiosity most cruel to herself; but Georges did not wince, and replied simply:

"My life belongs to him."

"It belongs to me, too; and I do not wish you to go down. There has been scandal enough in my father's house. Remember that the whole factory is aware of what is going on. Every one is watching us, spying upon us. It required all the authority of the foremen to keep the men busy to-day, to compel them to keep their inquisitive looks on their work."

"But I shall seem to be hiding."

"And suppose it were so! That is just like a man. They do not recoil from the worst crimes: betraying a wife, betraying a friend; but the thought that they may be accused of being afraid touches them more keenly than anything. Moreover, listen to what I say. Sidonie has gone; she has gone forever; and if you leave this house I shall think that you have gone to join her."

"Very well, I will stay," said Georges. "I will do whatever you wish."

Claire descended into Planus' office.

To see Risler striding to and fro, with his hands behind his back, as calm as usual, no one would ever have suspected all that had taken place in his life since the night before. As for Sigismond, he was fairly beaming, for he saw nothing in it all beyond the fact that the notes had been paid at maturity and that the honor of the firm was safe.

When Madame Fromont appeared, Risler smiled sadly and shook his head.

"I thought that you would prefer to come down in his place; but you are not the one with whom I have to deal. It is absolutely necessary that I should see Georges and talk with him. We have paid the notes that fell due this morning; the crisis has passed; but we must come to an understanding about many matters."

"Risler, my friend, I beg you to wait a little longer."

"Why, Madame Chorche, there's not a minute to lose. Oh! I suspect that you fear I may give way to an outbreak of anger. Have no fear—let him have no fear. You know what I told you, that the honor of the house of Fromont is to be assured before my own. I have endangered it by my fault. First of all, I must repair the evil I have done or allowed to be done."

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"Your conduct toward us is worthy of all admiration, my good Risler; I know it well."

"Oh! Madame, if you could see him! he's a saint," said poor Sigismond, who, not daring to speak to his friend, was determined at all events to express his remorse.

"But aren't you afraid?" continued Claire. "Human endurance has its limits. It may be that in presence of the man who has injured you so—"

Risler took her hands, gazed into her eyes with grave admiration, and said:

"You dear creature, who speak of nothing but the injury done to me! Do you not know that I hate him as bitterly for his falseness to you? But nothing of that sort has any existence for me at this moment. You see in me simply a business man who wishes to have an understanding with his partner for the good of the firm. So let him come down without the slightest fear, and if you dread any outbreak on my part, stay here with us. I shall need only to look at my old master's daughter to be reminded of my promise and my duty."

"I trust you, my friend," said Claire; and she went up to bring her husband.

The first minute of the interview was terrible. Georges was deeply moved, humiliated, pale as death. He would have preferred a hundred times over to be looking into the barrel of that man's pistol at twenty paces, awaiting his fire, instead of appearing before him as an unpunished culprit and being compelled to confine his feelings within the commonplace limits of a business conversation.

Risler pretended not to look at him, and continued to pace the floor as he talked:

"Our house is passing through a terrible crisis. We have averted the disaster for to-day; but this is not the last of our obligations. That cursed invention has kept my mind away from the business for a long while. Luckily, I am free now, and able to attend to it. But you must give your attention to it as well. The workmen and clerks have followed the example of their employers to some extent. Indeed, they have become extremely negligent and indifferent. This morning, for the first time in a year, they began work at the proper time. I expect that you will make it your business to change all that. As for me, I shall work at my drawings again. Our patterns are old-fashioned. We must have new ones for the new machines. I have great confidence in our presses. The experiments have succeeded beyond my hopes. We unquestionably have in them a means of building up our business. I didn't tell you sooner because I wished to surprise you; but we have no more surprises for each other, have we, Georges?"

There was such a stinging note of irony in his voice that Claire shuddered, fearing an outbreak; but he continued, in his natural tone.



“Yes, I think I can promise that in six months the Risler Press will begin to show magnificent results. But those six months will be very hard to live through. We must limit ourselves, cut down our expenses, save in every way that we can. We have five draughtsmen now; hereafter we will have but two. I will undertake to make the absence of the others of no consequence by working at night myself. Furthermore, beginning with this month, I abandon my interest in the firm. I will take my salary as foreman as I took it before, and nothing more.”

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Fromont attempted to speak, but a gesture from his wife restrained him, and Risler continued:

"I am no longer your partner, Georges. I am once more the clerk that I never should have ceased to be. From this day our partnership articles are cancelled. I insist upon it, you understand; I insist upon it. We will remain in that relation to each other until the house is out of difficulty and I can—But what I shall do then concerns me alone. This is what I wanted to say to you, Georges. You must give your attention to the factory diligently; you must show yourself, make it felt that you are master now, and I believe there will turn out to be, among all our misfortunes, some that can be retrieved."

During the silence that followed, they heard the sound of wheels in the garden, and two great furniture vans stopped at the door.

"I beg your pardon," said Risler, "but I must leave you a moment. Those are the vans from the public auction rooms; they have come to take away my furniture from upstairs."

"What! you are going to sell your furniture too?" asked Madame Fromont.

"Certainly—to the last piece. I am simply giving it back to the firm. It belongs to it."

"But that is impossible," said Georges. "I can not allow that."

Risler turned upon him indignantly.

"What's that? What is it that you can't allow?"

Claire checked him with an imploring gesture.

"True—true!" he muttered; and he hurried from the room to escape the sudden temptation to give vent to all that was in his heart.

The second floor was deserted. The servants, who had been paid and dismissed in the morning, had abandoned the apartments to the disorder of the day following a ball; and they wore the aspect peculiar to places where a drama has been enacted, and which are left in suspense, as it were, between the events that have happened and those that are still to happen. The open doors, the rugs lying in heaps in the corners, the salvers laden with glasses, the preparations for the supper, the table still set and untouched, the dust from the dancing on all the furniture, its odor mingled with the fumes of punch, of withered flowers, of rice-powder—all these details attracted Risler's notice as he entered.

In the disordered salon the piano was open, the bacchanal from 'Orphee aux Enfers' on the music-shelf, and the gaudy hangings surrounding that scene of desolation, the chairs overturned, as if in fear, reminded one of the saloon of a wrecked packet-boat, of

one of those ghostly nights of watching when one is suddenly informed, in the midst of a fete at sea, that the ship has sprung a leak, that she is taking in water in every part.

The men began to remove the furniture. Risler watched them at work with an indifferent air, as if he were in a stranger's house. That magnificence which had once made him so happy and proud inspired in him now an insurmountable disgust. But, when he entered his wife's bedroom, he was conscious of a vague emotion.

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It was a large room, hung with blue satin under white lace. A veritable cocotte's nest. There were torn and rumpled tulle ruffles lying about, bows, and artificial flowers. The wax candles around the mirror had burned down to the end and cracked the candlesticks; and the bed, with its lace flounces and valances, its great curtains raised and drawn back, untouched in the general confusion, seemed like the bed of a corpse, a state bed on which no one would ever sleep again.

Risler's first feeling upon entering the room was one of mad indignation, a longing to fall upon the things before him, to tear and rend and shatter everything. Nothing, you see, resembles a woman so much as her bedroom. Even when she is absent, her image still smiles in the mirrors that have reflected it. A little something of her, of her favorite perfume, remains in everything she has touched. Her attitudes are reproduced in the cushions of her couch, and one can follow her goings and comings between the mirror and the toilette table in the pattern of the carpet. The one thing above all others in that room that recalled Sidonie was an 'etagere' covered with childish toys, petty, trivial knickknacks, microscopic fans, dolls' tea-sets, gilded shoes, little shepherds and shepherdesses facing one another, exchanging cold, gleaming, porcelain glances. That 'etagere' was Sidonie's very soul, and her thoughts, always commonplace, petty, vain, and empty, resembled those gewgaws. Yes, in very truth, if Risler, while he held her in his grasp last night, had in his frenzy broken that fragile little head, a whole world of 'etagere' ornaments would have come from it in place of a brain.

The poor man was thinking sadly of all these things amid the ringing of hammers and the heavy footsteps of the furniture-movers, when he heard an interloping, authoritative step behind him, and Monsieur Chebe appeared, little Monsieur Chebe, flushed and breathless, with flames darting from his eyes. He assumed, as always, a very high tone with his son-in-law.

"What does this mean? What is this I hear? Ah! so you're moving, are you?"

"I am not moving, Monsieur Chebe—I am selling out."

The little man gave a leap like a scalded fish.

"You are selling out? What are you selling, pray?"

"I am selling everything," said Risler in a hollow voice, without even looking at him.

"Come, come, son-in-law, be reasonable. God knows I don't say that Sidonie's conduct—But, for my part, I know nothing about it. I never wanted to know anything. Only I must remind you of your dignity. People wash their dirty linen in private, deuce take it! They don't make spectacles of themselves as you've been doing ever since morning. Just see everybody at the workshop windows; and on the porch, too! Why, you're the talk of the quarter, my dear fellow."

“So much the better. The dishonor was public, the reparation must be public, too.”

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This apparent coolness, this indifference to all his observations, exasperated Monsieur Chebe. He suddenly changed his tactics, and adopted, in addressing his son-in-law, the serious, peremptory tone which one uses with children or lunatics.

“Well, I say that you haven’t any right to take anything away from here. I remonstrate formally, with all my strength as a man, with all my authority as a father. Do you suppose I am going to let you drive my child into the street. No, indeed! Oh! no, indeed! Enough of such nonsense as that! Nothing more shall go out of these rooms.”

And Monsieur Chebe, having closed the door, planted himself in front of it with a heroic gesture. Deuce take it! his own interest was at stake in the matter. The fact was that when his child was once in the gutter he ran great risk of not having a feather bed to sleep on himself. He was superb in that attitude of an indignant father, but he did not keep it long. Two hands, two vises, seized his wrists, and he found himself in the middle of the room, leaving the doorway clear for the workmen.

“Chebe, my boy, just listen,” said Risler, leaning over him. “I am at the end of my forbearance. Since this morning I have been making superhuman efforts to restrain myself, but it would take very little now to make my anger burst all bonds, and woe to the man on whom it falls! I am quite capable of killing some one. Come! Be off at once!—”

There was such an intonation in his son-in-law’s voice, and the way that son-in-law shook him as he spoke was so eloquent, that Monsieur Chebe was fully convinced. He even stammered an apology. Certainly Risler had good reason for acting as he had. All honorable people would be on his side. And he backed toward the door as he spoke. When he reached it, he inquired timidly if Madame Chebe’s little allowance would be continued.

“Yes,” was Risler’s reply, “but never go beyond it, for my position here is not what it was. I am no longer a partner in the house.”

Monsieur Chebe stared at him in amazement, and assumed the idiotic expression which led many people to believe that the accident that had happened to him—exactly like that of the Duc d’Orleans, you know—was not a fable of his own invention; but he dared not make the slightest observation. Surely some one had changed his son-in-law. Was this really Risler, this tiger-cat, who bristled up at the slightest word and talked of nothing less than killing people?

He took to his heels, recovered his self-possession at the foot of the stairs, and walked across the courtyard with the air of a conqueror.

When all the rooms were cleared and empty, Risler walked through them for the last time, then took the key and went down to Planus’s office to hand it to Madame Georges.



"You can let the apartment," he said, "it will be so much added to the income of the factory."

"But you, my friend?"

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"Oh! I don't need much. An iron bed up under the eaves. That's all a clerk needs. For, I repeat, I am nothing but a clerk from this time on. A useful clerk, by the way, faithful and courageous, of whom you will have no occasion to complain, I promise you."

Georges, who was going over the books with Planus, was so affected at hearing the poor fellow talk in that strain that he left his seat precipitately. He was suffocated by his sobs. Claire, too, was deeply moved; she went to the new clerk of the house of Fromont and said to him:

"Risler, I thank you in my father's name."

At that moment Pere Achille appeared with the mail.

Risler took the pile of letters, opened them tranquilly one by one, and passed them over to Sigismond.

"Here's an order for Lyon. Why wasn't it answered at Saint-Etienne?"

He plunged with all his energy into these details, and he brought to them a keen intelligence, due to the constant straining of the mind toward peace and forgetfulness.

Suddenly, among those huge envelopes, stamped with the names of business houses, the paper of which and the manner of folding suggested the office and hasty despatch, he discovered one smaller one, carefully sealed, and hidden so cunningly between the others that at first he did not notice it. He recognized instantly that long, fine, firm writing,—To Monsieur Risler—Personal. It was Sidonie's writing! When he saw it he felt the same sensation he had felt in the bedroom upstairs.

All his love, all the hot wrath of the betrayed husband poured back into his heart with the frantic force that makes assassins. What was she writing to him? What lie had she invented now? He was about to open the letter; then he paused. He realized that, if he should read that, it would be all over with his courage; so he leaned over to the old cashier, and said in an undertone:

"Sigismond, old friend, will you do me a favor?"

"I should think so!" said the worthy man enthusiastically. He was so delighted to hear his friend speak to him in the kindly voice of the old days.

"Here's a letter someone has written me which I don't wish to read now. I am sure it would interfere with my thinking and living. You must keep it for me, and this with it."

He took from his pocket a little package carefully tied, and handed it to him through the grating.

“That is all I have left of the past, all I have left of that woman. I have determined not to see her, nor anything that reminds me of her, until my task here is concluded, and concluded satisfactorily,—I need all my intelligence, you understand. You will pay the Chebes’ allowance. If she herself should ask for anything, you will give her what she needs. But you will never mention my name. And you will keep this package safe for me until I ask you for it.”

Sigismond locked the letter and the package in a secret drawer of his desk with other valuable papers. Risler returned at once to his correspondence; but all the time he had before his eyes the slender English letters traced by a little hand which he had so often and so ardently pressed to his heart.

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CHAPTER XXIII

CAFE CHANTANT

What a rare, what a conscientious clerk did that new employe of the house of Fromont prove himself!

Every day his lamp was the first to appear at, and the last to disappear from, the windows of the factory. A little room had been arranged for him under the eaves, exactly like the one he had formerly occupied with Frantz, a veritable Trappist's cell, furnished with an iron cot and a white wooden table, that stood under his brother's portrait. He led the same busy, regular, quiet life as in those old days.

He worked constantly, and had his meals brought from the same little creamery. But, alas! the disappearance forever of youth and hope deprived those memories of all their charm. Luckily he still had Frantz and Madame "Chorche," the only two human beings of whom he could think without a feeling of sadness. Madame "Chorche" was always at hand, always trying to minister to his comfort, to console him; and Frantz wrote to him often, without mentioning Sidonie, by the way. Risler supposed that some one had told Frantz of the disaster that had befallen him, and he too avoided all allusion to the subject in his letters. "Oh! when I can send for him to come home!" That was his dream, his sole ambition: to restore the factory and recall his brother.

Meanwhile the days succeeded one another, always the same to him in the restless activity of business and the heartrending loneliness of his grief. Every morning he walked through the workshops, where the profound respect he inspired and his stern, silent countenance had reestablished the orderly conditions that had been temporarily disturbed. In the beginning there had been much gossip, and various explanations of Sidonie's departure had been made. Some said that she had eloped with a lover, others that Risler had turned her out. The one fact that upset all conjectures was the attitude of the two partners toward each other, apparently as unconstrained as before. Sometimes, however, when they were talking together in the office, with no one by, Risler would suddenly start convulsively, as a vision of the crime passed before his eyes.

Then he would feel a mad longing to spring upon the villain, seize him by the throat, strangle him without mercy; but the thought of Madame "Chorche" was always there to restrain him. Should he be less courageous, less master of himself than that young wife? Neither Claire, nor Fromont, nor anybody else suspected what was in his mind. They could barely detect a severity, an inflexibility in his conduct, which were not habitual with him. Risler awed the workmen now; and those of them upon whom his white hair, blanched in one night, his drawn, prematurely old features did not impose respect, quailed before his strange glance—a glance from eyes of a bluish-black like the



color of a gun-barrel. Whereas he had always been very kind and affable with the workmen, he had become pitilessly severe in regard to the slightest infraction of the rules. It seemed as if he were taking vengeance upon himself for some indulgence in the past, blind, culpable indulgence, for which he blamed himself.

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Surely he was a marvellous employe, was this new officer in the house of Fromont.

Thanks to him, the factory bell, notwithstanding the quavering of its old, cracked voice, had very soon resumed its authority; and the man who guided the whole establishment denied himself the slightest recreation. Sober as an apprentice, he left three-fourths of his salary with Planus for the Chebes' allowance, but he never asked any questions about them. Punctually on the last day of the month the little man appeared to collect his little income, stiff and formal in his dealings with Sigismond, as became an annuitant on duty. Madame Chebe had tried to obtain an interview with her son-in-law, whom she pitied and loved; but the mere appearance of her palm-leaf shawl on the steps put Sidonie's husband to flight.

In truth, the courage with which he armed himself was more apparent than real. The memory of his wife never left him. What had become of her? What was she doing? He was almost angry with Planus for never mentioning her. That letter, above all things, that letter which he had had the courage not to open, disturbed him. He thought of it continually. Ah! had he dared, how he would have liked to ask Sigismond for it!

One day the temptation was too strong. He was alone in the office. The old cashier had gone out to luncheon, leaving the key in his drawer, a most extraordinary thing. Risler could not resist. He opened the drawer, moved the papers, and searched for his letter. It was not there. Sigismond must have put it away even more carefully, perhaps with a foreboding of what actually happened. In his heart Risler was not sorry for his disappointment; for he well knew that, had he found the letter, it would have been the end of the resigned and busy life which he imposed upon himself with so much difficulty.

Through the week it was all very well. Life was endurable, absorbed by the innumerable duties of the factory, and so fatiguing that, when night came, Risler fell on his bed like a lifeless mass. But Sunday was long and sad. The silence of the deserted yards and workshops opened a far wider field to his thoughts. He tried to busy himself, but he missed the encouragement of the others' work. He alone was busy in that great, empty factory whose very breath was arrested. The locked doors, the closed blinds, the hoarse voice of Pere Achille playing with his dog in the deserted courtyard, all spoke of solitude. And the whole neighborhood also produced the same effect. In the streets, which seemed wider because of their emptiness, and where the passers-by were few and silent, the bells ringing for vespers had a melancholy sound, and sometimes an echo of the din of Paris, rumbling wheels, a belated hand-organ, the click of a toy-peddler's clappers, broke the silence, as if to make it even more noticeable.

Risler would try to invent new combinations of flowers and leaves, and, while he handled his pencil, his thoughts, not finding sufficient food there, would escape him, would fly back to his past happiness, to his hopeless misfortunes, would suffer martyrdom, and then, on returning, would ask the poor somnambulist, still seated at his table: "What have you done in my absence?" Alas! he had done nothing.

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Oh! the long, heartbreaking, cruel Sundays! Consider that, mingled with all these perplexities in his mind, was the superstitious reverence of the common people for holy days, for the twenty-four hours of rest, wherein one recovers strength and courage. If he had gone out, the sight of a workingman with his wife and child would have made him weep, but his monastic seclusion gave him other forms of suffering, the despair of recluses, their terrible outbreaks of rebellion when the god to whom they have consecrated themselves does not respond to their sacrifices. Now, Risler's god was work, and as he no longer found comfort or serenity therein, he no longer believed in it, but cursed it.

Often in those hours of mental struggle the door of the draughting-room would open gently and Claire Fromont would appear. The poor man's loneliness throughout those long Sunday afternoons filled her with compassion, and she would come with her little girl to keep him company, knowing by experience how contagious is the sweet joyousness of children. The little one, who could now walk alone, would slip from her mother's arms to run to her friend. Risler would hear the little, hurrying steps. He would feel the light breath behind him, and instantly he would be conscious of a soothing, rejuvenating influence. She would throw her plump little arms around his neck with affectionate warmth, with her artless, causeless laugh, and a kiss from that little mouth which never had lied. Claire Fromont, standing in the doorway, would smile as she looked at them.

"Risler, my friend," she would say, "you must come down into the garden a while,—you work too hard. You will be ill."

"No, no, Madame,—on the contrary, work is what saves me. It keeps me from thinking."

Then, after a long pause, she would continue:

"Come, my dear Risler, you must try to forget."

Risler would shake his head.

"Forget? Is that possible? There are some things beyond one's strength. A man may forgive, but he never forgets."

The child almost always succeeded in dragging him down to the garden. He must play ball, or in the sand, with her; but her playfellow's awkwardness and lack of enthusiasm soon impressed the little girl. Then she would become very sedate, contenting herself with walking gravely between the hedges of box, with her hand in her friend's. After a moment Risler would entirely forget that she was there; but, although he did not realize it, the warmth of that little hand in his had a magnetic, softening effect upon his diseased mind.

A man may forgive, but he never forgets!



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Poor Claire herself knew something about it; for she had never forgotten, notwithstanding her great courage and the conception she had formed of her duty. To her, as to Risler; her surroundings were a constant reminder of her sufferings. The objects amid which she lived pitilessly reopened the wound that was ready to close. The staircase, the garden, the courtyard, all those dumb witnesses of her husband's sin, assumed on certain days an implacable expression. Even the careful precaution her husband took to spare her painful reminders, the way in which he called attention to the fact that he no longer went out in the evening, and took pains to tell her where he had been during the day, served only to remind her the more forcibly of his wrong-doing. Sometimes she longed to ask him to forbear,—to say to him: “Do not protest too much.” Faith was shattered within her, and the horrible agony of the priest who doubts, and seeks at the same time to remain faithful to his vows, betrayed itself in her bitter smile, her cold, uncomplaining gentleness.

Georges was wofully unhappy. He loved his wife now. The nobility of her character had conquered him. There was admiration in his love, and—why not say it?—Claire's sorrow filled the place of the coquetry which was contrary to her nature, the lack of which had always been a defect in her husband's eyes. He was one of that strange type of men who love to make conquests. Sidonie, capricious and cold as she was, responded to that whim of his heart. After parting from her with a tender farewell, he found her indifferent and forgetful the next day, and that continual need of wooing her back to him took the place of genuine passion. Serenity in love bored him as a voyage without storms wearies a sailor. On this occasion he had been very near shipwreck with his wife, and the danger had not passed even yet. He knew that Claire was alienated from him and devoted entirely to the child, the only link between them thenceforth. Their separation made her seem lovelier, more desirable, and he exercised all his powers of fascination to recapture her. He knew how hard a task it would be, and that he had no ordinary, frivolous nature to deal with. But he did not despair. Sometimes a vague gleam in the depths of the mild and apparently impassive glance with which she watched his efforts, bade him hope.

As for Sidonie, he no longer thought of her. Let no one be astonished at that abrupt mental rupture. Those two superficial beings had nothing to attach them securely to each other. Georges was incapable of receiving lasting impressions unless they were continually renewed; Sidonie, for her part, had no power to inspire any noble or durable sentiment. It was one of those intrigues between a cocotte and a coxcomb, compounded of vanity and of wounded self-love, which inspire neither devotion nor constancy, but tragic adventures, duels, suicides which are rarely fatal, and which end in a radical cure. Perhaps,

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had he seen her again, he might have had a relapse of his disease; but the impetus of flight had carried Sidonie away so swiftly and so far that her return was impossible. At all events, it was a relief for him to be able to live without lying; and the new life he was leading, a life of hard work and self-denial, with the goal of success in the distance, was not distasteful to him. Luckily; for the courage and determination of both partners were none too much to put the house on its feet once more.

The poor house of Fromont had sprung leaks on all sides. So Pere Planus still had wretched nights, haunted by the nightmare of notes maturing and the ominous vision of the little blue man. But, by strict economy, they always succeeded in paying.

Soon four Risler Presses were definitively set up and used in the work of the factory. People began to take a deep interest in them and in the wall-paper trade. Lyons, Caen, Rixheim, the great centres of the industry, were much disturbed concerning that marvellous “rotary and dodecagonal” machine. One fine day the Prochassons appeared, and offered three hundred thousand francs simply for an interest in the patent rights.

“What shall we do?” Fromont Jeune asked Risler Aine.

The latter shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

“Decide for yourself. It doesn’t concern me. I am only an employe.”

The words, spoken coldly, without anger, fell heavily upon Fromont’s bewildered joy, and reminded him of the gravity of a situation which he was always on the point of forgetting.

But when he was alone with his dear Madame “Chorche,” Risler advised her not to accept the Prochassons’ offer.

“Wait,—don’t be in a hurry. Later you will have a better offer.”

He spoke only of them in that affair in which his own share was so glorious. She felt that he was preparing to cut himself adrift from their future.

Meanwhile orders came pouring in and accumulated on their hands. The quality of the paper, the reduced price because of the improved methods of manufacture, made competition impossible. There was no doubt that a colossal fortune was in store for the house of Fromont. The factory had resumed its former flourishing aspect and its loud, business-like hum. Intensely alive were all the great buildings and the hundreds of workmen who filled them. Pere Planus never raised his nose from his desk; one could see him from the little garden, leaning over his great ledgers, jotting down in magnificently molded figures the profits of the Risler press.



Risler still worked as before, without change or rest. The return of prosperity brought no alteration in his secluded habits, and from the highest window on the topmost floor of the house he listened to the ceaseless roar of his machines. He was no less gloomy, no less silent. One day, however, it became known at the factory that the press, a specimen of which had been sent to the great Exposition at Manchester, had received the gold medal, whereby its success was definitely established. Madame Georges called Risler into the garden at the luncheon hour, wishing to be the first to tell him the good news.

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For the moment a proud smile relaxed his prematurely old, gloomy features. His inventor's vanity, his pride in his renown, above all, the idea of repairing thus magnificently the wrong done to the family by his wife, gave him a moment of true happiness. He pressed Claire's hands and murmured, as in the old days:

"I am very happy! I am very happy!"

But what a difference in tone! He said it without enthusiasm, hopelessly, with the satisfaction of a task accomplished, and nothing more.

The bell rang for the workmen to return, and Risler went calmly upstairs to resume his work as on other days.

In a moment he came down again. In spite of all, that news had excited him more than he cared to show. He wandered about the garden, prowled around the counting-room, smiling sadly at Pere Planus through the window.

"What ails him?" the old cashier wondered. "What does he want of me?"

At last, when night came and it was time to close the office, Risler summoned courage to go and speak to him.

"Planus, my old friend, I should like—"

He hesitated a moment.

"I should like you to give me the—letter, you know, the little letter and the package."

Sigismond stared at him in amazement. In his innocence, he had imagined that Risler never thought of Sidonie, that he had entirely forgotten her.

"What—you want—?"

"Ah! I have well earned it; I can think of myself a little now. I have thought enough of others."

"You are right," said Planus. "Well, this is what we'll do. The letter and package are at my house at Montrouge. If you choose, we will go and dine together at the Palais-Royal, as in the good old times. I will stand treat. We'll water your medal with a bottle of wine; something choice! Then we'll go to the house together. You can get your trinkets, and if it's too late for you to go home, Mademoiselle Planus, my sister, shall make up a bed for you, and you shall pass the night with us. We are very comfortable there—it's in the country. To-morrow morning at seven o'clock we'll come back to the factory by the first omnibus. Come, old fellow, give me this pleasure. If you don't, I shall think you still bear your old Sigismond a grudge."

Risler accepted. He cared little about celebrating the award of his medal, but he desired to gain a few hours before opening the little letter he had at last earned the right to read.

He must dress. That was quite a serious matter, for he had lived in a workman's jacket during the past six months. And what an event in the factory! Madame Fromont was informed at once.

"Madame, Madame! Monsieur Risler is going out!"

Claire looked at him from her window, and that tall form, bowed by sorrow, leaning on Sigismond's arm, aroused in her a profound, unusual emotion which she remembered ever after.

In the street people bowed to Risler with great interest. Even their greetings warmed his heart. He was so much in need of kindness! But the noise of vehicles made him a little dizzy.

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"My head is spinning," he said to Planus:

"Lean hard on me, old fellow-don't be afraid."

And honest Planus drew himself up, escorting his friend with the artless, unconventional pride of a peasant of the South bearing aloft his village saint.

At last they arrived at the Palais-Royal.

The garden was full of people. They had come to hear the music, and were trying to find seats amid clouds of dust and the scraping of chairs. The two friends hurried into the restaurant to avoid all that turmoil. They established themselves in one of the large salons on the first floor, whence they could see the green trees, the promenaders, and the water spurting from the fountain between the two melancholy flower-gardens. To Sigismond it was the ideal of luxury, that restaurant, with gilding everywhere, around the mirrors, in the chandelier and even on the figured wallpaper. The white napkin, the roll, the menu of a table d'hote dinner filled his soul with joy. "We are comfortable here, aren't we?" he said to Risler.

And he exclaimed at each of the courses of that banquet at two francs fifty, and insisted on filling his friend's plate.

"Eat that—it's good."

The other, notwithstanding his desire to do honor to the fete, seemed preoccupied and gazed out-of-doors.

"Do you remember, Sigismond?" he said, after a pause.

The old cashier, engrossed in his memories of long ago, of Risler's first employment at the factory, replied:

"I should think I do remember—listen! The first time we dined together at the Palais-Royal was in February, 'forty-six, the year we put in the planches-plates at the factory."

Risler shook his head.

"Oh! no—I mean three years ago. It was in that room just opposite that we dined on that memorable evening."

And he pointed to the great windows of the salon of Cafe Vefour, gleaming in the rays of the setting sun like the chandeliers at a wedding feast.

"Ah! yes, true," murmured Sigismond, abashed. What an unlucky idea of his to bring his friend to a place that recalled such painful things!

Risler, not wishing to cast a gloom upon their banquet, abruptly raised his glass.

“Come! here’s your health, my old comrade.”

He tried to change the subject. But a moment later he himself led the conversation back to it again, and asked Sigismond, in an undertone, as if he were ashamed:

“Have you seen her?”

“Your wife? No, never.”

“She hasn’t written again?”

“No—never again.”

“But you must have heard of her. What has she been doing these six months? Does she live with her parents?”

“No.”

Risler turned pale.

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He hoped that Sidonie would have returned to her mother, that she would have worked, as he had worked, to forget and atone. He had often thought that he would arrange his life according to what he should learn of her when he should have the right to speak of her; and in one of those far-off visions of the future, which have the vagueness of a dream, he sometimes fancied himself living in exile with the Chebes in an unknown land, where nothing would remind him of his past shame. It was not a definite plan, to be sure; but the thought lived in the depths of his mind like a hope, caused by the need that all human creatures feel of finding their lost happiness.

"Is she in Paris?" he asked, after a few moments' reflection.

"No. She went away three months ago. No one knows where she has gone."

Sigismond did not add that she had gone with her Cazaboni, whose name she now bore, that they were making the circuit of the provincial cities together, that her mother was in despair, never saw her, and heard of her only through Delobelle. Sigismond did not deem it his duty to mention all that, and after his last words he held his peace.

Risler, for his part, dared ask no further questions.

While they sat there, facing each other, both embarrassed by the long silence, the military band began to play under the trees in the garden. They played one of those Italian operatic overtures which seem to have been written expressly for public open-air resorts; the swiftly-flowing notes, as they rise into the air, blend with the call of the swallows and the silvery splash of the fountain. The blaring brass brings out in bold relief the mild warmth of the closing hours of those summer days, so long and enervating in Paris; it seems as if one could hear nothing else. The distant rumbling of wheels, the cries of children playing, the footsteps of the promenaders are wafted away in those resonant, gushing, refreshing waves of melody, as useful to the people of Paris as the daily watering of their streets. On all sides the faded flowers, the trees white with dust, the faces made pale and wan by the heat, all the sorrows, all the miseries of a great city, sitting dreamily, with bowed head, on the benches in the garden, feel its comforting, refreshing influence. The air is stirred, renewed by those strains that traverse it, filling it with harmony.

Poor Risler felt as if the tension upon all his nerves were relaxed.

"A little music does one good," he said, with glistening eyes. "My heart is heavy, old fellow," he added, in a lower tone; "if you knew—"

They sat without speaking, their elbows resting on the window-sill, while their coffee was served.



Then the music ceased, the garden became deserted. The light that had loitered in the corners crept upward to the roofs, cast its last rays upon the highest windowpanes, followed by the birds, the swallows, which saluted the close of day with a farewell chirp from the gutter where they were huddled together.

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"Now, where shall we go?" said Planus, as they left the restaurant.

"Wherever you wish."

On the first floor of a building on the Rue Montpensier, close at hand, was a cafe chantant, where many people entered.

"Suppose we go in," said Planus, desirous of banishing his friend's melancholy at any cost, "the beer is excellent."

Risler assented to the suggestion; he had not tasted beer for six months.

It was a former restaurant transformed into a concert-hall. There were three large rooms, separated by gilded pillars, the partitions having been removed; the decoration was in the Moorish style, bright red, pale blue, with little crescents and turbans for ornament.

Although it was still early, the place was full; and even before entering one had a feeling of suffocation, simply from seeing the crowds of people sitting around the tables, and at the farther end, half-hidden by the rows of pillars, a group of white-robed women on a raised platform, in the heat and glare of the gas.

Our two friends had much difficulty in finding seats, and had to be content with a place behind a pillar whence they could see only half of the platform, then occupied by a superb person in black coat and yellow gloves, curled and waxed and oiled, who was singing in a vibrating voice—

Mes beaux lions aux crins dores,
Du sang des troupeaux alteres,
Halte la!—Je fais sentinello!

[My proud lions with golden manes
Who thirst for the blood of my flocks,
Stand back!—I am on guard!]

The audience—small tradesmen of the quarter with their wives and daughters-seemed highly enthusiastic: especially the women. He represented so perfectly the ideal of the shopkeeper imagination, that magnificent shepherd of the desert, who addressed lions with such an air of authority and tended his flocks in full evening dress. And so, despite their bourgeois bearing, their modest costumes and their expressionless shop-girl smiles, all those women, made up their little mouths to be caught by the hook of sentiment, and cast languishing glances upon the singer. It was truly comical to see that glance at the platform suddenly change and become contemptuous and fierce as it fell upon the husband, the poor husband tranquilly drinking a glass of beer opposite his

wife: "You would never be capable of doing sentry duty in the very teeth of lions, and in a black coat too, and with yellow gloves!"

And the husband's eye seemed to reply:

"Ah! 'dame', yes, he's quite a dashing buck, that fellow."

Being decidedly indifferent to heroism of that stamp, Risler and Sigismond were drinking their beer without paying much attention to the music, when, at the end of the song, amid the applause and cries and uproar that followed it, Pere Planus uttered an exclamation:

"Why, that is odd; one would say—but no, I'm not mistaken. It is he, it's Delobelle!"

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It was, in fact, the illustrious actor, whom he had discovered in the front row near the platform. His gray head was turned partly away from them. He was leaning carelessly against a pillar, hat in hand, in his grand make-up as leading man: dazzlingly white linen, hair curled with the tongs, black coat with a camellia in the buttonhole, like the ribbon of an order. He glanced at the crowd from time to time with a patronizing air: but his eyes were most frequently turned toward the platform, with encouraging little gestures and smiles and pretended applause, addressed to some one whom Pere Planus could not see from his seat.

There was nothing very extraordinary in the presence of the illustrious Delobelle at a cafe concert, as he spent all his evenings away from home; and yet the old cashier felt vaguely disturbed, especially when he discovered in the same row a blue cape and a pair of steely eyes. It was Madame Dobson, the sentimental singing-teacher. The conjunction of those two faces amid the pipe-smoke and the confusion of the crowd, produced upon Sigismond the effect of two ghosts evoked by a bad dream. He was afraid for his friend, without knowing exactly why; and suddenly it occurred to him to take him away.

"Let us go, Risler. The heat here is enough to kill one."

Just as they rose—for Risler was no more desirous to stay than to go—the orchestra, consisting of a piano and several violins, began a peculiar refrain. There was a flutter of curiosity throughout the room, and cries of "Hush! hush! sit down!"

They were obliged to resume their seats. Risler, too, was beginning to be disturbed.

"I know that tune," he said to himself. "Where have I heard it?"

A thunder of applause and an exclamation from Planus made him raise his eyes.

"Come, come, let us go," said the cashier, trying to lead him away.

But it was too late.

Risler had already seen his wife come forward to the front of the stage and curtsy to the audience with a ballet-dancer's smile.

She wore a white gown, as on the night of the ball; but her whole costume was much less rich and shockingly immodest.

The dress was barely caught together at the shoulders; her hair floated in a blond mist low over her eyes, and around her neck was a necklace of pearls too large to be real, alternated with bits of tinsel. Delobelle was right: the Bohemian life was better suited to her. Her beauty had gained an indefinably reckless expression, which was its most characteristic feature, and made her a perfect type of the woman who has escaped from



all restraint, placed herself at the mercy of every accident, and is descending stage by stage to the lowest depths of the Parisian hell, from which nothing is powerful enough to lift her and restore her to the pure air and the light.

And how perfectly at ease she seemed in her strolling life! With what self-possession she walked to the front of the stage! Ah! could she have seen the desperate, terrible glance fixed upon her down there in the hall, concealed behind a pillar, her smile would have lost that equivocal placidity, her voice would have sought in vain those wheedling, languorous tones in which she warbled the only song Madame Dobson had ever been able to teach her:

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Pauv' petit Mamz'elle Zizi,
C'est l'amou, l'amou qui tourne
La tete a li.

Risler had risen, in spite of Planus's efforts. "Sit down! sit down!" the people shouted. The wretched man heard nothing. He was staring at his wife.

C'est l'amou, l'amou qui tourne
La tete a li,

Sidonie repeated affectedly.

For a moment he wondered whether he should not leap on the platform and kill her. Red flames shot before his eyes, and he was blinded with frenzy.

Then, suddenly, shame and disgust seized upon him and he rushed from the hall, overturning chairs and tables, pursued by the terror and imprecations of all those scandalized bourgeois.

CHAPTER XXIV

SIDONIE'S VENGEANCE

Never had Sigismond Planus returned home so late without giving his sister warning, during the twenty years and more that he had lived at Montrouge. Consequently Mademoiselle Planus was greatly worried. Living in community of ideas and of everything else with her brother, having but one mind for herself and for him, the old maid had felt for several months the rebound of all the cashier's anxiety and indignation; and the effect was still noticeable in her tendency to tremble and become agitated on slight provocation. At the slightest tardiness on Sigismond's part, she would think:

"Ah! mon Dieu! If only nothing has happened at the factory!"

That is the reason why on the evening in question, when the hens and chickens were all asleep on their perches, and the dinner had been removed untouched, Mademoiselle Planus was sitting in the little ground-floor living-room, waiting, in great agitation.

At last, about eleven o'clock, some one rang. A timid, melancholy ring, in no wise resembling Sigismond's vigorous pull.

"Is it you, Monsieur Planus?" queried the old lady from behind the door.

It was he; but he was not alone. A tall, bent old man accompanied him, and, as they entered, bade her good-evening in a slow, hesitating voice. Not till then did

Mademoiselle Planus recognize Risler Aine, whom she had not seen since the days of the New Year's calls, that is to say, some time before the dramas at the factory. She could hardly restrain an exclamation of pity; but the grave taciturnity of the two men told her that she must be silent.

"Mademoiselle Planus, my sister, you will put clean sheets on my bed. Our friend Risler does us the honor to pass the night with us."

The sister hastened away to prepare the bedroom with an almost affectionate zeal; for, as we know, beside "Monsieur Planus, my brother," Risler was the only man excepted from the general reprobation in which she enveloped the whole male sex.

Upon leaving the cafe concert, Sidonie's husband had had a moment of frantic excitement. He leaned on Planus's arm, every nerve in his body strained to the utmost. At that moment he had no thought of going to Montrouge to get the letter and the package.

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"Leave me—go away," he said to Sigismond. "I must be alone."

But the other knew better than to abandon him thus to his despair. Unnoticed by Risler, he led him away from the factory, and as his affectionate heart suggested to the old cashier what he had best say to his friend, he talked to him all the time of Frantz, his little Frantz whom he loved so dearly.

"That was genuine affection, genuine and trustworthy. No treachery to fear with such hearts as that!"

While they talked they left behind them the noisy streets of the centre of Paris. They walked along the quays, skirted the Jardin des Plantes, plunged into Faubourg Saint-Marceau. Risler followed where the other led. Sigismond's words did him so much good!

In due time they came to the Bievre, bordered at that point with tanneries whose tall drying-houses with open sides were outlined in blue against the sky; and then the ill-defined plains of Montsouris, vast tracts of land scorched and stripped of vegetation by the fiery breath that Paris exhales around its daily toil, like a monstrous dragon, whose breath of flame and smoke suffers no vegetation within its range.

From Montsouris to the fortifications of Montrouge is but a step. When they had reached that point, Planus had no great difficulty in taking his friend home with him. He thought, and justly, that his tranquil fireside, the spectacle of a placid, fraternal, devoted affection, would give the wretched man's heart a sort of foretaste of the happiness that was in store for him with his brother Frantz. And, in truth, the charm of the little household began to work as soon as they arrived.

"Yes, yes, you are right, old fellow," said Risler, pacing the floor of the living-room, "I mustn't think of that woman any more. She's like a dead woman to me now. I have nobody left in the world but my little Frantz; I don't know yet whether I shall send for him to come home, or go out and join him; the one thing that is certain is that we are going to stay together. Ah! I longed so to have a son! Now I have found one. I want no other. When I think that for a moment I had an idea of killing myself! Nonsense! it would make Madame What-d'ye-call-her, yonder, too happy. On the contrary, I mean to live—to live with my Frantz, and for him, and for nothing else."

"Bravo!" said Sigismond, "that's the way I like to hear you talk."

At that moment Mademoiselle Planus came to say that the room was ready.

Risler apologized for the trouble he was causing them.

"You are so comfortable, so happy here. Really, it's too bad to burden you with my melancholy."



“Ah! my old friend, you can arrange just such happiness as ours for yourself,” said honest Sigismond with beaming face. “I have my sister, you have your brother. What do we lack?”

Risler smiled vaguely. He fancied himself already installed with Frantz in a quiet little quakerish house like that.

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Decidedly, that was an excellent idea of Pere Planus.

“Come to bed,” he said triumphantly. “We’ll go and show you your room.”

Sigismond Planus’s bedroom was on the ground floor, a large room simply but neatly furnished; with muslin curtains at the windows and the bed, and little squares of carpet on the polished floor, in front of the chairs. The dowager Madame Fromont herself could have found nothing to say as to the orderly and cleanly aspect of the place. On a shelf or two against the wall were a few books: Manual of Fishing, The Perfect Country Housewife, Bayeme’s Book-keeping. That was the whole of the intellectual equipment of the room.

Pere Planus glanced proudly around. The glass of water was in its place on the walnut table, the box of razors on the dressing-case.

“You see, Risler. Here is everything you need. And if you should want anything else, the keys are in all the drawers—you have only to turn them. Just see what a beautiful view you get from here. It’s a little dark just now, but when you wake up in the morning you’ll see; it is magnificent.”

He opened the widow. Great drops of rain were beginning to fall, and lightning flashes rending the darkness disclosed the long, silent line of the fortifications, with telegraph poles at intervals, or the frowning door of a casemate. Now and then the footsteps of a patrol making the rounds, the clash of muskets or swords, reminded them that they were within the military zone.

That was the outlook so vaunted by Planus—a melancholy outlook if ever there were one.

“And now good-night. Sleep well!”

But, as the old cashier was leaving the room, his friend called him back:

“Sigismond.”

“Here!” said Sigismond, and he waited.

Risler blushed slightly and moved his lips like a man who is about to speak; then, with a mighty effort, he said:

“No, no-nothing. Good-night, old man.”

In the dining-room the brother and sister talked together a long while in low tones. Planus described the terrible occurrence of the evening, the meeting with Sidonie; and you can imagine the—“Oh! these women!” and “Oh! these men?” At last, when they had

locked the little garden-door, Mademoiselle Planus went up to her room, and Sigismond made himself as comfortable as possible in a small cabinet adjoining.

About midnight the cashier was aroused by his sister calling him in a terrified whisper:

“Monsieur Planus, my brother?”

“What is it?”

“Did you hear?”

“No. What?”

“Oh! it was awful. Something like a deep sigh, but so loud and so sad! It came from the room below.”

They listened. Without, the rain was falling in torrents, with the dreary rustling of leaves that makes the country seem so lonely.

“That is only the wind,” said Planus.

“I am sure not. Hush! Listen!”

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Amid the tumult of the storm, they heard a wailing sound, like a sob, in which a name was pronounced with difficulty:

“Frantz! Frantz!”

It was terrible and pitiful.

When Christ on the Cross sent up to heaven His despairing cry: ‘Eli, eli, lama sabachthani’, they who heard him must have felt the same species of superstitious terror that suddenly seized upon Mademoiselle Planus.

“I am afraid!” she whispered; “suppose you go and look—”

“No, no, we will let him alone. He is thinking of his brother. Poor fellow! It’s the very thought of all others that will do him the most good.”

And the old cashier went to sleep again.

The next morning he woke as usual when the drums beat the reveille in the fortifications; for the little family, surrounded by barracks, regulated its life by the military calls. The sister had already risen and was feeding the poultry. When she saw Sigismond she came to him in agitation.

“It is very strange,” she said, “I hear nothing stirring in Monsieur Risler’s room. But the window is wide open.”

Sigismond, greatly surprised, went and knocked at his friend’s door.

“Risler! Risler!”

He called in great anxiety:

“Risler, are you there? Are you asleep?”

There was no reply. He opened the door.

The room was cold. It was evident that the damp air had been blowing in all night through the open window. At the first glance at the bed, Sigismond thought: “He hasn’t been in bed”—for the clothes were undisturbed and the condition of the room, even in the most trivial details, revealed an agitated vigil: the still smoking lamp, which he had neglected to extinguish, the carafe, drained to the last drop by the fever of sleeplessness; but the thing that filled the cashier with dismay was to find the bureau drawer wide open in which he had carefully bestowed the letter and package entrusted to him by his friend.

The letter was no longer there. The package lay on the table, open, revealing a photograph of Sidonie at fifteen. With her high-necked frock, her rebellious hair parted over the forehead, and the embarrassed pose of an awkward girl, the little Chebe of the old days, Mademoiselle Le Mire's apprentice, bore little resemblance to the Sidonie of to-day. And that was the reason why Risler had kept that photograph, as a souvenir, not of his wife, but of the "little one."

Sigismond was in great dismay.

"This is my fault," he said to himself. "I ought to have taken away the keys. But who would have supposed that he was still thinking of her? He had sworn so many times that that woman no longer existed for him."

At that moment Mademoiselle Planus entered the room with consternation written on her face.

"Monsieur Risler has gone!" she exclaimed.

"Gone? Why, wasn't the garden-gate locked?"

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"He must have climbed over the wall. You can see his footprints."

They looked at each other, terrified beyond measure.

"It was the letter!" thought Planus.

Evidently that letter from his wife must have made some extraordinary revelation to Risler; and, in order not to disturb his hosts, he had made his escape noiselessly through the window, like a burglar. Why? With what aim in view?

"You will see, sister," said poor Planus, as he dressed with all haste, "you will see that that hussy has played him still another trick." And when his sister tried to encourage him, he recurred to his favorite refrain:

"I haf no gonfidence!"

As soon as he was dressed, he darted out of the house.

Risler's footprints could be distinguished on the wet ground as far as the gate of the little garden. He must have gone before daylight, for the beds of vegetables and flowers were trampled down at random by deep footprints with long spaces between; there were marks of heels on the garden-wall and the mortar was crumbled slightly on top. The brother and sister went out on the road skirting the fortifications. There it was impossible to follow the footprints. They could tell nothing more than that Risler had gone in the direction of the Orleans road.

"After all," Mademoiselle Planus ventured to say, "we are very foolish to torment ourselves about him; perhaps he has simply gone back to the factory."

Sigismond shook his head. Ah! if he had said all that he thought!

"Return to the house, sister. I will go and see."

And with the old "I haf no gonfidence" he rushed away like a hurricane, his white mane standing even more erect than usual.

At that hour, on the road near the fortifications, was an endless procession of soldiers and market-gardeners, guard-mounting, officers' horses out for exercise, sutlers with their paraphernalia, all the bustle and activity that is seen in the morning in the neighborhood of forts. Planus was striding along amid the tumult, when suddenly he stopped. At the foot of the bank, on the left, in front of a small, square building, with the inscription.

*City of Paris,
entrance to the quarries,*

On the rough plaster, he saw a crowd assembled, and soldiers' and custom-house officers' uniforms, mingled with the shabby, dirty blouses of barracks-loafers. The old man instinctively approached. A customs officer, seated on the stone step below a round postern with iron bars, was talking with many gestures, as if he were acting out his narrative.

"He was where I am," he said. "He had hanged himself sitting, by pulling with all his strength on the rope! It's clear that he had made up his mind to die, for he had a razor in his pocket that he would have used in case the rope had broken."

A voice in the crowd exclaimed: "Poor devil!" Then another, a tremulous voice, choking with emotion, asked timidly:

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"Is it quite certain that he's dead?"

Everybody looked at Planus and began to laugh.

"Well, here's a greenhorn," said the officer. "Don't I tell you that he was all blue this morning, when we cut him down to take him to the chasseurs' barracks!"

The barracks were not far away; and yet Sigismond Planus had the greatest difficulty in the world in dragging himself so far. In vain did he say to himself that suicides are of frequent occurrence in Paris, especially in those regions; that not a day passes that a dead body is not found somewhere along that line of fortifications, as upon the shores of a tempestuous sea,—he could not escape the terrible presentiment that had oppressed his heart since early morning.

"Ah! you have come to see the man that hanged himself," said the quartermaster-sergeant at the door of the barracks. "See! there he is."

The body had been laid on a table supported by trestles in a sort of shed. A cavalry cloak that had been thrown over it covered it from head to foot, and fell in the shroud-like folds which all draperies assume that come in contact with the rigidity of death. A group of officers and several soldiers in duck trousers were looking on at a distance, whispering as if in a church; and an assistant-surgeon was writing a report of the death on a high window-ledge. To him Sigismond spoke.

"I should like very much to see him," he said softly.

"Go and look."

He walked to the table, hesitated a minute, then, summoning courage, uncovered a swollen face, a tall, motionless body in its rain-soaked garments.

"She has killed you at last, my old comrade!" murmured Planus, and fell on his knees, sobbing bitterly.

The officers had come forward, gazing curiously at the body, which was left uncovered.

"Look, surgeon," said one of them. "His hand is closed, as if he were holding something in it."

"That is true," the surgeon replied, drawing nearer. "That sometimes happens in the last convulsions."

"You remember at Solferino, Commandant Bordy held his little daughter's miniature in his hand like that? We had much difficulty in taking it from him."

As he spoke he tried to open the poor, tightly-closed dead hand.

“Look!” said he, “it is a letter that he is holding so tight.”

He was about to read it; but one of the officers took it from his hands and passed it to Sigismond, who was still kneeling.

“Here, Monsieur. Perhaps you will find in this some last wish to be carried out.”

Sigismond Planus rose. As the light in the room was dim, he walked with faltering step to the window, and read, his eyes filled with tears:

“Well, yes, I love you, I love you, more than ever and forever! What is the use of struggling and fighting against fate? Our sin is stronger than we . . . ”

It was the letter which Frantz had written to his sister-in-law a year before, and which Sidonie had sent to her husband on the day following their terrible scene, to revenge herself on him and his brother at the same time.

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Risler could have survived his wife's treachery, but that of his brother had killed him.

When Sigismond understood, he was petrified with horror. He stood there, with the letter in his hand, gazing mechanically through the open window.

The clock struck six.

Yonder, over Paris, whose dull roar they could hear although they could not see the city, a cloud of smoke arose, heavy and hot, moving slowly upward, with a fringe of red and black around its edges, like the powder-smoke on a field of battle. Little by little, steeples, white buildings, a gilded cupola, emerged from the mist, and burst forth in a splendid awakening.

Then the thousands of tall factory chimneys, towering above that sea of clustered roofs, began with one accord to exhale their quivering vapor, with the energy of a steamer about to sail. Life was beginning anew. Forward, ye wheels of time! And so much the worse for him who lags behind!

Thereupon old Planus gave way to a terrible outburst of wrath.

"Ah! harlot-harlot!" he cried, shaking his fist; and no one could say whether he was addressing the woman or the city of Paris.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A man may forgive, but he never forgets
Word "sacrifice," so vague on careless lips

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire Fromont and Risler:

A man may forgive, but he never forgets
Abundant details which he sometimes volunteered
Affectation of indifference
Always smiling condescendingly
Charm of that one day's rest and its solemnity
Clashing knives and forks mark time
Convent of Saint Joseph, four shoes under the bed!
Deeming every sort of occupation beneath him
Dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed
Exaggerated dramatic pantomime
Faces taken by surprise allow their real thoughts to be seen
He fixed the time mentally when he would speak
Little feathers fluttering for an opportunity to fly away
Make for themselves a horizon of the neighboring walls and roofs
No one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were



Pass half the day in procuring two cakes, worth three sous
She was of those who disdain no compliment
Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter
Superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works
Terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings
The poor must pay for all their enjoyments
The groom isn't handsome, but the bride's as pretty as a picture
Void in her heart, a place made ready for disasters to come
Wiping his forehead ostentatiously
Word "sacrifice," so vague on careless lips
Would have liked him to be blind only so far as he was concerned

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GERFAUT

By *Charles de Bernard*

With a Preface by *Jules Claretie*, of the French Academy

CHARLES DE BERNARD

Pierre-Marie-Charles de Bernard du grail de la Villette, better known by the name of Charles de Bernard, was born in Besancon, February 24, 1804. He came from a very ancient family of the Vivarais, was educated at the college of his native city, and studied for the law in Dijon and at Paris. He was awarded a prize by the 'Jeux floraux' for his dithyrambics, 'Une fete de Neron' in 1829. This first success in literature did not prevent him aspiring to the Magistrature, when the Revolution of 1830 broke out and induced him to enter politics. He became one of the founders of the 'Gazette de Franche-Comte' and an article in the pages of this journal about 'Peau de chagrin' earned him the thanks and the friendship of Balzac.

The latter induced him to take up his domicile in Paris and initiated him into the art of novel-writing. Bernard had published a volume of odes: 'Plus Deuil que Joie' (1838), which was not much noticed, but a series of stories in the same year gained him the reputation of a genial 'conteur'. They were collected under the title 'Le Noeud Gordien', and one of the tales, 'Une Aventure du Magistrat', was adapted by Sardou for his comedy 'Pommes du voisin'. 'Gerfaut', his greatest work, crowned by the Academy, appeared also in 1838, then followed 'Le Paravent', another collection of novels (1839); 'Les Ailes d'Icare' (1840); 'La Peau du Lion' and 'La Chasse aux Amants' (1841); 'L'Ecueil' (1842); 'Un Beau-pere' (1845); and finally 'Le Gentilhomme campagnard,' in 1847. Bernard died, only forty-eight years old, March 6, 1850.

Charles de Bernard was a realist, a pupil of Balzac. He surpasses his master, nevertheless, in energy and limpidity of composition. His style is elegant and cultured. His genius is most fully represented in a score or so of delightful tales rarely exceeding some sixty or seventy pages in length, but perfect in proportion, full of invention and originality, and saturated with the purest and pleasantest essence of the spirit which for six centuries in tableaux, farces, tales in prose and verse, comedies and correspondence, made French literature the delight and recreation of Europe. 'Gerfaut' is considered De Bernard's greatest work. The plot turns on an attachment between a married woman and the hero of the story. The book has nothing that can justly offend, the incomparable sketches of Marillac and Mademoiselle de Corandeuil are admirable; Gerfaut and Bergenheim possess pronounced originality, and the author is, so to speak, incarnated with the hero of his romance.

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The most uncritical reader can not fail to notice the success with which Charles de Bernard introduces people of rank and breeding into his stories. Whether or not he drew from nature, his portraits of this kind are exquisitely natural and easy. It is sufficient to say that he is the literary Sir Joshua Reynolds of the post-revolution vicomtes and marquises. We can see that his portraits are faithful; we must feel that they are at the same time charming. Bernard is an amiable and spirited 'conteur' who excels in producing an animated spectacle for a refined and selected public, whether he paints the ridiculousness or the misery of humanity.

The works of Charles de Bernard in wit and urbanity, and in the peculiar charm that wit and urbanity give, are of the best French type. To any elevation save a lofty place in fiction they have no claim; but in that phase of literature their worth is undisputed, and from many testimonies it would seem that those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing.

These novels, well enough as they are known to professed students of French literature, have, by the mere fact of their age, rather slipped out of the list of books known to the general reader. The general reader who reads for amusement can not possibly do better than proceed to transform his ignorance of them into knowledge.

Jules Claretie
de l'Academie Francaise.
Gerfaut

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE TRAVELLER

During the first days of the month of September, 1832, a young man about thirty years of age was walking through one of the valleys in Lorraine originating in the Vosges mountains. A little river which, after a few leagues of its course, flows into the Moselle, watered this wild basin shut in between two parallel lines of mountains. The hills in the south became gradually lower and finally dwindled away into the plain. Alongside the plateau, arranged in amphitheatres, large square fields stripped of their harvest lay here and there in the primitive forest; in other places, innumerable oaks and elms had been dethroned to give place to plantations of cherry-trees, whose symmetrical rows promised an abundant harvest.

This contest of nature with industry is everywhere, but is more pronounced in hilly countries. The scene changed, however, as one penetrated farther, and little by little the influence of the soil gained ascendancy. As the hills grew nearer together, enclosing

the valley in a closer embrace, the clearings gave way to the natural obduracy of the soil. A little farther on they disappeared entirely. At the foot of one of the bluffs which bordered with its granite bands the highest plateau of the mountain, the forest rolled victoriously down to the banks of the river.

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Now came patches of forest, like solid battalions of infantry; sometimes solitary trees appeared, as if distributed by chance upon the grassy slopes, or scaling the summit of the steepest rocks like a body of bold sharpshooters. A little, unfrequented road, if one can judge from the scarcity of tracks, ran alongside the banks of the stream, climbing up and down hills; overcoming every obstacle, it stretched out in almost a straight line. One might compare it to those strong characters who mark out a course in life and imperturbably follow it. The river, on the contrary, like those docile and compliant minds that bend to agreeable emergencies, described graceful curves, obeying thus the caprices of the soil which served as its bed.

At a first glance, the young man who was walking alone in the midst of this picturesque country seemed to have nothing remarkable in his dress; a straw hat, a blue blouse and linen trousers composed his costume. It would have been very natural to take him for an Alsatian peasant returning to his village through the Vosges's rough pathways; but a more attentive glance quickly dispelled this conjecture. There is something in the way in which a person wears the plainest costume which betrays the real man, no matter how he may be clothed. Thus, nothing could be more modest than this traveller's blouse, but the absence on collar and sleeves of the arabesques in white or red thread, the pride of all village dandies, was sufficient for one to realize that this was not a fancy costume.

His expressive, but not handsome face was dark, it is true, but it did not look as if wind or sun had contributed to its complexion; it seemed rather to have lost by a sedentary life something of the southern carnation, which had ended by blending these warmer tints into a dead uniform pallor. Finally, if, as one may suppose after different diagnoses, this person had the slightest desire to play the role of Tyrcis or Amintas, his white hand, as carefully cared for as a pretty woman's, would have been sufficient to betray him. It was evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing! The lion's ears pierced the ass's skin this time.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the sky, which had been overcast all the morning, had assumed, within a few moments, a more sombre aspect; large clouds were rapidly moving from south to north, rolled one over another by an ominous wind. So the traveller, who had just entered the wildest part of the valley, seemed very little disposed to admire its fine vegetation and romantic sites. Impatient to reach the end of his journey, or fearing the approaching storm, he quickened his steps; but this pace was not kept long. At the end of a few moments, having crossed a small clearing, he found himself at the entrance of a lawn where the road divided in two directions, one continuing to skirt the river banks, the other, broader and better built, turning to the left into a winding ravine.

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Which of these two roads should he follow? He did not know. The profound solitude of the place made him fear that he might not meet any one who could direct him, when the sound of a psalm vigorously chanted reached his ears from the distance. Soon it became more distinct, and he recognized the words, 'In exitu Israel de Egypto', sung at the top of the lungs by a voice so shrill that it would have irritated the larynx of any of the sopranos at the Opera. Its vibrating but sharp tones resounded so clearly in the dead silence of the forest that a number of stanzas were finished before the pious musician came in sight. At last a drove of cattle appeared through the trees which bordered the road on the left, walking with a slow, grave step; they were driven by a little shepherd about nine or ten years of age, who interrupted his song from time to time to reassemble the members of his flock with heavy blows from his whip, thus uniting temporal cares with those of a spiritual nature with a coolness which the most important personages might have envied him.

"Which of these roads leads to Bergenheim?" called out the traveller when they were near enough to speak to each other.

"Bergenheim!" repeated the child, taking off his cotton cap, which was striped like a rainbow, and adding a few words in an unintelligible Gallo-Germanic patois.

"You are not French, then?" asked the stranger, in a disappointed tone.

The shepherd raised his head proudly and replied:

"I am Alsatian, not French!"

The young man smiled at this trait of local patriotism so common then in the beautiful province by the Rhine; then he thought that pantomime might be necessary, so he pointed with his finger first at one road, then at the other:

"There or there, Bergenheim?" asked he.

The child, in his turn, pointed silently with the tip of his whip to the banks of the river, designating, at some distance on the other side, a thicket of woods behind which a slight column of smoke was rising.

"The deuce!" murmured the stranger, "it seems that I have gone astray; if the chateau is on the other side, where can I establish my ambuscade?"

The shepherd seemed to understand the traveller's embarrassment. Gazing at him with his intelligent blue eyes, he traced, with the tip of his toe in the middle of the road, a furrow across which he rounded his whip like the arch of a bridge; then he pointed a second time up the river.

“You are an honor to your country, young fellow,” exclaimed the stranger; “there is the material in you to make one of Cooper’s redskins.” As he said these words he threw a piece of money into the child’s cap and walked rapidly away in the direction indicated.

The Alsatian stood motionless for a few moments with one hand in his blond hair and his eyes fastened upon the piece of silver which shone like a star in the bottom of his cap; when the one whom he considered as a model of extraordinary generosity had disappeared behind the trees, he gave vent to his joy by heavy blows from his whip upon the backs of the cattle, then he resumed his way, singing in a still more triumphant tone: ‘Mantes exultaverunt ut arites’, and jumping higher himself than all the hills and rams in the Bible.

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The young man had not walked more than five minutes before he recognized the correctness of the directions he had received. The ground which he had passed over was a field covered with clumps of low trees; it was easy to see by its disc-like shape that it had been formed by successive alluvia, at the expense of the other shore, which had been incessantly worn away by the stream. This sort of flat, level peninsula was crossed in a straight line by the road, which deviated from the river at the point where the two roads came together again, like the cross and string of a bow at its extremity. The trees, becoming thinner, revealed a perspective all the more wonderful as it was unexpected. While the eye followed the widening stream, which disappeared in the depths of a mountainous gorge, a new prospect suddenly presented itself on the right upon the other shore.

A second valley, smaller than the first and in measure its vassal, formed an amphitheatre the crest of which was bordered by a fringe of perpendicular rocks as white as dried bones. Under this crown, which rendered it almost inaccessible, the little valley was resplendent in its wealth of evergreen trees, oaks with their knotty branches, and its fresh green turf.

Taken as a whole, it was a foundation worthy of the picturesque edifice which met one's eye in the foreground, and at which the traveller gazed with extreme interest.

At the junction of the two valleys stood an enormous building, half manorial, half monastic in appearance. The shore formed, at this point, for an extent of several hundred feet, a bluff whose edge plunged vertically into the river. The chateau and its outbuildings rested upon this solid base. The principal house was a large parallelogram of very old construction, but which had evidently been almost entirely rebuilt at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The stones, of grayish granite which abounds in the Vosges, were streaked with blue and violet veins, and gave the facade a sombre aspect, increased by the scarcity of windows, some of which were 'a la Palladio', others almost as narrow as loop-holes. An immense roof of red tile, darkened by rain, projected several feet over the whole front, as is still to be seen in old cities in the North. Thanks to this projecting weather-board, the apartments upon the upper floor were shaded from the sun's rays, like those persons who have weak eyes and who protect them from a strong light by wearing a green shade.

The view which this melancholy dwelling presented from the place where the traveller had first seen it, was one which made it appear to the best advantage; it seemed, from this point, to come immediately out of the river, built as it was upon the very curb of the bluffs, at this place at least thirty feet high. This elevation, added to that of the building, effaced the lack of proportion of the roof and gave to the whole a most imposing appearance; it seemed as if

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the rocks were a part of the building to which it served as foundation, for the stones had ended by assuming the same color, and it would have been difficult to discover the junction of man's work and that of nature, had it not been outlined by a massive iron balcony running across the entire length of the first story, whence one could enjoy the pleasure of line-fishing. Two round towers with pointed roofs stood at each corner of the facade and seemed to gaze with proud satisfaction at their own reflection in the water.

A long line of sycamore-trees skirted the banks of the river, beginning from the foot of the chateau, and forming the edge of a park which extended to the back of the double valley. A little wooden bridge connected this sort of avenue with the road the traveller had just passed over; but the latter did not seem disposed to profit by this silent invitation to which large raindrops gave more emphasis. He was so absorbed in his meditation that, to arouse him, it needed the sound of a gruff voice behind him uttering these words:

"That is what I call an ugly castle! It is hardly as good as our common country houses around Marseilles."

The stranger turned quickly around and found himself face to face with a man wearing a gray cap and carrying his coat upon his shoulder, as workmen do in the South. He held in his hand a knotty stick which had been recently cut. The newcomer had a swarthy complexion, harsh features, and deep-set eyes which gave his face an ugly, false expression.

"I said an ugly castle," continued he. "However, the cage is made for the bird."

"It seems, then, that you do not like its master?" said the traveller.

"The master!" repeated the workman, seizing hold of his stick with a threatening air, "Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim, as they say! He is rich and a nobleman, and I am only a poor carpenter. Well, then, if you stay here a few days, you will witness a comical ceremony; I shall make this brigand repent."

"Brigand!" exclaimed the stranger, in a surprised tone. "What has he done to you?"

"Yes, brigand! you may tell him so from me. But, by the way," continued the workman, surveying his companion from head to foot with a searching, defiant air, "do you happen to be the carpenter who is coming from Strasbourg? In that case, I have a few words to say to you. Lambernier does not allow any one to take the bread out of his mouth in that way; do you understand?"

The young man seemed very little moved by this declaration.

"I am not a carpenter," said he, smiling, "and I have no wish for your work."

"Truly, you do not look as if you had pushed a plane very often. It seems that in your business one does not spoil one's hands. You are a workman about as much as I am pope."

This remark made the one to whom it was addressed feel in as bad a humor as an author does when he finds a grammatical error in one of his books.

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"So you work at the chateau, then," said he, finally, to change the conversation.

"For six months I have worked in that shanty," replied the workman; "I am the one who carved the new woodwork, and I will say it is well done. Well, this great wild boar of a Bergenheim turned me out of the house yesterday as if I had been one of his dogs."

"He doubtless had his reasons."

"I tell you, I will crush him—reasons! Damn it! They told him I talked too often with his wife's maid and quarrelled with the servants, a pack of idlers! Did he not forbid my putting my foot upon his land? I am upon his land now; let him come and chase me off; let him come, he will see how I shall receive him. Do you see this stick? I have just cut it in his own woods to use it on himself!"

The young man no longer listened to the workman; his eyes were turned toward the castle, whose slightest details he studied, as if he hoped that in the end the stone would turn into glass and let him see the interior. If this curiosity had any other object than the architecture and form of the building it was not gratified. No human figure came to enliven this sad, lonely dwelling. All the windows were closed, as if the house were uninhabited. The baying of dogs, probably imprisoned in their kennel, was the only sound which came to break the strange silence, and the distant thunder, with its dull rumbling, repeated by the echoes, responded plaintively, and gave a lugubrious character to the scene.

"When one speaks of the devil he appears," said the workman, suddenly, with an emotion which gave the lie to his recent bravado; "if you wish to see this devil incarnate of a Bergenheim, just turn your head. Good-by."

At these words he leaped a ditch at the left of the road and disappeared in the bushes. The stranger also seemed to feel an impression very like that of Lambernier's as he saw a man on horseback advancing on a gallop. Instead of waiting for him, he darted into the field which descended to the river, and hid behind a group of trees.

The Baron, who was not more than thirty-three years of age, had one of those energetic, handsome faces whose type seems to belong particularly to old military families. His bright, blond hair and clear, blue eyes contrasted strongly with his ruddy complexion; his aspect was severe, but noble and imposing, in spite of his negligent dress, which showed that indifference to matters of personal attire which becomes habitual with country lords. His tall figure was beginning to grow stout, and that increased his athletic appearance. He sat very erect in his saddle, and from the way in which he straightened out his long legs against the sides of his beast, one suspected that he could, if necessary, repeat the Marshal de Saxe's feats of skill. He stopped his horse suddenly at the very spot which the two men had just vacated and called out in a voice which would startle a regiment of cuirassiers:



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"Here, Lambernier!"

The carpenter hesitated a moment, at this imperative call, between the fear which he could not overcome and shame at fleeing from a single man in the presence of a witness; finally this last feeling triumphed. He returned to the edge of the road without saying a word, and stationed himself in an insolent way face to face with the Baron, with his hat drawn down over his ears, and grasped through precaution the knotty stick which served him as a weapon.

"Lambernier," said the master of the castle, in a severe tone, "your account was settled yesterday; was it not paid in full? Is anything due you?"

"I ask nothing of you," replied the workman, brusquely.

"In that case, why are you wandering about my place when I forbade you?"

"I am upon the highway, nobody can prevent me from passing there."

"You are upon my land, and you came out of my woods," replied the Baron, emphasizing his words with the firmness of a man who would permit no violation of his rights as a landowner.

"The ground upon which I walk is mine," said the workman, in his turn, as he struck the end of his stick upon the ground as if to take possession. This gesture attracted Bergenheim's attention, and his eyes flashed with a sudden light at the sight of the stick which Lambernier held.

"You scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "you probably regard my trees also as your own. Where did you cut that stick?"

"Go and find out," said the workman, accompanying his reply with a flourish of the stick.

The Baron coolly dismounted, threw the bridle over his horse's neck, walked up to the workman, who had taken the position of a practised pugilist to receive him, and, without giving him time to strike, he disarmed him with one hand by a blow which would have been sufficient to uproot the beech rod before it was metamorphosed into a club; with the other hand he seized the man by the collar and gave him a shaking that it was as impossible to struggle against as if it had been caused by a steam-engine. Obeying this irresistible force, in spite of his kicking, Lambernier described a dozen circles around his adversary, while the latter set these off with some of the hardest blows from green wood that ever chastised an insolent fellow. This gymnastic exercise ended by a sleight-of-hand trick, which, after making the carpenter pirouette for the last time, sent him rolling head-first into a ditch, the bottom of which, fortunately for him, was provided with a bed of soft mud. When the punishment was over, Bergenheim remounted his horse as tranquilly as he had dismounted it, and continued his way toward the chateau.



The young man, in the midst of the thicket where he was concealed, had lost no detail of this rural scene. He could not help having a feeling of admiration for this energetic representative of the feudal ages who, with no fear of any court of justice or other bourgeois inventions, had thus exerted over his own domains the summary justice in force in Eastern countries.

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"France has thrashed Gaul," said he, smiling to himself; "if all our men had this Bergenheim's iron fist many things determined upon to-day might be called in question. If I ever have the slightest difficulty with this Milo de Crotona, he may be sure I shall not choose pugilism as my mode of discussion."

The storm now burst forth in all its fury. A dark curtain covered the whole valley, and the rain fell in torrents. The Baron put spurs to his horse, crossed the bridge and, entering the sycamore avenue, was soon out of sight. Without paying any attention to Lambernier, who was uttering imprecations at the bottom of the ditch, into which he was sinking deeper and deeper, the stranger went to seek a less illusive shelter than the trees under which he had taken his position; but at this moment his attention was attracted to one side of the castle. A window, or rather a glass door, just then opened upon the balcony, and a young woman in a rose-colored negligee appeared upon the dark facade. It would be impossible to imagine anything more fresh or charming than this apparition at such a moment. Leaning upon the balustrade, the young woman rested her face upon a hand which was as white as a lily, and her finger smoothed with a mechanical caress the ringlets of chestnut hair that lay upon her forehead, while her large brown eyes gazed into the depths of the clouds from which the lightning was flashing, and with which they vied in brilliancy. A poet would have said it was Miranda evoked by the tempest.

The stranger parted the branches before him to get a better view; at the same instant he was blinded by a terrible flash which lighted the whole valley and was immediately followed by a terrific crash. When he opened his eyes the chateau which he believed to be at the bottom of the river stood still upright, solemn, and firm as before; but the lady in the rose-colored gown had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THE CASTLE OF BERGENHEIM

The appearance of the room into which the lady had precipitately entered, when startled by the thunder, corresponded with the edifice to which it belonged. It was a very large room, longer than it was wide, and lighted by three windows, the middle one of which opened from top to bottom like a door and led out upon the balcony. The woodwork and ceiling were in chestnut, which time had polished and a skilful hand had ornamented with a profusion of allegorical figures. The beauty of this work of art was almost entirely concealed by a very remarkable decoration which covered every side of the room, consisting of one of the most glorious collections of family portraits which a country chateau of the nineteenth century could offer.

The first of these portraits hung opposite the windows at the right of the entrance door and was that of a chevalier in full armor, whose teeth gleamed from under his long



moustache like those of an untamed tiger. Beginning with this formidable figure, which bore the date 1247, forty others of about the same dimensions were placed in order according to their dates. It seemed as if each period had left its mark upon those of the personages it had seen live and die, and had left something of its own character there.

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There were more gallant cavaliers cut after the same pattern as the first. Their stern, harsh faces, red beards, and broad, square military shoulders told that by swordthrusts and broken lances they had founded the nobility of their race. An heroic preface to this family biography! A rough and warlike page of the Middle Ages! After these proud men-of-arms came several figures of a less ferocious aspect, but not so imposing. In these portraits of the fifteenth century beards had disappeared with the sword. In those wearing caps and velvet toques, silk robes and heavy gold chains supporting a badge of the same metal, one recognized lords in full and tranquil possession of the fiefs won by their fathers, landowners who had degenerated a little and preferred mountain life in a manor to the chances of a more hazardous existence. These pacific gentlemen were, for the most part, painted with the left hand gloved and resting upon the hip; the right one was bare, a sort of token of disarmament which one might take for a painter's epigram. Some of them had allowed their favorite dogs to share the honors of the picture. All in this group indicated that this branch of the family had many points of resemblance with the more illustrious faces. It was the period of idle kings.

A half dozen solemn personages with gold-braided hats and long red robes bordered with ermine, and wearing starched ruffles, occupied one corner of the parlor near the windows. These worthy advisers of the Dukes of Lorraine explained the way in which the masters of the chateau had awakened from the torpor in which they had been plunged for several generations, in order to participate in the affairs of their country and enter a more active sphere.

Here the portraits assumed the proportions of history. Did not this branch, descended from warlike stock, seem like a fragment taken from the European annals? Was it not a symbolical image of the progress of civilization, of regular legislation struggling against barbaric customs? Thanks to these respectable counsellors and judges, one might reverse the motto: 'Non solum toga', in favor of their race. But it did not seem as if these bearded ancestors looked with much gratitude upon this parliamentary flower added to their feudal crest. They appeared to look down from the height of their worm-eaten frames upon their enrobed descendants with that disdainful smile with which the peers of France used to greet men of law the first time they were called to sit by their side, after being for so long a time at their feet.

In the space between the windows and upon the remaining woodwork was a crowd of military men, with here and there an Abbe with cross and mitre, a Commander of Malta, and a solemn Canon, sterile branches of this genealogical tree. Several among the military ones wore sashes and plumes of the colors of Lorraine; others, even before the union of this province to France, had served the latter country; there were lieutenant-colonels of infantry and cavalry; some dressed in blue coats lined with buff serge and little round patches of black plush, which served as the uniform for the dragoons of the Lorraine legion.

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Last of all was a young man with an agreeable face, who smiled superciliously from under a vast wig of powdered hair; a rose was in the buttonhole of his green cloth pelisse with orange facings, a red sabrecache hung against his boots a little lower than the hilt of his sabre. The costume represented a sprightly officer of the Royal Nassau hussars. The portrait was hung on the left of the entrance door and only separated by it from his great-grandfather of 1247, whom he might have assisted, had these venerable portraits taken some night a fancy to descend from their frames to execute a dance such as Hoffmann dreamed.

These two persons were the alpha and the omega of this genealogical tree, the two extreme links of the chain—one, the root buried in the sands of time; the other, the branch which had blossomed at the top. Fate had created a tragical resemblance between these two lives, separated by more than five centuries. The chevalier in coat-of-mail had been killed in the battle of the Mansourah during the first crusade of St. Louis. The young man with the supercilious smile had mounted the scaffold during the Reign of Terror, holding between his lips a rose, his usual decoration for his coat. The history of the French nobility was embodied in these two men, born in blood, who had died in blood.

Large gilded frames of Gothic style surrounded all these portraits. At the right, on the bottom of each picture was painted a little escutcheon having for its crest a baronial coronet and for supports two wild men armed with clubs. The field was red; with its three bulls' heads in silver, it announced to people well versed in heraldic art that they had before them the lineaments of noble and powerful lords, squires of Reinsach-Bergenheim, lords of Reinsach in Suabia, barons of the Holy Empire, lords of Sapois, Labresse, Gerbamont, *etc.*, counts of Bergenheim, the latter title granted them by Louis XV, chevaliers of Lorraine, *etc.*, *etc.*, *etc.*

This ostentatious enumeration was not needed in order to recognize the kindred of all these noble personages. Had they been mingled with other portraits, a careful observer would have promptly distinguished and reunited them, so pronounced were the family features common to them all. The furniture of the room was not unworthy of these proud defunct ones. High-backed chairs and enormous armchairs, dating from the time of Louis XIII; more modern sofas, which had been made to harmonize with the older furniture, filled the room. They were covered with flowered tapestry in thousands of shades, which must have busied the white hands of the ladies of the house for two or three generations past.

The row of portraits was interrupted on one side by a large fireplace of grayish granite, which was too high for one to hang a mirror above or to place ornaments upon its mantel. Opposite was an ebony console inlaid with ivory, upon which was placed one of those elegant clocks whose delicate and original chased work has not been eclipsed by any modern workmanship. Two large Japanese vases accompanied it; the whole was

reflected in an antique mirror which hung above the console; its edges were bevelled, doubtless in order to cause one to admire the thickness of the glass.

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It would be impossible to imagine a stronger contrast than that of this Gothic room with the lady in the rose-colored gown who had just entered it so precipitately. The fire upon the hearth threw a warm light over the old portraits, and it was heightened by the heavy, red damask curtains which hung by the windows. The light sometimes softened, sometimes revived by some sudden flash of the flames, glanced over the scowling faces and red beards, enlivening the eyes and giving a supernatural animation to those lifeless canvases. One would have said that the cold, grave faces looked with curiosity at the young woman with graceful movements and cool garments, whom Aladdin's genii seemed to have transported from the most elegant boudoir on the Chaussee d'Antin, and thrown, still frightened, into the midst of this strange assembly.

"You are crazy, Clemence, to leave that window open!" said at this moment an old voice issuing from an armchair placed in a corner near the fireplace.

The person who broke the charm of this silent scene was a woman of sixty or seventy years of age, according to the gallantry of the calculator. It was easy to judge that she was tall and thin as she lay, rather than sat, in her chair with its back lowered down. She was dressed in a yellowish-brown gown. A false front as black as jet, surmounted by a cap with poppy-colored ribbons, framed her face. She had sharp, withered features, and the brilliancy of her primitive freshness had been converted into a blotched and pimpled complexion which affected above all her nose and cheek-bones, but whose ardor had been dimmed only a trifle by age. There was something about the whole face as crabbed, sour, and unkind as if she had daily bathed it in vinegar. One could read old maid in every feature! Besides, a slight observation of her ways would have destroyed all lingering doubt in this respect.

A large, coffee-colored pug-dog was lying before the fire. This interesting animal served as a footstool for his mistress, stretched in her easy-chair, and recalled to mind the lions which sleep at the foot of chevaliers in their Gothic tombs. As a pug-dog and an old maid pertain to each other, it was only necessary, in order to divine this venerable lady's state, to read the name upon the golden circlet which served as a collar for the dog: "Constance belongs to Mademoiselle de Corandeuil."

Before the younger lady, who was leaning upon the back of a chair, seeming to breathe with difficulty, had time to reply, she received a second injunction.

"But, aunt," said she, at last, "it was a horrible crash! Did you not hear it?"

"I am not so deaf as that yet," replied the old maid. "Shut that window; do you not know that currents of air attract lightning?"

Clemence obeyed, dropping the curtain to shut out the flashes of lightning which continued to dart through the heavens; she then approached the fireplace.

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"Since you are so afraid of lightning," said her aunt; "which, by the way, is perfectly ridiculous in a Corandeuil, what induced you to go out upon the balcony? The sleeve of your gown is wet. That is the way one gets cold; afterward, there is nothing but an endless array of syrups and drugs. You ought to change your gown and put on something warmer. Who would ever think of dressing like that in such weather as this?"

"I assure you, aunt, it is not cold. It is because you have a habit of always being near the fire—"

"Ah! habit! when you are my age you will not hint at such a thing. Now, everything goes wonderfully well; you never listen to my advice—you go out in the wind and rain with that flighty Aline and your husband, who has no more sense than his sister; you will pay for it later. Open the curtains, I pray; the storm is over, and I wish to read the Gazette."

The young woman obeyed a second time and stood with her forehead pressed against the glass. The distant rumbling of the thunder announced the end of the storm; but a few flashes still traversed the horizon.

"Aunt," said she, after a moment's silence, "come and look at the Montigny rocks; when the lightning strikes them they look like a file of silver columns or a procession of ghosts."

"What a romantic speech," growled the old lady, never taking her eyes from her paper.

"I assure you I am not romantic the least in the world," replied Clemence. "I simply find the storm a distraction, and here, you know, there is no great choice of pleasures."

"Then you find it dull?"

"Oh, aunt, horribly so!" At these words, pronounced with a heartfelt accent, the young woman dropped into an armchair.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil took off her eye-glasses, put the paper upon the table and gazed for several moments at her pretty niece's face, which was tinged with a look of deep melancholy. She then straightened herself up in her chair, and, leaning forward, asked in a low tone:

"Have you had any trouble with your husband?"

"If so, I should not be so bored," replied Clemence, in a gay tone, which she repented immediately, for she continued more calmly:

"No, aunt; Christian is kind, very kind; he is very much attached to me, and full of good-humor and attentions. You have seen how he has allowed me to arrange my apartments to suit myself, even taking down the partition and enlarging the windows;



and yet, you know how much he clings to everything that is old about the house. He tries to do everything for my pleasure. Did he not go to Strasbourg the other day to buy a pony for me, because I thought Titania was too skittish? It would be impossible to show greater kindness.”

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"Your husband," suddenly interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, for she held the praise of others in sovereign displeasure, "is a Bergenheim like all the Bergenheims present, past, and future, including your little sister-in-law, who appears more as if she had been brought up with boys than at the 'Sacred Heart.' He is a worthy son of his father there," said she, pointing to one of the portraits near the young Royal-Nassau officer; "and he was the most brutal, unbearable, and detestable of all the dragoons in Lorraine; so much so that he got into three quarrels at Nancy in one month, and at Metz, over a game of checkers, he killed the poor Vicomte de Megrigny, who was worth a hundred of him and danced so well! Some one described Bergenheim as being 'proud as a peacock, as stubborn as a mule, and as furious as a lion!' Ugly race! ugly race! What I say to you now, Clemence, is to excuse your husband's faults, for it would be time lost to try to correct them. However, all men are alike; and since you are Madame de Bergenheim, you must accept your fate and bear it as well as possible. And then, if you have your troubles, you still have your good aunt to whom you can confide them and who will not allow you to be tyrannized over. I will speak to your husband."

Clemence saw, from the first words of this tirade, that she must arm herself with resignation; for anything which concerned the Bergenheims aroused one of the hobbies which the old maid rode with a most complacent spite; so she settled herself back in her chair like a person who would at least be comfortable while she listened to a tiresome discourse, and busied herself during this lecture caressing with the tip of a very shapely foot the top of one of the andirons.

"But, aunt," said she at last, when the tirade was over, and she gave a rather drawling expression to her voice, "I can not understand why you have taken this idea into your head that Christian renders me unhappy. I repeat it, it is impossible that one should be kinder to me than he, and, on my side, I have the greatest respect and friendship for him."

"Very well, if he is such a pearl of husbands, if you live so much like turtle-doves-and, to tell the truth, I do not believe a word of it—what causes this ennui of which you complain and which has been perfectly noticeable for some time? When I say ennui, it is more than that; it is sadness, it is grief? You grow thinner every day; you are as pale as a ghost; just at this moment, your complexion is gone; you will end by being a regular fright. They say that it is the fashion to be pale nowadays; a silly notion, indeed, but it will not last, for complexion makes the woman."

The old lady said this like a person who had her reasons for not liking pale complexions, and who gladly took pimples for roses.

Madame de Bergenheim bowed her head as if to acquiesce in this decision, and then resumed in her drawling voice:

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"I know that I am very unreasonable, and I am often vexed with myself for having so little control over my feelings, but it is beyond my strength. I have a tired sensation, a disgust for everything, something which I can not overcome. It is an inexplicable physical and moral languor, for which, for this reason, I see no remedy. I am weary and I suffer; I am sure it will end in my being ill. Sometimes I wish I were dead. However, I have really no reason to be unhappy. I suppose I am happy—I ought to be happy."

"Truly, I can not understand in the least the women of today. Formerly, upon exciting occasions, we had a good nervous attack and all was over; the crisis passed, we became amiable again, put on rouge and went to a ball. Now it is languor, ennui, stomach troubles—all imagination and humbug! The men are just as bad, and they call it spleen! Spleen! a new discovery, an English importation! Fine things come to us from England; to begin with, the constitutional government! All this is perfectly ridiculous. As for you, Clemence, you ought to put an end to such childishness. Two months ago, in Paris, you did not have any of the rest that you enjoy here. I had serious reasons for wishing to delay my departure; my apartment to refurnish, my neuralgia which still troubles me—and Constance, who had just been in the hands of the doctor, was hardly in a condition to travel, poor creature! You would listen to nothing; we had to submit to your caprices, and now—"

"But, aunt, you admitted yourself that it was the proper thing for me to do, to join my husband. Was it not enough, and too much, to have left him to pass the entire winter alone here while I was dancing in Paris?"

"It was very proper, of course, and I do not blame you. But why does the very thing you so much desired two months ago bore you so terribly now? In Paris you talked all the time of Bergenheim, longed only for Bergenheim, you had duties to fulfil, you wished to be with your husband; you bothered and wore me out with your conjugal love. When back at Bergenheim, you dream and sigh for Paris. Do not shake your head; I am an old aunt to whom you pay no heed, but who sees clearly yet. Will you do me the favor to tell me what it is that you regret in Paris at this time of the year, when there are no balls or parties, and not one human being worth visiting, for all the people you know are in the country? Is it because—"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil did not finish her sentence, but she put a severity into these three words which seemed to condense all the quintessence of prudery that a celibacy of sixty years could coagulate in an old maid's heart.

Clemence raised her eyes to her aunt's face as if to demand an explanation.

It was such a calm, steady glance that the latter could not help being impressed by it.

"Well," said she, softening her voice, "there is no necessity for putting on such queenly airs; we are here alone, and you know that I am a kind aunt to you. Now, then, speak

freely—have you left anything or any person in Paris, the remembrance of which makes your sojourn here more tiresome than it really is? Any of your adorers of the winter?"

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"What an idea, aunt! Did I have any adorers?" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, quickly, as if trying to conceal by a smile the rosy flush that mounted to her cheeks.

"And what if you should have some, child?" continued the old maid, to whom curiosity lent an unaccustomed coaxing accent to her voice, "where would be the harm? Is it forbidden to please? When one is of good birth, must one not live in society and hold one's position there? One need not bury one's self in a desert at twenty-three years of age, and you really are charming enough to inspire love; you understand, I do not say, to experience it; but when one is young and pretty conquests are made almost unwittingly. You are not the first of the family to whom that has happened; you are a Corandeuil. Now, then, my good Clemence, what troubled heart is pining for you in Paris? Is it Monsieur de Mauleon?"

"Monsieur de Mauleon!" exclaimed the young woman, bursting into laughter; "he, a heart! and a troubled one, too! Oh, aunt, you do him honor! Monsieur de Mauleon, who is past forty-five years old and wears stays! an audacious man who squeezes his partners' hands in the dance and looks at them with passionate glances! Oh! Monsieur de Mauleon!"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil sanctioned by a slight grimace of her thin lips her niece's burst of gayety, when, with one hand upon her heart, she rolled her sparkling eyes in imitation of the languishing air of her unfortunate adorer.

"Perhaps it is Monsieur d'Arzenac?"

"Monsieur d'Arzenac is certainly very nice; he has perfect manners; it may be that he did not disdain to chat with me; on my side, I found his conversation very entertaining; but you may rest assured that he did not think of me nor I of him. Besides, you know that he is engaged to marry Mademoiselle de la Neuville."

"Monsieur de Gerfaut?" continued Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, with the persistency with which aged people follow an idea, and as if determined to pass in review all the young men of their acquaintance until she had discovered her niece's secret.

The latter was silent a moment before replying.

"How can you think of such a thing, aunt?" said she at last, "a man with such a bad reputation, who writes books that one hardly dares read, and plays that it's almost a sin to witness! Did you not hear Madame de Pontivers say that a young woman who cared for her reputation would permit his visits very rarely?"

"Madame de Pontivers is a prude, whom I can not endure, with her show of little, grimaces and her pretentious, outrageous mock-modesty. Did she not take it into her head this winter to constitute me her chaperon? I gave her to understand that a widow



forty years old was quite old enough to go about alone! She has a mania for fearing that she may be compromised. The idea of turning up her nose at Monsieur de Gerfaut! What presumption! He certainly is too clever ever to solicit the honor of being bored to death in her house; for he is clever, very clever. I never could understand your dislike for him, nor your haughty manner of treating him; especially, during the latter part of our stay in Paris."

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“One is not mistress of one’s dislikes or affections, aunt. But to reply to your questions, I will say that you may rest assured that none of these gentlemen, nor any of those whom you might name, has the slightest effect upon my state of mind. I am bored because it probably is my nature to need distractions, and there are none in this deserted place. It is an involuntary disagreeableness, for which I reproach myself and which I hope will pass away. Rest assured, that the root of the evil does not lie in my heart.”

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil understood by the cold and rather dry tone in which these words were spoken that her niece wished to keep her secret, if she had one; she could not prevent a gesture of anger as she saw her advances thus repelled, but felt that she was no wiser than when she began the conversation. She manifested her disappointment by pushing the dog aside with her foot—the poor thing was perfectly innocent!—and in a cross tone, which was much more familiar than her former coaxing one, she continued:

“Very well, since I am wrong, since your husband adores you and you him, since, to sum it all up, your heart is perfectly tranquil and free, your conduct is devoid of common-sense, and I advise you to change it. I warn you that all this hypochondria, paleness, and languor are caprices which are very disagreeable to others. There is a Provence proverb which says: Vaillance de Blacas, prudence de Pontevéz, caprice de Corandeuil. If there was not such a saying, it should be created for you, for you have something incomprehensible enough in your character to make a saint swear. If anybody should know you, it is I, who brought you up. I do not wish to reproach you, but you gave me trouble enough; you were a most wayward, capricious, and fantastic creature, a spoiled child—”

“Aunt,” interrupted Clemence, with heightened color in her pale cheeks, “you have told me of my faults often enough for me to know them, and, if they were not corrected, it was not your fault, for you never spared me scoldings. If I had not been so unfortunate as to lose my mother when I was a baby, I should not have given you so much trouble.”

Tears came into the young woman’s eyes, but she had enough control over herself to keep them from streaming down her burning cheeks. Taking a journal from the table, she opened it, in order to conceal her emotion and to put an end to this conversation, which had become painful to her. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, on her side, carefully replaced her eye-glasses upon her nose, and, solemnly stretching herself upon her chair, she turned over the leaves of the ‘Gazette de France,’ which she had neglected so long.

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Silence reigned for some moments in the room. The aunt apparently read the paper very attentively. Her niece sat motionless, with her eyes fastened upon the yellow cover of the last number of 'La Mode,' which had chanced to fall into her hands. She aroused herself at last from her revery and carelessly turned over the leaves of the review in a manner which showed how little interest she felt in it. As she turned the first page a surprised cry escaped her, and her eyes were fastened upon the pamphlet with eager curiosity. Upon the frontispiece, where the Duchesse de Berry's coat-of-arms is engraved, and in the middle of the shield, which was left empty at this time by the absence of the usual fleurs de lys, was sketched with a pencil a bird whose head was surmounted by a baron's coronet.

Curious to know what could have caused her niece so much surprise, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stretched out her neck and gazed for an instant upon the page without seeing, at first, anything extraordinary, but finally her glance rested upon the armorial bearings, and she discovered the new feature added to the royal Bourbon coat-of-arms.

"A cock!" exclaimed she, after a moment's reflection; "a cock upon Madame's shield! What can that mean, 'bon Dieu'! and it is not engraved nor lithographed; it is drawn with a pencil."

"It is not a cock, it is a crowned gerfaut," said Madame de Bergenheim.

"A gerfaut! How do you know what a gerfaut is? At Corandeuil, in your grandfather's time, there was a falconry, and I have seen gerfauts there, but you—I tell you it is a cock, an old French cock; ugly thing! What you take for a coronet—and it really does resemble one—is a badly drawn cock's comb. How did this horrid creature come to be there? I should like to know if such pretty tricks are permitted at the postoffice. People protest against the 'cabinet noir', but it is a hundred times worse if one is permitted to outrage with impunity peaceable families in their own homes. I mean to find out who has played this trick. Will you be so kind as to ring the bell?"

"It really is very strange!" said Madame de Bergenheim, pulling the bell-rope with a vivacity which showed that she shared, if not the indignation, at least the curiosity of her aunt.

A servant in green livery appeared.

"Who went to Remiremont yesterday for the newspapers?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"It was Pere Rousselet, Mademoiselle," replied the servant.

"Where is Monsieur de Bergenheim?"

"Monsieur le Baron is playing billiards with Mademoiselle Aline."



“Send Leonard Rousselet here.”

And Mademoiselle de Corandeuil settled herself back in her chair with the dignity of a chancellor about to hold court.

CHAPTER III

A DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD

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The servants in the castle of Bergenheim formed a family whose members were far from living in harmony. The Baron managed his household himself, and employed a large number of day-laborers, farm servants, and kitchen-girls, whom the liveried servants treated with great disdain. The rustics, on their side, resisted these privileged lackeys and called them "coxcombs" and "Parisians," sometimes accompanying these remarks with the most expressive blows. Between these tribes of sworn enemies a third class, much less numerous, found them selves in a critical position; these were the two servants brought by Mademoiselle de Corandeuil. It was fortunate for them that their mistress liked large, vigorous men, and had chosen them for their broad, military shoulders; but for that it would have been impossible for them to come out of their daily quarrels safe and sound.

The question of superiority between the two households had been the first apple of discord; a number of personal quarrels followed to inflame them. They fought for their colors the whole time; the Bergenheim livery was red, the Corandeuil green. There were two flags; each exalted his own while throwing that of his adversaries in the mud. Greenhorn and crab were jokes; cucumber and lobster were insults.

Such were the gracious terms exchanged every day between the two parties. In the midst of this civil war, which was carefully concealed from their masters' eyes, whose severity they feared, lived one rather singular personage. Leonard Rousselet, Pere Rousselet, as he was generally called, was an old peasant who, disheartened with life, had made various efforts to get out of his sphere, but had never succeeded in doing so. Having been successively hairdresser, sexton, school-teacher, nurse, and gardener, he had ended, when sixty years old, by falling back to the very point whence he started. He had no particular employment in M. de Bergenheim's house; he went on errands, cared for the gardens, and doctored the mules and horses; he was a tall man, about as much at ease in his clothing as a dry almond in its shell. A long, dark, yellow coat usually hung about the calves of his legs, which were covered with long, blue woollen stockings, and looked more like vine-poles than human legs; a conformation which furnished daily jokes for the other servants, to which the old man deigned no response save a disdainful smile, grumbling through his teeth, "Menials, peasants without education." This latter speech expressed the late gardener's scorn, for it had been his greatest grief to pass for an uneducated man; and he had gathered from his various conditions a singularly dignified and pretentious way of speaking.

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In spite of his self-confidence, it was not without some emotion that Leonard Rousselet responded to this call to appear in the drawing-room before the person he most feared in the chateau. His bearing showed this feeling when he presented himself at the drawing-room door, where he stood as grave and silent as Banquo's ghost. Constance arose at sight of this fantastic figure, barked furiously and darted toward a pair of legs for which she seemed to share the irreverence of the liveried servants; but the texture of the blue stocking and the flesh which covered the tibia were rather too hard morsels for the dowager's teeth; she was obliged to give up the attack and content herself with impotent barks, while the old man, who would gladly have given a month's wages to break her jaw with the tip of his, boot, caressed her with his hand, saying, "Softly, pretty dear! softly, pretty little creature!" in a hypocritical tone.

This courtier-like conduct touched the old lady's heart and softened the severe look upon her face.

"Stop your noise, Constance," said she, "lie down beside your mistress. Rousselet, come nearer."

The old man obeyed, walking across the floor with reverential bows, and taking a position like a soldier presenting arms.

"You were the one," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, "who was sent to Remiremont yesterday? Did you perform all the commissions that were given you?"

"It is not among the impossibilities, Mademoiselle, that I may have neglected some of them," replied the old man, fearing to compromise himself by a positive affirmative.

"Tell us, then, what you did."

Leonard wiped his nose behind his hat, like a well-bred orator, and, balancing himself upon his legs in a way not at all Bourbonic, he said:

"I went to the city that morning myself because Monsieur le Baron had said the night before that he should hunt to-day, and that the groom was to help Monsieur le Baron drive a wild boar out of the Corne woods. I reached Remiremont; I went to the butcher's; I purchased five kilogrammes of dressed goods—"

"Of dressed goods at the butcher's!" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim.

"I would say ten pounds of what uneducated people call pork," said Rousselet, pronouncing this last word in a strangled voice.

"Pass over these details," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil. "You went to the post-office."

"I went to the post-office, where I put in letters for Mademoiselle, Madame, Monsieur le Baron, and one from Mademoiselle Aline for Monsieur d'Artigues."

"Aline writing to her cousin! Did you know that?" said the old aunt, turning quickly toward her niece.

"Certainly; they correspond regularly," replied Clemence with a smile which seemed to say that she saw no harm in it.

The old maid shook her head and protruded her under lip, as much as to say: We will attend to this another time.

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Madame de Bergenheim, who was out of patience at this questioning, began to speak in a quick tone which was a contrast to her aunt's solemn slowness.

"Rousselet," said she, "when you took the newspapers out of the office, did you notice whether the wrappers were intact, or whether they had been opened?"

The good man half concealed his face in his cravat at this precise questioning, and it was with embarrassment that he replied, after a moment's hesitation:

"Certainly, Madame—as to the wrappers—I do not accuse the postmaster—"

"If the journals were sealed when you received them, you are the only one who could have opened them."

Rousselet straightened himself up to his full height, and, giving to his nut-cracker face the most dignified look possible, he said in a solemn tone:

"With due deference to you, Madame, Leonard Rousselet is well known. Fifty-seven years old on Saint-Hubert's day, I am incapable of opening newspapers. When they have been read at the chateau and they send me with them to the cure, I do not say—perhaps on my way—it is a recreation—and then the cure is Jean Bartou, son of Joseph Bartou, the tilemaker. But to read the newspaper before my masters have done so! Never! Leonard Rousselet is an old man incapable of such baseness. Baptized when a child; fifty-seven years on Saint-Hubert's day."

"When you speak of your pastor, do so in a more becoming manner," interrupted Mademoiselle de Colrandeuil, although she herself in private did not speak of the plebeian priest in very respectful terms. But if Joseph Bartou's son was always the son of Joseph Bartou to her, she meant that he should be Monsieur le Cure to the peasants.

Madame de Bergenheim had not been much affected by Pere Rousselet's harangue, and shook her head impatiently, saying in an imperative tone:

"I am certain that the newspapers have been opened by you, or by some person to whom you have given them, and I wish to know at once by whom."

Rousselet dropped his pose of a Roman senator; passing his hand behind his ears, a familiar gesture with people when in embarrassing positions, he continued less emphatically:

"I stopped on my way back at La Fauconnerie, at the 'Femme-sans-Tete Inn'."

"And what were you doing in a tavern?" interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil severely. "You know it is not intended that the servants in this house should frequent

taverns and such low places, which are not respectable and corrupt the morals of the lower classes.”

“Servants! lower classes! Old aristocrat!” growled Rousselet secretly; but, not daring to show his ill humor, he replied in a bland voice:

“If Mademoiselle had gone the same road that I did, with the same conveyance, she would know that it is a rather thirsty stretch. I stopped at the ‘Femme-sans-Tete’ to wash the dust down my parched throat. Whereupon Mademoiselle Reine—the daughter of Madame Gobillot, the landlady of the inn—Mademoiselle Reine asked me to allow her to look at the yellow-journal in which there are fashions for ladies; I asked her why; she said it was so that she might see how they made their bonnets, gowns, and other finery in Paris. The frivolity of women!”

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Mademoiselle de Corandeuil threw herself back in her chair and gave way to an access of hilarity in which she rarely indulged.

“Mademoiselle Gobillot reading *La Mode*! Mademoiselle Gobillot talking of gowns, shawls, and cashmeres! Clemence, what do you say to that? You will see, she will be ordering her bonnets from Herbault! Ha! ha! This is what is called the progress of civilization, the age of light!”

“Mademoiselle Gobillot,” said Clemence, fixing a penetrating glance upon the old man, “was not the only one who looked at *La Mode*. Was there no other person in the tavern who saw it?”

“Madame,” replied Rousselet, forced from his last refuge, “there were two young men taking their refection, and one of them wore a beard no longer than a goat’s. Madame will pardon me if I allow myself to use this vulgar expression, but Madame wished to know all.”

“And the other young man?”

“The other had his facial epidermis shaved as close as a lady’s or mine. He was the one who held the journal while his comrade was smoking outside the door.”

Madame de Bergenheim made no further inquiries, but fell into a profound revery. With eyes fixed upon the last number of *La Mode*, she seemed to study the slightest lines of the sketch that had been made thereon, as if she hoped to find a solution to the mystery. Her irregular breathing, and the bright flush which tinged her usually pale cheeks, would have denoted to an eye-witness one of those tempests of the heart, the physical manifestations of which are like those of a fever. The pale winter flower dying under the snow had suddenly raised its drooping head and recovered its color; the melancholy against which the young woman had so vainly struggled had disappeared as if by enchantment. A little bird surmounted by a coronet, the whole rather badly sketched, was the strange talisman that had produced this change.

“They were commercial travellers,” said the old aunt; “they always pretend to know everything. One of them, doubtless, when reading the well-known name of Monsieur de Bergenheim upon the wrapper, sketched the animal in question. These gentlemen of industry usually have a rather good education! But this is giving the affair more importance than it merits. Leonard Rousselet,” said she, raising her voice as a judge does in court when pronouncing his charge, “you were wrong to let anything addressed to your master leave your hands. We will excuse you this time, but I warn you to be more careful in future; when you go to Madame Gobillot’s, you may say to Mademoiselle Reine, from me, that if she wishes to read *La Mode* I shall be delighted to procure a subscriber to one of our journals. You may retire now.”

Without waiting for this invitation to be repeated, Rousselet backed out of the room like an ambassador leaving the royal presence, escorted by Constance acting as master of ceremonies. Not having calculated the distance, he had just bumped against the door, when it suddenly opened and a person of extreme vivacity bounded into the middle of the room.

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It was a very young and petite lady, whose perfectly developed form predicted an inclination to stoutness in the future. She belonged to the Bergenheim family, if one could credit the resemblance between her characteristic features and several of the old portraits in the room; she wore a dark-brown riding-habit, a gray hat perched on one side, showing on the left a mass of very curly, bright blond hair. This coiffure and the long green veil, floating at each movement like the plume in a helmet, gave a singularly easy air to the fresh face of this pretty amazon, who brandished, in guise of a lance, a billiard cue.

"Clemence," she exclaimed, "I have just beaten Christian; I made the red ball, I made the white, and then the double stroke; I made all! Mademoiselle, I have just beaten Christian two games; is it not glorious? He made only eighteen points in a single game. Pere Rousselet, I have just beaten Christian! Do you know how to play billiards?"

"Mademoiselle Aline, I am absolutely ignorant of the game," replied the old man, with as gracious a smile as was possible, while he tried to recover his equilibrium.

"You are needed no longer, Rousselet," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil; "close the door as you go out."

When she had been obeyed, the old maid turned gravely toward Aline, who was still dancing about the room, having seized her sister-in-law's hands in order to force her to share her childish joy.

"Mademoiselle," said she in a severe tone, "is it the custom at the 'Sacred Heart' to enter a room without greeting the persons who are in it, and to jump about like a crazy person? a thing that is never permitted even in a peasant's house."

Aline stopped short in the midst of her dance and blushed a trifle; she caressed the pug dog, instead of replying, for she knew as well as Rousselet that it was the surest way of softening the old maid's heart. The cajolery was lost this time.

"Do not touch Constance, I beg of you," exclaimed the aunt, as if a dagger had been raised against the object of her love, "do not soil this poor beast with your hands. What dreadful thing have you on your fingers? Have you just come out of an indigo bag?"

The young girl blushed still deeper and gazed at her pretty hands, which were really a little daubed, and began to wipe them with an embroidered handkerchief which she took from her pocket.

"It was the billiards," she said, in a low voice, "it is the blue chalk they rub the cue with in order to make good shots and caroms."



“Make good shots! Caroms! Will you be so good as to spare us your slang speeches,” continued Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who seemed to become more crabbed as the young girl’s confusion increased. “What a fine education for a young lady! and one who has just come from the ‘Sacred Heart’! One that has taken five prizes not fifteen days ago! I really do not know what to think of those ladies, your teachers! And now I suppose you are going to ride. Billiards and horses, horses and billiards! It is fine! It is admirable!”

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"But, Mademoiselle," said Aline, raising her large blue eyes, which were on the verge of tears, "it is vacation now, and there is no wrong in my playing a game of billiards with my brother; we have no billiards at the 'Sacred Heart,' and it is such fun! It is like riding; the doctor said that it would be very healthful for me, and Christian hoped that it might make me grow a little."

As she said these words, the young girl glanced into the mirror in order to see whether her brother's hopes had been realized; for her small stature was her sole anxiety. But this glance was as quick as a flash, for she feared that the severe old maid would make this act of coquetry serve as the text for another sermon.

"You are not my niece, and I am thankful for it," continued the old lady. "I am too old to begin another education; thank goodness, one is quite enough! I have no authority over you, and your conduct is your brother's concern. The advice which I give you is entirely disinterested; your amusements are not such as seem to me proper for a young girl of good birth. It may be possible that it is the fashion today, so I will say no more about it; but there is one thing more serious, upon which I should advise you to reflect. In my youth, a young lady never was allowed to write letters except to her father and mother. Your letters to your cousin d'Artigues are inconsiderate—do not interrupt me—they are inconsiderate, and I should advise you to mend your ways."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil arose, and, as she had found an opportunity to read three sermons in one forenoon, she could not say, like Titus, "I have wasted my morning." She left the room with a majestic step, escorted by her dog and satisfied with herself, bestowing an ironical curtsy on the young girl, which the latter did not think it necessary to return.

"How hateful your aunt is!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Bergenheim to her sister-in-law, when they were alone. "Christian says that I must pay no attention to her, because all women become like her if they never marry. As for myself, I know very well that if I am an old maid I shall try not to hurt others' feelings—I, inconsiderate! When she can think of nothing more to say, she scolds me about my cousin. It is hardly worth while, for what we write about! Alphonse wrote of nothing, in his last letter, but of the partridge he had shot and his hunting costume; he is such a boy! But why do you not say something? You sit there speechless; are you angry with me, too?"

She approached Clemence and was about to seat herself in her lap, when the latter arose to avoid this loving familiarity.

"So you really have beaten Christian," said she, in a listless tone; "are you going for a ride now? Your habit is very becoming."

"Truly? oh! I am so glad!" replied the young girl, planting herself before the glass to look at her pretty figure. She pulled down her waist, adjusted the folds of the skirt of her



dress and arranged her veil, placed her hat on her head with a little more jaunty air, turned three quarters around to get a better view of her costume; in one word, she went through the coquettish movements that all pretty women learn upon entering society. On the whole, she seemed very well pleased with her examination, for she smiled and showed a row of small teeth which were as white as milk.

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"I am sorry now," said she, "that I did not send for a black hat; my hair is so light that gray makes me look ugly. Do you not think so? Why do you not reply, Clemence? One can not get a word out of you to-day; is it because you have your neuralgia?"

"I have a trifle of it," said Madame de Bergenheim, in order to give some pretext for her preoccupation.

"Now, then, you ought to come with us for a ride; the fresh air will do you good. Look how fine the weather is now; we will have a good gallop. Will you? I will help you put on your habit, and in five minutes you will be ready. Listen, I hear them in the yard now. I am going to tell Christian to have your horse saddled; come."

Aline took her sister-in-law by the hand, led her into the next room and opened the window to see what was going on outside, where the cracking of whips and several voices were to be heard. A servant was walking up and down the yard leading a large horse which he had just brought from the stable; the Baron was holding a smaller one, which bore a lady's saddle, while he carefully examined all the buckles. As he heard the window open above his head, he turned and bowed to Clemence with much chivalrous gallantry.

"You still refuse to go with us?" he asked.

"Is Aline going to ride Titania," replied Madame de Bergenheim, making an effort to speak; "I am sure the mare will end by playing her some trick."

The young girl, who had a fancy for Titania because the skittish creature had the attraction of forbidden fruit, nudged her sister with her elbow, and made a little grimace.

"Aline is afraid of nothing," said the Baron; "we will enlist her with the hussars as soon as she leaves the 'Sacred Heart.' Come, Aline."

The young girl kissed the Baroness, gathered up her skirt, and in a few moments was in the yard patting the neck of her dear brown mare.

"Up with you!" said Christian, taking his sister's foot in one hand while he raised her with the other, placing her in the saddle as easily as he would a six-year-old child. Then he mounted his large horse, saluted his wife, and the couple, starting at a trot, soon disappeared down the avenue, which began at the gate of the courtyard.

As soon as they were out of sight, Clemence went to her room, took a shawl from her bed, and went rapidly down a secret stairway which led into the gardens.

CHAPTER IV

THE GALLANT IN THE GARDEN

Madame de Bergenheim's apartments occupied the first floor of the wing on the left side of the house. On the ground floor were the library, a bathroom, and several guest-chambers. The large windows had a modern look, but they were made to harmonize with the rest of the house by means of grayish paint. At the foot of this facade was a lawn surrounded by a wall and orange-trees planted in tubs, forming a sort of English garden, a sanctuary reserved for the mistress of the castle, and which brought her, as a morning tribute, the perfume of its flowers and the coolness of its shade.

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Through the tops of the fir-trees and the tuliptrees, which rose above the group of smaller shrubs, the eye could follow the winding river until it finally disappeared at the extremity of the valley. It was this picturesque view and a more extensive horizon which had induced the Baroness to choose this part of the Gothic manor for her own private apartments.

After crossing the lawn, the young woman opened a gate concealed by shrubs and entered the avenue by the banks of the river. This avenue described a curve around the garden, and led to the principal entrance of the chateau. Night was approaching, the countryside, which had been momentarily disturbed by the storm, had resumed its customary serenity. The leaves of the trees, as often happens after a rain, looked as fresh as a newly varnished picture. The setting sun cast long shadows through the trees, and their interlaced branches looked like a forest of boa-constrictors.

Clemence advanced slowly under this leafy dome, which became darker and more mysterious every moment, with head bent and enveloped in a large cashmere shawl which fell in irregular folds to the ground. Madame de Bergenheim had one of those faces which other women would call not at all remarkable, but which intelligent men ardently admire. At the first glance she seemed hardly pretty; at the second, she attracted involuntary admiration; afterward, it was difficult to keep her out of one's thoughts. Her features, which taken separately might seem irregular, were singularly harmonious, and, like a thin veil which tempers a too dazzling light, softened the whole expression. Her light chestnut hair was arranged about the temples in ingenious waves; while her still darker eyebrows gave, at times, an imposing gravity to her face. The same contrast was to be found in the mouth; the short distance which separated it from the nose would indicate, according to Lavater, unusual energy; but the prominent underlip impregnated her smile with enchanting voluptuousness. Her rather clearcut features, the exceeding brilliancy of her brown eyes, which seemed like diamonds set in jet, would, perhaps, have given to the whole rather too strong a character had not these eyes when veiled given to their dazzling rays a glamour of indescribable softness.

The effect produced by this face might be compared to that of a prism, every facet of which reflects a different color. The ardor burning under this changeable surface, which, through some sudden cause, betrayed its presence, was so deeply hidden, however, that it seemed impossible to fathom it completely. Was she a coquette, or simply a fashionable lady, or a devotee? In one word, was she imbued with the most egotistical pride or the most exalted love? One might suppose anything, but know nothing; one remained undecided and thoughtful, but fascinated, the mind plunged into ecstatic contemplation such as the portrait of Monna Lisa inspires. An observer might have perceived that she had one of those hearts, so finely strung, from which a clever hand might make incomparable harmonies of passion gush; but perhaps he would be mistaken. So many women have their souls only in their eyes!

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Madame de Bergenheim's revery rendered the mysterious and impenetrable veil which usually enveloped her countenance more unfathomable yet. What sentiment made her bend her head and walk slowly as she meditated? Was it the ennui of which she had just complained to her aunt? Was it pure melancholy? The monotonous ripple of the stream, the singing of the birds in the woods, the long golden reflections under the trees, all seemed to unite in filling the soul with sadness; but neither the murmuring water, the singing birds, nor the sun's splendor was paid any attention to by Madame de Bergenheim; she gave them neither a glance nor a sigh. Her meditation was not revery, but thought; not thoughts of the past, but of the present. There was something precise and positive in the rapid, intelligent glance which flashed from her eyes when she raised them; it was as if she had a lucid foresight of an approaching drama.

A moment after she had passed over the wooden bridge which led from the avenue, a man wearing a blouse crossed it and followed her. Hearing the sound of hurried steps behind her, she turned and saw, not two steps from her, the stranger who, during the storm, had vainly tried to attract her attention. There was a moment's silence. The young man stood motionless, trying to catch his breath, which had been hurried, either by emotion or rapid walking. Madame de Bergenheim, with head thrown back and widely opened eyes, looked at him with a more agitated than surprised look.

"It is you," exclaimed he, impulsively, "you whom I had lost and now find again!"

"What madness, Monsieur!" she replied, in a low voice, putting out her hand as if to stop him.

"I beg of you, do not look at me so! Let me gaze at you and assure myself that it is really you—I have dreamed of this moment for so long! Have I not paid dear enough for it? Two months passed away from you—from heaven! Two months of sadness, grief, and unhappiness! But you are pale! Do you suffer, too?"

"Much, at this moment."

"Clemence!"

"Call me Madame, Monsieur de Gerfaut," she interrupted, severely.

"Why should I disobey you? Are you not my lady, my queen?"

He bent his knee as a sign of bondage, and tried to seize her hand, which she immediately withdrew. Madame de Bergenheim seemed to pay very little attention to the words addressed her; her uneasy glances wandered in every direction, into the depths of the bushes and the slightest undulations of the ground. Gerfaut understood this pantomime. He glanced, in his turn, over the place, and soon discovered at some distance a more propitious place for such a conversation as theirs. It was a semicircular



recess in one of the thickets in the park. A rustic seat under a large oak seemed to have been placed there expressly for those who came to seek solitude and speak of love. From there, one could see the approach of danger,

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and, in case of alarm, the wood offered a secure retreat. The young man had had enough experience in gallant strategies to seize the advantage of this position, and wended his steps in that direction while continuing to converse. It may be that instinct which, in a critical situation, makes us follow mechanically an unknown impulse; it may be that the same idea of prudence had also struck her, for Madame de Bergenheim walked beside him.

"If you could understand what I suffered," said he, "when I found that you had left Paris! I could not discover at first where you had gone; some spoke of Corandeuil, others of Italy. I thought, from this hasty departure and the care you took to conceal your abiding-place, that you were fleeing from me. Oh! tell me that I was mistaken; or, if it is true that you wished to separate yourself from me, say that this cruel resolve had left your mind, and that you will pardon me for following you! You will pardon me, will you not? If I trouble or annoy you, lay the blame entirely upon my love, which I can not restrain, and which drives me at times to do the most extravagant things; call it reckless, insane love, if you will; but believe it to be true and devoted!"

Clemence replied to this passionate tirade by simply shaking her head as a child does who hears the buzzing of a wasp and fears its sting; then, as they reached the bench, she said with affected surprise:

"You have made a mistake, this is not your road; you should have gone over the bridge."

There was a little palpable insincerity in these words; for if the road which they had taken did not lead to the bridge, neither did it lead to the chateau, and the mistake, if there was one, was mutual.

"Listen to me, I beg of you," replied the lover, with 'a supplicating glance, "I have so many things to say to you! I beg of you, grant me one moment."

"Afterward, will you obey me?"

"Only a few words, and I will then do all that you wish."

She hesitated a moment; then, her conscience doubtless lulled by this promise, she seated herself and made a gesture for M. de Gerfaut to do likewise. The young man did not make her repeat this invitation, but hypocritically seated himself on the farther end of the seat.

"Now, talk reasonably," she said, in a calm tone. "I suppose that you are on your way to Germany or Switzerland, and as you passed near me you wished to favor me with a call. I ought to be proud of this mark of respect from a man so celebrated as you are, although you are rather hiding your light under this garb. We are not very strict as to

dress in the country, but, really, yours is quite unceremonious. Tell me, where did you find that headdress?"

These last words were spoken with the careless, mocking gayety of a young girl.

Gerfaut smiled, but he took off his cap. Knowing the importance that women attach to little things, and what an irreparable impression an ugly cravat or unblackened boots might produce in the most affecting moments, he did not wish to compromise himself by a ridiculous head-gear. He passed his hand through his hair, pushing it back from his large, broad forehead, and said softly:

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"You know very well that I am not going to Germany or Switzerland, and that Bergenheim is the end of my journey, as it has been its aim."

"Then will you be so good as to tell me what your intention was in taking such a step, and whether you have realized how strange, inconsiderate, and in every way extravagant your conduct is?"

"I have realized it; I know it. You were here, I came because there is a loadstone within you, that is my heart's sole attraction, and I must follow my heart. I came because I wanted to see your beautiful eyes again, to be intoxicated by your sweet voice, because to live away from you is impossible for me; because your presence is as necessary to my happiness as air to my life; because I love you. That is why I came. Is it possible that you do not understand me, that you will not pardon me?"

"I do not wish to believe that you are speaking seriously," said Clemence, with increased severity. "What sort of an idea can you have of me, if you think I will allow such conduct? And then, even if I were foolish enough for that—which I never shall be—to what would it lead? You know perfectly well that it is impossible for you to come to the castle, as you are not acquainted with Monsieur de Bergenheim, and I certainly shall not introduce you to him. My aunt is here, and she would persecute me the whole day long with questions! Mon Dieu! how you disturb me! how unhappy you make me!"

"Your aunt never goes out, so she will not see me, unless I am officially received at the chateau, and then there could be no danger."

"But the servants she brought with her, and mine, who have seen you in her house! I tell you, the whole thing is as perilous as it is crazy, and you will make me die of fright and chagrin."

"If one of those servants should chance to meet me, how could he ever recognize me in this costume? Do not fear, I shall be prudent! I would live in a log cabin, if necessary, for the joy of seeing you occasionally."

Madame de Bergenheim smiled disdainfully.

"That would be quite pastoral," she replied; "but I believe that such disguises are seldom seen now except upon the stage. If this is a scene out of a play, which you wish to rehearse in order to judge its effect, I warn you that it is entirely lost upon me, and that I consider the play itself very ill-timed, improper, and ridiculous. Besides, for a man of talent and a romantic poet you have not exhibited any very great imagination. It is a classical imitation, nothing better. There is something like it in mythology, I believe. Did not Apollo disguise himself as a shepherd?"



Nothing more is to be feared by a lover than a witty woman who does not love or loves but half; he is obliged to wear velvet gloves in all such sentimental controversies; he owes it to himself out of propriety first, out of prudence afterward. For it is not a question of taking part in a conversation for the simple pleasure of brilliant repartee; and while he applies himself carefully to play his part well, he feels that he has been dexterously cut to pieces with a well-sharpened knife.

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Gerfaut indulged in these unpleasant reflections while gazing at Madame de Bergenheim. Seated up on the bench as proudly as a queen upon her throne, with shining eyes, scornful lips, and arms tightly folded under her cashmere shawl, with that haughty gesture familiar to her, the young woman looked as invulnerable under this light wrap as if she had been covered with Ajax's shield, formed, if we can credit Homer, of seven bulls' hides and a sheet of brass.

After gazing at this scornful face for a moment, Gerfaut glanced at his coarse blouse, his leggings, and muddy boots. His usual dainty ways made the details of this costume yet more shocking to him, and he exaggerated this little disaster. He felt degraded and almost ridiculous. The thought took away for a moment his presence of mind; he began mechanically to twirl his hat in his hands, exactly as if he had been Pere Rousselet himself. But instead of being hurtful to him, this awkwardness served him better than the eloquence of Rousseau or the coolness of Richelieu. Was it not a genuine triumph for Clemence to reduce a man of his recognized talent, who was usually anything but timid, to this state of embarrassment? What witty response, what passionate speech could equal the flattery of this poet with bent head and this expression of deep sadness upon his face?

Madame de Bergenheim continued her raillery, but in a softer tone.

"This time, instead of staying in a cabin, the god of poetry has descended to a tavern. Have you not established your general headquarters at La Fauconnerie?"

"How did you know that?"

"By the singular visiting-card that you drew in La Mode. Do I not know your coat-of-arms? An expressive one, as my aunt would say."

At these words, which probably referred to some letters, doubtless read without very much anger, since they were thus recalled, Gerfaut took courage.

"Yes," said he, "I am staying at La Fauconnerie; but I can not stay there any longer, for I think your servants make the tavern their pleasure-ground. I must come to some decision. I have two propositions to submit to you: the first is, that you will allow me to see you occasionally; there are numerous promenades about here; you go out alone, so it would be very easy."

"Let us hear the second," said Clemence, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"If you will not grant my first, I beg of you to persuade your aunt that she is ill and to take her with you to Plombieres or Baden. The season is not very far advanced; there, at least, I should be able to see you."



"Let us end this folly," said the Baroness; "I have listened patiently to you; now, in your turn, listen to me. You will be sensible, will you not? You will leave me and go. You will go to Switzerland, and return to the Montanvert, where you met me for the first time, which I shall always remember, if you, yourself, do not make it painful for me to do so. You will obey me, Octave, will you not? Give me this proof of your esteem and friendship. You know very well that it is impossible for me to grant what you ask; believe me, it is painful to me to be forced to refuse you. So, say farewell to me; you shall see me again next winter in Paris. Adieu!"



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She arose and extended her hand; he took it, but, thinking to profit by the emotion betrayed by Madame de Bergenheim's voice, he exclaimed in a sort of transport:

"No! I will not wait until next winter to see you. I was about to submit to your will; if you repulse me I will consult only myself; if you repulse me, Clemence, I warn you that tomorrow I shall be in your house, seated at your table and admitted to your drawing-room."

"You?"

"I!"

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow."

"And how will you do it, pray?" said she, defiantly.

"That is my secret, Madame," he replied, coldly.

Although her curiosity was greatly aroused, Clemence felt that it would be beneath her to ask any more questions. She replied with an affectation of mocking indifference:

"Since I am to have the pleasure of seeing you tomorrow, I hope you will permit me to leave you today. You know that I am not well, and it is showing me very little attention to allow me to stand here in this wet grass."

She raised her skirt a trifle and extended her foot, showing her slipper, which was really covered with pearly drops of rain. Octave threw himself quickly upon his knees, and, taking a silk handkerchief from his pocket, began to wipe away all traces of the storm. His action was so rapid that Madame de Bergenheim stood for a moment motionless and speechless, but when she felt her foot imprisoned in the hand of the man who had just declared war against her, her surprise gave place to a mingled feeling of impatience and anger. She drew her foot back with a sudden movement, but unfortunately the foot went one way and the slipper another. A fencing-master, who sees his foil carried ten steps away from him by a back stroke, could not feel more astonishment than that felt by Madame de Bergenheim. Her first movement was to place her foot, so singularly undressed, upon the ground; an instinctive horror of the damp, muddy walk made her draw it quickly back. She stood thus with one foot lifted; the movement which she had started to make threw her off her balance and as she was about to fall she extended her hand to find some support. This support proved to be Octave's head, for he still remained upon his knees. With the usual presumption of lovers, he believed that he had the right to give her the assistance which she seemed to ask for, and passed his arm about the slender waist which was bent toward him.



Clemence drew herself up at once, and with frowning brow regained her coolness, standing upright upon one foot, like Cupid in the painting by Gerard; like him, also, she seemed about to fly away, there was so much airy lightness in her improvised attitude.

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Many puerile incidents and ridiculous events occur in life, which it would render impossible for the most imperturbable of mandarins to struggle against in order to preserve his gravity. When Louis XIV, this king so expert in courtly ways, dressed his hair alone behind his curtains before presenting himself to the eyes of his courtiers, he feared that this disarray of costume might compromise even his royal majesty. So, upon such authority, if one looks upon a complete head of hair as indispensable to the dignity of manhood, the same reasoning should exist for the covering of one's feet. In less than a second, Madame de Bergenheim comprehended that in such circumstances prudish airs would fail of their effect. Meanwhile, the agreeable side of her position operated within her; she felt unable to keep up the show of anger that she had wished to assume. The involuntary smile upon her lips smoothed her forehead as a ray of sun dissipates a cloud. Thus, disposed to clemency by reflection or fascination, it was in a very sweet and coaxing voice that she said: "Octave, give me my slipper." Gerfaut gazed at the lovely face bent toward him with an expression of childish entreaty, then he glanced with an irresolute air at the trophy which he held in his hand. This slipper, which was as small as Cinderella's, was not green, but gray, the lining was of rose-colored silk, and the whole was so pretty, coquettish, and dainty that it seemed impossible its owner could be vexed with him if he examined it closely. "I will give it back to you," said he, at last, "on condition that you will allow me to put it on for you."

"As to that, certainly not," said she, in a sharp tone; "I should much prefer to leave it with you and return home as I am."

Gerfaut shook his head and smiled incredulously.

"Think of your delicate lungs and of this terrible mud?"

Clemence drew her foot suddenly back under her skirt, concealing it entirely from the sight of the young man, who gazed at it more than she thought proper. Then she exclaimed, with the obstinacy of a spoiled child:

"Very well! I will return hopping on one foot; I could hop very well when I was young, I should be able to do so now."

To give more weight to this observation, she took two little jumps with a grace and sprightliness worthy of Mademoiselle Taglioni.

Octave arose.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing you waltz," said he; "but I admit that I shall be pleased to witness a new dance, and one executed for me alone."

As he said these words, he pretended to conceal the innocent object of this dispute in his blouse. The pretty dancer saw by this that a compromise would be necessary.

Recourse to concessions is often as fatal to women as to kings; but what can one do when every other exit is closed? Obligated by absolute necessity to accept the conditions imposed upon her, Clemence wished at least to cover this defeat with sufficient dignity, and escape from an awkward position with the honors of war.

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“Get down upon your knees, then,” she said, haughtily, “and put on my slipper, since you exact it, and let this end this ridiculous scene. I think you should be too proud to regard a maid’s privilege as a favor.”

“As a favor which a king would envy,” replied Gerfaut, in a voice as tender as hers had been disdainful. He put one knee on the ground, placed the little slipper upon the other and seemed to await his enemy’s pleasure. But the latter found a new subject for complaint in the pedestal offered her, for she said with increased severity:

“On the ground, Monsieur; and let that end it.”

He obeyed, without a reply, after giving her a reproachful glance by which she was as much moved as by his silent obedience. She put out her foot with a more gracious air, and thrust it into the slipper. To be a correct historian, we must admit that this time she left it in the hands which softly pressed it longer than was strictly necessary. When Octave had fastened it with skill but with no haste, he bent his head and pressed his lips to the openwork stocking, through which he could catch a glimpse of white, satiny skin.

“My husband!” exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, as she heard the clatter of horses’ hoofs at the end of the avenue; and without adding a word she fled rapidly toward the chateau. Gerfaut arose from his position no less rapidly and darted into the woods. A rustling of branches which he heard a few steps from him made him uneasy at first, for he feared that an invisible witness had been present at this imprudent interview; but he was soon reassured by the silence which reigned about him.

After the Baron and his sister had passed, he crossed the avenue and soon disappeared over the winding road on the other side of the bridge.

CHAPTER V

ART AND MUSIC

A league below the castle of Bergenheim, the village of La Fauconnerie was situated, at the junction of several valleys the principal of which, by means of an unfrequented road, opened communications between Lorraine and upper Alsatia. This position had been one of some importance in the Middle Ages, at the time when the Vosges were beset with partisans from the two countries, always ready to renew border hostilities, the everlasting plague of all frontiers. Upon a cliff overlooking the village were situated the ruins which had given the village its name; it owed it to the birds of prey [falcons, in French: ‘faucons’], the habitual guests of the perpendicular rocks. To render proper justice to whom it belongs, we should add that the proprietors of La Fauconnerie had made it a point at all times to justify this appellation by customs more warlike than hospitable; but for some time the souvenirs of their feudal prowess had slept with their



race under the ruins of the manor; the chateau had fallen without the hamlet extending over its ruins; from a bourg of some importance La Fauconnerie had come down to a small village, and had nothing remarkable about it but the melancholy ruins of the chateau.

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It would be impossible to imagine anything more miserably prosaic than the houses that bordered the road, in regular order; their one story with its thatched roof blackened by rain; the sorry garden surrounded by a little low wall and presenting as vegetables patches of cabbage and a few rows of beans, gave an idea of the poverty of its inhabitants. Save the church, which the Bishop of St.-Die had caused to be built, and the manse that had naturally shared this fortunate privilege, only one house rose above the condition of a thatched cottage; this was the tavern called 'La Femme-sans-Tete', and kept by Madame Gobillot, an energetic woman, who did not suggest in the least the name of her establishment, "The Headless Woman."

A large sign shared with the inevitable bunch of juniper, the honor of decorating the entrance and justified an appellation one might have regarded as disrespectful to the fair sex. The original design had been repainted in dazzling colors by the artist charged with restoring the church. This alliance of the profane with the sacred had, it is true, scandalized the parish priest, but he did not dare say a word too much, as Madame Gobillot was one of his most important parishioners. A woman in a rose-colored dress and large panniers, standing upon very high-heeled shoes, displayed upon this sign the rejuvenated costume of 1750; an enormous green fan, which she held in her hand, entirely concealed her face, and it was through this caprice of the painter that the tavern came to have the name it bore.

At the right of this original figure was painted, in a very appetizing manner, a pie out of whose crust peeped a trio of woodcocks' heads. A little farther, upon a bed of watercresses, floated a sort of marine monster, carp or sturgeon, trout or crocodile. The left of the sign was none the less tempting; it represented a roast chicken lying upon its back with its head under its wing, and raising its mutilated legs in the air with a piteous look; it had for its companion a cluster of crabs, of a little too fine a red to have been freshly caught. The whole was interspersed with bottles and glasses brimful of wine. There were stone jugs at each extremity, the sergeants of the rear-rank of this gastronomic platoon, whose corks had blown out and were still flying in space, while a bubbling white foam issued from their necks and fell majestically over their sides after describing a long parabola. A misleading sign, indeed!

A remorseful conscience, or a desire to protect herself from all reproach of mendacity on the part of the customers, had made the owner of the inn place a wire cupboard upon the sill of one of the windows near the door; in which receptacle were some eggs on a plate, a bit of bread with which David might have loaded his sling, a white glass bottle filled with a liquid of some color intended to represent kirsch, but which was in reality only water. This array gave a much more correct idea of the resources of the establishment and formed a menu like an anchorite's repast, and even this it was difficult for the kitchen's resources to maintain.

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A carriage-gate led into the yard and to the stables, cart-drivers being the principal habitues of the place; another entrance, the one which was crowned with the fantastic sign, was flanked by two stone seats and opened directly into the kitchen, which also served as parlor for the guests. A fireplace with an enormous mantel, under which a whole family might warm themselves, occupied the middle of one side of the room. There was a large oven in one corner which opened its huge mouth, the door partly hiding the shovels and tongs employed in its service. Two or three thoroughly smoked hams, suspended from the beams, announced that there was no fear of a famine before the gastronomic massacres of Middlemas. Opposite the window, a large, polished oak dresser displayed an array of large flowered plates and little octagon-shaped glasses. A huge kitchen kettle and some wooden chairs completed the furniture of the room.

From the kitchen one passed into another room, where a permanent table surrounded by benches occupied its entire length. The wall paper, once green, was now a dirty gray; it was embellished by half a dozen black frames representing the story of Prince Poniatowski, who shares the honor of decorating village inns with Paul and Virginia and Wilhelm Tell. On the upper floor—for this aristocratic dwelling had a second story—several sleeping-rooms opened upon a long corridor, at the end of which was a room with two beds in it. This room was very neat and clean, and was destined for any distinguished guests whose unlucky star led them into this deserted country.

That evening the inn presented an unaccustomed lively appearance; the long seats, each side of the door, were occupied by rustics stripping hemp, by some village lads, and three or four cart-drivers smoking short pipes as black as coal. They were listening to two girls who were singing in a most mournful way a song well known to all in this country:

“Au chateau de Belfort
Sont trois jolies filles, *etc.*”

The light from the hearth, shining through the open door, left this group in the shadow and concentrated its rays upon a few faces in the interior of the kitchen. First, there was Madame Gobillot in person, wearing a long white apron, her head covered with an immense cap. She went from oven to dresser, and from dresser to fireplace with a very important air. A fat little servant disappeared frequently through the dining-room door, where she seemed to be laying the cover for a feast. With that particular dexterity of country girls, she made three trips to carry two plates, and puffed like a porpoise at her work, while the look of frightened amazement showed upon her face that every fibre of her intelligence was under unaccustomed tension. Before the fire, and upon the range, three or four stew-pans were bubbling. A plump chicken was turning on the spit, or, rather, the spit and its victim were turned by a bright-looking boy of about a dozen years, who with one hand turned the handle and with the other, armed with a large cooking-ladle, basted the roast.

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But the two principal persons in this picture were a young country girl and a young man seated opposite her, who seemed busily engaged in making her portrait. One would easily recognize, from the airs and elegance of the young woman, that she was the daughter of the house, Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot, the one whose passion for fashion-plates had excited Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's anger. She sat as straight and rigid upon her stool as a Prussian corporal carrying arms, and maintained an excessively gracious smile upon her lips, while she made her bust more prominent by drawing back her shoulders as far as she could.

The young painter, on the contrary, was seated with artistic abandon, balancing himself upon a two-legged chair with his heels resting against the mantel; he was dressed in a black velvet coat, and a very small Tam O'Shanter cap of the same material covered the right side of his head, allowing a luxuriant crop of brown hair to be seen upon the other side. This head-dress, accompanied by long moustaches and a pointed beard covering only his chin, gave the stranger's face the mediaeval look he probably desired. This travelling artist was sketching in an album placed upon his knees, with a freedom which indicated perfect confidence in his own talents. A cigar, skilfully held in one corner of his mouth, did not prevent him from warbling between each puff some snatches of Italian airs of which he seemed to possess a complete repertoire. In spite of this triple occupation he sustained a conversation with the ease of a man who, like Caesar, could have dictated to three secretaries at once if necessary.

"Dell' Assiria, ai semidei
Aspirar—"

"I have already asked you not to purse up your mouth so, Mademoiselle Reine; it gives you a Watteau air radically bourgeois."

"What sort of air does it give me?" she asked, anxiously.

"A Watteau, Regence, Pompadour air. You have a large mouth, and we will leave it natural, if you please."

"I have a large mouth!" exclaimed Reine, blushing with anger; "how polite you are!"

And she pinched up her lips until she reduced them to nearly the size of Montmorency cherries.

"Stop this vulgar way of judging of art, queen of my heart. Learn that there is nothing more appetizing than a large mouth. I do not care for rosebud mouths!"

"If it is the fashion!" murmured the young girl, in a pleased tone, as she spread out horizontally her vermillion lips, which might have extended from ear to ear, not unlike—if

we can credit that slanderer, Bussy-Rabutin-the amorous smile of Mademoiselle de la Valliere.

“Why did you not let me put on my gold necklace?

“That would have given my portrait a smarter look. Sophie Mitoux had hers painted with a coral comb and earrings. How shabby this style is!”

“I beg of you, my good Reine, let me follow my own fancy; an artist is a being of inspiration and spontaneity. Meanwhile, you make your bust too prominent; there is no necessity for you to look as if you had swallowed a whale. L’art n’est pas fait pour toi, tu n’en as pas besoin. Upon my word, you have a most astonishing bust; a genuine Rubens.”

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Madame Gobillot was an austere woman, though an innkeeper, and watched over her daughter with particular care, lest any ill-sounding or insidious expression should reach her child's ear. Considering the company which frequented the house, the task was not easy. So she was shocked at the young man's last words, and although she did not quite understand his meaning, for that very reason she thought she scented a concealed poison more dangerous for Mademoiselle Reine than the awful words used by the drivers. She dared not, however, show her displeasure to a customer, and one who seemed disposed to spend money freely; and, as usual in such circumstances, she vented her displeasure upon the persons immediately under her charge.

"Hurry now, Catherine! Will you never finish setting the table? I told you before to put on the Britannia; these gentlemen are used to eating with silver. Listen to me when I am talking to you. Who washed these glasses? What a shame! You are as afraid of water as a mad-dog. And you! what are you staring at that chicken for, instead of basting it? If you let it burn you shall go to bed without any supper. If it is not provoking!" she continued, in a scolding tone, visiting her stewpans one after another, "everything is dried up; a fillet that was as tender as it could be will be scorched! This is the third time that I have diluted the gravy. Catherine! bring me a dish. Now, then, make haste."

"One thing is certain," interrupted the artist, "that Gerfaut is making a fool of me. I do not see what can have become of him. Tell me, Madame Gobillot, are you certain that an amateur of art and the picturesque, travelling at this hour, would not be eaten by wolves or plundered by robbers in these mountains?"

"Our mountains are safe, Monsieur," replied the landlady, with offended dignity; "except for the pedler who was assassinated six months ago and whose body was found in the Combe-aux-Renards—"

"And the driver who was stopped three weeks ago in the Fosse," added Mademoiselle Reine; "the thieves did not quite kill him, but he is still in the hospital at Remiremont."

"Oh! that is enough to make one's hair stand on end! This is worse than the forest of Bondy! Truly, if I knew what direction my friend took this morning, I would follow him with my pistols."

"Here is Fritz," said Madame Gobillot. "He met a stranger in the woods who gave him ten sous for telling him the way to Bergenheim. From his description, it seems that it must be the gentleman you speak of. Tell us about it, Fritz."

The child related in his Alsatian patois his meeting of the afternoon, and the artist was convinced that it was Gerfaut he had met.

“He must be wandering in the valley,” said he, “dreaming about our play. But did you not say something about Bergenheim? Is there a village near here by that name?”

“There is a chateau of that name, Monsieur, and it is about a league from here as you go up the river.”

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"And does this chateau happen to belong to the Baron de Bergenheim—a large, blond, good-looking fellow, with rather reddish moustache?"

"That's the picture of its owner, only that the Baron does not wear a moustache now, not since he left the service. Do you know him, Monsieur?"

"Yes, I know him! Speaking of service, I once rendered him one which was of some account. Is he at the castle?"

"Yes, Monsieur, and his lady also."

"Ah! his wife, too. She was a Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, of Provence. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty," said Mademoiselle Gobillot, pursing up her lips, "that depends upon tastes. If a person likes a face as white as a ghost, she is. And, then, she is so thin! It certainly can not be very difficult to have a slender waist when one is as thin as that."

"Not everybody can have rosy cheeks and a form like an enchantress," said the painter, in a low voice, as he looked at his model in a seductive manner.

"There are some people who think that Monsieur's sister is prettier than Madame," observed Madame Gobillot.

"O mother! how can you say that?" exclaimed Reine with a disdainful air.

"Mademoiselle Aline! A child of fifteen! She certainly is not wanting in color; her hair is such a blond, such a red, rather! It looks as if it were on fire."

"Do not say anything against red hair, I beg of you," said the artist, "it is an eminently artistic shade, which is very popular."

"With some it may be so, but with Christians! It seems to me that black hair—"

"When it is long and glossy like yours, it is wonderful," said the young man, darting another killing glance. "Madame Gobillot, would you mind closing that door? One can not hear one's self think here. I am a little critical, so far as music is concerned, and you have two sopranos outside who deafen me with their shrieks."

"It is Marguerite Mottet and her sister. Since our cure has taken to teaching them, they bore us to death, coming here and singing their fine songs. One of these days I shall notify them to leave."

As she said these words, Madame Gobillot went to close the door in order to please her guest; as soon as her back was turned, the latter leaned forward with the boldness of a Lovelace and imprinted a very loving kiss upon the rosy cheek of Mademoiselle Reine, who never thought of drawing back until the offence was committed.

The sole witness to this incident was the little kitchen drudge, whose blue eyes had been fastened upon the artist's moustache and beard for some time. They seemed to plunge him into a deep admiration. But at this unexpected event his amazement was so complete that he dropped his spoon into the ashes.

"Eh! mein herr, do you wish to go to bed without your supper, as has been promised you?" said the young man, while the beautiful Reine was trying to recover her countenance. "Now, then, sing us a little song instead of staring at me as if I were a giraffe. Your little cook has a nice voice, Madame Gobillot. Now, then, mein herr, give us a little German lied. I will give you six kreutzers if you sing in tune, and a flogging if you grate upon my ears."

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He arose and put his album under his arm.

“And my portrait?” exclaimed the young girl, whose cheek was still burning from the kiss she had just received.

The painter drew near her, smiling, and said in a mysterious tone:

“When I make a portrait of a pretty person like you, I never finish it the first day. If you will give me another sitting in the morning before your mother arises I promise to finish this sketch in a way that will not be displeasing to you.”

Mademoiselle Reine saw that her mother was watching her, and walked away with no reply save a glance which was not discouraging.

“Now, then! You droll little fellow!” exclaimed the artist, as he whirled on one foot; “triple time; one, two, begin.”

The child burst into an Alsatian song in a high, ringing voice.

“Wait a moment! What devilish key are you singing that in? La, la, la, la; mi, in E major, key of four sharps. By Jove, my little man! here is a fellow who sings B’s and C’s away up in the clouds; an E sharp, too!” he continued, with astonishment, while the singer made a hold upon the keynote an octave higher in a voice as clear as a crystal.

The artist threw into the fire the cigar which he had just lighted, and began pacing the kitchen floor, paying no more attention to Mademoiselle Reine, who felt a little piqued at seeing herself neglected for a kitchen drudge.

“A rare voice,” said he, as he took a great stride; “per Bacco, a very rare voice. Added to that, he sings very deep; two octaves and a half, a clear, ringing tone, the two registers are well united. He would make an admirable ‘primo musico’. And the little fellow has a pretty face, too. After supper I will make him wash his face, and I will sketch it. I am sure that in less than a year’s study, he could make his debut with the greatest success. By Jove! I have an idea! Why does not that Gerfaut return? Now, then, he would do very well for ‘Pippo’ in La Gazza, or for Gemma in Wilhelm Tell. But we must have a role for him to make his debut in. What subject could we take properly to introduce a child’s part? Why does not that Gerfaut come? A child, girl or boy; a boy part would be better. ‘Daniel,’ of course; viva ‘Daniel!’ ‘The Chaste Suzannah,’ opera in three acts. Madame Begrand would be fine as Suzannah. By Jove! if Meyerbeer would only take charge of the score! That falls to him by right as a compatriot. Then, that would give him an opportunity to break lances with Mehul and Rossini. If that fool of a Gerfaut would only come! Let us see what would be the three characters: Soprano, Suzannah; contralto, David; the old men, two basses; as for the tenor, he would be, of course, Suzannah’s husband. There would be a superb entrance for him upon his

return from the army, 'cavatina guerriera con cori'. Oh! that terrible Gerfaut! the wolves must have devoured him. If he were here, we would knock off the thing between our fruit and cheese."

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Just at that moment the door opened suddenly. "Is supper ready?" asked a deep voice.

"Eh, here he is, the dear friend!

"O surprise extreme!
Grand Dieu! c'est lui-meme—

alive and in the flesh."

"And hungry," said Gerfaut, as he dropped into a chair near the fire.

"Would you like to compose an opera in three acts, *The Chaste Suzannah*, music by Meyerbeer?"

"I should like some supper first. Madame Gobillot, I beseech you, give me something to eat. Thanks to your mountain air, I am almost starved."

"But, Monsieur, we have been waiting two hours for you," retorted the landlady, as she made each stewpan dance in succession.

"That is a fact," said the artist; "let us go into the dining-room, then.

"*Gia la mensa a preparata.*"

"While supping, I will explain my plans to you. I have just found a Daniel in the ashes—"

"My dear Marillac, drop your Daniel and Suzannah," replied Gerfaut, as he sat down to the table; "I have something much more important to talk to you about."

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing!
Mania for fearing that she may be compromised
Material in you to make one of Cooper's redskins
Recourse to concessions is often as fatal to women as to kings
Those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing
Trying to conceal by a smile (a blush)
When one speaks of the devil he appears
Wiped his nose behind his hat, like a well-bred orator

GERFAUT

By Charles de Bernard

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VI

GERFAUT'S STORY

While the two friends are devouring to the very last morsel the feast prepared for them by Madame Gobillot, it may not be out of place to explain in a few words the nature of the bonds that united these two men.

The Vicomte de Gerfaut was one of those talented beings who are the veritable champions of an age when the lightest pen weighs more in the social balance than our ancestors' heaviest sword. He was born in the south of France, of one of those old families whose fortune had diminished each generation, their name finally being almost all that they had left. After making many sacrifices to give their son an education worthy of his birth, his parents did not live to enjoy the fruits of their efforts, and Gerfaut became an orphan at the time when he had just finished his law studies. He then abandoned the career of which his father had dreamed for him, and the possibilities of a red gown bordered with ermine. A mobile and highly colored imagination, a passionate love for the arts, and, more than all, some intimacies contracted with men of letters, decided his vocation and launched him into literature.

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The ardent young man, without a murmur or any misgivings, drank to the very dregs the cup poured out to neophytes in the harsh career of letters by editors, theatrical managers, and publishers. With some, this course ends in suicide, but it only cost Gerfaut a portion of his slender patrimony; he bore this loss like a man who feels that he is strong enough to repair it. When his plans were once made, he followed them up with indefatigable perseverance, and became a striking example of the irresistible power of intelligence united to will-power. Reputation, for him, lay in the unknown depths of an arid and rocky soil; he was obliged, in order to reach it, to dig a sort of artesian well. Gerfaut accepted this heroic labor; he worked day and night for several years, his forehead, metaphorically, bathed in a painful perspiration alleviated only by hopes far away. At last the untiring worker's drill struck the underground spring over which so many noble ones breathlessly bend, although their thirst is never quenched. At this victorious stroke, glory burst forth, falling in luminous sparks, making this new name—his name—flash with a brilliancy too dearly paid for not to be lasting.

At the time of which we speak, Octave had conquered every obstacle in the literary field. With a versatility of talent which sometimes recalled Voltaire's "proteanism," he attacked in succession the most difficult styles. Besides their poetic value, his dramas had this positive merit, the highest in the theatre world they were money-makers; so the managers greeted him with due respect, while collaborators swarmed about him. The journals paid for his articles in their weight in gold; reviews snatched every line of his yet unfinished novels; his works were illustrated by Porret and Tony Johannot—the masters of the day—and shone resplendent behind the glass cases in the Orleans gallery. Gerfaut had at last made a place for himself among that baker's dozen of writers who call themselves, and justly, too, the field-m Marshals of French literature, of which Chateaubriand was then commander-in-chief.

What was it that had brought such a person a hundred leagues from the opera balcony, to put on a pretty woman's slipper? Was the fair lady one of those caprices, so frequent and fleeting in an artist's thoughts, or had she given birth to one of those sentiments that end by absorbing the rest of one's life?

The young man seated opposite Gerfaut was, physically and morally, as complete a contrast to him as one could possibly imagine. He was one of the kind very much in request in fashionable society. There is not a person who has not met one of these worthy fellows, destined to make good officers, perfect merchants, and very satisfactory lawyers, but who, unfortunately, have been seized with a mania for notoriety. Ordinarily they think of it on account of somebody else's talent. This one is brother to a poet, another son-in-law to a historian; they conclude that they also have a right to be poet and historian in their turn. Thomas Corneille is their model; but we must admit that very few of our writers reach the rank attained by Corneille the younger.

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Marillac was train-bearer to Gerfaut, and was rewarded for this bondage by a few bribes of collaboration, crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. They had been close friends since they both entered the law school, where they were companions in folly rather than in study. Marillac also had thrown himself into the arena of literature; then, different fortunes having greeted the two friends' efforts, he had descended little by little from the role of a rival to that of an inferior. Marillac was an artist, talent accepted, from the tip of his toes to the sole of his boots, which he wished to lengthen by pointed toes out of respect for the Middle Ages; for he excelled above all things in his manner of dressing, and possessed, among other intellectual merits, the longest moustache in literature.

If he had not art in his brain, to make up for it he always had its name at his tongue's end. Vaudeville writing or painting, poetry or music, he dabbled in all these, like those horses sold as good for both riding and driving, which are as bad in the saddle as in front of a tilbury. He signed himself "Marillac, man of letters"; meanwhile, aside from his profound disdain for the bourgeois, whom he called vulgar, and for the French Academy, to which he had sworn never to belong, one could reproach him with nothing. His penchant for the picturesque in expression was not always, it is true, in the most excellent taste, but, in spite of these little oddities, his unfortunate passion for art, and his affection for the Middle Ages, he was a brave, worthy, and happy fellow, full of good qualities, very much devoted to his friends, above all to Gerfaut. One could, therefore, pardon him for being a pseudo-artist.

"Will your story be a long one?" said he to the playwright, when Catherine had conducted them after supper to the double-bedded room, where they were to pass the night.

"Long or short, what does it matter, since you must listen to it?"

"Because, first, I would make some grog and fill my pipe; otherwise, I would content myself with a cigar."

"Take your pipe and make your grog."

"Here!" said the artist, running after Catherine, "don't rush downstairs so. You are wanted. Fear nothing, interesting maid; you are safe with us; but bring us a couple of glasses, brandy, sugar, a bowl, and some hot water."

"They want some hot water," cried the servant, rushing into the kitchen with a frightened look; "can they be ill at this hour?"

"Give the gentlemen what they want, you little simpleton!" replied Mademoiselle Reine; "they probably want to concoct some of their Paris drinks."



When all the articles necessary for the grog were on the table, Marillac drew up an old armchair, took another chair to stretch his legs upon, replaced his cap with a handkerchief artistically knotted about his head, his boots with a pair of slippers, and, finally, lighted his pipe.

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"Now," said he, as he seated himself, "I will listen without moving an eyelid should your story last, like the creation, six days and nights."

Gerfaut took two or three turns about the room with the air of an orator who is seeking for a beginning to a speech.

"You know," said he, "that Fate has more or less influence over our lives, according to the condition of mind in which we happen to be. In order that you may understand the importance of the adventure I am about relating to you, it will be necessary for me to picture the state of mind which I was in at the time it happened; this will be a sort of philosophical and psychological preamble."

"Thunder!" interrupted Marillac, "if I had known that, I would have ordered a second bowl."

"You will remember," continued Gerfaut, paying no attention to this pleasantry, "the rather bad attack of spleen which I had a little over a year ago?"

"Before your trip to Switzerland?"

"Exactly."

"If I remember right," said the artist, "you were strangely cross and whimsical at the time. Was it not just after the failure of our drama at the Porte Saint-Martin?"

"You might also add of our play at the Gymnase."

"I wash my hands of that. You know very well that it only went as far as the second act, and I did not write one word in the first."

"And hardly one in the second. However, I take the catastrophe upon my shoulders; that made two perfect failures in that d——d month of August."

"Two failures that were hard to swallow," replied Marillac, "We can say, for our consolation, that there never were more infamous conspiracies against us, above all, than at the Gymnase. My ears ring with the hisses yet! I could see, from our box, a little villain in a dress coat, in one corner of the pit, who gave the signal with a whistle as large as a horse-pistol. How I would have liked to cram it down his throat!" As he said these words, he brought his fist down upon the table, and made the glasses and candles dance 'upon it.

"Conspiracy or not, this time they judged the play aright. I believe it would be impossible to imagine two worse plays; but, as Brid Oison says, 'These are things that one admits only to himself'; it is always disagreeable to be informed of one's stupidity by an ignorant audience that shouts after you like a pack of hounds after a hare. In spite of



my pretension of being the least susceptible regarding an author's vanity of all the writers in Paris, it is perfectly impossible to be indifferent to such a thing—a hiss is a hiss. However, vanity aside, there was a question of money which, as I have a bad habit of spending regularly my capital as well as my income, was not without its importance. It meant, according to my calculation, some sixty thousand francs cut off from my resources, and my trip to the East was indefinitely postponed.

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"They say, with truth, that misfortunes never come singly. You know Melanie, whom I prevented from making her debut at the Vaudeville? By taking her away from all society, lodging her in a comfortable manner and obliging her to work, I rendered her a valuable service. She was a good girl, and, aside from her love for the theatre and a certain indolence that was not without charm, I did not find any fault in her and grew more attached to her every day. Sometimes after spending long hours with her, a fancy for a retired life and domestic happiness would seize me. Gentlemen with brains are privileged to commit foolish acts at times, and I really do not know what I might have ended in doing, had I not been preserved from the danger in an unexpected manner.

"One evening, when I arrived at Melanie's, I found the bird had flown. That great ninny of a Ferussac, whom I never had suspected, and had introduced to her myself, had turned her head by making capital out of her love for the stage. As he was about to leave for Belgium, he persuaded her to go there and dethrone Mademoiselle Prevost. I have since learned that a Brussels banker revenged me by taking this Helene of the stage away from Ferussac. Now she is launched and can fly with her own wings upon the great highway of bravos, flowers, guineas—"

"And wreck and ruin," added Marillac. "Here's to her health!"

"This triple disappointment of pride, money, and heart did not cause, I hope you will believe me, the deep state of melancholy into which I soon fell; but the malady manifested itself upon this occasion, for it had been lurking about me for a long time, as the dormant pain of a wound is aroused if one pours a caustic upon its surface.

"There is some dominant power in each individual which is developed at the expense of the other faculties, above all when the profession one chooses suits his nature. The vital powers thus condensed manifest themselves externally, and gush out with an abundance which would become impossible if all the faculties were used alike, and if life filtered away, so to speak. To avoid such destruction, and concentrate life upon one point, in order to increase the action, is the price of talent and individuality. Among athletes, the forehead contracts according as the chest enlarges; with men of thought, it is the brain which causes the other organs to suffer, insatiable vampire, exhausting at times the last drop of blood in the body which serves as its victim. This vampire was my torturer.

"For ten years I had crowded romance upon poetry, vaudeville upon drama, literary criticism upon leader; I proved, through my own self, in a physical way, the phenomena of the absorption of the senses by intelligence. Many times, after several nights of hard work, the chords of my mind being too violently stretched, they relaxed and gave only indistinct harmony. Then, if I happened to resist this lassitude of nature demanding

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repose, I felt the pressure of my will exhausting the sources at the very depths of my being. It seemed to me that I dug out my ideas from the bottom of a mine, instead of gathering them upon the surface of the brain. The more material organs came to the rescue of their failing chief. The blood from my heart rushed to my head to revive it; the muscles of my limbs communicated to the fibres of the brain their galvanic tension. Nerves turned into imagination, flesh into life. Nothing has developed my materialistic beliefs like this decarnation of which I had such a sensible, or rather visible perception.

"I destroyed my health with these psychological experiments, and the abuse of work perhaps shortened my life. When I was thirty years old my face was wrinkled, my cheeks were pallid, and my heart blighted and empty. For what result, grand Dieu! For a fleeting and fruitless renown!

"The failure of my two plays warned me that others judged me as I judged myself. I recalled to mind the Archbishop of Granada, and I thought I could hear Gil Blas predicting the failure of my works. We can not dismiss the public as we can our secretary; meanwhile, I surrendered to a too severe justice in order to decline others' opinions. A horrible thought suddenly came into my mind; my artistic life was ended, I was a worn-out man; in one word, to picture my situation in a trivial but correct manner, I had reached the end of my rope.

"I could not express to you the discouragement that I felt at this conviction. Melanie's infidelity was the crowning touch. It was not my heart, but my vanity which had been rendered more irritable by recent disappointments. This, then, was the end of all my ambitious dreams! I had not enough mind left, at thirty years of age, to write a vaudeville or to be loved by a grisette!

"One day Doctor Labanchie came to see me.

"'What are you doing there' said he, as he saw me seated at my desk.

"'Doctor,' said I, reaching out my hand to him, 'I believe that I am a little feverish.'

"'Your pulse is a little rapid,' said he, after making careful examination, 'but your fever is more of imagination than of blood.'

"I explained to him my condition, which was now becoming almost unendurable. Without believing in medicine very much, I had confidence in him and knew him to be a man who would give good advice.

"'You work too much,' said he, shaking his head. 'Your brain is put to too strong a tension. This is a warning nature gives you, and you will make a mistake if you do not follow it. When you are sleepy, go to bed; when you are tired, you must have rest. It is



rest for your brain that you now need. Go into the country, confine yourself to a regular and healthy diet: vegetables, white meat, milk in the morning, a very little wine, but, above all things, no coffee. Take moderate exercise, hunt—and avoid all irritating thoughts; read the ‘Musée des familles’ or the ‘Magasin Pittoresque’. This regime will have the effect of a soothing poultice upon your brain, and before the end of six months you will be in your normal condition again.’

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“Six months!’ I exclaimed. ‘You wretch of a doctor, tell me, then, to let my beard and nails grow like Nebuchadnezzar. Six months! You do not know how I detest the country, partridges, rabbits and all. For heaven’s sake, find some other remedy for me.’

“There is homoeopathy,’ said he, smiling. ‘Hahnemann is quite the fashion now.’

“Let us have homoeopathy!’

“You know the principles of the system: ‘Similia similibus!’ If you have fever, redouble it; if you have smallpox, be inoculated with a triple dose. So far as you are concerned, you are a little used up and ‘blase’, as we all are in this Babylon of ours; have recourse, then, as a remedy, to the very excesses which have brought you into this state. Homoeopathize yourself morally. It may cure you, it may kill you; I wash my hands of it.’

“The doctor was joking, I said to myself after he had left. Does he think that passions are like the Wandering Jew’s five sous, that there is nothing to do but to put your hand in your pocket and take them out at your convenience when necessary. However, this idea, strange as it seemed, struck me forcibly. I decided to try it.

“The next day at seven o’clock in the evening, I was rolling along the road to Lyons. Eight days later, I was rowing in a boat on Lake Geneva. For a long time I had wanted to go to Switzerland, and it seemed as if I could not have chosen a better time. I hoped that the fresh mountain air and the soft pure breezes from the lakes would communicate some of their calm serenity to my heart and brain.

“There is something in Parisian life, I do not know what, so exclusive and hardening, that it ends by making one irresponsive to sensations of a more simple order.

“‘My kingdom for the gutter in the Rue du Bac!’ I exclaimed with Madame de Stael from the height of the Coppet terrace. The spectacle of nature interests only contemplative and religious minds powerfully. Mine was neither the one nor the other. My habits of analysis and observation make me find more attraction in a characteristic face than in a magnificent landscape; I prefer the exercising of thought to the careless gratification of ecstasy, the study of flesh and soul to earthly horizons, of human passions to a perfectly pure atmosphere.

“I met at Geneva an Englishman, who was as morose as myself. We vented our spleen in common and were both bored together. We travelled thus through the Oberland and the best part of Valais; we were often rolled up in our travelling robes in the depths of the carriage, and fast asleep when the most beautiful points of interest were in sight.

“From Valais we went to Mont-Blanc, and one night we arrived at Chamounix—”

“Did you see any idiots in Valais?” suddenly interrupted Marillac, as he filled his pipe the second time.

“Several, and they were all horrible.”

“Do you not think we might compose something with an idiot in it? It might be rather taking.”

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"It would not equal Caliban or Quasimodo; will you be so kind as to spare me just now these efforts of imagination, and listen to me, for I am reaching the interesting part of my story?"

"God be praised!" said the artist, as he puffed out an enormous cloud of smoke.

"The next day the Englishman was served with tea in his bedroom, and when I asked him to go to the 'Mer de Glace' he turned his head toward the wall; so, leaving my phlegmatic companion enveloped in bedclothes up to his ears, I started alone for the Montanvert.

"It was a magnificent morning, and small parties of travellers, some on foot, others mounted, skirted the banks of the Arve or climbed the sides of the mountain. They looked like groups of mice in the distance, and this extreme lessening in size made one comprehend, better than anything else, the immense proportions of the landscape. As for myself, I was alone: I had not even taken a guide, this was too favorite a resort for tourists, for the precaution to be necessary. For a wonder, I felt rather gay, with an elasticity of body and mind which I had not felt in some time.

"I courageously began climbing the rough pathway which led to the Mer de Glace, aiding myself with a long staff, which I had procured at the inn.

"At every step I breathed with renewed pleasure the fresh, pure, morning air; I gazed vaguely at the different effects of the sun or mist, at the undulations of the road, which sometimes rose almost straight up in the air, sometimes followed a horizontal line, while skirting the open abyss at the right. The Arve, wending its course like a silvery ribbon, seemed at times to recede, while the ridges of the perpendicular rocks stood out more plainly. At times, the noise of a falling avalanche was repeated, echo after echo. A troupe of German students below me were responding to the voice of the glaciers by a chorus from Oberon. Following the turns in the road, I could see through the fir-trees, or, rather, at my feet, their long Teutonic frock-coats, their blond beards, and caps about the size of one's fist. As I walked along, when the path was not too steep, I amused myself by throwing my stick against the trunks of the trees which bordered the roadside; I remember how pleased I was when I succeeded in hitting them, which I admit was not very often.

"In the midst of this innocent amusement, I reached the spot where the reign of the Alpine plants begins. All at once I saw, above me, a rock decked with rhododendrons; these flowers looked like tufts of oleanders through the dark foliage of the fir-trees, and produced a charming effect. I left the path in order to reach them sooner, and when I had gathered a bouquet, I threw my staff and at the same time uttered a joyous cry, in imitation of the students, my companions on this trip.

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"A frightened scream responded to mine. My staff in its flight had crossed the path and darted into an angle in the road. At that same moment, I saw a mule's head appear with ears thrown back in terror, then the rest of its body, and upon its back a lady ready to fall into the abyss. Fright paralyzed me. All aid was impossible on account of the narrowness of the road, and this stranger's life depended upon her coolness and the intelligence of her beast. Finally the animal seemed to regain its courage and began to walk away, lowering its head as if it could still hear the terrible whistle of the javelin in his ears. I slipped from the rock upon which I stood and seized the mule by the bridle, and succeeded in getting them out of a bad position. I led the animal in this way for some distance, until I reached a place where the path was broader, and danger was over.

"I then offered my apologies to the person whose life I had just compromised by my imprudence, and for the first time took a good look at her. She was young and well dressed; a black silk gown fitted her slender form to perfection; her straw hat was fastened to the saddle, and her long chestnut hair floated in disorder over her pale cheeks. As she heard my voice, she opened her eyes, which in her fright she had instinctively closed; they seemed to me the most beautiful I had ever seen in my life.

"She looked at the precipice and turned away with a shudder. Her glance rested upon me, and then upon the rhododendrons which I held in my hand.

"The frightened expression on her face was replaced immediately by one of childish curiosity.

"'What pretty flowers!' she exclaimed, in a fresh, young voice. 'Are those rhododendrons, Monsieur?'

"I presented her my bouquet without replying; as she hesitated about taking it, I said:

"'If you refuse these flowers, Madame, I shall not believe that you have pardoned me.'

"By this time, the persons who were with her had joined us. There were two other ladies, three or four men mounted upon mules, and several guides. At the word rhododendron, a rather large, handsome fellow, dressed in a pretentious style, slipped from his mule and climbed the somewhat steep precipice in quest of the flowers which seemed to be so much in favor. When he returned, panting for breath, with an enormous bunch of them in his hand, the lady had already accepted mine.

"'Thank you, Monsieur de Mauleon,' said she, with a rather scornful air; 'offer your flowers to these ladies.' Then, with a slight inclination of the head to me, she struck her mule with her whip, and they rode away.



“The rest of the company followed her, gazing at me as they passed, the big, fashionable fellow especially giving me a rather impertinent glance. I did not try to pick a quarrel with him on account of this discourteous manifestation. When the cavalcade was at some distance, I went in search of my stick, which I found under a tree on the edge of the precipice; then I continued climbing the steep path, with my eyes fastened upon the rider in the black silk gown, her hair flying in the wind and my bouquet in her hand.

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"A few moments later, I reached the pavilion at the Montanvert, where I found a gay company gathered together, made up principally of English people. As for myself, I must admit the frivolous, or, rather mundane, bent of my tastes; the truly admirable spectacle presented to my eyes interested me much less than the young stranger, who at this moment was descending with the lightness of a sylph the little road which led to the Mer de Glace.

"I do not know what mysterious link bound me to this woman. I had met many much more beautiful, but the sight of them had left me perfectly indifferent. This one attracted me from the first. The singular circumstances of this first interview, doubtless, had something to do with the impression. I felt glad to see that she had kept my bouquet; she held it in one hand, while she leaned with the other upon a staff somewhat like my own. The two other ladies, and even the men had stopped on the edge of the ice.

"Monsieur de Mauleon wished to fulfil his duties as escort, but at the first crevasse he had also halted without manifesting the slightest desire to imitate the chamois. The young woman seemed to take a malicious pleasure in contemplating her admirer's prudent attitude, and, far from listening to the advice he gave her, she began to run upon the ice, bounding over the crevasses with the aid of her stick. I was admiring her lightness and thoughtlessness, but with an uneasy feeling, when I saw her suddenly stop. I instinctively ran toward her. An enormous crevasse of great depth lay at her feet, blue at its edges and dark in its depths. She stood motionless before this frightful gulf with hands thrown out before her in horror, but charmed like a bird about to be swallowed by a serpent. I knew the irresistible effect upon nervous temperaments of this magnetic attraction toward an abyss. I seized her by the arm, the suddenness of the movement made her drop her staff and flowers, which fell into the depths of the chasm.

"I tried to lead her away, but after she had taken a few steps, I felt her totter; she had grown pale; her eyes were closed. I threw my arm about her, in order to support her and turned her face toward the north; the cold air striking her revived her, and she soon opened her beautiful brown eyes. I do not know what sudden tenderness seized me then, but I pressed this lovely creature within my grasp, and she remained in my arms unresistingly. I felt that I loved her already.

"She remained for a moment with her languishing eyes fixed on mine, making no response, perhaps not even having heard me. The shouts of her party, some of whom were coming toward her, broke the charm. With a rapid movement, she withdrew from my embrace, and I offered her my arm, just as if we were in a drawing-room and I was about to lead her out for a dance; she took it, but I did not feel elated at this, for I could feel her knees waver at every step. The smallest crevasse, which she had crossed before

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with such agility, now inspired her with a horror which I could divine by the trembling of her arm within mine. I was obliged to make numerous detours in order to avoid them, and thus prolonged the distance, for which I was not sorry. Did I not know that when we reached our destination, the world, that other sea of ice, was going to take her away from me, perhaps forever? We walked silently, occasionally making a few trivial remarks, both deeply embarrassed. When we reached the persons who awaited her, I said, as she disengaged my arm:

“You dropped my flowers, Madame; will it be the same with your memory of me?”

“She looked at me, but made no reply. I loved this silence. I bowed politely to her and returned to the pavilion, while she related her adventure to her friends; but I am quite sure she did not tell all the details.

“The register for travellers who visit the Montan-Vert is a mixture of all nationalities, and no tourist refuses his tribute; modest ones write down their names only. I hoped in this way to learn the name of the young traveller, and I was not disappointed. I soon saw the corpulent Monsieur de Mauleon busily writing his name upon the register in characters worthy of Monsieur Prudhomme; the other members of the little party followed his example. The young woman was the last to write down her name. I took the book in my turn, after she had left, and with apparent composure I read upon the last line these words, written in a slender handwriting:

“Baroness Clemence de Bergenheim.”

CHAPTER VII

GERFAUT ASKS A FAVOR

“The Baroness de Bergenheim!” exclaimed Marillac. “Ah! I understand it all now, and you may dispense with the remainder of your story. So this was the reason why, instead of visiting the banks of the Rhine as we agreed, you made me leave the route at Strasbourg under the pretext of walking through the picturesque sites of the Vosges. It was unworthy of you to abuse my confidence as a friend. And I allowed myself to be led by the nose to within a mile of Bergenheim!”

“Peace,” interrupted Gerfaut; “I have not finished. Smoke and listen.

“I followed Madame de Bergenheim as far as Geneva. She had gone there from here with her aunt, and had availed herself of this journey to visit Mont Blanc. She left for her home the next day without my meeting her again; but I preserved her name, and it was not unknown to me. I had heard it spoken in several houses in the Faubourg Saint-

Germain, and I knew that I should certainly have an opportunity of meeting her during the winter.

“So I remained at Geneva, yielding to a sensation as new as it was strange. It first acted upon my brain whose ice I felt melting away, and its sources ready to gush forth. I seized my pen with a passion not unlike an access of rage. I finished in four days two acts of a drama that I was then writing. I never had written anything more vigorous or more highly colored. My unconstrained genius throbbed in my arteries, ran through my blood, and bubbled over as if it wished to burst forth. My hand could not keep even with the course of my imagination; I was obliged to write in hieroglyphics.

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“Adieu to the empty reveries brought about by spleen, and to the meditations ‘a la Werther’! The sky was blue, the air pure, life delightful—my talent was not dead.

“After this first effort, I slackened a little! Madame de Bergenheim’s face, which I had seen but dimly during this short time, returned to me in a less vaporous form; I took extreme delight in calling to mind the slightest circumstances of our meeting, the smallest details of her features, her toilette, her manner of walking and carrying her head. What had impressed me most was the extreme softness of her dark eyes, the almost childish tone of her voice, a vague odor of heliotrope with which her hair was perfumed; also the touch of her hand upon my arm. I sometimes caught myself embracing myself in order to feel this last sensation again, and then I could not help laughing at my thoughts, which were worthy of a fifteen-year-old lover.

“I had felt so convinced of my powerlessness to love, that the thought of a serious passion did not at first enter my mind. However, a remembrance of my beautiful traveller pervaded my thoughts more and more, and threatened to usurp the place of everything else. I then subjected myself to a rigid analysis; I sought for the exact location of this sentiment whose involuntary yoke I already felt; I persuaded myself, for some time yet, that it was only the transient excitement of my brain, one of those fevers of imagination whose fleeting titillations I had felt more than once.

“But I realized that the evil, or the good—for why call love an evil?—had penetrated into the most remote regions of my being, and I realized the energy of my struggle like a person entombed who tries to extricate himself. From the ashes of this volcano which I had believed to be extinct, a flower had suddenly blossomed, perfumed with the most fragrant of odors and decked with the most charming colors. Artless enthusiasm, faith in love, all the brilliant array of the fresh illusions of my youth returned, as if by enchantment, to greet this new bloom of my life; it seemed to me as if I had been created a second time, since I was aided by intelligence and understood its mysteries while tasting of its delights. My past, in the presence of this regeneration, was nothing more than a shadow at the bottom of an abyss. I turned toward the future with the faith of a Mussulman who kneels with his face toward the East—I loved!

“I returned to Paris, and applied to my friend Casorans, who knows the Faubourg Saint-Germain from Dan to Beersheba.

“‘Madame de Bergenheim,’ he said to me, ‘is a very popular society woman, not very pretty, perhaps, rather clever, though, and very amiable. She is one of our coquettes of the old nobility, and with her twenty-four carats’ virtue she always has two sufferers attached to her chariot, and a third on the waiting-list, and yet it is impossible for one to find a word to say against her behavior.

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Just at this moment, Mauleon and d'Arzenac compose the team; I do not know who is on the waiting-list. She will probably spend the winter here with her aunt, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, one of the hatefulest old women on the Rue de Varennes. The husband is a good fellow who, since the July revolution, has lived upon his estates, caring for his forests and killing wild boars without troubling himself much about his wife.'

"He then told me which houses these ladies frequented, and left me, saying with a knowing air:

"Take care, if you intend to try the power of your seductions upon the little Baroness; whoever meddles with her smarts for it!"

"This information from a viper like Casorans satisfied me in every way. Evidently the place was not taken; impregnable, that was another thing.

"Before Madame de Bergenheim's return, I began to show myself assiduously at the houses of which my friend had spoken. My position in the Faubourg Saint-Germain is peculiar, but good, according to my opinion. I have enough family ties to be sustained by several should I be attacked by many, and this is the essential point. It is true that, thanks to my works, I am regarded as an atheist and a Jacobin; aside from these two little defects, they think well enough of me. Besides, it is a notorious fact that I have rejected several offers from the present government, and refused last year the 'croix d'honneur'; this makes amends and washes away half my sins. Finally, I have the reputation of having a certain-knowledge of heraldry, which I owe to my uncle, a confirmed hunter after genealogical claims. This gains me a respect which makes me laugh sometimes, when I see people who detest me greet me as cordially as the Cure of Saint-Eustache greeted Bayle, for fear that I might destroy their favorite saint. However, in this society, I am no longer Gerfaut of the Porte-Saint-Martin, but I am the Vicomte de Gerfaut. Perhaps, with your bourgeois ideas, you do not understand—"

"Bourgeois!" exclaimed Marillac, bounding from his seat, "what are you talking about? Do you wish that we should cut each other's throats before breakfast to-morrow? Bourgeois! why not grocer? I am an artist—don't you know that by this time?"

"Don't get angry, my dear fellow; I meant to say that in certain places the title of a Vicomte has still a more powerful attraction than you, with your artistic but plebeian ideas, would suppose in this year of our Lord 1832."

"Well and good. I accept your apology."

"A vicomte's title is a recommendation in the eyes of people who still cling to the baubles of nobility, and all women are of this class. There is something, I know not



what, delicate and knightly in this title, which suits a youngish bachelor. Duke above all titles is the one that sounds the best. Moliere and Regnard have done great harm to the title of marquis. Count is terribly bourgeois, thanks to the senators of the empire. As to a Baron, unless he is called Montmorency or Beaufremont, it is the lowest grade of nobility; vicomte, on the contrary, is above reproach; it exhales a mixed odor of the old regime and young France; then, don't you know, our Chateaubriand was a vicomte.

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"I departed from my subject in speaking of nobility. I accidentally turned over one day to the article upon my family in the Dictionnaire de Saint-Allais; I found that one of my ancestors, Christophe de Gerfaut, married, in 1569, a Mademoiselle Yolande de Corandeuil.

"O my ancestor! O my ancestress!' I exclaimed, 'you had strange baptismal names; but no matter, I thank you. You are going to serve me as a grappling iron; I shall be very unskilful if at the very first meeting the old aunt escapes Christophe.'

"A few days later I went to the Marquise de Chameillan's, one of the most exclusive houses in the noble Faubourg. When I enter her drawing-room, I usually cause the same sensation that Beelzebub would doubtless produce should he put his foot into one of the drawing-rooms in Paradise. That evening, when I was announced, I saw a certain undulation of heads in a group of young women who were whispering to one another; many curious eyes were fastened upon me, and among these beautiful eyes were two more beautiful than all the others: they were those of my bewitching traveller.

"I exchanged a rapid glance with her, one only; after paying my respects to the mistress of the house, I mingled with a crowd of men, and entered into conversation with an old peer upon some political question, avoiding to look again toward Madame de Bergenheim.

"A moment later, Madame de Chameillan came to ask the peer to play whist; he excused himself, he could not remain late.

"I dare not ask you to play with Mademoiselle de Corandeuil,' said she, turning toward me; 'besides, I understand too well that it is to my interest and the pleasure of these ladies, not to exile you to a whist table.'

"I took the card which she half offered me with an eagerness which might have made her suppose that I had become a confirmed whist expert during my voyage.

"Mademoiselle de Corandeuil certainly was the ugly, crabbed creature that Casorans had described; but had she been as frightful as the witches in Macbeth I was determined to make her conquest. So I began playing with unusual attention. I was her partner, and I knew from experience the profound horror which the loss of money inspires in old women. Thank heaven, we won! Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who has an income of one hundred thousand francs, was not at all indifferent to the gain of two or three louis. She, therefore, with an almost gracious air, congratulated me, as we left the table, upon my manner of playing.

"I would willingly contract an alliance, offensive and defensive with you,' said she to me.

"The alliance is already contracted, Mademoiselle,' said I, seizing the opportunity.

“‘How is that, Monsieur?’ she replied, raising her head with a dignified air, as if she were getting ready to rebuke some impertinent speech.

“I also gravely straightened up and gave a feudal look to my face.

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“Mademoiselle, I have the honor of belonging to your family, a little distantly, to be sure; that is what makes me speak of an alliance between us as a thing already concluded. One of my ancestors, Christophe de Gerfaut, married Mademoiselle Yolande de Corandeuil, one of your great-grand-aunts, in 1569.’

“Yolande is really a family name,’ replied the old lady, with the most affable smile that her face would admit; ‘I bear it myself. The Corandeuils, Monsieur, never have denied their alliances, and it is a pleasure for me to recognize my relationship with such a man as you. We address by the title of cousin relatives as far back as 1300.’

“‘I am nearer related to you by three centuries,’ I replied, in my most insinuating voice; ‘may I hope that this good fortune will authorize me to pay my respects to you?’

“Mademoiselle de Corandeuil replied to my ‘tartuferie’ by granting me permission to call upon her. My attention was not so much absorbed in our conversation that I did not see in a mirror, during this time, the interest with which Madame de Bergenheim watched my conversation with her aunt; but I was careful not to turn around, and I let her take her departure without giving her a second glance.

“Three days later, I made my first call. Madame de Bergenheim received my greeting like a woman who had been warned and was, therefore, prepared. We exchanged only one rapid, earnest glance, that was all. Availing myself of the presence of other callers, numerous enough to assure each one his liberty, I began to observe, with a practised eye, the field whereon I had just taken my position.

“Before the end of the evening, I recognized the correctness of Casorans’s information. Among all the gentlemen present I found only two professed admirers: Monsieur de Mauleon, whose insignificance was notorious, and Monsieur d’Arzenac, who appeared at first glance as if he might be more to be feared. D’Arzenac, thanks to an income of ten thousand livres, beside being a man of rank, occupies also one of the finest positions that one could desire; he is not unworthy of his name and his fortune. Irreproachable in morals as in manners; sufficiently well informed; of an exquisite but reserved politeness; understanding perfectly the ground that he is walking upon; making also more advances than is customary among the pachas of modern France, he was, without doubt, the flower of the flock in Mademoiselle de Corandeuil’s drawing-room. In spite of all these advantages, an attentive examination showed me that his passion was hopeless. Madame de Bergenheim received his attentions very kindly—too kindly. She usually listened to him with a smile in which one could read gratitude for the devotion he lavished upon her. She willingly accepted him as her favorite partner in the galop, which he danced to perfection. His success stopped there.

“At the end of several days, the ground having been carefully explored and the admirers, dangerous and otherwise, having been passed in review, one after another, I felt convinced that Clemence loved nobody.

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“‘She shall love me,’ said I, on the day I reached this conclusion. In order to formulate in a decisive manner the accomplishment of my desire, I relied upon the following propositions, which are to me articles of faith.

“No woman is unattainable, except when she loves another. Thus, a woman who does not love, and who has resisted nine admirers, will yield to the tenth. The only question for me was to be the tenth. Here began the problem to be solved.

“Madame de Bergenheim had been married only three years; her husband, who was good-looking and young, passed for a model husband; if these latter considerations were of little importance, the first was of great weight. According to all probability, it was too soon for any serious attack. Without being beautiful, she pleased much and many; a second obstacle, since sensibility in women is almost always developed in inverse ratio to their success. She had brains; she was wonderfully aristocratic in all her tastes.

“Last, being very much the fashion, sought after and envied, she was under the special surveillance of pious persons, old maids, retired beauties in one word, all that feminine mounted police, whose eyes, ears, and mouths seem to have assumed the express mission of annoying sensitive hearts while watching over the preservation of good morals.

“This mass of difficulties, none of which escaped me, traced as many lines upon my forehead as if I had been commanded to solve at once all the propositions in Euclid. She shall love me! these words flashed unceasingly before my eyes; but the means to attain this end? No satisfactory plan came to me. Women are so capricious, deep, and unfathomable! It is, with them, the thing soonest done which is soonest ended! A false step, the least awkwardness, a want of intelligence, a quarter of an hour too soon or too late! One thing only was evident: it needed a grand display of attractions, a complete plan of gallant strategy; but, then, what more?

“That earthly paradise of the Montanvert was far from us, where I had been able in less time than it would take to walk over a quadrille, to expose her to death, to save her afterward, and finally to say to her ‘I love you!’ Passion in drawing-rooms is not allowed those free, dramatic ways; flowers fade in the candle-light; the oppressive atmosphere of balls and fetes stifles the heart, so ready to dilate in pure mountain air. The unexpected and irresistible influence of the glacier would have been improper and foolish in Paris. There, an artless sympathy, stronger than social conventions, had drawn us to each other—Octave and Clemence. Here, she was the Baroness de Bergenheim, and I the Vicomte de Gerfaut. I must from necessity enter the ordinary route, begin the romance at the first page, without knowing how to connect the prologue with it.

“What should be my plan of campaign?

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“Should I pose as an agreeable man, and try to captivate her attention and good graces by the minute attentions and delicate flattery which constitute what is classically called paying court? But D’Arzenac had seized this role, and filled it in such a superior way that all competition would be unsuccessful. I saw where this had led him. It needed, in order to inflame this heart, a more active spark than foppish gallantry; the latter flatters the vanity without reaching the heart.

“There was the passionate method—ardent, burning, fierce love. There are some women upon whom convulsive sighs drawn from the depths of the stomach, eyebrows frowning in a fantastic manner, and eyes in which only the whites are to be seen and which seem to say: ‘Love me, or I will kill you!’ produce a prodigious effect. I had myself felt the power of this fascination while using it one day upon a softhearted blond creature who thought it delightful to have a Blue-Beard for a lover. But the drooping corners of Clemence’s mouth showed at times an ironical expression which would have cooled down even an Othello’s outbursts.

“‘She has brains, and she knows it,’ said I to myself; ‘shall I attack her in that direction?’ Women rather like such a little war of words; it gives them an opportunity for displaying a mine of pretty expressions, piquant pouts, fresh bursts of laughter, graceful peculiarities of which they well know the effect. Should I be the Benedict to this Beatrice? But this by-play would hardly fill the prologue, and I very much wished to reach the epilogue.

“I passed in review the different routes that a lover might take to reach his end; I recapitulated every one of the more or less infallible methods of conquering female hearts; in a word, I went over my tactics like a lieutenant about to drill a battalion of recruits. When I had ended I had made no farther advance than before.

“‘To the devil with systems!’ exclaimed I; ‘I will not be so foolish as wilfully to adopt the role of roue when I feel called upon to play the plain role of true lover. Let those who like play the part of Lovelace! As for myself, I will love; upon the whole, that is what pleases best.’ And I jumped headlong into the torrent without troubling myself as to the place of landing.

“While I was thus scheming my attack, Madame de Bergenheim was upon her guard and had prepared her means of defence. Puzzled by my reserve, which was in singular contrast with my almost extravagant conduct at our first meeting, her woman’s intelligence had surmised, on my part, a plan which she proposed to baffle. I was partly found out, but I knew it and thus kept the advantage.

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"I could not help smiling at the Baroness's clever coquetry, when I decided to follow the inspirations of my heart, instead of choosing selfish motives as my guide. Every time I took her hand when dancing with her, I expected to feel a little claw ready to pierce the cold glove. But, while waiting for the scratch, it was a very soft, velvety little hand that was given me; and I, who willingly lent myself to her deception, did not feel very much duped. It was evident that the sort of halo which my merited or unmerited reputation had thrown over me had made me appear to her as a conquest of some value, a victim upon whom one could lavish just enough flowers in order to bring him to the sacrificial altar. In order to wind the first chain around my neck, Mauleon and D'Arzenac, 'a tutti quanti', were sacrificed for me without my soliciting, even by a glance, this general disbandment. I could interpret this discharge. I saw that the fair one wished to concentrate all her seductions against me, so as to leave me no means of escape; people neglect the hares to hunt for the deer. You must excuse my conceit.

"This conduct wounded me at first, but I afterward forgave her, when a more careful examination taught me to know this adorable woman's character. Coquetry was with her not a vice of the heart or of an unscrupulous mind; having nothing better to do, she enjoyed it as a legitimate pastime, without giving it any importance or feeling any scruples. Like all women, she liked to please; her success was sweet to her vanity; perhaps flattery turned her head at times, but in the midst of this tumult her heart remained in perfect peace. She found so little danger for herself in the game she played that it did not seem to her that it could be very serious for others. Genuine love is not common enough in Parisian parlors for a pretty woman to conceive any great remorse at pleasing without loving.

"Madame de Bergenheim was thus, ingenuously, unsuspectingly, a matchless coquette. Never having loved, not even her husband, she looked upon her little intriguing as one of the rights earned on the day of her marriage, the same as her diamonds and cashmeres. There was something touching in the sound of her voice and in her large, innocent eyes which she sometimes allowed to rest upon mine, without thinking to turn them away, and which said, 'I have never loved.' As for myself, I believed it all; one is so happy to believe!

"Far from being annoyed at the trap she laid for me, I, on the contrary, ran my head into it and presented my neck to the yoke with a docility which must have amused her, I think; but I hoped not to bear it alone. A coquette who coolly flaunts her triumphs to the world resembles those master-swimmers who, while spectators are admiring the grace of their poses, are struck by an unexpected current; the performer is sometimes swept away and drowned without his elegant strokes being of much service to him. Throw Celimene into the current of genuine passion—I do not mean the brutality of Alceste—I will wager that coquetry will be swept away by love. I had such faith in mine that I thought to be able to fix the moment when I should call myself victorious and sure of being obeyed.



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"You know that sadness and ennui were considered etiquette last winter, in a certain society, which was thrown into mourning by the July revolution. Reunions were very few; there were no balls or soirees; dancing in drawing-rooms to the piano was hardly permissible, even with intimate friends. When once I was installed in Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's drawing-room upon a friendly footing, this cessation of worldly festivities gave me an opportunity to see Clemence in a rather intimate way.

"It would take too long to tell you now all the thousand and one little incidents which compose the history of all passions. Profiting by her coquetry, which made her receive me kindly in order to make me expiate my success afterward, my love for her was soon an understood thing between us; she listened to me in a mocking way, but did not dispute my right to speak. She ended by receiving my letters, after being constrained to do so through a course of strategies in which, truly, I showed incredible invention. I was listened to and she read my letters; I asked for nothing more.

"My love, from the first, had been her secret as well as mine; but every day I made to sparkle some unexpected facet of this prism of a thousand colors. Even after telling her a hundred times how much I adored her, my love still had for her the attraction of the unknown. I really had something inexhaustible in my heart, and I was sure, in the end, to intoxicate her with this philtre, which I constantly poured out and which she drank, while making sport of it like a child.

"One day I found her thoughtful and silent. She did not reply to me with her usual sprightliness during the few moments that I was able to talk with her; the expression of her eyes had changed; there was something deeper and less glowing in their depths; instead of dazzling me by their excessive splendor, as had often happened to me before, they seemed to soften as they rested on mine; she kept her eyelids a trifle lowered, as if she were tired of being gazed at by me. Her voice, as she spoke, had a low, soft sound, a sort of inexplicable something which came from the very depths of her soul. She never had looked at me with that glance or spoken to me in that tone before. Upon that day I knew that she loved me.

"I returned to my home unutterably happy, for I loved this woman with a love of which I believed myself incapable.

"When I met Madame de Bergenheim again, I found her completely changed toward me; an icy gravity, an impassible calm, an ironical and disdainful haughtiness had taken the place of the delicious abandon of her former bearing. In spite of my strong determination to allow myself to love with the utmost candor, it was impossible for me to return to that happy age when the frowning brows of the beautiful idol to whom we paid court inspired us with the resolve to drown ourselves. I could not isolate myself from my past experiences. My heart was rejuvenated, but my head remained old. I was, therefore, not in the least discouraged by this change of humor, and the fit of anger which it portended.

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“‘Now,’ said I to myself, ‘there is an end to coquetry, it is beaten on all sides; it is gone, never to return. She has seen that the affair is a little too deep for that, and the field not tenable. She will erect barriers in order to defend herself and will no longer attack.’ Thus we pass from the period of amiable smiles, sweet glances, and half-avowals to that of severity and prudery, while waiting for the remorse and despair of the denouement. I am sure that at this time she called to her help all her powers of resistance. From that day she would retreat behind the line of duty, conjugal fidelity, honor, and all the other fine sentiments which would need numbering after the fashion of Homer. At the first attack, all this household battalion would make a furious sortie; should I succeed in overthrowing them and take up my quarters in the trenches, there would then be a gathering of the reserve force, and boiling oil or tar would rain upon my head, representing virtue, religion, heaven, and hell.”

“A sort of conjugal earthquake,” interrupted Marillac.

“I calculated the strength and approximate duration of these means of defence. The whole thing appeared to me only a question of time, a few days or weeks at most—so long on the husband’s account, so long on the father confessor’s account. I deserved to be boxed on the ears for my presumption; I was.

“A combat is necessary in order to secure a victory. In spite of all my efforts and ruses, it was not possible for me to fight this combat; I did not succeed, in spite of all my challenges, in shattering, as I expected, this virtuous conjugal fortress. Madame de Bergenheim still persisted in her systematic reserve, with incredible prudence and skill. During the remainder of the winter, I did not find more than one opportunity of speaking to her alone. As I was a permanent fixture every evening in her aunt’s parlors, she entered them only when other guests were there. She never went out alone, and in every place where I was likely to meet her I was sure to find a triple rampart of women erected between us, through which it was impossible to address one word to her. In short, I was encountering a desperate resistance; and, yet, she loved me! I could see her cheeks gradually grow pale; her brilliant eyes often had dark rings beneath them, as if sleep had deserted her. Sometimes, when she thought she was not observed, I surprised them fastened upon me; but she immediately turned them away.

“She had been coquettish and indifferent; she was now loving but virtuous.

“Spring came. One afternoon I went to call upon Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who had been ill for several days. I was received, however, probably through some mistake of the servants. As I entered the room I saw Madame de Bergenheim; she was alone at her embroidery, seated upon a divan. There were several vases of flowers in the windows, whose curtains only permitted a soft, mysterious light to penetrate the room. The perfume from the flowers, the sort of obscurity, the solitude in which I found her, overcame me for a moment; I was obliged to pause in order to quiet the beating of my heart.

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"She arose as she heard my name announced; without speaking or laying down her work, she pointed to a chair and seated herself; but instead of obeying her, I fell upon my knees before her and seized her hands, which she did not withdraw. It had been impossible for me to say another word to her before, save 'I love you!' I now told her of all my love. Oh! I am sure of it, my words penetrated to the very depth of her heart, for I felt her hands tremble as they left mine. She listened without interrupting me or making any reply, with her face bent toward me as if she were breathing the perfume of a flower. When I begged her to answer me, when I implored her for one single word from her heart, she withdrew one of her hands, imprisoned within mine, and placed it upon my forehead, pushing back my head with a gesture familiar to women. She gazed at me thus for a long time; her eyes were so languishing under their long lashes, and their languor was so penetrating, that I closed mine, not being able to endure the fascination of this glance any longer.

"A shiver which ran over her and which went through me also, like an electric shock, aroused me. When I opened my eyes I saw her face bathed in tears. She drew back and repelled me. I arose impetuously, seated myself by her side and took her in my arms.

"Am I not a wretched, unhappy woman?" said she, and fell upon my breast, sobbing.

"Madame la Comtesse de Pontiviers," announced the servant, whom I would willingly have assassinated, as well as the visiting bore who followed in his footsteps.

"I never saw Madame de Bergenheim in Paris again. I was obliged to go to Bordeaux the next day, on account of a lawsuit which you know all about. Upon my return, at the end of three weeks, I found she had left. I finally learned that she had come to this place, and I followed her. That is the extent of my drama.

"Now you know very well that I have not related this long story to you for the sole pleasure of keeping you awake until one o'clock in the morning. I wanted to explain to you that it was really a serious thing for me, so that you might not refuse to do what I wish to ask of you."

"I think I understand what you are aiming at," said Marillac, rather pensively.

"You know Bergenheim; you will go to see him to-morrow. He will invite you to pass a few days with him; you will stay to dinner. You will see Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, in whose presence you will speak my name as you refer to our journey; and before night, my venerable cousin of 1569 shall send me an invitation to come to see her."

"I would rather render you any other service than this," replied the artist, walking up and down the room in long strides. "I know very well that in all circumstances bachelors



should triumph over husbands, but that does not prevent my conscience from smiting me. You know that I saved Bergenheim's life?"

"Rest assured that he runs no very great danger at present. Nothing will result from this step save the little enjoyment I shall take in annoying the cruel creature who defied me today. Is it agreed?"

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"Since you insist upon it. But then, when our visit is ended, shall we go to work at our drama or upon 'The Chaste Suzannah' opera in three acts? For, really, you neglected art terribly for the sake of your love affairs."

"The Chaste Suzannah or the whole Sacred History we shall put into vaudeville, if you exact it. Until to-morrow, then."

"Until to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII

A LOVER'S RUSE

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the drawing-room of the Chateau de Bergenheim presented its usual aspect and occupants. The fire on the hearth, lighted during the morning, was slowly dying, and a beautiful autumn sun threw its rays upon the floor through the half-opened windows. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, stretched on the couch before the fireplace with Constance at her feet, was reading, according to her habit, the newspapers which had just arrived. Madame de Bergenheim seemed very busily occupied with a piece of tapestry in her lap; but the slow manner in which her needle moved, and the singular mistakes she made, showed that her mind was far away from the flowers she was working. She had just finished a beautiful dark lily, which contrasted strangely with its neighbors, when a servant entered.

"Madame," said he, "there is a person here inquiring for Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim."

"Is Monsieur de Bergenheim not at home?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"Monsieur has gone to ride with Mademoiselle Aline."

"Who is this person?"

"It is a gentleman; but I did not ask his name."

"Let him enter."

Clemence arose at the servant's first words and threw her work upon a chair, making a movement as if to leave the room; but after a moment's reflection, she resumed her seat and her work, apparently indifferent as to who might enter.

"Monsieur de Marillac," announced the lackey, as he opened the door a second time.

Madame de Bergenheim darted a rapid glance at the individual who presented himself, and then breathed freely again.

After setting to rights his coiffure 'a la Perinet', the artist entered the room, throwing back his shoulders. Tightly buttoned up in his travelling redingote, and balancing with ease a small gray hat, he bowed respectfully to the two ladies and then assumed a pose a la Van Dyke.

Constance was so frightened at the sight of this imposing figure that, instead of jumping at the newcomer's legs, as was her custom, she sheltered herself under her mistress's chair, uttering low growls; at first glance the latter shared, if not the terror, at least the aversion of her dog. Among her numerous antipathies, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil detested a beard. This was a common sentiment with all old ladies, who barely tolerated moustaches: "Gentlemen did not wear them in 1780," they would say.

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Marillac's eyes turned involuntarily toward the portraits, and other picturesque details of a room which was worthy the attention of a connoisseur; but he felt that the moment was not opportune for indulging in artistic contemplation, and that he must leave the dead for the living.

"Ladies," said he, "I ought, first of all, to ask your pardon for thus intruding without having had the honor of an introduction. I hoped to find here Monsieur de Bergenheim, with whom I am on very intimate terms. I was told that he was at the chateau."

"My husband's friends do not need to be presented at his house," said Clemence; "Monsieur de Bergenheim probably will return soon." And with a gracious gesture she motioned the visitor to a seat.

"Your name is not unknown to me," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil in her turn, having succeeded in calming Constance's agitation. "I remember having heard Monsieur de Bergenheim mention you often."

"We were at college together, although I am a few years younger than Christian."

"But," exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, struck by some sudden thought, "there is more than a college friendship between you. Are you not, Monsieur, the person who saved my husband's life in 1830?"

Marillac smiled, bowed his head, and seated himself. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil herself could not but graciously greet her nephew's preserver, had he had a moustache as long as that of the Shah of Persia, who ties his in a bow behind his neck.

After the exchange of a few compliments, Madame de Bergenheim, with the amiability of a mistress of the house who seeks subjects of conversation that may show off to best advantage the persons she receives, continued:

"My husband does not like to talk of himself, and never has told us the details of this adventure, in which he ran such great danger. Will you be kind enough to gratify our curiosity on this point?"

Marillac, among his other pretensions, had that of being able to relate a story in an impressive manner. These words were as pleasing to his ears as the request for a song is to a lady who requires urging, although she is dying to sing.

"Ladies," said he, crossing one leg over the other and leaning upon one arm of his chair, "it was on the twenty-eighth of July, 1830; the disastrous decrees had produced their effects; the volcano which—"

"Pardon me, Monsieur, if I interrupt you," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, quickly; "according to my opinion, and that of many others, the royal decrees you speak of were

good and necessary. The only mistake of Charles Tenth was not to have fifty thousand men around Paris to force their acceptance. I am only a woman, Monsieur, but if I had had under my command twenty cannon upon the quays, and as many upon the boulevards, I assure you that your tricolored flag never should have floated over the Tuileries."

"Pitt and Cobourg!" said the artist between his teeth, as, with an astonished air, he gazed at the old lady; but his common-sense told him that republicanism was not acceptable within this castle. Besides, remembering the mission with which he was charged, he did not think his conscience would feel much hurt if he made a little concession of principles and manoeuvred diplomatically.

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"Madame," replied he, "I call the decrees disastrous when I think of their result. You will certainly admit that our situation to-day ought to make everybody regret the causes which brought it about."

"We are exactly of the same opinion regarding that point, Monsieur," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, resuming her serenity.

"The open volcano beneath our feet," continued Marillac, who still stuck to his point, "warned us by deep rumblings of the hot lava which was about to gush forth. The excitement of the people was intense. Several engagements with the soldiers had already taken place at different points. I stood on the Boulevard Poissonniere, where I had just taken my luncheon, and was gazing with an artist's eye upon the dramatic scene spread out before me. Men with bare arms and women panting with excitement were tearing up the pavements or felling trees. An omnibus had just been upset; the rioters added cabriolets, furniture, and casks to it; everything became means of defence. The crashing of the trees as they fell, the blows of crowbars on the stones, the confused roaring of thousands of voices, the Marseillaise sung in chorus, and the irregular cannonading which resounded from the direction of the Rue Saint-Denis, all composed a strident, stupefying, tempestuous harmony, beside which Beethoven's Tempest would have seemed like the buzzing of a bee.

"I was listening to the roaring of the people, who were gnawing at their chains before breaking them, when my eyes happened to fall upon a window of a second-floor apartment opposite me. A man about sixty years of age, with gray hair, a fresh, plump face, an honest, placid countenance, and wearing a mouse-colored silk dressing-gown, was seated before a small, round table. The window opened to the floor, and I could see him in this frame like a full-length portrait. There was a bowl of coffee upon the table, in which he dipped his roll as he read his journal. I beg your pardon, ladies, for entering into these petty details, but the habit of writing—"

"I assure you, Monsieur, your story interests me very much," said Madame de Bergenheim, kindly.

"A King Charles spaniel, like yours, Mademoiselle, was standing near the window with his paws resting upon it; he was gazing with curiosity at the revolution of July, while his master was reading his paper and sipping his coffee, as indifferent to all that passed as if he had been in Pekin or New York.

"'Oh, the calm of a pure, sincere soul!' I exclaimed to myself, at the sight of this little tableau worthy of Greuze; 'oh, patriarchal philosophy! in a few minutes perhaps blood will flow in the streets, and here sits a handsome old man quietly sipping his coffee.' He seemed like a lamb browsing upon a volcano."



Marillac loved volcanoes, and never lost an opportunity to bring one in at every possible opportunity.

“Suddenly a commotion ran through the crowd; the people rushed in every direction, and in an instant the boulevard was empty. Plumes waving from high caps, red-and-white flags floating from the ends of long lances, and the cavalcade that I saw approaching through the trees told me the cause of this panic. A squadron of lancers was charging. Have you ever seen a charge of lancers?”

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"Never!" said both of the ladies at once.

"It is a very grand sight, I assure you. Fancy, ladies, a legion of demons galloping along upon their horses, thrusting to the right and left with long pikes, whose steel points are eighteen inches long. That is a charge of lancers. I beg you to believe that I had shown before this the mettle there was in me, but I will not conceal from you that at this moment I shared with the crowd the impression which the coming of these gentlemen made. I had only time to jump over the sidewalk and to dart up a staircase which ran on the outside of a house, every door being closed. I never shall forget the face of one of those men who thrust the point of a lance at me, long enough to pierce through six men at once. I admit that I felt excited then! The jinn having passed—"

"The—what?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was not familiar with Eastern terms.

"I beg a thousand pardons, it was a poetical reminiscence. The lancers, having rushed through the boulevard like an avalanche, a laggard rider, a hundred steps behind the others, galloped proudly by, erect in his stirrups and flourishing his sword. Suddenly the report of a gun resounded, the lancer reeled backward, then forward, and finally fell upon his horse's neck; a moment later he turned in his saddle and lay stretched upon the ground, his foot caught in the stirrup; the horse, still galloping, dragged the man and the lance, which was fastened to his arm by a leather band."

"How horrible!" said Clemence, clasping her hands.

Marillac, much pleased with the effect of his narration, leaned back in his chair and continued his tale with his usual assurance.

"I looked to the neighboring roofs to discover whence came this shot; as I was glancing to the right and left I saw smoke issuing through the blinds of the room on the second floor, which had been closed at the approach of the lancers.

"'Good God!' I exclaimed; 'it must be this handsome old man in the mouse-colored silk dressing-gown who amuses himself by firing upon the lancers, as if they were rabbits in a warren!'

"Just then the blinds were opened, and the strange fellow with the unruffled countenance leaned out and gazed with a smiling face in the direction the horse was taking, dragging his master's body after him. The patriarch had killed his man between two sips of his coffee."

"And that is the cowardly way in which members of the royal guard were assassinated by the 'heroes' of your glorious insurrection!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, indignantly.



“When the troops had passed,” Marillac continued, “the crowd returned, more excited and noisy than ever. Barricades were erected with wonderful rapidity; two of those were on the boulevard close to the place where I was. I saw a horseman suddenly bound over the first; he wore a tuft of red-and-white feathers in his hat. I saw that it was a staff officer, doubtless carrying some despatch to headquarters. He continued his way, sabre in its sheath, head erect, proud and calm in the midst of insulting shouts from the crowd; stones were thrown at him and sticks at his horse’s legs; he looked as if he were parading upon the Place du Carrousel.

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"When he reached the second barricade, he drew his horse up, as if it were merely a question of jumping a hurdle in a steeplechase just then I saw the window on the first floor open again. 'Ah! you old rascal!' I exclaimed. The report of a gun drowned my voice; the horse which had just made the leap, fell on his knees; the horseman tried to pull him up, but after making one effort the animal fell over upon his side. The ball had gone through the steed's head."

"It was that poor Fidele that I gave your husband," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was always very sentimental in the choice of names she gave to animals.

"He merited his name, Mademoiselle, for the poor beast died for his master, for whom the shot was intended. Several of those horrible faces, which upon riot days suddenly appear as if they came out of the ground, darted toward the unhorsed officer. I, and several other young men who were as little disposed as myself to allow a defenceless man to be slaughtered, ran toward him. I recognized Christian as I approached; his right leg was caught under the horse, and he was trying to unsheath his sword with his left hand. Sticks and stones were showered at him. I drew out the sword, which his position prevented him from doing, and exclaimed as I waved it in the air: 'The first rascal who advances, I will cut open like a dog.'

"I accompanied these words with a flourish which kept the cannibals at a distance for the time being.

"The young fellows who were with me followed my example. One took a pickaxe, another seized the branch of a tree, while others tried to release Christian from his horse. During this time the crowd increased around us; the shouts redoubled: 'Down with the ordinances! These are disguised gendarmes! Vive la liberte!—We must kill them! Let's hang the spies to the lamp-posts!'

"Danger was imminent, and I realized that only a patriotic harangue would get us out of the scrape. While they were releasing Christian, I jumped upon Fidele so as to be seen by all and shouted:

"'Vive la liberte!'

"'Vive la liberte!' replied the crowd.

"'Down with Charles Tenth! Down with the ministers! Down with the ordinances!'

"'Down!' shouted a thousand voices at once.

"You understand, ladies, this was a sort of bait, intended to close the mouths of these brutes.

“‘We are all citizens, we are all Frenchmen,’ I continued; ‘we must not soil our hands with the blood of one of our disarmed brothers. After a victory there are no enemies. This officer was doing his duty in fulfilling his chief’s commands; let us do ours by dying, if necessary, for our country and the preservation of our rights.’

“‘Vive la liberte! vive la liberte!’ shouted the crowd. ‘He is right; the officer was doing his duty. It would be assassination!’ exclaimed numerous voices.

“‘Thanks, Marillac,’ said Bergenheim to me, as I took his hand to lead him away, availing ourselves of the effect of my harangue; ‘but do not press me so hard, for I really believe that my right arm is broken; only for that, I should ask you to return me my sword that I might show this rabble that they can not kill a Bergenheim as they would a chicken.’

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“Let him cry: Vive la Charte!’ roared out a man, with a ferocious face.

“‘I receive orders from nobody,’ Christian replied, in a very loud voice, as he glared at him with eyes which would have put a rhinoceros to flight.”

“Your husband is really a very brave man,” said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, addressing Clemence.

“Brave as an old warrior. This time he pushed his courage to the verge of imprudence; I do not know what the result might have been if the crowd had not been dispersed a second time by the approach of the lancers, who were returning through the boulevard. I led Bergenheim into a cafe; fortunately, his arm was only sprained.” Just at this moment Marillac’s story was interrupted by a sound of voices and hurried steps. The door opened suddenly, and Aline burst into the room with her usual impetuosity.

“What has happened to you, Aline?” exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, hurrying to her sister’s side. The young girl’s riding-habit and hat were covered with splashes of mud.

“Oh, nothing,” replied the young girl, in a broken voice; “it was only Titania, who wanted to throw me into the river. Do you know where Rousselet is? They say it is necessary to bleed him; and he is the only one who knows how to do it.”

“Whom do you mean, child? Is my husband wounded?” asked Clemence, turning pale.

“No, not Christian; it is a gentleman I do not know; only for him I should have been drowned. Mon Dieu! can not Rousselet be found?”

Aline left the room in great agitation. They all went over to the windows that opened out into the court, whence the sound of voices seemed to arise, and where they could hear the master’s voice thundering out his commands. Several servants had gone to his assistance: one of them held Titania by the bridle; she was covered with foam and mud, and was trembling, with distended nostrils, like a beast that knows it has just committed a wicked action. A young man was seated upon a stone bench, wiping away blood which streamed from his forehead. It was Monsieur de Gerfaut.

At this sight Clemence supported herself against the framework of the window, and Marillac hurriedly left the room.

Pere Rousselet, who had at last been found in the kitchen, advanced majestically, eating an enormous slice of bread and butter.

“Good heavens! have you arrived at last?” exclaimed Bergenheim. “Here is a gentleman this crazy mare has thrown against a tree, and who has received a violent blow on the head. Do you not think it would be the proper thing to bleed him?”

"A slight phlebotomy might be very advantageous in stopping the extravasation of blood in the frontal region," replied the peasant, calling to his aid all the technical terms he had learned when he was a hospital nurse.

"Are you sure you can do this bleeding well?"

"I'll take the liberty of saying to Monsieur le Baron that I phlebotomized Perdreau last week and Mascareau only a month ago, without any complaint from them."



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"Indeed! I believe you," sneered the groom, "both are on their last legs."

"I am neither Perdreau nor Mascareau," observed the wounded man with a smile.

Rousselet drew himself up at full height, with the dignity of a man of talent who scorns to reply to either criticism or mistrust.

"Monsieur," said Gerfaut, turning to the Baron, "I am really causing you too much trouble. This trifle does not merit the attention you give it. I do not suffer in the least. Some water and a napkin are all that I need. I fancy that I resemble an Iroquois Indian who has just been scalped; my pride is really what is most hurt," he added, with a smile, "when I think of the grotesque sight I must present to the ladies whom I notice at the window."

"Why, it is Monsieur de Gerfaut!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, toward whom he raised his eyes.

Octave bowed to her with a gracious air. His glance wandered from the old lady to Clemence, who did not seem to have the strength to leave the window. M. de Bergenheim, after hurriedly greeting Marillac, finally yielded to the assurance that a surgeon was unnecessary, and conducted the two friends to his own room, where the wounded man could find everything that he needed.

"What the devil was the use in sending me as ambassador, since you were to make such a fine entrance upon the stage?" murmured Marillac in his friend's ear.

"Silence!" replied the latter as he pressed his hand; "I am only behind the scenes as yet."

During this time Clemence and her aunt had led Aline to her room.

"Now, tell us what all this means?" said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, while the young girl was changing her dress.

"It was Christian's fault," replied Aline. "We were galloping along beside the river when Titania became frightened by the branch of a tree. 'Do not be afraid!' exclaimed my brother. I was not in the least frightened; but when he saw that my horse was about to run away, he urged his on in order to join me. When Titania heard the galloping behind her she did run away in earnest; she left the road and started straight for the river. Then I began to be a little frightened. Just fancy, Clemence, I bounded in the saddle at each leap, sometimes upon the mare's neck, sometimes upon the crupper; it was terrible! I tried to withdraw my foot from the stirrup as Christian had told me to do; but just then Titania ran against the trunk of a tree, and I rolled over with her. A gentleman, whom I had not seen before, and who, I believe, actually jumped out of the ground, raised me from the saddle, where I was held by something, I do not know what; then that naughty



Titania threw him against the tree as he was helping me to my feet, and when I was able to look at him his face was covered with blood. Christian rushed on the scene, and, when he saw that I was not badly hurt, he ran after Titania and beat her! Oh! how he beat her! Mon Dieu! how cruel men are! It was in vain for me to cry for mercy; he would not listen to me. Then we came home, and, since this gentleman is not badly wounded, it seems that my poor dress has fared worst of all."

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The young girl took her riding-habit from the chair as she said these words, and could not restrain a cry of horror when she saw an enormous rent in it.

“Mon Dieu!” she exclaimed, as she showed it to her sister-in-law. It was all that she had strength to articulate.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil took the skirt in her turn, and looked at it with the practised eye of a person who had made a special study of little disasters of the toilet and the ways of remedying them.

“It is in the fullness,” said she, “and by putting in a new breadth it will never be seen.”

Aline, once convinced that the evil could be repaired, soon recovered her serenity.

When the three ladies entered the drawing-room they found the Baron and his two guests chatting amicably. Gerfaut had his forehead tied up with a black silk band which gave him a slight resemblance to Cupid with his bandage just off his eyes. His sparkling glance showed that blindness was not what there was in common between him and the charming little god. After the first greetings, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was always strict as to etiquette, and who thought that Titania had been a rather unceremonious master of ceremonies between her nephew and M. de Gerfaut, advanced toward the latter in order to introduce them formally to each other.

“I do not think,” said she, “that Monsieur de Bergenheim has had the honor of meeting you before today; allow me then to present you to him. Baron, this is Monsieur le Vicomte de Gerfaut, one of my relatives.”

When Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was in good humor, she treated Gerfaut as a relative on account of their family alliance of 1569. At this moment the poet felt profoundly grateful for this kindness.

“Monsieur has presented himself so well,” said Christian frankly, “that your recommendation, my dear aunt, in spite of the respect I have for it, will not add to my gratitude. Only for Monsieur de Gerfaut, here is a madcap little girl whom we should be obliged to look for now at the bottom of the river.”

As he said these words, he passed his arm about his sister’s waist and kissed her tenderly, while Aline was obliged to stand upon the tips of her toes to reach her brother’s lips.

“These gentlemen,” he continued, “have agreed to sacrifice for us the pleasure of the Femme-sans-Tete, as well as Mademoiselle Gobillot’s civilities, and establish their headquarters in my house. They can pursue their picturesque and romantic studies from here just as well; I suppose, Marillac, that you are still a determined dauber of canvas?”

“To tell the truth,” replied the poet, “art absorbs me a great deal.”

“As to myself, I never succeeded in drawing a nose that did not resemble an ear and vice versa. But for that worthy Baringnier, who was kind enough to look over my plans, I ran a great risk of leaving Saint Cyr without a graduating diploma. But seriously, gentlemen, when you are tired of sketching trees and tumbledown houses, I can give you some good boar hunting. Are you a hunter, Monsieur de Gerfaut?”

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"I like hunting very much," replied the lover, with rare effrontery.

The conversation continued thus upon the topics that occupy people who meet for the first time. When the Baron spoke of the two friends installing themselves at the chateau, Octave darted a glance at Madame de Bergenheim, as if soliciting a tacit approbation of his conduct; but met with no response. Clemence, with a gloomy, sombre air fulfilled the duties that politeness imposed upon her as mistress of the house. Her conduct did not change during the rest of the evening, and Gerfaut no longer tried by a single glance to soften the severity she seemed determined to adopt toward him. All his attentions were reserved for Mademoiselle de Corandeuil and Aline, who listened with unconcealed pleasure to the man whom she regarded as her saviour; for the young girl's remembrance of the danger which she had run excited her more and more.

After supper Mademoiselle de Corandeuil proposed a game of whist to M. de Gerfaut, whose talent for the game had made a lasting impression upon her. The poet accepted this diversion with an enthusiasm equal to that he had shown for hunting, and quite as sincere too. Christian and his sister—a little gamester in embryo, like all of her family—completed the party, while Clemence took up her work and listened with an absentminded air to Marillac's conversation. It was in vain for the latter to call art and the Middle Ages to his aid, using the very quintessence of his brightest speeches—success did not attend his effort. After the end of an hour, he had a firm conviction that Madame de Bergenheim was, everything considered, only a woman of ordinary intelligence and entirely unworthy of the passion she had inspired in his friend.

"Upon my soul," he thought, "I would a hundred times rather have Reine Gobillot for a sweetheart. I must take a trip in that direction tomorrow."

When they separated for the night, Gerfaut, bored by his evening and wounded by his reception from Clemence, which, he thought, surpassed anything he could have expected of her capricious disposition, addressed to the young woman a profound bow and a look which said:

"I am here in spite of you; I shall stay here in spite of you; you shall love me in spite of yourself."

Madame de Bergenheim replied by a glance none the less expressive, in which a lover the most prone to conceit could read:

"Do as you like; I have as much indifference for your love as disdain for your presumption."

This was the last shot in this preliminary skirmish.

CHAPTER IX

GERFAUT, THE WIZARD

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There are some women who, like the heroic Cure Merino, need but one hour's sleep. A nervous, irritable, subtle organization gives them a power for waking, without apparent fatigue, refused to most men. And yet, when a strong emotion causes its corrosive waters to filtrate into the veins of these impressionable beings, it trickles there drop by drop, until it has hollowed out in the very depths of their hearts a lake full of trouble and storms. Then, in the silence of night and the calm of solitude, insomnia makes the rosy cheeks grow pale and dark rings encircle the most sparkling eyes. It is in vain for the burning forehead to seek the cool pillow; the pillow grows warm without the forehead cooling. In vain the mind hunts for commonplace ideas, as a sort of intellectual poppy-leaves that may lead to a quiet night's rest; a persistent thought still returns, chasing away all others, as an eagle disperses a flock of timid birds in order to remain sole master of its prey. If one tries to repeat the accustomed prayer, and invoke the aid of the Virgin, or the good angel who watches at the foot of young girls' beds, in order to keep away the charms of the tempter, the prayer is only on the lips, the Virgin is deaf, the angel sleeps! The breath of passion against which one struggles runs through every fibre of the heart, like a storm over the chords of an Tolian harp, and extorts from it those magic melodies to which a poor, troubled, and frightened woman listens with remorse and despair; but to which she listens, and with which at last she is intoxicated, for the allegory of Eve is an immortal myth, that repeats itself, through every century and in every clime.

Since her entrance into society, Madame de Bergenheim had formed the habit of keeping late hours. When the minute details of her toilette for the night were over, and she had confided her beautiful body to the snowy sheets of her couch, some new novel or fashionable magazine helped her wile away the time until sleep came to her. Christian left his room, like a good country gentleman, at sunrise; he left it either for the chase—or to oversee workmen, who were continually being employed upon some part of his domain. Ordinarily, he returned only in time for dinner, and rarely saw Clemence except between that time and supper, at the conclusion of which, fatigued by his day's work, he hastened to seek the repose of the just. Husband and wife, while living under the same roof, were thus almost completely isolated from each other; night for one was day for the other.

By the haste with which Clemence shortened her preparations for the night, one would have said that she must have been blessed with an unusually sleepy sensation. But when she lay in bed, with her head under her arm, like a swan with his neck under his wing, and almost in the attitude of Correggio's Magdalen, her eyes, which sparkled with a feverish light, betrayed the fact that she had sought the solitude of her bed in order to indulge more freely in deep meditation.

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With marvelous fidelity she went over the slightest events of the day, to which by a constant effort of willpower, she had seemed so indifferent. First, she saw Gerfaut with his face covered with blood, and the thought of the terrible sensation which this sight caused her made her heart throb violently. She then recalled him as she next saw him, in the drawing-room by her husband's side, seated in the very chair that she had left but a moment before. This trifling circumstance impressed her; she saw in this a proof of sympathetic understanding, a sort of gift of second sight which Octave possessed, and which in her eyes was so formidable a weapon. According to her ideas, he must have suspected that this was her own favorite chair and have seized it for that reason, just as he would have loved to take her in his arms.

For the first time, Clemence had seen together the man to whom she belonged and the man whom she regarded somewhat as her property. For, by one of those arrangements with their consciences of which women alone possess the secret, she had managed to reason like this: "Since I am certain always to belong to Monsieur de Bergenheim only, Octave can certainly belong to me." An heterodoxical syllogism, whose two premises she reconciled with an inconceivable subtlety. A feeling of shame had made her dread this meeting, which the most hardened coquette could never witness without embarrassment. A woman, between her husband and her lover, is like a plant one sprinkles with ice-cold water while a ray of sunlight is trying to comfort it. The sombre and jealous, or even tranquil and unsuspecting, face of a husband has a wonderful power of repression. One is embarrassed to love under the glance of an eye that darts flashes as bright as steel; and a calm, kindly look is more terrible yet, for all jealousy seems tyrannical, and tyranny leads to revolt; but a confiding husband is like a victim strangled in his sleep, and inspires, by his very calmness, the most poignant remorse.

The meeting of these two men naturally led Clemence to a comparison which could but be to Christian's advantage. Gerfaut had nothing remarkable about him save an intelligent, intensely clever air; there was a thoughtful look in his eyes and an archness in his smile, but his irregular features showed no mark of beauty; his face wore an habitually tired expression, peculiar to those people who have lived a great deal in a short time, and it made him look older than Christian, although he was really several years younger. The latter, on the contrary, owed to his strong constitution, fortified by country life, an appearance of blooming youth that enhanced his noble regularity of features.



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In a word, Christian was handsomer than his rival, and Clemence exaggerated her husband's superiority over her lover. Not being able to find the latter awkward or insignificant, she tried to persuade herself that he was ugly. She then reviewed in her mind all M. de Bergenheim's good qualities, his attachment and kindness to her, his loyal, generous ways; she recalled the striking instance that Marillac had related of his bravery, a quality without which there is no hope of success for a man in the eyes of any woman. She did all in her power to inflame her imagination and to see in her husband a hero worthy of inspiring the most fervent love. When she had exhausted her efforts toward such enthusiasm and admiration, she turned round, in despair, and, burying her head in her pillow, she sobbed:

"I cannot, I cannot love him!"

She wept bitterly for a long while. As she recalled her own severity in the past regarding women whose conduct had caused scandal, she employed in her turn the harshness of her judgment in examining her own actions. She felt herself more guilty than all the others, for her weakness appeared less excusable to her. She felt that she was unworthy and contemptible, and wished to die that she might escape the shame that made her blush scarlet, and the remorse that tortured her soul.

How many such unhappy tears bathe the eyes of those who should shed only tears of joy! How many such sighs break the silence of the night! There are noble, celestial beings among women whom remorse stretches out upon its relentless brasier, but in the midst of the flames that torture them the heart palpitates, imperishable as a salamander. Is it not human fate to suffer? After Madame de Bergenheim had given vent, by convulsive sobs and stifled sighs, to her grief for this love which she could not tear from her breast, she formed a desperate resolution. From the manner in which M. de Gerfaut had taken possession of the chateau the very first day, she recognized that he was master of the situation. The sort of infatuation which Mademoiselle de Corandeuil seemed to have for him, and Christian's courteous and hospitable habits, would give him an opportunity to prolong his stay as long as he desired. She thus compared herself to a besieged general, who sees the enemy within his ramparts.

"Very well! I will shut myself up in the fortress!" said she, smiling in spite of herself in the midst of her tears. "Since this insupportable man has taken possession of my drawing-room, I will remain in my own room; we will see whether he dares to approach that!"

She shook her pretty head with a defiant air, but she could not help glancing into the room which was barely lighted with a night lamp. She sat up and listened for a moment rather anxiously, as if Octave's dark eyes might suddenly glisten in the obscurity. When she had assured herself that all was tranquil, and that the throbbing of her heart was all that disturbed the silence, she continued preparing her plan of defense.

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She decided that she would be ill the next day and keep to her bed, if necessary, until her persecutor should make up his mind to beat a retreat. She solemnly pledged herself to be firm, courageous, and inflexible; then she tried to pray. It was now two o'clock in the morning. For some time Clemence remained motionless, and one might have thought that at least she was asleep. Suddenly she arose. Without stopping to put on her dressing-gown, she lighted a candle by the night-lamp, pushed the bolt of her door and then went to the windows, the space between them forming a rather deep projection on account of the thickness of the walls. A portrait of the Duke of Bordeaux hung there; she raised it and pressed a button concealed in the woodwork. A panel opened, showing a small empty space. The shelf in this sort of closet contained only a rosewood casket. She opened this mysterious box and took from it a package of letters, then returned to her bed with the eagerness of a miser who is about to gaze upon his treasures.

Had she not struggled and prayed? Had she not offered upon the tyrannical altar of duty as an expiation, tears, pale cheeks and a tortured soul? Had she not just taken a solemn vow, in the presence of God and herself, which should protect her against her weakness? Was she not a virtuous wife, and had she not paid dearly enough for a moment of sad happiness? Was it a crime to breathe for an instant the balmy air of love through the gratings of this prison-cell, the doors of which she had just locked with her own hand? Admirable logic for loving hearts, which, not being able to control their feelings, suffer in order to prove themselves less guilty, and clothe themselves in haircloth so that each shudder may cause a pain that condones the sin!

Being at peace with herself, she read as women read who are in love; leaning her head upon her hand, she drew out the letters, one by one, from her bosom where she had placed them. She drank with her heart and eyes the poison these passionate words contained; she allowed herself to be swayed at will by these melodies which lulled but did not benumb. When one of those invincible appeals of imploring passion awoke all the echoes of her love, and ran through her veins with a thrill, striking the innermost depths of her heart, she threw herself back and imprinted her burning lips upon the cold paper. With one letter pressed to her heart, and another pressed to her lips, she gave herself up completely, exclaiming in an inaudible voice: "I love thee! I am thine!"

The next morning, when Aline entered her sister-in law's room, according to her usual custom, the latter was not obliged to feign the indisposition she had planned; the sensations of this sleepless night had paled her cheeks and altered her features; it would have been difficult to imagine a more complete contrast than that between these two young women at this moment. Clemence, lying upon her bed motionless

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and white as the sheet which covered her, resembled Juliet sleeping in her tomb; Aline, rosy, vivacious, and more petulant than usual, looked very much the madcap Mademoiselle de Corandeuil had reproached her with being. Her face was full of that still childish grace, more lovely than calm, more pleasing than impressive, which makes young girls so charming to the eye but less eloquent to the heart; for are they not fresh flowers more rich in coloring than in perfume?

Clemence could hardly stifle a sigh as she gazed at those rosy checks, those sparkling eyes, that life so full of the rich future. She recalled a time when she was thus, when grief glided over her cheeks without paling them, when tears dried as they left her eyes; she also had had her happy, careless days, her dreams of unalloyed bliss.

Aline, after presenting her face like a child who asks for a kiss, wished to tease her as usual, but, with a tired gesture, her sister-in-law begged for mercy.

"Are you ill?" asked the young girl anxiously, as she seated herself upon the edge of the bed.

Madame de Bergenheim smiled, a forced smile.

"Thank me for my poor health," said she, "for it obliges you to do the honors; I shall doubtless not be able to go down to dinner, and you must take my place. You know that it tires my aunt to have to trouble herself about others."

Aline made a little grimace as she replied:

"If I thought you were speaking seriously, I would go and get into my own bed at once!"

"Child! will you not in your turn be mistress of a home? Is it not necessary for you to become accustomed to it? It is an excellent opportunity, and, with my aunt as a guide, you are sure to acquit yourself well."

These last words were spoken rather maliciously, for the young woman knew that of all the possible mentors, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was the one whom Aline dreaded most.

"I beg of you, my kind sister," replied the girl, clasping her hands, "do not be ill to-day. Is it the neuralgia of the day before yesterday you are suffering from? Do be a good sister, and get up and come and take a walk in the park; the fresh air will cure you, I am sure of it."

"And I shall not be obliged to preside at the dinner-table, you would add; is it not so? You selfish girl!"

"I am afraid of Monsieur de Gerfaut," said the child, lowering her voice.

When she heard pronounced this name, so deeply agitating her, Madame de Bergenheim was silent for a moment; at last she said:

"What has Monsieur de Gerfaut done to you? Is it not downright ungrateful to be afraid of him so soon after the service he has rendered you?"

"No, I am not ungrateful," replied the young girl quickly. "I never shall forget that I owe my life to him, for certainly, but for him, I should have been dragged into the river. But he has such black, piercing eyes that they seem to look into your very soul; and then, he is such a brilliant man! I am all the time afraid of saying something that he may laugh at. You know, some people think I talk too much; but I shall never dare open my mouth in his presence. Why do some persons' eyes make such an impression upon one?"

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Clemence lowered her own beautiful eyes and made no reply.

"His friend, Monsieur Marillac, does not frighten me one bit, in spite of his big moustache. Tell me, does not this Monsieur de Gerfaut frighten you a little too?"

"Not at all, I assure you," replied Madame de Bergenheim, trying to smile. "But," she continued, in order to change the conversation, "how fine you look! You have certainly some plan of conquest. What! a city gown at nine o'clock in the morning, and hair dressed as if for a ball?"

"Would you like to know the compliment your aunt just paid me?"

"Some little jest of hers, I suppose?"

"You might say some spiteful remark, for she is the hatefulest thing! She told me that blue ribbons suited red hair very badly and advised me to change one or the other. Is it true that my hair is red?"

Mademoiselle de Bergenheim asked this question with so much anxiety that her sister-in-law could not repress a smile.

"You know that my aunt delights in annoying you," said she. "Your hair is very pretty, a bright blond, very pleasant to the eye; only Justine waves it a little too tight; it curls naturally. She dresses your hair too high; it would be more becoming to you if she pushed it back from your temples a little than to wave it as much as she does. Come a little nearer to me."

Aline knelt before Madame de Bergenheim's bed, and the latter, adding a practical lesson to verbal advice, began to modify the maid's work to suit her own taste.

"It curls like a little mane," said the young girl, as she saw the trouble her sister-in-law had in succeeding; "it was my great trouble at the Sacred Heart. The sisters wished us to wear our hair plain, and I always had a terrible time to keep it in place. However, blond hair looks ugly when too plainly dressed, and Monsieur de Gerfaut said yesterday that it was the shade he liked best."

"Monsieur de Gerfaut told you he liked blond hair best!"

"Take care; you are pulling my hair! Yes, blond hair and blue eyes. He said that when speaking of Carlo Dolci's Virgin, and he said she was of the most beautiful Jewish type; if he intended it as a compliment to me, I am very much obliged to him. Do you think that my eyes are as blue as that of the painted Virgin's. Monsieur de Gerfaut pretends that there is a strong resemblance."

Madame de Bergenheim withdrew her hand so quickly that she pulled out half a dozen or more hairs from her sister-in-law's head, and buried herself up to the chin in the bedclothes.

"Oh! Monsieur de Gerfaut knows how to pay very pretty compliments!" she said. "And you doubtless are very well pleased to resemble Carlo Dolci's Madonna?"

"She is very pretty!—and then it is the Holy Virgin, you know—Ah! I hear Monsieur de Gerfaut's voice in the garden."

The young girl arose quickly and ran to the window, where, concealed behind the curtains, she could see what was going on outside without being seen herself.

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"He is with Christian," she continued. "There, they are going to the library. They must have just taken a long walk, for they are bespattered with mud. If you could only see what a pretty little cap Monsieur de Gerfaut has on!"

"Truly, he will turn her head," thought Madame de Bergenheim, with a decided feeling of anger; then she closed her eyes as if she wished to sleep.

Gerfaut had, in fact, just returned from paying his respects to the estate. He had followed his host, who, under the pretext of showing him several picturesque sights, promenaded him, in the morning dew, through the lettuce in the kitchen garden and the underbrush in the park. But he knew through experience that all was not roses in a lover's path; watching in the snow, climbing walls, hiding in obscure closets, imprisonment in wardrobes, were more disagreeable incidents than a quiet tete-a-tete with a husband.

He listened, therefore, complacently enough to Bergenheim's prolix explanations, interested himself in the planting of trees, thought the fields very green, the forests admirable, the granite rocks more beautiful than those of the Alps, went into ecstasies over the smallest vista, advised the establishment of a new mill on the river, which, being navigable for rafts, might convey lumber to all the cities on the Moselle, and thus greatly increase the value of the owner's woods. They fraternized like Glaucus and Diomedes; Gerfaut hoping, of course, to play the part of the Greek, who, according to Homer, received in return for a common iron armor a gold one of inestimable value. There is always such a secret mental reservation in the lover's mind when associating with the husband of his inamorata.

When he entered the room of his wife, whose indisposition had been reported to him, Christian's first words were:

"This Monsieur de Gerfaut appears to be a very excellent fellow, and I shall be delighted if he will stay with us a while. It is too bad that you are ill. He is a good musician, as well as Marillac; you might have sung together. Try to get better quickly and come down to dinner."

"I can not really tell him that Monsieur de Gerfaut has loved me for more than a year," said Madame de Bergenheim to herself.

A moment later, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil appeared, and with a prim air seated herself beside the bed.

"Perhaps you think that I am fooled by this indisposition. I see plainly that you wish to be impolite to Monsieur de Gerfaut, for you can not endure him. It seems to me, however, that a relative of your family ought to be treated with more respect by you, above all, when you know how much I esteem him. This is unheard-of absurdity, and I

shall end by speaking to your husband about it; we shall see if his intervention will not have more effect than mine."

"You shall not do that, aunt," Clemence interrupted, sitting up in bed and trying to take her aunt's hand.



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"If you wish that your discourteous conduct should rest a secret between us, I advise you to get rid of your neuralgia this very day. Now, you had better decide immediately —"

"This is genuine persecution," exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, falling back upon her bed when the old lady had departed. "He has bewitched everybody! Aline, my aunt, and my husband; to say nothing of myself, for I shall end by going mad. I must end this, at any price." She rang the bell violently.

"Justine," said she to her maid, "do not let any one enter this room under any pretext whatsoever, and do not come in yourself until I ring; I will try to sleep."

Justine obeyed, after closing the blinds. She had hardly gone out when her mistress arose, put on her dressing-gown and slippers with a vivacity which betokened anger; she then seated herself at her desk and began to write rapidly, dashing her pen over the satiny paper without troubling herself as to blots. The last word was ended with a dash as energetically drawn as the Napoleonic flourish.

When a young man who, according to custom, begins to read the end of his letters first finds an arabesque of this style at the bottom of a lady's letter, he ought to arm himself with patience and resignation before he reads its contents.

CHAPTER X

PLOTS

That evening, when Gerfaut entered his room he hardly took time to place the candlestick which he held in his hand upon the mantel before he took from his waistcoat pocket a paper reduced to microscopic dimensions, which he carried to his lips and kissed passionately before opening. His eyes fell first upon the threatening flourish of the final word; this word was: Adieu!

"Hum!" said the lover, whose exaltation was sensibly cooled at this sight.

He read the whole letter with one glance of the eye, darting to the culminating point of each phrase as a deer bounds over ledges of rocks; he weighed the plain meaning as well as the innuendoes of the slightest expression, like a rabbi who comments upon the Bible, and deciphered the erasures with the patience of a seeker after hieroglyphics, so as to detach from them some particle of the idea they had contained. After analyzing and criticising this note in all its most imperceptible shades, he crushed it within his hand and began to pace the floor, uttering from time to time some of those exclamations which the Dictionnaire de l'Academie has not yet decided to sanction; for all lovers resemble the lazzaroni who kiss San-Gennaro's feet when he acts well, but who call him briconne as soon as they have reason to complain of him. However, women are

very kind, and almost invariably excuse the stones that an angry lover throws at them in such moments of acute disappointment, and willingly say with the indulgent smile of the Roman emperor: "I feel no wound!"

In the midst of this paroxysm of furious anger, two or three knocks resounded behind the woodwork.

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"Are you composing?" asked a voice like that of a ventriloquist; "I am with you."

A minute later, Marillac appeared upon the threshold, in his slippers and with a silk handkerchief tied about his head, holding his candlestick in one hand and a pipe in the other; he stood there motionless.

"You are fine," said he, "you are magnificent, fatal and accursed—You remind me of Kean in Othello—"

"Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemona?"

Gerfaut gazed at him with frowning brows, but made no reply.

"I will wager that it is the last scene in our third act," replied the artist, placing his candlestick upon the mantel; "it seems that it is to be very tragic. Now listen! I also feel the poetical afflatus coming over me, and, if you like, we will set about devouring paper like two boa-constrictors. Speaking of serpents, have you a rattle? Ah, yes! Here is the bell-rope. I was about to say that we would have a bowl of coffee. Or rather, I will go into the kitchen myself; I am very good friends with Marianne, the cook; besides, the motto of the house of Bergenheim is liberte, libertas. Coffee is my muse; in this respect, I resemble Voltaire—"

"Marillac!" exclaimed Gerfaut, as the artist was about to leave the room. The artist turned, and meekly retraced his steps.

"You will be so good as to do me the favor of returning to your room," said Gerfaut. "You may work or you may sleep, just as you like; between us, you would do well to sleep. I wish to be alone."

"You say that as if you meditated an attempt upon your illustrious person. Are you thinking of suicide? Let us see whether you have some concealed weapon, some poisoned ring. Curse upon it! the poison of the Borgias! Is the white substance in this china bowl, vulgarly called sugar, by some terrible chance infamous arsenic disguised under the appearance of an honest colonial commodity?"

"Be kind enough to spare your jokes," said Octave, as his friend poked about in all the corners of the room with an affectation of anxiety, "and, as I can not get rid of you, listen to my opinion: if you think that I brought you here for you to conduct yourself as you have for the last two days, you are mistaken."

"What have I done?"

"You left me the whole morning with that tiresome Bergenheim on my hands, and I verily believe he made me count every stick in his park and every frog in his pond. Tonight, when that old witch of Endor proposed her infernal game of whist, to which it seems I

am to be condemned daily, you-excused yourself upon the pretext of ignorance, and yet you play as good a game as I."

"I can not endure whist at twenty sous a point."

"Do I like it any better?"

"Well, you are a nice fellow! You have an object in view which should make you swallow all these disagreeable trifles as if they were as sweet as honey. Is it possible you would like me to play Bertrand and Raton? I should be Raton the oftener of the two!"

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"But, really, what did you do all day?"

Marillac posed before the mirror, arranged his kerchief about his head in a more picturesque fashion, twisted his moustache, puffed out, through the corner of his mouth, a cloud of smoke, which surrounded his face like a London fog, then turned to his friend and said, with the air of a person perfectly satisfied with himself:

"Upon my faith, my dear friend, each one for himself and God for us all! You, for example, indulge in romantic love-affairs; you must have titled ladies. Titles turn your head and make you exclusive. You make love to the aristocracy; so be it, that is your own concern. As for me, I have another system; I am, in all matters of sentiment, what I am in politics: I want republican institutions."

"What is all that nonsense about?"

"Let me tell you. I want universal suffrage, the cooperation of all citizens, admission to all offices, general elections, a popular government, in a word, a sound, patriotic hash. Which means regarding women that I carry them all in my heart, that I recognize between them no distinction of caste or rank. Article First of my set of laws: all women are equal in love, provided they are young, pretty, admirably attractive in shape and carriage, above all, not too thin."

"And what of equality?"

"So much the worse. With this eminently liberal and constitutional policy, I intend to gather all the flowers that will allow themselves to be gathered by me, without one being esteemed more fresh than another, because it belongs to the nobility, or another less sweet, because plebeian. And as field daisies are a little more numerous than imperial roses, it follows that I very often stoop. That is the reason why, at this very moment, I am up to my ears in a little rustic love affair:

Simple et naive bergerette, elle regne—"

"Stop that noise; Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's room is just underneath."

"I will tell you then, since I must give an account of myself, that I went into the park to sketch a few fir-trees before dinner; they are more beautiful of their kind than the ancient Fontainebleau oaks. That is for art. At dinner, I dined nobly and well. To do the Bergenheims justice, they live in a royal manner. That is for the stomach. Afterward I stealthily ordered a horse to be saddled and rode to La Fauconnerie in a trice, where I presented the expression of my adoration to Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot, a minor yet, but enjoying her full rights already. That is for the heart."

"Indeed!"



“No sarcasm, if you please; not everybody can share your taste for princesses, who make you go a hundred leagues to follow them and then upon your arrival, only give you the tip of a glove to kiss. Such intrigues are not to my fancy.

Je suis sergent,
Brave—”

“Again, I say, will you stop that noise? Don’t you know that I have nobody on my side at present but this respectable dowager on the first floor below? If she supposes that I am making all this racket over her head we shall be deadly enemies by to-morrow.”

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"Zitto, zitto, piano, piano,
Senza strepito e rumore,"

replied Marillac, putting his finger to his lips and lowering his voice. "What you say is a surprise to me. From the way in which you offered your arm to Madame de Bergenheim to lead her into the drawing-room after supper, I thought you understood each other perfectly. As I was returning, for I made it my duty to offer my arm to the old lady—and you say that I do nothing for you—it seemed to me that I noticed a meeting of hands—You know that I have an eagle eye. She slipped a note into your hand as sure as my name is Marillac."

Gerfaut took the note which he held crumpled up in his hand, and held it in the flame of one of the candles. The paper ignited, and in less than a second nothing of it remained but a few dark pieces which fell into ashes upon the marble mantel.

"You burn it! You are wrong," said the artist; "as for me, I keep everything, letters and hair. When I am old, I shall have the letters to read evenings, and shall weave an allegorical picture with the hair. I shall hang it before my desk, so as to have before me a souvenir of the adorable creatures who furnished the threads. I will answer for it that there will be every shade in it from that of Camille Hautier, my first love, who was an albino, to this that I have here."

As he spoke, he took out of his pocket a small parcel from which he drew a lock of coal-black hair, which he spread out upon his hand.

"Did you pull this hair from Titania's mane?" asked Gerfaut, as he drew through his fingers the more glossy than silky lock, which he ridiculed by this ironical supposition.

"They might be softer, I admit," replied Marillac negligently; and he examined the lock submitted to this merciless criticism as if it were simply a piece of goods, of the fineness of whose texture he wished to assure himself.

"You will admit at least that the color is beautiful, and the quantity makes up for the quality. Upon my word, this poor Reine has given me enough to make a pacha's banner. Provincial and primitive simplicity! I know of one woman in particular who never gave an adorer more than seven of her hairs; and yet, at the end of three years, this cautious beauty was obliged to wear a false front. All her hair had disappeared.

"Are you like me, Octave? The first thing I ask for is one of these locks. Women rather like this sort of childishness, and when they have granted you that, it is a snare spread for them which catches them."

Marillac took the long, dark tress and held it near the candle; but his movement was so poorly calculated that the hair caught fire and was instantly destroyed.

“A bad sign,” exclaimed Gerfaut, who could not help laughing at his friend’s dismayed look.

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"This is a day of autos-de-fe," said the artist, dropping into a chair; "but bah! small loss; if Reine asks to see this lock, I will tell her that I destroyed it with kisses. That always flatters them, and I am sure it will please this little field-flower. It is a fact that she has cheeks like rosy apples! On my way back I thought of a vaudeville that I should like to write about this. Only I should lay the scene in Switzerland and I should call the young woman Betty or Kettly instead of Reine, a name ending in 'Y' which would rhyme with Rutly, on account of local peculiarities. Will you join in it? I have almost finished the scenario. First scene—Upon the rising of the curtain, harvesters are discovered—"

"Will you do me the favor of going to bed?" interrupted Gerfaut.

"Chorus of harvesters:

Deja l'aurore
Qui se colore—"

"If you do not leave me alone, I will throw the contents of this water-pitcher at your head."

"I never have seen you in such a surly temper. It looks indeed as if your divinity had treated you cruelly."

"She has treated me shamefully!" exclaimed the lover, whose anger was freshly kindled at this question; "she has treated me as one would treat a barber's boy. This note, which I just burned, was a most formal, unpleasant, insolent dismissal. This woman is a monster, do you understand me?"

"A monster! your angel, a monster!" said Marillac, suppressing with difficulty a violent outburst of laughter.

"She, an angel? I must say that she is a demon—This woman—"

"Do you not adore her?"

"I hate her, I abhor her, she makes me shudder. You may laugh, if you like!"

As he said these words, Gerfaut struck a violent blow upon the table with his fist.

"You forget that Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's room is just beneath us," said the artist, in a teasing way.

"Listen to me, Marillac! Your system with women is vulgar, gross, and trivial. The daisies which you gather, the maidens from whom you cut handfuls of hair excellent for stuffing mattresses, your rustic beauties with cheeks like rosy apples are conquests worthy of counter-jumpers in their Sunday clothes. That is nothing but the very lowest

grade of love-making, and yet you are right, a thousand times right, and wonderfully wise compared with me."

"You do me too much honor! So, then, you are not loved?"

"Truly, I had an idea I was, or, if I was not loved to-day, I hoped to be to-morrow. But you are mistaken as to what discourages me. I simply fear that her heart is narrow. I believe that she loves me as much as she is able to love; unfortunately, that is not enough for me."

"It certainly seems to me that, so far, she has not shown herself madly in love with you."

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"Ah, madly! Do you know many women who love madly with their hearts and souls? You talk like a college braggart. There are conquerors like yourself who, if we are to believe them, would devour a whole convent at their breakfast. These men excite my pity. As for me, really, I have always felt that it was most difficult to make one's self really loved. In these days of prudery, almost all women of rank appear 'frappe a la glace', like a bottle of champagne. It is necessary to thaw them first, and there are some of them whose shells are so frigid that they would put out the devil's furnace. They call this virtue; I call it social servitude. But what matters the name? the result is the same."

"But, really, are you sure that Madame de Bergenheim loves you?" asked Marillac, emphasizing the word "love" so strongly as to attract his friend's attention.

"Sure? of course I am!" replied the latter. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because, when you are not quite so angry, I want to ask you something." He hesitated a moment. "If you learned that she cares more for another than for you, what would you do?"

Gerfaut looked at him and smiled disdainfully.

"Listen!" said he, "you have heard me storm and curse, and you took this nonsense for genuine hatred. My good fellow! do you know why I raved in such a manner? It was because, knowing my temperament, I felt the necessity of getting angry and giving vent to what was in my heart. If I had not employed this infallible remedy, the annoyance which this note caused me would have disturbed my nerves all night, and when I do not sleep my complexion is more leaden than usual and I have dark rings under my eyes."

"Fop!"

"Simpleton!"

"Why simpleton?"

"Do you take me for a dandy? Do you not understand why I wish to sleep soundly? It is simply because I do not wish to appear before her with a face like a ghost. That would be all that was needed to encourage her in her severity. I shall take good care that she does not discover how hard her last thrust has hit me. I would give you a one-hundred-franc note if I could secure for to-morrow morning your alderman's face and your complexion a la Teniers."

"Thanks, we are not masquerading just at present."

"Nevertheless, all that you have said does not prove in the slightest that she loves you."



“My dear Marillac, words may have escaped me in my anger which have caused you to judge hastily. Now that I am calm and that my remedy has brought back my nervous system to its normal state, I will explain to you my real position. She is my Galatea, I her Pygmalion. ‘An allegory as old as the world,’ you are about to say; old or not, it is my true story. I have not yet broken the marble-virtue, education, propriety, duty, prejudices—which covers the flesh of my statue; but I am nearing my goal and I shall reach it. Her desperate resistance

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is the very proof of my progress. It is a terrible step for a woman to take, from No to Yes. My Galatea begins to feel the blows from my heart over her heart and she is afraid—afraid of the world, of me, of her husband, of herself, of heaven and hell. Do you not adore women who are afraid of everything? She, love another! never! It is written in all eternity that she shall be mine. What did you wish to say to me?”

“Nothing, since you are so sure of her.”

“Sure—more than of my eternal life! But I wish to know what you mean.”

“But you won’t be told just a suspicion that came to me; something that was told to me the other day; a conjecture so vague that it would be useless to dwell upon it.”

“I am not good at guessing enigmas,” said Octave, in a dry tone.

“We will speak of this again to-morrow.”

“As you like,” replied the lover, with somewhat affected indifference. “If you wish to play the part of Iago with me, I warn you I am not disposed to jealousy.”

“To-morrow, I tell you, I shall enlighten myself as to this affair; whatever the result of my inquiries may be, I will tell you the truth. After all, it was nothing but woman’s gossip.”

“Very well, take your time. But I have another favor to ask of you. Tomorrow I shall try to persuade the ladies to take a walk in the park. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil will probably not go; you must do me the favor of sticking to Bergenheim and the little sister, and gradually to walk on ahead of us, in such a way as to give me an opportunity of speaking with this cruel creature alone for a few moments; for she has given me to understand that I shall not succeed in speaking with her alone under any circumstances, and it is absolutely necessary that I should do so.”

“There will be one difficulty in the way, though—they expect about twenty persons at dinner, and all her time will probably be taken up with her duties as hostess.”

“That is true,” exclaimed Gerfaut, jumping up so suddenly that he upset his chair.

“You still forget that Mademoiselle de Corandeuil’s room is beneath us.”

“The devil is playing her hand!” exclaimed the lover, as he paced the room in long strides. “I wish that during the night he would wring the neck of all these visitors. Now; then, she has her innings. Today and tomorrow this little despot’s battle of Ligny will be fought and won; but the day after to-morrow, look out for her Waterloo!”



"Good-night, my Lord Wellington," said Marillac, as he arose and took up his candlestick.

"Good-night, Iago! Ah! you think you have annoyed me with your mysterious words and melodramatic reticence?"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" replied the artist as he left the room.

"Ce secret-la
Se trahira."

CHAPTER XI

A QUARREL

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The next morning, before most of the inhabitants of the chateau had thought of leaving their beds, or at least their rooms, a man, on horseback, and alone, took his departure through a door opening from the stable-yard into the park. He wore a long travelling redingote trimmed with braid and fur, rather premature clothing for the season, but which the sharp cold air that was blowing at this moment made appear very comfortable. He galloped away, and continued this pace for about three-quarters of a mile, in spite of the unevenness of the road, which followed a nearly straight line over hilly ground. It would have been difficult to decide which to admire more, the horse's limbs or the rider's lungs; for the latter, during this rapid ride, had sung without taking breath, so to speak, the whole overture to *Wilhelm Tell*. We must admit that the voice in which he sang the andante of the Swiss mountaineer's chorus resembled a reed pipe more than a hautboy; but, to make amends when he reached the presto, his voice, a rather good bass, struck the horse's ears with such force that the latter redoubled his vigor as if this melody had produced upon him the effect of a trumpet sounding the charge on the day of battle.

The traveller, whom we have probably recognized by his musical feat, concluded his concert by stopping at the entrance to some woods which extended from the top of the rocks to the river, breaking, here and there, the uniformity of the fields. After gazing about him for some time, he left the road and, entering the woods on the right, stopped at the foot of a large tree. Near this tree was a very small brook, which took its source not far away and descended with a sweet murmur to the river, making a narrow bed in the clayey ground which it watered. Such was the modesty of its course that a little brighter green and fresher grass a few feet away from it were the only indications of its presence. Nothing was wanting to make this an idyllic place for a rendezvous, neither the protecting shade, the warbling of birds in the trees, the picturesque landscape surrounding it, nor the soft grass.

After dismounting from his steed and tying him to the branches of an oak, thus conforming to the time-honored custom of lovers, the cavalier struck his foot upon the ground three or four times to start the circulation in his legs, and then drew from his pocket a very pretty Breguet watch.

"Ten minutes past eight," said he; "I am late and yet I am early. It looks as if the clocks at La Fauconnerie were not very well regulated." He walked up and down with a quick step whistling with a vengeance:

"Quand je quittai la Normandie
J'attends—j'attends—"

a refrain which the occasion brought to his mind. When this pastime was exhausted he had recourse to another, the nature of which proved that if the expected beauty had not punctuality for a virtue, she was not one of those little exacting creatures always ready to faint or whose delicate nerves make them intolerant of their lovers' imperfections.

Plunging his hand into one of the pockets in his redingote, the waiting cavalier drew out a sealskin case filled with Havana cigars, and, lighting one, began to smoke, while continuing his promenade.

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But at the end of a few moments this palliative, like the first, had exhausted its effect.

"Twenty-five minutes past eight!" exclaimed Marillac, as he looked at his watch a second time; "I should like to know what this little miniature rose takes me for? It was hardly worth the trouble of over-straining this poor horse, who looks as wet as if he had come out of the river. It is enough to give him inflammation of the lungs. If Bergenheim were to see him sweating and panting like this in this bleak wind, he would give me a sound blowing-up. Upon my word, it is becoming comical! There are no more young girls! I shall see her appear presently as spruce and conceited as if she had been playing the finest trick in the world. It will do for once; but if we sojourn in these quarters some time yet, she must be educated and taught to say, 'If you please' and 'Thanks.' Ah! ha! she has no idea what sort of man she is dealing with! Half past eight! If she is not here in five minutes I shall go to La Fauconnerie and raise a terrible uproar. I will break every bit of crockery there is in the 'Femme-sans-Tete' with blows from my whip. What can I do to kill time?" He raised his head quickly, as he felt himself suddenly almost smothered under a shower of dust. This was a fatal movement for him, for his eyes received part of the libation destined for his hair. He closed them with a disagreeable sensation, after seeing Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot's fresh, chubby face, her figure prim beyond measure in a lilac-and-green plaid gingham dress, and carrying a basket on her arm, a necessary burden to maidens of a certain class who play truant.

"What sort of breeding is this?" exclaimed Marillac, rubbing his eyes; "you have made me dance attendance for an hour and now you have blinded me. I do not like this at all, you understand."

"How you scold me, just for a little pinch of dust!" replied Reine, turning as red as a cherry as she threw the remainder of the handful which she had taken from a mole-heap close by them.

"It is because it smarts like the devil," replied the artist, in a milder tone, for he realized the ridiculousness of his anger; "since you have hurt me, try at least to ease the pain; they say that to blow in the eye will cure it."

"No. I'll do nothing of the kind—I don't like to be spoken to harshly."

The artist arose at once as he saw the young girl make a movement as if to go; he put his arm about her waist and half forced her to sit beside him.

"The grass is damp and I shall stain my dress," said she, as a last resistance.

A handkerchief was at once spread upon the ground, in lieu of a carpet, by the lover, who had suddenly become very polite again.

“Now, my dear Reine,” continued he, “will you tell me why you come so late? Do you know that for an hour I have been tearing my hair in despair?”

“Perhaps the dust will make it grow again,” she replied, with a malicious glance at Marillac, whose head was powdered with brown dust as if a tobacco-box had been emptied upon it.

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"Naughty girl!" he exclaimed, laughing, although his eyes looked as if he were crying; and, acting upon the principle of retaliation less odious in love than in war, he tried to snatch a kiss to punish her.

"Stop that, Monsieur Marillac! you know very well what you promised me."

"To love you forever, you entrancing creature," said he, in the voice of a crocodile that sighs to attract his prey.

Reine pursed up her lips and assumed important airs, but, in order to obey the feminine instinct which prescribes changing the subject of conversation after too direct an avowal, with the firm intention of returning to it later through another channel, she said:

"What were you doing just as I arrived? You were so busy you did not hear me coming. You were so droll; you waved your arms in the air and struck your forehead as you talked."

"I was thinking of you."

"But it was not necessary, in order to do that, to strike your head with your fist. It must have hurt you."

"Adorable woman!" exclaimed the artist, in a passionate tone.

"Mon Dieu! how you frighten me. If I had known I would not have come here at all. I must go away directly."

"Leave me already, queen of my heart! No! do not expect to do that; I would sooner lose my life—"

"Will you stop! what if some one should hear you? they might be passing," said Reine, gazing anxiously about her. "If you knew how frightened I was in coming! I told mamma that I was going to the mill to see my uncle; but that horrid old Lambernier met me just as I entered the woods. What shall I do if he tells that he saw me? This is not the road to the mill. It is to be hoped that he has not followed me! I should be in a pretty plight!"

"You can say that you came to gather berries or nuts, or to hear the nightingale sing; Mother Gobillot will not think anything of it. Who is this Lambernier?"

"You know—the carpenter. You saw him at our house the other day."

"Ah! ah!" said Marillac, with interest, "the one who was turned away from the chateau?"

"Yes, and they did well to do it, too; he is a downright bad man."

“He is the one who told you something about Madame de Bergenheim. Tell me the story. Your mother interrupted us yesterday just as you began telling it to me.—What was it that he said?”

“Oh! falsehoods probably. One can not believe anything that he says.”

“But what did he tell you?”

“What difference does it make to you what is said about the Baroness?” replied the young girl, rather spitefully, as she saw that Marillac was not occupied in thinking of her exclusively.

“Pure curiosity. He told you then that he would tell the Baron what he knew, and that the latter would give him plenty of money to make him keep silent?”

“It makes no difference what he told me. Ask him if you wish to know. Why did you not stay at the chateau if you can think only of the Baroness? Are you in love with her?”



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"I am in love with you, my dear. [The devil take me if she is not jealous now! How shall I make her talk?] I am of the same opinion as you," he replied, in a loud voice, "that all this talk of Lambernier's is pure calumny."

"There is no doubt about it. He is well known about the place; he has a wicked tongue and watches everything that one does or says in order to report it at cross-purposes. Mon Dieu! suppose he should make some story out of his seeing me enter these woods!"

"Madame de Bergenheim," continued the artist, with affectation, "is certainly far above the gossip of a scoundrel of this kind."

Reine pursed up her lips, but made no reply.

"She has too many good qualities and virtues for people to believe anything he says."

"Oh, as to that, there are hypocrites among the Parisian ladies as well as elsewhere," said the young girl, with a sour look.

"Bless me!" thought Marillac, "we have it now. I'd wager my last franc that I'll loosen her tongue."

"Madame de Bergenheim," he replied, emphasizing each word, "is such a good woman, so sensible and so pretty!"

"Mon Dieu! say that you love her at once, then—that'll be plain talk," exclaimed Reine, suddenly disengaging herself from the arm which was still about her waist. "A great lady who has her carriages and footmen in livery is a conquest to boast of! While a country girl, who has only her virtue—"

She lowered her eyes with an air of affected modesty, and did not finish her sentence.

"A virtue which grants a rendezvous at the end of three days' acquaintance, and in the depths of the woods! That is amusing!" thought the artist.

"Still, you will not be the first of the fine lady's lovers," she continued, raising her head and trying to conceal her vexation under an ironical air.

"These are falsehoods."

"Falsehoods, when I tell you that I know what I am speaking about! Lambernier is not a liar."

“Lambertier is not a liar?” repeated a harsh, hoarse voice, which seemed to come from the cavity of the tree under which they were seated. “Who has said that Lambertier was a liar?”

At the same moment, the carpenter in person suddenly appeared upon the scene. He stood before the amazed pair with his brown coat thrown over his shoulders, as usual, and his broad-brimmed gray hat pulled down over his ears, gazing at them with his deep, ugly eyes and a sardonic laugh escaping from his lips.

Mademoiselle Reine uttered a shriek as if she had seen Satan rise up from the ground at her feet; Marillac rose with a bound and seized his whip.

“You are a very insolent fellow,” said he, in his ringing bass voice. “Go your way!”

“I receive no such orders,” replied the workman, in a tone which justified the epithet which had just been bestowed upon him; “we are upon public ground, and I have a right to be here as well as you.”

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"If you do not take to your heels at once," said the artist, becoming purple with rage, "I will cut your face in two."

"Apples are sometimes cut in two," said Lambernier, sneeringly advancing his face with an air of bravado. "My face is not afraid of your whip; you can not frighten me because you are a gentleman and I am a workman! I snap my fingers at bourgeois like—"

This time he did not have time to finish his comparison; a blow from the whip cut him in the face and made him reel in spite of himself.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed, in a voice like thunder, "may I lose my name if I do not polish you off well!"

He threw his coat on the grass, spat, in his hands and rubbed them together, assuming the position of an athlete ready for a boxing-bout.

Mademoiselle Gobillot, arose, trembling with fright at this demonstration, and uttered two or three inarticulate cries; but, instead of throwing herself between the combatants in the approved style, she ran away as fast as she could.

Although the weapons of the adversaries were not of a nature to spill blood upon the turf, there was something warlike about their countenances which would have done honor to ancient paladins. Lambernier squatting upon his legs, according to the rules of pugilism, and with his fists on a level with his shoulders, resembled, somewhat, a cat ready to bound upon its prey. The artist stood with his body thrown backward, his legs on a tension, his chin buried up to his moustache in the fur collar of his coat, with whip lowered, watching all his adversary's movements with a steady eye. When he saw the carpenter advancing toward him, he raised his arm and gave him on the left side a second lash from his whip, so vigorously applied that the workman beat a retreat once more, rubbing his hands and roaring:

"Thunder! I'll finish you—"

He put his hands in his trousers' pockets and drew out one of those large iron compasses such as carpenters use, and opened it with a rapid movement. He then seized it in the centre and was thus armed with a sort of double-pointed stiletto, which he brandished with a threatening gesture.

Marillac, at this sight, drew back a few paces, passed his whip to his left hand and, arming himself with his Corsican poniard, placed himself in a position of defence.

"My friend," said he, with perfect deliberation, "my needle is shorter than yours, but it pricks better. If you take one step nearer me, if you raise your hand, I will bleed you like a wild boar."



Seeing the firm attitude of the artist, whose solid figure seemed to denote rather uncommon vigor, and whose moustache and sparkling eyes gave him a rather formidable aspect at this moment; above all, when he saw the large, sharp blade of the poniard, Lambernier stopped.

“By the gods!” exclaimed Marillac, who saw that his bold looks had produced their effect, “you are a Provencal, and I a Gascon. You have a quick hand, comrade—”

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"But, by Jove! you are the one who has the quick hand; you struck me with your whip as if I had been a horse. You have put my eye almost out. Do you imagine that I am well provided for like yourself and have nothing to do but to flirt with girls? I need my eyes in order to work, by God! Because you are a bourgeois and I am a workman—"

"I am not more of a bourgeois than you," replied the artist, rather glad to see his adversary's fury exhaust itself in words, and his attitude assume a less threatening character; "pick up your compass and return to your work. Here," he added, taking two five-franc pieces from his pocket. "You were a little boorish and I a little hasty. Go and bathe your eyes with a glass of wine."

Lambertier scowled and his eyes darted ugly, hateful glances. He hesitated a moment, as if he were thinking what he had better do, and was weighing his chances of success in case of a hostile resolve. After a few moments' reflection, prudence got the better of his anger. He closed his compass and put it in his pocket, but he refused the silver offered him.

"You are generous," said he, with a bitter smile; "five francs for each blow of the whip! I know a good many people who would offer you their cheek twelve hours of the day at that price. But I am not one of that kind; I ask nothing of nobody."

"If Leonardo da Vinci could have seen this fellow's face just now," thought the artist, "he would not have had to seek so long for his model for the face of Judas. Only for my poniard, my fate would have been settled. This man was ready to murder me."

"Listen, Lambertier," said he, "I was wrong to strike you, and I would like to atone for it. I have been told that you were sent away from the chateau against your will. I am intimate enough with Monsieur de Bergenheim to be useful to you; do you wish me to speak to him for you?"

The carpenter stood motionless in his place, with his eyes fixed upon his adversary while the latter was preparing his horse to mount, eyes which seemed filled with hatred to their very depths. His face suddenly changed its expression and became abjectly polite when he heard himself addressed anew. He shook his head two or three times before replying.

"Unless you are the very devil," he said, "I defy you to make this gentleman say yes when he has once said no. He turned me away like a dog; all right. Let them laugh that win. It was that old idiot of a Rousselet and that old simpleton of a coachman of Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's who told tales about me. I could tell tales also if I liked."

"But what motive could they have to send you away?" continued Marillac, "you are a clever workman. I have seen your work at the chateau; there are some rooms yet

unfinished; there must have been some very grave reason for their not employing you just at the moment when they needed you most."

"They said that I talked with Mademoiselle Justine, and Madame caused me to be discharged. She is mistress there, is she not? But I am the one to make her repent for it."

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"And how can you make her repent for it?" asked the artist, whose curiosity, left ungratified by Mademoiselle Reine, was growing more and more excited, "what can you have in common with Madame la Baronne?"

"Because she is a lady and I am a workman, you mean? All the same, if I could only whisper two or three words in her ear, she would give me more gold than I have earned since I worked at the chateau, I am sure of it."

"By the powers! if I were in your place, I would say those words to her this very day."

"So as to be thrown out by that band of idle fellows in their red coats. None of that for me. I have my own scheme; let them laugh that win!"

As he repeated this proverb, the workman uttered his usual sardonic laugh.

"Lambertier," said the artist, in a serious tone, "I have heard of certain very strange speeches that you have made within the last few days. Do you know that there is a punishment by law for those who invent calumnies?"

"Is it a calumny, when one can prove what he says?" replied the carpenter, with assurance.

"What is it that you undertake to prove?" exclaimed Marillac, suddenly.

"Eh! you know very well that if Monsieur le Baron—" he did not continue, but with a coarse gesture he finished explaining his thoughts.

"You can prove this?"

"Before the courts, if necessary."

"Before the courts would not amount to very much for you; but if you will cease this talk and never open your mouth about all this, whatever it may be, and will give to me, and me only, this proof of which you speak, I will give you ten napoleons."

For a moment Lambertier gazed at the artist with a singularly penetrating glance.

"So you have two sweethearts, then—one from the city and one from the country, a married woman and this poor girl," said he, in a jeering tone; "does little Reine know that she is playing second fiddle?"

"What do you mean to insinuate?"

"Oh! you are more clever than!"

The two men looked at each other in silence, trying to read each other's thoughts.

"This is a lover of Madame de Bergenheim," thought Lambernier, with the barefaced impudence of his kind; "if I were to tell him what I know, my vengeance would be in good hands, without my taking the trouble to commit myself."

"Here is a sneaking fellow who pretends to be deucedly strong in diplomacy," said Marillac to himself; "but he is revengeful and I must make him explain himself."

"Ten napoleons are not to be found every day," continued the carpenter, after a moment's silence; "you may give them to me, if you like, in a week."

"You will be able to prove to me, then, what you have said," replied Marillac, with hesitation, blushing in spite of himself at the part he was playing at that moment, upon the odious side of which he had not looked until now. "Bah!" said he to himself, in order to quiet his conscience, "if this rascal really knows anything it is much better that I should buy the secret than anybody else. I never should take advantage of it, and I might be able to render the lady a service. Is it not a gentleman's sworn duty to devote himself to the defence of an imprudent beauty who is in danger?"

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"I will bring you the proof you want," said the carpenter.

"When?"

"Meet me Monday at four o'clock in the afternoon at the cross-roads near the corner of the Come woods."

"At the end of the park?"

"Yes, a little above the rocks."

"I will be there. Until then, you will not say a word to anybody?"

"That is a bargain, since you buy the goods I have for sale—"

"Here is some money to bind the trade," replied the artist. And he handed him the silver pieces he still held in his hand; Lambernier took them this time without any objections, and put them in his pocket.

"Monday, at four o'clock!"

"Monday, at four o'clock!" repeated Marillac, as he mounted his horse and rode away in great haste as if eager to take leave of his companion. He turned when he reached the road, and, looking behind him, saw the workman standing motionless at the foot of the tree.

"There is a scamp," thought he, "whose ball and chain are waiting for him at Toulon or Brest, and I have just concluded a devilish treaty with him. Bah! I have nothing to reproach myself with. Of two evils choose the least; it remains to be seen whether Gerfaut is the dupe of a coquette or whether his love is threatened with some catastrophe; at all events, I am his friend, and I ought to clear up this mystery and put him on his guard."

"Ten francs to-day, and ten napoleons Monday," said Lambernier as, with an eye in which there was a mixture of scorn and hatred, he watched the traveller disappear. "I should be a double idiot to refuse. But this does not pay for the blows from your whip, you puppy; when we have settled this affair of the fine lady, I shall attend to you."

CHAPTER XII

AN INHARMONIOUS MUSICALE

The visitors referred to in the conversation between the two friends arrived at the castle at an early hour, according to the custom in the country, where they dine in the middle of

the day. Gerfaut saw from his chamber, where he had remained like Achilles under his tent, half a dozen carriages drive one after another up the avenue, bringing the guests announced by Marillac. Little by little the company scattered through the gardens in groups; four or five young girls under Aline's escort hurried to a swing, to which several good-natured young men attached themselves, and among them Gerfaut recognized his Pylades. During this time Madame de Bergenheim was doing the honors of the house to the matrons, who thought this amusement too youthful for their age and preferred a quiet walk through the park. Christian, on his side, was explaining methods of improvements to gentlemen of agricultural and industrial appearance, who seemed to listen to him with great interest. Three or four others had taken possession of the billiard-table; while the more venerable among the guests had remained in the parlor with Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

Page 2300

"Have you a pair of clean trousers?" asked Marillac, hastily entering his friend's room as the first bell rang for dinner. An enormous green stain upon one of his knees was all the explanation necessary on this subject.

"You, lose no time," said Gerfaut, as he opened a drawer in his closet. "Which of these rustic beauties has had the honor of seeing you on your knees at her feet?"

"It was that confounded swing! Silly invention! To sacrifice one's self to please little girls! If I am ever caught at it again I'll let you know! Your selfish method is a better, one. By the way, Madame de Bergenheim asked me, with a rather sly look, whether you were ill and whether you would not come down to dinner?"

"Irony!"

"It: seemed like it. The lady smiled in a decidedly disagreeable manner. I am not timid, but I would rather write a vaudeville in three acts than to be obliged to make a declaration to her if she had that impish smile on her lips. She has a way of protruding her under lip-ugh! do you know you are terribly slender? Will you let me cut the band of your trousers? I never could dance with my stomach compressed in this manner."

"What about this secret you were to reveal to me?" Gerfaut interrupted, with a smile which seemed to denote perfect security.

Marillac looked at his friend with a grave countenance, then began to laugh in an embarrassed manner.

"We will leave serious matters until to-morrow," he replied. "The essential thing to-day is to make ourselves agreeable. Madame de Bergenheim asked me a little while ago whether we would be kind enough to sing a few duets? I accepted for us both. I do not suppose that the inhabitants of this valley have often heard the duet from Mose with the embellishments a la Tamburini:

Palpito a quello aspetto,
'Gemo nel suo dolor.'

"Would you prefer that or the one from 'Il Barbiere'? although that is out of date, now."

"Whatever pleases you, but do not split my head about it in advance. I wish that music and dancing were at the bottom of the Moselle."

"With all my heart, but not the dinner. I gave a glance into the dining-room; it promises to be very fine. Now, then, everybody has returned to the house; to the table!"

The time has long since passed when Paris and the province formed two regions almost foreign to each other. To-day, thanks to the rapidity of communication, and the

importations of all kinds which reach the centre from the circumference without having time to spoil on the way, Paris and the rest of France are only one immense body excited by the same opinions, dressed in the same fashions, laughing at the same bon mot, revolutionized by the same opinions.

Provincial customs have almost entirely lost their peculiarities; a drawing-room filled with guests is the same everywhere. There are sometimes exceptions, however. The company gathered at the Bergenheim chateau was an example of one of those heterogeneous assemblies which the most exclusive mistress of a mansion can not avoid if she wishes to be neighborly, and in which a duchess may have on her right at the table the village mayor, and the most elegant of ladies a corpulent justice of the peace who believes he is making himself agreeable when he urges his fair neighbor to frequent potations.

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Madame de Bergenheim had discovered symptoms of haughty jealousy among her country neighbors, always ready to feel themselves insulted and very little qualified to make themselves agreeable in society. So she resolved to extend a general invitation to all those whom she felt obliged to receive, in order to relieve herself at once of a nuisance for which no pleasure could prove an equivalent. This day was one of her duty days.

Among these ladies, much more gorgeously than elegantly attired, these healthy young girls with large arms, and feet shaped like flat-irons, ponderous gentlemen strangled by their white cravats and puffed up in their frock-coats, Gerfaut, whose nervous system had been singularly irritated by his disappointment of the night before, felt ready to burst with rage. He was seated at the table between two ladies, who seemed to have exhausted, in their toilettes, every color in the solar spectrum, and whose coquettish instincts were aroused by the proximity of a celebrated writer. But their simperings were all lost; the one for whom they were intended bore himself in a sulky way, which fortunately passed for romantic melancholy; this rendered him still more interesting in the eyes of his neighbor on the left, a plump blonde about twenty-five years old, fresh and dimpled, who doted upon Lord Byron, a common pretension among pretty, buxom women who adore false sentimentality.

With the exception of a bow when he entered the drawing-room, Octave had not shown Madame de Bergenheim any attention. The cold, disdainful, bored manner in which he patiently endured the pleasures of the day exceeded even the privilege for boorish bearing willingly granted to gentlemen of unquestionable talent. Clemence, on the contrary, seemed to increase in amiability and liveliness. There was not one of her tiresome guests to whom she did not address some pleasant remark, not one of those vulgar, pretentious women to whom she was not gracious and attentive; one would have said that she had a particular desire to be more attractive than usual, and that her lover's sombre air added materially to her good humor.

After dinner they retired to the drawing-room where coffee was served. A sudden shower, whose drops pattered loudly against the windows, rendered impossible all plans for amusement out of doors. Gerfaut soon noticed a rather animated conversation taking place between Madame de Bergenheim, who was somewhat embarrassed as to how to amuse her guests for the remainder of the afternoon, and Marillac, who, with his accustomed enthusiasm, had constituted himself master of ceremonies. A moment later, the drawing-room door opened, and servants appeared bending under the burden of an enormous grand piano which was placed between the windows. At this sight, a tremor of delight ran through the group of young girls, while Octave, who was standing in one corner near the mantel, finished his Mocha with a still more melancholy air.

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"Now, then!" said Marillac, who had been extremely busy during these preparations, and had spread a dozen musical scores upon the top of the piano, "it is agreed that we shall sing the duet from Mose. There are two or three little boarding-school misses here whose mothers are dying for them to show off. You understand that we must sacrifice ourselves to encourage them. Besides, a duet for male voices is the thing to open a concert with."

"A concert! has Madame de Bergenheim arranged to pasture us in this sheepfold in order to make use of us this evening?" replied Gerfaut, whose ill-humor increased every moment.

"Five or six pieces only, afterward they will have a dance. I have an engagement with your diva; if you wish for a quadrille and have not yet secured your number, I should advise you to ask her for it now, for there are five or six dandies who seem to be terribly attentive to her. After our duet I shall sing the trio from La Date Blanche, with those young ladies who have eyes as round as a fish's, and apricot-colored gowns on—those two over there in the corner, near that pretty blonde who sat beside you at table and ogled you all the time. She had already bored me to death! I do not know whether I shall be able to hit my low 'G' right or not. I have a cataclysm of charlotte-russe in my stomach. Just listen:

'A cette complaisance!—'"

Marillac leaned toward his friend and roared in his ear the note supposed to be the "G" in question.

"Like an ophicleide," said Gerfaut, who could not help laughing at the importance the artist attached to his display of talent.

"In that case I shall risk my great run at the end of the first solo. Two octaves from 'E' to 'E'! Zuchelli was good enough to give me a few points as to the time, and I do it rather nicely."

"Madame would like to speak to Monsieur," said a servant, who interrupted him in the midst of his sentence.

"Dolce, soave amor," warbled the artist, softly, as he responded to the call from the lady of the house, trying to fix in his mind that run, which he regarded as one of the most beautiful flowers in his musical crown.

Everybody was seated, Madame de Bergenheim sat at the piano and Marillac stood behind her. The artist selected one of the scores, spread it out on the rack, turned down the corners so that during the execution he might not be stopped by some refractory leaf, coughed in his deep bass voice, placed himself in such a manner as to show the

side of his head which he thought would produce the best effect upon the audience, then gave a knowing nod to Gerfaut, who still stood gloomy and isolated in a far corner.

“We trespass upon your kindness too much, Monsieur,” said Madame de Bergenheim to him, when he had responded to this mute invitation; and as she struck a few chords, she raised her dark, brown eyes to his. It was the first glance she had given him that day; from coquetry, perhaps, or because sorrow for her lover had softened her heart, or because she felt remorse for the extreme harshness of her note the night before, we must admit that this glance had nothing very discouraging in it. Octave bowed, and spoke a few words as coldly polite as he would have spoken to a woman sixty years of age.

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Madame de Bergenheim lowered her eyes and endeavored to smile disdainfully, as she struck the first bars of the duet.

The concert began. Gerfaut had a sweet, clear, tenor voice which he used skilfully, gliding over dangerous passages, skipping too difficult ones which he thought beyond his execution, singing, in fact, with the prudence of an amateur who can not spend his time studying runs and chromatic passages four hours daily. He sang his solo with a simplicity bordering upon negligence, and even substituted for the rather complicated passage at the end a more than modest ending.

Clemence, for whom he had often sung, putting his whole soul into the performance, was vexed with this affectation of indifference. It seemed to her as if he ought, for her sake, to make more of an effort in her drawing-room, whatever might be their private quarrel; she felt it was a consideration due to her and to which his numerous homages had accustomed her. She entered this new grievance in a double-entry book, which a woman always devotes to the slightest actions of the man who pays court to her.

Marillac, on the contrary, was grateful to his friend for this indifference of execution, for he saw in it an occasion to shine at his expense. He began his solo 'E il ciel per noi sereno,' with an unusual tension of the larynx, roaring out his low notes. Except for the extension being a little irregular and unconnected, he did not acquit himself very badly in the first part. When he reached his final run, he took a long breath, as if it devolved upon him to set in motion all the windmills in Montmartre, and started with a majestic fury; the first forty notes, while they did not resemble Mademoiselle Grisi's pearly tones, ascended and descended without any notable accident; but at the last stages of the descent, the singer's breath and voice failed him at the same moment, the "A" came out weak, the "G" was stifled, the "F" resembled the buzzing of a bee, and the "E" was absent!

Zuchelli's run was like one of those Gothic staircases which show an almost complete state of preservation upon the upper floor, but whose base, worn by time, leaves a solution of continuity between the ground and the last step.

Madame de Bergenheim waited the conclusion of this dangerous run, not thinking to strike the final chord; the only sound heard was the rustling of the dilettante's beard, as his chin sought his voice in vain in the depths of his satin cravat, accompanied by applause from a benevolent old lady who had judged of the merit of the execution by the desperate contortions of the singer.

"D—n that charlotte-russe!" growled the artist, whose face was as red as a lobster.

The rest of the duet was sung without any new incident, and gave general satisfaction.

"Madame, your piano is half a tone too low," said the basso, with a reproachful accent.

“That is true,” replied Clemence, who could not restrain a smile; “I have so little voice that I am obliged to have my piano tuned to suit it. You can well afford to pardon me for my selfishness, for you sang like an angel.”

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Marillac bowed, partly consoled by this compliment, but thinking to himself that a hostess's first duty was to have her piano in tune, and not to expose a bass singer to the danger of imperilling his low "E" before an audience of forty.

"Madame, can I be of any more service to you?" asked Gerfaut, as he leaned toward Madame de Bergenheim, with one of his coldest smiles.

"I do not wish to impose further upon your kindness, Monsieur," said she, in a voice which showed her secret displeasure.

The poet bowed and walked away.

Then Clemence, upon general request, sang a romance with more taste than brilliancy, and more method than expression. It seemed as if Octave's icy manner had reacted upon her, in spite of the efforts she had made at first to maintain a cheerful air. A singular oppression overcame her; once or twice she feared her voice would fail her entirely. When she finished, the compliments and applause with which she was overwhelmed seemed so insupportable to her that it was with difficulty she could restrain herself from leaving the room. While exasperated by her weakness, she could not help casting a glance in Octave's direction. She could not catch his eye, however, as he was busy talking with Aline. She felt so lonely and deserted at this moment, and longed so for this glance which she could not obtain, that tears of vexation filled her eyes.

"I was wrong to write him as I did," thought she; "but if he really loved me, he would not so quickly resign himself to obeying me!"

A woman in a drawing-room resembles a soldier on a breastwork; self-abnegation is the first of her duties; however much she may suffer, she must present as calm and serene a countenance as a warrior in the hour of danger, and fall, if necessary, upon the spot, with death in her heart and a smile upon her lips. In order to obey this unwritten law, Madame de Bergenheim, after a slight interruption, seated herself at the piano to accompany three or four young girls who were each to sing in turn the songs that they had been drilled on for six months.

Marillac, who had gone to strengthen his stomach with a glass of rum, atoned for his little mishap, in the trio from *La Dame Blanche*, and everything went smoothly. Finally, to close this concert (may heaven preserve us from all exhibitions of this kind!), Aline was led to the piano by her brother, who, like all people who are not musical, could not understand why one should study music for years if not from love for the art. Christian was fond of his little sister and very proud of her talents. The poor child, whose courage had all disappeared, sang in a fresh, trembling little voice, a romance revised and corrected at her boarding-school. The word love had been replaced by that of friendship, and to repair this slight fault of prosody, the extra syllable disappeared in a

hiatus which would have made Boileau's blond wig stand on end. But the Sacred Heart has a system of versification of its own which, rather than allow the dangerous expression to be used, let ultra-modesty destroy poetry!

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This sample of sacred music was the final number of the concert; after that, they began dancing, and Gerfaut invited Aline. Whether because he wished to struggle against his ill-humor, or from kindness of heart because he understood her emotion, he began to talk with the young girl, who was still blushing at her success. Among his talents, Octave possessed in a peculiar degree that of adapting his conversation to the age, position, and character of his companions. Aline listened with unconcealed pleasure to her partner's words; the elasticity of her step and a sort of general trembling made her seem like a flower swaying to the breeze, and revealed the pleasure which his conversation gave her. Every time her eyes met Octave's penetrating glance they fell, out of instinctive modesty. Each word, however indifferent it might be, rang in her ears sweet and melodious; each contact with his hand seemed to her like a tender pressure.

Gerfaut experienced a feeling of melancholy as he noticed how this fresh, innocent rose brightened up at each word he uttered, and he thought:

"She would love me as I want to be loved, with all her heart, mind, and soul. She would kneel before my love as before an altar, while this coquette—"

He glanced in the direction where Madame de Bergenheim was dancing with Marillac, and met her gaze fixed full upon him. The glance which he received was rapid, displeased, and imperious. It signified clearly: "I forbid you to speak thus to your partner."

Octave, at that moment; was not disposed to obedience. After glancing over the quadrille, as if it were by mere chance that his eyes had met Clemence's, he turned toward Aline and redoubled his amiability:

A moment later, he received, not directly, but through the medium of the mirror—that so often indiscreet confidant—a second glance more sombre and threatening than before.

"Very good," said he, to himself, as he led the young girl to her seat; "we are jealous. That alters the situation. I know now where the ramparts are the weakest and where to begin my attack."

No other incident marked the day. The guests left at nightfall, and the society was reduced to the usual members of the household. Octave entered his room after supper, humming an Italian air, evidently in such good spirits that his friend was quite surprised.

"I give it up, I can not understand your conduct," said the latter; "you have been as solemn as an owl all day, and now here you are as gay as a lark; have you had an understanding?"

"I am more vexed than ever."

"And you enjoy being so?"

“Very much.”

“Ah! you are playing ‘who loses wins!’”

“Not exactly; but as my good sentiments lead to nothing, I hope to conduct myself in such a disagreeable way as to force this capricious creature to adore me.”

“The devil! that is clever. Besides, it is a system as good as any other. Women are such extraordinary creatures!”

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“Woman,” said Octave, “resembles a pendulum, whose movement is a continual reaction; when it moves to the right, it has to go to the left in order to return to the right again, and so on. Suppose virtue is on one side and love on the other, and the feminine balance between them, the odds are that, having moved to the right in a violent manner, it will return none the less energetically to the left; for the longer a vibration has been, the greater play the contrary vibration has. In order to hasten the action of this pendulum I am about to attach to it—to act as extra balance-weight—a little anguish which I ought to have employed sooner.”

“Why make her suffer, since you believe that she loves you?”

“Why? Because she drives me to it. Do you fancy that I torture her willingly; that I take pleasure in seeing her cheeks grow pale from insomnia and her eyes show traces of tears? I love her, I tell you; I suffer and weep with her. But I love her, and I must make sure of her love. If she will leave but a road full of brambles and sharp stones for me to reach her, must I give up the struggle just because I run the risk by taking her with me, of wounding her charming feet? I will cure them with my kisses!”

“Listen to me! I am not in love; I am an artist. If I have some peculiar ideas, it is not my fault. And you, in your character of docile lover, have you decided to yield?”

“Morally.”

“Very well! after all, you are right. The science of love resembles those old signs upon which one reads: ‘Here, hair is dressed according to one’s fancy.’ If this angel wishes her hair pulled, do it for her.”

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

I believed it all; one is so happy to believe!
It is a terrible step for a woman to take, from No to Yes
Lady who requires urging, although she is dying to sing
Let them laugh that win!
Let ultra-modesty destroy poetry
Misfortunes never come single
No woman is unattainable, except when she loves another
These are things that one admits only to himself
Topics that occupy people who meet for the first time
You are playing ‘who loses wins!’

GERFAUT

By Charles de Bernard

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XIII

MONSIEUR DE BERGENHEIM

Some men in society marry too soon, a great number too late, a small and fortunate proportion at an opportune time. Young men in the country, of good family, are usually established in marriage by their parents as early as possible. When the family council finds an heiress who answers all the conditions of the programme laid out, they begin by giving the victim his cue. Provided the young lady has not a positively crooked nose, arms too red, and too uncouth a waist—sometimes even notwithstanding these little misfortunes—the transaction is concluded without any difficulty.

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Clemence and Christian should be placed in the first rank of privileged couples of this kind. The most fastidious old uncle or precise old dowager could not discover the slightest pretense for criticism. Age, social position, wealth, physical endowments, all seemed united by a chance as rare as fortunate. So Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who had very high pretensions for her niece, made no objection upon receiving the first overtures. She had not, at this time, the antipathy for her future nephew's family which developed later. The Bergenheims were in her eyes very well-born gentleman.

A meeting took place at the Russian Embassy. Bergenheim came in uniform; it was etiquette to do so, as the minister of war was present; but at the same time, of course, there was a little vanity on his part, for his uniform showed off his tall, athletic figure to the best advantage. Christian was certainly a very handsome soldier; his moustache and eyebrows were of a lighter tint than his complexion, and gave him that martial air which pleases women. Clemence could find no reason for a refusal. The way in which she had been brought up by her aunt had not rendered her so happy but that she often desired to change her situation. Like the greater number of young girls, she consented to become a wife so as not to remain a maiden; she said yes, so as not to say no.

As to Christian, he was in love with his wife as nine out of ten cavalry officers know how to love, and he seemed perfectly satisfied with the sentiment that he received in return for this sudden affection. A few successes with young belles, for whom an epaulette has an irresistible attraction, had inspired Baron de Bergenheim with a confidence in himself the simplicity of which excused the conceit. He persuaded himself that he pleased Clemence because she suited him exactly.

There are singers who pretend to read music at sight; give them a score by Gluck—"I beg your pardon," they will say, "my part is written here in the key of 'C' and I sing only in the key of 'G'!" How many men do not know even the key of 'G' in matters of love! Unfortunately for him, Bergenheim was one of that number. After three years of married life, he had not divined the first note in Clemence's character. He decided in his own mind, at the end of a few months, that she was cold, if not heartless. This discovery, which ought to have wounded his vanity, inspired him, on the contrary, with a deeper respect for her; insensibly this reserve reacted upon himself, for love is a fire whose heat dies out for want of fuel, and its cooling off is more sudden when the flame is more on the surface than in the depths.

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The revolution of 1830 stopped Christian's career, and gave further pretexts for temporary absences which only added to the coolness which already existed between husband and wife. After handing in his resignation, the Baron fixed his residence at his chateau in the Vosges mountains, for which he shared the hereditary predilection of his family. His tastes were in perfect harmony with this dwelling, for he had quickly become the perfect type of a country gentleman, scorning the court and rarely leaving his ancestral acres. He was too kind-hearted to exact that his wife should share his country tastes and retired life. The unlimited confidence which he had in her, a loyalty which never allowed him to suppose evil or suspect her, a nature very little inclined to jealousy, made him allow Clemence the greatest liberty. The young woman lived at will in Paris with her aunt, or at Bergenheim with her husband, without a suspicious thought ever entering his head. Really,—what had he to fear? What wrong could she reproach him with? Was he not full of kindness and attention toward her? Did he not leave her mistress of her own fortune, free to do as she liked, to gratify every caprice? He thus lived upon his faith in the marriage contract, with unbounded confidence and old-fashioned loyalty.

According to general opinion, Madame de Bergenheim was a very fortunate woman, to whom virtue must be so easy that it could hardly be called a merit. Happiness, according to society, consists in a box at the Opera, a fine carriage, and a husband who pays the bills without frowning. Add to the above privileges, a hundred thousand francs' worth of diamonds, and a woman has really no right to dream or to suffer. There are, however, poor, loving creatures who stifle under this happiness as if under one of those leaden covers that Dante speaks of; they breathe, in imagination, the pure, vital air that a fatal instinct has revealed to them; they struggle between duty and desire; they gaze, like captive doves and with a sorrowful eye, upon the forbidden region where it would be so blissful to soar; for, in fastening a chain to their feet, the law did not bandage their eyes, and nature gave them wings; if the wings tear the chain asunder, shame and misfortune await them! Society will never forgive the heart that catches a glimpse of the joys it is unacquainted with; even a brief hour in that paradise has to be expiated by implacable social damnation and its everlasting flames.

CHAPTER XIV

GERFAUT'S ALLEGORY

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There almost always comes a moment when a woman, in her combat against love, is obliged to call falsehood to the help of duty. Madame de Bergenheim had entered this terrible period, in which virtue, doubting its own strength, does not blush to resort to other resources. At the moment when Octave, a man of experience, was seeking assistance in exciting her jealousy, she was meditating a plan of defence founded upon deceit. In order to take away all hope from her lover, she pretended a sudden affection for her husband, and in spite of her secret remorse she persisted in this role for two days; but during the night her tears expiated her treachery. Christian greeted his wife's virtuous coquetry with the gratitude and eagerness of a husband who has been deprived of love more than he likes. Gerfaut was very indignant at the sight of this perfidious manoeuvre, the intention of which he immediately divined; and his rage wanted only provocation to break out in full force.

One evening they were all gathered in the drawing-room with the exception of Aline, whom a reprimand from Mademoiselle de Corandeuil had exiled to her room. The old lady, stretched out in her chair, had decided to be unfaithful to her whist in favor of conversation. Marillac, leaning his elbows upon a round table, was negligently sketching some political caricatures, at that time very much the fashion, and particularly agreeable to the Legitimist party. Christian, who was seated near his wife, whose hand he was pressing with caressing familiarity, passed from one subject to another, and showed in his conversation the overwhelming conceit of a happy man who regards his happiness as a proof of superiority.

Gerfaut, standing, gazed gloomily at Clemence, who leaned toward her husband and seemed to listen eagerly to his slightest word. Bergenheim was a faithful admirer of the classics, as are all country gentlemen, who introduce a sentiment of propriety into their literary opinions and prefer the ancient writers to the modern, for the reason that their libraries are much richer in old works than in modern books. The Baron unmercifully sacrificed Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, whom he had never read, upon the altar of Racine and Corneille, of which he possessed two or three editions, and yet it would have embarrassed him to recite half a dozen verses from them. Marillac boldly defended the cause of contemporary literature, which he considered as a personal matter, and poured out a profusion of sarcastic remarks in which there was more wit than good taste.

"The gods fell from Olympus, why should they not also fall from Parnassus?" said the artist, finally, with a triumphant air. "Say what you will, Bergenheim, your feeble opposition will not prevail against the instincts of the age. The future is ours, let me tell you, and we are the high priests of the new religion; is it not so, Gerfaut?"

At these words, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil shook her head, gravely.

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"A new religion!" said she; "if this pretension should be verified you would only be guilty of heresy, and, without allowing myself to be taken in, I can understand how elevated minds and enthusiastic hearts might be attracted by the promises of a deceptive Utopia; but you, gentlemen, whom I believe to be sincere, do you not see to what an extent you delude yourselves? What you call religion is the most absolute negation of religious principles; it is the most distressing impiety ornamented with a certain sentimental hypocrisy which has not even the courage frankly to proclaim its principles."

"I swear to you, Mademoiselle, that I am religious three days out of four," replied Marillac; "that is something; there are some Christians who are pious only on Sunday."

"Materialism is the source from which modern literature takes its inspiration," continued the old lady; "and this poisonous stream not only dries up the thoughts which would expand toward heaven, but also withers all that is noble in human sentiment. To-day, people are not content to deny God, because they are not pure enough to comprehend Him; they disown even the weakness of the heart, provided they have an exalted and dignified character. They believe no longer in love. All the women that your fashionable writers tell us about are vulgar and sometimes unchaste creatures, to whom formerly a gentleman would have blushed to give one glance or to offer a supper. I say this for your benefit, Monsieur de Gerfaut, for in this respect you are far from being irreproachable; and I could bring forth your books to support my theory. If I accuse you of atheism, in love, what have you to say in reply?"

Carried away by one of those impulsive emotions which men of imagination can not resist, Octave arose and said:

"I should not deny such an accusation. Yes, it is a sad thing, but true, and only weak minds recoil from the truth: reality exists only in material objects; all the rest is merely deception and fancy. All poetry is a dream, all spiritualism a fraud! Why not apply to love the accommodating philosophy which takes the world as it is, and does not throw a savory fruit into the press under the pretext of extracting I know not what imaginary essence? Two beautiful eyes, a satin skin, white teeth, and a shapely foot and hand are of such positive and inestimable value! Is it not unreasonable, then, to place elsewhere than in them all the wealth of love? Intellect sustains its owner, they say; no, intelligence kills. It is thought that corrupts sensation and causes suffering where, but for that, joy would reign supreme.

"Thought! accursed gift! Do we give or ask a thought of the rose whose perfume we breathe? Why not love as we breathe? Would not woman, considered simply as a perfectly organized vegetation, be the queen of creation? Why not enjoy her perfume as we bend before her, leaving her clinging to the ground where she was born and lives? Why tear her from the earth, this flower so fresh, and have her wither in our hands as we raise her up like an offering? Why make of so weak and fragile a creature

a being above all others, for whom our enthusiasm can find no name, and then discover her to be but an unworthy angel?

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"Angel! yes, of course, but an angel of the Earth, not of Heaven; an angel of flesh, not of light! By dint of loving, we love wrongly. We place our mistress too high and ourselves too low; there is never a pedestal lofty enough for her, according to our ideas. Fools! Oh! reflection is always wise, but desire is foolish, and our conduct is regulated by our desire. We, above all, with our active, restless minds, blase in many respects, unbelieving in others and disrespectful in the remainder, soar over life as over an impure lake, and look at everything with contempt, seeking in love an altar before which we can humble our pride and soften our disdain.

"For there is in every man an insurmountable need to fall on his knees before no matter what idol, if it remains standing and allows itself to be adored. At certain hours, a prayerbell rings in the depth of the heart, the sound of which throws him upon his knees as it cries: 'Kneel!' And then the very being who ignores God in His churches and scorns kings upon their thrones, the being who has already exhausted the hollow idols of glory and fame, not having a temple to pray in, makes a fetich for himself in order to have a divinity to adore, so as not to be alone in his impiety, and to see, above his head when he arises, something that shall not be empty and vacant space. This man seeks a woman, takes all that he has, talent passion, youth, enthusiasm, all the wealth of his heart, and throws them at her feet like the mantle that Raleigh spread out before Elizabeth, and he says to this woman: 'Walk, O my queen; trample under your blessed feet the heart of your adoring slave!' This man is a fool, is he not? For when the queen has passed, what remains upon the mantle? Mud!"

Gerfaut accompanied these words with such a withering glance that the one for whom they were intended felt her blood freeze in her veins, and withdrew the hand her husband had kept till then in his; she soon arose and seated herself at the other side of the table, under the pretext of getting nearer the lamp to work, but in reality in order to withdraw from Christian's vicinity. Clemence had expected her lover's anger, but not his scorn; she had not strength to endure this torture, and the conjugal love which had, not without difficulty, inflamed her heart for the last few days, fell to ashes at the first breath of Octave's indignation.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil greeted the Vicomte's words indulgently; for, from consummate pride, she separated herself from other women.

"So then," said she, "you pretend that if to-day love is painted under false and vulgar colors, the fault is the model's, not the artist's."

"You express my thought much better than I could have done it myself," said Gerfaut, in an ironical tone; "where are the angels whose portraits are called for?"

"They are in our poetical dreams," said Marillac, raising his eyes to the ceiling with an inspired air.

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"Very well! tell us your dreams then, instead of copying a reality which it is impossible for you to render poetic, since you yourselves see it without illusions."

Gerfaut smiled bitterly at this suggestion, artlessly uttered by the Baron.

"My dreams," he replied, "I should tell them to you poorly indeed, for the first blessing of the awakening is forgetfulness, and to-day I am awake. However, I remember how I allowed myself to be once overcome by a dream that has now vanished, but still emits its luminous trail in my eyes. I thought I had discovered, under a beautiful and attractive appearance, the richest treasure that the earth can bestow upon the heart of man; I thought I had discovered a soul, that divine mystery, deep as the ocean, ardent as a flame, pure as air, glorious as heaven itself, infinite as space, immortal as eternity! It was another universe, where I should be king. With what ardent and holy love I attempted the conquest of this new world, but, less fortunate than Columbus, I met with shipwreck instead of triumph."

Clemence, at this avowal of her lover's defeat, threw him a glance of intense contradiction, then lowered her eyes, for she felt her face suffused with burning blushes.

When he entered his room that night, Gerfaut went straight to the window. He could see in the darkness the light which gleamed in Clemence's room.

"She is alone," said he to himself; "certainly heaven protects us, for in the state of exasperation I am in, I should have killed them both."

CHAPTER XV

DECLARATION OF WAR

Far from rejoicing at this moment in the triumph he had just obtained, Gerfaut fell into one of those attacks of disenchantment, during which, urged on by some unknown demon, he unmercifully administered to himself his own dreaded sarcasm. Being unable to sleep, he arose and opened his window again, and remained with his elbows resting upon the sill for some time. The night was calm, numberless stars twinkled in the heavens, the moon bathed with its silvery light the tops of the trees, through which a monotonous breeze softly rustled. After gazing at this melancholy picture of sleeping nature, the poet smiled disdainfully, and said to himself "This comedy must end. I can not waste my life thus. Doubtless, glory is a dream as well as love; to pass the night idiotically gazing at the moon and stars is, after all, as reasonable as to grow pale over a work destined to live a day, a year, or a century! for what renown lasts longer than that? If I were really loved, I should not regret those wasted hours; but is it true that I am loved? There are moments when I recover my coolness and clearness of mind, a degree of self possession incompatible with the enthusiasm of genuine passion; at other

times, it is true, a sudden agitation renders me powerless and leaves me as weak as a child. Oh, yes, I

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love her in a strange manner; the sentiment that I feel for her has become a study of the mind as well as an emotion of the heart, and that is what gives it its despotic tenacity; for a material impression weakens and gradually dies out, but when an energetic intelligence is brought to bear upon it, it becomes desperate. I should be wrong to complain. Passion, a passive sentiment! This word has a contradictory meaning for me. I am a lover as Napoleon was an emperor: nobody forced the crown upon him, he took it and crowned himself with his own hand. If my crown happens to be a thorny one, whom can I accuse? Did not my brow crave it?

"I have loved this woman of my own choosing, above all others; the choice made, I have worked at my love as I would at a cherished poem; it has been the subject of all my meditations, the fairy of all my dreams, for more than a year. I have not had a thought in which I have not paid her homage. I have devoted my talents to her; it seemed to me that by loving and perpetually contemplating her image, I might at last become worthy of painting it. I was conscious of a grand future, if only she had understood me; I often thought of Raphael and his own Fornarina. There is a throne vacant in poetry; I had dreamed of this throne in order to lay it at Clemence's feet. Oh! although this may never be more than a dream, this dream has given me hours of incomparable happiness! I should be ungrateful to deny it.

"And yet this love is only a fictitious sentiment; I realize it today. It is not with her that I am in love, it is with a woman created by my imagination, and whom I see clearly within this unfeeling marble shape. When we have meditated for a long time, our thoughts end by taking life and walking by our side. I can now understand the allegory of Adam taking Eve from his own substance; but flesh forms a palpitating flesh akin to itself; the mind creates only a shadow, and a shadow can not animate a dead body. Two dead bodies can not make a living one; a body without a soul is only a cadaver—and she has no soul."

Gerfaut sat motionless for some time with his face buried in his hands; suddenly he raised his head and burst into harsh laughter.

"Enough of this soaring in the clouds!" he exclaimed; "let us come down to earth again. It is permissible to think in verse, but one must act in prose, and that is what I shall do tomorrow. This woman's caprices, which she takes for efforts of virtue, have made of me a cruel and inexorable man; I have begged in vain for peace; if she wishes war, very well, so be it, she shall have war."

CHAPTER XVI

GERFAUT WINS A POINT

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For several days, Gerfaut followed, with unrelenting perseverance, the plan which he had mapped out in that eventful night. The most exacting woman could but appear satisfied with the politeness he displayed toward Madame de Bergenheim, but nothing in his conduct showed the slightest desire for an explanation. He was so careful of every look, gesture, and word of his, that it would have been impossible to discover the slightest difference in his actions toward Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, and the manner in which he treated Clemence. His choicest attentions and most particular efforts at amiability were bestowed upon Aline. He used as much caution as cunning, in his little game, for he knew that in spite of her inclination to be jealous, Madame de Bergenheim would never believe in a sudden desertion, and that she would surely discover the object of his ruse, if he made the mistake of exaggerating it in the least.

While renouncing the idea of a direct attack, he did not work with any less care to fortify his position. He redoubled his activity in widening the breach between the old aunt and the husband, following the principles of military art, that one should become master of the exterior works of a stronghold before seriously attacking its ramparts.

It was, in a way, by reflection that Octave's passion reached Clemence. Every few moments she learned some detail of this indirect attack, to which it was impossible for her to raise any objections.

"Monsieur de Gerfaut has promised to spend a fortnight longer with us," said her aunt to her, in a jeering tone.

"Really, Gerfaut is very obliging," said her husband, in his turn; "he thinks it very strange that we have not had a genealogical tree made to put in the drawing-room. He pretends that it is an indispensable complement to my collection of family portraits, and he offers to do me the favor of assuming charge of it. It seems, from what your aunt tells me, that he is very learned in heraldry. Would you believe it, he spent the whole morning in the library looking over files of old manuscripts? I am delighted, for this will prolong his stay here. He is a very charming fellow; a Liberal in politics, but a gentleman at heart. Marillac, who is a superb penman, undertakes to make a fair copy of the genealogy and to illuminate the crests. Do you know, we can not find my great-grandmother Cantelescar's coat-of-arms? But, my darling, it seems to me that you are not very kindly disposed toward your cousin Gerfaut."

Madame de Bergenheim, when these remarks and various others of a similar nature came up, tried to change the conversation, but she felt an antipathy for her husband bordering upon aversion. For lack of intelligence is one of the faults women can pardon the least; they look upon a confidence which is lulled into security by faith in their honor, and a blindness which does not suspect the possibility of a fall, as positive crimes.

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"Look at these pretty verses Monsieur de Gerfaut has written in my album, Clemence," said Aline, in her turn. During vacation, among her other pleasures forbidden her at the Sacred Heart, the young girl had purchased a superbly bound album, containing so far but two ugly sketches in sepia, one very bad attempt in water-colors, and the verses in question. She called this "my album!" as she called a certain little blank book, "my diary!" To the latter she confided every night the important events of the day. This book had assumed such proportions, during the last few days, that it threatened to reach the dimensions of the Duchesse d'Abrantes' memoires, but if the album was free to public admiration, nobody ever saw the diary, and Justine herself never had been able to discover the sanctuary that concealed this mysterious manuscript.

Aline was not so pleasantly received as the others, and Madame de Bergenheim hardly concealed the ill-humor her pretty sister-in-law's beaming face caused her every time Octave's name was mentioned.

The latter's diplomatic conduct was bearing fruit, and his expectations were being fulfilled with a precision which proved the correctness of his calculations.

In the midst of all the contradictory sentiments of fear, remorse, vexation, love, and jealousy, Clemence's head was so turned, at times, that she did not know what she did want. She found herself in one of those situations when a woman of a complex and mobile character whom all sensations impress, passes, with surprising facility, from one resolve to another entirely opposed to it. After being frightened beyond measure by her lover's presence in her husband's house, she ended by becoming accustomed to it, and then by ridiculing her first terror.

"Truly," she thought, at times, "I was too silly thus to torment myself and make myself ill; I was wanting in self-respect to mistrust myself to such an extent, and to see danger where there was none. He can not expect to make himself so very formidable while scrawling this genealogical tree. If he came one hundred leagues from Paris for that, he really does not merit such severe treatment."

Then, having thus reassured herself against the perils of her position, without realizing that to fear danger less was to embolden love, she proceeded to examine her lover's conduct.

"He seems perfectly resigned," she said, to herself; "not one word or glance for two days! Since he resigns himself so easily, he might, it seems to me, obey me entirely and go away; or, if he wishes to disobey me, he might do it in a less disagreeable manner. For really, his manner is almost rude; he might at least remember that I am his hostess, and that he is in my house. I do not see what pleasure he can take in talking to this little girl. I wager that his only object is to annoy me! He deceives himself most assuredly; it is all the same to me! But Aline takes all this seriously! She has become

very coquettish, the last few days! It certainly is very wrong for him to try to turn this child's head. I should like to know what he would say to justify himself."

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Thus, little by little, she mentally reached the point to which Octave wished to bring her. The desire for an explanation with him, which she dared not admit to herself at first from a feeling of pride, became greater from day to day, and at last Octave himself could not have longed more ardently for an interview. Now that Octave seemed to forget her, she realized that she loved him almost to adoration. She reproached herself for her harshness toward him more than she had ever reproached herself for her weakness. Her antipathy for all that did not concern him increased to such a degree that the most simple of household duties became odious to her. It seemed to her that all the people about her were enemies bent upon separating her from happiness, for happiness was Octave; and this happiness, made up of words, letters, glances from him, was lost!

The evening of the fourth day, she found this torture beyond her strength.

"I shall become insane," she thought; "to-morrow I will speak to him."

Gerfaut was saying to himself, at nearly the same moment: "To-morrow I will have a talk with her." Thus, by a strange sympathy, their hearts seemed to understand each other in spite of their separation. But what was an irresistible attraction in Clemence was only a determination resulting from almost a mathematical calculation on her lover's part. By the aid of this gift of second sight which intelligent men who are in love sometimes possess, he had followed, degree by degree, the variations of her heart, without her saying one word; and in spite of the veil of scorn and indifference with which she still had the courage to shield herself, he had not lost a single one of the tortures she had endured for the last four days. Now he thought that he had discovered enough to allow him to risk a step that, until then, he would have deemed dangerous; and with the egotism common to all men, even the best of lovers, he trusted in the weakness born of sorrow.

The next day a hunting party was arranged with some of the neighbors. Early in the morning, Bergenheim and Marillac started for the rendezvous, which was at the foot of the large oak-tree where the artist's *tete-a-tete* had been so cruelly interrupted. Gerfaut refused to join them, under the pretence of finishing an article for the 'Revue de Paris', and remained at home with the three ladies. As soon as dinner was ended, he went to his room in order to give a semblance of truth to his excuse.

He had been busying himself for some time trimming a quill pen at the window, which looked out upon the park, when he saw in the garden, directly beneath him, Constance's forefeet and nose; soon the dog jumped upon the sill in order to warm herself in the sun.

"The old lady has entered her sanctuary," thought Gerfaut, who knew that it was as impossible to see Constance without her mistress as St.-Roch without his dog.

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A moment later he saw Justine and Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's maid starting off, arm in arm, as if they were going for a promenade. Finally, he had hardly written half a page, when he noticed Aline opposite his window, with a straw hat upon her head and a watering-pot in her hand. A servant carried a bucket of water and placed it near a mass of dahlias, which the young girl had taken under her protection, and she at once set about her work with great zeal.

"Now," said Gerfaut, "let us see whether the place is approachable." And closing his desk, he stealthily descended the stairs.

After crossing the vestibule on the first floor, and a small gallery decorated with commonplace pictures, he found himself at the library door. Thanks to the genealogical tree which he had promised to compile, he possessed a key to this room, which was not usually open. By dint of preaching about the danger in certain reading for young girls, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil had caused this system of locking-up, especially designed to preserve Aline from the temptation of opening certain novels which the old lady rejected en masse. "Young girls did not read novels in 1780," she would say. This put an end to all discussion and cut short the protestations of the young girl, who was brought up exclusively upon a diet of Le Ragois and Mentelle's geography, and such solid mental food.

Several large books and numerous manuscripts were spread out upon the table in the library, together with a wide sheet of Holland paper, upon which was sketched the family tree of the Bergenheims. Instead of going to work, however, Gerfaut locked the door, and then went across the room and pressed a little knob which opened a small door no one would have noticed at first.

Leather bands representing the binding of books, like those which covered the rest of the walls, made it necessary for one to be informed of the existence of this secret exit in order to distinguish it from the rest of the room. This door had had a singular attraction for Gerfaut ever since the day he first discovered it. After silently opening it, he found himself in a small passage at the end of which was a small spiral staircase leading to the floor above. A cat creeping to surprise a bird asleep could not have walked more stealthily than he, as he mounted the stairs.

When he crossed the last step, he found himself in a small room, filled with wardrobes, lighted by a small glass door covered with a muslin curtain. This door opened into a little parlor which separated Madame de Bergenheim's private sitting-room from her sleeping-apartment. The only window was opposite the closet and occupied almost the whole of the woodwork, the rest of which was hung with pearl-gray stuff with lilac figures upon it. A broad, low divan, covered with the same material as the hanging, occupied the space in front of the window. It was the only piece of furniture, and it seemed almost impossible to introduce even one chair more.

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The blinds were carefully closed, as well as the double curtains, and they let in so little light that Octave had to accustom himself to the obscurity before he could distinguish Madame de Bergenheim through the muslin, curtains and the glass door. She was lying upon the divan, with her head turned in his direction and a book in her hand. He first thought her asleep, but soon noticed her gleaming eyes fastened upon the ceiling.

“She is not asleep, she does not read, then she is thinking of me!” said he to himself, by a logical deduction he believed incontestable.

After a moment’s hesitation, seeing that the young woman remained motionless, Gerfaut tried to turn the handle of the door as softly as possible so as to make his entrance quietly. The bolt had just noiselessly slipped in the lock when the drawing-room door suddenly opened, a flood of light inundated the floor, and Aline appeared upon the threshold, watering-pot in hand.

The young girl stopped an instant, for she thought her sister-in-law was asleep; but, meeting in the shade Clemence’s sparkling eyes, she entered, saying in a fresh, silvery voice:

“All my flowers are doing well; I have come to water yours.”

Madame de Bergenheim made no reply, but her eyebrows contracted slightly as she watched the young girl kneel before a superb datura. This almost imperceptible symptom, and the rather ill-humored look, foretold a storm. A few drops of water falling upon the floor gave her the needed pretext, and Gerfaut, as much in love as he was, could not help thinking of the fable of the wolf and the lamb, when he heard the lady of his thoughts exclaim, in an impatient tone:

“Let those flowers alone; they do not need to be watered. Do you not see that you are wetting the floor?”

Aline turned around and looked at the scolder for a moment; then, placing her watering-pot upon the floor, she darted toward the divan like a kitten that has just received a blow from its mother’s paw and feels authorized to play with her. Madame de Bergenheim tried to rise at this unexpected attack; but before she could sit up, she was thrown back upon the cushions by the young girl, who seized both her hands and kissed her on each cheek.

“Good gracious! how cross you have been for the last few days!” cried Aline, pressing her sister’s hands. “Are you going to be like your aunt? You do nothing but scold now. What have I done? Are you vexed with me? Do you not love me any longer?”



Clemence felt a sort of remorse at this question, asked with such a loving accent; but her jealousy she could not overcome. To make up for it, she kissed her sister-in-law with a show of affection which seemed to satisfy the latter.

“What are you reading?” asked the young girl, picking up the book which had fallen to the floor in their struggle—“Notre Dame de Paris. That must be interesting! Will you let me read it? Oh! do! will you?”

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“You know very well that my aunt has forbidden you to read novels.”

“Oh! she does that just to annoy me and for no other reason. Do you think that is right? Must I remain an idiot, and never read anything but history and geography the rest of my life? As if I did not know that Louis Thirteenth was the son of Henri Fourth, and that there are eighty-six departments in France. You read novels. Does it do you any harm?”

Clemence replied in a rather imperative tone, which should have put an end to the discussion.

“When you are married you can do as you like. Until then you must leave your education in the hands of those who are interested in you.”

“All my friends,” replied Aline with a pout, “have relatives who are interested in them, at least as much as your aunt is in me, and they do not prevent their reading the books they like. There is Claire de Saponay, who has read all of Walter Scott’s novels, Maleck-Adel, Eugenie and Mathilde—and I do not know how many more; Gessner, Mademoiselle de Lafayette—she has read everything; and I—they have let me read Numa Ponzpilius and Paul and Virginia. Isn’t that ridiculous at sixteen years of age?”

“Do not get excited, but go into the library and get one of Walter Scott’s novels; but do not let my aunt know anything about it.”

At this act of capitulation, by which Madame de Bergenheim doubtless wished to atone for her disagreeableness, Aline made one joyous bound for the glass door. Gerfaut had barely time to leave his post of observation and to conceal himself between two wardrobes, under a cloak which was hanging there, when the young girl made her appearance, but she paid no attention to the pair of legs which were but imperfectly concealed. She bounded down the stairs and returned a moment later with the precious volumes in her hand.

“Waverley, or, Scotland Sixty Years Ago,” said she, as she read the title. “I took the first one on the shelf, because you are going to lend them all to me, one by one, are you not? Claire says that a young girl can read Walter Scott, and that his books are very nice.”

“We shall see whether you are sensible,” replied Clemence, smiling; “but, above all things, do not let my aunt see these books, for I am the one who would get the scolding.”

“Do not worry;—I will go and hide them in my room.”

She went as far as the door, then stopped and came back a few steps.

"It seems," said she, "that Monsieur de Gerfaut worked in the library yesterday, for there are piles of books on the table. It is very kind of him to be willing to make this tree, is it not? Shall we both be in it? Do they put women in such things? I hope your aunt will not be there; she is not one of our family."

Clemence's face clouded again at the name of Gerfaut.

"I know no more about it than you," she replied, a little harshly.

"The reason I asked is because there are only pictures of men in the drawing-room; it is not very polite on their part. I should much prefer that there should be portraits of our grandmothers; it would be so amusing to see the beautiful dresses that they wore in those days rather than those old beards which frighten me. But perhaps they do not put young girls in genealogical trees," she continued, in a musing tone.



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"You might ask Monsieur de Gerfaut; he wishes to please you too much to refuse to tell you," said Clemence, with an almost ironical smile.

"Do you think so?" asked Aline, innocently. "I should never dare to ask him."

"You are still afraid of him, then?"

"A little," replied the young girl, lowering her eyes, for she felt her face flush.

This symptom made Madame de Bergenheim more vexed than ever, and she continued, in a cutting, sarcastic tone:

"Has your cousin d'Artigues written you lately?"

Mademoiselle de Bergenheim raised her eyes and looked at her for a moment with an indifferent air:

"I don't know," she said, at last.

"What! you do not know whether you have received a letter from your cousin?" continued Clemence, laughing affectedly.

"Ah! Alphonse—no, that is, yes; but it was a long time ago."

"How cold and indifferent you are all of a sudden to this dear Alphonse! You do not remember, then, how you wept at his departure, a year ago, and how vexed you were with your brother who tried to tease you about this beautiful affection, and how you swore that you would never have any other husband than your cousin?"

"I was a simpleton, and Christian was right. Alphonse is only one year older than I! Think of it, what a fine couple we should make! I know that I am not very sensible, and so it is necessary that my husband should be wise enough for both. Christian is nine years older than you, is he not?"

"Do you think that is too much?" asked Madame de Bergenheim.

"Quite the contrary."

"What age should you like your husband to be?"

"Oh!—thirty," replied the young girl, after a slight hesitation.

"Monsieur de Gerfaut's age?"

They gazed at each other in silence. Octave, who, from his place of concealment heard the whole of this conversation, noticed the sad expression which passed over

Clemence's face, and seemed to provoke entire confidence. The young girl allowed herself to be caught by this appearance of interest and affection.

"I will tell you something," said she, "if you will promise never to tell a soul."

"To whom should I repeat it? You know that I am very discreet as to your little secrets."

"It is because this might be perhaps a great secret," continued Aline.

Clemence took her sister-in-law's hand, and drew her down beside her.

"You know," said Aline, "that Christian has promised to give me a watch like yours, because I do not like mine. Yesterday, when we were out walking, I told him I thought it was very unkind of him not to have given it to me yet. Do you know what he replied?—It is true that he laughed a little—It is hardly worth while buying you one now; when you are the Vicomtesse de Gerfaut, your husband will give you one."

"Your brother was joking at your expense; how could you be such a child as not to perceive it?"

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"I am not such a child!" exclaimed Aline, rising with a vexed air; "I know what I have seen. They were talking a long time together in the drawing-room last evening, and I am sure they were speaking of me."

Madame de Bergenheim burst into laughter, which increased her sister-in-law's vexation, for she was less and less disposed to be treated like a young girl.

"Poor Aline!" said the Baroness, at last; "they were talking about the fifth portrait; Monsieur de Gerfaut can not find the name of the original among the old papers, and he thinks he did not belong to the family. You know, that old face with the gray beard, near the door."

The young girl bent her head, like a child who sees her naughty sister throw down her castle of cards.

"And how do you know?" said she, after a moment's reflection. "You were at the piano. How could you hear at the other end of the room what Monsieur de Gerfaut was saying?"

It was Clemence's turn to hang her head, for it seemed to her that the girl had suspected the constant attention which, under an affectation of indifference, never allowed her to lose one of Octave's words. As usual, she concealed her embarrassment by redoubling her sarcasm.

"Very likely," said she, "I was mistaken, and you may be right after all. What day shall we have the honor of saluting Madame la Vicomtesse de Gerfaut?"

"I foolishly told you what I imagined, and you at once make fun of me," said Aline, whose round face lengthened at each word, and passed from rose-color to scarlet; "is it my fault that my brother said this?"

"I do not think it was necessary for him to speak of it, for you to think a great deal about the matter."

"Very well; must one not think of something?"

"But one should be careful of one's thoughts; it is not proper for a young girl to think of any man," replied Clemence, with an accent of severity which would have made her aunt recognize with pride the pure blood of the Corandeuils.

"I think it is more proper for a young girl to do so than for a married woman."

At this unexpected retort, Madame de Bergenheim lost countenance and sat speechless before the young maiden, like a pupil who has just been punished by his teacher.

“Where the devil did the little serpent get that idea?” thought Gerfaut, who was very ill at ease between the two wardrobes where he was concealed.

Seeing that her sister-in-law did not reply to her, Aline took this silence from confusion for an expression of bad temper, and at once became angry in her turn.

“You are very cross to-day,” said she; “good-by, I do not want your books.”

She threw the volumes of Waverley upon the sofa, picked up her watering-pot and went out, closing the door with a loud bang. Madame de Bergenheim sat motionless with a pensive, gloomy air, as if the young girl’s remark had changed her into a statue.

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"Shall I enter?" said Octave to himself, leaving his niche and putting his hand upon the door-knob. "This little simpleton has done me an infinite wrong with her silly speeches. I am sure that she is cruising with full sails set upon the stormy sea of remorse, and that those two rosebuds she is gazing at now seem to her like her husband's eyes."

Before the poet could make up his mind what to do, the Baroness arose and left the room, closing the door almost as noisily as her sister-in-law had done.

Gerfaut went downstairs, cursing, from the very depths of his heart, boarding-school misses and sixteen-year-old hearts. After walking up and down the library for a few moments, he left it and started to return to his room. As he passed the drawing-room, loud music reached his ear; chromatic fireworks, scales running with the rapidity of the cataract of Niagara, extraordinary arpeggios, hammering in the bass with a petulance and frenzy which proved that the 'furie francaise' is not the exclusive right of the stronger sex. In this jumble of grave, wild, and sad notes, Gerfaut recognized, by the clearness of touch and brilliancy of some of the passages, that this improvisation could not come from Aline's unpractised fingers. He understood that the piano must be at this moment Madame de Bergenheim's confidant, and that she was pouring out the contradictory emotions in which she had indulged for several days; for, to a heart deprived of another heart in which to confide its joys and woes, music is a friend that listens and replies.

Gerfaut listened for some time in silence, with his head leaning against the drawing-room door. Clemence wandered through vague melodies without fixing upon any one in particular. At last a thought seemed to captivate her. After playing the first measures of the romance from Saul, she resumed the motive with more precision, and when she had finished the ritornello she began to sing, in a soft, veiled voice,

"Assisa al pie d'un salice—"

Gerfaut had heard her sing this several times, in society, but never with this depth of expression. She sang before strangers with her lips; now it all came from her heart. At the third verse, when he believed her to be exalted by her singing and the passion exhaled in this exquisite song, the poet softly entered, judging it to be a favorable moment, and enough agitated himself to believe in the contagion of his agitation.

The first sight which met his eyes was Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stretched out in her armchair, head thrown back, arms drooping and letting escape by way of accompaniment a whistling, crackling, nasal melody. The old maid's spectacles hanging on the end of her nose had singularly compromised the harmony of her false front. The 'Gazette de France' had fallen from her hands and decorated the back of Constance, who, as usual, was lying at her mistress's feet.

“Horrible old witch!” said Gerfaut to himself. “Decidedly, the Fates are against me to-day.” However, as both mistress and dog were sleeping soundly, he closed the door and tiptoed across the floor.

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Madame de Bergenheim had ceased to sing, but her fingers still continued softly to play the motive of the song. As she saw Octave approaching her, she leaned over to look at her aunt, whom she had not noticed to be asleep, as the high back of her chair was turned toward her. Nobody sleeps in a very imposing manner, but the old lady's profile, with her false front awry, was so comical that it was too much for her niece's gravity. The desire to laugh was, for the moment, stronger than respect for melancholy; and Clemence, through that necessity for sympathy peculiar to acute merriment, glanced involuntarily at Octave, who was also smiling. Although there was nothing sentimental in this exchange of thoughts, the latter hastened to profit by it; a moment more, and he was seated upon a stool in front of the piano, at her left and only a few inches from her.

"How can a person sleep when you are singing?"

The most embarrassed freshman could have turned out as bright a speech as this; but the eloquence of it lay less in the words than in the expression. The ease and grace with which Octave seated himself, the elegant precision of his manner, the gracious way in which he bent his head toward Clemence, while speaking, showed a great aptitude in this kind of conversation. If the words were those of a freshman, the accent and pose were those of a graduate.

The Baroness's first thought was to rise and leave the room, but an invincible charm held her back. She was not mistress enough of her eyes to dare to let them meet Octave's; so she turned them away and pretended to look at the old lady.

"I have a particular talent for putting my aunt to sleep," said she, in a gay tone; "she will sleep until evening, if I like; when I stop playing, the silence awakens her."

"I beg of you, continue to play; never awaken her," said Gerfaut; and, as if he were afraid his wish would not be granted, he began to pound in the bass without being disturbed by the unmusical sounds.

"Do not play discords," said Clemence, laughing; "let us at least put her to sleep in tune."

She was wrong to say us; for her lover took this as complicity for whatever might happen. Us, in a *tete-a-tete*, is the most traitorous word in the whole language.

It may be that Clemence had no great desire that her aunt should awaken; perhaps she wished to avoid a conversation; perhaps she wished to enjoy in silence the happiness of feeling that she was still loved, for since he had seated himself beside her Octave's slightest action had become a renewed avowal. Madame de Bergenheim began to play the Duke of Reichstadt's Waltz, striking only the first measure of the accompaniment, in order to show her lover where to put his fingers.



The waltz went on. Clemence played the air and Octave the bass, two of their hands remaining unoccupied—those that were close to each other. Now, what could two idle hands do, when one belonged to a man deeply in love, the other to a young woman who for some time had ill-treated her lover and exhausted her severity? Before the end of the first part, the long unoccupied, tapering fingers of the treble were imprisoned by those of the bass, without the least disturbance in the musical effect—and the old aunt slept on!

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A moment later, Octave's lips were fastened upon this rather trembling hand, as if he wished to imbibe, to the very depths of his soul, the soft, perfumed tissue. Twice the Baroness tried to disengage herself, twice her strength failed her. It was beginning to be time for the aunt to awaken, but she slept more soundly than ever; and if a slight indecision was to be noticed in the upper hand, the lower notes were struck with an energy capable of metamorphosing Mademoiselle de Corandeuil into a second Sleeping Beauty.

When Octave had softly caressed this hand for a long time, he raised his head in order to obtain a new favor. This time Madame de Bergenheim did not turn away her eyes, but, after looking at Octave for an instant, she said to him in a coquettish, seductive way:

"Aline?"

The mute glance which replied to this question was such an eloquent denial that all words were superfluous. His sweet, knowing smile betrayed the secret of his duplicity; he was understood and forgiven. There was at this moment no longer any doubt, fear, or struggle between them. They did not feel the necessity of any explanation as to the mutual suffering they had undergone; the suffering no longer existed. They were silent for some time, happy to look at each other, to be together and alone-for the old aunt still slept. Not a sound was to be heard; one would have said that sleep had overcome the two lovers also. Suddenly the charm was broken by a terrible noise, like a trumpet calling the guilty ones to repentance.

CHAPTER XVII

A RUDE INTERRUPTION

Had a cannon-ball struck the two lovers in the midst of their ecstasy it would have been less cruel than the sensation caused by this horrible noise. Clemence trembled and fell back in her chair, frozen with horror. Gerfaut rose, almost as frightened as she; Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, aroused from her sleep, sat up in her chair as suddenly as a Jack-in-a-box that jumps in one's face when a spring is touched. As to Constance, she darted under her mistress's chair, uttering the most piteous howls.

One of the folding-doors opposite the window opened; the bell of a hunting-horn appeared in the opening, blown at full blast and waking the echoes in the drawing-room. The curtain of the drama had risen upon a parody, a second incident had changed the pantomime and sentiments of the performers. The old lady fell back in her chair and stopped up her ears with her fingers, as she stamped upon the floor; but it was in vain for her to try to speak, her words were drowned by the racket made by this terrible instrument. Clemence also stopped her ears. After running in her terror, under



every chair in the room, Constance, half wild, darted, in a fit of despair, through the partly opened door. Gerfaut finally began to laugh heartily as if he thought it all great fun, for M. de Bergenheim's purple face took the place of the trumpet and his hearty laugh rang out almost as noisily.

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"Ah! ha! you did not expect that kind of accompaniment," said the Baron, when his gayety had calmed a little; "this is the article that you were obliged to write for the *Revue de Paris*, is it? Do you think that I am going to leave you to sing Italian duets with Madame while I am scouring the woods? You must take me for a very careless husband, Vicomte. Now, then, right about face! March! Do me the kindness to take a gun. We are going to shoot a few hares in the Corne woods before supper."

"Monsieur de Bergenheim," exclaimed the old lady, when her emotion would allow her to speak, "this is indecorous—vulgar—the conduct of a common soldier—of a cannibal! My head is split open; I am sure to have an awful neuralgia in a quarter of an hour. It is the conduct of a herdsman."

"Do not think of your neuralgia, my dear aunt," replied Christian, whose good-humor seemed aroused by the day's sport; "you are as fresh as a rosebud—and Constance shall have some hares' heads roasted for her supper."

At this moment a second uproar was heard in the courtyard; a horn was evidently being played by an amateur, accompanied by the confused yelps and barks of a numerous pack of hounds; the whole was mingled with shouts of laughter, the cracking of whips, and clamors of all kinds. In the midst of this racket, a cry, more piercing than the others, rang out, a cry of agony and despair.

"Constance!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, in a falsetto voice full of terror; she rushed to one of the windows and all followed her.

The spectacle in the courtyard was as noisy as it was picturesque. Marillac, seated upon a bench, was blowing upon a trumpet, trying to play the waltz from *Robert-le-Diable* in a true infernal manner. At his feet were seven or eight hunters and as many servants encouraging him by their shouts. The Baron's pack of hounds, of great renown in the country, was composed of about forty dogs, all branded upon their right thighs with the Bergenheim coat-of-arms. From time immemorial, the chateau's dogs had been branded thus with their master's crest, and Christian, who was a great stickler for old customs, had taken care not to drop this one. This feudal sign had probably acted upon the morals of the pack, for it was impossible to find, within twenty leagues, a collection of more snarly terriers, dissolute hounds, ugly bloodhounds, or more quarrelsome greyhounds. They were perfect hunters, but it seemed as if, on account of their being dogs of quality, all vices were permitted them.

In the midst of this horde, without respect for law or order, the unfortunate Constance had found herself after crossing the ante-chamber, vestibule, and outside steps, still pursued by the sounds from Christian's huge horn. An honest merchant surprised at the turn of the road by a band of robbers would not have been greeted any better than the poodle was at the moment she darted into the yard. It may have been

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that the quarrel between the Bergenheims and Corandeuils had reached the canine species; it may have been at the instigation of the footmen, who all cordially detested the beast—the sad fact remains that she was pounced upon in a moment as if she were a deer, snatched, turned topsy-turvy, rolled, kicked about, and bitten by the forty four-legged brigands, who each seemed determined to carry away as a trophy some portion of her cafe-au-lait colored blanket.

The person who took the most delight in this deplorable spectacle was Pere Rousselet. He actually clapped his hands together behind his back, spread his legs apart in the attitude of the Colossus of Rhodes, while his coat-skirts almost touched the ground, giving him the look of a kangaroo resting his paws under his tail. From his large cockatoo mouth escaped provoking hisses, which encouraged the assassins in their crime as much as did Marillac's racket.

"Constance!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil a second time, frozen with horror at the sight of her poodle lying upon its back among its enemies.

This call produced no effect upon the animal section of the actors in this scene, but it caused a sudden change among the servants and a few of the hunters; the shouts of encouragement ceased at once; several of the participants prudently tried to efface themselves; as to Rousselet, more politic than the others, he boldly darted into the melee and picked up the fainting puppy in his arms, carrying her as tenderly as a mother would an infant, without troubling himself whether or not he was leaving part of his coat-tails with the savage hounds.

When the old lady saw the object of her love placed at her feet covered with mud, sprinkled with blood, and uttering stifled groans, which she took for the death-rattle, she fell back in her chair speechless.

"Let us go," said Bergenheim in a low voice, taking his guest by the arm. Gerfaut threw a glance around him and sought Clemence's eyes, but he did not find them. Without troubling herself as to her aunt's despair, Clemence had hurried to her room; for she felt the necessity of solitude in order to calm her emotions, or perhaps to live them over a second time. Octave resigned himself to following his companion. At the end of a few moments, the barking of the dogs, the joking of the hunters, even the wind in the trees and the rustling leaves, had bored Octave to such an extent that, in spite of himself, his face betrayed him.

"What a doleful face you have!" exclaimed his host, laughingly. "I am sorry that I took you away from Madame de Bergenheim; it seems that you decidedly prefer her society to ours."

“Would you be very jealous if I were to admit the fact?” replied Octave, making an effort to assume the same laughing tone as the Baron.

“Jealous! No, upon my honor! However, you are well constituted to give umbrage to a poor husband.

“But jealousy is not one of my traits of character, nor among my principles.”



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"You are philosophical!" said the lover, with a forced smile.

"My philosophy is very simple. I respect my wife too much to suspect her, and I love her too much to annoy her in advance with an imaginary trouble. If this trouble should come, and I were sure of it, it would be time enough to worry myself about it. Besides, it would be an affair soon settled."

"What affair?" asked Marillac, slackening his pace in order to join in the conversation.

"A foolish affair, my friend, which does not concern you, Monsieur de Gerfaut, nor myself any longer, I hope; although I belong to the class exposed to danger. We were speaking of conjugal troubles."

The artist threw a glance at his friend which signified: "What the deuce made you take it into your head to start up this hare?"

"There are many things to be said on this subject," said he, in a sententious tone, thinking that his intervention might be useful in getting his friend out of the awkward position in which he found himself, "an infinite number of things may be said; books without number have been written upon this subject. Every one has his own system and plan of conduct as to the way of looking at and acting upon it."

"And what would be yours, you consummate villain?" asked Christian; "would you be as cruel a husband as you are an immoral bachelor? That usually happens; the bolder a poacher one has been, the more intractable a gamekeeper one becomes. What would be your system?"

"Hum! hum! you are mistaken, Bergenheim; my boyish love adventures have disposed me to indulgence. 'Debilis caro', you know! Shakespeare has translated it, 'Frailty, thy name is woman!'"

"I am a little rusty in my; Latin and I never knew a word of English. What does that mean?"

"Upon my word, it means, if I were married and my wife deceived me, I should resign myself to it like a gentleman, considering the fragility of this enchanting sex."

"Mere boy's talk, my friend! And you, Gerfaut?"

"I must admit," replied the latter, a little embarrassed, "that I have never given the subject very much thought. However, I believe in the virtue of women."

"That is all very well, but in case of misfortune what would you do?"



"I think I should say with Lanoue: 'Sensation is for the fop, complaints for the fool, an honest man who is deceived goes away and says nothing.'"

"I partly agree with Lanoue; only I should make a little variation—instead of goes away should say avenges himself."

Marillac threw at his friend a second glance full of meaning.

"Per Bacco!" said he, "are you a Venetian or a Castilian husband?"

"Eh!" replied Bergenheim, "I suppose that without being either, I should kill my wife, the other man, and then myself, without even crying, 'Beware!' Here! Brichou! pay attention; Tambeau is separated from the rest."

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As he said these words the Baron leaped over a broad ditch, which divided the road from the clearing which the hunters had already entered.

"What do you say to that?" murmured the artist, in a rather dramatic tone, in his friend's ear.

Instead of replying, the lover made a gesture which signified, according to all appearance: "I do not care."

The clearing they must cross in order to reach the woods formed a large, square field upon an inclined plane which sloped to the river side. Just as Marillac in his turn was jumping the ditch, his friend saw, at the extremity of the clearing, Madame de Bergenheim walking slowly in the avenue of sycamores. A moment later, she had disappeared behind a mass of trees without the other men noticing her.

"Take care that you do not slip," said the artist, "the ground is wet."

This warning brought misfortune to Gerfaut, who in jumping caught his foot in the root of a tree and fell.

"Are you hurt?" asked Bergenheim.

Octave arose and tried to walk, but was obliged to lean upon his gun.

"I think I have twisted my foot," said he, and he carried his hand to it as if he felt a sharp pain there.

"The devil! it may be a sprain," observed the Baron, coming toward them; "sit down. Do you think you will be able to walk?"

"Yes, but I fear hunting would be too much for me; I will return to the house."

"Do you wish us to make a litter and carry you?"

"You are laughing at me; it's not so bad as that. I will walk back slowly, and will take a foot-bath in my room."

"Lean upon me, then, and I will help you," said the artist, offering his arm.

"Thanks; I do not need you," Octave replied; "go to the devil!" he continued, in an expressive aside.

"Capisco!" Marillac replied, in the same tone, giving his arm an expressive pressure. "Excuse me," said he aloud, "I am not willing that you should go alone. I will be your Antigone—"

Antigone me reste, Antigone est and fille.

“Bergenheim, I will take charge of him. Go on with your hunting, the gentlemen are waiting for you. We will meet again at supper; around the table; legs are articles of luxury and sprains a delusion, provided that the throat and stomach are properly treated.”

The Baron looked first at his guests, then at the group that had just reached the top of the clearing. For an instant Christian charity struggled against love of hunting, then the latter triumphed. As he saw that Octave, although limping slightly, was already in a condition to walk, especially with the aid of his friend’s arm, he said:

“Do not forget to put your foot in water, and send for Rousselet; he understands all about sprains.”

This advice having eased his conscience, he joined his companions, while the two friends slowly took the road back to the chateau, Octave resting one hand upon the artist’s arm and the other upon his gun.

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"The bourgeois is outwitted!" said Marillac with a stifled laugh, as soon as he was sure that Bergenheim could not hear him. "Upon my word, these soldiers have a primitive, baptismal candor! It is not so with us artists; they could not bamboozle us in this way. Your strain is an old story; it is taken from the 'Mariage de raison', first act, second scene."

"You will do me the favor to leave me as soon as we reach the woods," said Gerfaut, as he continued to limp with a grace which would have made Lord Byron envious; "you may go straight ahead, or you may turn to the left, as you choose; the right is forbidden you."

"Very well. Hearts are trumps, it seems, and, for the time being, you agree with Sganarelle, who places the heart on the right side."

"Do not return to the chateau, as it is understood that we are together. If you rejoin the hunting-party, say to Bergenheim that you left me seated at the foot of a tree and that the pain in my foot had almost entirely gone. You would have done better not to accompany me, as I tried to make you understand."

"I had reasons of my own for wishing to get out of Christian's crowd. To-day is Monday, and I have an appointment at four o'clock which interests you more than me. Now, will you listen to a little advice?"

"Listen, yes; follow it, not so sure."

"O race of lovers!" exclaimed the artist, in a sort of transport, "foolish, absurd, wicked, impious, and sacrilegious kind!"

"What of it?"

"What of it? I tell you this will all end with swords for two."

"Bah!"

"Do you know that this rabid Bergenheim, with his round face and good-natured smile, killed three or four men while he was in the service, on account of a game of billiards or some such trivial matter?"

"Requiescat in pace."

"Take care that he does not cause the 'De Profundis' to be sung for you. He was called the best swords man at Saint-Cyr: he has the devil of a lunge. As to pistol-shooting, I have seen him break nine plaster images at Lepage's one after another."

"Very well, if I have an engagement with him, we will fight it out with arsenic."

“By Jove, joking is out of place. I tell you that he is sure to discover something, and then your business will soon be settled; he will kill you as if you were one of the hares he is hunting this moment.”

“You might find a less humiliating comparison for me,” replied Gerfaut, with an indifferent smile; “however, you exaggerate. I have always noticed that these bullies with mysterious threats of their own and these slaughterers of plaster images were not such very dangerous fellows to meet. This is not disputing Bergenheim’s bravery, for I believe it to be solid and genuine.”

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"I tell you, he is a regular lion! After all, you will admit that it is sheer folly to come and attack him in his cage and pull his whiskers through the bars. And that is what you are doing. To be in love with his wife and pay court to her in Paris, when he is a hundred leagues from you, is all very well, but to install yourself in his house, within reach of his clutches! that is not love, it is sheer madness. This is nothing to laugh at. I am sure that this will end in some horrible tragedy. You heard him speak of killing his wife and her lover just now, as if it were a very slight matter. Very well; I know him; he will do as he says without flinching. These ruddy-faced people are very devils, if you meddle with their family affairs! He is capable of murdering you in some corner of his park, and of burying you at the foot of some tree and then of forcing Madame de Bergenheim to eat your heart fricasseed in champagne, as they say Raoul de Coucy did."

"You will admit, at least, that it would be a very charming repast, and that there would be nothing bourgeois about it."

"Certainly, I boast of detesting the bourgeois; I am celebrated for that; but I should much prefer to die in a worsted nightcap, flannel underwear, and cotton night-shirt, than to have Bergenheim assist me, too brusquely, in this little operation. He is such an out-and-out Goliath! Just look at him!"

And the artist forced his friend to turn about, and pointed at Christian, who stood with the other hunters upon the brow of the hill, a few steps from the spot where they had left him. The Baron was indeed a worthy representative of the feudal ages, when physical strength was the only incontestable superiority. In spite of the distance, they could hear his clear, ringing voice although they could not distinguish his words.

"He really has a look of the times of the Round Table," said Gerfaut; "five or six hundred years ago it would not have been very agreeable to find one's self face to face with him in a tournament; and if to-day, as in those times, feminine hearts were won by feats with double-edged swords, I admit that my chances would not be very good. Fortunately, we are emancipated from animal vigor; it is out, of fashion."

"Out of fashion, if you like; meanwhile, he will kill you."

"You do not understand the charms of danger nor the attractions that difficulties give to pleasure. I have studied Christian thoroughly since I have been here, and I know him as well as if I had passed my life with him. I am also sure that, at the very first revelation, he will kill me if he can, and I take a strange interest in knowing that I risk my life thus. Here we are in the woods," said Gerfaut, as he dropped the artist's arm and ceased limping; "they can no longer see us; the farce is played out. You know what I told you to say if you join them: you left me at the foot of a tree. You are forbidden to approach the sycamores, under penalty of receiving the shot from my gun in your moustache."

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At these words he threw the gun which had served him as crutch over his shoulder, and darted off in the direction of the river.

CHAPTER XVIII

ESPIONAGE

At the extremity of the sycamore walk, the shore formed a bluff like the one upon which the chateau was built, but much more abrupt, and partly wooded. In order to avoid this stretch, which was not passable for carriages, the road leading into the principal part of the valley turned to the right, and reached by an easier ascent a more level plateau. There was only one narrow path by the river, which was shaded by branches of beeches and willows that hung over this bank into the river. After walking a short distance through this shady path, one found himself before a huge triangular rock covered with moss, which nature had rolled from the top of the mountain as if to close up the passage.

This obstacle was not insurmountable; but in order to cross it, one must have a sure foot and steady head, for the least false step would precipitate the unlucky one into the river, which was rapid as well as deep. From the rock, one could reach the top of the cliff by means of some natural stone steps, and then, descending on the other side, could resume the path by the river, which had been momentarily interrupted. In this case, one would reach, in about sixty steps, a place where the river grew broader and the banks projected, forming here and there little islands of sand covered with bushes. Here was a ford well known to shepherds and to all persons who wished to avoid going as far as the castle bridge.

Near the mossy rock of which we have spoken as being close to the sycamore walk, at the foot of a wall against which it flowed, forming a rather deep excavation, the current had found a vein of soft, brittle stone which, by its incessant force, it had ended in wearing away. It was a natural grotto formed by water, but which earth, in its turn, had undertaken to embellish. An enormous willow had taken root in a few inches of soil in a fissure of the rock, and its drooping branches fell into the stream, which drifted them along without being able to detach them.

Madame de Bergenheim was seated at the front of this grotto, upon a seat formed by the base of the rock. She was tracing in the sand, with a stick which she had picked up on the way, strange figures which she carefully erased with her foot. Doubtless these hieroglyphics had some meaning to her, and perhaps she feared lest the slightest marks might be carelessly forgotten, as they would betray the secret they concealed. Clemence was plunged into one of those ecstatic reveries which abolish time and distance. The fibres of her heart, whose exquisite vibrating had been so suddenly paralyzed by Christian's arrival, had resumed their passionate thrills. She lived over



again in her mind the tete-a-tete in the drawing-room; she could hear the entrancing waltz again; she felt her lover's breath in her hair; her hand trembled again under the pressure of his kiss. When she awoke from this dream it was a reality; for Octave was seated by her side without her having seen him arrive, and he had taken up the scene at the piano just where it had been interrupted.

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She was not afraid. Her mind had reached that state of exaltation which renders imperceptible the transition from dreaming to reality. It seemed to her that Octave had always been there, that it was his place, and for a moment she no longer thought, but remained motionless in the arms which embraced her. But soon her reason came back to her. She arose trembling, and drew away a few steps, standing before her lover with lowered head and face suffused with blushes.

"Why are you afraid of me? Do you not think me worthy of your love?" he asked, in an altered voice, and, without trying to retain or approach her, he fell upon his knees with a movement of sweet, sad grace.

He had analyzed Madame de Bergenheim's character well enough to perceive the least variation in her capricious nature. By the young woman's frightened attitude, her burning cheeks and the flashes which he saw from her eyes through her long, drooping lashes, he saw that a reaction had taken place, and he feared the next outburst; for he knew that women, when overcome with remorse, always smite their lover by way of expiation for themselves.

"If I let this recovered virtue have the mastery, I am a lost man for a fortnight at least," he thought.

He quickly abandoned the dangerous ground upon which he had taken position, and passed, by an adroit transition, from the most passionate frenzy to the most submissive bearing. When Clemence raised her large eyes, in which was a threatening gleam, she saw, instead of an audacious man to be punished, an imploring slave.

There was something so flattering in this attitude of humility that she was completely disarmed. She approached Octave, and took him by the hand to raise him, seated herself again and allowed him to resume his position beside her. She softly pressed his hand, of which she had not let go, and, looking her lover in the eyes, said in that deep, penetrating voice that women sometimes have:

"My friend!"

"Friend!" he thought; "yes, certainly. I will raise no dispute as to the word, provided the fact is recognized. What matters the color of the flag? Only fools trouble themselves about that. 'Friend' is not the throne I aspire to, but it is the road that leads to it. So then, let it be 'friend,' while waiting for better. This word is very pleasant to hear when spoken in these siren's accents, and when at the same time the eyes say 'lover!'"

"Will you always love me thus?" Octave asked, whose face beamed with virtuous pledges.

“Always!” sighed Clemence, without lowering eyes under the burning glance which met hers.

“You will be the soul of my soul; the angel of my heaven?”

“Your sister,” she said, with a sweet smile, as she caressed her lover’s cheek with her hand.

He felt the blood mount to his face at this caress, and turned his eyes away with a dreamy air.

“I probably am one of the greatest fools that has ever existed since the days of Joseph and Hippolytus,” thought he.



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He remained silent and apparently indifferent for several moments.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Madame de Bergenheim, surprised by Octave's silence and rather listless air.

He gave a start of surprise at this question.

"May I die if I tell her!" he thought; "she must think me ridiculous enough as it is."

"Tell me, I wish you to speak out," she continued, in that despotic tone which a woman assumes when sure of her empire.

Instead of replying, as she demanded, he gave her a long, questioning glance, and it would have been impossible at that moment for her to keep a single secret from her lover. Madame de Bergenheim felt the magnetic influence of his penetrating glance so deeply that it seemed to her these sharp eyes were fathoming her very heart. She felt intensely disturbed to be gazed at in that way, and, in order to free herself from this mute questioning, she leaned her head upon Octave's shoulder, as she said softly:

"Do not look at me like that or I shall not love your eyes any more."

Her straw hat, whose ribbons were not tied, slipped and fell, dragging with it the comb which confined her beautiful hair, and it fell in disorder over her shoulders. Gerfaut passed his hand behind the charming head which rested upon his breast, in order to carry this silky, perfumed fleece to his lips. At the same time, he gently pressed the supple form which, as it bent toward him, seemed to ask for this caress.

Clemence made a sudden effort and arose, fastening her hair at the back of her head with an almost shamed haste.

"Will you refuse me one lock of your hair as a souvenir of this hour?" said Octave, stopping her gently as she was about to replace her comb.

"Do you need any souvenir?" she replied, giving him a glance which was neither a reproach nor a refusal.

"The souvenir is in my heart, the hair will never leave my bosom! We live in an unworthy age. I can not boast of wearing your colors in everybody's eyes, and yet I should like to wear a sign of my bondage."

She let her hair fall down her back again, but seemed embarrassed as to how to execute his wish.

"I can not cut my hair with my teeth," she said, with a smile which betrayed a double row of pearls.

Octave took a stiletto from his pocket.

“Why do you always carry this stiletto?” asked the young woman, in a changed voice; “it frightens me to see you armed thus.”

“Fear nothing,” said Gerfaut, who did not reply to her question, “I will respect the hair which serves you as a crown. I know where I must cut it, and, if my ambition is great, my hand shall be discreet.”

Madame de Bergenheim had no confidence in his moderation, and, fearing to leave her beautiful hair to her lover’s mercy, she took the stiletto and cut off a little lock which she drew through her fingers and then offered to him, with a loving gesture that doubled the value of the gift. At this moment, hunting-horns resounded in the distance.

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"I must leave you now!" exclaimed Clemence, "I must. My dear love, let me go now; say good-by to me."

She leaned toward him and presented her forehead to receive this adieu. It was her lips which met Octave's, but this kiss was rapid and fleeting as a flash of light. Withdrawing from the arms which would yet retain her, she darted out of the grotto, and in a moment had disappeared in one of the shady paths.

For some time, plunged in deep reflection, Gerfaut stood on the same spot; but at last arousing himself from this dreamy languor, he climbed the rock so as to reach the top of the cliff. After taking a few steps he stopped with a frightened look, as if he had espied some venomous reptile in his path. He could see, through the bushes which bordered the crest of the plateau at the top of the ladder cut in the rock, Bergenheim, motionless, and in the attitude of a man who is trying to conceal himself in order that he may watch somebody. The Baron's eyes not being turned in Gerfaut's direction, he could not tell whether he was the object of this espionage, or whether the lay of the land allowed him to see Madame de Bergenheim, who must be under the sycamores by this time. Uncertain as to what he should do, he remained motionless, half crouched down upon the rock, behind the ledge of which, thanks to his position, he could hide from the Baron.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REVELATION

A few moments before the castle clock struck four, a man leaped across the ditch which served as enclosure to the park. Lambernier, for it was he who showed himself so prompt at keeping his promise, directed his steps through the thickets toward the corner of the Corne woods which he had designated to Marillac; but, after walking for some time, he was forced to slacken his steps. The hunting-party were coming in his direction, and Lambernier knew that to continue in the path he had first chosen would take him directly among the hunters; and, in spite of his insolence, he feared the Baron too much to wish to expose himself to the danger of another chastisement. He therefore retraced his steps and took a roundabout way through the thickets, whose paths were all familiar to him; he descended to the banks of the river ready to ascend to the place appointed for the rendezvous as soon as the hunting party had passed.

He had hardly reached the plateau covered with trees, which extended above the rocks, when, as he entered a clearing which had been recently made, he saw two men coming toward him who were walking very fast, and whom to meet in this place caused him a very disagreeable sensation. The first man was Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's coachman, as large a fellow as ever crushed the seats of landau or brougham with his rotundity. He was advancing with hands in the pockets of his green jacket and his



broad shoulders thrown back, as if he had taken it upon himself to replace Atlas. His cap, placed in military fashion upon his head, his scowling brows, and his bombastic air, announced that he was upon the point of accomplishing some important deed which greatly interested him. Leonard Rousselet, walking by his side, moved his spider legs with equal activity, carefully holding up the skirts of his long coat as if they were petticoats.

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Lambernier, at sight of them, turned to enter the woods again, but he was stopped in his retreat by a threatening shout.

"Stop, you vagabond!" exclaimed the coachman; "halt! If you take a trot, I shall take a gallop."

"What do you want? I have no business with you," replied the workman, in a surly tone.

"But I have business with you," replied the big domestic, placing himself in front of him and balancing himself first on his toes then on his heels, with a motion like the wooden rocking-horses children play with. "Come here, Rousselet; are you wheezy or foundered?"

"I have not as good legs as your horses," replied the old man, who reached them at last, breathless, and took off his hat to wipe his forehead.

"What does this mean, jumping out upon one from a corner in the woods like two assassins?" asked Lambernier, foreseeing that this beginning might lead to some scene in which he was threatened to be forced to play a not very agreeable role.

"It means," said the coachman: "first, that Rousselet has nothing to do with it; I do not need anybody's help to punish an insignificant fellow like you; second, that you are going to receive your quietus in a trice."

At these words he pushed his cap down over his ears and rolled up his sleeves, in order to give freer action to his large, broad hands.

The three men were standing upon a plot of ground where charcoal had been burned the year before. The ground was black and slippery, but being rather level, it was a very favorable place for a duel with fists or any other weapons. When Lambernier saw the lackey's warlike preparations, he placed his cap and coat upon an old stump and stationed himself in front of his adversary. But, before the hostilities had begun, Rousselet advanced, stretching his long arms out between them, and said, in a voice whose solemnity seemed to be increased by the gravity of the occasion:

"I do not suppose that you both wish to kill each other; only uneducated people conduct themselves in this vulgar manner; you ought to have a friendly explanation, and see if the matter is not susceptible of arrangement. That was the way such things were done when I was in the twenty-fifth demi-brigade."

"The explanation is," said the coachman, in his gruff voice, "that here is a low fellow who takes every opportunity to undervalue me and my horses, and I have sworn to give him a good drubbing the first time I could lay my hands upon him. So, Pere Rousselet, step aside. He will see if I am a pickle; he will find out that the pickle is peppery!"

“If you made use of such a vulgar expression as that,” observed Rousselet, turning to Lambernier, “you were at fault, and should beg his pardon as is the custom among educated people.”

“It is false!” exclaimed Lambernier; “and besides, everybody calls the Corandeuils that, on account of the color of their livery.”

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"Did you not say Sunday, at the 'Femme-sans-Tete', and in the presence of Thiedot, that all the servants of the chateau were idlers and good-for-nothings, and that if you met one of them who tried to annoy you, you would level him with your plane?"

"If you used the word 'level,' it was very uncivil," observed Rousselet.

"Thiedot had better keep in his own house," growled the carpenter, clenching his fists.

"It looks well for a tramp like you to insult gentlemen like us," continued the lackey, in an imposing tone. "And did you not say that when I took Mademoiselle to mass I looked like a green toad upon the box, ..thus trying to dishonor my physique and my clothes? Did you not say that?"

"Only a joke about the color of your livery. They call the others measles and lobsters."

"Lobsters are lobsters," replied the coachman, in an imperative tone; "if that vexes them, they can take care of themselves. But I will not allow any one to attack my honor or that of my beasts by calling them screws—and that is what you did, you vagabond! And did you not say that I sent bags of oats to Remiremont to be sold, and that, for a month, my team had steadily been getting thin? Did you ever hear anything so scandalous, Pere Rousselet? to dare to say that I endanger the lives of my horses? Did you not say that, you rascal? And did you not say that Mademoiselle Marianne and I had little private feasts in her room, and that was why I could not eat more at the table? Here is Rousselet, who has been a doctor and knows that I am on a diet on account of my weak stomach." At these words, the servant, carried away by his anger, gave his stomach a blow with his fist.

"Lambernier," said Rousselet, turning up his lips with a look of contempt, "I must admit that, for a man well brought up, you have made most disgusting remarks."

"To say that I eat the horses' oats!" roared the coachman.

"I ought to have said that you drank them," replied Lambernier, with his usual sneer.

"Rousselet, out of the way!" exclaimed the burly lackey at this new insult; the old peasant not moving as quickly as he desired, he seized him by the arm and sent him whirling ten steps away.

At this moment, a new person completed the scene, joining in it, if not as actor at least as interested spectator. If the two champions had suspected his presence they would have probably postponed their fight until a more opportune moment, for this spectator was no other than the Baron himself. As he saw from a distance the trio gesticulating in a very animated manner, he judged that a disorderly scene was in preparation, and as he had wished for a long time to put an end to the quarrelsome ways of the chateau servants, he was not sorry to catch them in the very act, so as to make an example of

them. At first, he stooped and concealed himself in the thickets, ready to appear for the denouement.

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As Lambernier saw the giant's fist coming down upon him, he darted to one side and the blow only struck the air, making the coachman stumble from the force of his impetuosity. Lambernier profited by this position to gather all his strength, and threw himself upon his adversary, whom he seized by the flank and gave such a severe blow as to bring him down upon his knees. He then gave him a dozen more blows upon the head, and succeeded in overthrowing him completely.

If the coachman had not had a cranium as hard as iron, he probably could not have received such a storm of fisticuffs without giving up the ghost. Fortunately for him, he had one of those excellent Breton heads that break the sticks which beat them. Save for a certain giddiness, he came out of the scramble safe and sound. Far from losing his presence of mind by the disadvantageous position in which he found himself, he supported himself upon the ground with his left hand, and, passing his other arm behind him, he wound it around the workman's legs, who thus found himself reaped down, so to speak, and a moment later was lying on his back in front of his adversary. The latter, holding him fast with his strong hands, placed a knee, as large as a plate, upon his chest and then pulled off the cap that his enemy had pushed down over his eyes, and proceeded to administer full justice to him.

"Ah! you thought you'd attack me treacherously, did you?" said he, with a derisive chuckle as if to slacken the speed of his horses. "You know short reckonings make good friends. Oh! what a fine thrashing you are going to receive, my friend! Take care! if you try to bite my hand, I'll choke you with my two fingers, do you hear! Now, then, take this for the green toad; this, for my horses' sake; this, for Mademoiselle Marianne!"

He followed each "this" with a heavy blow from his fist. At the third blow the blood poured out of the mouth of the carpenter, who writhed under the pressure of his adversary's knee like a buffalo stifled by a boa-constrictor; he succeeded at last in freeing one hand, which he thrust into his trousers' pocket.

"Ah! you rascal! I am killed!" howled the coachman, giving a bound backward. Lambernier, profiting by his freedom, jumped upon his feet, and, without troubling himself as to his adversary, who had fallen on his knees and was pressing his hand to his left thigh; he picked up his cap and vest and started off through the clearing. Rousselet, who until then had prudently kept aside, tried to stop the workman, at a cry from his companion, but the scoundrel brandished his iron compass before his eyes with such an ugly look that the peasant promptly left the way open for him.

At this tragic and unexpected denouement, Bergenheim, who was getting ready to make his appearance from behind the trees and to interpose his authority, started in full pursuit of the would-be murderer. From the direction he took, he judged that he would try to reach the river by passing over the rock. He walked in this direction, with his gun over his shoulder, until he reached the foot of the steps which descended into the grotto. Christian crouched behind some bushes to wait for Lambernier, who must pass

this way, and it was at this moment that Gerfaut, who was forty feet below him, saw him without suspecting the reason for his attitude.

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Bergenheim soon found out that he had calculated correctly when he heard a sound like that made by a wild boar when he rushes through the thickets and breaks the small branches in his path, as if they were no more than blades of grass. Soon Lambernier appeared with a haggard, wild look and a face bleeding from the blows he had received. He stopped for a moment to catch his breath and to wipe off his compass with a handful of grass; he then staunched the blood streaming from his nose and mouth, and after putting on his coat started rapidly in the direction of the river.

"Halt!" exclaimed the Baron, suddenly, rising before him and barring his passage.

The workman jumped back in terror; then he drew out his compass a second time and made a movement as if to throw himself upon this new adversary, out of sheer desperation. Christian, at this threatening pantomime, raised his gun to his cheek with as much coolness and precision as he would have shown at firing into a body of soldiers.

"Down with your weapon!" he exclaimed, in his commanding voice, "or I will shoot you down like a rabbit."

The carpenter uttered a hoarse cry as he saw the muzzle of the gun within an inch of his head, ready to blow his brains out. Feeling assured that there was no escape for him, he closed his compass and threw it with an angry gesture at the Baron's feet.

"Now," said the latter, "you will walk straight ahead of me as far as the chateau, and if you turn one step to the right or left, I will send the contents of my gun into you. So right about march!"

As he said these words, he stooped, without losing sight of the workman, and picked up the compass, which he put in his pocket.

"Monsieur le Baron, it was the coachman who attacked me first; I had to defend myself," stammered Lambernier.

"All right, we will see about that later. March on!"

"You will deliver me up to the police—I am a ruined man!"

"That will make one rascal the less," exclaimed Christian, repelling with disgust the workman, who had thrown himself on his knees before him.

"I have three children, Monsieur, three children," he repeated, in a supplicating tone.

"Will you march!" replied Bergenheim imperiously, as he made a gesture with his gun as if to shoot him.

Lambernier arose suddenly, and the expression of terror upon his countenance gave place to one of resolution mingled with hatred and scorn.

“Very well,” he exclaimed, “let us go on! but remember what I tell you; if you have me arrested, you will be the first to repent of it, Baron though you are. If I appear before a judge, I will tell something that you would pay a good price for.”

Bergenheim looked fixedly at Lambernier.

“What do you mean by such insolence?” said he.

“I will tell you what I mean, if you will promise to let me go; if you give me into the hands of the police, I repeat it, you will repent not having listened to me to-day.”

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"This is some idle yarn, made to gain time; no matter, speak; I will listen."

The workman darted a defiant glance at Christian.

"Give me your word of honor to let me go afterward."

"If I do not do so, are you not at liberty to repeat your story?" replied the Baron, who, in spite of his curiosity, would not give his word to a scoundrel whose only aim probably was to escape justice.

This observation impressed Lambernier, who, after a moment's reflection, assumed a strange attitude of cool assurance, considering the position in which he found himself. Not a sound was to be heard; even the barking of the dogs in the distance had ceased. The deepest silence surrounded them; even Gerfaut, in the place where he was concealed, could no longer see them, now that Bergenheim had left the edge of the cliff; from time to time their voices reached him, but he could not distinguish the meaning of their words.

Leaning with one hand upon his gun, Christian waited for the carpenter to begin his story, gazing at him with his clear, piercing eyes. Lambernier bore this glance without flinching, returning it in his insolent way.

"You know, Monsieur, that when the alterations were made in Madame's apartment, I had charge of the carving for her chamber. When I took away the old woodwork, I saw that the wall between the windows was constructed out of square, and I asked Madame if she wished that the panel should be fastened like the other or if she preferred it to open so that it would make a closet. She said to have it open by means of a secret spring. So I made the panel with concealed hinges and a little button hidden in the lower part of the woodwork; it only needs to be pressed, after turning it to the right, and the woodwork will open like a door."

Christian had now become extremely attentive.

"Monsieur will remember that he was in Nancy at the time, and that Madame's chamber was completed during his absence. As I was the only one who worked in this room, the other workmen not being capable of carving the wood as Madame wished, I was the only person who knew that the panel was not nailed down the length of the wall."

"Well?" asked the Baron, impatiently.

"Well," Lambernier replied, in a careless tone, "if, on account of the blow which I gave the coachman, it is necessary for me to appear in court, I shall be obliged to tell, in order to revenge myself, what I saw in that closet not more than a month ago."

"Finish your story," exclaimed Bergenheim, as he clenched the handle of his gun.

“Mademoiselle Justine took me into this room in order to hang some curtains; as I needed some nails, she went out to get them. While I was examining the woodwork, which I had not seen since it had been put in place, I saw that the oak had warped in one place because it was not dry enough when it was used. I wished to see if the same thing had happened between the windows, and if the panel could open. I pressed the spring, and when the door opened I saw a small package of letters upon the little shelf; it seemed very singular to me that Madame should choose this place to keep her letters, and the thought came to me that she wished to conceal them from Monsieur.”

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Bergenheim gave the workman a withering glance, and made a sign for him to continue.

“They were already talking about discharging me from the chateau’s employ; I do not know how it happened, but the thought entered my head that perhaps one of these letters would be of use to me, and I took the first one in the package; I had only time to close the panel when Mademoiselle Justine returned.”

“Very well! what is there in common between these letters and the criminal court that awaits you?” asked Christian, in an altered voice, although he tried to appear indifferent.

“Oh! nothing at all,” replied the carpenter, with an air of indifference; “but I thought that you would not like people to know that Madame had a lover.”

Bergenheim shivered as if he were taken with a chill, and his gun dropped from his hand to the ground.

As quick as thought Lambernier stooped over to seize the gun, but he did not have time to carry out his intention, for he was seized by the throat and half choked by an iron hand.

“That letter! that letter!” said Christian to him, in a low, trembling voice, and he put his face down close to the carpenter’s, as if he feared that a breath of wind might carry away his words and repeat them.

“Let me alone first, I can not breathe—” stammered the workman, whose face, was becoming purple and his eyes starting out of his head, as if his adversary’s fingers had been a rope.

The latter granted the prayer by loosening his hold of the carpenter’s neck and seizing him by his vest in such a way as to take away all chance of escape while leaving him free to speak.

“This letter!” he repeated.

Frightened by the shaking he had just received, and not in a condition to reflect with his usual prudence, Lambernier mechanically obeyed this order; he hunted in his pockets for some time, and at last took a carefully folded paper from his vest-pocket, saying with a stunned air:

“Here it is. It is worth ten louis.”

Christian seized the paper and opened it with his teeth, for he could not use his hands without releasing his prisoner. It was, like all notes of this kind, without address, seal, or signature. It did not differ from most of its kind save in the natural beauty of its style and its simple eloquence. Ardent protestations, sweet and loving complaints, those precious

words that one bestows only upon the woman he loves and which betray a love that has yet much to desire but as much to hope. The handwriting was entirely unknown to Bergenheim, but Clemence's name, which was repeated several times, did not permit him to doubt for a moment that this note was written to his wife. When he had finished reading, he put it in his pocket with apparent serenity, and then looked at Lambernier, who, during this time, had remained motionless under the hand that detained him.

"You are mistaken, Lambernier," said he to him; "it is one of my letters before my marriage." And he tried to force himself to smile; but the muscles of his lips refused to act this falsehood, and drops of cold perspiration stood upon his forehead and at the roots of his hair.

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The carpenter had watched the change in the Baron's countenance as he read the letter. He was persuaded that he could turn the capital importance of his revelations into profit for himself; he believed that the time had come when he might gain advantage by showing that he understood perfectly well the value of the secret he had just imparted. So he replied with a glance of intelligence:

"Monsieur's handwriting must have changed greatly, then; I have some of his orders which do not resemble this any more than a glass of water does a glass of wine."

Christian tried to find a response but failed. His eyebrows contracted in a manner that betokened a coming storm, but Lambernier was not disturbed by this symptom; he continued in a more and more assured voice:

"When I said that this letter was worth ten louis, I meant that it was worth that much to a mere stranger, and I am very sure I should not have to go very far to find one; but Monsieur le Baron is too sensible not to know the value of this secret. I do not wish to set a price upon it, but since I am obliged to go away on account of this coachman, and have no money—"

He did not have time to finish; Bergenheim seized him in the middle of the body and made him describe a horizontal half-circle without touching the ground, then threw him upon his knees on the edge of the path which descended almost perpendicularly alongside the rocks. Lambernier suddenly saw his haggard face reflected in the river fifty feet below. At this sight, and feeling a powerful knee between his shoulders which bent him over the abyss, as if to make him appreciate its dangers, the workman uttered a terrified cry; his hands clutched wildly at the tufts of grass and roots of plants which grew here and there on the sides of the rocks, and he struggled with all his might to throw himself back upon the ground. But it was in vain for him to struggle against the superior strength of his adversary, and his attempts only aggravated the danger of his position. After two or three powerless attempts, he found himself lying upon his stomach with half his body hanging over the precipice, having nothing to prevent him from falling over but Bergenheim's hand, which held him by the collar and at the same time hindered him from rising.

"Have you ever said one word about this?" asked the Baron, as he took hold of the trunk of a tree to steady himself upon this dangerous ground that he had chosen as the field of discussion.

"To nobody!—ah!—how my head swims!" replied the carpenter, closing his eyes in terror, for the blood rushing to his brain made him dizzy, and it seemed to him that the river was slowly reaching him.

"You see that if I make one gesture, you are a dead man," replied the Baron, leaning upon him harder yet.

“Give me up to the police; I will say nothing about the letters; as sure as there is a God, I will say nothing. But do not let me fall—hold me tight—do not let go of me—I am slipping—oh! holy mother of God!”

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Christian taking hold of the tree near him, leaned over and raised Lambernier up, for he really was incapable of doing so himself; fright and the sight of the water had given him vertigo. When he was upon his legs again, he reeled like a drunken man and his feet nearly gave way beneath him. The Baron looked at him a moment in silence, but at last he said:

“Go away, leave the country at once; you have time to fly before there will be any pursuit. But remember that if I ever hear one word of what has passed between us from your lips, I shall know how to find you and you will die by my hand.”

“I swear by the Holy Virgin and by all the saints—” stammered Lambernier, who had suddenly become a very fervent Catholic.

Christian pointed with his finger to the stone steps beneath them.

“There is your road; pass over the rock, through the woods, and reach Alsace. If you conduct yourself well, I will assure your living. But remember; one single indiscreet word, and you are a dead man.”

At these words he pushed him into the path with one of those quick movements which very powerful men can not always calculate the effect of. Lambernier, whose strength was almost exhausted by the struggles he had undergone, had not vigor enough left to stand, and he lost his balance at this violent as well as unexpected push. He stumbled over the first step, reeled as he tried to regain his footing, and fell head first down the almost vertical declivity. A ledge of the cliff, against which he first struck, threw him upon the loose rocks. He slowly glided downward, uttering lamentable cries; he clutched, for a moment, a little bush which had grown in a crevice of the rocks but he did not have strength enough to hold on to it, his arm having been broken in three places by his fall. He let go of it suddenly, and dropped farther and farther down uttering a last terrible shriek of despair; he rolled over twice again-and then fell into the torrent below, that swallowed him up like a mass already deprived of life.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Antipathy for her husband bordering upon aversion
Attractions that difficulties give to pleasure
Consented to become a wife so as not to remain a maiden
Despotic tone which a woman assumes when sure of her empire
Love is a fire whose heat dies out for want of fuel
Regards his happiness as a proof of superiority
She said yes, so as not to say no

GERFAUT

By Charles de Bernard

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XX

MARILLAC TELLS A STORY

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Guests were seated that evening around the oval table in the dining-room of the castle of Bergenheim. According to custom, the ladies were not present at this repast. This was a custom which had been adopted by the Baroness for the suppers which were given by her husband at the close of his hunting parties; she dispensed with appearing at table on those days; perhaps she was too fastidious to preside at these lengthy seances of which the ruses of the hare, the death of the stag, and the feats of the hounds, formed the principal topics of conversation. It is probable that this conduct was duly appreciated by those who participated in those rather boisterous repasts, and that they felt a certain gratitude, in spite of the regrets they manifested on account of Madame's absence.

Among the guests was Marillac, whose sparkling eye, and cheeks even more rosy than usual, made him conspicuous. Seated between a fat notary and another boon companion, who were almost as drunk as he Marillac emptied glass after glass, red wine after the white, the white after the red, with noisy laughter, and jests of all kinds by way of accompaniment. His head became every moment more and more excited by the libations destined to refresh his throat, and his neighbors, without his perceiving the conspiracy, thought it would be good fun to put a Parisian dandy under the table. However, he was not the only one who was gliding over the slippery precipice that leads to the attractive abyss of drunkenness. The majority of the guests shared his imprudent abandon and progressive exaltation. A bacchic emulation reigned, which threatened to end in scenes bordering upon a debauch.

Among these highly colored cheeks, under which the wine seemed to circulate with the blood, these eyes shining with a dull, fictitious light, all this disorderly pantomime so contrary to the quiet habit of the gesticulators, two faces contrasted strangely with the careless mirth of the others. The Baron fulfilled his duties as master of the house with a sort of nervous excitement which might pass for genuine merriment in the eyes of those of his guests who were in no condition to study his countenance; but a quiet observer would soon have discerned that these violent efforts at good-humor and bantering concealed some terrible suffering. From time to time, in the midst of a sentence or a laugh, he would suddenly stop, the muscles of his face would twitch as if the spring which set them in motion had broken; his expression became sombre and savage; he sank back in his chair motionless, a stranger to all that surrounded him, and gave himself up to some mysterious thought against which resistance seemed powerless. Suddenly he appeared to wake from some perplexing dream, and by another powerful effort aroused himself and joined in the conversation with sharp, cutting speeches; he encouraged the noisy humor of his guests, inciting them to drunkenness by setting the example himself; then the same mysterious thought would cross his face anew, and he would fall back into the tortures of a revery which must have been horrible, to judge by the expression of his face.

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Among his guests, one only, who was seated almost opposite Bergenheim, seemed to be in the secret of his thoughts and to study the symptoms with deep attention. Gerfaut, for it was he, showed an interest in this examination which reacted on his own countenance, for he was paler than ever.

"When I saw that the hare was reaching the upper road," said one of the guests, a handsome old man about sixty years of age, with gray hair and rosy cheeks, "I ran toward the new clearing to wait for its return. I felt perfectly sure, notary, that he would pass through your hands safe and sound."

"Now, notary," said Marillac, from the other end of the table, "defend yourself; one, two, three, ready!"

"Monsieur de Camier," replied the hunter whose skill had been questioned, "I do not pretend to have your skill. I never have shot as large game as you did at your last hunt."

This reply was an allusion to a little misadventure which had happened to the first speaker, who, on account of nearsightedness, had shot a cow, taking it for a buck. The laugh, which had been at the notary's expense first, now turned against his adversary.

"How many pairs of boots did you get out of your game?" asked one.

"Gentlemen, let us return to our conversation," said a young man, whose precise face aspired to an austere and imposing air. "Up to this time, we can form only very vague conjectures as to the road that Lambernier took to escape. This, allow me to say, is more important than the notary's hare or Monsieur de Carrier's cow."

At these words, Bergenheim, who had taken no part in the conversation, straightened up in his chair.

"A glass of Sauterne," said he, suddenly, to one of his neighbors.

Gerfaut looked at him stealthily for a moment, and then lowered his eyes, as if he feared his glance might be noticed.

"The public prosecutor scents a culprit, and there is no fear he will drop the trail," said the notary.

"The case will doubtless come up at the next session of the Assizes."

M. de Carrier put his glass, which was half filled, upon the table, angrily exclaiming:

"The devil take the jury! I am called to the next session, and I will wager my head that I shall be drawn. How agreeable that will be! To leave my home and business in the

middle of winter and spend a fortnight with a lot of fellows whom I do not know from Adam! That is one of the agreeable things supplied by constitutional government. The French have to be judged by their peers! Of what use is it to pay for judges if we, land-owners, are obliged to do their work. The old parliaments, against which so much has been said, were a thousand times better than all this bedlam let loose in a court of assizes."

Marillac, who during this speech was amusing himself with singing his low "G" while peeling an apple, interrupted his song, to the great relief of a hound who lay at his feet, and whose nerves seemed to be singularly affected by the strain.

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“Monsieur de Carrier,” said he, “you are a large landowner, an eligible citizen and a Carlist; you fast on Fridays, go to mass in your parish, and occasionally kill cows for bucks; I esteem and respect you; but allow me to say that you have just uttered an old, antediluvian platitude.”

“Gentlemen,” said the public prosecutor, punctuating each word with his first finger, “I have the greatest respect for the old parliaments, those worthy models of our modern magistracy, those incorruptible defenders of national freedom, but my veneration is none the less great for the institutions emanating from our wise constitution, and it prevents me from adopting an exclusive opinion. However, without pretending to proclaim in too absolute a manner the superiority of the old system over the new, I am in a certain sense of Monsieur de Carrier’s opinion. In my position, I am better able than any other person to study the advantages and disadvantages of a jury, and I am forced to admit that if the advantages are real, the disadvantages are none the less indisputable. One of the great vices of juries consists in the habit that a great number of its members have of calling for material proofs in order to form their opinions. They must almost see the wounds of the victim before agreeing on a verdict. As to Lambernier, I hope that they will not contest the existence of the main evidence: the victim’s still bleeding thigh.”

“Tra-de-ri-di-ra,” exclaimed the artist, striking alternately with his knife a glass and a bottle, as if he were playing a triangle. “I must say that you choose madly gay subjects for conversation. We are truly a joyous crowd; look at Bergenheim opposite us; he looks like Macbeth in the presence of Banquo’s ghost; here is my friend Gerfaut drinking water with a profoundly solemn air. Good gracious, gentlemen! enough of this foolish talk! Let them cut this Lambernier’s throat and put an end to the subject! The theatre for dramatic music, the church for sacred!

Le vin, le jeu; les belles,
Voila mes seuls amours.”

A general protestation rose from the whole table at this verse, which was roared out in a lugubrious voice. Noisy shouts, rapping of knives upon tumblers and bottles, and exclamations of all kinds called the orator to order.

“Monsieur Marillac,” exclaimed the public prosecutor, in a joking tone, “it seems to me that you have wandered from the subject.”

The artist looked at him with an astonished air.

“Had I anything in particular to say to you?” he asked; “if so, I will sustain my point. Only do me the kindness to tell me what it was about.”

"It was on the subject of this man Lambernier," whispered the notary to him, as he poured out a glass of wine. "Courage! you improvise better than Berryer! If you exert yourself, the public prosecutor will be beaten in no time."

Marillac thanked his neighbor with a smile and a nod of the head, which signified: "Trust me." He then emptied his glass with the recklessness that had characterized his drinking for some time, but, strangely enough, the libation, instead of putting the finishing stroke to his drunkenness, gave his mind, for the time being, a sort of lucidity.

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"The accusation," he continued, with the coolness of an old lawyer, "rests upon two grounds: first, the presence without cause of the accused upon the spot where the crime was committed; second, the nature of the weapon used.—Two simple but peremptory replies will make the scaffold which has been erected upon this double supposition fall to the ground. First, Lambernier had a rendezvous at this place, and at the exact hour when this crime with which he is accused took place; this will be proved by a witness, and will be established by evidence in a most indisputable manner. His presence will thus be explained without its being interpreted in any way against him. Second, the public prosecutor has admitted that the carrying of a weapon which Lambernier may have been in the habit of using in his regular trade could not be used as an argument against him, and for that same reason could not be used as an argument in favor of premeditation; now, this is precisely the case in question. This weapon was neither a sword, bayonet, nor stiletto, nothing that the fertile imagination of the public prosecutor could imagine; it was a simple tool used by the accused in his profession, the presence of which in his pocket is as easily understood as that of a snuff-box in the pocket of my neighbor, the notary, who takes twenty pinches of snuff a minute. Gentlemen, this weapon was a pair of carpenter's compasses."

"A compass!" exclaimed several voices at once.

"A compass!" exclaimed the Baron, gazing fixedly at the artist. Then he carried his hand to his pocket, and suddenly withdrew it, as he felt the workman's compass there, where it had been ever since the scene upon the rocks.

"An iron compass," repeated the artist, "about ten inches long, more or less, the legs of it being closed."

"Will you explain yourself, Monsieur?" excitedly exclaimed the public prosecutor, "for it really seems as if you had witnessed the crime. In that case you will be called out as a witness for the defence. Justice is impartial, gentlemen. Justice has not two pairs of scales."

"To the devil with justice! You must have come from Timbuctoo to use such old-fashioned metaphors."

"Make your deposition, witness; I require you to make your deposition," said the magistrate, whose increasing drunkenness appeared as dignified and solemn as the artist was noisy.

"I have nothing to state; I saw nothing."

Here the Baron drew a long breath, as if these words were a relief.



"But I saw something!" said Gerfaut to himself, as he gazed at the Baron's face, upon which anxiety was depicted.

"I reason by hypothesis and supposition," continued the artist. "I had a little altercation with Lambernier a few days ago, and, but for my good poniard, he would have put an end to me as he did to this fellow to-day."

He then related his meeting with Lambernier, but the consideration due Mademoiselle Gobillot's honor imposed numberless circumlocutions and concealments which ended by making his story rather unintelligible to his auditors, and in the midst of it his head became so muddled that he was completely put out.

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"Basta!" he exclaimed, in conclusion, as he dropped heavily into his chair. "Not another word for the 'whole empire. Give me something to drink! Notary, you are the only man here who has any regard for me. One thing is certain about this matter—I am in ten louis by this rascal's adventure."

These words struck the Baron forcibly, as they brought to his mind what the carpenter had said to him when he gave him the letter.

"Ten louis!" said he, suddenly, looking at Marillac as if he wished to look into his very heart.

"Two hundred francs, if you like it better. A genuine bargain. But we have talked enough, 'mio caro'; you deceive yourselves if you think you are going to make me blab. No, indeed! I am not the one to allow myself to become entangled. I am now as mute and silent as the grave."

Bergenheim insisted no longer, but, leaning against the back of his chair, he let his head fall upon his breast. He remained for some time buried in thought and vainly trying to connect the obscure words he had just heard with Lambernier's incomplete revelations. With the exception of Gerfaut, who did not lose one of his host's movements, the guests, more or less absorbed by their own sensations, paid no attention to the strange attitude of the master of the house, or, like Monsieur de Camier, attributed it to the influence of wine. The conversation continued its noisy course, interrupted every few moments by the startling vagaries of some guest more animatedly excited than the rest, for, at the end of a repast where sobriety has not reigned, each one is disposed to impose upon others the despotism of his own intoxication, and the idle talk of his peculiar hallucinations. Marillac bore away the prize among the talking contingent, thanks to the vigor of his lungs and the originality of his words, which sometimes forced the attention of his adversaries. Finally he remained master of the field, and flashed volleys of his drunken eloquence to the right and left.

"It is a pity," he exclaimed, in the midst of his triumph, as he glanced disdainfully up and down the table, "it really is a pity, gentlemen, to listen to your conversation. One could imagine nothing more commonplace-prosaic or bourgeois. Would it not please you to indulge in a discussion of a little higher order?"

"Let us join hands, and talk of poetry and art. I am thirsting for an artistic conversation; I am thirsting for wit and intelligence."

"You must drink if you are thirsty," said the notary, filling his glass to the brim.

The artist emptied it at one draught, and continued in a languishing voice as he gazed with a loving look at his fat neighbor.

"I will begin our artistic conversation: 'Knowest thou the land where the orange-flower blooms?'"

"It is warmer than ours," replied the notary, who was not familiar with Mignon's song; and, beginning to laugh maliciously, he gave a wink at his neighbors as if to say:

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"I have settled him now."

Marillac leaned toward him with the meekness of a lamb that presents his head to the butcher, and sympathetically pressed his hands.

"O poet!" he continued, "do you not feel, as I do at the twilight hour and in the eventide, a vague desire for a sunny, perfumed, southern life? Will you not bid adieu to this sterile country and sail away to a land where the blue sky is reflected in the blue sea? Venice! the Rialto, the Bridge of Sighs, Saint Mark! Rome! the Coliseum and Saint Peter—But I know Italy by heart; let us go instead to Constantinople. I am thirsting for sultanias and houris; I am thirsting—"

"Good gracious! why do you not drink if you are thirsty?"

"Gladly. I never say no to that. I scorn love in a nightcap; I adore danger. Danger is life to me.

"I dote on silken ladders as long as Jacob's, on citadels worth scaling; on moonlight evenings, bearded husbands, and all that sort of thing—I would love a bed composed of five hundred poniards; you understand me, poet—"

"I beg of you, do not make him drink any more," said Gerfaut to the notary.

"You are right not to wish to drink any more, Octave, I was about to advise you not to. You have already drunk to excess to-day, and I am afraid that it will make you ill; your health is so weak—you are not a strong man like me. Fancy, gentlemen, Monsieur le Vicomte de Gerfaut, a native of Gascony, a roue by profession, a star of the first magnitude in literature, is afflicted by nature with a stomach which has nothing in common with that of an ostrich; he has need to use the greatest care. So we have him drink seltzer-water principally, and feed him on the white meat of the chicken. Besides, we keep this precious phenomenon rolled up between two wool blankets and over a kettle of boiling water. He is a great poet; I myself am a very great poet."

"And I also, I hope," said the notary.

"Gentlemen, formerly there were poets who wrote only in verse; nowadays they revel in prose. There are some even who are neither prose nor verse writers, who have never confided their secret to anybody, and who selfishly keep their poetry to themselves. It is a very simple thing to be a poet, provided you feel the indescribable intoxication of the soul, and understand the inexpressible afflatus that bubbles over in your large brain, and your noble heart throbs under your left breast—"

"He is as drunk as a fool," said M. de Camier, loud enough for him to hear.

“Old man,” said he, “you are the one who is drunk. Besides the word drunk is not civil; if you had said intoxicated I should not have objected.”

Loud shouts of laughter burst forth from the party. He threw a threatening glance around him, as if he were seeking some one upon whom to vent his anger, and, placing his hand upon his hip, assumed the pose of a bully.

“Softly, my good fellows!” said he, “if any of you pretend that I am drunk, I declare to him that he lies, and I call him a misanthrope, a vagabond, an academician!” he concluded, with a loud burst of laughter; for he thought that the jesters would be crushed by this last heavy weapon.

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"By Jove! your friend is hilariously drunk," said the notary to Gerfaut; "while here is Bergenheim, who has not taken very much wine, and yet looks as if he were assisting at a funeral. I thought he was more substantial than this."

Marillac's voice burst out more loudly than ever, and Octave's reply was not heard.

"It is simply astounding. They are all as drunk as fools, and yet they pretend that it is I who am drunk. Very well! I defy you all; who among you wishes to argue with me? Will you discuss art, literature, politics, medicine, music, philosophy, archiology, jurisprudence, magnetism—"

"Jurisprudence!" exclaimed the thick voice of the public prosecutor, who was aroused from his stupor by this magic word; "let us talk jurisprudence."

"Would you like," said Marillac, without stopping at this interruption, "that I should improvise a discourse upon the death penalty or upon temperance? Would you like me to tell you a story?"

"A story, yes, a story!" they all exclaimed in unison.

"Speak out, then; order what story you like; it will cost you nothing," replied the artist, rubbing his hands with a radiant air. "Would you like a tale from the Middle Ages? a fairy, an eastern, a comical, or a private story? I warn you that the latter style is less old-fashioned than the others."

"Let us have it, then, by all means," said all the drunken voices.

"Very well. Now would you like it to be laid in Spain, Arabia, or France?"

"France!" exclaimed the prosecutor.

"I am French, you are French, he is French. You shall have a French story."

Marillac leaned his forehead upon his hands, and his elbows upon the table, as if to gather his scattered ideas. After a few moments' reflection, he raised his head and looked first at Gerfaut, then at Bergenheim, with a peculiar smile.

"It would be very original," said he, in a low voice as if replying to his own thoughts.

"The story!" exclaimed one of the party, more impatient than the rest.

"Here it is," replied the artist. "You all know, gentlemen, how difficult it always is to choose a title. In order not to make you wait, I have chosen one which is already well known. My story is to be called 'The husband, the wife, and the lover.' We are not all single men here, and a wise proverb says that one must never speak—"

In spite of his muddled brain, the artist did not finish his quotation. A remnant of common-sense made him realize that he was treading upon dangerous ground and was upon the point of committing an unpardonable indiscretion. Fortunately, the Baron had paid no attention to his words; but Gerfaut was frightened at his friend's jabbering, and threw him a glance of the most threatening advice to be prudent. Marillac vaguely understood his mistake, and was half intimidated by this glance; he leaned before the notary and said to him, in a voice which he tried to make confidential, but which could be heard from one end of the table to the other:

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"Be calm, Octave, I will tell it in obscure words and in such a way that he will not see anything in it. It is a scene for a drama that I have in my mind."

"You will make some grotesque blunder, if you go on drinking and talking," replied Gerfaut, in an anxious voice. "Hold your tongue, or else come away from the table with me."

"When I tell you that I will use obscure words," replied the artist; "what do you take me for? I swear to you that I will gloss it over in such a way that nobody will suspect anything."

"The story! the story!" exclaimed several, who were amused by the incoherent chattering of the artist.

"Here it is," said the latter, sitting upright in his chair, and paying no heed to his friend's warnings. "The scene takes place in a little court in Germany—Eh!" said he, looking at Gerfaut and maliciously winking his eye—"do you not think that is glossed over?"

"Not in a German court, you said it was to be a French story," said the public prosecutor, disposed to play the critic toward the orator who had reduced him to silence.

"Well, it is a French story, but the scene is laid in Germany," he replied, coolly. "Do you desire to teach me my profession? Understand that nothing is more elastic than a German court; the story-teller can introduce there whoever he likes; I may bring in the Shah of Persia and the Emperor of China if I care to. However, if you prefer the court of Italy, it is the same thing to me."

This conciliating proposal remained without response. Marillac continued raising his eyes in such a way that nothing but the whites could be seen, and as if he were searching for his words in the ceiling.

"The Princess Borinski was walking slowly in the mysterious alley on the borders of the foaming torrent—"

"Borinski! she is a Pole, then?" interrupted M. de Camier.

"Oh! go to the devil, old man! Do not interrupt me," exclaimed the artist, impatiently.

"That is right. Silence now."

"You have the floor," said several voices at once.

"—She was pale, and she heaved convulsive sighs and wrung her soft, warm hands, and a white pearl rolled from her dark lashes, and—"

"Why do you begin all your phrases with 'and?'" asked the public prosecutor, with the captiousness of an inexorable critic.

"Because it is biblical and unaffected. Now let me alone," replied Marillac, with superb disdain. "You are a police-officer; I am an artist; what is there in common between you and me? I will continue: And he saw this pensive, weeping woman pass in the distance, and he said to the Prince: 'Borinski, a bit of root in which my foot caught has hurt my limb, will you suffer me to return to the palace? And the Prince Borinski said to him, 'Shall my men carry you in a palanquin?' and the cunning Octave replied—"

"Your story has not even common-sense and you are a terrible bore," interrupted Gerfaut brusquely. "Gentlemen, are we going to sit at the table all night?"

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He arose, but nobody followed his example. Bergenheim, who for the last few minutes had lent an attentive ear to the artist's story, gazed alternately at the two friends with an observing eye.

"Let him talk," said the young magistrate, with an ironical smile. "I like the palanquin in the court of Germany. That is probably what novelists call local color. O Racine, poor, deserted Racine!"

Marillac was not intimidated this time by Gerfaut's withering glance, but, with the obstinacy of drunkenness, continued in a more or less stammering voice:

"I swore that I would gloss it over; you annoy me. I committed an error, gentlemen, in calling the lover in this story Octave. It is as clear as day that his name is Boleslas, Boleslas Matalowski. There is no more connection between him and my friend Octave than there is between my other friend Bergenheim and the prince Kolinski—Woginski—what the devil has become of my Prince's name? A good reward to whoever will tell me his name!"

"It is wrong to take advantage of his condition and make him talk any more," said Gerfaut. "I beg of you, Marillac, hold your tongue and come with me," said he, lowering his voice as he leaned toward the headstrong story-teller and took him by the arm, trying to make him rise. This attempt only irritated Marillac; he seized hold of the edge of the table and clung to it with all his might, screaming:

"No! a thousand times no! I will finish my story. President, allow me to speak. Ah! ha! you wish to prevent me from speaking because you know that I tell a story better than you, and that I make an impression upon my audience. You never have been able to catch my chic. Jealous! Envious! I know you, serpent!"

"I beg of you, if you ever cared for me, listen!" replied Octave, who, as he bent over his friend, noticed the Baron's attentive look.

"No, I say no!" shouted the artist again, and he added to this word one of the ugliest-sounding oaths in the French language. He arose, and pushing Octave aside, leaned upon the table, bursting into a loud laugh. "Poets all," said he, "be reassured and rejoice. You shall have your story, in spite of those envious serpents. But first give me something to drink, for my throat is like a box of matches. No wine," he added, as he saw the notary armed with a bottle. "This devilish wine has made me thirsty instead of refreshing me; besides, I am going to be as sober as a judge."

Gerfaut, with the desperation of a man who sees that he is about to be ruined, seized him again by the arm and tried to fascinate him by his steady gaze. But he obtained no response to this mute and threatening supplication except a stupid smile and these stammering words:

“Give me something to drink, Boleslas—Marinski-Graboski—I believe that Satan has lighted his heating apparatus within my stomach.”

The persons seated near the two friends heard an angry hiss from Gerfaut’s lips. He suddenly leaned over, and taking, from among several bottles, a little carafe he filled Marillac’s glass to the brim.

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"Thanks," said the latter, trying to stand erect upon his legs; "you are an angel. Rest easy, your love affairs will run no risk. I will gloss it all over—To your health, gentlemen!"

He emptied the glass and put it upon the table; he then smiled and waved his hand at his auditors with true royal courtesy; but his mouth remained half open as if his lips were petrified, his eyes grew large and assumed a haggard expression; the hand he had stretched out fell to his side; a second more, and he reeled and fell from his chair as if he had had a stroke of apoplexy.

Gerfaut, whose eyes had not left him, watched these different symptoms with unutterable anxiety; but in spite of his fright, he drew a sigh of relief when he saw Marillac mute and speechless.

"It is singular," observed the notary, as he aided in removing his neighbor from the table, "that glass of water had more effect upon him than four or five bottles of wine."

"Georges," said Gerfaut to one of the servants, in an agitated voice, "open his bed and help me carry him to it; Monsieur de Bergenheim, I suppose there is a chemist near here, if I should need any medicine."

The greater part of the guests arose at this unexpected incident, and some of them hastened to Marillac's side, as he remained motionless in his chair. The repeated bathing of his temples with cold water and the holding of salts to his nose were not able to bring him to consciousness.

Instead of going to his aid with the others, Bergenheim profited by the general confusion to lean over the table. He plunged his finger into the artist's glass, in which a part of the water remained, and then touched his tongue. Only the notary noticed this movement. Thinking this rather strange, he seized the glass in his turn and swallowed the few drops that it contained.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, to Bergenheim, "I am not surprised that the bumper asphyxiated him on the spot. Do you know, Baron, if this Monsieur de Gerfaut had taken anything but water during the evening, I should say that he was the drunker of the two; or that, if they were not such good friends, he wished to poison him in order to stop his talk. Did you notice that he did not seem pleased to hear this story?"

"Ah! you, too!" exclaimed the Baron angrily, "everybody will know it."

"To take a carafe of kirsch for clear water," continued the notary, without paying any attention to the Baron's agitation. "The devil! the safe thing to do is to give him an emetic at once; this poor fellow has enough prussic acid in his stomach to poison a cow."



“Who is talking of prussic acid and poisoning?” exclaimed the public prosecutor, running with an unsteady step from one extremity of the table to the other, “who has been poisoned? I am the public prosecutor, I am the only one here who has any power to start an investigation. Have they had an autopsy? Where did they find it? Buried in the fields or the woods, or floating on the river?”

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"You lie! there is no dead body in the river!" exclaimed Bergenheim, in a thundering voice, as he seized the magistrate by the collar in a bewildered way.

The magistrate was incapable of making the least resistance when held by such a vigorous hand and he received two or three shakings. Suddenly the Baron stopped, and struck his forehead with a gesture common to persons who feel that their reason has given way under a paroxysm of rage.

"I am crazy," said he, with much emotion. "Monsieur," he added, "I am very sorry. We really have all taken too much wine. I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I will leave you a moment—I need some fresh air."

He hurriedly left the room, almost running against the persons who were carrying Marillac to his room. The public prosecutor, whose ideas had been somewhat mixed before, was now completely muddled by this unheard-of attack upon his dignity, and fell back exhausted in his chair.

"All poor drinkers!" said the notary to Monsieur de Carrier who was left alone with him, for the prosecutor, half suffocated with indignation and intoxication, could no longer be counted as one of them. "Here they are, all drunk, from just a few glasses of wine."

The notary shook his head with a mysterious air.

"These things, though, are plain enough to me," said he at last; "first, this Monsieur Marillac has not a very strong head and tells pretty tedious stories when drunk; then his friend has a way of taking kirsch for water which I can understand only in extreme cases; but the Baron is the one who astonished me most. Did you notice how he shook our friend who has just fallen on the floor? As to the Baron pretending that he was drunk and thus excusing himself, I do not believe one word of it; he drank nothing but water. There were times this evening when he appeared very strange indeed! There is some devilry underneath all this; Monsieur de Carrier, rest assured there is some devilry underneath it all."

"I am the public prosecutor—they can not remove the body without me," stammered the weak voice of the magistrate, who, after trying in vain to recover his equilibrium, lay flat upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

A STRATAGEM

Instead of joining the persons who were carrying Marillac away, Christian went into the garden after leaving the dining-room, in quest of the fresh air which he gave as an excuse for leaving his guests. In fact, he felt oppressed almost to suffocation by the

emotions he had undergone during the last few hours. The dissimulation which prudence made a necessity and honor a duty had aggravated the suffering by protracted concealment.

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For some time Christian walked rapidly among the paths and trees in the park. Bathing his burning brow in the cool night air, he sought to calm the secret agitation and the boiling blood that were raging within him, in the midst of which his reason struggled and fought like a ship about to be wrecked. He used all his strength to recover his self-possession, so as to be able to master the perils and troubles which surrounded him with a calm if not indifferent eye; in one word, to regain that control over himself that he had lost several times during the supper. His efforts were not in vain. He contemplated his situation without weakness, exaggeration, or anger, as if it concerned another. Two facts rose foremost before him, one accomplished, the other uncertain. On one side, murder, on the other, adultery. No human power could remedy the first or prevent its consequences; he accepted it, then, but turn his mind away from it he must, in the presence of this greater disaster. So far, only presumptions existed against Clemence—grave ones, to be sure, if one added Lambernier's revelations to Marillac's strangely indiscreet remarks. It was his first duty to himself, as well as to her, to know the whole truth; if innocent, he would beg her forgiveness; if guilty, he had a chastisement to inflict.

"It is an abyss," thought he, "and I may find as much blood as mud at the bottom of it. No matter, I will descend to its very depths."

When he returned to the chateau, his face had resumed its usual calm expression. The most observing person would hardly have noticed any change in his looks. The dining-room had been abandoned at last. The victorious and the vanquished had retired to their rooms. First of all, he went up to the artist's apartment, so that no singularity in his conduct should attract attention, for, as master of the house, a visit to one of his guests who had fallen dead, or nearly so, at his own table was a positive duty. The attentions lavished upon Marillac by his friend had removed the danger which might have resulted from his imprudent excesses in drinking, and the sort of poisoning with which he had crowned the whole. He lay upon his bed in the same position in which he had first been placed, and was sleeping that heavy, painful sleep which serves as an expiation for bacchic excesses. Gerfaut was seated a few steps from him, at a table, writing; he seemed prepared to sit up all night, and to fulfill, with the devotion of a friend, the duties of a nurse.

Octave arose at sight of the Baron, his face having resumed its habitual reserved expression. The two men greeted each other with equal composure.

"Is he sleeping?" asked Christian.

"But a few minutes only," replied the latter; "he is all right now, and I hope," Octave added, smilingly, "that this will serve as a lesson to you, and that hereafter you will put some limits to your princely hospitality. Your table is a regular ambush."

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"Do not throw stones at me, I pray," replied the Baron, with an appearance of equal good-humor. "If your friend wants to ask an explanation of anybody it is of you, for you took some kirsch of 1765 for water."

"I really believe that I was the drunker of the two," interrupted Octave, with a vivacity which concealed a certain embarrassment; "we must have terribly scandalized Monsieur de Camier, who has but a poor opinion of Parisian heads and stomachs."

After looking for a moment at the sleeping artist, Christian approached the table where Gerfaut was seated, and threw a glance over the latter's writing.

"You are still at work, I see?" said he, as his eyes rested upon the paper.

"Just now I am following the modest trade of copyist. These are some verses which Mademoiselle de Corandeuil asked me for—"

"Will you do me a favor? I am going to her room now; give me these verses to hand to her. Since the misfortune that befell Constance, she has been terribly angry with me, and I shall not be sorry to have some reason for going to her room."

Octave finished the two or three lines which remained to be copied, and handed the sheet to Bergenheim. The latter looked at it attentively, then carefully folded it and put it in his pocket.

"I thank you, Monsieur," said he, "I will leave you to your friendly duties."

There was something so solemn in the calm accent of these words, and the polite bow which accompanied them, that Gerfaut felt chilled, though not alarmed, for he did not understand.

When he reached his room, Bergenheim opened the paper which Gerfaut had just given him and compared it with the letter he had received from Lambernier. The suspicions which a separate examination had aroused were confirmed upon comparing the two letters; no doubt was possible; the letter and the poetry were written by the same hand!

After a few moments' reflection, Christian went to his wife's room.

Clemence was seated in an armchair, near the fireplace, indulging in a reverie. Although her lover was not there, she was still under the charm of this consuming as well as intellectual passion, which responded to the yearnings of her heart, the delicacy of her tastes, and the activity of her imagination. At this moment, she was happy to live; there was not a sad thought that these words, "He loves me!" could not efface.

The noise of the opening door aroused her from her meditation. Madame de Bergenheim turned her head with a look of vexation, but instead of the servant whom



she was ready to reprimand, she saw her husband. The expression of impatience imprinted upon her face gave way to one of fright. She arose with a movement she could not repress, as if she had seen a stranger, and stood leaning against the mantel in a constrained attitude. Nothing in Christian's manner justified, however, the fear the sight of him seemed to cause his wife. He advanced with a tranquil air, and a smile that he had forced upon his lips.

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With the presence of mind with which all women seem to be gifted, Clemence fell back into her chair, and, assuming a languid, suffering tone, mixed with an appearance of reproach, she said:

"I am glad to see you for a moment in order to scold you; you have not shown your usual consideration to-night. Did you not think that the noise from the dining-room might reach as far as here?"

"Has it troubled you?" asked Christian, looking at her attentively.

"Unless one had a head of cast-iron—It seems that these gentlemen have abused the liberty permitted in the country. From what Justine tells me, things have taken place which would have been more appropriate at the Femme-sans-Tete."

"Are you suffering very much?"

"A frightful neuralgia—I only wish I could sleep."

"I was wrong not to have thought of this. You will forgive me, will you not?"

Bergenheim leaned over the chair, passed his arm around the young woman's shoulders, and pressed his lips to her forehead. For the first time in his life, he was playing a part upon the marital stage, and he watched with the closest attention the slightest expression of his wife's face. He noticed that she shivered, and that her forehead which he had lightly touched was as cold as marble.

He arose and took several turns about the room, avoiding even a glance at her, for the aversion which she had just shown toward her husband seemed to him positive proof of the very thing he dreaded, and he feared he should not be able to contain himself.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked, as she noticed his agitation.

These words brought the Baron to his senses, and he returned to her side, replying in a careless tone:

"I am annoyed for a very simple cause; it concerns your aunt."

"I know. She is furious against you on account of the double misfortune to her dog and coachman. You will admit that, as far as Constance is concerned, you are guilty."

"She is not content with being furious; she threatens a complete rupture. Here, read this."

He handed her a large letter, folded lengthwise and sealed with the Corandeuil crest.

Madame de Bergenheim took the letter and read its contents aloud:

“After the unheard-of and unqualifiable events of this day, the resolution which I have formed will doubtless not surprise you in the least, Monsieur. You will understand that I can not and will not remain longer in a house where the lives of my servants and other creatures which are dear to me may be exposed to the most deplorable, wilful injury. I have seen for some time, although I have tried to close my eyes to the light of truth, the plots that were hatched daily against all who wore the Corandeuil livery. I supposed that I should not be obliged to put an end to this highly unpleasant matter myself, but that you would undertake

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this charge. It seems, however, that respect and regard for women do not form part of a gentleman's duties nowadays. I shall therefore be obliged to make up myself for the absence of such attentions, and watch over the safety of the persons and other creatures that belong to me. I shall leave for Paris tomorrow. I hope that Constance's condition will permit her to endure the journey, but Baptiste's wound is too serious for me to dare to expose him. I am compelled, although with deep regret, to leave him here until he is able to travel, trusting him to the kind mercies of my niece.

"Receive, Monsieur, with my adieux, my thanks for your courteous hospitality.

"Yolande de Corandeuil."

"Your aunt abuses the privileges of being foolish," said the Baron, when his wife had finished reading the letter; "she deserts the battlefield and leaves behind her wounded."

"But I saw her, not two hours ago, and, although she was very angry, she did not say one word of this departure."

"Jean handed me this letter but a moment ago, clad in full livery, and with the importance of an ambassador who demands his passports. You must go and talk with her, dear, and use all your eloquence to make her change her mind."

"I will go at once," said Clemence, rising.

"You know that your aunt is rather obstinate when she takes a notion into her head. If she persists in this, tell her, in order to decide her to remain, that I am obliged to go to Epinal with Monsieur de Carrier tomorrow morning, on account of the sale of some wood-land, and that I shall be absent three days at least. You understand that it will be difficult for your aunt to leave you alone during my absence, on account of these gentlemen."

"Certainly, that could not be," said she, quickly.

"I do not see, as far as I am concerned, anything improper about it," said the Baron, trying to smile; "but we must obey the proprieties. You are too young and too pretty a mistress of the house to pass for a chaperon, and Aline, instead of being a help, would be one inconvenience the more. So your aunt must stay here until my return."

"And by that time Constance and Baptiste will be both cured and her anger will have passed away. You did not tell me about this trip to Epinal nor the selling of the woodland."

“Go to your aunt’s room before she retires to bed,” replied Bergenheim, without paying any attention to this remark, and seating himself in the armchair; “I will wait for you here. We leave to-morrow morning early, and I wish to know tonight what to depend upon.”

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As soon as Madame de Bergenheim had left the room, Christian arose and ran, rather than walked, to the space between the two windows, and sought the button in the woodwork of which Lambernier had told him. He soon found it, and upon his first pressure the spring worked and the panel flew open. The casket was upon the shelf; he took it and carefully examined the letters which it contained. The greater part of them resembled in form the one that he possessed; some of them were in envelopes directed to Madame de Bergenheim and bore Gerfaut's crest. There was no doubt about the identity of the handwriting; if the Baron had had any, these proofs were enough. After glancing rapidly over a few of the notes, he replaced them in the casket and returned the latter to the shelf where he had found it. He then carefully closed the little door and reseated himself beside the fireplace.

When Clemence returned, her husband seemed absorbed in reading one of the books which he had found upon her table, while he mechanically played with a little bronze cup that his wife used to drop her rings in when she removed them.

"I have won my case," said the Baroness, in a gay tone; "my aunt saw clearly the logic of the reasons which I gave her, and she defers her departure until your return."

Christian made no reply.

"That means that she will not go at all, for her anger will have time to cool off in three days; at heart she is really kind!—How long is it since you have known English?" she asked, as she noticed that her husband's attention seemed to be fixed upon a volume of Lord Byron's poems.

Bergenheim threw the book on the table, raised his head and gazed calmly at his wife. In spite of all his efforts, his face had assumed an expression which would have frightened her if she had noticed it, but her eyes were fastened upon the cup which he was twisting in his hand as if it were made of clay.

"Mon Dieu! Christian, what is the matter with you? What are you doing to my poor cup?" she asked, with surprise mingled with a little of that fright which is so prompt to be aroused if one feels not above reproach.

He arose and put the misshapen bronze upon the table.

"I do not know what ails me to-night," said he, "my nerves are unstrung. I will leave you, for I need rest myself. I shall start to-morrow morning before you are up, and I shall return Wednesday."

"Not any later, I hope," she said, with that soft, sweet voice, from which, in such circumstances, very few women have the loyalty to abstain.

He went out without replying, for he feared he might be no longer master of himself; he felt, when offered this hypocritical, almost criminal, caress, as if he would like to end it all by killing her on the spot.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CRISIS

Twenty-four hours had passed. The Baron had departed early in the morning, and so had all his guests, with the exception of Gerfaut and the artist. The day passed slowly and tediously. Aline had been vexed, somewhat estranged from her sister-in-law since their conversation in the little parlor. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was entirely occupied in restoring her poodle to health.



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Marillac, who had been drinking tea ever since rising, dared not present his face, which showed the effects of his debauch of the night before, to the mistress of the house, whose exacting and aristocratic austerity he very much feared. He pretended to be ill, in order to delay the moment when he should be forced to make his appearance. Madame de Bergenheim did not leave her aunt, and thus avoided being alone with Octave—who, on account of these different complications, might have spent a continual tete-a-tete with her had she been so inclined. Christian's absence, instead of being a signal of deliverance for the lovers, seemed to have created a new misunderstanding, for Clemence felt that it would be a mean action to abuse the liberty her husband's departure gave her. She was thus very reserved during the day, when she felt that there were more facilities for yielding, but, in the evening, when alone in her apartment, this fictitious prudery disappeared. She spent the entire evening lying upon the divan in the little boudoir, dreaming of Octave, talking to him as if he could reply, putting into practice again that capitulation of conscience which permits our mind to wander on the brink of guilt, provided actions are strictly correct.

After a while this exaltation fell by degrees. When struggling earnestly, she had regarded Octave as an enemy; but, since she had gone to him as one passes over to the enemy, and, in her heart, had taken part with the lover against the husband, her courage failed her as she thought of this, and she fell, weak, guilty, and vanquished before the combat.

When she had played with her passion, she had given Christian little thought; she had felt it childish to bring her husband into an amusement that she believed perfectly harmless; then, when she wished to break her plaything, and found it made of iron and turning more and more into a tyrannical yoke, she called to her aid the conjugal divinities, but in too faint a voice to be heard. Now the situation had changed again. Christian was no longer the insignificant ally that the virtuous wife had condemned, through self-conceit, to ignorant neutrality; he was the husband, in the hostile and fearful acceptance of the word. This man whom she had wronged would always have law on his side.

Religion sometimes takes pity on a wayward wife, but society is always ready to condemn her. She was his own, fastened to him by indissoluble bonds. He had marked her with his name like a thing of his own; he held the threads of her life in his hands; he was the dispenser of her fortune, the judge of her actions, and the master of their fireside. She had no dignity except through him. If he should withdraw his support for a single day, she would fall from her position without any human power being able to rescue her. Society closes its doors to the outcast wife, and adds to the husband's sentence another penalty still more scathing.

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Having now fallen from the sphere of illusion to that of reality, Madame de Bergenheim was wounded at every step. A bitter feeling of discouragement overwhelmed her, as she thought of the impossibility of happiness to which a deplorable fatality condemned her. Marriage and love struggled for existence, both powerless to conquer, and qualified only to cause each other's death. Marriage made love a crime; love made marriage a torture. She could only choose between two abysses: shame in her love, despair in her virtue.

The hours passed rapidly in these sad and gloomy meditations; the clock marked the hour of midnight. Madame de Bergenheim thought it time to try to sleep; but, instead of ringing for her maid, she decided to go to the library herself and get a book, thinking that perhaps it might aid her in going to sleep. As she opened the door leading into the closet adjoining her parlor, she saw by the light of the candle which she held in her hand something which shone like a precious stone lying upon the floor. At first she thought it might be one of her rings, but as she stooped to pick it up she saw her error. It was a ruby pin mounted in enamelled gold. She recognized it, at the very first glance, as belonging to M. de Gerfaut.

She picked up the pin and returned to the parlor. She exhausted in imagination a thousand conjectures in order to explain the presence of this object in such a place. Octave must have entered it or he could not have left this sign of his presence; it meant that he could enter her room at his will; what he had done once, he could certainly do again! The terror which this thought gave her dissipated like a dash of cold water all her former intoxicating thoughts; for, like the majority of women, she had more courage in theory than in action. A moment before, she had invoked Octave's image and seated it lovingly by her side.

When she believed this realization possible, all she thought of was to prevent it. She was sure that her lover never had entered the closet through the parlor, as he never had been in this part of the house farther than the little drawing-room. Suddenly a thought of the little corridor door struck her; she remembered that this door was not usually locked because the one from the library was always closed; she knew that Octave had a key to the latter, and she readily understood how he had reached her apartment. Mustering up all her courage through excessive fear, she returned to the closet, hurried down the stairs, and pushed the bolt. She then returned to the parlor and fell upon the divan, completely exhausted by her expedition.

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Little by little her emotion passed away. Her fright appeared childish to her, as soon as she believed herself sheltered from danger; she promised herself to give Octave a good scolding the next morning; then she renounced this little pleasure, when she remembered that it would force her to admit the discovery of the pin, and of course to return it to him, for she had resolved to keep it. She had always had a particular fancy for this pin, but she would never have dared to ask him for it, and besides, it was the fact that Octave usually wore it that made it of infinite value to her. The desire to appropriate it was irresistible, since chance had thrown it into her hands. She tied a black satin ribbon about her white neck, and pinned it with the precious ruby. After kissing it as devotedly as if it were a relic, she ran to her mirror to judge of the effect of the theft.

“How pretty, and how I love it!” said she; “but how can I wear it so that he will not see it?”

Before she could solve this problem, she heard a slight noise, which petrified her as she stood before her glass.

“It is he!” she thought; after standing for a moment half stunned, she dragged herself as far as the stairs, and leaning over, listened with fear and trembling. At first she could hear nothing but the beating of her heart; then she heard the other noise again, and more distinctly. Somebody was turning the handle of the door, trying to open it. The unexpected obstacle of the bolt doubtless exasperated the would-be visitor, for the door was shaken and pushed with a violence which threatened to break the lock or push down the door.

Madame de Bergenheim’s first thought was to run into her chamber and lock the door behind her;—the second showed her the danger that might result if the slightest noise should reach other ears. Not a moment was to be lost in hesitation. The young woman quickly descended the stairs and drew the bolt. The door opened softly and closed with the same precaution. The lamp from the parlor threw a feeble light upon the upper steps of the staircase, but the lower ones were in complete darkness. It was with her heart rather than her eyes that she recognized Octave; he could distinguish Madame de Bergenheim only in an indistinct way by her white dress, which was faintly outlined in the darkness; she stood before him silent and trembling with emotion, for she had not yet thought of a speech that would send him away.

He also felt the embarrassment usual in any one guilty of so foolhardy an action. He had expected to surprise Clemence, and he found her upon her guard; the thought of the disloyal part he was playing at this moment made the blood mount to his cheeks and took away, for the time being, his ordinary assurance. He sought in vain for a speech which might first justify him and then conquer her. He had recourse to a method often employed in the absence of eloquence. He fell on his knees before the young woman and seized her hands; it seemed as if the violence of his emotions rendered him

incapable of expressing himself except by silent adoration. As she felt his hands touch hers, Clemence drew back and said in a low voice:



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"You disgust me!"

"Disgust!" he repeated, drawing himself up to his full height.

"Yes, and that is not enough," she continued, indignantly, "I ought to say scorn instead of disgust. You deceived me when you said you loved me—you infamously deceived me!"

"But I adore you!" he exclaimed, with vehemence; "what proof do you wish of my love?"

"Go! go away at once! A proof, did you say? I will accept only one: go, I order it, do you understand?"

Instead of obeying her, he seized her in his arms in spite of her resistance.

"Anything but that," he said; "order me to kill myself at your feet, I will do it, but I will not go."

She tried for a moment to disengage herself, but although she used all her strength, she was unable to do so.

"Oh, you are without pity," she said, feebly, "but I abhor you; rather, a thousand times rather, kill me!"

Gerfaut was almost frightened by the agonized accent in which she spoke these words; he released her, but as he removed his arms, she reeled and he was obliged to support her.

"Why do you persecute me, then?" she murmured, as she fell in a faint upon her lover's breast.

He picked her up in his arms and mounted the narrow stairs with difficulty. Carrying her into the parlor, he placed her upon the divan. She had completely lost consciousness; one would have believed her dead from the pallor of her face, were, it not for a slight trembling which agitated her form every few seconds and announced a nervous attack. The most expert of lady's maids could not have removed the little ribbon from her neck, which seemed to trouble her respiration, more adroitly than did Octave. In spite of his anxiety, he could not repress a smile as he recognized the pin which he hardly expected to find upon Clemence's neck, considering the hostile way in which she had greeted him. He knelt before her and bathed her temples with cold water, making her also inhale some salts which he found upon the toilet table in the next room. Little by little, these attentions produced an effect; the nervous convulsion became less frequent and a slight flush suffused her pale cheeks. She opened her eyes and then closed them, as if the light troubled them; then, extending her arms, she passed them about Octave's

neck as he leaned over her; she remained thus for some time, breathing quietly and to all appearances sleeping. Suddenly she said:

“You will give me your pin, will you not?”

“Is not all that I have yours?” he replied, in a low tone.

“Mine!” she continued, in a feebly loving voice; “tell me again that you belong to me, to me alone, Octave!”

“You do not send me away any longer, then? you like me to be near you?” he said, with a happy smile, as he kissed the young woman’s brow.

“Oh! stay, I beg of you! stay with me forever!”

She folded her arms more tightly around him, as if she feared he might leave her. Suddenly she sat up, opened her eyes, and gazed about her in silent astonishment.

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"What has happened?" said she, "and how is it that you are here? Ah! this is dreadful indeed; you have cruelly punished me for my weakness."

This sudden severity after her delicious abandon, changed Octave's pleasure into angry vexation.

"You are the one," he replied, "who are cruel! Why allow me so much bliss, if you intended to take it away from me so soon? Since you love me only in your dreams, I beg of you to go to sleep again and never awaken. I will stay near you. Your words were so sweet, but a moment ago, and now you deny them!"

"What did I say?" she asked, with hesitation, a deep blush suffusing her face and neck.

These symptoms, which he considered a bad augury, increased Octave's irritation. He arose and said in a bitter tone:

"Fear nothing! I will not abuse the words which have escaped you, however flattering or charming they may have been; they told me that you loved me. I do not believe it any longer; you are agitated, I can see; but it is from fear and not love."

Clemence drew herself up upon the divan, crossed her arms over her breast and gazed at him for a few moments in silence.

"Do you believe these two sentiments incompatible?" she asked at last; "you are the only one whom I fear. Others would not complain."

There was such irresistible charm in her voice and glance that Gerfaut's ill-humor melted away like ice in the sun's rays. He fell upon his knees before the divan, and tried to pass her arms about his neck as before; but instead of lending herself to this project, she attempted to rise.

"I am so happy at your feet," he said, gently preventing her. "Everybody else can sit beside you; I only have the right to kneel. Do not take this right away from me."

Madame de Bergenheim extricated one of her hands, and, raising her finger with a threatening gesture, she said:

"Think a little less of your rights, and more of your duties. I advise you to obey me and to profit by my kindness, which allows you to sit by my side for a moment. Think that I might be more severe, and that if I treated you as you merited—if I told you to go away, would you obey me?"

Gerfaut hesitated a moment and looked at her supplicatingly.

"I would obey," said he; "but would you have the courage to order it?"

"I allow you to remain until just half past twelve," said she, as she glanced at the clock, which she could see through the half-open door. Gerfaut followed her glance, and saw that she accorded him only a quarter of an hour: but he was too clever to make any observation. He knew that the second quarter of an hour is always less difficult to obtain than the first.

"I am sure," said she, "that you have thought me capricious to-day; you must pardon me, it is a family fault. You know the saying: 'Caprice de Corandeuil?'"

"I wish it to be said: Amour de Gerfaut," said he, tenderly.

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"You are right to be amiable and say pleasant things to me, for I need them badly to-night. I am sad and weary; the darkest visions come before my mind. I think it is the storm which makes me feel so. How doleful this thunder is! It seems to me like an omen of misfortune."

"It is only the fancy of your vivid imagination. If you exerted the same will to be happy that you do to imagine troubles, our life would be perfect. What matters the storm? and even if you do see an omen in it, what is there so very terrible? Clouds are vapor, thunder is a sound, both are equally ephemeral; only the blue sky, which they can obscure but for a moment, is eternal."

"Did you not hear something just now?" asked Madame de Bergenheim, as she gave a sudden start and listened eagerly.

"Nothing. What did you think it was?"

"I feared it might be Justine who had taken it into her head to come down stairs; she is so tiresome in her attentions—"

She arose and went to look in her chamber, which she carefully locked; a moment later, she returned and seated herself again upon the divan.

"Justine is sleeping by this time," said Octave; "I should not have ventured if I had not seen that her light was out."

Clemence took his hand and placed it over her heart.

"Now," said she, "when I tell you that I am frightened, will you believe me?"

"Poor dear!" he exclaimed, as he felt her heart throbbing violently.

"You are the one who causes me these palpitations for the slightest thing. I know that we do not run any danger, that everybody is in his own room by this time, and yet, somehow, I feel terribly frightened. There are women, so they say, who get used to this torture, and end by being guilty and tranquil at the same time. It is an unworthy thought, but I'll confess that, sometimes, when I suffer so, I wish I were like them. But it is impossible; I was not made for wrong-doing. You can not understand this, you are a man; you love boldly, you indulge in every thought that seems sweet to you without being troubled by remorse. And then, when you suffer, your anguish at least belongs to you, nobody has any right to ask you what is the matter. But I, my tears even are not my own; I have often shed them on your account—I must hide them, for he has a right to ask: 'Why do you weep?' And what can I reply?"

She turned away her head to conceal the tears which she could not restrain; he saw them, and, leaning over her, he kissed them away.

“Your tears are mine!” he exclaimed, passionately; “but do not distress me by telling me that our love makes you unhappy.”

“Unhappy! oh, yes! very unhappy! and yet I would not change this sorrow for the richest joys of others. This unhappiness is my treasure! To be loved by you! To think that there was a time when our love might have been legitimate! What fatality weighs upon us, Octave? Why did we know each other too late? I often dream a beautiful dream—a dream of freedom.”

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"You are free if you love me—It is the rain against the windows," said he, seeing Madame de Bergenheim anxiously listening again. They kept silent for a moment, but could hear nothing except the monotonous whistling of the storm.

"To be loved by you and not to blush!" said she, as she gazed at him lovingly. "To be together always, without fearing that a stroke of lightning might separate us! to give you my heart and still be worthy to pray! it would be one of those heavenly delights that one grasps only in dreams—"

"Oh! dream when I shall be far from you; but, when I am at your feet, when our hearts beat only for each other, do not evoke, lest you destroy our present happiness, that which is beyond our power. Do you think there are bonds which can more strongly unite us? Am I not yours? And you, yourself, who speak of the gift of your heart, have you not given it to me entirely?"

"Oh! yes, entirely! And it is but right, since I owe it to you. I did not understand life until the day I received it from your eyes; since that minute I have lived, and I can die. I love you! I fail to find words to tell you one-tenth of what my heart contains, but I love you—"

He received her in his arms, where she took refuge so as to conceal her face after these words. She remained thus for an instant, then arose with a start, seized Octave's hands and pressed them in a convulsive manner, saying in a voice as weak as a dying woman's:

"I am lost!"

He instinctively followed Clemence's gaze, which was fastened upon the glass door. An almost imperceptible movement of the muslin curtain was evident. At the same moment, there was a slight noise, a step upon the carpet, the turning of the handle of the door, and it was silently opened as if by a ghost.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE AGREEMENT

Madame de Bergenheim tried to rise, but her strength failed her, she fell on her knees, and then dropped at her lover's feet. The latter leaped from the divan with out trying to assist her, stepped over the body stretched before him, and drew his poniard out of his pocket.

Christian stood upon the threshold of the door silent and motionless.

There was a moment of terrible silence. Only the eyes of the two men spoke; those of the husband were fixed, dull, and implacable; those of the lover sparkled with the

audacity of despair. After a moment of mutual fascination, the Baron made a movement as if to enter.

“One step more and you are a dead man!” exclaimed Gerfaut, in a low voice, as he clutched the handle of his poniard.

Christian extended his hand, replying to this threat only by a look; but such an imperative one that the thrust of a lance would not have been as fearful to the lover. Octave put his poniard in its sheath, ashamed of his emotion in the presence of such calm, and imitated his enemy's scornful attitude.

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"Come, Monsieur," said the latter, in a low voice, as he took a step backward.

Instead of following his example, Gerfaut cast a glance upon Clemence. She had fallen in such a dead faint that he sought in vain for her breath. He leaned over her, with an irresistible feeling of pity and love; but just as he was about to take her in his arms and place her upon the divan, Bergenheim's hand stopped him. If there is a being on earth to whom one owes regard and respect, it is the one whom our own wrong has rendered our enemy. Octave arose, and said, in a grave, resigned voice:

"I am at your orders, Monsieur."

Christian pointed to the door, as if to invite him to pass out first, thus preserving, with his extraordinary composure, the politeness which a good education makes an indelible habit, but which at this moment was more frightful to behold than the most furious outburst of temper. Gerfaut glanced at Clemence again, and said, as he pointed to her:

"Shall you leave her without any aid in this condition? It is cruel."

"It is not from cruelty, but out of pity," replied the Baron, coldly; "she will awake only too soon."

Octave's heart was intensely oppressed, but he managed to conceal his emotion. He hesitated no longer and stepped out. The husband followed, without giving a glance at the poor woman whose own words had condemned her so inexorably. And so she was left alone in this pretty boudoir as if in a tomb.

The two men descended the stairs leading from the little closet. At the library door they found themselves in absolute obscurity; Christian opened a dark-lantern and its faint light guided their steps. They traversed, in silence, the picture-gallery, the vestibule, and then mounted the main staircase. They reached the Baron's apartment without meeting anybody or betraying themselves by the slightest sound. With the same outward self-possession which had characterized his whole conduct, Christian, after carefully closing the doors, lighted a candelabra filled with candles which was upon the mantel, and then turned to his companion, who was far less composed than he.

Gerfaut had suffered tortures since leaving the little parlor. A feeling of regret and deepest pity, at the thought of the inevitable catastrophe which must follow, had softened his heart. He saw in the most odious of colors the selfishness of his love. Clemence's last glance as she fell fainting at his feet—a forgiving and a loving glance—was like a dagger in his heart. He had ruined her! the woman he loved! the queen of his life! the angel he adored! This idea was like hell to him. He was almost unable to control his emotion, dizzy as he was on the brink of the abyss opened by his hand, into which he had precipitated what he counted as the dearest part of his own self.



Bergenheim stood, cold and sombre, like a northern sky, opposite this pale-faced man, upon whose countenance a thousand passionate emotions were depicted like clouds on a stormy day.

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When Bergenheim's eyes met Octave's, they were so full of vengeance and hatred that the latter trembled as if he had come in contact with a wild beast. The lover actually realized the inferiority of his attitude in the presence of this enraged husband. A feeling of self-pride and indignation came to his aid. He put aside remorse and regrets until later; these sad expiations were forbidden him now; another duty lay before him. There is only one reparation possible for certain offences. The course once open, one must go to its very end; pardon is to be found only upon the tomb of the offended.

Octave knew he had to submit to this necessity. He stifled all scruples which might have weakened his firmness, and resumed his habitual disdainful look. His eyes returned his enemy's glance of deadly hatred, and he began the conversation like a man who is accustomed to master the events of his life and forbids any one to shape them for him.

"Before any explanations take place between us," he said, "I have to declare to you, upon my honor, that there is only one guilty person in this affair, and that I am the one. The slightest reproach addressed to Madame de Bergenheim would be a most unjust outrage and a most deplorable error on your part. I introduced myself into her apartment without her knowledge and without having been authorized in any way to do so. I had just entered it when you arrived. Necessity obliges me to admit a love that is an outrage to you; I am ready to repair this outrage by any satisfaction you may demand; but in putting myself at your discretion, I earnestly insist upon exculpating Madame de Bergenheim from all that can in any way affect her virtue or her reputation."

"As to her reputation," said Christian, "I will watch over that; as to her virtue—"

He did not finish, but his face assumed an expression of incredulous irony.

"I swear to you, Monsieur," said Octave, with increasing emotion, "that she is above all seduction and should be sheltered from all insult; I swear to you—What oath can I take that you will believe? I swear that Madame de Bergenheim never has betrayed any of her duties toward you; that I never have received the slightest encouragement from her; that she is as innocent of my folly as the angels in heaven."

Christian shook his head with a scornful smile.

"This day will be the undying remorse of my life if you will not believe me," said Gerfaut, with almost uncontrolled vehemence; "I tell you, Monsieur, she is innocent; innocent! do you understand me? I was led astray by my passion. I wished to profit by your absence. You know that I have a key to the library; I used it without her suspecting it. Would to God that you could have been a witness to our *tete-a-tete*! you could then have not one doubt left. Can one prevent a man from entering a lady's room, when he has succeeded in finding the way to it in spite of her wishes? I repeat it, she—"

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"Enough, Monsieur," replied the Baron coldly. "You are doing as I should do in your place; but this discussion is out of place; let this woman exculpate herself. There should be no mention of her between us now."

"When I protest that upon my honor—"

"Monsieur, under such conditions, a false oath is not dishonorable. I have been a bachelor myself, and I know that anything is allowable against a husband. Let us drop this, I beg of you, and return to facts. I consider that I have been insulted by you, and you must give me satisfaction for this insult."

Octave made a sign of acquiescence.

"One of us must die," replied Bergenheim, leaning his elbow negligently upon the mantel. The lover bowed his head a second time.

"I have offended you," said he; "you have the right to choose the reparation due you."

"There is only one possible, Monsieur. Blood alone can wipe away the disgrace; you know it as well as I. You have dishonored my home, you owe me your life for that. If Fate favors you, you will be rid of me, and I shall be wronged in every way. There are arrangements to be made, and we shall settle them at once, if you are willing."

He pushed an armchair toward Gerfaut, and took another himself.

They seated themselves beside a desk which stood in the middle of the room, and, with an equal appearance of sang-froid and polite haughtiness, they discussed this murderous combat.

"It is not necessary for me to say to you," said Octave, "that I accept in advance whatever you may decide upon; the weapons, place, and seconds—"

"Listen to me, then," interrupted Bergenheim; "you just now spoke in favor of this woman in a way that made me think you did not wish her ruined in the eyes of the world; so I trust you will accept the proposition I am about to make to you. An ordinary duel would arouse suspicion and inevitably lead to a discovery of the truth; people would seek for some plausible motive for the encounter, whatever story we might tell our seconds. You know that there is but one motive which will be found acceptable by society for a duel between a young man who had been received as a guest of this house and the husband. In whatever way this duel may terminate, this woman's honor would remain on the ground with the dead, and that is what I wish to avoid, since she bears my name."

"Will you explain to me what your plan is?" asked Octave, who could not understand what his adversary had in mind.



"You know, Monsieur," Bergenheim continued, in his calm voice, "that I had a perfect right to kill you a moment ago; I did not do so for two reasons: first, a gentleman should use his sword and not a poniard, and then your dead body would have embarrassed me."

"The river is close by!" interrupted Gerfaut, with a strange smile.

Christian looked at him fixedly for a moment, and then replied in a slightly changed tone:

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"Instead of availing myself of my right, I intend to risk my life against yours. The danger is the same for myself, who never have insulted you, as for you, who have offered me the deadliest insult that one man can offer another. I am willing to spill my blood, but not to soil my honor."

"If it is a duel without seconds that you desire, you have my consent; I have perfect confidence in your loyalty, and I hope you can say the same for mine."

Christian bowed his head slightly and continued:

"It is more than a duel without seconds, for the whole affair must be so contrived as to be looked upon as an accident; it is the only way to prevent the outbreak and scandal I dread so much. Now here is my proposition: You know that a wild-boar hunt is to take place to-morrow in the Mares woods. When we station ourselves we shall be placed together at a spot I know of, where we shall be out of the sight of the other hunters. When the boar crosses the enclosure we will fire at a signal agreed upon. In this way, the denouement, whatever it may be, will be looked upon as one of those accidents which so frequently happen in shooting-parties."

"I am a dead man," thought Gerfaut, as he saw that the gun would be the weapon chosen by his adversary, and recalled his wonderful skill, of which he had had many and various proofs. But instead of showing the slightest hesitation, his countenance grew still more arrogant.

"This kind of combat seems to me very wisely planned," said he; "I accept, for I desire as much as you that this affair should remain an eternal secret."

"Since we are to have no seconds," continued Bergenheim, "let us arrange everything so that nothing can betray us; it is inconceivable how the most trifling circumstances often turn out crushing evidence. I think that I have foreseen everything. If you find that I have forgotten any detail, please remind me of it. The place I speak of is a narrow, well-shaded path. The ground is perfectly level; it lies from north to south, so that at eight o'clock in the morning the sun will be on that side; there will be no advantage in position. There is an old elm on the borders of the wood; at fifty steps' distance in the pathway, lies the trunk of an oak which has been felled this year. These are the two places where we will station ourselves, if you consent to it. Is it the proper distance?"

"Near or farther, it matters little. Breast to breast, if you like."

"Nearer would be imprudent. However, fifty steps with the gun is less than fifteen with a pistol. This point is settled. We will remain with heads covered, although this is not the custom. A ball might strike the head where the cap would be, and if this should happen it would arouse suspicion, as people do not hunt bareheaded. It only remains to decide who shall fire first," continued Christian.

“You, of course; you are the offended one.”

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"You do not admit the full offence to have been committed, and, since this is in doubt, and I can not be judge and jury together, we shall consult chance."

"I declare to you that I will not fire first," interrupted Gerfaut.

"Remember that it is a mortal duel, and such scruples are foolish. Let us agree that whoever has the first shot, shall place himself upon the border of the woods and await the signal, which the other will give when the boar crosses the enclosure."

He took a gold piece from his purse and threw it in the air.

"Heads!" said the lover, ready to acquiesce to the least of his adversary's conditions.

"Fate is for you," said Christian, looking at the coin with marked indifference; "but, remember, if at the signal given by me you do not fire, or only fire in the air, I shall use my right to shoot—You know that I rarely miss my aim."

These preliminaries ended, the Baron took two guns from his closet, loaded them, taking particular care to show that they were of equal length and the same calibre. He then locked them up in the closet and offered Gerfaut the key.

"I would not do you this injustice," said the latter.

"This precaution is hardly necessary, since, tomorrow, you will take your choice of those weapons. Now that everything is arranged," continued the Baron, in a graver tone, "I have one request to make of you, and I think you are too loyal to refuse it. Swear to me that whatever may be the result, you will keep all this a profound secret. My honor is now in your hands; speaking as a gentleman to a gentleman, I ask you to respect it."

"If I have the sad privilege of surviving you," replied Gerfaut, no less solemnly, "I swear to you to keep the secret inviolate. But, supposing a contrary event, I also have a request to make to you. What are your intentions regarding Madame de Bergenheim?"

Christian gazed at his adversary a moment, with a searching glance which seemed to read his innermost thoughts.

"My intentions?" said he at last, in a displeased, surprised tone; "this is a very strange question; I do not recognize your right to ask it."

"My right is certainly strange," said the lover, with a bitter smile; "but whatever it may be, I shall make use of it. I have destroyed this woman's happiness forever; if I can not repair this fault, at least I ought to mitigate the effect as much as lies in my power. Will you reply to me—if I die tomorrow, what will be her fate?"

Bergenheim kept silent, his sombre eyes lowered to the floor.



“Listen to me, Monsieur,” continued Gerfaut, with great emotion; “when I said to you, ‘She is not guilty,’ you did not believe me, and I despair of ever persuading you, for I know well what your suspicions must be. However, these are the last words addressed to you that will leave my mouth, and you know that one has to believe a dying man’s statement. If tomorrow you avenge yourself, I earnestly beg of you, let this reparation suffice. All my pride is gone, you see, since I beg this of you upon my bended knees. Be humane toward her; spare her, Monsieur. It is not pardon which I ask you to grant her—it is pity for her unsullied innocence. Treat her kindly—honorably. Do not make her too wretched.”

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He stopped, for his voice failed him, and his eyes filled with tears.

"I know what I ought to do," replied the Baron, in as harsh a tone as Gerfaut's had been tender; "I am her husband, and I do not recognize anybody's right, yours least of all, to interpose between us."

"I can foresee the fate which you have in reserve for her," replied the lover, indignantly; "you will not murder her, for that would be too imprudent; what would become of your vaunted honor then? But you will slowly kill her; you will make her die a new death every day, in order to satisfy a blind vengeance. You are a man to meditate over each new torture as calmly as you have regulated every detail of our duel."

Bergenheim, instead of replying, lighted a candle as if to put an end to this discussion.

"Until to-morrow, Monsieur," said he, with a cold air.

"One moment!" exclaimed Gerfaut, as he arose; "you refuse to give me one word which will assure me of the fate of the woman whose life I have ruined?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Very well, then; I will protect her, and I will do it in spite of you and against you."

"Not another word," interrupted the Baron, sternly.

Octave leaned over the table between them and looked at him for a moment, then said in a terrible voice:

"You killed Lambernier!"

Christian bounded backward as if he had been struck.

"I was a witness of that murder," continued Gerfaut, slowly, as he emphasized each word; "I will write my deposition and give it to a man of whom I am as sure as of myself. If I die to-morrow, I will leave him a mission which no effort on your part will prevent him from fulfilling. He shall watch over your slightest actions with inexorable vigilance; he will be Madame de Bergenheim's protector, if you forget that your first duty is to protect her. The day upon which you abuse your position with her, the day when she shall call out despairingly, 'Help me!' that day shall my deposition be placed in the hands of the public prosecutor at Nancy. He will believe its contents; of that you may be certain. Besides, the river is an indiscreet tomb; before long it will give up the body you have confided to it. You will be tried and condemned. You know the punishment for murder! It is hard labor for life."

Bergenheim darted toward the mantel at these words and seized a hunting-knife which hung there. Octave, as he saw him ready to strike, crossed his arms upon his breast, and said, coldly:

“Remember that my body might embarrass you; one corpse is enough.”

The Baron threw the weapon on the floor with such force that he broke it in two.

“But it was you,” he said, in a trembling voice, “you were Lambernier’s assassin. I—He knew this infamous secret, and his death was involuntary on my part.”

“The intention is of little account. The deed is the question. There is not a jury that would not condemn you, and that is what I wish, for such a sentence would bring a legal separation between you and your wife and give her her liberty.”



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"You are not speaking seriously," said Christian, turning pale; "you, a gentleman, would not denounce me! And, besides, would not my being sentenced injure the woman in whom you take so much interest?"

"I know all that," Gerfaut replied; "I too cling to the honor of my name, and yet I expose it. I have plenty of enemies who will be glad enough to outrage my memory. Public opinion will condemn me, for they will see only the action, and that is odious. There is one thing, however, more precious and necessary to me than the world's opinion, and that is peace for every day, the right to live; and that is the reason why, happiness having forsaken me, I am going to bequeath it to the one whom fate has put in your power, but whom I shall not leave to your mercy."

"I am her husband," Bergenheim replied, angrily.

"Yes, you are her husband; so the law is on your side. You have only to call upon society for its aid; it will come but too gladly at your call and help you crush a defenceless woman. And I, who love her as you have never known how to love her, I can do nothing for her! Living, I must keep silent and bow before your will; but dead, your absurd laws no longer exist for me; dead, I can place myself between you and her, and I will do it. Since, in order to aid her, I have no choice of arms, I will not recoil from the one weapon which presents itself. Yes, if in order to save her from your vengeance, I am obliged to resort to the shame of a denunciation, I swear to you here, I will turn informer. I will sully my name with this stain; I will pick up this stone from the mud, and I will crush your head with it."

"These are a coward's words!" exclaimed Christian, as he fell back in his chair.

Gerfaut looked at him with a calm, stony glance, while replying:

"No insults, please! One of us will not be living to-morrow. Remember what I tell you: if I fall in this duel, it will be to your interest to have this matter stop then and there. I submit to death myself; but I exact liberty for her—liberty, with peace and respect. Think it over, Monsieur; at the first outrage, I shall arise from my tomb to prevent a second, and dig a trench between you and her which never can be crossed—the penitentiary!"

CHAPTER XXIV

A FRIEND'S ADVICE

After she came out of her faint, Madame de Bergenheim remained for a long time in a dazed condition, and did not realize, save in a confused manner, her real position. She saw vaguely, at her first glance, the curtains of the bed upon which she lay, and thought that she had awakened from an ordinary sleep. Little by little, her thoughts became clearer, and she saw that she was fully dressed, also that her room seemed brighter



than it usually was with only her night-lamp lighted. She noticed between the half-open curtains a gigantic form reflected almost to the ceiling opposite her bed. She sat up and distinctly saw a man sitting in the corner by the fireplace. Frozen with terror, she fell back upon her pillow as she recognized her husband. Then she remembered everything, even the slightest details of the scene in the small parlor. She felt ready to faint again when she heard Christian's steps upon the carpet, although he walked with great precaution.

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The Baron looked at her a moment, and then, opening the bed-curtains, he said:

"You can not pass the night thus, it is nearly three o'clock. You must go to bed as usual."

Clemence shivered at these words, whose accent, however, was not hard. She obeyed mechanically; but she had hardly risen when she was obliged to recline upon the bed, for her trembling limbs would not support her.

"Do not be afraid of me," said Bergenheim, drawing back a few steps; "my presence should not frighten you. I only wish that people should know that I have passed the night in your chamber, for it is possible that my return may arouse suspicion. You know that our love is only a comedy played for the benefit of our servants."

There was such affected lightness in these remarks that the young woman was cut to the very quick. She had expected an explosion of anger, but not this calm contempt. Her revolted pride gave her courage.

"I do not deserve to be treated thus," said she; "do not condemn me without a hearing."

"I ask nothing of you," replied Christian, who seated himself again beside the mantel; "undress yourself, and go to sleep if it is possible for you to do so. It is not necessary for Justine to make any comments tomorrow about your day clothes not having been removed."

Instead of obeying him, she went toward him and tried to remain standing in order to speak to him, but her emotion was so intense that it took away her strength and she was obliged to sit down.

"You treat me too cruelly, Christian," said she, when she had succeeded to recover her voice. "I am not guilty; at least, not so much as you think I am—" said she, drooping her head.

He looked at her attentively for a moment, and then replied, in a voice which did not betray the slightest emotion:

"You must know that my greatest desire is to be persuaded of this by you. I know that too often appearances are deceitful; perhaps you will be able to explain to me what took place last evening; I am still inclined to believe your word. Swear to me that you do not love Monsieur de Gerfaut."

"I swear it!" said she, in a weak voice, and without raising her eyes.

He went to the bed and took down a little silver crucifix which was hanging above it.

“Swear it to me upon this crucifix,” said he, presenting it to his wife.

She tried in vain to raise her hand, which seemed fastened to the arm of her chair.

“I swear it!” she stammered a second time, while her face became as pale as death.

A savage laugh escaped Christian’s lips. He put the crucifix in its place again without saying a word, then he opened the secret panel and, taking out the casket, placed it upon the table before his wife. She made a movement as if to seize it, but her courage failed her.

“You have perjured yourself to your husband and to God!” said Bergenheim slowly. “Do you know what kind of woman you are?”

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Clemence remained for some time powerless to reply; her respiration was so painful that each breath seemed like suffocation; her head, after rolling about on the back of the chair, fell upon her breast, like a blade of grass broken and bruised by the rain.

"If you have read those letters," she murmured, when she had strength enough to speak, "you must know that I am not as unworthy as you think. I am very guilty—but I still have a right to be forgiven."

Christian, at this moment, had he been gifted with the intelligence which fathoms the mysteries of the heart, might have renewed the bonds which were so near being broken; he could at least have stopped Clemence upon a dangerous path and saved her from a most irreparable fall. But his nature was too unrefined for him to see the degrees which separate weakness from vice, and the intoxication of a loving heart from the depravity of a corrupt character. With the obstinacy of narrow-minded people, he had been looking at the whole thing in its worst light, and for several hours already he had decided upon his wife's guilt in his own mind; this served now as a foundation for his stern conduct. His features remained perfectly impassive as he listened to Clemence's words of justification, which she uttered in a weak, broken voice.

"I know that I merit your hatred—but if you could know how much I suffer, you would surely forgive me—You left me in Paris very young, inexperienced; I ought to have fought against this feeling better than I did, but I used up in this struggle all the strength that I had—You can see how pale and changed I have become within the past year. I have aged several years in those few months; I am not yet what you call a—a lost woman. He ought to have told you that—"

"Oh, he has! of course he has," replied Christian with bitter irony. "Oh, you have in him a loyal cavalier!"

"You do not believe me, then! you do not believe me!" she continued, wringing her hands in despair; "but read these letters, the last ones. See whether one writes like this to a woman who is entirely lost—"

She tried to take the package which her husband held; instead of giving the letters to her, he lighted them at the candle and then threw them into the fireplace. Clemence uttered a cry and darted forward to save them, but Christian's iron hand seized her and pushed her back into her chair.

"I understand how much you care for this correspondence," said he, in a more excited tone, "but you are more loving than prudent. Let me destroy one witness which accuses you. Do you know that I have already killed a man on account of these letters?"

"Killed!" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, whom this word drove almost to madness, for she could not understand its real meaning and applied it to her lover. "Well, then, kill

me too, for I lied when I said that I repented. I do not repent! I am guilty! I deceived you! I love him and I abhor you; I love him! kill me!"

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She fell upon her knees before him and dragged herself along the floor, striking her head upon it as if she wished to break it. Christian raised her and seated her in the chair, in spite of her resistance. She struggled in her husband's arms, and the only words which she uttered were: "I love him! kill me! I love him! kill me!"

Her grief was so intense that Bergenheim really pitied her.

"You did not understand me," he said, "he is not the man I killed."

She became motionless, dumb. He left her then, from a feeling of compassion, and returned to his seat. They remained for some time seated in this way, one on each side of the fireplace; he, with his head leaning against the mantel; she, crouched in her chair with her face concealed behind her hands; only the striking of the clock interrupted this silence and lulled their gloomy thoughts with its monotonous vibrations.

A sharp, quick sound against one of the windows interrupted this sad scene. Clemence arose suddenly as if she had received a galvanic shock; her frightened eyes met her husband's. He made an imperious gesture with his hand as if to order silence, and both listened attentively and anxiously.

The same noise was heard a second time. A rattling against the blinds was followed by a dry, metallic sound, evidently caused by the contact of some body against the window.

"It is some signal," said Christian in a low voice, as he looked at his wife. "You probably know what it means."

"I do not, I swear to you," replied Clemence, her heart throbbing with a new emotion.

"I will tell you, then; he is there and he has something to say to you. Rise and open the window."

"Open the window?" said she, with a frightened look.

"Do what I tell you. Do you wish him to pass the night under your window, so that the servants may see him?"

At this command, spoken in a severe tone, she arose. Noticing that their shadows might be seen from the outside when the curtains were drawn, Bergenheim changed the candles to another place. Clemence walked slowly toward the window; she had hardly opened it, when a purse fell upon the floor.

"Close it now," said the Baron. While his wife was quietly obeying, he picked up the purse, and opening it, took the following note from it:



"I have ruined you—you for whom I would gladly have died! But of what use are regrets and despair now? And my blood will not wipe away your tears. Our position is so frightful that I tremble so speak of it. I ought to tell you the truth, however, horrible as it may be. Do not curse me, Clemence; do not impute to me this fatality, which obliges me thus to torture you. In a few hours I shall have expiated the wrongs of my love, or you yourself may be free. Free! pardon me for using this word; I know it is an odious one to you, but I am too troubled to find another. Whatever happens,

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I am about to put within your reach the only aid which it is possible for me to offer you; it will at least give you a choice of unhappiness. If you never see me again, to live with him will be a torture beyond your strength, perhaps, for you love me. I do not know how to express my thoughts, and I dare not offer you advice or entreat you. All that I feel is the necessity of telling you that my whole life belongs to you, that I am yours until death; but I hardly dare have the courage to lay at your feet the offering of a destiny already so sad, and which may soon be stained with blood. A fatal necessity sometimes imposes actions which public opinion condemns, but the heart excuses, for it alone understands them. Do not be angry at what you are about to read; never did words like these come out of a more desolate heart. During the whole day a post-chaise will wait for you at the rear of the Montigny plateau; a fire lighted upon the rock which you can see from your room will notify you of its presence. In a short time it can reach the Rhine. A person devoted to you will accompany you to Munich, to the house of one of my relatives, whose character and position will assure you sufficient protection from all tyranny. There, at least, you will be permitted to weep. That is all that I can do for you. My heart is broken when I think of the powerlessness of my love. They say that when one crushes the scorpion which has wounded him, he is cured; even my death will not repair the wrong that I have done you; it will only be one grief the more. Can you understand how desperate is the feeling which I experience now? For months past, to be loved by you has been the sole desire of my heart, and now I must repent ever having attained it. Out of pity for you, I ought to wish that you did love me with a love as perishable as my life, so that a remembrance of me would leave you in peace. All this is so sad that I have not the courage to continue. Adieu, Clemence! Once more, one last time, I must say: I love you! and yet, I dare not. I feel unworthy to speak to you thus, for my love has become a disastrous gift. Did I not ruin you? The only word that seems to be permissible is the one that even a murderer dares to address to his God: pardon me!"

After reading this, the Baron passed the letter to his wife without saying a word, and resumed his sombre attitude.

"You see what he asks of you?" he said, after a rather long pause, as he observed the dazed way in which Madame de Bergenheim's eyes wandered over this letter.

"My head is bewildered," she replied, "I do not understand what he says—Why does he speak of death?"

Christian's lips curled disdainfully as he answered:

"It does not concern you; one does not kill women."

"They need it not to die," replied Clemence, who gazed at her husband with wild, haggard eyes.

“Then you are going to fight?” she added, after a moment’s pause.

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"Really, have you divined as much?" he replied, with an ironical smile; "it is a wonderful thing how quick is your intelligence! You have spoken the truth. You see, each of us has his part to play. The wife deceives her husband; the husband fights with the lover, and the lover in order to close the comedy in a suitable manner—proposes to run away with the wife, for that is the meaning of his letter, notwithstanding all his oratorical precautions."

"You are going to fight!" she exclaimed, with the energy of despair. "You are going to fight! And for me—unworthy and miserable creature that I am! What have you done? And is he not free to love? I alone am the guilty one, I alone have offended you, and I alone deserve punishment. Do with me what you will; shut me up in a convent or a cell; bring me poison, I will drink it."

The Baron burst into sardonic laughter.

"So you are afraid that I shall kill, him?" said he, gazing at her intently, with his arms crossed upon his breast.

"I fear for you, for us all. Do you think that I can live after causing blood to be shed? If there must be a victim, take me—or, at least, begin with me. Have pity! tell me that you will not fight."

"But think—there is an even chance that you may be set free!" said he.

"Spare me!" she murmured, shivering with horror.

"It is a pity that blood must be shed, is it not?" said Bergenheim, in a mocking tone; "adultery would be pleasant but for that. I am sure that you think me coarse and brutal to look upon your honor as a serious thing, when you do not do so yourself."

"I entreat you!"

"I am the one who has to entreat you. This astonishes you, does it not?—While I live, I shall protect your reputation in spite of yourself; but if I die, try to guard it yourself. Content yourself with having betrayed me; do not outrage my memory. I am glad now that we have no children, for I should fear for them, and should feel obliged to deprive you of their care as much as lay in my power. That is one trouble the less. But as you bear my name, and I can not take it away from you, I beg of you do not drag it in the mire when I shall not be here to wash it for you."

The young woman fell back upon her seat as if every fibre in her body had been successively torn to pieces.

"You crush me to the earth!" she said, feebly.

“This revolts you,” continued the husband, who seemed to choose the most cutting thrust; “you are young; this is your first error, you are not made for such adventures. But rest assured, one becomes accustomed to everything. A lover always knows how to find the most beautiful phrases with which to console a widow and vanquish her repugnances.”

“You are killing me,” she murmured, falling back almost unconscious in her chair.

Christian leaned over her, and, taking her by the arm, said in a low tone:



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"Remember, if I die and he asks you to follow him, you will be an infamous creature if you obey him. He is a man to glory in you; that is easy enough to see. He is a man who would drag you after him—"

"Oh! have pity—I shall die—"

Clemence closed her eyes and her lips twitched convulsively.

The first rays of the morning sun fell upon another scene in the opposite wing of the chateau. Marillac was quietly sleeping the sleep of the just when he was suddenly awakened by a shaking that nearly threw him out of his bed.

"Go to the devil!" he said, angrily, when he succeeded in half opening his heavy eyes, and recognized Gerfaut standing beside his bed.

"Get up!" said the latter, taking him by the arm to give more force to his command.

The artist covered himself with the clothes up to his chin.

"Are you walking in your sleep or insane?" asked Marillac, "or do you want me to go to work?" he added, as he saw that his friend had some papers in his hand. "You know very well I never have any ideas when fasting, and that I am stupid until noon."

"Get up at once!" said Gerfaut, "I must have a talk with you."

There was something so serious and urgent in Gerfaut's accent as he said these words, that the artist got up at once and hurriedly dressed himself.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as he put on his dressing-gown, "you look as if the affairs of the nation rested upon you."

"Put on your coat and boots," said Octave, "you must go to La Fauconnerie. They are used to seeing you go out early in the morning for your appointments with Reine, and therefore—"

"It is to this shepherdess you would send me!" interrupted the artist, as he began to undress himself; "in that case I will go to bed again. Enough of that!"

"I am to fight with Bergenheim at nine o'clock!" said Gerfaut, in a low voice.

"Stupendous!" exclaimed Marillac, as he jumped back a few steps, and then stood as motionless as a statue. Without wasting any time in unnecessary explanations, his friend gave him a brief account of the night's events.

"Now," said he, "I need you; can I count upon your friendship?"

"In life and in death!" exclaimed Marillac, and he pressed his hand with the emotion that the bravest of men feel at the approach of a danger which threatens one who is dear to them.

"Here," said Gerfaut, as he handed him the papers in his hand, "is a letter for you in which you will find my instructions in full; they will serve you as a guide, according to circumstances. This sealed paper will be deposited by you in the office of the public prosecutor at Nancy, under certain circumstances which my note explains. Finally, this is my will. I have no very near relative; I have made you my heir.

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"Listen to me! I do not know a more honest man than you, that is the reason why I select you. First, this legacy is a trust. I speak to you now in case of events which probably will never happen, but which I ought to prepare for. I do not know what effect this may have upon Clemence's fate; her aunt, who is very austere, may quarrel with her and deprive her of her rights; her personal fortune is not very large, I believe, and I know nothing about her marriage settlement. She may thus be entirely at her husband's mercy, and that is what I will not allow. My fortune is therefore a trust that you will hold to be placed at her disposal at any time. I hope that she loves me enough not to refuse this service of me."

"Well and good!" said Marillac; "I will admit that the thought of inheriting from you choked me like a noose around my neck."

"I beg of you to accept for yourself my copyrights as author. You can not refuse that," said Gerfaut, with a half smile; "this legacy belongs to the domain of art. To whom should I leave it if not to you, my Patroclus, my faithful collaborator?"

The artist took several agitated turns about his room.

"To think," he exclaimed, "that I was the one who saved this Bergenheim's life! If he kills you, I shall never forgive myself. And yet, I told you this would end in some tragic manner."

"What business had he there? Is it not so? What can I say? We were seeking for a drama; here it is. I am not anxious on my own account, but on hers. Unhappy woman! A duel is a stone that might fall upon a man's head twenty times a day; it is sufficient for a simpleton if you stare at him, or for an awkward fellow if you tread upon his toes; but on her account—poor angel!—I can not think of it. I need the fullest command of my head and my heart. But it is growing lighter; there is not a moment to lose. Go to the stable; saddle a horse yourself, if there is no servant up; go, as I said, to La Fauconnerie; I have often seen a post-chaise in the tavern courtyard; order it to wait all day at the back of the Montigny plateau. You will find everything explained in detail in the note which I have given you. Here is my purse; I need no money."

Marillac put the purse in his pocket and the papers in his memorandum-book; he then buttoned up his redingote and put on his travelling cap. His countenance showed a state of exaltation which belied, for the time being, the pacific theories he had expounded a few days before.

"You can depend upon me as upon yourself," said he with energy. "If this poor woman calls for my aid, I promise you that I will serve her faithfully. I will take her wherever she wishes; to China, if she asks it, and in spite of the whole police force. If Bergenheim kills you and then follows her up, there will be another duel."

As he said these words, he took his stiletto and a pair of pistols from the mantel and put them in his pocket, after examining the edge of the one and the caps of the others.

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"Adieu!" said Gerfaut.

"Adieu!" said the artist, whose extreme agitation contrasted strongly with his friend's calm. "Rest easy! I will look after her—and I will publish a complete edition—But what an idea—to accept a duel as irregular as this! Have you ever seen him use a gun? He had no right to exact this."

"Hurry! you must leave before the servants are up."

"Kiss me, my poor fellow!" said Marillac, with tears in his eyes; "it is not very manly I know, but I can not help it—Oh! these women! I adore them, of course; but just now I am like Nero, I wish that they all had but one head. It is for these little, worthless dolls that we kill each other!"

"You can curse them on your way," said Gerfaut, who was impatient to see him leave.

"Oh, good gracious, yes! They can flatter themselves this moment that they all inspire me with a deadly hatred."

"Do not make any noise," said his friend, as he carefully opened the door.

Marillac pressed his hand for the last time, and went out. When he reached the end of the corridor, he stopped a moment, then went back.

"Above all things," said he, as he passed his head through the half-open door, "no foolish proceedings. Remember that it is necessary that one of you should fall, and that if you fail; he will not. Take your time—aim—and fire at him as you would at a rabbit."

After this last piece of advice, he went away; ten minutes after he had left, Gerfaut saw him riding out of the courtyard as fast as Beverley's four legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WILD BOAR

The most radiant sun that ever gilded a beautiful September day had arisen upon the castle. The whole valley was as fresh and laughing as a young girl who had just left her bath. The rocks seemed to have a band of silver surrounding them; the woods a mantle of green draped over their shoulders.

There was an unusual excitement in the courtyard of the chateau. The servants were coming and going, the dogs were starting a concert of irregular barks, and the horses were jumping about, sharing their instinctive presentiment and trying to break away from the bridles which held them.

The Baron, seated in his saddle with his usual military attitude, and a cigar in his mouth, went from one to another, speaking in a joking tone which prevented anybody from suspecting his secret thoughts. Gerfaut had imposed upon his countenance that impassible serenity which guards the heart's inner secrets, but had not succeeded so well. His affectation of gayety betrayed continual restraint; the smile which he forced upon his lips left the rest of his face cold, and never removed the wrinkle between his brows. An incident, perhaps sadly longed for, but un hoped for, increased this gloomy, melancholy expression. Just as the cavalcade passed before the English garden,

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which separated the sycamore walk from the wing of the chateau occupied by Madame de Bergenheim, Octave slackened the pace of his horse and lingered behind the rest of his companions; his eyes closely examined each of the windows; the blinds of her sleeping-room were only half closed; behind the panes he saw the curtains move and then separate. A pale face appeared for a moment between the blue folds, like an angel who peeps through the sky to gaze upon the earth. Gerfaut raised himself on his stirrups so as to drink in this apparition as long as possible, but he dared not make one gesture of adieu. As he was still endeavoring to obtain one more glance, he saw that the Baron was at his side.

"Play your role better," said he to him; "we are surrounded by spies. De Camier has already made an observation about your preoccupied demeanor."

"You are right," said Octave; "and you join example to advice. I admire your coolness, but I despair of equalling it."

"You must mingle with my guests and talk with them," Christian replied.

He started off at a trot; Gerfaut followed his example, stifling a sigh as he darted a last glance toward the chateau. They soon rejoined the cart which carried several of the hunters, and which Monsieur de Camier drove with the assurance of a professional coachman.

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the trot of the horses and the sound of the wheels upon the level ground.

"What the devil ails your dogs?" exclaimed Monsieur de Camier suddenly, as he turned to the Baron, who was riding behind him. "There they are all making for the river." Just at this moment the dogs, who could be seen in the distance, hurried to the water-side, in spite of all that their leader could do to prevent them. They almost disappeared behind the willows that bordered the river, and one could hear them barking furiously; their barks sounded like rage mingled with terror.

"It is some duck that they have scented," observed the prosecutor.

"They wouldn't bark like that," said Monsieur de Camier, with the sagacity of a professional hunter; "if it were a wolf, they could not make a greater uproar. Is it by chance some wild boar who is taking a bath, in order to receive us more ceremoniously?"

He gave the horses a vigorous blow from the whip, and they all rapidly approached the spot where a scene was taking place which excited to the highest pitch everybody's



curiosity. Before they reached the spot, the keeper, who had run after the dogs to call them together, came out of a thicket, waving his hat to stop the hunters, exclaiming:

“A body! a body!”

“A body! a drowned man!” he exclaimed, when the vehicle stopped.

This time it was the public prosecutor who arose and jumped from the cart with the agility of a deer.

“A drowned man!” said he. “In the name of the law, let nobody touch the body. Call back the dogs.”

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As he said these words he hastened to the spot which the servant pointed out to him. Everybody dismounted and followed him. Octave and Bergenheim had exchanged strange glances when they heard the servant's words.

It was, as the servant had announced, the battered body of a man, thrown by the current against the trunk of the tree, and there caught between two branches of the willow as if in a vise.

"It is the carpenter!" exclaimed Monsieur de Camier as he parted the foliage, which had prevented the head from being seen until then, for he recognized the workman's livid, swollen features. "It is that poor devil of a Lambernier, is it not, Bergenheim?"

"It is true!" stammered Christian, who, in spite of his boldness, could not help turning away his eyes.

"The carpenter!—drowned!—this is frightful!—I never should have recognized him—how disfigured he is!" exclaimed the others, as they pressed forward to gaze at this horrible spectacle.

"This is a sad way to escape justice," observed the notary, in a philosophical tone.

The Baron seized this opening with avidity.

"He must have crossed the river to escape," said he, "and in his haste he made a misstep and fell."

The public prosecutor shook his head with an air of doubt.

"That is not probable," said he; "I know the place. If he tried to cross the river a little above or a little below the rock—it doesn't matter which—the current would have carried him into the little bay above the rock and not here. It is evident that he must have drowned himself or been drowned farther down. I say, been drowned, for you can see that he has a wound upon the left side of his forehead, as if he had received a violent blow, or his head had, hit against a hard substance. Now, if he had been drowned accidentally while crossing the river, he would not have been wounded in this manner."

This remark silenced the Baron; and while the others exhausted conjectures to explain the way in which this tragic event had taken place, he stood motionless, with his eyes fastened upon the river and avoiding a glance at the dead body. During this time the public prosecutor had taken from his pocket some paper and a pen, which he usually carried with him.

"Gentlemen," said he, seating himself upon the trunk of a tree opposite the drowned man, "two of you will do me the favor to act as witnesses while I draw up my official

report. If any of you have a statement to make in regard to this affair, I beg of him to remain here, so that I may receive his deposition.”

Nobody stirred, but Gerfaut threw such a penetrating glance at the Baron that the latter turned away his eyes.

“Gentlemen,” continued the magistrate, “I do not wish any of you to renounce the sport on account of this untoward incident. There is nothing attractive about this spectacle, and I assure you that if my duty did not keep me here, I should be the first to withdraw. Baron, I beg of you to send me two men and a stretcher in order to have the body carried away; I will have it taken to one of your farms, so as not to frighten the ladies.”

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"The prosecutor is right," said Christian, whom these words delivered from a terrible anxiety.

After a deliberation, presided over by Monsieur de Camier, the 'tragueurs' and the dogs left in silence to surround the thickets where the animal had been found to be hidden. At the same time the hunters turned their steps in the opposite direction in order to take their positions. They soon reached the ditch alongside of which they were to place themselves. From time to time, as they advanced, one of them left the party and remained mute and motionless like a sentinel at his post. This manoeuvre gradually reduced their numbers, and at last there were only three remaining.

"You remain here, Camier," said the Baron, when they were about sixty steps from the last position.

That gentleman, who knew the ground, was hardly flattered by this proposition.

"By Jove!" said he, "you are on your own grounds; you ought at least to do the honors of your woods and let us choose our own positions. I think you wish to place yourself upon the outskirts, because it is always about that region that the animal first appears; but there will be two of us, for I shall go also."

This determination annoyed Christian considerably, since it threatened to ruin the plan so prudently laid out.

"I am going to put our friend Gerfaut at this post," said he, whispering to the refractory hunter; "I shall be very much pleased if he has an opportunity to fire. What difference does one boar more or less make to an old hunter like you?"

"Well and good; just as you like," retorted Monsieur de Carrier, striking the ground with the butt-end of his gun, and beginning to whistle in order to cool off his anger.

When the adversaries found themselves side by side and alone, Bergenheim's countenance changed suddenly; the smiling look he had assumed, in order to convince the old hunter of his cheerful disposition, gave place to deep gravity.

"You remember our agreement," he said, as they walked along; "I feel sure that the boar will come in our direction. At the moment when I call out, 'Take care!' I shall expect you to fire; if, at the end of twenty seconds, you have not done so, I warn you that I shall fire myself."

"Very well, Monsieur," said Gerfaut, looking at him fixedly; "you also doubtless remember my words; the discovery of this body will give them still more weight. The public prosecutor has already begun his preliminary proceedings; remember that it depends on me how they shall be completed. The deposition which I spoke to you

about is in the hands of a safe person, who is fully instructed to make use of it if necessary.”

“Marillac, I suppose,” said Christian, in an evil tone; “he is your confidant. It is a fatal secret that you have confided to him, Monsieur. If I survive today, I shall have to secure his silence. May all this blood, past, present, and future, be on your head!”

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Deeply affected by this reproach, the Vicomte bowed his head in silence.

"Here is my place," said the Baron, stopping before the trunk of an old oak, "and there is the elm where you are to station yourself."

Gerfaut stopped, and said, in a trembling voice:

"Monsieur, one of us will not leave these woods alive. In the presence of death, one tells the truth. I hope for your peace of mind, and my own, that you will believe my last words. I swear to you, upon my honor and by all that is sacred, that Madame de Bergenheim is innocent."

He bowed, and withdrew from Christian without waiting for a response.

Bergenheim and Gerfaut were out of sight of the others, and stood at their posts with eyes fastened upon each other. The ditch was wide enough to prevent the branches of the trees from troubling them; at the distance of sixty feet, which separated them, each could see his adversary standing motionless, framed by the green foliage. Suddenly, barking was heard in the distance, partially drowned by the firing of a gun. A few seconds later, two feeble reports were heard, followed by an imprecation from Monsieur de Camier, whose caps flashed in the pan. The Baron, who had just leaned forward that he might see better through the thicket, raised his hand to warn Octave to hold himself in readiness. He then placed himself in position. An extreme indecision marked Gerfaut's attitude. After raising his gun, he dropped it to the ground with a despondent gesture, as if his resolution to fire had suddenly abandoned him; the pallor of death could not be more terrible than that which overspread his features. The howling of the dogs and shouts of the hunters increased. Suddenly another sound was heard. Low, deep growls, followed by the crackling of branches, came from the woods opposite our adversaries. The whole thicket seemed to tremble as if agitated by a storm.

"Take care!" exclaimed Bergenheim, in a firm voice.

At the same moment an enormous head appeared, and the report of a gun was heard. When Gerfaut looked through the smoke caused by his gun, at the farther end of the ditch, nothing was to be seen but the foliage.

The boar, after crossing the clearing, vanished like a flash, leaving behind him a trail of broken branches—and Bergenheim lay behind the trunk of the old oak, upon which large drops of blood had already fallen.

CHAPTER XXVI

BERGENHEIM'S REVENGE



On the same morning the drawing-room of the Bergenheim castle was the theatre of a quiet home scene very much like the one we described at the beginning of this story. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was seated in her armchair reading the periodicals which had just arrived; Aline was practising upon the piano, and her sister-in-law was seated before one of the windows embroidering. By the calm attitude of these three ladies, and the interest they seemed to

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show in their several occupations, one would have supposed that they were all equally peaceful at heart. Madame de Bergenheim, upon rising, had resumed her usual habits; she managed to find the proper words to reply when spoken to, her dejection did not differ from her usual melancholy enough for it to become the subject of remark. A rather bright color in her cheeks heightened her beauty; her eyes never had sparkled with more brilliancy; but if a hand had been placed upon her forehead, one would have soon discovered by its burning the secret of all this unwonted color. In fact, in the midst of this sumptuous room, surrounded by her friends, and bending over her embroidery with most exquisite grace, Madame de Bergenheim was slowly dying. A wasting fever was circulating like poison through her veins. She felt that an unheard-of sorrow was hanging over her head, and that no effort of hers could prevent it.

At this very moment, either the man she belonged to or the one she loved was about to die; whatever her widowhood might be, she felt that her mourning would be brief; young, beautiful, surrounded by all the privileges of rank and fortune, life was closing around her, and left but one pathway open, which was full of blood; she would have to bathe her feet in it in order to pass through.

"What is that smoke above the Montigny rock?" Aline exclaimed with surprise; "it looks as if there were a fire in the woods."

Madame de Bergenheim raised her eyes, shivered from head to foot as she saw the stream of smoke which stood out against the horizon, and then let her head droop upon her breast. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stopped her reading as she heard Aline's remark, and turned slowly to look out of the window.

"That's some of the shepherds' work," said she; "they have built a fire in the bushes at the risk of setting fire to the whole woods. Really, I do not know what to think of your husband, Clemence; he takes everybody away to the hunt with him, and does not leave a soul here to prevent his dwelling from being devastated."

Clemence made no reply, and her sister-in-law, who expected she would say something to keep the conversation alive, returned and seated herself at the piano with a pouting air.

"Thanks, that will do for to-day!" exclaimed the old lady at the first notes; "you have split our heads long enough. You would do better to study your history of France."

Aline closed the piano angrily; but instead of obeying this last piece of advice, she remained seated upon the stool with the sulky air of a pupil in disgrace. A deep silence reigned. Madame de Bergenheim had dropped her embroidery without noticing it. From time to time she trembled as if a chill passed over her, her eyes were raised to

watch the smoke ascending above the rock, or else she seemed to listen to some imaginary sound.

“Truly,” said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, as she laid her journal down in her lap, “good morals have made great progress since the July revolution. Yesterday a woman twenty years of age ran away to Montpellier with her lover; to-day, here is another, in Lyons, who poisons her husband and kills herself afterward. If I were superstitious, I should say that the world was coming to an end. What do you think of such atrocious doings, my dear?”

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Clemence raised her head with an effort, and answered, in a gloomy voice:

"You must pardon her, since she is dead."

"You are very indulgent," replied the old aunt; "such creatures ought to be burned alive, like the Brinvilliers."

"They often speak in the papers of husbands who kill their wives, but not so often of wives killing their husbands," said Aline, with the partisan feeling natural to the fair sex.

"It is not proper that you should talk of such horrid things," said the old lady, in a severe tone; "behold the fruits of all the morals of the age! It is the effect of all the disgusting stuff that is acted nowadays upon the stage and written in novels. When one thinks of the fine education that is given youth at the present time, it is enough to make one tremble for the future!"

"Mon Dieu! Mademoiselle, you may be sure that I shall never kill my husband," replied the young girl, to whom this remark seemed particularly addressed.

A stifled groan, which Madame de Bergenheim could not suppress, attracted the attention of the two ladies.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, noticing for the first time her niece's dejected air and the frightened expression in her eyes.

"Nothing," murmured the latter; "I think it is the heat of the room."

Aline hastily opened a window, then went and took her sister-in-law's hands in her own.

"You have a fever," said she; "your hands burn and your forehead also; I did not dare tell you, but your beautiful color—"

A frightful cry which Madame de Bergenheim uttered made the young girl draw back in fright.

"Clemence! Clemence!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who thought that her niece had gone insane.

"Did you not hear?" she cried, with an accent of terror impossible to describe. She darted suddenly toward the drawing-room door; but, instead of opening it, she leaned against it with arms crossed. Then she ran two or three times around the room in a sort of frenzy, and ended by falling upon her knees before the sofa and burying her head in its cushions.

This scene bewildered the two women. While Mademoiselle de Corandeuil tried to raise Clemence, Aline, still more frightened, ran out of the room to call for aid. A rumor which had just begun to arise in the courtyard was distinctly heard when the door was thrown open. A moment more, and a piercing shriek was heard, and the young girl rushed into the parlor; throwing herself on her knees beside her sister-in-law she pressed her to her breast with convulsive energy.

As she felt herself seized in this fashion, Clemence raised her head and, placing her hands upon Aline's shoulders, she pushed her backward and gazed at her with eyes that seemed to devour her.

"Which? which?" she asked, in a harsh voice.

"My brother—covered with blood!" stammered Aline.

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Madame de Bergenheim pushed her aside and threw herself upon the sofa. Her first feeling was a horrible joy at not hearing the name of Octave; but she tried to smother her hysterical utterances by pressing her mouth against the cushion upon which her face was leaning.

A noise of voices was heard in the vestibule; the greatest confusion seemed to reign among the people outside. At last, several men entered the drawing room; at their head was Monsieur de Camier, whose ruddy face had lost all its color.

"Do not be frightened, ladies," said he, in a trembling voice; "do not be frightened. It is only a slight accident, without any danger. Monsieur de Bergenheim was wounded in the hunt," he continued, addressing Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

At last, the folding-doors were thrown open, and two servants appeared, bearing the Baron upon a mattress.

When the servants had deposited their burden in front of one of the windows, Aline threw herself upon her brother's body, uttering heartrending cries. Madame de Bergenheim did not stir; she lay upon the sofa with eyes and ears buried in the cushions, and seemed deaf and blind to all that surrounded her. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was the only one who preserved her presence of mind. Controlling her emotion, she leaned over the Baron and sought for some sign of life.

"Is he dead?" she asked, in a low voice, of Monsieur de Camier.

"No, Mademoiselle," replied the latter, in a tone which announced that he had little hope.

"Has a physician been sent for?"

"To Remiremont, Epinal, everywhere."

At this moment Aline uttered a cry of joy. Bergenheim had just stirred, brought to life, perhaps, by the pressure of his sister's arms. He opened his eyes and, closed them several times; at last his energy triumphed over his sufferings; he sat up on his improvised cot and, leaning upon his left elbow, he glanced around the room.

"My wife!" said he, in a weak voice.

Madame de Bergenheim arose and forced her way through the group that surrounded the mattress, and silently took her place beside her husband. Her features had changed so terribly within a few moments that a murmur of pity ran through the group of men that filled the room.

"Take my sister away," said Christian, disengaging his hand from the young girl, who was covering it with kisses and tears.

“My brother! I can not leave my brother!” exclaimed Aline, as she was dragged away rather than led to her room.

“Leave me for a moment,” continued the Baron; “I wish to speak to my wife.”

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil gave Monsieur de Gamier a questioning glance, as if to ask if it were best to grant this request.

“We can do nothing before the doctors arrive,” said the latter, in a low voice, “and perhaps it would be imprudent to oppose him.”

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Mademoiselle de Corandeuil recognized the correctness of this observation, and left the room, asking the others to follow her. During this time, Madame de Bergenheim remained motionless in her place, apparently insensible to all that surrounded her. The noise of the closing door aroused her from her stupor. She looked around the room as if she were seeking the others; her eyes, which were opened with the fixed look of a somnambulist, did not change their expression when they fell upon her husband.

"Come nearer," said he, "I have not strength enough to speak loud."

She obeyed mechanically. When she saw the large red stain which had soaked Christian's right sleeve, she closed her eyes, threw back her head, and her features contracted with a horrified expression.

"You women are wonderfully fastidious," said the Baron, as he noticed this movement; "you delight in causing a murder, but the slightest scratch frightens you. Pass over to the left side; you will not see so much blood—besides, it is the side where the heart is."

There was something terrible in the irony of the voice in which he spoke at this moment. Clemence fell upon her knees beside him and took his hand, crying,

"Pardon! pardon!"

The dying man took away his hand, raised his wife's head, and, looking at her a few moments attentively, he said at last:

"Your eyes are very dry. No tears! What! not one tear when you see me thus!"

"I can not weep," replied she; "I shall die!"

"It is very humiliating for me to be so poorly regretted, and it does you little honor—try to shed a few tears, Madame—it will be remarked—a widow who does not weep!"

"A widow—never!" she said, with energy.

"It would be convenient if they sold tears as they sell crape, would it not? Ah! only you women have a real talent for that—all women know how to weep."

"You will not die, Christian—oh! tell me that you will not die—and that you will forgive me."

"Your lover has killed me," said Bergenheim, slowly; "I have a bullet in my chest—I feel it—I am the one who is to die—in less than an hour I shall be a corpse—don't you see how hard it is already for me to talk?"

In reality his voice was becoming weaker and weaker. His breath grew shorter with each word; a wheezing sound within his chest indicated the extent of the lesion and the continued extravasation of blood.

“Mercy! pardon!” exclaimed the unhappy woman, prostrating herself upon the floor.

“More air—open the windows—” said the Baron, as he fell back upon the mattress, exhausted by the efforts he had just made to talk.

Madame de Bergenheim obeyed his order with the precision of an automaton. A fresh, pure breeze entered the room; when the curtains were raised, floods of light illuminated the floor, and the old portraits, suddenly lighted up, looked like ghosts who had left their graves to witness the death agonies of the last of their descendants. Christian, refreshed by the air which swept over his face, sat up again. He gazed with a melancholy eye at the radiant sun and the green woods which lay stretched out in front of the chateau.



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"I lost my father on such a day as this," said he, as if talking to himself—"all our family die during the beautiful weather—ah! do you see that smoke over the Montigny rock?" he exclaimed, suddenly.

After opening the windows, Clemence stepped out upon the balcony. Leaning upon the balustrade, she gazed at the deep, rapid river which flowed at her feet. Her husband's voice calling her aroused her from this gloomy contemplation. When she returned to Christian, his eyes were flaming, a flush like that of fever had overspread his cheeks, and a writhing, furious indignation was depicted upon his face. "Were you looking at that smoke?" said he, angrily; "it is your lover's signal; he is there—he is waiting to take you away—and I, your husband, forbid you to go—you must not leave me—your place is here—close by me."

"Close by you," she repeated, not understanding what he said.

"Wait at least until I am dead," he continued, while his eyes flashed more and more—"let my body get cold—when you are a widow you can do as you like—you will be free—and even then—I forbid it—I order you to wear mourning for me—above all, try to weep—"

"Strike me with a knife! At least I should bleed," said she, bending toward him and tearing open her dress to lay bare her bosom.

He seized her by the arm, and, exerting all his wasting strength to reach her, he said, in a voice whose harshness was changed almost into supplication:

"Clemence, do not dishonor me by giving yourself to him when I am dead—I would curse you if I thought that you would do that."

"Oh! do not curse me!" she exclaimed; "do not drive me mad. Do you not know that I am about to die?"

"There are women who do not see their husband's blood upon their lover's hands—but I would curse you—"

He dropped Clemence's arm and fell back upon the mattress with a sob. His eyes closed, and some unintelligible words died on his lips, which were covered with a bloody froth. He was dying.

Madame de Bergenheim, crouched down upon the floor, heard him repeating in his expiring voice:

"I would curse you—I would curse you!"

She remained motionless for some time, her eyes fastened upon the dying man before her with a look of stupefied curiosity. Then she arose and went to the mirror; she gazed



at herself for a moment as if obeying the whim of an insane woman, pushing aside, in order to see herself better, the hair which covered her forehead. Suddenly a flash of reason came to her; she uttered a horrible cry as she saw some blood upon her face; she looked at herself from head to foot; her dress was stained with it; she wrung her hands in horror, and felt that they were wet. Her husband's blood was everywhere. Then, her brain filled with the fire of raving madness, she rushed out upon the balcony, and Bergenheim, before his last breath escaped him, heard the noise of her body as it fell into the river.

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Several days later, the Sentinelle des Vosges contained the following paragraph, written with the official sorrow found in all death-notices at thirty sous per line:

“A frightful event, which has just thrown two of our best families into mourning, has caused the greatest consternation throughout the Remiremont district. Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim, one of the richest land-owners in our province, was killed by accident at a wild-boar hunt on his own domains. It was by the hand of one of his best friends, Monsieur de Gerfaut, well known by, his important literary work, which has given its author a worldwide reputation, that he received his death-blow. Nothing could equal the grief of the involuntary cause of this catastrophe. Madame de Bergenheim, upon learning of this tragic accident, was unable to survive the death of her adored husband, and drowned herself in her despair. Thus the same grave received this couple, still in the bloom of life, to whom their great mutual affection seemed to promise a most happy future.”

Twenty-eight months later the Parisian journals, in their turn, inserted, with but slight variations, the following article:

“Nothing could give any idea of the enthusiasm manifested at the Theatre-Francais last evening, at the first representation of Monsieur de Gerfaut’s new drama. Never has this writer, whose silence literature has deplored for too long a time, distinguished himself so highly. His early departure for the East is announced. Let us hope that this voyage will turn to the advantage of art, and that the beautiful and sunny countries of Asia will be a mine for new inspirations for this celebrated poet, who has taken, in such a glorious manner, his place at the head of our literature.”

Bergenheim’s last wish had been realized; his honor was secure; nobody outraged by even an incredulous smile the purity of Clemence’s winding-sheet; and the world did not refuse to their double grave the commonplace consideration that had surrounded their lives.

Clemence’s death did not destroy the future of the man who loved her so passionately, but the mourning he wears for her, to this day, is of the kind that is never put aside. And, as the poet’s heart was always reflected in his works, the world took part in this mourning without being initiated into its mystery. When the bitter cup of memory overflowed in them, they believed it to be a new vein which had opened in the writer’s brain. Octave received, every day, congratulations upon this sadly exquisite tone of his lyre, whose vibrations surpassed in supreme intensity the sighs of Rene or Obermann’s Reveries. Nobody knew that those sad pages were written under the inspiration of the most mournful of visions, and that this dark and melancholy tinge, which was taken for a caprice of the imagination, had its source in blood and in the spasms of a broken heart.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

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Attractive abyss of drunkenness
Obstinacy of drunkenness

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire GERFAULT:

Antipathy for her husband bordering upon aversion
Attractions that difficulties give to pleasure
Attractive abyss of drunkenness
Consented to become a wife so as not to remain a maiden
Despotic tone which a woman assumes when sure of her empire
Evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing!
I believed it all; one is so happy to believe!
It is a terrible step for a woman to take, from No to Yes
Lady who requires urging, although she is dying to sing
Let them laugh that win!
Let ultra-modesty destroy poetry
Love is a fire whose heat dies out for want of fuel
Mania for fearing that she may be compromised
Material in you to make one of Cooper's redskins
Misfortunes never come single
No woman is unattainable, except when she loves another
Obstinacy of drunkenness
Recourse to concessions is often as fatal to women as to kings
Regards his happiness as a proof of superiority
She said yes, so as not to say no
These are things that one admits only to himself
Those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing
Topics that occupy people who meet for the first time
Trying to conceal by a smile (a blush)
When one speaks of the devil he appears
Wiped his nose behind his hat, like a well-bred orator
You are playing 'who loses wins!'

CONSCIENCE

By Hector Malot

With a Preface by *Edouard Pailleron*, of the French Academy

HECTOR MALOT

Hector-Henri Malot, the son of a notary public, was born at La Brouille (Seine-Inferieure), March 20, 1830. He studied law, intending to devote himself also to the Notariat, but toward 1853 or 1854 commenced writing for various small journals. Somewhat later he assisted in compiling the 'Biographie Generale' of Firmin Didot, and was also a contributor to some reviews. Under the generic title of 'Les Victimes d'Amour,' he made his debut with the following three family-romances: 'Les Amants (1859), Les Epoux (1865), and Les Enfants (1866).' About the same period he published a book, 'La Vie Moderne en Angleterre.' Malot has written quite a number of novels, of which the greatest is 'Conscience,' crowned by the French Academy in 1878.

His works have met with great success in all countries. They possess that lasting interest which attends all work based on keen observation and masterly analysis of the secret motives of human actions.

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The titles of his writings run as follows: 'Les Amours de Jacques (1868); Un Beau Frere (1869); Romain Kalbris (1864), being a romance for children; Une Bonne Afaire, and Madame Obernin (1870); Un Cure de Province (1872); Un Mariage sons le Second Empire (1873); Une Belle Mere (1874); L'Auberge du Monde (1875-1876, 4 vols.); Les Batailles du Mariage (1877, 3 vols.); Cara (1877); Le Docteur Claude (1879); Le Boheme Tapageuse (1880, 3 vols.); Pompon, and Une Femme d'Argent (1881); La Petite Soeur, and Les Millions Honteux (1882); Les Besogneux, and Paulette (1883); Marichette, and Micheline (1884.); Le Lieutenant Bonnet, and Sang Bleu (1885); Baccara, and Zyte (1886); Viceo Francis, Seduction, and Ghislaine (1887); Mondaine (1888); Mariage Riche, and Justice (1889); Mere (1890), Anie (1891); Complices (1892); Conscience (1893); and Amours de Jeunes et Amours de Vieux (1894).'

About this time Hector Malot resolved not to write fiction any more. He announced this determination in a card published in the journal, 'Le Temps,' May 25, 1895—It was then maliciously stated that "M. Malot his retired from business after having accumulated a fortune." However, he took up his pen again and published a history of his literary life: Le Roman de mes Romans (1896); besides two volumes of fiction, L'Amour dominateur (1896), and Pages choisies (1898), works which showed that, in the language of Holy Writ, "his eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated," and afforded him a triumph over his slanderers.

EdouardPailleron
de l'Academie Francaise.

CONSCIENCE

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE REUNION

When Crozat, the Bohemian, escaped from poverty, by a good marriage that made him a citizen of the Rue de Vaugirard, he did not break with his old comrades; instead of shunning them, or keeping them at a distance, he took pleasure in gathering them about him, glad to open his house to them, the comforts of which were very different from the attic of the Rue Ganneron, that he had occupied for so long a time.

Every Wednesday, from four to seven o'clock, he had a reunion at his house, the Hotel des Medicis, and it was a holiday for which his friends prepared themselves. When a new idea occurred to one of the habitues it was caressed, matured, studied in solitude, in order to be presented in full bloom at the assembly.



Crozat's reception of his friends was pleasing, simple, like the man, cordial on the part of the husband, as well as on the part of the wife, who, having been an actress, held to the religion of comradeship: On a table were small pitchers of beer and glasses; within reach was an old stone jar from Beauvais, full of tobacco. The beer was good, the tobacco dry, and the glasses were never empty.

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And it was not silly subjects that were discussed here, worldly babblings, or gossiping about absent friends, but the great questions that ruled humanity: philosophy, politics, society, and religion.

Formed at first of friends, or, at least, of comrades who had worked and suffered together, these reunions had enlarged gradually, until one day the rooms at the Hotel des Medicis became a 'parlotte' where preachers of ideas and of new religions, thinkers, reformers, apostles, politicians, aesthetes, and even babblers in search of ears more or less complaisant that would listen to them, met together. Any one might come who wished, and if one did not enter there exactly as one would enter an ordinary hotel, it was sufficient to be brought by an habitue in order to have the right to a pipe, some beer, and to speak.

One of the habitues, Brigard, was a species of apostle, who had acquired celebrity by practising in his daily life the ideas that he professed and preached. Comte de Brigard by birth, he began by renouncing his title, which made him a vassal of the respect of men and of social conventions; an instructor of law, he could easily have made a thousand or twelve hundred francs a month, but he arranged the number and the price of his lessons so that each day brought him only ten francs in order that he might not be a slave to money; living with a woman whom he loved, he had always insisted, although he had two daughters, on living with her 'en union libre', and in not acknowledging his children legally, because the law debased the ties which attached him to them and lessened his duties; it was conscience that sanctioned these duties; and nature, like conscience, made him the most faithful of lovers, the best, the most affectionate, the most tender of fathers. Tall, proud, carrying in his person and manners the native elegance of his race, he dressed like the porter at the corner, only replacing the blue velvet by chestnut velvet, a less frivolous color. Living in Clamart for twenty years, he always came to Paris on foot, and the only concessions that he made to conventionality or to his comfort were to wear sabots in winter, and to carry his vest on his arm in summer.

Thus organized, he must have disciples, and he sought them everywhere—in the streets, where he buttonholed those he was able to snatch under the trees of the Luxembourg Gardens, and on Wednesday at the house of his old comrade Crozat. How many he had had! But, unfortunately, the greater number turned out badly. Several became ministers; others accepted high government positions for life; some handled millions of francs; two were at Noumea; one preached in the pulpit of Notre Dame.

One afternoon in October the little parlor was full; the end of the summer vacation had brought back the habitues, and for the first time the number was nearly large enough to open a profitable discussion. Crozat, near the door, smiled at the arrivals on shaking hands, and Brigard, his soft felt hat on his head, presided, assisted by his two favorite

disciples of the moment, the advocate Nougarede and the poet Gladys, neither of whom would turn out badly, he was certain.

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To tell the truth, for those who knew how to look and to see, the pale face of Nougarede, his thin lips, restless eyes, and an austerity of dress and manners which clashed with his twenty-six years, gave him more the appearance of a man of ambition than of an apostle. And when one knew that Glady was the owner of a beautiful house in Paris, and of real estate in the country that brought him a hundred thousand francs a year, it was difficult to imagine that he would long follow Father Brigard.

But to see was not the dominant faculty of Brigard; it was to reason, and reason told him that ambition would soon make Nougarede a deputy, as fortune would one day make Glady an academician; and in that case, although he detested assemblies as much as academies, they would then have two tribunes whence the good word would fall on the multitude with more weight. They might be counted on. When Nougarede began to come to the Wednesday reunions he was as empty as a drum, and if he spoke brilliantly on no matter what subject with an imperturbable eloquence, it was to say nothing. In Glady's first volume were words learnedly arranged to please the ears and the eyes. Now, ideas sustained the discourse of the advocate, as the verses of the poet said something—and these ideas were Brigard's; this something was the perfume of his teaching.

For half an hour the pipes burned fiercely, the smoke slowly rose to the ceiling, and as in a cloud Brigard might be seen like a bearded god, proclaiming his law, his hat on his head; for, if he had made a rule never to take it off, he manipulated it continually while he spoke, frequently pushing it forward, sometimes to the back of his head, to the right, to the left, raising it, and flattening it, according to the needs of his argument.

"It is incontestable," he said, "that we scatter our great force when we ought to concentrate it."

He pressed down his hat.

"In effect," he raised it, "the hour has arrived for us to assert ourselves as a group, and it is a duty for us, since it is a need of humanity—"

At this moment a new arrival glided into the room quietly, with the manifest intention of disturbing no one; but Crozat, who was seated near the door, stopped him and shook hands.

"Tiens', Saniel! Good-day, doctor."

"Good-evening, my dear sir."

"Come to the table; the beer is good to-day."

"Thank you; I am very well here."



Without taking the chair that Crozat designated, he leaned against the wall. He was a tall, solid man about thirty, with tawny hair falling on the collar of his coat, a long, curled beard, a face energetic, but troubled and wan, to which the pale blue eyes gave an expression of hardness that was accentuated by a prominent jaw and a decided air. A Gaul, a true Gaul of ancient times, strong, bold, and resolute.

Brigard continued:

“It is incontestable”—this was his formula, because everything he said was incontestable to him, simply because he said it—“it is incontestable that in the struggle for existence the dogma of conscience must be established, its only sanction being the performance of duty and inward satisfaction—”

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"Duty accomplished toward whom?" interrupted Saniel.

"Toward one's self."

"Then begin by stating what are our duties, and codify what is good and what is bad."

"That is easy," some one replied.

"Easy if you admit a certain innate regard for human life, for property, and for the family. But you must acknowledge that not all men have this regard. How many believe that it is not a fault to run away with the wife of a friend, not a crime to appropriate something that they want, or to kill an enemy! Where are the duties of those who reason and feel in this way? What is their inward satisfaction worth? This is why I will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our actions."

There were several exclamations at this, which Brigard checked.

"What guide, then, shall men obey?" he demanded.

"Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life!"

"That which leads to a wise and progressive extermination. Is this what you desire?"

"Why not? I do not shrink from an extermination that relieves humanity of idlers that it drags about without power to advance or to free itself, finally sinking under the load. Is it not better for the world to be rid of such people, who obstruct the advancement of others?"

"At least the idea is bizarre coming from a doctor," interrupted Crozat, "since it would put an end to hospitals."

"Not at all; I would preserve them for the study of monsters."

"In placing society on this antagonistic footing," said Brigard, "you destroy society itself, which is founded on reciprocity, on good fellowship; and in doing so you can create for the strong a state of suspicion that paralyzes them. Carthage and Venice practised the selection by force, and destroyed themselves."

"You speak of force, my dear Saniel," interrupted a voice; "where do you get that—the force of things, the tatum? There is no beginning, no will; events decide for us climate, temperament, environment."

"Then," replied Saniel, "there is no responsibility, and this instrument conscience, that should decide everything, is good for nothing. You need not consider consequences. Success or defeat may yet be immaterial, for the accomplishment of an act that you

have believed condemnable may serve the race, while another that you have believed beneficent may prove injurious; from which it follows that intentions only should be judged, and that no one but God can sound human hearts to their depths."

He began to laugh.

"Do you believe that? Is that the conclusion at which you have arrived?"

A waiter entered, carrying pitchers of beer on a tray, and the discussion was necessarily interrupted, every one drawing up to the table where Crozat filled the glasses, and the conversation took a more private turn.

Saniel shook hands with Brigard, who received him somewhat coldly; then he approached Glady with the manifest intention of detaining him, but Glady had said that he was obliged to leave, so Saniel said that he could remain no longer, and had only dropped in on passing.

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When they were both gone Brigard turned to Crozat and Nougarede, who were near him, and declared that Saniei made him uneasy.

"He believes himself stronger than life," he said, "because he is sound and intelligent. He must take care that he does not go too far!"

CHAPTER II

THE RICH MAN'S REFUSAL

When Saniei and Gladly reached the street, the rain that had fallen since morning had ceased, and the asphalt shone clear and glittering like a mirror.

"The walking is good," Saniei remarked.

"It will rain again," responded Gladly, looking at the sky.

"I think not." It was evident that Gladly wished to take a cab, but as none passed he was obliged to walk with Saniei.

"Do you know," he said, "that you have wounded Brigard?"

"I regret it sincerely; but the salon of our friend Crozat is not yet a church, and I do not suppose that discussion is forbidden there."

"To deny is not to discuss."

"You say that as if you were angry with me."

"Not at all. I am sorry that you have wounded Brigard—nothing more."

"That is too much, because I have a sincere esteem, a real friendship for you, if you will permit me to say so."

But Gladly, apparently, did not desire the conversation to take this turn.

"I think this is an empty cab," he said, as a fiacre approached them.

"No," replied Saniei, "I see the light of a cigar through the windowpane."

Gladly made a slight gesture of impatience that was not lost upon Saniei, who was expecting some such demonstration.

Rich, and frequenting the society of poor men, Gladly lived in dread of borrowers. It was enough for any man to appear to wish to talk to him privately to make him believe that



he was going to ask for fifty louis or twenty francs; so often was this the case that every friend or comrade was an enemy against whom he must defend his purse. And so he lay in wait as if expecting some one to spring upon him, his eyes open, his ears listening, and his hands in his pockets. This explains his attitude toward Sanie!l, in whom he scented a demand for money, and was the reason for his attempt to escape by taking a cab. But luck was against him, and he tried to decline the unspoken request in another way.

"Do not be surprised," he said, with the volubility with which a man speaks when he does not wish to give his companion a chance to say a word, "that I was pained to see Brigard take seriously an argument that evidently was not directed against him."

"Neither against him nor against his ideas."

"I know that; you do not need to defend yourself. But I have so much friendship, so much esteem and respect for Brigard that everything that touches him affects me. And how could it be otherwise when one knows his value, and what a man he is? This life of mediocrity that he lives, in order to be free, is it not admirable? What a beautiful example!"

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"Not every one can follow it."

"You think that one cannot be contented with ten francs a day?"

"I mean that not every one has the chance to make ten francs a day."

The vague fears of Gladly became definite at these words. They had walked down the Rue Ferou and reached the Place St. Sulpice.

"I think that at last I am going to find a cab," he said, precipitately.

But this hope was not realized; there was not a single cab at the station, and he was forced to submit to the assault from Saniei.

And Saniei began:

"You are compelled to walk with me, and, frankly, I rejoice, because I wish to talk to you of a serious affair—on which depends my future."

"This is a poor place for serious talk."

"I do not find it so."

"We would better appoint some other time."

"Why should we, since chance has thrown us together here?"

Gladly resigned himself to the inevitable, and was as polite as he could be in the circumstances.

"I await your pleasure," he said in a gracious tone, that was a contrast to his former one.

Saniei, who was in such a hurry a few moments before, now silently walked by Gladly, whose eyes were on the shining asphalt pavement.

At last he spoke.

"I have told you that my future depends on the affair concerning which I wish to speak to you. I can tell you all in a few words: If I am not able to procure three thousand francs within two days, I shall be obliged to leave Paris, to give up my studies and my work here, and go and bury myself in my native town and become a plain country doctor."

Gladly did not flinch; if he had not foreseen the amount he expected the demand, and he continued gazing at his feet.



“You know,” continued Saniei, “that I am the son of peasants; my father was marshal in a poor village of Auvergne. At school I gave proof of a certain aptitude for work above my comrades, and our cure conceived an affection for me and taught me all he knew. Then he made me enter a small seminary. But I had neither the docile mind nor the submissive character that was necessary for this education, and after several years of pranks and punishments, although I was not expelled, I was given to understand that my departure would be hailed with delight. I then became usher in a small school, but without salary, taking board and lodging as payment. I passed a good examination and was preparing for my degree, when I left the school owing to a quarrel. I had made some money by giving private lessons, and I found myself the possessor of nearly eighty francs. I started for Paris, where I arrived at five o’clock one morning in June, and where I knew, no one. I had a small trunk containing a few shirts, which obliged me to take a carriage. I told the coachman to take me to a hotel in the Latin Quarter. ‘Which hotel?’ he asked; ‘I do not care,’ I answered. ‘Do you wish to go to the Hotel du Senat?’ The name pleased me; perhaps it was an omen. He took me to the Hotel du Senat, where, with what I had left of my eighty francs, I paid a month in advance. I stayed there eight years.”

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“That is remarkable.”

“What else could I do? I knew Latin and Greek as well as any man in France, but as far as anything else was concerned I was as ignorant as a schoolmaster. The same day I tried to make use of what I knew, and I went to a publisher of classic books, of whom I had heard my professor of Greek literature speak. After questioning me he gave me a copy of Pindar to prepare with Latin notes, and advanced me thirty francs, which lasted me a month. I came to Paris with the desire to work, but without having made up my mind what to do. I went wherever there were lectures, to the Sorbonne, to the College de France, to the Law School, and to the School of Medicine; but it was a month before I came to a decision. The subtleties of law displeased me, but the study of medicine, depending upon the observation of facts, attracted me, and I decided to become a doctor.”

“A marriage of reason.”

“No, a marriage for love. Because, if I had consulted reason, it would have told me that to marry medicine when one has nothing—neither family to sustain you nor relatives to push you—would be to condemn yourself to a life of trials, of battles, and of misery. My student life was happy; I worked hard, and by giving lessons in Latin I had enough to eat. When I received as house-surgeon six, eight, nine hundred francs, I thought it a large fortune, and I would have remained in this position for the rest of my life if I had been able to do so, but when I took my degree of doctor I was obliged to leave the hospital. The possessor of several thousand francs, I should have followed rigorously my dream of ambition. While attending the mistress of one of my comrades I made the acquaintance of an upholsterer, who suggested that he should furnish an apartment for me, and that I might pay him later. I yielded to temptation. Remember, I had passed eight years in the Hotel du Senat, and I knew nothing of Paris life. A home of my own! My own furniture, and a servant in my anteroom! I should be somebody! My upholsterer could have installed me in his own quarter of Paris, and perhaps could have obtained some patients for me among his customers, who are rich and fashionable. But he did not do this, probably concluding that with my awkward appearance I would not be a success with such people. When you are successful it is original to be a peasant—people find you clever; but before success comes to you it is a disgrace. He furnished me an apartment in a very respectable house in the Rue Louis-le-Grand. When I went into it I had debts to the amount of ten thousand francs behind me, the interest on this sum, the rent of two thousand four hundred francs, not a sou in my pocket, not a relative —”

“That was courageous.”

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"I did not know that in Paris everything is accomplished through influence, and I imagined that an intelligent man could make his way without assistance. I was to learn by experience. When a new doctor arrives anywhere his brother doctors do not receive him with much sympathy. 'What does this intruder want?' 'Are there not enough of us already?' He is watched, and the first patient that he loses is made use of as an example of his ignorance or imprudence, and his position becomes uncomfortable. The chemists of my quarter whom I called upon did not receive me very warmly; they made me feel the distance that separates an honorable merchant from a beggar, and I was given to understand that they could patronize me only on condition that I ordered the specialties that they wished to profit by—iron from this one and tar from that. On commencing to practise I had as patients only the people of the quarter, whose principle was never to pay a doctor, and who wait for the arrival of a new one in order that they may be rid of the old one and this sort is numerous everywhere. It happened that my concierge was from Auvergne like myself, and he considered it his duty to make me give free attendance to all those from our country that he could find in the quarter and everywhere else, so that I had the patriotic satisfaction of seeing all the charcoal-dealers from Auvergne sprawling in my beautiful armchairs. Finally, by remaining religiously at home every Sunday in summer, while the other doctors were away, by rising quickly at night every time my bell rang, I was able to acquire a practice among a class of people who were more reasonable and satisfactory. I obtained a prize at the Academy. At the same time I delivered, at a moderate price, lectures in anatomy at schools on the outskirts of the city; I gave lessons; I undertook all the anonymous work of the book trade and of journalism that I could find. I slept five hours a day, and in four years I had decreased my debt seven thousand francs. If my upholsterer wished to be paid I could have it arranged, but that was not his intention. He wishes to take his furniture that is not worn out, and to keep the money that he has received. If I do not pay these three thousand francs in a few days I shall be turned into the street. To tell the truth, I shall soon have a thousand francs, but those who owe it to me are not in Paris, or will pay in January. Behold my situation! I am desperate because there is no one to whom I can apply; those whom I have asked for money have not listened to me; I have told you that I have no relatives, and neither have I any friends—perhaps because I am not amiable. And then I thought of you. You know me. You know that people say I have a future before me. At the end of three months I shall be a doctor in the hospitals; my competitors admit that I shall not miss admission; I have undertaken some experiments that will, perhaps, give me fame. Will you give me your hand?"



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Glady extended it toward him. "I thank you for having applied to me; it is a proof of confidence that touches me." He pressed the hand that he had taken with some warmth. "I see that you have divined the sentiments of esteem with which you have inspired me."

Saniel drew a long breath.

"Unfortunately," continued Glady, "I cannot do what you desire without deviating from my usual line of conduct. When I started out in life I lent to all those who appealed to me, and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money. I then took an oath to refuse every one. It is an oath that I cannot break. What would my old friends say if they learned that I did for a young man what I have refused to do for them?"

"Who would know it?"

"My conscience."

They had reached the Quai Voltaire, where fiacres were stationed.

"At last here are some cabs," Glady said. "Pardon me for leaving you, but I am in a hurry."

CHAPTER III

A LAST RESORT

Gady entered the cab so quickly that Saniel remained staring at the sidewalk, slightly dazed. It was only when the door closed that he understood.

"His conscience!" he murmured. "Behold them! Tartufes!"

After a moment of hesitation, he continued his way and reached the bridge of Saints-Peres, but he walked with doubtful steps, like a man who does not know where he is going. Presently he stopped, and, leaning his arms on the parapet, watched the sombre, rapidly flowing Seine, its small waves fringed with white foam. The rain had ceased, but the wind blew in squalls, roughening the surface of the river and making the red and green lights of the omnibus boats sway in the darkness. The passers-by came and went, and more than one examined him from the corner of the eye, wondering what this tall man was doing there, and if he intended to throw himself into the water.

And why not? What better could he do?

And this was what Saniel said to himself while watching the flowing water. One plunge, and he would end the fierce battle in which he had so madly engaged for four years, and which would in the end drive him mad.

It was not the first time that this idea of ending everything had tempted him, and he only warded it off by constantly inventing combinations which it seemed to him at the moment might save him. Why yield to such a temptation before trying everything? And this was how he happened to appeal to Glady. But he knew him, and knew that his avarice, about which every one joked, had a certain reason for its existence. However, he said to himself that if the landed proprietor obstinately refused a friendly loan, which would only pay the debts of youth, the poet would willingly fill the role of Providence and save from shipwreck, without risking anything, a man with a future, who, later, would pay him back. It was with this hope that he risked a refusal. The landed proprietor replied; the poet was silent. And now there was nothing to expect from any one. Glady was his last resort.

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In explaining his situation to Gladly he lightened the misery instead of exaggerating it. For it was not only his upholsterer that he owed, but also his tailor, his bootmaker, his coal-dealer, his concierge, and all those with whom he had dealings. In reality, his creditors had not harassed him very much until lately, but this state of affairs would not last when they saw him prosecuted; they also would sue him, and how could he defend himself? How should he live? His only resource would be to return to the Hotel du Senat, where even they would not leave him in peace, or to his native town and become a country doctor. In either case it was renouncing all his ambitions. Would it not be better to die?

What good was life if his dreams were not realized—if he had nothing that he wanted?

Like many who frequently come in contact with death, life in itself was a small thing to him—his own life as well as that of others; with Hamlet he said: “To die, to sleep, no more,” but without adding: “To die, to sleep, perchance to dream,” feeling certain that the dead do not dream; and what is better than sleep to those who have had a hard life?

He was absorbed in thought when something came between him and the flaring gaslight, and threw a shadow over him that made him straighten himself up. What was it? Only a policeman, who came and leaned against the parapet near him.

He understood. His attitude was that of a man who contemplates throwing himself into the river, and the policeman had placed himself there in order to prevent it.

“Thanks!” he said to the astonished man.

He continued his way, walking quickly, but hearing distinctly the steps of the policeman following him, who evidently took him for a madman who must be watched.

When he left the bridge of Saints-Peres for the Place du Carrousel this surveillance ceased, and he could then indulge freely in reflection—at least as freely as his trouble and discouragement permitted.

“The weak kill themselves; the strong fight to their last breath.”

And, low as he was, he was not yet at his last breath.

When he decided to appeal to Gladly he had hesitated between him and a usurer named Caffie, whom he did not know personally, but whom he had heard spoken of as a rascal who was interested in all sorts of affairs, preferring the bad to the good—of successions, marriages, interdictions, extortions; and if he had not been to him it was for fear of being refused, as much as from the dread of putting himself in such hands in case of meeting with compliance. But these scruples and these fears were useless now; since Gladly failed him, cost what it might and happen what would, he must go to this scamp for assistance.



He knew that Caffie lived in the Rue Sainte-Anne, but he did not know the number. He had only to go to one of his patients, a wine-merchant in the Rue Therese, to find his address in the directory. It was but a step, and he decided to run the risk; there was need of haste. Discouraged by all the applications that he had made up to this time, disheartened by betrayed hopes, irritated by rebuffs, he did not deceive himself as to the chances of this last attempt, but at least he would try it, slight though the hope of success might be.

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It was an old house where Caffie lived, and had been formerly a private hotel; it was composed of two wings, one on the street, the other on an inside court. A porte cochere gave access to this court, and under its roof, near the staircase, was the concierge's lodge. Sanie! knocked at the door in vain; it was locked and would not open. He waited several minutes, and in his nervous impatience walked restlessly up and down the court. At last an old woman appeared carrying a small wax taper. She was feeble and bent, and began to excuse herself; she was alone and could not be everywhere at the same time, in her lodge and lighting the lamps on the stairways. Caffie lived on the first floor, in the wing on the street.

Sanie! mounted the stairs and rang the bell. A long time passed, or at least it seemed long to him, before there was an answer. At last he heard a slow and heavy step on the tiled floor and the door was opened, but held by a hand and a foot.

"What do you wish?"

"Monsieur Caffie."

"I am he. Who are you?"

"Doctor Sanie!."

"I have not sent for a doctor."

"It is not as doctor that I am here, but as client."

"This is not the hour when I receive clients."

"But you are at home."

"That is a fact!"

And Caffie, concluding to open the door, asked Sanie! to enter, and then closed it.

"Come into my office."

They were in a small room filled with papers that had only an old desk and three chairs for furniture; it communicated with the office of the business man, which was larger, but furnished with the same simplicity and strewn with scraps of paper that had a mouldy smell.

"My clerk is ill just now," Caffie said, "and when I am alone I do not like to open the door."

After giving this excuse he offered Saniel a chair, and, seating himself before his desk, lighted by a lamp from which he had taken the shade, he said:

“Doctor, I am ready to listen to you.”

He replaced the shade on the lamp.

Saniel made his request concisely, without the details that he had entered into with Gladly. He owed three thousand francs to the upholsterer who had furnished his apartment, and as he could not pay immediately he was in danger of being prosecuted.

“Who is the upholsterer?” Caffie asked, while holding his left jaw with his right hand.

“Jardine, Boulevard Haussmann.”

“I know him. It is his trade to take back his furniture in this way, after three quarters of the sum has been paid, and he has become rich at it. How much money have you already paid of this ten thousand francs?”

“Including the interest and what I have paid in instalments, nearly twelve thousand francs.”

“And you still owe three thousand?”

“Yes.”

“That is nice.”

Caffie seemed full of admiration for this manner of proceeding.



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"What guarantee have you to offer for this loan of three thousand francs?"

"No other than my present position, I confess, and above all, my future."

At Caffie's request he explained his plans and prospects for the future, while the business man, with his cheek resting on his hand, listened, and from time to time breathed a stifled sigh, a sort of groan.

"Hum! hum!" he said when Sanie! finished his explanation. "You know, my dear friend, you know:

To fools alone the future's smile unchangeable appears,
For Friday's laughter Sunday's sun may change to bitter tears."

"It is Sunday with you, my dear sir."

"But I am not at the end of my life nor at the end of my energy, and I assure you that my energy makes me capable of many things."

"I do not doubt it; I know what energy can do. Tell a Greek who is dying of hunger to go to heaven and he will go

Graeculus esuriens in coelum, jussuris, ibit."

"But I do not see that you have started for heaven."

A smile of derision, accompanied by a grimace, crossed Caffie's face. Before becoming the usurer of the Rue Sainte-Anne, whom every one called a rascal, he had been attorney in the country, deputy judge, and if unmerited evils had obliged him to resign and to hide the unpleasant circumstances in Paris, he never lost an opportunity to prove that by education he was far above his present position. Finding this new client a man of learning, he was glad to make quotations that he thought would make him worthy of consideration.

"It is, perhaps, because I am not Greek," Sanie! replied; "but I am an Auvergnat, and the men of my country have great physical strength."

Caffie shook his head.

"My dear sir," he said, "I might as well tell you frankly that I do not believe the thing can be done. I would do it myself willingly, because I read intelligence in your face, and resolution in your whole person, which inspire me with confidence in you; but I have no money to put into such speculations. I can only be, as usual, a go-between—that is to say, I can propose the loan to one of my clients, but I do not know one who would be

contented with the guarantee of a future that is more or less uncertain. There are so many doctors in Paris who are in your position.”

Saniel rose.

“Are you going?” cried Caffie.

“But—”

“Sit down, my dear sir! It is no use to throw the handle after the axe. You make me a proposition, and I show you the difficulties in the way, but I do not say there is no way to extricate you from embarrassment. I must look around. I have known you only a few minutes; but it does not take long to appreciate a man like you, and, frankly, you inspire me with great interest.”

What did he wish? Saniel was not simple enough to be caught by words, nor was he a fop who accepts with gaping mouth all the compliments addressed to him. Why did he inspire a sudden interest in this man who had the reputation of pushing business matters to extremes? He would find out. In the mean time he would be on his guard.



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"I thank you for your sympathy," he said.

"I shall prove to you that it is real, and that it may become useful. You come to me because you want three thousand francs. I hope I may find them for you, and I promise to try, though it will be difficult, very difficult. They will make you secure for the present. But will they assure your future? that is, will they permit you to continue the important works of which you have spoken to me, and on which your future depends? No. Your struggles will soon begin again. And you must shake yourself clear from such cares in order to secure for yourself the liberty that is indispensable if you wish to advance rapidly. And to obtain this freedom from cares and this liberty, I see only one way—you must marry."

CHAPTER IV

'Twixt the devil and the deep sea

Saniel, who was on his guard and expected some sort of roguery from this man, had not foreseen that these expressions of interest were leading up to a proposal of marriage, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. But it was lost in the sound of the door-bell, which rang at that moment.

Caffie rose. "How disagreeable it is not to have a clerk!" he said.

He went to open the door with an eagerness that he had not shown to Saniel, which proved that he had no fear of admitting people when he was not alone.

It was a clerk from the bank.

"You will permit me," Caffie said, on returning to his office. "It will take but an instant."

The clerk took a paper from his portfolio and handed it to Caffie.

Caffie drew a key from the pocket of his vest, with which he opened the iron safe placed behind his desk, and turning his back to Saniel and the clerk counted the bills which they heard rustle in his hands. Presently he rose, and closing the door of the safe he placed under the lamp the package of bills that he had counted. The clerk then counted them, and placing them in his portfolio took his leave.

"Close the door when you go out," Caffie said, who was already seated in his arm-chair.

"Do not be afraid."

When the clerk was gone Caffie apologized for the interruption.

“Let us continue our conversation, my dear sir. I told you that there is only one way to relieve you permanently from embarrassment, and that way you will find is in a good marriage, that will place ‘hic et nunc’ a reasonable sum at your disposal.”

“But it would be folly for me to marry now, when I have no position to offer a wife.”

“And your future, of which you have just spoken with so much assurance, have you no faith in that?”

“An absolute faith—as firm to-day as when I first began the battle of life, only brighter. However, as others have not the same reasons that I have to hope and believe what I hope and believe, it is quite natural that they should feel doubts of my future. You felt it yourself instantly in not finding it a good guarantee for the small loan of three thousand francs.”

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"A loan and marriage are not the same thing. A loan relieves you temporarily, and leaves you in a state to contract several others successively, which, you must acknowledge, weakens the guarantee that you offer. While a marriage instantly opens to you the road that your ambition wishes to travel."

"I have never thought of marriage."

"If you should think of it?"

"There must be a woman first of all."

"If I should propose one, what would you say?"

"But—"

"You are surprised?"

"I confess that I am."

"My dear sir, I am the friend of my clients, and for many of them—I dare to say it—a father. And having much affection for a young woman, and for the daughter of one of my friends, while listening to you I thought that one or the other might be the woman you need. Both have fortunes, and both possess physical attractions that a handsome man like yourself has a right to demand. And for the rest, I have their photographs, and you may see for yourself what they are."

He opened a drawer in his desk, and took from it a package of photographs. As he turned them over Sanieel saw that they were all portraits of women. Presently he selected two and handed them to Sanieel.

One represented a woman from thirty-eight to forty years, corpulent, robust, covered with horrible cheap jewelry that she had evidently put on for the purpose of being photographed. The other was a young girl of about twenty years, pretty, simply and elegantly dressed, whose distinguished and reserved physiognomy was a strong contrast to the first portrait.

While Sanieel looked at these pictures Caffie studied him, trying to discover the effect they produced.

"Now that you have seen them," he said, "let us talk of them a little. If you knew me better, my dear sir, you would know that I am frankness itself, and in business my principle is to tell everything, the good and the bad, so that my clients are responsible for the decisions they make. In reality, there is nothing bad about these two persons, because, if there were, I would not propose them to you. But there are certain things



that my delicacy compels me to point out to you, which I do frankly, feeling certain that a man like you is not the slave of narrow prejudices.”

An expression of pain passed over his face, and he clasped his jaw with both hands.

“You suffer?” Saniel asked.

“Yes, from my teeth, cruelly. Pardon me that I show it; I know by myself that nothing is more annoying than the sight of the sufferings of others.”

“At least not to doctors.”

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"Never mind; we will return to my clients. This one"—and he touched the portrait of the bejewelled woman—"is, as you have divined already, a widow, a very amiable widow. Perhaps she is a little older than you are, but that is nothing. Your experience must have taught you that the man who wishes to be loved, tenderly loved, pampered, caressed, spoiled, should marry a woman older than himself, who will treat him as a husband and as a son. Her first husband was a careful merchant, who, had he lived, would have made a large fortune in the butcher business"—he mumbled this word instead of pronouncing it clearly—"but although he died just at the time when his affairs were beginning to develop, he left twenty thousand pounds' income to his wife. As I have told you what is good, I must tell you what is to be regretted. Carried away by gay companions, this intelligent man became addicted to intemperance, and from drinking at saloons she soon took to drinking at home, and his wife drank with him. I have every reason to believe that she has reformed; but, if it is otherwise, you, a doctor, can easily cure her—"

"You believe it?"

"Without doubt. However, if it is impossible, you need only let her alone, and her vice will soon carry her off; and, as the contract will be made according to my wishes in view of such an event, you will find yourself invested with a fortune and unencumbered with a wife."

"And the other?" Sanial said, who had listened silently to this curious explanation of the situation that Caffie made with the most perfect good-nature. So grave were the circumstances that he could not help being amused at this diplomacy.

"I expected your demand," replied the agent with a shrewd smile. "And if I spoke of this amiable widow it was rather to acquit my conscience than with any hope of succeeding. However free from prejudices one may be, one always retains a few. I understand yours, and more than that, I share them. Happily, what I am now about to tell you is something quite different. Take her photograph, my dear sir, and look at it while I talk. A charming face, is it not? She has been finely educated at a fashionable convent. In a word, a pearl, that you shall wear. And now I must tell you the flaw, for there is one. Who is blameless? The daughter of one of our leading actresses, after leaving the convent she returned to live with her mother. It was there, in this environment-ahem! ahem!—that an accident happened to her. To be brief, she has a sweet little child that the father would have recognized assuredly, had he not been already married. But at least he has provided for its future by an endowment of two hundred thousand francs, in such a way that whoever marries the mother and legitimizes the child will enjoy the interest of this sum until the child's majority. If that ever arrives—these little creatures are so fragile! You being a physician, you know more about that than any one. In case of an accident

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the father will inherit half the money from his son; and if it seems cruel for an own father to inherit from his own son, it is quite a different thing when it is a stranger who receives the fortune. This is all, my dear sir, plainly and frankly, and I will not do you the injury to suppose that you do not see the advantages of what I have said to you without need of my insisting further. If I have not explained clearly,”

“But nothing is more clear.”

“—it is the fault of this pain that paralyzes me.”

And he groaned while holding his jaw.

“You have a troublesome tooth?” Saniel said, with the tone of a physician who questions a patient.

“All my teeth trouble me. To tell the truth, they are all going to pieces.”

“Have you consulted a doctor?”

“Neither a doctor nor a dentist. I have faith in medicine, of course; but when I consult doctors, which seldom happens, I notice that they think much more of their own affairs than of what I am saying, and that keeps me away from them. But, my dear sir, when a client consults me, I put myself in his place.”

While he spoke, Saniel examined him, which he had not done until this moment, and he saw the characteristic signs of rapid consumption. His clothes hung on him as if made for a man twice his size, and his face was red and shining, as if he were covered with a coating of cherry jelly.

“Will you show me your teeth?” he asked. “It may be possible to relieve your sufferings.”

“Do you think so?”

The examination did not last long.

“Your mouth is often dry, is it not?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“You are often thirsty?”

“Always.”



"Do you sleep well?"

"No."

"Your sight troubles you?"

"Yes."

"Have you a good appetite?"

"Yes, I eat heartily; and the more I eat the thinner I become. I am turning into a skeleton."

"I see that you have scars from boils on the back of your neck."

"They made me suffer enough, the rascals; but they are gone as they came. Hang it, one is no longer young at seventy-two years; one has small vexations. They are small vexations, are they not?"

"Certainly. With some precautions and a diet that I shall prescribe, if you wish, you will soon be better. I will give you a prescription that will relieve your toothache."

"We will talk of this again, because we shall have occasion to meet if, as I presume, you appreciate the advantages of the proposition that I have made you."

"I must have time to reflect."

"Nothing is more reasonable. There is no hurry."

"But I am in a hurry because, if I do not pay Jardine, I shall find myself in the street, which would not be a position to offer to a wife."

"In the street? Oh, things will not come to such a pass as that! What are the prosecutions?"

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"They will soon begin; Jardine has already threatened me."

"They are going to begin? Then they have not begun. If he does, as we presume he will, proceed by a replevin, we shall have sufficient time before the judgment. Do you owe anything to your landlord?"

"The lease expired on the fifteenth."

"Do not pay it."

"That is easy; it is the only thing that is easy for me to do."

"It is an obstacle in the way of your Jardine, and may stop him a moment. We can manage this way more easily. The important thing is to warn me as soon as the fire begins. 'Au revoir', my dear Sir."

CHAPTER V

A CHARMING VISITOR

Although Saniel had had no experience in business, he was not simple enough not to know that in refusing him this loan Caffie meant to make use of him.

"It is very simple," he said to himself, as he went downstairs. "He undertakes to manage my affairs, and in such a way that some day I shall have to save myself by marrying that charming girl. What a scoundrel!"

However, the situation was such that he was glad to avail himself of the assistance of this scoundrel. At least, some time was gained, and when Jardine found that he was not disposed to let himself be slaughtered, he might accept a reasonable arrangement. But he must manage so that Caffie would not prevent this arrangement.

Unfortunately, he felt himself hardly capable of such manoeuvring, having been always straightforward, his eyes fixed on the end he wished to attain, and thinking only of the work through which he would attain it. And now he must act the part of a diplomat, submitting to craftiness and rogueries that were not at all in accord with his open nature. He had begun by not telling Caffie, instantly, what he thought of his propositions; but it is more difficult to act than to control one's self, to speak than to be silent.

What would he say, what would he do, when the time for action came?

He reached his house without having decided anything, and as he passed before the concierge's lodge absorbed in thought, he heard some one call him.

“Doctor, come in a moment, I beg of you.”

He thought some one wished to consult him, some countryman who had waited for his return; and, although he did not feel like listening patiently to idle complainings, he turned back and entered the lodge.

“Some one brought this,” the concierge said, handing him a paper that was stamped and covered with a running handwriting. “This” was the beginning of the fire of which Caffie had spoken. Without reading it, Sanie! put it in his pocket and turned to go; but the concierge detained him.

“I would like to say two words to ‘monchieur le docteur’ about this paper.”

“Have you read it?”

“No, but I talked with the officer who gave it to me, and he told me what it meant. It is unfortunate, doctor.”

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To be pitied by his concierge! This was too much.

"It is not as he told you," he replied, haughtily.

"So much the better. I am glad for you and for me. You can pay my little bill."

"Give it to me."

"I have given it to you twice already, but I have a copy. Here it is."

To be sued by a creditor paralyzed Saniel; he was stunned, crushed, humiliated, and could only answer stupidly. Taking the bill that the concierge handed him, he put it in his pocket and stammered a few words.

"You see, doctor, I must say what has been in my heart a long time. You are my countryman, and I esteem you too much not to speak. In taking your apartment and engaging your upholsterer, you did too much. You ruin yourself. Give up your apartment, and take the one opposite that costs less than half, and you will get on. You will not be obliged to leave this quarter. What will become of our neighbors if you leave us? You are a good doctor; everybody knows it and says so. And now, as for my bill, it is understood that I shall be paid first, shall I not?"

"As soon as I have the money I will pay you."

"It is a promise?"

"I promise you."

"Thank you very much."

"If it could be to-morrow, it would suit me. I am not rich, you know, but I have always paid the gas-bill for your experiments."

With the paper in his pocket, Saniel returned to Caffie, who was just going out, and to whom he gave it.

"I will see about it this, evening," said the man of business. "Just now I am going to dinner. Do not worry. To-morrow I will do what is necessary. Good-evening. I am dying of hunger."

But three days before, Saniel emptied his purse to soothe his upholsterer by an instalment as large as he was able to make it, keeping only five francs for himself, and with the few sous left he could not go to a restaurant, not even the lowest and cheapest. He could only buy some bread for his supper, and eat it while working, as he had often done before.

But when he returned to his rooms he was not in a state of mind to write an article that must be delivered that evening. Among other things that he had undertaken was one, and not the least fastidious, which consisted in giving, by correspondence, advice to the subscribers of a fashion magazine, or, more exactly speaking, to recommend, in the form of medical advice, all the cosmetics, depilatories, elixirs, dyes, essences, oils, creams, soaps, pomades, toothpowders, rouges, and also all the chemists' specialties, to which their inventors wished to give an authority that the public, which believes itself acute, refused to the simple advertisement on the last page. With his ambition and the career before him, he would never have consented to carry on this correspondence under his own name. He did it for a neighboring doctor, a simple man, who was not so cautious, and who signed his name to these letters, glad to get clients from any quarter. For his trouble, Saniel took this doctor's place during Sunday in summer, and from time to time received a box of perfumery or quack medicines, which he sold at a low price when occasion offered.

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Every week he received the list of cosmetics and specialties that he must make use of in his correspondence, no matter how he recommended them, whether in answer to letters that were really addressed to him, or by inventing questions that gave him the opportunity to introduce them.

He began to consult this list and the pile of letters from subscribers that the magazine had sent him, when the doorbell rang. Perhaps it was a patient, the good patient whom he had expected for four years. He left his desk to open the door.

It was his coal man, who came with his bill.

"I will stop some day when I am near you," Saniei said. "I am in a hurry this evening."

"And I am in a hurry, too; I must pay a large bill tomorrow, and I count upon having some money from you."

"I have no money here."

After a long talk he got rid of the man and returned to his desk. He had answered but a few of the many letters when his bell rang again. This time he would not open the door; it was a creditor, without doubt. And he continued his correspondence.

But for four years he had waited for chance to draw him a good ticket in the lottery of life—a rich patient afflicted with a cyst or a tumor that he would take to a fashionable surgeon, who would divide with him the ten or fifteen thousand francs that he would receive for the operation. In that case he would be saved.

He ran to the door. The patient with the cyst presented himself in the form of a small bearded man with a red face, wearing over his vest the wine-merchant's apron of coarse black cloth. In fact, it was the wine merchant from the corner, who, having heard of the officer's visit, came to ask for the payment of his bill for furnishing wine for three months.

A scene similar to that which he had had with the coal merchant, but more violent, took place, and it was only by threatening to put him out of the door that Saniei got rid of the man, who went away declaring that he would come the next morning with an officer.

Saniei returned to his work.

His pen flew over the paper, when a noise made him raise his head. Either he had not closed the door tightly, or his servant was entering with his key. What did he want? He did not employ him all day, but only during his office hours, to put his rooms in order and to open the door for his clients.

As Saniel rose to go and see who it was, there was a knock at the door. It was his servant, with a blank and embarrassed air.

“What is the matter, Joseph?”

“I thought I should find you, sir, so I came.”

“Why?”

Joseph hesitated; then, taking courage, he said volubly, while lowering his eyes:

“I came to ask, sir, if you will pay me my month, which expired on the fifteenth, because there is need of money at my house; if there was not need of money I would not have come. If you wish, sir, I will release you—”

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"How?"

"I will take the coat that you made me order a month ago; I am quite sure it is not worth what is due me, but it is always so."

"Take the coat."

Joseph took the coat from the wardrobe in the hall, and rolled it in a newspaper.

"Of course you will not expect me in the morning," he said, as he put his key on the table. "I must look out for another place."

"Very well, I shall not expect you."

"Good-evening, sir."

And Joseph hurried away as quickly as possible.

Left alone, Saniel did not return to his work immediately, but throwing himself in an armchair he cast a melancholy glance around his office and through the open door into the parlor. In the faint light of the candle he saw the large armchairs methodically placed each side of the chimney, the curtains at the windows lost in shadow, and all the furniture which for four years had cost him so many efforts. He had long been the prisoner of this Louis XIV camlet, and he was now going to be executed. A beautiful affair, truly, brilliant and able! All this had been used only by the poor Auvergnats, without Saniel enjoying it at all, for he had neither the bourgeois taste for ornaments nor the desire for elegance. A movement of anger and revolt against himself made him strike his desk with his fist. What a fool he had been!

The bell rang again. This time, not expecting a rich patient, he would not open it. After a moment a slight tap was heard on the panel. He rose quickly and ran to open the door.

A woman threw herself into his arms.

"O my dearest! I am so glad to find you at home!"

CHAPTER VI

A SWEET CONSOLER

She passed her arm about him and pressed him to her, and with arms entwined they entered the study.

“How glad I am!” she said. “What a good idea I had!”

With a quick movement she took off her long gray cloak that enveloped her from head to foot.

“And are you glad?” she asked, as she stood looking at him.

“Can you ask that?”

“Only to hear you say that you are.”

“Are you not my only joy, the sweet lamp that gives me light in the cavern where I work day and night?”

“Dear Victor!”

She was a tall, slender young woman with chestnut hair, whose thick curls clustering about her forehead almost touched her eyebrows. Her beautiful eyes were dark, her nose short, while her superb teeth and rich, ruby-colored lips gave her the effect of a pretty doll; and she had gayety, playful vivacity, gracious effrontery, and a passionate caressing glance. Dressed extravagantly, like the Parisian woman who has not a sou, but who adorns everything she wears, she had an ease, a freedom, a natural elegance that was charming. With this she had the voice of a child, a joyous laugh, and an expression of sensibility on her fresh face.



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"I have come to dine with you," she said, gayly, "and I am so hungry."

He made a gesture that was not lost upon her.

"Do I disturb you?" she asked, uneasily.

"Not at all."

"Must you go out?"

"No."

"Then why did you make a gesture that showed indifference, or, at least, embarrassment?"

"You are mistaken, my little Phillis."

"With any one else I might be mistaken, but with you it is impossible. You know that between us words are not necessary; that I read in your eyes what you would say, in your face what you think and feel. Is it not always so when one loves—as I love you?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her long and tenderly. Then going to a chair on which he had thrown his coat, he drew from the pocket the bread that he had bought.

"This is my dinner," he said, showing the bread.

"Oh! I must scold you. Work is making you lose your head. Can you not take time to eat?"

He smiled sadly.

"It is not time that I want."

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out three big sous.

"I cannot dine at a restaurant with six sous."

She threw herself in his arms.

"O dearest, forgive me!" she cried. "Poor, dear martyr! Dear, great man! It is I who accuse you, when I ought to embrace your knees. And you do not scold me; a sad smile is your only reply. And it is really so bad as that! Nothing to eat!"

"Bread is very good eating. If I might be assured that I shall always have some!"

“Well, to-day you shall have something more and better. This morning, seeing the storm, an idea came to me associated with you. It is quite natural, since you are always in my heart and in my thoughts. I told mamma that if the storm continued I would dine at the pension. You can imagine with what joy I listened to the wind all day, and watched the rain and leaves falling, and the dead branches waving in the whirlwind. Thank God, the weather was bad enough for mamma to believe me safe at the pension; and here I am. But we must not fast. I shall go and buy something to eat, and we will play at making dinner by the fire, which will be far more amusing than going to a restaurant.”

She put on her cloak quickly.

“Set the table while I make my purchases.”

“I have my article to finish that will be sent for at eight o’clock. Just think, I have three tonics to recommend, four preparations of iron, a dye, two capillary lotions, an opiate, and I don’t know how many soaps and powders. What a business!”

“Very well, then, do not trouble yourself about the table; we will set it together when you have finished, and that will be much more amusing.”

“You take everything in good part.”

“Is it better to look on the dark side? I shall soon return.”

She went to the door.

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"Do not be extravagant," he said.

"There is no danger," she replied, striking her pocket.

Then, returning to him, she embraced him passionately.

"Work!"

And she ran out.

They had loved each other for two years. At the time they met, Saniel was giving a course of lectures on anatomy at a young ladies' school just outside of Paris, and every time he went out there he saw a young woman whom he could not help noticing. She came and went on the same trains that he did, and gave lessons in a rival school. As she frequently carried under her arm a large cartoon, and sometimes a plaster cast, he concluded that she gave lessons in drawing. At first he paid no attention to her. What was she to him? He had more important things in his head than women. But little by little, and because she was reserved and discreet, he was struck by the vivacity and gayety of her expression. He really enjoyed looking at this pretty and pleasing young woman. However, his looks said nothing; if their eyes smiled when they met, that was all; they did not make each other's acquaintance. When they left the train they did not notice each other; if he took the left side of the street, she took the other, and vice versa. This state of things lasted several months without a word having been exchanged between them; in due time they learned each other's names and professions. She was a professor of drawing, as he supposed, the daughter of an artist who had been dead several years, and was called Mademoiselle Phillis Cormier. He was a physician for whom a brilliant future was prophesied, a man of power, who would some day be famous; and, very naturally, their attitude remained the same. There was no particular reason why it should change. But accident made a reason. One summer day, at the hour when they ordinarily took the train back to Paris, the sky suddenly became overcast, and it was evident that a violent storm was approaching. Saniel saw Phillis hurrying to the station without an umbrella, and, as some friend had lent him one, he decided to speak to her for the first time.

"It seems as if the storm would overtake us before we reach the station. As you have no umbrella, will you permit me to walk beside you, and to shelter you with mine?"

She replied with a smile, and they walked side by side until the rain began to fall, when she drew nearer to him, and they entered the station talking gayly.

"Your umbrella is better than Virginia's skirt," she said.

"And what is Virginia's skirt?"

"Have you not read Paul and Virginia?"

“No.”

She looked at him with a mocking smile, wondering what superior men read.

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Not only had he not read Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's romance, nor any others, but he had never been in love. He knew nothing of the affairs of the heart nor of the imagination. Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love, for they require a liberty of mind and an independence of life that he had not. Where could he find time to read novels? When and how could he pay attention to a woman? Those that he had known since his arrival in Paris had not had the slightest influence over him, and he retained only faint memories of them. On the contrary, thinking of this walk in the rain, he remembered this young girl with a vividness entirely new to him. She made a strong impression on him, and it remained. He saw her again, with her smile that showed her brilliant teeth, he heard the music of her voice, and the bare plain that he had walked so many times now seemed the most beautiful country in the world to him. Evidently there was a change in him; something was awakened in his soul; for the first time he discovered that the hollow and muscular conoid organ called the heart had a use besides for the circulation of blood.

What a surprise and what a disappointment! Was he going to be simpleton enough to love this young girl and entangle his life, already so hard and heavily weighted, with a woman? A fine thing, truly, and nature had built him to play the lover! It is true that only those who wish it fall in love, and he knew the power of will by experience.

But he soon lost confidence in himself. Away from Phillis he could do as he wished, but with her it was as she wished. With one look she mastered him. He met her, furious at the influence she exercised over him, and against which he had struggled since their last meeting; he left her, ravished at feeling how profoundly he loved her.

To a man whose life had been ruled by reason and logic until this moment, these contradictions were exasperating; and he only excused himself for submitting to them by saying that they could in no way modify the line of conduct that he had traced out for himself, nor make him deviate from the road that he followed.

Rich, or even with a small fortune, he might—when he was with her and in her power—let himself be carried away; but when he was dying of hunger he was not going to commit the folly of taking a wife. What would he have to give her? Misery, nothing but misery; and shame, in default of any other reason, would forever prevent him from offering himself to her.

She was the daughter of an artist who, after years of struggle, died at the moment when fortune was beginning to smile upon him. Ten years more of work, and he would have left his family, if not rich, at least in comfortable circumstances. In reality, he left nothing but ruin. The hotel he built was sold, and, after the debts were paid, nothing remained but some furniture. His widow, son, and daughter must work. The widow, having no trade, took in

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sewing; the son left college to become the clerk of a money-lender named Caffie; the daughter, who, happily for her, had learned to draw and paint under her father's direction, obtained pupils, and designed menaces for the stationers, and painted silk fans and boxes. They lived with great economy, submitting to many privations. The brother, weary of his monotonous existence and of the exactions of his master, left them to try his fortunes in America.

If Saniel ever married, which he doubted, certainly he would not marry a woman situated as Phillis was.

This reflection was reassuring, and he was more devoted to her. Why should he not enjoy the delicious pleasure of seeing her and listening to her? His life was neither gay nor happy; he felt perfectly sure of himself, and, as he knew her now, he was also sure of her—a brave and honest girl. Otherwise, how had she divined that he loved her?

They continued to see each other with a pleasure that seemed equal on both sides, meeting in the station, arranging to take the same trains, and talking freely and gayly.

Things went on this way until the approach of vacation, when they decided to take a walk after their last lesson, instead of returning immediately to Paris.

When the day came the sun was very hot; they had walked some distance, when Phillis expressed a wish to rest for a few minutes. They seated themselves in a shady copse, and soon found themselves in each other's arms.

Since then Saniel had never spoken of marriage, and neither had Phillis.

They loved each other.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE DINNER FOR TWO

Saniel was still at work when Phillis returned.

"You have not yet finished, dear?"

"Give me time to cure, by correspondence, a malady that has not yielded to the care of ten physicians, and I am yours."

In three lines he finished the letter, and left his desk.

“I am ready. What shall I do?”

“Help me to take things out of my pockets.”

“Don’t press too hard,” she said as he took each parcel.

At last the pockets were empty.

“Where shall we dine?” she asked.

“Here, as the dining-room is transformed into a laboratory.”

“Then let us begin by making a good fire. I wet my feet coming from the station.”

“I do not know whether there is any wood.”

“Let us see.”

She took the candle and they passed into the kitchen, which, like the dining-room, was a laboratory, a stable where Sanial kept in cages pigs from India and rabbits for his experiments, and where Joseph heaped pell-mell the things that were in his way, without paying any attention to the stove in which there never had been a fire. But their search was vain; there was everything in this kitchen except fire-wood.

“Do you value these boxes?” she asked, caressing a little pig that she had taken in her arms.

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"Not at all; they enclosed the perfumes and tonics, but they are useless now."

They returned to the office, Saniel carrying the boxes.

"We will set the table here," she said, gayly, for Saniel told her that the dining-room was uninviting, as it was a small bacteriological laboratory.

The table was set by Phillis, who went and came, walking about with a gracefulness that Saniel admired.

"You are doing nothing," she said.

"I am watching you and thinking."

"And the result of these thoughts?"

"It is that you have a fund of good-humor and gayety, an exuberance of life, that would enliven a man condemned to death."

"And what would have become of us, I should like to know, if I had been melancholy and discouraged when we lost my poor papa? He was joy itself, singing all day long, laughing and joking. He brought me up, and I am like him. Mamma, as you know, is melancholy and nervous, looking on the dark side, and Florentin is like her. I obtained a place for Florentin, I found work for mamma and for myself. We all took courage, and gradually we became calm."

She looked at him with a smile that said:

"Will you let me do for you what I have done for others?"

But she did not speak these words. On the contrary, she immediately endeavored to destroy the impression which she believed her words had made upon him.

"Go and bring some water," she said, "and I will light the fire."

When he returned, carrying a carafe, the fire blazed brightly, lighting the whole room. Phillis was seated at the desk, writing.

"What are you doing?" he asked in surprise.

"I am writing our menu, for you know we are not going to sit down at the table like the bourgeois. How do you like it?"

She read it to him.

"Sardines de Nantes."



“Cuisse de dinde rotie.”

“Terrine de pate de foie gras aux truffes du Perigord.”

“But this is a feast.”

“Did you think that I would offer you a fricandeau au jus?”

She continued:

“Fromage de Brie.”

“Choux a la creme vanillge.”

“Pomme de Normandie.”

“Wine.”

“Ah! Voila! What wine? I do not wish to deceive you. Let us put, ‘Wine from the wine-seller at the corner.’ And now we will sit down.”

As he was about to seat himself, she said:

“You do not give me your arm to conduct me to the table. If we do not do things seriously and methodically we shall not believe in them, and perhaps the Perigord truffles will change into little black pieces of anything else.”

When they were seated opposite to each other, she continued, jesting:

“My dear doctor, did you go to the representation of Don Juan, on Monday?”

And Saniel, who, in spite of all, had kept a sober face, now laughed loudly.

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“Charming!” she cried, clapping her hands. “No more preoccupation; no more cares. Look into my eyes, dear Victor, and think only of the present hour, of the joy of being together, of our love.”

She reached her hand over the table, and he pressed it in his.

“Very well.” The dinner continued gayly, Saniel replying to Phillis’s smiles, who would not permit the conversation to languish. She helped him to each dish, poured out his wine, leaving her chair occasionally to put a piece of wood on the fire, and such shoutings and laughter had never been heard before in that office.

However, she noticed that, little by little, Saniel’s face, that relaxed one moment, was the next clouded by the preoccupation and bitterness that she had tried hard to chase away. She would make a new effort.

“Does not this charming little dinner give you the wish to repeat it?”

“How? Where?”

“As I am able to come this evening without making mamma uneasy, I shall find some excuse to come again next week.”

He shook his head.

“Have you engagements for the whole of next week?” she asked with uneasiness.

“Where shall I be next week, to-morrow, in a few days?”

“You alarm me. Explain, I beg of you. O Victor, have pity! Do not leave me in suspense.”

“You are right; I ought to tell you everything, and not let your tender heart torment itself, trying to explain my preoccupation.”

“If you have cares, do you not esteem me enough to let me share them with you? You know that I love you; you only, to-day, to-morrow, forever!”

Saniel had not left her ignorant of the difficulties of his position, but he had not entered into details, preferring to speak of his hopes rather than of his present misery.

The story that he had already told to Glady and Caffie he now told to Phillis, adding what had passed with the concierge, the wine-seller, the coal man, and Joseph.

She listened, stupefied.

“He took your coat?” she murmured.

“That was what he came for.”

“And to-morrow?”

“Ah! to-morrow—to-morrow!”

“Working so hard as you have, how did you come to such a pass?”

“Like you, I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me! Because I felt within me a will that nothing could weaken, a strength that nothing could fatigue, a courage that nothing could, dishearten, I imagined that I was armed for battle in such a way that I should never be conquered, and I am conquered, as much by the fault of circumstances as by my own—”

“And in what are you to blame, poor dear?”

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“For my ignorance of life, stupidity, presumption, and blindness. If I had been less simple, should I have been taken in by Jardine’s propositions? Should I have accepted this furniture, this apartment? He told me that the papers he made me sign were mere formalities, that in reality I might pay when I could, and that he would be content with a fair interest. That seemed reasonable, and, without inquiring further, I accepted, happy and delighted to have a home, feeling sure of having strength to bear this burden. To have confidence in one’s self is strength, but it is also weakness. Because you love me you do not know me; you do not see me as I am. In reality, I am not sociable, and I lack, absolutely, suppleness, delicacy, politeness, as much in my character as in my manners. Being so, how can I obtain a large practice, or succeed, unless it is by some stroke of luck? I have counted on the luck, but its hour has not yet sounded. Because I lack suppleness I have not been able to win the sympathy or interest of my masters. They see only my reserve; and because I stay away from them, as much through timidity as pride, they do not come to me—which is quite natural, I admit. And because I have not yielded my ideas to the authority of others, they have taken a dislike to me, which is still more natural. Because I lack politeness, and am still an Auvergnat, heavy and awkward as nature made me, men of the world disdain me, judging me by my exterior, which they see and dislike. More wary, more sly, more experienced, I should be, at least, sustained by friendship, but I have given no thought to it. What good is it? I had no need of it, my force was sufficient. I find it more easy to make myself feared than loved. Thus formed, there are only two things for me to do: remain in my poor room in the Hotel du Senat, living by giving lessons and by work from the booksellers, until the examination and admission to the central bureau; or to establish myself in an out-of-the-way quarter at Belleville, Montrouge, or elsewhere, and there practise among people who will demand neither politeness nor fine manners. As these two ways are reasonable, I have made up my mind to neither. Belleville, because I should work only with my legs, like one of my comrades whom I saw work at Villette: ‘Your tongue, good. Your arm, good.’ And while he is supposed to be feeling the pulse of the patient with one hand, with the other he is writing his prescription: ‘Vomitive, purgative, forty sous;’ and he hurries away, his diagnosis having taken less than five minutes; he had no time to waste. I object to the Hotel du Senat because I have had enough of it, and it was there that Jardine tempted me with his proposals. See what he has brought me to!”

“And now?”

CHAPTER VIII

EXPLANATIONS

At this moment, without warning, the candle on the table went out.

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Phillis rose. "Where are the candles?" she asked.

"There are no more; this was the last."

"Then we must brighten up the fire."

She threw a small log on the hearth, and then, instead of resuming her seat, she took a cushion from the sofa, and placing it before the chimney, threw herself upon it, and leaned her elbow on Saniel's knee.

"And now?" she repeated, her eyes raised to his.

"Now I suppose the only thing for me to do is to return to Auvergne and become a country doctor."

"My God! is it possible?" she murmured in a tone that surprised Saniel. If there was sadness in this cry, there was also a sentiment that he did not understand.

"On leaving the school I could continue to live at the Hotel du Senat, and, while giving lessons, prepare my 'concoeurs'; now, after having reached a certain position, can I return to this life of poverty and study? My creditors, who have fallen on me here, will harass me, and my competitors will mock my misery—which is caused by my vices. They will think that I dishonor the Faculty, and I shall be rebuffed. Neither doctor of the hospitals nor fellow, I shall be reduced to nothing but a doctor of the quarter. Of what use is it? The effort has been made here; you see how it has succeeded."

"Then you mean to go?"

"Not without sorrow and despair, since it will be our separation, the renouncement of all the hopes on which I have lived for ten years, the abandonment of my work, death itself. You see now why, in spite of your gayety, I have not been able to hide my preoccupation from you. The more charming you were, the more I felt how dear you are, and the greater my despair at the thought of separation."

"Why should we separate?"

"What do you mean?"

She turned toward him.

"To go with you. You must acknowledge that until this moment I have never spoken to you of marriage, and never have I let the thought appear that you might one day make me your wife. In your position, in the struggle you have been through, a wife would have been a burden that would have paralyzed you; above all, such a poor, miserable creature as myself, with no dot but her misery and that of her family. But the conditions



are no longer the same. You are as miserable as I am, and more desperate. In your own country, where you have only distant relatives who are nothing to you, as they have not your education or ideas, desires or habits, what will become of you all alone with your 158 disappointment and regrets? If you accept me, I will go with you; together, and loving each other, we cannot be unhappy anywhere. When you come home fatigued you will find me with a smile; when you stay at home you will tell me your thoughts, and explain your work, and I will try to understand. I have no fear of poverty, you know, and neither do I fear solitude. Wherever we are together I shall be happy. All that I ask of you

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is to take my mother with us, because you know I cannot leave her alone. In attending her, you have learned to know her well enough to know that she is not disagreeable or difficult to please. As for Florentin, he will remain in Paris and work. His trip to America has made him wise, and his ambition will now be easily satisfied; to earn a small salary is all that he asks. Without doubt we shall be a burden, but not so heavy as one might think at first. A woman, when she chooses, brings order and economy into a house, and I promise you that I will be that woman. And then I will work. I am sure my stationer will give me as many menus when I am in Auvergne as he does now that I am in Paris. I could, also, without doubt, procure other work. It would be a hundred francs a month, perhaps a hundred and fifty, perhaps even two hundred. While waiting for your patients to come, we could live on this money. In Auvergne living must be cheap."

She had taken his hands in hers, and she watched anxiously his face as the firelight shone on it, to see the effect of her words. It was the life of both of them that was to be decided, and the fulness of her heart made her voice tremble. What would he reply? She saw that his face was agitated, without being able to read more.

As she remained silent, he took her head in his hands, and looked in her face for several moments.

"How you love me!" he said.

"Let me prove it in some way besides in words."

"It would be cowardly to let you share my misery."

"It would be loving me enough to feel sure that I would be happy."

"And I?"

"Is not the love in your heart greater than pride? Do you not feel that since I have loved you my love has filled all my life, and that there is nothing in the world, in the present or in the future, but it and you? Because I see you for several hours from time to time in Paris, I am happy; whatever difficulties await us, I should be much happier in Auvergne, because we should be together always."

He remained silent for some time.

"Could you love me there?" he murmured.

Evidently it was more to himself than to her that he addressed this question, which was the sum of his reflections.

“O dear Victor!” she cried. “Why do you doubt me? Have I deserved it? The past, the present, do they not assure the future?”

He shook his head.

“The man you have loved, whom you love, has never shown himself to you as he really is. In spite of the trials and sorrows of his life he has been able to answer your smile with a smile, because, cruel as his life was, he was sustained by hope and confidence; in Auvergne there will be no more hope or confidence, but the madness of a broken life, and the dejection of impotence. What sort of man should I be? Could you love such a man?”

“A thousand times more, for he would be unhappy, and I should have to comfort him.”

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“Would you have the strength to do it? After a time you would become weary, for the burden would be too heavy, however great your devotion or profound your tenderness, to see my real position and my hopes, and, descending into the future, to see my ruin. You know I am ambitious without having ever compassed the scope of this ambition, and of the hopes, dreams if you like, on which it rests. Understand that these dreams are on the eve of being realized; two months more, and in December or January I pass the ‘concours’ for the central bureau, which will make me a physician of the hospitals, and at the same time the one for the admission, which opens the Faculty of Medicine to me. Without pride, I believe myself in a position to succeed—what sportsmen call ‘in condition.’ And just when I have only a few days to wait, behold me ruined forever.”

“Why forever?”

“A man leaves his village for Paris to make a name for himself, and he returns only when bad luck or inability sends him back. And then it is only every four years that there is a ‘concours’ for admission. In four years what will be my moral and intellectual condition? How should I support this exile of four years? Imagine the effect that four years of isolation in the mountains will produce. But this is not all. Besides this ostensible end that I have pursued since I left my village, I have my special work that I can carry out only in Paris. Without having overwhelmed you with the details of medicine, you know that it is about to undergo a revolution that will transform it. Until now it has been taught officially, in pathology, that the human organism carries within itself the germ of a great many infectious diseases which develop spontaneously in certain conditions; for instance, that tuberculosis is the result of fatigue, privations, and physiological miseries. Well, recently it has been admitted, that is to say, the revolutionists admit, a parasitical origin for these diseases, and in France and Germany there is an army looking for these parasites. I am a soldier in this army, and to help me in these researches I established a laboratory in the dining-room. It is to the parasites of tuberculosis and cancers that I devote myself, and for seven years, that is, since I was house-surgeon, my comrades have called me the cancer topic. I have discovered the parasite of the tuberculosis, but I have not yet been able to free it from all its impurities by the process of culture. I am still at it. That is to say, I am very near it, and to-morrow, perhaps, or in a few days, I may make a discovery that will be a revolution, and cover its discoverer with glory. The same with the cancer. I have found its microbe. But all is not done. See what I must give up in leaving Paris.”

“Why give all this up? Could you not continue your researches in Auvergne?”

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"It is impossible, for many reasons that are too long to explain, but one will suffice. The culture of these parasites can be done only in certain temperatures rigorously maintained at the necessary degree, and these temperatures can be obtained only by stoves, like the one in my laboratory, fed by gas, the entrance of which is automatically regulated by the temperature of the water. How could I use this stove in a country where there is no gas? No, no! If I leave Paris, everything is at an end my position, as well as my work. I shall become a country doctor, and nothing but a country doctor. Let the sheriff turn me out to-morrow, and all the four years' accumulations in my laboratory, all my works en train that demand only a few days or hours to complete, may go to the second-hand dealer, or be thrown into the street. Of all my efforts, weary nights, privations, and hopes, there remains only one souvenir—for me. And yet, if it did not remain, perhaps I should be less exasperated, and should accept with a heart less sore the life to which I shall never resign myself. You know very well that I am a rebel, and do not submit tamely."

She rose, and taking his hand, pressed it closely in her own.

"You must stay in Paris," she said. "Pardon me for having insisted that you could live in the country. I thought more of myself than of you, of our love and our marriage. It was an egotistic thought, a bad thought. A way must be found, no matter what it costs, to enable you to continue your work."

"But how to find it? Do you think I have not tried everything?"

He related his visits to Jardine, his solicitations, prayers, and also his request of a loan from Glady, and his visit to Caffie.

"Caffie!" she cried. "What made you think of going to Caffie?"

"I went partly because you had often spoken of him."

"But I spoke of him to you as the most wicked of men, capable of anything and everything that is bad."

"And partly, also, because I knew from one of my patients that he lends to those of whom he can make use."

"What did he say to you?"

"That it was probable he would not be able to find any one who would lend what I wished, but he would try to find some one, and would give me an answer tomorrow evening. He also promised to protect me from Jardine."

"You have put yourself in his hands?"

“Well, what do you expect? In my position, I am not at liberty to go to whom I wish and to those who inspire me with confidence in their honor. If I should go to a notary or a banker they would not listen to me, for I should be obliged to tell them, the first thing, that I have no security to offer. That is how the unfortunate fall into the hands of rascals; at least, these listen to them, and lend them something, small though it may be.”

“What did he give you?”

“Advice.”

“And you took it?”

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"There is time gained. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall be turned into the street. Caffie will obtain a respite."

"And what price will he ask for this service?"

"It is only those who own something who worry about the price."

"You have your name, dignity, and honor, and once you are in Caffie's hands, who knows what he may exact from you, what he may make you do, without your being able to resist him?"

"Then you wish me to leave Paris?"

"Certainly not; but I wish you to be on your guard against Caffie, whom you do not know, but I do, through what Florentin told us when he was with him. However secret a man may be, he cannot hide himself from his clerk. He is not only guilty of rascalities, but also of real crimes. I assure you that he deserves ten deaths. To gain a hundred francs he will do anything; he makes money only for the pleasure of making it, for he has neither child nor relative."

"Well, I promise to be on my guard as you advise. But, wicked as Caffie may be, I believe that I shall accept the concours that he offered me. Who knows what may happen in the short time that he gains for me? Because I need not tell you that I know beforehand what his reply will be to my request for a loan—he could find no one."

"I shall come, all the same, to-morrow evening to learn his answer."

CHAPTER IX

CAFFIE'S ANSWER

Although Sanie! did not build any false hopes on Caffie's reply, he went to see him the next afternoon at the same hour.

As before, he waited some time after ringing the bell. At last he heard a slow step within.

"Who is there?" Caffie asked.

As soon as Sanie! answered, the door was opened.

"As I do not like to be disturbed in the evening by troublesome people, I do not always open the door," Caffie said. "But I have a signal for my clients so that I may know them. After ringing, knock three times on the door."

During this explanation they entered Caffie's office.

"Have you done anything about my affair?" Saniel asked, after a moment, as Caffie seemed disinclined to open the conversation.

"Yes, my dear sir. I have been running about all the morning for you. I never neglect my clients; their affairs are mine."

He paused.

"Well?" Saniel said.

Caffie put on an expression of despair.

"What did I tell you, my dear sir? Do you remember? Do me the honor to believe that a man of my experience does not speak lightly. What I foresaw has come to pass. Everywhere I received the same reply. The risk is too great; no one would take it."

"Not even for a large interest?"

"Not even for a large interest; there is so much competition in your profession. As for me, I believe in your future, and I have proved it by my proposition; but, unfortunately, I am only an intermediary, and not the lender of money."

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Caffie emphasized the words, "my proposition," and underlined them with a glance; but SanieI did not appear to understand.

"And the upholsterer's summons?" he asked.

"You may be easy on that point. I have attended to it. Your landlord, to whom he owes rent, will interfere, and your creditor must indemnify him before going farther. Will he submit? We shall see. If he does, we shall defend ourselves on some other ground. I do not say victoriously, but in a way to gain time."

"How much time?"

"That, my dear sir, I do not know; the whole thing depends upon our adversary. But what do you mean by 'how much time?'—eternity?"

"I mean until April."

"That is eternity. Do you believe that you will be able to free yourself in April? If you have expectations founded on something substantial, you should tell me what they are, my dear sir."

This question was put with such an air of benevolence, that SanieI was taken in by it.

"I have no guarantee," he said. "But, on the other hand, it is of the utmost importance to me that I should have this length of time. As I have explained to you, I am about to pass two examinations; they will last three months, and in March, or, at the latest, in April, I shall be a physician of the hospitals, and fellow of the Faculty. In that case I should then offer a surface to the lenders, that would permit you, without doubt, to find the sum necessary to pay Jardine, whatever expenses there may be, and your fee."

As he spoke, SanieI saw that he was wrong in thus committing himself, but he continued to the end.

"I should be unworthy of your confidence, my dear sir," Caffie replied, "if I encouraged you with the idea that we could gain so much time. Whatever it costs me—and it costs me much, I assure you—I must tell you that it is impossible, radically impossible; a few days, yes, or a few weeks, but that is all."

"Well, obtain a few weeks," SanieI said, rising, "that will be something."

"And afterward?"

"We shall see."

“My dear sir, do not go. You would not believe how much I am touched by your position; I think only of you. When I learned that I could not find the sum you desire, I paid a friendly visit to my young client of whom I spoke to you—”

“The one who received a superior education in a fashionable convent?”

“Exactly; and I asked her what she would think of a young doctor, full of talent, future professor of the Faculty, actually considered already a savant of the first order, handsome—because you are handsome, my dear sir, and it is no flattery to say this—in good health, a peasant by birth, who presented himself as a husband. She appeared flattered, I tell you frankly. But immediately afterward she said, ‘And the child?’ To which I replied that you were too good, too noble, too generous, not to have the indulgence of superior men, who accept an involuntary fault with serenity. Did I go too far?”

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He did not wait for an answer.

“No?” he went on. “Exactly. The child was present, for the mother watches over it with a solicitude that promises much for the future, and I examined it leisurely. It is very delicate, my dear sir, and like its father. The poor baby! I doubt if you, with all your skill, can make it live. If it should die, as it is to be feared it will, it would not injure your reputation. You can give it care, but not life.”

“Speaking of health,” interrupted Saniei, who did not wish to reply, “did you do what I advised about yourself?”

“Not yet. The chemists of this quarter are only licensed cutthroats; but I am going this evening to see one of my clients who is a chemist, and he will deal honestly with me.”

“I will see you again, then.”

“When you wish, my dear sir; when you have reflected. You have the password.”

Before leaving home Saniei gave his key to the concierge, so that on her arrival Phillis might go immediately to his rooms. On his return the concierge told him that “madame” was up-stairs, and when he rang the bell, Phillis opened the door.

“Well?” she asked in a trembling voice, before he had time to enter.

“It is as I told you yesterday; he has found no one.”

She clasped him in a long, passionate embrace.

“And the upholsterer?”

“Caffie has promised to gain some time for me.”

While speaking, they entered the office. A fire burned on the hearth, and an inviting dinner was on the table. Saniei looked at it in surprise.

“I have set the table, you see; I am going to dine with you.”

And throwing herself in his arms:

“Knowing Caffie better than you do, I knew what his answer would be, and I did not wish you to be alone on your return. I made an excuse for not dining with mamma.”

“But this chicken?”

“We must have a piece de resistance.”

"This fire, and these candles?"

"There, that is the end of my economies. I should have been so happy if they had been less miserable and more useful."

As on the previous evening, they sat before the fire, and she began to talk of various things in order to distract him. But what their lips did not say, their eyes, on meeting, expressed with more intensity than words could do.

It was Saniel who suddenly betrayed his preoccupation.

"Your brother studied Caffie well," he said, as if speaking to himself.

"He did, indeed!"

"He is certainly the most thorough rascal that I have ever met."

"He proposed something infamous, I am sure."

"He proposed that I should marry."

"I suspected that."

"This is the reason why he refuses to lend me the money. I was foolish enough to tell him frankly just how I am situated, and how important it is for me to be free until April. He hopes that I shall be so pushed that I will accept one of the women whom he has proposed to me. With the knife at my throat, I should have to yield."

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"And these women?" she asked, not daring to look at him.

"Do not be alarmed, you have nothing to fear. One is the drunken widow of a butcher, and the other is a young girl who has a baby."

"He dares to propose such women to a man like you!"

And Sanie! repeated all that Caffie had said to him about these two women.

"What a monster he is!" Phillis said.

"While he was telling me these things I thought of what you said—that if some one killed him, it would be no more than he deserved."

"That is perfectly true."

"Nothing would have been easier than for me to have made away with him. He had the toothache, and when he showed me his teeth I could easily have strangled him. We were alone, and a miserable diabetic, such as he is, who has not more than six months to live, I am sure, could not have resisted a grasp like this. I could take his keys from his pocket, open his safe, and take the thirty, forty, sixty thousand francs that I saw heaped up there. The devil take me if it were ever discovered. A doctor does not strangle his patients, he poisons them. He kills them scientifically, not brutally."

"People who have no conscience can do such things; but for us they are impossible."

"I assure you it is not conscience that would have restrained me."

"The fear of remorse, if I may use an ugly word."

"But intelligent persons have no remorse, my dear child, because they reason before the deed, and not after. Before acting they weigh the pros and cons, and know what the consequences of their actions will be to others as well as to themselves. If this previous examination proves to them that for some reason or other they may act, they will always be calm, assured that they will feel no remorse, which is only the reproach of conscience."

"Without doubt what you say is to the point, but it is impossible for me to accept it. If I have never committed crimes, I have often been foolish and have committed faults, many of them deliberately, after the examination of which you speak. I should have been, according to you, perfectly placid and free from the reproach of conscience; however, the next morning I woke unhappy, tormented, often overwhelmed, and unable to stifle the mysterious voice that accused me."

"And in whose name did it speak, this voice, more vague than mysterious?"

“In the name of my conscience, evidently.”

“‘Evidently’ is too much, and you would be puzzled if called upon to demonstrate this evidence; whereas, nothing is more uncertain and elusive than the thing that is called conscience, which is in reality only an affair of environment and of education.”

“I do not understand.”

“Does your conscience tell you it is a crime to love me?”

“No, decidedly.”

“You see, then, that you have a personal way of understanding what is good and bad, which is not that of our country, where it is admitted, from the religious and from the social point of view, that a young girl is guilty when she has a lover. Of course, you see, also, that conscience is a bad weighing-machine, since each one, in order to make it work, uses a weight that he has himself manufactured.”

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"However it is, you did right not to strangle Cafflie."

"Whom you, yourself, have condemned to death."

"By the hand of justice, whether human or divine; but not by yours, any more than by Florentin's or mine, although we know better than any one that he does not deserve any mercy."

"And you see I foresaw your objections, as I did not tighten his cravat."

"Happily."

"Is it necessary to say 'happily'?"

CHAPTER X

SANIEL MAKES A RESOLUTION

This evening Phillis was obliged to be at home early, but she cleared off the table, and put everything in order before leaving.

"You can breakfast on the remains of the chicken," she said, as she put it in the pantry.

And as Saniel accompanied her with a candle in his hand, he saw that she had thought not only of his breakfast for the following day, but for many days, besides carrots for the rabbits.

"What a good heart you have!" he said.

"Because I think of the rabbits?"

"Because of your tenderness and thoughtfulness."

"I wish I could do something for you!"

As soon as she was gone he seated himself at his desk and began to work, anxious to make up for the time that he had given to sentiment. The fact that his work might not be of use to him, and that his experiments might be rudely interrupted the next morning or in a few days, was not a sufficient reason for being idle. He had work to do, and he worked as if with the certitude that he would pass his examinations, and that his experiments of four years past would have a good ending, without interference from any one.

This was his strong point, this power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything; not by pleasure or pain, by preoccupation or by misery. In the street he could think of Phillis, be he hungry or sleepy; at his desk he had no thought of Phillis, neither of hunger nor of sleep, no cares, no memories; his work occupied him entirely.

It was his strength, and also his pride, the only superiority of which he boasted; for although he knew that he had others, he never spoke of them, while he often said to his comrades:

"I work when I will and as much as I wish. My will never weakens when I am at work."

This evening he worked for about an hour, in his usual condition of mind; neither sheriffs, nor Jardine, nor Caffie troubled him. But having to draw upon his memory for certain facts, he found that it did not obey him as usual; there were a hesitation, a fogginess, above all, extraordinary wanderings. He wrestled with it and it obeyed, but only for a short time, and soon again it betrayed him a second time, then a third and fourth time.

Decidedly he was not in a normal state, and his will obeyed in place of commanding.

There were a name and a phrase that recurred to him mechanically from time to time. The name was Caffie, and the phrase was, "Nothing easier."

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Why should this hypothesis to strangle Caffie, of which he had lightly spoken, and to which he had attached no importance at the moment when he uttered it, return to him in this way as a sort of obsession?

Was it not strange?

Never, until this day, had he had an idea that he could strangle a man, even as wicked as this one, and yet, in talking of it, he found very natural and legitimate reasons for the murder of this scamp.

Had not Phillis herself condemned him?

To tell the truth, she had added that Providence or justice should be his executor, but this was the scruple of a simple conscience, formed in a narrow environment, to which influence he would not submit.

Had he these scruples, this old man who coldly, and merely for the interest of so much a hundred on a dot, advised him to hasten the death of a woman by drunkenness, and that of an infant in any way he pleased?

When he reached this conclusion he stopped, and asked himself whether he were mad to pursue this idea; then immediately, to get rid of it, he set to work, which absorbed him for a certain time, but not so long a time as at first.

Then, finding that he could not control his will, he turned his thoughts to Caffie.

It was only too evident that if he had carried out the idea of strangling Caffie, all the difficulties against which he had struggled, and which would overwhelm him, if not the following day, at least in a few days, would have disappeared immediately.

No more sheriffs, no more creditors. What a deliverance!

Repose, the possibility of passing examinations with a calm spirit that the fever of material troubles would not disturb—in this condition he felt his success was assured.

And his experiments! He would run no danger of seeing them rudely interrupted. His preparations were not cast out-of-doors; his precious culture-tubes were not broken; his vases, his balloons, were not at the second-hand dealer's. He continued this train of thought to the results that he desired for him, glory; for humanity, the cure of one, and perhaps two, of the most terrible maladies with which it was afflicted.

The question was simple:

On one side, Caffie;



On the other side, humanity and science;

An old rascal who deserved twenty deaths, and who would, anyhow, die naturally in a short time;

And humanity, science, which would profit by a discovery of which he would be the author.

He saw that the perspiration stood out on his hands, and he felt it run down his neck.

Why this weakness? From horror of the crime, the possibility of which he admitted? Or from fear of seeing his experiments destroyed?

He would reflect, think about it, be upon his guard.

He had told Phillis that intelligent men, before engaging in an action, weigh the pro and con.

Against Caffie's death he saw nothing.

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For, on the contrary, everything combined.

If he had had Phillis's scruples, or Brigard's beliefs, he would have stopped.

But, not having them, would he not be silly to draw back?

Before what should he shrink? Why should he stop?

Remorse? But he was convinced that intelligent men had no remorse when they came to a decision on good grounds. It was before that they felt remorse, not after; and he was exactly in this period of before.

Fear of being arrested? But intelligent men do not let themselves be arrested. Those who are lost are brutes who go straight ahead, or the half-intelligent, who use their skill and cunning to combine a complicated or romantic act, in which their hand is plainly seen. As for him, he was a man of science and precision, and he would not compromise himself by act or sentiment; there would be nothing to fear during the action, and nothing afterward. Caffie strangled, suspicion would not fall upon a doctor, but on a brute. When doctors wish to kill any one, they do it learnedly, by poison or by some scientific method. Brutal men kill brutally; murder, called the assassin's profession.

A few minutes before, he was inundated by perspiration; this word froze him.

He rose nervously, and walked up and down the room with long, unsteady steps. The fire had long since gone out; out-of-doors the street noises had ceased, and in his brain resounded the one word that he pronounced in a low tone, "Assassin!"

Was he the man to be influenced and stopped by a word? Where are the rich, the self-made men, the successful men, who have not left some corpses on the road behind them? Success carries them safely, and they achieved success only because they had force.

Certainly, violence was not recreation, and it would be more agreeable to go in his way peacefully, by the power of intelligence and work, than to make a way by blows; but he had not chosen this road, he was thrown into it by circumstances, by fate, and whoever wishes to reach the end cannot choose the means. If one must walk in the mud, what matters it, when one knows that one will not get muddy?

If Caffie had had heirs, poor people who expected to be saved from misery by inheriting his fortune, he would have been touched by this consideration, undoubtedly. Robber! The word was yet more vile than that of assassin. But who would miss the few banknotes that he would take from the safe? To steal is to injure some one. Whom would he injure? He could see no one. But he saw distinctly an army of afflicted persons whom he would benefit.

A timid ring of the bell made him start violently, and he was angry with himself for being so nervous, he who was always master of his mind as of his body.

He opened the door, and a man dressed like a laborer bowed humbly.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, sir."

"What do you want?"

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"I called on account of my wife, if you will be so good as to come to see her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"She is about to be confined. The nurse does not know what to do, and sent me for a doctor."

"Did the nurse tell you to come for me?"

"No, sir; she sent me to Doctor Legrand."

"Well?"

"His wife told me he could not get up on account of his bronchitis. And the chemist gave me your address."

"That is right."

"I must tell you, sir, I am an honest man, but we are not rich; we could not pay you—immediately."

"I understand. Wait a few minutes."

Saniel took his instruments and followed the laborer, who, on the way, explained his wife's condition.

"Where are we going?" Saniel asked, interrupting these explanations.

"Rue de la Corderie."

It was behind the Saint Honore' market, on the sixth floor, under the roof, in a room that was perfectly clean, in spite of its poverty. As soon as Saniel entered the nurse came forward, and in a few words told him the woman's trouble.

"Is the child living?"

"Yes."

"That is well; let us see."

He approached the bed and made a careful examination of the patient, who kept repeating:

"I am going to die. Save me, doctor!"

"Certainly, we shall save you," he said, very softly. "I promise you."

He turned away from the bed and said to the nurse:

“The only way to save the mother is to kill the child.”

The operation was long, difficult, and painful, and after it was over SanieI remained a long time with the patient. When he reached the street a neighboring clock struck five, and the market-place had already begun to show signs of life.

But in the streets was still the silence and solitude of night, and SanieI began to reflect on what had occurred during the last few hours. Thus, he had not hesitated to kill this child, who had, perhaps, sixty or seventy years of happy life before it, and he hesitated at the death of Caffie, to whom remained only a miserable existence of a few weeks. The interests of a poor, weak, stunted woman had decided him; his, those of humanity, left him perplexed, irresolute, weak, and cowardly. What a contradiction!

He walked with his eyes lowered, and at this moment, before him on the pavement, he saw an object that glittered in the glare of the gas. He approached it, and found that it was a butcher’s knife, that must have been lost, either on going to the market or the slaughterhouse.

He hesitated a moment whether he should pick it up or leave it there; then looking all about him, and seeing no one in the deserted street, and hearing no sound of footsteps in the silence, he bent quickly and took it.

Caffie’s fate was decided.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:



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As free from prejudices as one may be, one always retains a few
As ignorant as a schoolmaster
Confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness
Conscience is a bad weighing-machine
Conscience is only an affair of environment and of education
Find it more easy to make myself feared than loved
Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life
I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me!
Intelligent persons have no remorse
It is only those who own something who worry about the price
Leant—and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money
Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love
People whose principle was never to pay a doctor
Power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything
Reason before the deed, and not after
Will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our action

CONSCIENCE

By Hector Malot

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XI

THE INSTRUMENT OF DEATH

When, after two hours' sleep, Saniel woke, he did not at first think of this knife; he was tired and dull. Mechanically he walked about his room without paying attention to what he was doing, as if he were in a state of somnambulism, and it astonished him, because he never felt weariness of mind any more than of body, no matter how little he had slept, nor how hard he had worked.

But suddenly, catching a glimpse of the knife that he had placed on the mantel, he received a shock that annihilated his torpor and his fatigue. It dazzled him like a flash of lightning.

He took it, and, going to the window, he examined it by the pale light of early morning. It was a strong instrument that, in a firm hand, would be a terrible arm; newly sharpened, it had the edge of a razor.

Then the idea, the vision that had come to him two hours before, came back to him, clear and complete at nightfall, that is, at the moment when the concierge was in the second wing of the building, he mounted to Caffie's apartment without being seen, and with this knife he cut his throat. It was as simple as it was easy, and this knife left beside the corpse, and the nature of the wound, would lead the police to look for a butcher, or at least a man who was in the habit of using a knife of this kind.

The evening before, when he had discussed Caffie's death, the how and the when still remained vague and uncertain. But now the day and the means were definitely settled: it should be with this knife, and this evening.

This shook him out of his torpor and made him shudder.

He was angry with himself for this weakness. Did he know or did he not know what he wished? Was he irresolute or cowardly?

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Then, going from one idea to another, he thought of an observation that he had made, which appeared to prove that with many subjects there is less firmness in the morning than in the evening. Was this the result of dualism of the nervous centres, and was the human personality double like the brain? Were there hours when the right hemisphere is master of our will, and were there other hours when the left is master? Did one of these hemispheres possess what the other lacked, and is it according to the activity of this or that one, that one has such a character or such a temperament? This would be curious, and would amount to saying that, a lamb in the morning, one might be a tiger at evening. With him it was a lamb that woke in the morning to be devoured by a tiger during the day. To which hemisphere belonged the one and the other of these personalities?

He was angry with himself for yielding to these reflections; it was a time, truly, to study this psychological question! It was of Caffie that he should think, and of the plan which in an instant flashed through his mind in the street, before he decided to pick up this knife.

Evidently things were neither so simple nor so easy as they at first appeared, and to insure the success of his plan a combination of circumstances was necessary, which might be difficult to bring about.

Would not the concierge see him pass? Would no one go up or down the stairs? Would Caffie be alone? Would he open the door? Might not some one ring after he had entered?

Here was a series of questions that he had not thought of before, but which now presented itself.

He must examine them, weigh them, and not throw himself giddily into an adventure that presented such risks.

He was alone all day, fortunately, and, as in the state of agitation in which he found himself he could not think of work, he gave himself up to this examination. The stakes were worth the trouble—his honor and his life.

As soon as he was dressed he went out, and walked straight before him through the streets that were already filled with people.

It was only when he had left the heart of Paris that he could reflect as he wished, without being disturbed each instant by people in a hurry, for whom he must make way, or by others who, reading the newspapers, did not look before them, and so jostled against him.

Evidently the risks were more serious than he had imagined; and, as they loomed up before him, he asked himself whether he should go on. To suppress Caffie, yes; to give himself up, no.

“If it is impossible—”

He was not the man to set himself wildly against the impossible: he should have had a dream, a bad dream, and that would be all.

He stopped, and, after a moment of hesitation, turning on his heel, he retraced his steps. Of what use was it to go farther? He had no need to reflect nor to weigh the pro and con; he must give up this plan; decidedly it was too dangerous.



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He had gone but a short distance when he asked himself whether these dangers were such as he saw them, and whether he were face to face with a radically demonstrated impossibility.

Without doubt, the concierge might observe him when he passed her lodge, either on going up-stairs or coming down; and, also, she might not observe him. This, in reality, depended much upon himself, and on his method of proceeding.

Every evening this lame old concierge lighted the gas in the two wings of the building, one on the street and one on the court. She began by lighting that on the street, and, with the difficulty that she found in walking, it should take her some time to climb the five stories and to descend. If one watched from the street when, at dusk, she left her lodge with a wax taper in her hand, and mounted the stairs behind her, at a little distance, in such a way as to be on the landing of the first story when she should reach the second, there would be time, the deed done, to regain the street before she returned to her lodge, after having lighted the gas on the two staircases. It was important to proceed methodically, without hurry, but, also, without loitering.

Was this impossible?

Here, exactly, was the delicate point which he must examine with composure, without permitting himself to be influenced by any other consideration than that which sprang from the deed itself.

He was wrong, then, not to continue his route, and it was better, assuredly, to get out of Paris. In the country, in the fields or woods, he could find the calm that was indispensable to his over-excited brain, in which ideas clashed like the waves of a disturbed sea.

He was at this moment in the middle of the Faubourg Saint Honore; he followed a street that would bring him to the Champs Elysees, a desert at this early hour.

It took him some time to examine all the hypotheses that might present themselves, and he reached the conclusion that what had appeared impossible to him was not so. If he preserved his calmness, and did not lose perception of the passing time, he could very well escape the concierge, which was the main point.

To tell the truth, the danger of the concierge removed, all was not easy. There was the possibility of meeting one of the lodgers on the stairs; there was a chance of not finding Caffie at home, or, at least, not alone; or the bell might ring at the decisive moment. But, as everything depended upon chance, these circumstances could not be decided beforehand. It was a risk. If one of them happened, he would wait until the next day; it would be one more day of agitation to live through.



But one question that should be decided in advance, because, surely, it presented serious dangers, was how he should justify the coming into his hands of a sum of money which, providentially and in the nick of time, relieved him from the embarrassments against which he struggled.

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He had reached the Bois de Boulogne and still continued his walk. In passing a fountain the rippling of the water attracted his attention, and he stopped. Although the weather was damp and cold under the influence of a strong west wind charged with rain, his tongue was dry; he drank two goblets of water, and then pursued his way, indifferent where he went.

Then he built up an arrangement which appeared ingenious to him, when it occurred to him to remember that he had gone to Caffie to borrow three thousand francs. Why would he not lend it to him, if not the first day, at least the second? With this loan he paid his debts, if he were questioned on this point. To prove this loan he need only to sign a receipt which he could place in the safe, and which would be found there. Would not the first thought of those who had signed a paper of this kind be to take it when an occasion presented itself? As he would not seize this occasion to carry off his note, it would be the proof that he had not opened the safe.

Among other advantages, this arrangement did away with robbery; it was only a loan. Later he would return these three thousand francs to Caffie's heirs. So much the worse for him if it were a forced loan.

On returning to Paris he would buy a sheet of stamped paper, and as he had asked the price the previous evening, he knew that he could afford the expense.

When he reached Saint Cloud he entered a tavern and ordered some bread and cheese and wine. But if he drank little, he ate less, his parched throat refusing to swallow bread.

He took up his march in the clayey streets on the slope of Mont Valerian, but he was insensible to the unpleasantness of slipping on the soft soil, and walked hither and thither, his only care being not to get too far away from the Seine, so that he might enter Paris before night.

He was delighted since he had made up his mind to make out and sign a receipt for the money. But on giving it further consideration, he perceived that it was not so ingenious as he had at first supposed. Do not the dealers of stamped paper often number their paper? With this number it would be easy to find the dealer and him who had bought it. And then, was it not likely that a scrupulous business man like Caffie would keep a record of the loans he made, and would not the absence of this one and the note be sufficient to awaken suspicion and to direct it to him?

Decidedly, he only escaped one danger to fall into another.

For a moment he was discouraged, but it did not go so far as weakness. His error had been in imagining that the execution of the idea that had come to him while picking up

the knife was as plain as it was easy. But complicated and perilous as it was, it was not impossible.

The question which finally stood before him was, to know whether he possessed the force needed to cope with these dangers, and on this ground hesitation was not possible; to wish to foresee everything was folly; that which he would not have expected, would come to pass.

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He returned toward Paris, and by the Pont de Suresnes reentered the Bois de Boulogne. As it was not yet three o'clock, he had plenty of time to reach the Rue Sainte-Anne before night; but, on the way, a heavy shower forced him to take shelter, and he watched the falling rain, asking himself if this accident, which he had not foreseen, would not upset his plan. A man who had received the force of this shower could not appear in the street before Caffie's door without attracting the attention of the passers-by, and it was important for him that he should not attract the attention of any one.

At length the rain ceased, and at twenty minutes of five he reached his home. There remained fifteen or twenty minutes of daylight, which was more than he needed.

He stuck the point of the knife in a cork, and, after having placed it between the folded leaves of a newspaper, in the inside left-hand pocket of his overcoat, he went out.

CHAPTER XII

THE CRUCIAL MOMENT

When he reached Caffie's door the night had scarcely fallen, and the streets were not yet lighted.

The better and the surest plan for him had been to wait in the 'porte-cochere' across the street; from there he could watch the 'concierge', who would not be able to go out without being seen by him. But though the passers were few at this moment, they might have observed him. Next to this 'porte-cochere' was a small 'cafe', whose brilliant lights would cause him to be seen quite plainly. He, therefore, walked on, but soon returned.

All irresolution, all hesitation, had disappeared, and the only point on which he still questioned himself bore upon the state in which he found himself at this moment. He felt himself firm, and his pulse, he was certain, beat regularly. He was as he had imagined he would be; experience confirmed his foresight; his hand would tremble no more than his will.

As he passed before the house he saw the concierge come slowly out of her lodge and close her door carefully, putting the key in her pocket. In her left hand she held something white that he could not see distinctly in the twilight, but it was probably the wax-taper which, doubtless, she had not lighted for fear the wind would blow it out.

This was a favorable circumstance, that gave him one or two minutes more than he had counted on, for she would be obliged to strike a match on the stairs to light her taper; and, in the execution of his plan, two minutes, a single minute even, might be of great importance.



With dragging steps and bent back she disappeared through the vestibule of the stairway. Then Sanial continued his walk like an ordinary passer-by until she had time to reach the first story; then, turning, he returned to the porte-cochere and entered quietly. By the gaslight in the vestibule he saw by his watch, which he held in his hand, that it was fourteen minutes after five o'clock. Then, if his calculation was right, at twenty-four or twenty-five minutes after five he must pass before the lodge, which should still be empty at that moment.

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On the staircase above him he heard the heavy step of the concierge; she had lighted the gas on the first story, and continued on her way slowly. With rapid but light steps he mounted behind her, and, on reaching Caffie's door, he rang the bell, taking care not to ring too loudly or too timidly; then he knocked three times, as Caffie had instructed him.

Was Caffie alone?

Up to this time all had gone as he wished; no one in the vestibule, no one on the stairs; fate was in his favor; would it accompany him to the end?

While he waited at the door, asking himself this question, an idea flashed into his mind. He would make a last attempt. If Caffie consented to make the loan he would save himself; if he refused, he condemned himself.

After several seconds, that appeared like hours, his listening ears perceived a sound which announced that Caffie was at home. A scratching of wood on the tiled floor denoted that a chair had been pushed aside; heavy, dragging steps approached, then the bolt creaked, and the door was opened cautiously.

"Ah! It is you, my dear sir!" Caffie said, in surprise.

Saniel entered briskly and closed the door himself, pressing it firmly.

"Is there anything new?" Caffie asked, as he led the way to his office.

"No," Saniel replied.

"Well, then?" Caffie asked, as he seated himself in an armchair before his desk, on which stood a lighted lamp. "I suppose you have come to hear more about my young friend. This hurry augurs well."

"No, it is not of the young person that I wish to talk to you."

"I am sorry."

On seating himself opposite to Caffie, Saniel had taken out his watch. Two minutes had passed since he left the vestibule; he must hurry. In order to keep himself informed of the passing of time, he retained his watch in his hand.

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes; I will come immediately to business. It concerns myself, my position, and I make a last appeal to you. Let us be honest with each other. Undoubtedly you think that, pushed by my distress, and seeing that I shall be lost forever, I shall decide to accept this marriage to save myself."

“Can you suppose such a thing, my dear sir?” Caffie cried.

But Sanieel stopped him....

“The calculation is too natural for you not to have made it. Well, I must tell you that it is false. Never will I lend myself to such a bargain. Renounce your project, and let us discuss my demand. I am in absolute want of three thousand francs, and I will pay the interest that you fix upon.”

“I have not found a money-lender, my dear sir. I have taken a great deal of trouble, I assure you, but I did not succeed.”

“Make an effort yourself.”

“Me? My dear sir!”

“I address myself to you.”

“But I have no ready money.”

“It is a desperate appeal that I make. I understand that your long experience in business makes you insensible to the misery that you see every day—”

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"Insensible! Say that it breaks my heart, my dear sir."

"But will you not permit yourself to be touched by the misery of a man who is young, intelligent, courageous, who will drown if a hand is not held out to help him? For you, the assistance that I ask so earnestly is nothing—"

"Three thousand francs! Nothing! Bless me! How you talk!"

"For me, if you refuse me, it is death."

Saniel began to speak with his eyes fixed on the hands of his watch, but presently, carried away by the fever of the situation, he raised them to look at Caffie, and to see the effect that he produced on him. In this movement he made a discovery that destroyed all his calculations.

Caffie's office was a small room with a high window looking into the court; never having been in this office except in the evening, he had not observed that this window had neither shutters nor curtains of muslin or of heavier stuff; there was nothing but the glass. To tell the truth, two heavy curtains of woollen damask hung on either side of the window, but they were not drawn. Talking to Caffie, who was placed between him and this window, Saniel suddenly perceived that on the other side of the court, in the second wing of the building, on the second story, were two lighted windows directly opposite to the office, and that from there any one could see everything that occurred in the office.

How should he execute his plan under the eyes of these people whom he saw coming and going in this room? He would be lost. In any case, it was risking an adventure so hazardous that he would be a fool to attempt it, and he was not that; never had he felt himself so much the master of his mind and nerves.

Also, it was not only to save Caffie's life that he argued, it was to save himself in grasping this loan.

"I can only, to my great regret, repeat to you what I have already said, my dear sir. I have no ready money."

And he held his jaw, groaning, as if this refusal aroused his toothache.

Saniel rose; evidently there was nothing for him to do but to go. It was finished, and instead of being in despair he felt it as a relief.

But, as he was about to leave the room, an idea flashed through his mind.

He looked at his watch, which he had not consulted for some time; it was twenty minutes after five; there yet remained four minutes, five at the most.



“Why do you not draw these curtains?” he said. “I am sure your sufferings are partly caused by the wind that comes in this window.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it; you should be warm about the head, and avoid currents of air.”

Passing behind Caffie, he went to the window to draw the curtains, but the cords would not move.

“It is years since they were drawn,” Caffie said. “Doubtless the cords are entangled. I will bring the light.”

And, taking the lamp, he went to the window, holding it high in order to throw light on the cords.

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With a turn of the hand Saniel disentangled the cords, and the curtains slid on the rods, almost covering the window.

"It is true a good deal of air did come in the window," Caffie said. "I thank you, my dear doctor."

All this was done with a feverish rapidity that astonished Caffie.

"Decidedly, you are in a hurry," he said.

"Yes, in a great hurry."

He looked at his watch.

"However, I have still time to give you a consultation if you desire it."

"I would not trouble you—"

"You do not trouble me."

"But—"

"Sit down in your armchair, and show me your mouth."

While Caffie seated himself, Saniel continued in a vibrating voice:

"You see I give good for evil."

"How is that, my dear sir?"

"You refuse me a service that would save me, and I give you a consultation. It is true, it is the last."

"And why the last, my dear sir?"

"Because death is between us."

"Death!"

"Do you not see it?"

"No."

"I see it."

"You must not think of such a thing, my dear sir. One does not die because one cannot pay three thousand francs."

The chair in which Caffie seated himself was an old Voltaire, with an inclined back, and he half reclined in it. As his shirtcollar was too large for him since he had become thin, and his narrow cravat was scarcely tied, he displayed as much throat as jaw.

Saniel, behind the chair, had taken the knife in his right hand, while he pressed the left heavily on Caffie's forehead, and with a powerful stroke, as quick as lightning, he cut the larynx under the glottis, as well as the two carotid arteries, with the jugular veins. From this terrible wound sprang a large jet of blood, which, crossing the room, struck against the door. Cut clean, not a cry could be formed in the windpipe, and in his armchair Caffie shook with convulsions from head to foot.

Leaving his position behind the chair, Saniel, who had thrown the knife on the floor, looked at his watch and counted the ticking of the second-hand in a low voice.

"One, two, three—"

At the end of ninety seconds the convulsions ceased.

It was twenty-three minutes after five. Now it was important that he should hurry and not lose a second.

The blood, after having gushed out, had run down the body and wet the vest pocket in which was the key of the safe. But blood does not produce the same effect upon a doctor as upon those who are not accustomed to its sight and odor, and to its touch. In spite of the lukewarm sea in which it lay, Saniel took the key, and after wiping his hand on one of the tails of Caffie's coat, he placed it in the lock.

Would it turn freely, or was it closed with a combination? The question was poignant. The key turned and the door opened. On a shelf and in a wooden bowl were packages of bank-notes and rolls of gold that he had seen the evening when the bank-clerk came. Roughly, without counting; he thrust them into his pocket, and without closing the safe, he ran to the front door, taking care not to step in the streams of blood, which, on the sloping tiled floor, ran toward this door. The time was short.

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And now was the greatest danger, that of meeting some one behind this door, or on the stairs. He listened, and heard no noise. He went out, and no one was to be seen. Without running, but hastily, he descended the stairs. Should he look in the lodge, or should he turn his head away? He looked, but the concierge was not there.

A second later he was in the street mingling with the passersby, and he drew a long breath.

CHAPTER XIII

DISTRACTION

There was no longer any need to be cautious, to listen, to stretch his nerves, to restrain his heart; he could walk freely and reflect.

His first thought was to endeavor to explain to himself how he felt, and he found that it was an immense relief; something, doubtless, analogous to the returning to life after being in a state of asphyxiation. Physically, he was calm; morally, he felt no remorse. He was right, therefore, in his theory when he told Phillis that in the intelligent man remorse precedes the action, instead of following it.

But where he was mistaken was in imagining that during the act he should maintain his coolness and force, which, in reality, had failed him completely.

Going from one idea to another, tossed by irresolution, he was by no means the strong man that he had believed himself: one to go to the end unmoved, ready to face every attack; master of his nerves as of his will, in full possession of all his powers. On the contrary, he had been the plaything of agitation and weakness. If a serious danger had risen before him, he would not have known on which side to attack it; fear would have paralyzed him, and he would have been lost.

To tell the truth, his hand had been firm, but his head had been bewildered.

There was something humiliating in this, he was obliged to acknowledge; and, what was more serious, it was alarming. Because, although everything had gone as he wished, up to the present time, all was not finished, nor even begun.

If the investigations of the law should reach him, how should he defend himself?

He felt sure that he had not been seen in Caffie's house at the moment when the crime was committed; but does one ever know whether one has been seen or not?

And there was the production of money that he should use to pay his debts, which might become an accusation against which it would be difficult to defend himself. In any case,

he must be ready to explain his position. And what might complicate the matter was, that Caffie, a careful man, had probably taken care to write the numbers of his bank-notes in a book, which would be found.

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On leaving the Rue Sainte-Anne he took the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs to his home, to leave the bank-notes and to wash off the stains of blood that might have splashed on him and his hands, particularly the right one, which was still red. But suddenly it occurred to him that he might be followed, and it would be folly to show where he lived. He hastened his steps, in order to make any one who might be following him run, and took the streets that were not well lighted, those where there was little chance of any one seeing the stains, if they were visible, on his clothing or boots. He walked in this way for nearly half an hour, turning and returning on his track, and after having crossed the Place Vendome twice, where he was able to look behind him, he decided to go home, not knowing whether he should be satisfied to have bewildered all quest, or whether he should not be furious to have yielded to a sort of panic.

As he passed by the lodge without stopping, his concierge called him, and, running out, gave him a letter with unusual eagerness. Saniel, who wished to escape observation, took it hastily, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"It is an important letter," the concierge said. "The servant who brought it told me that it contained money."

It needed this recommendation at such a moment, or Saniel would not have opened it, which he did as soon as he entered his rooms.

"I do not wish, my dear Doctor, to leave Paris for Monaco, where I go to pass two or three months, without sending you our thanks.

"Yours very gratefully,
"C. *Duphot*."

These thanks were represented by two bills of one hundred francs, a payment more than sufficient for the care that Saniel had given some months before to the mistress of this old comrade. Of what use now were these two hundred francs, which a few days sooner would have been so much to him? He threw them on his desk; and then, after having lighted two candles, he inspected his clothing.

The precaution that he had taken to place himself behind the chair was wise. The blood, in squirting in front and on each side, had not reached him; only the hand that held the knife and the shirt-sleeve were splashed, but this was of no consequence. A doctor has the right to have some blood on his sleeves, and this shirt went to join the one he had worn the previous night when attending the sick woman.

Free from this care, he still had the money in his pockets. He emptied them on his desk and counted all: five rouleaux of gold, of a thousand francs, and three packages of ten thousand francs each, of bank-notes.

How should he get rid of this sum all at once, and, later, how should he justify its production when the moment came, if it came?

The question was complex, and, unfortunately for him, he was hardly in a state to consider it calmly.

For the gold, he had only to burn the papers in which it was rolled. Louis have neither numbers nor particular marks, but bills have. Where should he conceal them while waiting to learn through the newspapers if Caffie had or had not made a note of these numbers?

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While burning these papers on which Caffie had written “2,000 francs,” he tried to think of a place of concealment.

As he threw a glance around him, asking from things the inspiration that his brain did not furnish, he caught sight of the letter he had just received, and it suggested an idea. Duphot was at Monaco to play. Why should he not go also, and play?

Having neither relatives nor friends from whom he could procure a certain sum, his only resource was to make it at play; and in his desperate position, known to every one, nothing was more natural than this experiment. He had received two hundred francs, which would not save him from his creditors. He would risk them at roulette at Monaco. Whether he lost or won was of little consequence. He would have played that would be sufficient. He would be seen playing. Who would know whether he lost or won? From Monaco he would pay Jardine by telegraph, out of the five thousand Louis, which would be more than sufficient for that; and, when he returned to Paris, he would free himself from his other creditors with what remained.

The money affair decided—and it seemed to him cleverly settled—did not include the bank-notes, which, spread out before his eyes, disturbed him. What should he do with them? One moment he thought of burning them, but reflection held him back. Would it not be folly to destroy this fortune? In any case, would it not be the work of a narrow mind, of one not fertile in resources?

In trying to think of some safe place to hide the banknotes, one thought continually absorbed him: What was happening in the Rue Sainte-Anne? Had any one discovered the dead man?

He should be there to observe events, instead of timidly shutting himself up in his office.

For several minutes he tried to resist this thought, but it was stronger than his will or his reason. So much was he under its power that he could do nothing.

Willing or unwilling, foolish or not, he must go to the Rue Sainte-Anne.

He washed his hands, changed his shirt, and throwing the notes and gold into a drawer, he went out.

He knew very well that there was a certain danger in leaving these proofs of the crime, which, found in an official search, would overwhelm him, without his being able to defend himself. But he thought that an immediate search was unlikely to occur, and if he could not make a probable story, it would be better for him not to reason about it. It was a risk that he ran, but how much he had on his side!

He hastened along the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, but on approaching the Rue Sainte-Anne he slackened his steps, looking about him and listening. Nothing unusual

struck him. Even when he turned into the Rue Sainte-Anne he found it bore its ordinary aspect. A few passers-by, not curious; no groups on the sidewalk; no shopkeepers at their doors. Nothing was different from usual.

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Apparently, nothing had yet been discovered. Then he stopped, judging it useless to go farther. Already he had passed too much time before Caffie's door, and when one was of his build, above the medium height, with a physiognomy and appearance unlike others, one should avoid attracting attention.

For several minutes he walked up and down slowly, from the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs to the Rue du Hasard; from there he could see Caffie's house, and yet be so far away that no one would suspect him of watching it.

But this promenade, which was quite natural, and which he would have continued for an hour in ordinary circumstances, without thinking anything about it, soon alarmed him. It seemed as if people looked at him, and two persons stopping to talk made him wonder if they spoke of him. Why did they not continue their way? Why, from time to time, did they turn their heads toward him?

He left the place, and neither wishing nor being able to decide to go far away from "the house," he concluded to go to a small cafe which was close by.

On entering, he seated himself at a table near the door that appeared to be an excellent observatory, from where he could easily survey the street. A waiter asked him what he would have, and he ordered coffee.

He gave this order mechanically, without thinking what he was saying, and not till afterward did he wonder if it were natural to take coffee at this hour. The men seated at the other tables drank appetizers or beer. Had he not made a blunder?

But everything seemed a blunder, as everything seemed dangerous. Could he not regain his composure and his reason? He drank his coffee slowly; then he asked for a newspaper. The street was quiet, and people left the cafe one by one.

Behind his newspaper he reflected. It was his feverish curiosity that made him admit that Caffie's death would be discovered during the evening. In reality, it might easily remain undiscovered until the next day.

But he could not stay in the cafe until the next day, nor even until midnight. Perhaps he had remained there too long already.

He did not wish to go yet, so he ordered writing materials, and paid the waiter, in case he might wish to go hastily—if anything occurred.

What should he write? He wished to test himself, and found that he was able to write clearly, and to select the proper words; but when he came to read it over, his will failed him.

Time passed. Suddenly there was a movement under the porte-cochere of “the house,” and a man ran through the street. Two or three persons stopped in a group.

Without hurrying too much, Saniel went out, and in a strong voice asked what had happened.

“An agent of business has been assassinated in his office. Word has been sent to the police bureau in the Rue du Hasard.”

CHAPTER XIV

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THE EXAMINATION

Saniel was there to observe, without having decided what he should do. Instantly, with the decision that had "failed him so often during his vigil," he resolved to go to Caffie's. Was he not a doctor, and the physician of the dead-man? What could be more natural?

"A money-lender!" he exclaimed. "Is it Monsieur Caffie?"

"Exactly."

"But I am his doctor."

"A doctor! Here is a doctor!" cried several voices.

The crowd parted, and Saniel passed under the porte-cochere, where the concierge, half fainting, was seated on a chair, surrounded by all the maids of the house and several neighbors, to whom she related the news.

By using his elbows he was able to approach her.

"Who has said Monsieur Caffie is dead?" he asked with authority.

"No one has said he is dead; at least, I have not."

"Well, then?"

"There is a stain of blood that has run from his office down to the landing; and as he is at home, since the light of his lamp is seen in the court, and he never leaves it burning when he goes to dinner, something must have happened. And why are his curtains drawn? He always leaves them open."

At this moment two policemen appeared, preceded by a locksmith armed with a bunch of keys, and a little man with a shrewd, sharp appearance, wearing spectacles, and a hat from under which fell blond curls. The commissioner of police probably.

"On which story?" he asked the concierge.

"On the first."

"Come with us."

He started to go upstairs, accompanied by the concierge, the locksmith, and one of the policemen; Saniel wished to follow them, but the other policeman barred the way.

"Pardon, Monsieur Commissioner," Saniel said.



"What do you wish, sir?"

"I am Monsieur Caffie's physician."

"Your name?"

"Doctor SanieI."

"Let the doctor pass," the commissioner said, "but alone. Make every one go out, and shut the porte-cochere."

On reaching the landing the commissioner stopped to look at the brown stain which, running under the door, spread over the tiling, as Caffie never had had a mat.

"It is certainly a stain of blood," SanieI said, who stopped to examine it and dipped his finger in it.

"Open the door," the commissioner said to the locksmith.

The latter examined the lock, looked among his keys, selected one, and unlocked the door.

"Let no one enter," the commissioner said. "Doctor, have the goodness to follow me."

And, going ahead, he entered the first office, that of the clerk, followed by SanieI. Two little rills of blood, already thickened, starting from Caffie's chair, and running across the tiled floor, which sloped a little toward the side of the staircase, joined in the stain which caused the discovery of the crime. The commissioner and SanieI took care not to step in it.

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"The unfortunate man has had his throat cut," Saniel said. "Death must have occurred two or three hours ago. There is nothing to do."

"Speak for yourself, doctor."

And, stooping, he picked up the knife.

"Is it not a butcher's knife?" asked Saniel, who could only use this word.

"It looks like it."

He had raised Caffie's head and examined the wound.

"You see," he said, "that the victim has been butchered. The stroke was from left to right, by a firm hand which must be accustomed to handle this knife. But it is not only a strong and practised hand that has done this deed; it was guided by an intelligence that knew how to proceed to insure a quick, almost instantaneous death, and at the same time a silent one."

"You think it was done by a butcher?"

"By a professional killer; the larynx has been cut above the glottis, and with the same stroke the two carotid arteries, with the jugular veins. As the assassin had to raise the head, the victim was not able to cry out; considerable blood has flowed, and death must have ensued in one or two minutes."

"The scene appears to me very well reconstructed."

"The blood should have burst out in this direction," Saniel continued, pointing to the door. "But as this door was open, nothing is to be seen."

While Saniel spoke, the commissioner threw a glance about the room—the glance of the police, which takes in everything.

"The safe is open," he said. "The affair becomes clear; the assassination was followed by theft."

There was a door opposite to the entrance, which the commissioner opened; it was that of Caffie's bedroom.

"I will give you a man to help you carry the body into this room, where you can continue your examination more easily, while I will continue my investigations in this office."

Saniel would have liked to remain in the office to assist at these investigations, but it was impossible to raise an objection. The chair was rolled into the bedroom, where two

candles had been lighted on the mantel, and when the body was laid on the bed, the commissioner returned to the office.

Saniel made his examination last as long a time as possible, to the end that he need not leave the house; but he could not prolong it beyond certain limits. When they were reached, he returned to the clerk's office, where the commissioner had installed himself, and was hearing the concierge's deposition.

"And so," he said, "from five to seven o'clock no one asked for M. Caffie?"

"No one. But I left my lodge at a quarter past five to light the gas on the stairs; that took me twenty minutes, because I am stiff in my joints, and during this time some one might have gone up and down the stairs without my seeing them."

"Well," the commissioner said, turning to Saniel, "have you found any distinguishing feature?"

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"No; there is only the wound on the neck."

"Will you draw up your medico-legal report while I continue my inquest?"

"Willingly."

And, without waiting, he seated himself at the clerk's desk, facing the commissioner's secretary, who had arrived a few minutes previous.

"I am going to make you take the oath," the commissioner said.

After this formality Saniel began his report:

"We, the undersigned, Victor Saniel, doctor of medicine of the Paris Faculty, residing in Paris in the Rue Louis-le-Grand, after having taken an oath to fulfil in all honor and conscience the mission confided to us—"

All the time that he was writing he paid attention to everything that was said, and did not lose one word of the concierge's deposition.

"I am certain," she said, "that from half-past five until now no one has gone up or down the stairs but the people who live in the house."

"But before half-past five?"

"I have told you that from a quarter past five until half-past I was not in my lodge."

"And before a quarter past five o'clock?"

"Several persons passed whom I did not know."

"Did any one among them ask you for Monsieur Caffie?"

"No; that is to say, yes. There was one who asked me if Monsieur Caffie was at home; but I know him well; that is why I answered No."

"And who is he?"

"One of Monsieur Caffie's old clerks."

"His name?"

"Monsieur Florentin—Monsieur Florentin Cormier."

Saniel's hand was arrested at this name, but he did not raise his head.

"At what hour did he come?" asked the commissioner.

"Near three o'clock, before rather than after."

"Did you see him go away?"

"Certainly, he spoke to me."

"What time was it?"

"Half-past three."

"Do you think that death could have occurred at this moment?" the commissioner asked, turning to Saniel.

"No; I think it must have been between five and six o'clock."

"It is wrong for the commissioner to suspect Monsieur Florentin," cried the concierge.

"He is a good young man, incapable of harming a fly. And then, there is a good reason why death could not have taken place between three o'clock and half-past; it is that Monsieur Caffie's lamp was lighted, and you know the poor gentleman was not a man to light his lamp in broad daylight, looking as he was—"

She stopped abruptly, striking her forehead with her hand.

"That is what I remember, and you will see that Monsieur Florentin has nothing to do with this affair. As I went upstairs at a quarter past five to light my gas, some one came behind me and rang Monsieur Caffie's bell, and rapped three or four times at equal distances, which is the signal to open the door."

Again Saniel's pen stopped, and he was obliged to lean his hand on the table to prevent its trembling.

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"Who was it?"

"Ah! That I do not know," she answered. "I did not see him, but I heard him, the step of a man. It was this rascal who killed him, you may be sure."

This seemed likely.

"He went out while I was on the stairs; he knew the customs of the house."

Saniel continued his report.

After having questioned and cross-questioned the concierge without being able to make her say more, the commissioner dismissed her, and leaving Saniel at his work, he passed into Caffie's office, where he remained a long time.

When he returned he brought a small note-book that he consulted. Without doubt it was the book of Caffie's safe, simple and primitive, like everything relating to the old man's habits, governed by the narrowest economy in his expenses, as well as in his work.

"According to this note-book," the commissioner said to his secretary, "thirty-five or thirty-six thousand francs must have been taken from the safe; but there are left deeds and papers for a large sum."

Saniel, who had finished his report, did not take his eyes from the note-book, and what he could see reassured him. Evidently these accounts were reduced to a minimum: a date, a name, a sum, and after this name a capital P, which, without doubt, meant "paid." It was hardly possible that with such a system Caffie had ever taken the trouble to enter the number of the bills that had passed through his hands; in any case, if he did, it was not in this note-book. Would another one be found?

"My report is finished," he said. "Here it is."

"Since you are here, perhaps you can give me some information concerning the habits of the victim and the persons he received."

"Not at all. I have known him but a short time, and he was my patient, as I was his client, by accident. He undertook an affair for me, and I gave him advice; he was in the last stage of diabetes. The assassin hastened his death only a short time-a few days."

"That is nothing; he hastened it."

"Oh, certainly! Otherwise, if he is skilful in cutting throats, perhaps he is less so in making a diagnosis of their maladies."

"That is probable," responded the commissioner, smiling. "You think it was a butcher?"

“It seems probable.”

“The knife?”

“He might have stolen it or found it.”

“But the mode of operating?”

“That, it seems to me, is the point from where we should start.”

Saniel could remain no longer, and he rose to leave.

“You have my address,” he said; “but I must tell you, if you want me, I leave to-morrow for Nice. But I shall be absent only just long enough to go and return.”

“If we want you, it will not be for several days. We shall not get on very rapidly, we have so little to guide us.”

CHAPTER XV

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A NEW PLAN

Saniel walked home briskly. If, more than once during this interview, his emotion was poignant, he could not but be satisfied with the result. The concierge had not seen him, that was henceforth unquestionable; the hypothesis of the butcher's knife was put in a way to make his fortune; and it seemed probable that Caffie had not kept the numbers of the bank-notes.

But if they had been noted, and should the notebook containing them be discovered later, the danger was not immediate. While writing his report and listening to the concierge's deposition, by a sort of inspiration he thought of a way of disposing of them. He would divide them into small packages, place them in envelopes, and address them with different initials to the poste restante, where they would remain until he could call for them without compromising himself.

In the deposition of the concierge, in the track indicated by the knife, in the poste restante, he had just motives for satisfaction, that made him breathe freely. Decidedly, fate seemed to be with him, and he should have been able to say that everything was going well, if he had not committed the imprudence of entering the cafe. Why had he gone there and remained long enough to attract attention? What might not be the consequences of this stupidity?

As soon as he reached home and his door was closed, he carried out his intentions regarding the bank-notes, dividing them into ten packages. His first thought was to place them in the nearest letterbox, but reflection showed him that this would be unwise, and he decided to mail each one in a different quarter of the city.

After his long walk of the morning, and the emotions of the evening, he felt a fatigue that he had never known before, but he comprehended that he was not at liberty to yield to this weariness. A new situation was made for him, and henceforth he no longer belonged to himself. For the rest of his life he would be the prisoner of his crime. And it was this crime which, from this evening, would command, and he must obey.

Why had he not foreseen this situation when, weighing the pro and con like an intelligent man who can scrutinize the future under all its phases, he had examined what must happen? But surprising as it was, the discovery was no less certain, and the sad and troublesome proof was that, however intelligent one may be, one can always learn by experience.

What was there yet to learn? He confessed that he found himself face to face with the unknown, and all that he wished was, that this lesson he had learned from experience might be the hardest. It would be folly to imagine that it was the last. Time would show.

When he returned home, after posting his letters, it was long past one o'clock. He went to bed immediately, and slept heavily, without waking or dreaming.

It was broad daylight when he opened his eyes the next morning. Surprised at having slept so late, he jumped up and looked at his watch, which said eight o'clock. But as he should not leave until a quarter past eleven, he had plenty of time.

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How should he employ it?

It was the first time in years that he had asked himself such a question; he, who each day always found that he needed three or four hours more to carry out his programme.

He dressed slowly, and then thought of writing to Phillis to tell her of his trip to Nice. But suddenly he changed his mind, and decided to go to see her.

The preceding year he attended Madame Cormier, who had been stricken with paralysis, and he could occasionally present himself at her house without appearing to call upon Phillis. It was easy to say that he was passing by, and wished to learn news of the patient whom he had cured.

At nine o'clock he knocked at her door.

"Enter," a man's voice said.

He was surprised, for in his visits to Madame Cormier he had never seen a man there. He crossed the hall and knocked at the dining-room door. This time it was Phillis who bid him come in.

He opened the door and saw Phillis, in a gray blouse, seated before a large table placed by the window. She was painting some cards.

Hearing steps, she turned her head and instantly rose, but she restrained the cry-the name that was on her lips.

"Mamma," she said, "here is Doctor Saniel."

Madame Cormier entered, walking with difficulty; for, if Saniel had put her on her feet, he had not given her the suppleness or the grace of youth.

After a few words, Saniel explained that, having to pay a visit to the Batignolles, he would not come so near his former patient without calling to see her.

While Madame Cormier told at great length how she felt, and also how she did not feel, Phillis looked at Saniel, uneasy to see his face so convulsed. Surely, something very serious had happened; his visit said this. But what? Her anguish was so much the greater, because he certainly avoided looking at her. Why? She had done nothing, and could find nothing with which to reproach herself.

At this moment the door opened, and a man still young, tall, with a curled beard, entered the room.

"My son," Madame Cormier said.

“My brother Florentin, of whom we have spoken so often,” Phillis said.

Florentin! Was he then becoming imbecile, that he had not thought the voice of the man who bid him enter was that of Phillis's brother? Was he so profoundly overwhelmed that such a simple reasoning was impossible to him? Decidedly, it was important for him to go away as quickly as possible; the journey would calm his nerves.

“They wrote to me,” Florentin said, “and since my return they have told me how good you were to my mother. Permit me to thank you from a touched and grateful heart. I hope that before long this gratitude will be something more than a vain word.”

“Do not let us speak of that,” Saniel said, looking at Phillis with a frankness and an open countenance that reassured her on a certain point. “It is I who am obliged to Madame Cormier. If the word were not barbarous, I should say that her illness has been a good thing for me.”



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To turn the conversation, and because he wished to speak to Phillis alone, he approached her table and talked with her about her work.

Saniel then gave Madame Cormier some advice, and rose to go.

Phillis followed him, and Florentin was about to accompany them, but Phillis stopped him.

"I wish to ask Doctor Saniel a question," she said.

When they were on the landing she closed the door.

"What is the matter?" she asked in a hurried and trembling voice.

"I wished to tell you that I start for Monaco at eleven o'clock."

"You are going away?"

"I have received two hundred francs from a patient, and I am going to risk them at play. Two hundred francs will not pay Jardine or the others, but with them I may win several thousands of francs."

"Oh! Poor dear! How desperate you must be—you, such as you are, to have such an idea!"

"Am I wrong?"

"Never wrong to my eyes, to my heart, to my love. O my beloved, may fortune be with you!"

"Give me your hand."

She looked around, listening. There was no one, no noise.

Then, drawing him toward her, she put her lips on his:

"All yours, yours!"

"I will return Tuesday."

"Tuesday, at five o'clock, I shall be there."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SMILES OF FORTUNE

No one knew so little about play as Saniel. He knew that people played at Monaco, and that was all. He bought his ticket for Monaco, and left the train at that place.

On leaving the station he looked all about him, to see what kind of a place it was. Seeing nothing that looked like a gambling-house as he understood it, that is, like the Casino de Royal, the only establishment of the kind that he had ever seen, he asked a passer-by:

"Where is the gambling-house?"

"There is none at Monaco."

"I thought there was."

"There is one at Monte Carlo."

"Is it far?"

"Over yonder."

With his hand the man indicated, on the slope of the mountain, a green spot where, in the midst of the foliage, were seen roofs and facades of imposing buildings.

Saniel thanked him and followed his directions, while the man, calling another, related the question that had been addressed to him, and both laughed, shrugging their shoulders. Could any one be so stupid as these Parisians! Another one who was going to be plucked, and who came from Paris expressly for that! Was he not funny, with his big legs and arms?

Without troubling himself about the laughter that he heard behind him, Saniel continued his way. In spite of his night on the train, he felt no fatigue; on the contrary, his mind and body were active. The journey had calmed the agitation of his nerves, and it was with perfect tranquillity he looked back upon all that had passed before his departure. In the state of satisfaction that was his now, he had nothing more to fear from stupidity or acts of folly; and, since he had recovered his will, all would go well. No more backward glances, and fewer still before. The present only should absorb him.

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The present, at this moment, was play. What did they play? He knew roulette, but he knew not if the game was roulette. He would do as others did. If he were ridiculed, it was of little importance; and in reality he should desire to be ridiculed. People remember with pleasure those at whom they have laughed, and he had come here to find some one who would remember him.

When he entered the salon where the playing was going on, he observed that a religious silence reigned there. Round a large table covered with a carpet of green cloth, which was divided by lines and figures, some men were seated on high chairs, making them appear like officers; others, on lower chairs, or simply standing about the table, pushed or picked up the louis and bank bills on the green cloth, and a strong voice repeated, in a monotonous tone:

“Messieurs, faites votre jeu! Le jeu est fait! Rien ne va plus!”

Then a little ivory ball was thrown into a cylinder, where it rolled with a metallic noise. Although he had never seen roulette, it required no effort to divine that this was the game.

And, before putting several louis on the table, he looked about him to see how it was played. But after the tenth time he understood as little as at first. With the rakes the croupiers collected the stakes of certain players; with these same rakes they doubled, separated, or even paid, in proportions of which he took no account, certain others, and that was all.

But it mattered little. Having seen how the money was placed on the table, that was sufficient.

He had five louis in his hand when the croupier said:

“Messieurs, faites votre jeu.”

He placed them on the number thirty-two, or, at least, he believed that he placed them on this number.

“Rien ne va plus!” The ball rolled in the cylinder.

“Thirty-one!” cried the croupier, adding some other words that Saniel did not understand. So little did he understand roulette that he thought he had lost. He had placed his stake on the thirty-two, and it was the thirty-one that had appeared; the bank had won. He was surprised to see the croupier push a heap of gold toward him, which amounted to nearly a hundred louis, and accompany this movement with a glance which, without any doubt, meant to say:

“For you, sir.”

What should he do? Since he had lost, he could not take this, money that was given to him by mistake.

In placing his stake on the table, he had leaned over the shoulder of a gentleman whose hair and beard were of a most extraordinary black, who, without playing, pricked a card with a pin. This gentleman turned toward him, and with an amiable smile, and in a most gracious tone said:

“It is yours, sir.”

Decidedly, he was mistaken in thinking he had lost; and he must take this heap of louis, which he did, but neglecting to take, also, his first stake.

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The game continued.

"Thirty-two," called the croupier.

Saniel perceived that his five louis had remained on the thirty-two; he believed that he had won, since this number was called, and his ignorance was such that he did not know that in roulette a number is paid thirty-six times the stake: the croupier would, therefore, push toward him one hundred and eighty Louis.

But, to his great surprise, he pushed him no more money than at first. This was incomprehensible. When he lost, money was paid to him, and when he won, he was paid only half his due.

His face betrayed his astonishment so plainly that he saw a mocking smile in the eyes of the black-haired man, who had again turned toward him.

As he played merely for the sake of playing, and not to win or lose, he pocketed all that was pushed toward him and his stake.

"Since you are not going to play any more," said the amiable gentleman, leaving his chair, "will you permit me to say a word to you?"

Saniel bowed, and together they left the table. When they were far enough away to converse without disturbing the players, the gentleman bowed ceremoniously:

"Permit me to present myself-Prince Mazzazoli."

Saniel replied by giving his name and position.

"Well, doctor," the prince said with a strong Italian accent, "you will pardon me, I hope, for making the simple observation that my age authorizes: you play like a child."

"Like an ignoramus," Saniel replied, without being angry. For, however unusual this observation might be, he had already decided that it might be a good thing in the future to call upon the testimony of a prince.

"I am sure you are still asking yourself why you received eighteen times the sum of your stake at the first play, and why you did not receive thirty-six times the sum at the second."

"That is true."

"Well, I will tell you." And he proceeded to explain.

Saniel did not wait for the conclusion to learn the fact that this very-much-dyed Italian prince was a liar.

"I do not intend to play again," he said.

"With your luck that would be more than a fault."

"I wanted a certain sum; I have won it, and that satisfies me."

"You will not be so foolish as to refuse the hand that Fortune holds out?"

"Are you sure she holds it out to me?" Saniel asked, finding that it was the prince.

"Do not doubt it. I will show you—"

"Thank you; but I never break a resolution."

In another moment Saniel would have turned his back on the man, but he was a witness whom it would be well to treat with caution.

"I have nothing more to do here," he said, politely. "Permit me to retire, after having thanked you for your offer, whose kindness I appreciate."

"Well," cried the prince, "since you will not risk your fate, let me do it for you. This money may be a fetich. Take off five louis, only five louis, and confide them to me. I will play them according to my combinations, which are certain, and this evening I will give you your part of the proceeds. Where are you staying? I live at the Villa des Palmes."



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"Nowhere; I have just arrived."

"Then let us meet here this evening at ten o'clock, in this room, and we will liquidate our association."

His first impulse was to refuse. Of what use to give alms to this old monkey? But, after all, it did not cost much to pay his witness five louis, and he gave them to him.

"A thousand thanks! This evening, at ten o'clock."

As Sanie! left the room he found himself face to face with his old comrade Duphot, who was accompanied by a woman, the same whom he had cured.

"What! you here?" both the lover and his mistress exclaimed.

Sanie! related why he was at Monaco, and what he had done since his arrival.

"With my money! Ah! She is very well," Duphot cried.

"And you will play no more?" the woman asked.

"I have all I want."

"Then you will play for me."

He wished to decline, but they drew him to the roulette table, and each put a louis in his hand.

"Play."

"How?"

"As inspiration counsels you. You have the luck."

But his luck had died. The two louis were lost.

They gave him two others, which won eight.

"You see, dear friend."

He went on, with varying luck, winning and losing.

At the end of a quarter of an hour they permitted him to go.

"And what are you going to do now?" Duphot asked.

"To send what I owe to my creditors by telegraph."

"Do you know where the telegraph is?"

"No."

"I will go with you."

This was a second witness that Sanieel was too wise to shake off.

When he had sent his telegram to Jardine, he had nothing more to do at Monte Carlo, and as he could not leave before eleven o'clock in the evening, he was idle, not knowing how to employ his time. So he bought a Nice newspaper and seated himself in the garden, under a gaslight, facing the dark and tranquil sea. Perhaps he could find in it some telegraph despatch which would tell him what had occurred in the Rue Sainte-Anne since his departure.

At the end of the paper, under "Latest News," he read:

"The crime of the Rue Sainte-Anne seems to take a new turn; the investigations made with more care have led to the discovery of a trousers' button, to which is attached a piece of cloth. It shows, therefore, that before the crime there was a struggle between the victim and the assassin. As this button has certain letters and marks, it is a valuable clew for the police."

This proof of a struggle between the victim and the assassin made Sanieel smile. Who could tell how long this button had been there?

Suddenly he left his seat, and entering a copse he examined his clothing. Was it he who had lost it?

But soon he was ashamed of this unconscious movement. The button which the police were so proud to discover, did not belong to him. This new track on which they were about to enter did not lead to him.

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CHAPTER XVII

PHILLIS'S FEARS

On Tuesday, a little before five o'clock, as she had promised, Phillis rang at Sanie's door, and he left his laboratory where he was at work, to let her in.

She threw herself on his neck.

"Well?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

He told her how he had played and won, without stating the exact sum; also the propositions of the Prince Mazzazoli, the meeting with Duphot, and the telegram to Jardine.

"Oh! What happiness!" she said, pressing him in her arms. "You are free!"

"No more creditors! I am my own master. You see it was a good inspiration. Justice willed it."

Then interrupting him:

"Apropos of justice, you did not speak of Caffie the morning of your departure."

"I was so preoccupied I had no time to think of Caffie."

"Is it not curious, the coincidence of his death with the condemnation that we pronounced against him? Does it not prove exactly the justice of things?"

"If you choose."

"As the money you won at Monaco proves to you that what is just will happen. Caffie is punished for all his rascalities and crimes, and you are rewarded for your sufferings."

"Would it not have been just if Caffie had been punished sooner, and if I had suffered less?"

She remained silent.

"You see," he said smiling, "that your philosophy is weak."

"It is not of my philosophy that I am thinking, but of Caffie and ourselves."

"And how can Caffie be associated with you or yours?"

“He is, or rather he may be, if this justice in which I believe in spite of your joking permits him to be.”

“You are talking in enigmas.”

“What have you heard about Caffie since you went away?”

“Nothing, or almost nothing.”

“You know it is thought that the crime was committed by a butcher.”

“The commissioner picked up the knife before me, and it is certainly a butcher’s knife. And more than that, the stroke that cut Caffie’s throat was given by a hand accustomed to butchery. I have indicated this in my report.”

“Since then, more careful investigations have discovered a trousers’ button—”

“Which might have been torn off in a struggle between Caffie and his assassin, I read in a newspaper. But as for me, I do not believe in this struggle. Caffie’s position in his chair, where he was assaulted and where he died, indicates that the old scamp was surprised. Otherwise, if he had not been, if he had struggled, he could have cried out, and, without doubt, he would have been heard.”

“If you knew how happy I am to hear you say that!” she cried.

“Happy! What difference can it make to you?” and he looked at her in surprise. “Of what importance is it to you whether Caffie was killed with or without a struggle? You condemned him; he is dead. That should satisfy you.”

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"I was very wrong to pronounce this condemnation, which I did without attaching any importance to it."

"Do you think that hastened its execution?"

"I am not so foolish as that, but I should be better pleased if I had not condemned him."

"Do you regret it?"

"I regret that he is dead."

"Decidedly, the enigma continues; but you know I do not understand it, and, if you wish, we will stop there. We have something better to do than to talk of Caffie."

"On the contrary, let me talk to you of him, because we want your advice."

Again he looked at her, trying to read her face and to divine why she insisted on speaking of Caffie, when he had just expressed a wish not to speak of him. What was there beneath this insistence?

"I will listen," he said; "and, since you wish to ask my advice on the subject, you must tell me immediately what you mean."

"You are right; and I should have told you before, but embarrassment and shame restrained me. And I reproach myself, for with you I should feel neither embarrassment nor reproach."

"Assuredly."

"But before everything else, I must tell you—you must know—that my brother Florentin is a good and honest boy; you must believe it, you must be convinced of it."

"I am, since you tell me so. Besides, he produced the best impression on me during the short time I saw him the other day at your house."

"Would not one see immediately that he has a good nature?"

"Certainly."

"Frank and upright; weak, it is true, and a little effeminate also, that is, lacking energy, letting himself be carried away by goodness and tenderness. This weakness made him commit a fault before his departure for America. I have kept it from you until this moment, but you must know it now. Loving a woman who controlled him and made him do what she wished, he let himself be persuaded to take a sum of forty-five francs that

she demanded, that she insisted on having that evening, hoping to be able to replace it three days later, without his employer discovering it."

"His employer was Caffie?"

"No; it was three months after he left Caffie, and he was with another man of business of whom I have never spoken to you, and now you understand why. The money he expected failed him; his fault was discovered, and his employer lodged a complaint against him."

"We made him withdraw his complaint, never mind how, and Florentin went to America to seek his fortune. And since you have seen him, you admit that he might be capable of the fault that he committed, without being capable-of becoming an assassin."

He was about to reply, but she closed his lips with a quick gesture.

"You will see why I speak of this, and you will understand why I do not drop the subject of Caffie, and of this button, on which the police count to find the criminal. This button belonged to Florentin."



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"To your brother?"

"Yes, to Florentin, who, the day of the crime, had been to see Caffie."

"That is true; the concierge told the commissioner of police that he called about three o'clock."

Phillis gave a cry of despair.

"They know he was there? Then it is more serious than we imagined or believed."

"In answering a question as to whom Caffie had received that day, the concierge named your brother. But as this visit took place between three and half-past, and the crime was certainly committed between five and half-past, no one can accuse your brother of being the assassin, since he left before Caffie lighted his lamp. As this lamp could not light itself, it proves that he could not have butchered a man who was living an hour after the concierge saw your brother and talked with him."

"What you say is a great relief; if you could know how alarmed we have been!"

"You were too hasty to alarm yourself."

"Too hasty? But when Florentin read the account to us and came to the button, he exclaimed, 'This button is mine!' and we experienced a shock that made us lose our heads. We saw the police falling on us, questioning Florentin, reproaching him with the past, which would be retailed in all the newspapers, and you must understand how we felt."

"But cannot your brother explain how he lost this button at Caffie's?"

"Certainly, and in the most natural way. He went to see Caffie, to ask him for a letter of recommendation, saying that he had been his clerk for several years. Caffie gave it to him, and then, in the course of conversation, Caffie spoke of a bundle of papers that he could not find. Florentin had had charge of these papers, and had placed them on a high shelf in the closet. As Caffie could not find them, and wanted them, Florentin brought a small ladder, and, mounting it, found them. He was about to descend the ladder, when he made a misstep, and in trying to save himself, one of the buttons of his trousers was pulled off."

"And he did not pick it up?"

"He did not even notice it at first. But later, in the street, seeing one leg of his trousers longer than the other, he thought of the ladder, and found that he had lost a button. He would not return to Caffie's to look for it, of course."

“Of course.”

“How could he foresee that Caffie would be assassinated? That the crime would be so skilfully planned and executed that the criminal would escape? That two days later the police would find a button on which they would build a story that would make him the criminal? Florentin had not thought of all that.”

“That is understood.”

“The same evening he replaced the button by another, and it was only on reading the newspaper that he felt there might be something serious in this apparently insignificant fact. And we shared his alarm.”

“Have you spoken to any one of this button?”

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"Certainly not; we know too much. I tell you of it because I tell you everything; and if we are menaced, we have no help to expect, except from you. Florentin is a good boy, but he is weak and foolish. Mamma is like him in more than one respect, and as for me, although I am more resistant, I confess that, in the face of the law and the police, I should easily lose my head, like children who begin to scream when they are left in the dark. Is not the law, when you know nothing of it, a night of trouble, full of horrors, and peopled with phantoms?"

"I do not believe there is the danger that you imagined in the first moment of alarm."

"It was natural."

"Very natural, I admit, but reflection must show how little foundation there is for it. The button has not the name of the tailor who furnished it?"

"No, but it has the initials and the mark of the manufacturer; an A and a P, with a crown and a cock."

"Well! Among two or three thousand tailors in Paris, how is it possible for the police to find those who use these buttons? And when the tailors are found, how could they designate the owner of this button, this one exactly, and not another? It is looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. Where did your brother have these trousers made? Did he bring them from America?"

"The poor boy brought nothing from America but wretchedly shabby clothes, and we had to clothe him from head to foot. We were obliged to economize, and a little tailor in the Avenue de Clichy, called Valerius, made this suit."

"It seems to me scarcely probable that the police will find this little tailor. But if they do, would he recognize the button as coming from his stock? And, if they get as far as your brother, they must prove that there was a struggle; that the button was torn off in this struggle; that your brother was in the Rue Sainte-Anne between five and six o'clock; in which case, without doubt, he will find it easy to prove where he was at that moment."

"He was with us—with mamma."

"You see, then, you need not feel alarmed."

CHAPTER XVIII

A GRAVE DISCUSSION

Phillis hurried to return to the Rue des Moines, to share with her mother and brother the confidence that Saniei caused her to feel.

She pulled the bell with a trembling hand, for the time was past when in this quiet house, where all the lodgers knew each other, the key was left in the door, and one had only to knock before entering. Since the newspapers had spoken of the button, all was changed; the feeling of liberty and security had disappeared; the door was always closed, and when the bell rang they looked at each other in fear and with trembling.

When Florentin opened the door, the table was set for dinner.

“I was afraid something had happened to you,” Madame Cormier said.



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"I was detained."

She took off her hat and cloak hastily.

"You have learned nothing?" the mother asked, bringing in the soup.

"No."

"They spoke to you of nothing?" Florentin continued in a low voice.

"They spoke to me of nothing else; or I heard only that when I was not addressed directly."

"What was said?"

"No one believes that the investigations of the police bear on the button."

"You see, Florentin," Madame Cormier interrupted, smiling at her son.

But he shook his head.

"However, the opinion of all has a value," Phillis cried.

"Speak lower," Florentin said.

"It is thought that it is impossible for the police to find, among the two or three thousand tailors in Paris, all those who use the buttons marked A. P. And if they did find them, they could not designate all their customers to whom they have furnished these buttons. It is really looking for a needle in a bundle of hay."

"When one takes plenty of time, one finds a needle in a bundle of hay," Florentin said.

"You ask me what I heard, and I tell you. But I do not depend entirely on that. As I passed near the Rue Louis-le-Grand, I went to Doctor Sanie's; it being his office hour I hoped to find him."

"You told him the situation?" Florentin exclaimed.

In any other circumstances she would have replied frankly, explaining that she had perfect confidence in Sanie; but when she saw her brother's agitation, she could not exasperate him by this avowal, above all, because she could not at the same time give her reasons for her faith in him. She must reassure him before everything.

"No," she said, "but I spoke of Caffie to Doctor Sanie without his being surprised. As he made the first deposition, was it not natural that my curiosity should wish to learn a little more than the newspapers tell?"

“Never mind, the act must appear strange.”

“I think not. But, anyhow, the interest that we have to learn all made me overlook this; and I think, when I have told you the doctor’s opinion, you will not regret my visit.”

“And this opinion?” Madame Cormier asked.

“His opinion is, that there was no struggle between Caffie and the assassin, whereas the position of Caffie in the chair where he was attacked proves that he was surprised. Therefore, if there was no struggle, there was no button torn off, and all the scaffolding of the police falls to the ground.”

Madame Cormier breathed a profound sigh of deliverance.

“You see,” she said to her son.

“And the doctor’s opinion is not the opinion of the first-comer, it is not even that of an ordinary physician. It is that of the physician who has certified to the death, and who, more than any one, has power, has authority, to say how it was given—by surprise, without struggle, without a button being pulled off.”

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"It is not Doctor Saniel who directs the search of the police, or who inspires it," replied Florentin. "His opinion does not produce a criminal, while the button can—at least for those who believe in the struggle; and between the two the police will not hesitate.

"Already the newspapers laugh at them for not having discovered the assassin, who has rejoined all the others they have let escape. They must follow the track they have started on, and this track—"

He lowered his voice:

"It will lead them here."

"To do that they must pass by the Avenue de Clichy, and that seems unlikely."

"It is the possible that torments me, and not the unlikely, and you cannot but recognize that what I fear is possible. I was at Caffie's the day of the crime. I lost there a button torn off by violence. This button picked up by the police proves, according to them, the criminality of the one who lost it. They will find that I am the one—"

"They will not find you."

"Let us admit that they do find me. How should I defend myself?"

"By proving that you were not in the Rue Sainte-Anne between five and six o'clock, since you were here."

"And what witnesses will prove this alibi? I have only one—mamma. What is the testimony of a mother worth in favor of her son in such circumstances?"

"You will have that of the doctor, affirming that there was no struggle, and consequently no button torn off."

"Affirming, but carrying no proof to support his theory; the opinion of one doctor, which the opinion of another doctor may refute and destroy. And then, to prove that there was no struggle; Doctor Saniel will say that Caffie was surprised. Who could surprise Caffie? To open Caffie's door when the clerk was away, it was necessary to ring first, and then to knock three times in a peculiar way. No stranger could know that, and who could know it better than I?"

Step by step Phillis defended the ground against her brother; but little by little the confidence which at first sustained her weakened. With Saniel she was brave. Between her brother and mother, in this room that had witnessed their fears, not daring to speak loud, she was downcast, and let herself be overcome by their anxieties.

"Truly," she said, "it seems as if we were guilty and not innocent."

“And while we are tormenting ourselves, the criminal, probably, in perfect safety laughs at the police investigations; he had not thought of this button; chance throws it in his way. Luck is for him, and against us—once more.”

This was the complaint that was often on Florentin’s lips. Although he had never been a gambler—and for sufficient reason—in his eyes everything was decided by luck. There are those who are born under a lucky star, others under an unlucky one. There are those who, in the battle of life, receive knocks without being discouraged, because they expect something the next day, as there are those who become discouraged because they expect nothing, and know by experience that tomorrow will be for them what today is, what yesterday was. And Florentin was one of these.



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"Why did I not stay in America?" he said.

"Because you were too unhappy, my poor boy!" Madame Cormier said, whose maternal heart was moved by this cry.

"Am I happier here, or shall I be to-morrow? What does this to-morrow, full of uncertainty and dangers, hold for us?"

"Why do you insist that it has only dangers?" Phillis asked, in a conciliating and caressing tone.

"You always expect the good."

"At least I hope for it, and do not admit deliberately that it is impossible. I do not say that life is always rose-colored, but neither is it always black. I believe it is like the seasons. After winter, which is vile, I confess, come the spring, summer, and autumn."

"Well, if I had the money necessary for the voyage, I would go and pass the end of the winter in a country where it would be less disagreeable than here, and, above all, less dangerous for my constitution."

"You do not say that seriously, I hope?" cried Madame Cormier.

"On the contrary, very seriously."

"We are hardly reunited, and you think of a separation," she said, sadly.

"It is not of a separation that Florentin thinks," cried Phillis, "but of a flight."

"And why not?"

"Because only the guilty fly."

"It is exactly the contrary. The intelligent criminals stay, and, as generally they are resolute men, they know beforehand that they are able to face the danger; while the innocent, timid like myself, or the unlucky, lose their heads and fly, because they know beforehand, also, that if a danger threatens them, it will crush them. That is why I would return to America if I could pay my passage; at least I should feel easy there."

There was a moment of silence, during which each one seemed to have no thought but to finish dinner.

"Granting that this project is not likely," Florentin said, "I have another idea."

"Why do you have ideas?" Phillis asked.

"I wish you were in my place; we should see if you would not have them."

"I assure you that I am in your place, and that your trouble is mine, only it does not betray itself in the same manner. But what is your idea?"

"It is to find Valerius and tell him all."

"And who will answer to us for Valerius's discretion?" asked Madame Cormier. "Would it not be the greatest imprudence that you could commit? One cannot play with a secret of this importance."

"Valerius is an honest man."

"It is because he cannot work when political, or rather patriotic, affairs go wrong, that you say this."

"And why not? With a poor man who lives in a small way by his work, are not this care and pride in his country marks of an honorable heart?"

"I grant the honorable heart, but it is another reason for being prudent with him," Phillis said. "Precisely because he may be what you think, reserve is necessary. You tell him what is passed. If he accepts it and your innocence, it is well; he will not betray your secret voluntarily nor by stupidity. But he will not accept it; he will look beyond. He will suppose that you wish to deceive him, and he will suspect you. In that case, would he not go and tell all to the police commissioner of our quarter? As for me, I think it is a danger that it would be foolish to risk."

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"And, according to you, what is to be done?"

"Nothing; that is, wait, since there are a thousand chances against one for our uneasiness, and we exaggerate those that may never be realized."

"Well, let us wait," he said. "Moreover, I like that; at the least, I have no responsibilities. What can happen will happen."

CHAPTER XIX

THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR

In order to put the button found at Caffies on the track of the assassin, it required that it should have come from a Parisian tailor, or, at least, a French one, and that the trousers had not been sold by a ready-made clothing-house, where the names of customers are not kept.

The task of the police was therefore difficult, as weak, also, were the chances of success. As Saniei had said, it was like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, to go to each tailor in Paris.

But this was not their way of proceeding. In place of trying to find those who used these buttons, they looked for those who made them or sold them, and suddenly, without going farther than the directory, they found this manufacturer: "A. Pelinotte, manufacturer of metal buttons for trousers; trademark, A.P., crown and cock; Faubourg du Temple."

At first this manufacturer was not disposed to answer questions of the agent who went to see him; but when he began to understand that he might reap some advantage from the affair, like the good merchant that he was, young and active, he put his books and clerks at his disposition. His boast was, in effect, that his buttons, thanks to a brass bonnet around which the thread was rolled instead of passing through the holes, never cut the thread and could not be broken. When they came off it was with a piece of the cloth. What better justification of his pretensions, what better advertisement than his button torn off with a piece of the trousers of the assassin? The affair would go before the assizes, and in all the newspapers there would be mention of the "A. P. buttons."

He was asked for his customers' names, and after a few days the search began, guided by a list so exact that useless steps were spared.

One morning a detective reached the Avenue de Clichy, and found the tailor Valerius in his shop, reading a newspaper. For it was not only when the country was in danger that Valerius had a passion for reading papers, but every morning and evening.

Nothing that was published in the papers escaped him, and at the first words of the agent he understood immediately about what he was to be questioned.

"It is concerning the affair in the Rue Sainte-Anne that you wish this information?" he said.

"Frankly, yes."

"Well, frankly also, I do not know if the secrets of the profession permit me to answer you."

The agent, who was by no means stupid, immediately understood the man's character, and instead of yielding to the desire to laugh, caused by this reply honestly made by this good-natured man, whose long, black, bushy beard and bald head accentuated his gravity, he yielded to the necessity of the occasion.

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"That is a question to discuss."

"Then let us discuss it. A customer, confiding in my honesty and discretion, gives me an order to make a pair of trousers; he pays me as he agreed, without beating me down, and on the day he promised. We are loyal to each other. I give him a pair of good trousers, honestly made, and he pays me with good money. We are even. Have I the right afterward, by imprudent words, or otherwise, to furnish clews against him? The case is a delicate one."

"Do you place the interest of the individual above that of society?"

"When it is a question of a professional secret, yes. Where should we be if the lawyer, the notary, the doctor, the confessor, the tailor, could accept compromises on this point of doctrine? It would be anarchy, simply, and in the end it would be the interest of society that would suffer."

The agent, who had no time to lose, began to be impatient.

"I will tell you," he said, "that the tailor, however important his profession may be, is not placed exactly as the doctor or confessor. Have you not a book in which you write your customers' orders?"

"Certainly."

"So that if you persevere in a theory, pushing it to an extreme, I need only to go to the commissioner of your quarter, who, in virtue of the power of the law conferred upon him, will seize your books."

"That would be by violence, and my responsibility would be at an end."

"And in these books the judge would see to whom you have furnished trousers of this stuff. It would only remain then to discover in whose interest you have wished to escape the investigations of the law."

Saying this, he took from his pocket a small box, and taking out a piece of paper, he took from it a button to which adhered a piece of navy blue stuff.

Valerius, who was not in the least moved by the threat of the commissioner, for he was a man to brave martyrdom, looked at the box curiously. When the agent displayed the button, a movement of great surprise escaped him.

"You see," the agent exclaimed, "that you know this cloth!"

"Will you permit me to look at it?" Valerius asked.

“Willingly, but on condition that you do not touch it; it is precious.”

Valerius took the box, and approaching the front of the shop, looked at the button and the piece of cloth.

“It is a button marked ‘A.P.’ as you see, and we know that you use these buttons.”

“I do not deny it; they are good buttons, and I give only good things to my customers.”

Returning the box to the agent, he took a large book and began to turn over the leaves; pieces of cloth were pasted on the pages, and at the side were several lines of large handwriting. Arriving at a page where was a piece of blue cloth, he took the box and compared this piece with that of the button, examining it by daylight.

“Sir,” he said, “I am going to tell you some very serious things.”

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"I am listening."

"We hold the assassin of the Rue Sainte-Anne, and it is I who will give you the means of discovering him."

"You have made trousers of this cloth?"

"I have made three pairs; but there is only one pair that can interest you, that of the assassin. I have just told you that the secrets of the profession prevented me from replying to your questions, but what I have just seen frees my conscience. As I explained to you, when I make a pair of good trousers for a customer who pays me in good money, I do not think I have the right to reveal the affairs of my client to any one in the world, even to the law."

"I understand," interrupted the agent, whose impatience increased.

"But this reserve on my part rests on reciprocity: to a good customer, a good tailor. If the customer is not good the reciprocity ceases, or, rather, it continues on another footing—that of war; if any one treats me badly, I return the same. The trousers to which this stuff belongs"—he showed the button—"I made for an individual whom I do not know, and who presented himself to me as an Alsatian, which I believed so much more easily, because he spoke with a strong foreign accent. These trousers—I need not tell you how careful I was with them. I am a patriot, sir. He agreed to pay for them on delivery. When they were delivered, the young apprentice who took them had the weakness to not insist upon the money. I went to him, but could obtain nothing; he would pay me the next day, and so on. Finally he disappeared, leaving no address."

"And this customer?"

"I will give you his name without the slightest hesitation. Fritzner, not an Alsatian as I believed, but a Prussian to a certainty, who surely struck the blow; his disappearance the day after the crime is the proof of it."

"You say that you were not able to procure his address?"

"But you, who have other means at your disposal, can find him. He is twenty-seven or thirty years old, of middle height, blue eyes, a blond beard, and a complete blue suit of this cloth."

The agent wrote this description in his note-book as the tailor gave it to him.

"If he has not left Paris with these stolen thirty-five thousand francs, we shall find him, and the thanks will be yours," he said.

"I am happy to be able to do anything for you."

The agent was going, but he thought better of it.

“You said that you had made three suits of this cloth?”

“Yes, but there is only this Fritzner who counts. The two others are honest men, well known in the quarter, and they paid me honestly.”

“Since they have no cause for alarm, you need have no scruples in naming them. It is not in the name of justice that I ask their names, but for myself.—They will look well in my report and will prove that I pushed my investigations thoroughly.”

“One is a merchant in the Rue Truffant, and is called Monsieur Blanchet; the other is a young man just arrived from America, and his name is Monsieur Florentin Cormier.”

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"You say Florentin Cormier?" the agent asked, who remembered this name was that of one who had seen Caffie on the day of the crime. "Do you know him?"

"Not exactly; it is the first time that I have made clothes for him. But I know his mother and sister, who have lived in the Rue des Moines five or six years at least; good, honest people, who work hard and have no debts."

The next morning about ten o'clock, a short time after Phillis's departure, Florentin, who was reading the newspaper in the dining-room, while his mother prepared the breakfast, heard stealthy steps that stopped on the landing before their door. His ear was too familiar with the ordinary sounds in the house to be deceived; there was in these steps a hesitation or a precaution which evidently betrayed a stranger, and with the few connections they had, a stranger was surely an enemy—the one whom he expected.

A ring of the doorbell, given by a firm hand, made him jump from his chair. He did not hesitate; slowly, and with an air of indifference, he opened the door.

He saw before him a man of about forty years, with a polite and shrewd face, dressed in a short coat, and wearing a flat hat.

"Monsieur Florentin Cormier?"

"I am he."

And he asked him to come in.

"The judge desires to see you at his office."

Madame Cormier came from the kitchen in time to hear these few words, and if Florentin had not motioned to her to be silent, she would have betrayed herself. The words on her lips were:

"You came to arrest my son!" They would have escaped her, but she crushed them back.

"And can you tell me for what affair the judge summons me?" Florentin asked, steadying his voice.

"For the Caffie affair."

"And at what hour should I present myself before the judge?"

"Immediately."



"But my son has not breakfasted!" Madame Cormier exclaimed. "At least, take something before going, my dear child."

"It is not worth while."

He made a sign to her that she should not insist. His throat was too tight to swallow a piece of bread, and it was important that he should not betray his emotion before this agent.

"I am ready," he said.

Going to his mother he embraced her, but lightly, without effusion, as if he were only to be absent a short time.

"By-and-by."

She was distracted; but, understanding that she would compromise her son if she yielded to her feelings, she controlled herself.

CHAPTER XX

A TIGHTENING CHAIN

As it was a part that he played, Florentin said to himself that he would play it to the best of his ability in entering the skin of the person he wished to be, and this part was that of a witness.

He had been Caffie's clerk; the justice would interrogate him about his old employer, and nothing would be more natural. It was that only, and nothing but that, which he could admit; consequently, he should interest himself in the police investigations, and have the curiosity to learn how they stood.

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"Have you advanced far in the Caffie affair?" he asked the agent as they walked along.

"I do not know," the agent answered, who thought it prudent to be reserved. "I know nothing more than the newspapers tell."

On leaving his mother's house, Florentin observed on the other side of the street a man who appeared to be stationed there; at the end of several minutes, on turning a corner, he saw that this man followed them at a certain distance. Then it was not a simple appearance before the judge, for such precautions are not taken with a witness.

When they reached the Place Clichy, the agent asked him if he would take a carriage, but he declined. What good was it? It was a useless expense.

Then he saw the agent raise his hat, as if bowing to some one, but this bow was certainly not made to any one; and immediately, the man who had followed them approached. The raising of the hat was a signal. As from the deserted quarters of the Batignolles they entered the crowd, they feared he might try to escape. The character of the arrest became accentuated.

After the presentiments and fears that had tormented him during the last few days this did not astonish him, but since they took these precautions with him, all was not yet decided. He must, then, defend himself to the utmost. Distracted before the danger came, he felt less weak now that he was in it.

On arriving at the Palais de justice he was introduced immediately into the judge's office. But he did not attend to him at once; he was questioning a woman, and Florentin examined him by stealth. He saw a man of elegant and easy figure, still young, with nothing solemn or imposing about him, having more the air of a boulevardier or of a sportsman than of a magistrate.

While continuing his questioning, he also examined Florentin, but with a rapid glance, without persistence, carelessly, and simply because his eyes fell upon him. Before a table a clerk was writing, and near the door two policemen waited, with the weary, empty faces of men whose minds are elsewhere.

Soon the judge turned his head toward them.

"You may take away the accused."

Then, immediately addressing Florentin, he asked him his name, his Christian names, and his residence.

"You have been the clerk of the agent of affairs, Caffie. Why did you leave him?"

"Because my work was too heavy."

“You are afraid of work?”

“No, when it is not too hard; it was at his office, and left me no time to work for myself. I was obliged to reach his office at eight o’clock in the morning, breakfast there, and did not leave until seven to dine with my mother at the Batignolles. I had an hour and a half for that; at half-past eight I had to return, and stay until ten or half-past. In accepting this position I believed that I should be able to finish my education, interrupted by the death of my father, and to study law and become something better than a miserable clerk of a business man. It was impossible with Monsieur Caffie, so I left him, and this was the only reason why we separated.”

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"Where have you been since?"

This was a delicate question, and one that Florentin dreaded, for it might raise prejudices that nothing would destroy. However, he must reply, for what he would not tell himself others would reveal; an investigation on this point was too easy.

"With another business man, Monsieur Savoureux, Rue de la Victoire, where I was not obliged to work in the evening. I stayed there about three months, and then went to America."

"Why?"

"Because, when I began to study seriously, I found that my studies had been neglected too long to make it possible for me to take them up again. I had forgotten nearly all I had learned. I should, without doubt, fail in my examination, and I should only begin the law too late. I left France for America, where I hoped to find a good situation."

"How long since your return?"

"Three weeks."

"And you went to see Caffie?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To ask him for a recommendation to replace the one he gave me, which I had lost."

"It was the day of the crime?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"I reached his house about a quarter to three, and I left about half-past three."

"Did he give you the certificate for which you asked?"

"Yes; here it is."

And, taking it from his pocket, he presented it to the judge. It was a paper saying that, during the time that M. Florentin Cormier was his clerk, Caffie was entirely satisfied with him; with his work, as with his accuracy and probity.

"And you did not return to him during the evening?" the judge asked.

"Why should I return? I had obtained what I desired."

"Well, did you or did you not return?"

"I did not return to him."

"Do you remember what you did on leaving Caffie's house?"

If Florentin had indulged in the smallest illusion about his appearance before the judge, the manner of conducting the interview would have destroyed it. It was not a witness who was being questioned, it was a culprit. He had not to enlighten the justice, he had to defend himself.

"Perfectly," he said. "It is not so long ago. On leaving the Rue Sainte-Anne, as I had nothing to do, I went down to the quays, and looked at the old books from the Pont Royale to the Institute; but at this moment a heavy shower came on, and I returned to the Batignolles, where I remained with my mother."

"What time was it when you reached your mother's house?"

"A few minutes after five."

"Can you not say exactly?"

"About a quarter past five, a few minutes more or less."

"And you did not go out again?"

"No."

"Did any one call at your mother's after you arrived there?"

"No one. My sister came in at seven o'clock, as usual, when she returned from her lesson."

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"Before you went up to your rooms did you speak with any of the other lodgers?"

"No."

There was a pause, and Florentin felt the judge's eyes fixed on him with an aggravating persistency. It seemed as if this look, which enveloped him from head to foot, wished to penetrate his inmost thoughts.

"Another thing," said the judge. "You did not lose a trousers' button while you were with Caffie?"

Florentin expected this question, and for some time he had considered what answer he should make to it. To deny was impossible. It would be easy to convict him of a fib, for the fact of the question being asked was sufficient to say there was proof that the button was his. He must, then, confess the truth, grave as it might be.

"Yes," he said, "and this is how—"

He related in detail the story of the bundle of papers placed on the highest shelf of the cases, his slipping on the ladder, and the loss of the button, which he did not discover until he was in the street.

The judge opened a drawer and took from it a small box, from which he took a button that he handed to Florentin.

"Is that it?" he asked.

Florentin looked at it.

"It is difficult for me to answer," he said, finally; "one button resembles another."

"Not always."

"In that case, it would be necessary for me to have observed the form of the one I lost, and I gave no attention to it. It seems to me that no one knows exactly how, or of what, the buttons are made that they wear."

The judge examined him anew.

"But are not the trousers that you wear to-day the same from which this button was torn?"

"It is the pair I wore the day I called on Monsieur Caffie."



“Then it is quite easy to compare the button that I show you with those on your trousers, and your answer becomes easy.”

It was impossible to escape this verification.

“Unbutton your vest,” said the judge, “and make your comparison with care—with all the care that you think wise. The question has some importance.”

Florentin felt it only too much, the importance of this question, but as it was set before him, he could not but answer frankly.

He unbuttoned his waistcoat, and compared the button with his.

“I believe that it is really the button that I lost,” he said.

Although he endeavored not to betray his anguish, he felt that his voice trembled, and that it had a hoarse sound. Then he wished to explain this emotion.

“This is a truly terrible position for me,” he said.

The judge did not reply.

“But because I lost a button at Monsieur Caffie’s, it does not follow that it was torn off in a struggle.”

“You have your theory, and you will make the most of it, but this is not the place. I have only one more question to ask: By what button have you replaced the one you lost?”

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"By the first one I came across."

"Who sewed it on?"

"I did."

"Are you in the habit of sewing on your buttons yourself?"

Although the judge did not press this question by his tone, nor by the form in which he made it, Florentin saw the strength of the accusation that his reply would make against him.

"Sometimes," he said.

"And yet, on returning home, you found your mother, you told me. Was there any reason why she could not sew this button on for you?"

"I did not ask her to do it."

"But when she saw you sewing it, did she not take the needle from your hands?"

"She did not see me."

"Why?"

"She was occupied preparing our dinner."

"That is sufficient."

"I was in the entry of our apartment, where I have slept since my return; my mother was in the kitchen."

"Is there no communication between the kitchen and the entry?"

"The door was closed."

A flood of words rushed to his lips, to protest against the conclusions which seemed to follow these answers, but he kept them back. He saw himself caught in a net, and all his efforts to free himself only bound him more strongly.

As he was asked no more questions it seemed to him best to say nothing, and he was silent a long time, of the duration of which he was only vaguely conscious.

The judge talked in a low tone, the recorder wrote rapidly, and he heard only a monotonous murmur that interrupted the scratching of a pen on the paper.

"Your testimony will now be read to you," the judge said.

He wished to give all his attention to this reading, but he soon lost the thread of it. The impression it made upon him, however, was that it faithfully reproduced all that he had said, and he signed it.

"Now," said the judge, "my duty obliges me, in presence of the charges which emanate from your testimony, to deliver against you a 'manda depot'."

Florentin received this blow without flinching.

"I know," he said, "that all the protestations I might make would have no effect at this moment; I therefore spare you them. But I have a favor to ask of you; it is to permit me to write to my mother and sister the news of my arrest—they love me tenderly. Oh, you shall read my letter!"

"You may, sir."

CHAPTER XXI

"Regarding the Caffie affair"

After the departure of her son and the detective, Madame Cormier was prostrated. Her son! Her Florentin! The poor child! And she was sunk in despair.

Had they not suffered enough? Was this new proof necessary? Why had their life been so unmercifully cruel? Why had not Dr. Sanier let her die? At least she would not have seen this last catastrophe, this disgrace; her son accused of assassination, in prison, at the assizes!

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Heretofore when she had yielded to her feelings and bewailed their sad lot, Phillis was at hand to cheer and caress her; but now she was alone in her deserted apartment, no one to hear her, see her, nor scold. Why should she not abandon herself to tears? She wept and trembled, but the moment arrived when, after having reached the extreme of despair, which showed her her son condemned as an assassin, and executed, she stopped and asked herself if she had not gone too far.

He would return; certainly she might expect him. And she waited for him without breakfasting; he would not like to sit down to the table all alone, the poor child.

Besides, she was too profoundly overcome to eat. She arranged the fire with care, so that the haricot of mutton would keep warm, for it was his favorite dish.

Minutes and hours passed and he did not return. Her anguish came back; a witness would not be retained so long by the judge. Had they arrested him? Then what would become of him?

She fell into a state of tears and despair, and longed for Phillis. Fortunately she would not be late to-day. Finally a quick, light step was heard on the landing, and as soon as she could, Madame Cormier went to open the door, and was stunned on seeing the agitated face of her daughter. Evidently Phillis was surprised by the sudden opening of the door.

"You know all, then?" Madame Cormier cried.

Phillis put her arms about her, and drew her into the dining-room, where she made her sit down.

"Becalm," she said. "They will not keep him."

"You know some way?"

"We will find a way. I promise you that they will not keep him."

"You are sure?"

"I promise you."

"You give me life. But how did you know?"

"He wrote to me. The concierge gave me his letter, which had just come."

"What does he say?"

Madame Cormier took the letter that Phillis handed her, but the paper shook so violently in her trembling hand that she could not read.

“Read it to me.”

Phillis took it and read

“Dear little sister: After listening to my story, the judge retains me. Soften for mamma the pain of this blow. Make her understand that they will soon acknowledge the falseness of this accusation; and, on your part, try to make this falseness evident, while on mine, I will work to prove my innocence.

“Embrace poor mamma for me, and find in your tenderness, strength, and love, some consolation for her; mine will be to think that you are near her, dear little beloved sister.

“Florentin.”

“And it is this honest boy that they accuse of assassination!” cried Madame Cormier, beginning to weep.

It required several minutes for Phillis to quiet her a little.

“We must think of him, mamma; we must not give up.”

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"You are going to do something, are you not, my little Phillis?"

"I am going to find Doctor SanieL."

"He is a doctor, not a lawyer."

"It is exactly as a doctor that he can save Florentin. He knows that Caffie was killed without a struggle between him and the assassin; consequently without the wrenching off of a button. He will say it and prove it to the judge, and Florentin's innocence is evident. I am going to see him."

"I beg of you, do not leave me alone too long."

"I will come back immediately."

Phillis ran from the Batignolles to the Rue Louis-le-Grand. In answer to her ring, Joseph, who had returned to his place in the anteroom, opened the door, and as SanieL was alone, she went immediately to his office.

"What is the matter?" he asked, on seeing her agitation.

"My brother is arrested."

"Ah! The poor boy!"

What he had said to her on explaining that this arrest could not take place was sincere; he believed it, and he more than believed it, he wished it. When he decided to kill Caffie he had not thought that the law would ever discover a criminal; it would be a crime that would remain unpunished, as so many were, and no one would be disturbed. But now the law had found and arrested one who was the brother of the woman he loved.

"How was he arrested?" he asked, as much for the sake of knowing as to recover himself.

She told what she knew, and read Florentin's letter.

"He is a good boy, your brother," he said, as if talking to himself.

"You will save him?"

"How can I?"

This cry escaped him without her understanding its weight; without her divining the expression of anxious curiosity in his glance.

"To whom shall I address myself, if not to you? Are you not everything to me? My support, my guide, my counsel, my God!"

She explained what she wished him to do. Once more an exclamation escaped Saniel.

"You wish me to go to the judge—me?"

"Who, better than you, can explain how things happened?"

Saniel, who had recovered from his first feeling of surprise, did not flinch. Evidently she spoke with entire honesty, suspecting nothing, and it would be folly to look for more than she said.

"But I cannot present myself before a judge in such away," he said. "It is he who sends for those he wants to see."

"Why can you not go to his court, since you know things which will throw light upon it?"

"Is it truly easy to go before this court? In going before it, I make myself the defender of your brother."

"That is exactly what I ask of you."

"And in presenting myself as his defender, I take away the weight of my deposition, which would have more authority if it were that of a simple witness."

"But when will you be asked for this deposition? Think of Florentin's sufferings during this time, of mamma's, and of mine. He may lose his head; he may kill himself. His spirit is not strong, nor is mamma's. How will they bear all that the newspapers will publish?"

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Saniel hesitated a moment.

"Well, I will go," he said. "Not this evening, it is too late, but tomorrow."

"Oh, dear Victor!" she exclaimed, pressing him in her arms, "I knew that you would save him. We will owe you his life, as we owe you mamma's, as I owe you happiness. Am I not right to say you are my God?"

After she was gone he had a moment of repentance in which he regretted this weakness; for it was a weakness, a stupid sentimentalism, unworthy of a sensible man, who should not permit himself to be thus touched and involved. Why should he go and invite danger when he could be quiet, without any one giving him a thought? Was it not folly? The law wanted a criminal. Public curiosity demanded one. Why take away the one that they had? If he succeeded, would they not look for another? It was imprudence, and, to use the true word, madness. Now that he was no longer under the influence of Phillis's beautiful, tearful eyes, he would not commit this imprudence. All the evening this idea strengthened, and when he went to bed his resolution was taken. He would not go to the judge.

But on awakening, he was surprised to find that this resolution of the evening was not that of the morning, and that this dual personality, which had already struck him, asserted itself anew. It was at night that he resolved to kill Caffie, and he committed the deed in the evening. It was in the morning that he had abandoned the idea, as it was in the morning that he revoked the decision made the previous evening not to go to the rescue of this poor boy. Of what then, was the will of man made, undulating like the sea, and variable as the wind, that he had the folly to believe his was firm?

At noon he went to the Palais de justice and sent in his card to the judge, on which he wrote these words: "Regarding the Caffie affair."

He was received almost immediately, and briefly explained how, according to his opinion, Caffie was killed quickly and suddenly by a firm and skilful hand, that of a killer by profession.

"That is the conclusion of your report," the judge said.

"What I could not point out in my report, as I did not know of the finding of the button and the opinion it has led to, is that there was no struggle between the assassin and the victim, as is generally supposed."

And medically he demonstrated how this struggle was impossible.

The judge listened attentively, without a word, without interruption.

"Do you know this young man?" he asked.

"I have seen him only once; but I know his mother, who was my patient, and it is at her instigation that I decided to make this explanation to you."

"Without doubt, it has its value, but I must tell you that it tends in no way to destroy our hypothesis."

"But if it has no foundation?"

"I must tell you that you are negative, doctor, and not suggestive. We have a criminal and you have not. Do you see one?"

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Saniel thought that the judge looked at him with a disagreeable persistency.

"No," he said, sharply.

Then rising, he said, more calmly:

"That is not in my line."

He had nothing to do but to retire, which he did; and on passing through the vestibule he said to himself that the magistrate was right. He believed that he held a criminal. Why should he let him go?

As for him, he had done what he could.

CHAPTER XXII

NOUGAREDE'S BRIDE

Saniel passed the first proofs of his two 'concours' so brilliantly that the results of either were not doubtful. In delivering his thesis for the 'agregation', he commanded the admiration of his audience; by turns aggressive, severe, ironical, eloquent, he reduced his adversary to such an extremity that, overwhelmed, he was not able to reply. In his lecture at the hospital, his eloquence and his clear demonstration convinced the judges who were opposed to him that he was in the right.

What could Caffie's death weigh, placed in the balance with these results? So little that it counted for nothing, and would have held no place in his thoughts if it had not been mixed in his mind with the accusation that would send Florentin to the assizes.

Cleared of this fact, the death of the old man rarely crossed his mind. He had other things in his head, truly, than this memory which brought neither regret nor remorse; and it was not at this moment, when he touched the end at which he aimed, that he would embarrass himself, or sadden his triumph, with Caffie.

A little before the expiration of the two months, during which time the poste restante retained the letters containing the thirty thousand francs, he called for them, and readdressed and mailed them to other post-offices.

What did he want of this money, which was, in reality, a nuisance? His habits remained the same, except that he no longer struggled with his creditors, and paid cash for everything. He had no desire to make any change in his former mode of living; his ambition was otherwise and higher than in the small satisfactions, very small for him, that money gives.

Days passed without a thought of Caffie, except in connection with Florentin. But Florentin, and above all, Phillis, reminded him that the comfort he enjoyed he owed to Caffie's death, and he was troubled accordingly.

He did not believe that the investigations of the law would reach him now; everything conspired to confirm him in his scrutiny. That which he arranged so laboriously had succeeded according to his wish, and the only imprudence that he had committed, in a moment of aberration, seemed not to have been observed; no one had noticed his presence in the cafe opposite Caffie's house, and no one was astonished at his pertinacity in remaining there at an hour so unusual.

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But it was not enough that he was safe; he must prevent Florentin from being unjustly condemned for a crime of which he was innocent. It was a great deal that he should be imprisoned, that his sister should be in despair, and his mother ill from chagrin; but if he should be sent to the scaffold or to the galleys, it would be too much. In itself the death of Caffie was a small thing; it became atrocious if it led to such an ending.

He did not wish this to happen, and he would do everything not only to prevent the condemnation, but to shorten the imprisonment.

It was this sentiment that he obeyed in going to see the judge; but the manner in which he was received, showing him that the law was not disposed to let its hypothesis be changed by a simple medical demonstration, threw him into a state of uneasiness and perplexity.

Without doubt, any one else in his place would have let things take their course, and since the law had a criminal with which it contented itself, would have done nothing to release him. While it followed its hypothesis to prove the criminality of the one it held, it would not look elsewhere; when it had condemned him, all would be finished; the Caffie affair would be buried, as Caffie himself was buried; silence and oblivion would give him security. The crime punished, the conscience of the public satisfied, it would ask for no more, not even to know if the debt was paid by the one who really owed it; it was paid, and that was sufficient. But he was not "any one else," and if he found the death of this old scamp legitimate, it was on the condition that Florentin did not pay for it, from whom he had not profited.

Florentin must be released as soon as possible, and it was his duty to interest himself in his behalf—his imperative duty not only toward Phillis, but toward himself.

He told Phillis that until Florentin came before the jury, he could do nothing, or almost nothing. When the time came, he would assert his authority, and speaking in the name of science, he would prove to the jury that the story of the button was an invention of the police, who were pushed to extremes, and would not bear examination; but until then the poor boy remained at Mazas, and however assured one might be at this moment of an acquittal, an immediate 'ordonnance de non-lieu' was of more value, if it could be obtained.

For this the intervention and direction of a doctor were of little use; it required that of an advocate.

Whom should he have? Phillis would have liked to apply to the most illustrious, to him who, by his talent, authority, and success, would win all his cases. But Saniei explained to her that workers of miracles were probably as difficult to find at the bar as in the medical profession, and that, if they did exist, they would expect a large fee. To tell the truth, he would have willingly given the thirty thousand francs in the 'poste restante', or a

large part of this sum, to give Florentin his liberty; but it would be imprudent to take out the bills at this moment, and he could not declare that he had thirty thousand francs, or even ten thousand. He decided with Phillis to consult Brigard.

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On a Wednesday he went to the parlor in the Rue Vaugirard, where he had not been since his experiment with Glady. As usual, he was received affectionately by Crozat, who scolded him for coming so rarely, and as usual also, in order not to disturb the discussion that was going on, he remained standing near the door.

This evening the theme of the discourse was a phrase of Chateaubriand's: "The tiger kills and sleeps; man kills and is sleepless." On listening to the discussion, Saniei said to himself that it was truly a pity not to be able to reply to all this rhetoric by a simple fact of personal experience. He had never slept so well, so tranquilly, as since Caffie's death, which relieved him from all the cares that in these last months had tormented and broken his sleep so much.

At the end, Brigard concluded the discussion on saying that nothing better proved the power of the human conscience than this difference between man and beast.

When they had all gone but Brigard, and Saniei was alone with him and Crozat, he stated his desire.

"But is it the Caffie affair?"

"Exactly."

And he explained in detail the interest he felt in Florentin, the son of one of his patients, and also the situation of this patient.

Brigard strongly recommended Nougarede, and described his recent successes before a jury. Crozat concurred with Brigard, and advised Saniei to see Nougarede the day after to-morrow.

"In the morning, because after the Palais, Nougarede will be at his wedding, which, as you know, prevents him from coming here this evening."

"What! Nougarede married?" exclaimed Saniei, surprised that the favorite disciple gave this lie to the doctrine and examples of his master.

"My God, yes! We must not be too hard on him.

"He submits to the fate of a special environment. Without our knowledge, Nougarede, we may say it now, and ought to say it, was the happy lover of a charming young person, the daughter of one of our most distinguished actresses, who was brought up in a fashionable convent. You see the situation. The result of this liaison was a child, a delicious little boy. It seemed quite natural that they should live 'en union libre', since they loved each other, and not weakened by legalities the strength of those that attached them to this child. But the mother is an actress, as I have told you, and wished her daughter to receive all the sacraments that the law and the church can confer. She



managed so well that poor Nougarede yielded. He goes to the mayor, to the church; he legitimizes the child, and he even accepts a dot of two hundred thousand francs. I pity him, the unfortunate man! But I confess that I have the weakness to not condemn him as he would deserve if he married in any other way.”

Saniel was a little surprised at these points of resemblance with the charming young person that Caffie had proposed to him. At the least, it was curious; but if it were the same woman, he was not vexed to see that Nougarede had been less difficult than himself.

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CHAPTER XXIII

STUNNING NEWS

On going to see Nougarede, Saniei vaguely fancied the lawyer would tell him that an acquittal was certain if Florentin passed to the assizes, and even that an 'ordonnance de non-lieu' was probable. But his hope was not realized.

"The adventure of the button for you or me would not have the same gravity as for this boy; we have no antecedents on which presumptions might be established, but he has. The forty-five francs which constitute an embezzlement for a salaried man will be, certainly, a starting-point for the accusation; one commences by a weakness and finishes by a crime. Do you not hear the advocate-general? He will begin by presenting the portrait of the honest, laborious, exact, scrupulous clerk, content with a little, and getting satisfaction from his duties accomplished; then, in opposition, he will pass to the clerk of to-day, as irregular in his work as in his conduct, full of desires, in a hurry to enjoy, discontented with everything and everybody, with others as with himself. And he will go on to speak of the embezzlement of the forty-five francs as the beginning of the crimes that led to the assassination. You may be sure if the affair goes to the assizes that you will hear these words and more, and I assure you that it will be difficult for us to destroy the impression that he will produce on the jury. But I hope we shall succeed."

He had to give up the idea of obtaining the 'ordonnance de non-lieu', and to tell himself that the 'affaire' would come before the assizes; but it does not follow that one is condemned for what one is accused of, and Saniei persisted in believing that Florentin would not be. Assuredly, the prison was hard for the poor boy, and the trial before the jury, with all the ignominy that necessarily accompanies it, would be harder yet. But, after all, it would all disappear in the joy of acquittal; when that time came, there would be found, surely, some ingenious idea, sympathy, effective support, to pay him for all that he would have suffered. Certainly, things would come to pass thus, and the acquittal would be carried with a high hand.

He said this to himself again and again, and from the day when he put the affair in Nougarede's hands, he often went to see him, to hear him repeat it.

"He cannot be condemned; can he?"

"One may always be condemned, even when one is innocent; as one may die at any time, you know that, even with excellent health."

In one of these visits he met Madame Nougarede, who had then been several days married, and on recognizing in her the young virgin with a child, of whom Caffie showed him the portrait, he was strengthened in his idea that conscience, such as it was understood, was decidedly a strange weighing-machine, which might be made to say

whatever one chose. Of what good were these hypocrisies, and whom did they deceive?

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Although he had told Phillis repeatedly that an acquittal was certain, and that he had promised her he would do all he could for Florentin—which he really did—she did not give entirely into his hands, or into Nougarede's, the task of defending her brother, but worked with them in his defence.

Nougarede believed that the delay in bringing the affair before the assizes was caused by the attempts to learn if, during his residence in America, Florentin had not worked in some large meat-shop or sheepfold, where he would have learned to use a butcher knife, which was the chief point for the accusation. Phillis wrote to the various towns where Florentin had lived, and to tell the truth, he had worked at La Plata for six months as accountant in a large sheepfold, but never slaughtered the sheep.

When she received a letter, she carried it immediately to Sanie!l, and then to Nougarede; and, at the same time, on all sides, in Paris, among those who had held relations with her brother, she sought for testimony that should prove to the jury that he could not be the man that his accusers believed him. It was thus that, all alone, without other means of action than those which she found in her sisterly tenderness and bravery, she organized an investigation parallel to that of the law, which, on the day of judgment, would carry a certain weight, it seemed, with the conviction of the jury, showing them what had been the true life of this irregular and debauched man, capable of anything to glut his appetite and satisfy his desires.

Each time that she obtained a favorable deposition, she ran to Sanie!l to tell him, and then together they repeated that a conviction was impossible.

"You are sure, are you not?"

"Have I not always told you so?"

He had also said that Florentin could not be arrested, basing the accusation on the torn button, and he had said that certainly an 'ordonnance de non-lieu' would be given by the judge; but they wished to remember neither the one nor the other.

Things had reached this state, when one Saturday evening Phillis arrived at Sanie!l's, radiant.

As soon as the door opened she exclaimed:

"He is saved!"

"An ordonnance de non-lieu?"

"No; but now it is of little importance. We can go to the assizes."

She breathed a sigh which showed how great were her fears, in spite of the confidence she expressed when she repeated that conviction was impossible.

He left his desk, and going toward her, took her in his arms, and made her sit down beside him on the divan.

“You will see that I do not let myself be carried away by an illusion, and that, as I tell you, he is saved, really saved. You know that an illustrated paper has published his portrait?”

“I do not read illustrated papers.”

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"You could have seen them at the kiosks where they are displayed. It is there that I saw them yesterday morning when I went out, and I was petrified, red with shame, distracted, not knowing where to hide myself. 'Florentin Cormier, the assassin of the Rue Sainte-Anne.' Is it not infamous that an innocent person should be thus dishonored? This was what I said to myself. Where did the paper get the photograph? They came to ask us for one, but you can imagine how I treated them, not knowing how anything good for us would result from such a disgrace."

"And what is the result?"

"The proof that it is not Florentin who was with Caffie at the moment when the assassination took place. All day yesterday and all this morning I was filled with the feeling of disgrace that followed me, when at three o'clock I received this little note from the concierge of the Rue Sainte-Anne."

She took from her pocket a piece of paper folded in the form of a letter, which she handed to Saniel.

"Mademoiselle: If you will pass through the Rue Sainte-Anne, I have something to tell you that will give you a great deal of pleasure, I believe.

"I am your servant,

"Widow ANAIS BOUCHU."

"You know the lame old concierge has never been willing to admit that my brother could be guilty. Florentin was polite and kind to her during his stay with Caffie, and she is grateful. Very often she has said to me that she is certain the guilty one would be found, and that when it was announced I must tell her. Instead of my telling her the good news, she has written to me. You may be sure I hurried to the Rue Sainte-Anne, expecting to hear something favorable, but we have a proof. When I arrived, the old woman took both of my hands, and told me that she would conduct me immediately to a lady who saw Caffie's assassin."

"Saw him!" exclaimed Saniel, struck by a blow that shook him from head to foot.

"She saw him perfectly, as I tell you. She added that this lady was the proprietor of the house, and that she lived in the second wing of the building, on the second story on the court, just opposite to Caffie's office. This lady, who is called Madame Dammauville, widow of a lawyer, is afflicted with paralysis, and I believe has not left her room for a year. The concierge explained this to me while crossing the court and mounting the stairs, but would say no more."

If Phillis had been able to observe Saniel, she would have seen him pale to such a degree that his lips were as white as his cheeks; but she was completely absorbed in what she was saying.

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"A servant conducted us to Madame Dammauville, whom I found in a small bed near a window, and the concierge told her who I was. She received me kindly, and after having made me sit down in front of her, she told me that hearing from her concierge that I was exerting myself in my brother's behalf, she had something to tell me which would demonstrate that Caffie's assassin was not the man whom the law had arrested and detained. The evening of the assassination she was in this same room, lying on this same bed, before this same window, and after having read all day, she reflected and dreamed about her book, while listlessly watching the coming of twilight in the court, that already obscured everything in its shadow. Mechanically she had fixed her eyes on the window of Caffie's office opposite. Suddenly she saw a tall man, whom she took for an upholsterer, approach the window, and try to draw the curtains. Then Caffie rose, and taking the lamp, he came forward in such a way that the light fell full on the face of this upholsterer. You understand, do you not?"

"Yes," murmured SanieI.

"She saw him then plainly enough to remember him, and not to confound him with another. Tall, with long hair, a curled blond beard, and dressed like a gentleman, not like a poor man. The curtains were drawn. It was fifteen or twenty minutes after five. And it was at this same moment that Caffie was butchered by this false upholsterer, who evidently had only drawn the curtains so that he might kill Caffie in security, and not imagining that some one should see him doing a deed that denounced him as the assassin as surely as if he had been surprised with the knife in his hand. On reading the description of Florentin in the newspapers when he was arrested, Madame Dammauville believed the criminal was found—a tall man, with long hair and curled beard. There are some points of resemblance, but in the portrait published in the illustrated paper that she received, she did not recognize the man who drew the curtains, and she is certain that the judge is deceived. You see that Florentin is saved!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

For the rest of his life he would be the prisoner of his crime
In his eyes everything was decided by luck
Looking for a needle in a bundle of hay
Neither so simple nor so easy as they at first appeared

CONSCIENCE

By Hector Malot



BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIV

HEDGING

As he did not reply to this cry of triumph, she looked at him in surprise saw his face, pale, agitated, under the shock evidently of a violent emotion that she could not explain to herself.

“What is the matter?” she asked, with uneasiness.

“Nothing,” he answered, almost brutally.

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"You do not wish to weaken my hope?" she said, not imagining that he could not think of this hope and of Florentin. This was a path to lead him out of his confusion. In following it he would have time to recover himself.

"It is true," he said.

"You do not think that what Madame Dammauville saw proves Florentin's innocence?"

"Would what may be a proof for Madame Dammauville, for you, and for me, be one in the eyes of the law?"

"However—"

"I saw you so joyful that I did not dare to interrupt you."

"Then you believe that this testimony is without value," she murmured, feeling crushed.

"I do not say that. We must reflect, weigh the pro and con, compass the situation from divers points of view; that is what I try to do, which is the cause of my preoccupation that astonishes you."

"Say that it crushes me; I let myself be carried away."

"You need not be crushed or carried away. Certainly, what this lady told you forms a considerable piece of work."

"Does it not?"

"Without any doubt. But in order that the testimony she gives may be of great consequence, the witness must be worthy of trust."

"Do you believe this lady could have invented such a story?"

"I do not say that; but before all, it is necessary to know who she is."

"The widow of an attorney."

"The widow of an attorney and landowner. Evidently this constitutes a social status that merits consideration from the law; but the moral state, what is it? You say that she is paralyzed?"

"She has been so a little more than a year."

"Of what paralysis? That is a vague word for us others. There are paralyses that affect the sight; others that affect the mind. Is it one of these with which this lady is afflicted, or one of the others, which permitted her really to see, the evening of the assassination,

that which she relates, and which leaves her mental faculties in a sane condition? Before everything, it is important to know this."

Phillis was prostrated.

"I had not thought of all that," she murmured.

"It is very natural that you had not; but I am a doctor, and while you talked it was the doctor who listened."

"It is true, it is true," she repeated. "I only saw Florentin."

"In your place I should have seen, like you, only my brother, and I should have been carried away by hope. But I am not in your place. It is by your voice that this woman speaks, whom I do not know, and against whom I must be on my guard, for the sole reason that it is a paralytic who has told this story."

She could not restrain the tears that came to her eyes, and she let them flow silently, finding nothing to reply.

"I am sorry to pain you," he said.

"I saw only Florentin's liberty."

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"I do not say this testimony of Madame Dammauville will not influence the judge, and, above all, the jury; but I must warn you that you will expose yourself to a terrible deception if you believe that her testimony alone will give your brother liberty. It is not on a testimony of this kind or of this quality that the law decides; better than we, it knows to what illusions people can lend themselves when it is the question of a crime that absorbs and excites the public curiosity. There are some witnesses who, with the best faith in the world, believe they have seen the most extraordinary things which only existed in their imaginations; and there are people who accuse themselves rather than say nothing."

He heaped words on words, as if, in trying to convince Phillis, he might hope to convince himself; but when the sound of his words faded, he was obliged to declare to himself that, whatever the paralysis of this woman might be, it had not, in this instance, produced either defect of sight or of mind. She had seen, indeed, the tall man with long hair and curled beard, dressed like a gentleman, who was not Florentin. When she related the story of the lamp and the curtain cords, she knew what she was saying.

In his first alarm he had been very near betraying himself. Without doubt he should have told himself that this incident of the curtains might prove a trap; but all passed so rapidly that he never imagined that, exactly at the moment when Caffie raised the lamp to give him light, there was a woman opposite looking at him, and who saw him so plainly that she had not forgotten him. He thought to use all precautions on his side in drawing the curtains, when, on the contrary, he would have done better had he left them undrawn. Without doubt the widow of the attorney would have been a witness of a part of the scene, but in the shadow she would not have distinguished his features as she was able to do when he placed himself before the window under the light. But this idea did not enter his mind, and, to save himself from an immediate danger, he threw himself into another which, although uncertain, was not less grave.

Little by little Phillis recovered herself, and the hope that Madame Dammauville put in her heart, momentarily crushed by Sanie's remarks, sprang up again.

"Is it not possible Madame Dammauville really saw what she relates?"

"Without any doubt; and there are even probabilities that it is so, since the man who drew the curtains was not your brother, as we know. Unfortunately, it is not ourselves who must be convinced, since we are convinced in advance. It is those who, in advance also, have one whom they will not give up unless he is torn from them by force."

"But if Madame Dammauville saw clearly?"

"What must be learned before everything is, if she is in a state to see clearly; I have said nothing else."

“A doctor would surely know on examining her?”

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"Without doubt."

"If you were this doctor?"

It was a cry rather than an exclamation. She wished that he should present himself before this woman; but in that case she would recognize him.

Once more, under the pain of betraying his emotion, he must recover from this first impulse.

"But how can you wish me to go and examine this woman whom I do not know, and who does not know me? You know very well that patients choose their doctors, and not doctors their patients."

"If she sent for you?"

"By what right?"

"By what I shall learn on making the concierge talk, could you not recognize her kind of paralysis without seeing her?"

"That would be a little vague. However, I will do the best I can. Try to learn not only what concerns her illness, but all that relates to her—what her position is, who are her relations, which is important for a witness who overawes as much by what he is as by what he says. You understand that a deposition that destroys the whole plan of the prosecution will be severely disputed, and will only be accepted if Madame Dammauville has by her character and position a sufficient authority to break down all opposition."

"I will also try to learn who is her doctor. You may know him. What he would tell you would be worth more than all the details that I could bring you."

"We should be immediately decided on the paralysis, and we should see what credit we could accord this woman's words."

While listening to Phillis and talking himself, he had time to compass the situation that this thunderbolt created for him. Evidently, the first thing to do was to prevent a suspicion from arising in Phillis's mind, and it was to this that he applied himself on explaining the different kinds of paralysis. He knew her well enough to know that he had succeeded. But what would she do now? How did she mean to make use of Madame Dammauville's declaration? Had she spoken of it to any one besides himself? Was it her intention to go to Nougarede and tell him what she had learned? All that must be made clear, and as soon as possible. She must do nothing without his knowledge and approval. The circumstances were critical enough, without his letting accident become the master to direct them and conduct them blindly.



"When did you see Madame Dammauville?" he asked.

"Just this minute."

"And now, what do you wish to do?"

"I think that I ought to tell Monsieur Nougarde."

"Evidently, whatever the value of Madame Dammauville's declaration, he should know it; he will appraise it. Only, as it is well to explain to him what may vitiate this testimony, if you wish, I will go to see him."

"Certainly I wish it, and I thank you."

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"In the mean time, return to your mother and tell her what you have learned; but, that she may not yield to an exaggerated hope, tell her, also, that if there are chances, and great ones, in favor of your brother, on the other side there are some that are unfavorable. Tomorrow or this evening you will return to the Rue Sainte-Anne and begin your inquiries of the concierge. If the old woman tells you nothing interesting, you must go to Madame Dammauville, and make some reason for seeing her. Make her talk, and you will notice if her ideas are consecutive, and examine her face and eyes. Above all, neglect nothing that appears to you characteristic. Having taken care of your mother, you know almost as well as a doctor the symptoms of myelitis, and you could see instantly if Madame Dammauville has them."

"If I dared!" she said timidly, after a short hesitation.

"What?"

"I would ask you to come with me to the concierge immediately."

"You think of such a thing!" he exclaimed.

Since the evening when he had testified to the death of Caffie, he had not returned to the Rue Sainte-Anne; and it was not when the description given by Madame Dammauville was, doubtless, already spread in the quarter, that he was going to commit the imprudence of showing himself. But he must explain this exclamation.

"How can you expect a doctor to give himself up to such an investigation? On your part it is quite natural; on mine it would be unheard of and ridiculous; add that it would be dangerous. You must conciliate Madame Dammauville, and this would be truly a stupidity that would give her a pretext for thinking that you are trying to find out whether she is, or is not, in her right mind."

"That is true," she said. "I had not thought of that. I said to myself that, while I could only listen to what the concierge would tell me, you would know how to question her in a way that would lead her to say what you want to learn."

"I hope that your investigation will tell me. In any case, let us offend in nothing. If tomorrow you bring me only insignificant details, we will consider what to do. In the mean time, return to the concierge this evening and question her. If it is possible, see Madame Dammauville, and do not go home until after having obtained some news on this subject that is of such importance to us. And I will go to see Nougarde."

CHAPTER XXV

DAGNEROUS DETAILS

It was not to falsify Phillis's story that Saniel insisted on going to see Nougarede. What good would it do? That would be a blunder which sooner or later would show itself, and in that case would turn against him. He would have liked, with the authority of a physician, to explain that this testimony of a paralytic could have no more importance than that of a crazy woman.

But at the first words of an explanation Nougarede stopped him.

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"What you say is very possible, my dear friend; but I shall make you see that it is not for us to raise objections of this kind. Here is a testimony that may save our client; let us accept this, such as it may be, whence it comes. It is the business of the prosecution to prove that our witness could not see what she relates that she saw, or that her mental condition does not permit her to know what she saw; and do not be afraid, investigation will not be lacking. Do not let us even give a hint from our side; that would be stupid."

This, certainly, was not what Saniel wished; only he believed it a duty, in his quality of physician, to indicate some rocks against which they might strike themselves.

"Our duty," continued the advocate, "is, therefore, to manage in a way to escape them; and this is how I understand the role of this really providential witness, if it is possible to make her undertake it. Since it has occurred to you—you who wish the acquittal of this poor boy—that the testimony of Madame Dammauville may be vitiated by the simple fact that it comes from a sick woman, it is incontestable, is it not, that this same idea will occur to those who wish for his conviction? This testimony should be irrefutable; it should be presented in such a way that no one could raise anything against it, so that it would compel the acquittal in the same moment that it is presented. It was between a quarter past and half past five o'clock that Caffie was assassinated; at exactly a quarter past five, a woman of respectable position, and whose intellectual as well as physical faculties render her worthy of being believed, saw in Caffie's office a man, with whom it is materially impossible to confound Florentin Cormier, draw the curtains of the window, and thus prepare for the crime. She would make her deposition in these conditions, and in these terms, and the affair would be finished. There would not be a judge, after this confrontation, who would send Florentin Cormier before the assizes, and, assuredly, there would not be two voices in the jury for conviction. But things will not happen like this. Without doubt, Madame Dammauville bears a name that is worth something; her husband was an estimable attorney, a brother of the one who was notary at Paris."

"Have you ever had any business with her?"

"Never. I tell you what is well known to every one, morally she is irreproachable. But is she the same physically and mentally? Not at all, unfortunately. If a physician can be found who will declare that her paralysis does not give her aberrations or hallucinations, another one will be found who will contest these opinions, and who will come to an opposite conclusion. So much for the witness herself; now for the testimony. This testimony does not say that the man who drew the curtains at a quarter past five was built in such a way that it is materially impossible to confound him with Florentin Cormier, because he was small or hunchbacked or bald, or dressed like a workman; while Florentin is tall, straight, with long hair and beard, and dressed like a gentleman. It says, simply, that the man who drew the curtains was tall, with long hair, and curled blond beard, and dressed like a gentleman. But this description is exactly Florentin Cormier's, as it is yours—"

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"Mine!" Saniei exclaimed.

"Yours, as well as that of many others. And it is this, unfortunately for us, which destroys the irrefutability that we must have. How is it certain that this tall man, with long hair and curled beard, is not Florentin Cormier, since these are his chief characteristics? And it was at night, at a distance of twelve or fifteen metres, through a window, whose panes were obscured by the dust of papers and the mist, that this sick woman, whose eyes are affected, whose mind is weakened by suffering, was able, in a very short space of time, when she had no interest to imprint upon her memory what she saw, to grasp certain signs, that she recalled yesterday strongly enough to declare that the man who drew the curtains was not Florentin Cormier, against whom so many charges have accumulated from various sides, and who has only this testimony in his favor—every sensible person could not but find it suspicious!"

"But it is true," Saniei said, happy to lend himself to this view of the matter, which was his own.

"What makes the truth of a thing, my dear sir, is the way of presenting it; let us change this manner and we falsify it. To arrive at the conclusion which made you say 'It is true,' I am on the side of the idea that to-morrow Madame Dammauville's story should be known to the law, that the brave lady should be heard before the prosecution, and that time should be allowed to examine this testimony that you suspect. Now let us look at it from the opposite point. Madame Dammauville's story is not known to the law, or, if something transpires, we will arrange that this something is so vague that the prosecution will attach but little importance to it. And this is possible if we do not base a new defence on this testimony. We arrive at the judgment, and when the prosecution has listened to its witnesses which have overwhelmed us—the agent of affairs Savoureux, the tailor Valerius,—it is Madame Dammauville's turn. She simply relates what she saw, and declares that the man who is on the prisoner's bench is not the same who drew the curtains at a quarter past five. Do you see the 'coup de theatre'? The prosecution had not foreseen it; it had not inquired into the health of the witness; the physician would not be there to quote the defects of sight or reason; very probably it would not think of the dusty windowpanes, or of the distance. And all the opposing arguments that would be properly arranged if there were time, would be lacking, and we should carry the acquittal with a high hand."

Arranged thus, things were too favorable for Saniei for him not to receive, with a sentiment of relief, this combination which brought Florentin's acquittal more surely, it seemed to him, than all that they had arranged for his defence up to this day. However, an objection occurred to him, which he communicated to Nougarede immediately.

"Would one wish to admit that Madame Dammauville had kept silent on so grave a matter, and waited for an audience to reveal it?"

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"This silence she kept until yesterday; why should she not keep it a few days longer? It is evident that if she had not related what she saw, it is because she had reasons for being silent. It is probable that, being ill, she did not wish to expose herself to the annoyances and fatigue of an investigation; and in her eyes her deposition was not of great importance. What should she have revealed to the prosecution? That the man who committed the crime was tall, with a curled blond beard? This man the law held, or it held one the description of whom answered to this, which to Madame Dammauville was the same thing. She did not need, therefore, to call the police or the judge to tell them these insignificant things for her own comfort; and, also, because she believed that she had nothing interesting to say, she did not speak. It was when accident brought to her notice the portrait of the accused, she recognized that the law had not the real criminal, and then she broke the silence. The moment when she first saw this portrait is not stated precisely; I undertake to arrange that. The difficulty is not there."

"Where do you see it?"

"Here: Madame Dammauville may have already told her story to so many persons that it is already public property, where the prosecution has picked it up. In that case there will be no 'coup de theatre'. She will be questioned, her deposition examined, and we will have only a suspected testimony. The first thing to do, then, is to know how far this story has spread, and if there is yet time to prevent it from spreading farther."

"That is not easy, it seems to me."

"I believe Mademoiselle Phillis can do it. She is a brave woman, whom nothing dejects or disconcerts, which is the living proof that we are only valued according to the force and versatility of the inner consciousness. For the rest, I need not sound her praises, since you know her better than I; and what I say has no other object but to explain the confidence that I place in her. As I cannot interfere myself, I think there is no better person than she to act on Madame Dammauville, without disturbing or wounding her, and to bring about the result that we desire. I am sure that she has already won Madame Dammauville, and that she will be listened to with sympathy."

"Do you wish me to write to her to come to see you tomorrow?"

"No; it would be better for you so see her this evening, if possible."

"I shall go to the Batignolles when I leave you."

"She will enter into her part perfectly, I am certain, and she will succeed, I hope."

"It seems to me that your combination rests, above all, on the 'coup de theatre' of the non-recognition of Florentin by Madame Dammauville. How will you bring this paralytic to court?"

“I depend upon you.”

“And how?”

“You will examine her.”

“I shall have to go to her house!”

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"Why not?"

"Because I am not her doctor."

"You will become so."

"It is impossible."

"I do not find it at all impossible that you should be called in consultation. I have not forgotten that your thesis was on the paralyses due to the affection of the spinal cord, and it was remarkable enough for us to discuss it in our 'parlotte' of the Rue de Vaugirard. You have, therefore, authority in the matter."

"It is not on account of having written several works on the pathological anatomy of medullary lesions, and especially on the alterations of the spinal ganglia, that one acquires authority in a question so comprehensive and so delicate."

"Do not be too modest, dear friend. I have had, lately, to consult my Dictionary of Medicine, and at each page your work was quoted. And, besides, the way in which you passed your examinations made you famous. Every one talks of you. So it is not impossible that Mademoiselle Phillis, relating that her mother was cured of a similar paralysis, will give Madame Dammauville the idea of consulting you, and her physician will send for you."

"You will not do that?"

"And why should I not do it?"

They looked at each other a moment in silence, and Saniel turned his eyes away.

"I detest nothing so much as to appear to put myself forward."

"In this case it is no matter what you detest or like. The question is to save this unfortunate young man whom you know to be innocent; and you can do a kind deed and aid us. You examine Madame Dammauville; you see with which paralysis she is afflicted, and consequently, what exceptions may be taken at her testimony. At the same time, you see if you can cure her, or, at least, put her in a state to go to court."

"And if it is proved that she cannot leave her bed?"

"In that case I shall change my order of battle, and that is why it is of capital importance—you know that that is the word—that we should be warned beforehand."

"You will make the judge receive her deposition?"



“In any case. But I shall make her write a letter that I shall read at the desired moment, and I shall call upon her physician to explain that he would not permit his patient to come to court. Without doubt, the effect would not be what I desire, but, anyhow, we should have one.”

CHAPTER XXVI

A GOOD MEMORY

After Phillis, Nougarde also wished him to see Madame Dammauville; this coincidence was not the least danger of the situation that opened before him.

If he saw her, the chances were that she would recognize in him the man who drew the curtains; for, if he was able to speak to Phillis and Nougarde of an affection of the eyes or of the mind, he did not believe in these affections, which for him were only makeshifts.

When he reached Madame Cormier's, Phillis had not returned, and he was obliged to explain to the uneasy mother why her daughter was late.

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It was a delirium of joy, before which he felt embarrassed. How should he break the hope of this unhappy mother?

What he had said to Phillis and to Nougarede he repeated to her.

"But it is possible, also, for paralytics to enjoy all their faculties!" Madame Cormier said, with a decision that was not in accordance with her habit or with her character.

"Assuredly."

"Am I not an example?"

"Without doubt."

"Then Florentin will be saved."

"This is what we hope. I only caution you against an excess of joy by an excess of prudence. Nevertheless, it is probable Mademoiselle Phillis will settle this for us when she returns."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had gone to the Rue Sainte-Anne. You would have found her."

There was, then, a universal mania to send him to the Rue Sainte-Anne!

They waited, but the conversation was difficult and slow between them. It was neither of Phillis nor of Florentin that Sanie thought; it was of himself and of his own fears; while Madame Cormier's thoughts ran to Phillis. Then there were long silences that Madame Cormier interrupted by going to the kitchen to look after her dinner, that had been ready since two o'clock.

Not knowing what to say or do in the presence of Sanie's sombre face and preoccupation, which she could not explain, she asked him if he had dined.

"Not yet."

"If you will accept a plate of soup, I have some of yesterday's bouillon, that Phillis did not find bad."

But he did not accept, which hurt Madame Cormier. For a long time Sanie had been a sort of god to her, and since he had shown so much zeal regarding Florentin, the 'culte' was become more fervent.

At last Phillis's step was heard.

"What! You came to tell mamma!" she exclaimed, on seeing Saniel.

Ordinarily her mother listened to her respectfully, but now she interrupted her.

"And Madame Dammauville?" she asked.

"Madame Dammauville has excellent eyes. She is a woman of intellect, who, without the assistance of any business man, manages her fortune."

Overcome, Madame Cormier fell into a chair.

"Oh, the poor child!" she murmured.

Exclamations of joy escaped her which contained but little sense.

"It is as I thought," Saniel said; "but it would be imprudent to abandon ourselves to hopes to-day that to-morrow may destroy."

While he spoke he escaped, at least, from the embarrassment of his position and from the examination of Phillis.

"What did Monsieur Nougarde say?" she asked.

"I will explain to you presently. Begin by telling us what you learned from Madame Dammauville. It is her condition that will decide our course, at least that which Nougarde counsels us to adopt."

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"When the concierge saw me return," Phillis began, "she showed a certain surprise; but she is a good woman, who is easily tamed, and I had not much trouble in making her tell me all she knows of Madame Dammauville. Three years ago Madame Dammauville became a widow without children. She is about forty years of age, and since her widowhood has lived in her house in the Rue Sainte-Anne. Until last year she was not ill, but she went every year to the springs at Lamoulon. It is a year since she was taken with pains that were thought to be rheumatic, following which, paralysis attacked her and confined her to her bed. She suffers so much sometimes that she cries, but these are spasms that do not last. In the intervals she lives the ordinary life, except that she does not get up. She reads a great deal, receives her friends, her sister-in-law—widow of a notary—her nephews and nieces, and one of the vicars of the parish, for she is very charitable. Her eyes are excellent. She has never had delirium or hallucinations. She is very reserved, detests gossip, and above everything seeks to live quietly. The assassination of Caffie exasperated her; she would let no one speak to her of him, and she spoke of it to no one. She even said that if she were in a condition to leave her house, she would sell it, so that she would never hear the name of Caffie."

"How did she speak of the portrait and of the man she saw in Caffie's office?" Sanie! asked.

"That is exactly the question that the concierge was not able to answer; so I decided to go to see Madame Dammauville again."

"You are courageous," the mother said with pride.

"I assure you that I was not so on going up-stairs. After what I had heard of her character, it was truly audacious to go a second time, after an interval of two hours, to trouble her, but it was necessary. While ascending, I sought a reason to justify, or, at least, to explain my second visit, and I found only an adventurous one, for which I ought to ask your indulgence."

She said this on turning toward Sanie!, but with lowered eyes, without daring to look at him, and with an emotion that made him uneasy.

"My indulgence?" he said.

"I acted without having time to reflect, and under the pressure of immediate need. As Madame Dammauville expressed surprise at seeing me again, I told her that what she had said to me was so serious, and might have such consequences for the life and honor of my brother, that I had thought of returning the next day, accompanied by a person familiar with the affair, before whom she would repeat her story; and that I came to ask her permission to present this person. This person is yourself." "I!"

“And that is why,” she said feebly, without raising her eyes, “that I have need of your indulgence.”

“But I had told you—” he exclaimed with a violence that the dissatisfaction at being so disposed of was not sufficient to justify.

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"That you could not present yourself to Madame Dammauville in the character of a physician unless she sent for you. I did not forget that; and it is not as a physician that I wish to beg you to accompany me, but as a friend, if you permit me to speak thus; as the most devoted, the most firm, and the most generous friend that we have had the happiness to encounter in our distress."

"My daughter speaks in my name, as in her own," Madame Cormier said with emotion; "I add that it is a respectful friendship, a profound gratitude, that we feel toward you."

Although Phillis trembled to see the effect that she produced on Saniei, she continued with firmness:

"You would accompany me, then, without doing anything ostensibly, without saying you are a doctor, and while she talks you could examine her. Madame Dammauville gave her consent to my request with extreme kindness. I shall return to her to-morrow, and if you think it useful, if you think you should accept the part that I claimed for you without consulting you, you can accompany me."

He did not reply to these last words, which were an invitation as well as a question.

"Did you not examine her as I told you?" he asked, after a moment of reflection.

"With all the attention of which I was capable in my anguish. Her glance seemed to me straight and untroubled; her voice is regular, very rhythmical; her words follow each other without hesitation; her ideas are consecutive and clearly expressed. There is no trace of suffering on her pale face, which bears only the mark of a resigned grief. She moves her arms freely, but the legs, so far as I could judge under the bedclothes, are motionless. In many ways it seems to me that her paralysis resembles mamma's, though it is true that in others it does not. She must be extremely sensitive to the cold, for although the weather is not cold today, the temperature of her room seemed very high."

"This is an examination," Saniei said, "that a physician could not have conducted better, unless he questioned the patient; and had I been with you during this visit we should not have learned anything more. It appears certain that Madame Dammauville is in possession of her faculties, which renders her testimony invulnerable."

Madame Cormier drew her daughter to her and kissed her passionately.

"I have, therefore, nothing to do with this lady," continued Saniei, with the precipitation of a man who has just escaped a danger. "But your part, Mademoiselle, is not finished, and you must return to her tomorrow to fulfil that which Nougarde confides to you."

He explained what Nougarde expected of her.

“Certainly,” she said. “I will do all that I am advised to do for Florentin. I will go to Madame Dammauville; I will go everywhere. But will you permit me to express my astonishment that immediate profit is not made of this declaration to obtain the release of my brother?”

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He repeated the reasons that Nougarede had given him for not proceeding in this manner.

"I would not say anything that resembles a reproach," said Madame Cormier, with more decision than she ordinarily put into her words; "but perhaps Monsieur Nougarde has some personal ideas in his advice. Our interest is that Florentin should return to us as quickly as possible, and that he should be spared the sufferings of a prison. But I understand that to an 'ordonnance de non-lieu', in which he does not appear, Monsieur Nougarde prefers the broad light of the court, where he could deliver a brilliant address, useful to his reputation."

"Whether or not he has made this calculation," Saniei said, "things are thus. I, also, I should have preferred the 'ordonnance de non-lieu', which has the great advantage of finishing everything immediately. Nougarede does not believe that this would be a good plan to follow, so we must follow the one that he traces out for us."

"We will follow it," Phillis said, "and I believe that it may bring about the result Monsieur Nougarede expects, as Madame Dammauville would have spoken to but few persons. When I tried to make her explain herself on this point, without asking her the question directly, she told me that she had only spoken to the concierge of the non-resemblance of the portrait to the man she saw draw the curtains, so that the concierge, who had often spoken to her of Florentin and of my efforts to save him, might warn me. I shall see, then, to-morrow, how far her story has spread, and I will go to see you about it at five o'clock, unless you prefer that I should go at once to see Monsieur Nougarede."

"Begin with me, and we will go together to see him, if there is occasion. I am going to write to him."

"If I understand Monsieur Nougarde's plan, it seems that it rests on Madame Dammauville's appearance in court. Will this appearance be possible? That is what I could not learn; only a physician could tell."

Saniei did not wish to let it appear that he understood this new challenge.

"I forgot to tell you," Phillis continued, "that the physician who attends her is Doctor Balzajette of the Rue de l'Echelle. Do you know him?"

"A prig, who conceals his ignorance under dignified manners."

No sooner had these words left his lips than he realized his error. Madame Dammauville should have an excellent physician, one who was so high in the estimation of his 'confreres' that, if he did not cure her, it was because she was incurable.

"Then how can you hope that he will cure her in time for her to go to court?" Phillis asked.



He did not answer, and rose to go. Timidly, Madame Cormier repeated her invitation, but he did not accept it, in spite of the tender glance that Phillis gave him.

CHAPTER XXVII

A NEW PERIL

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Would he be able to resist the pressure which from all sides at once pushed him toward the Rue Sainte Anne?

It seemed that nothing was easier than not to commit the folly of yielding, and yet such was the persistence of the efforts that were united against him, that he asked himself if, one day, he would not be led to obey them in spite of himself. Phillis, Nougarede, Madame Cormier. Now, whence would come a new attack?

For several months he had enjoyed a complete security, which convinced him that all danger was over forever. But all at once this danger burst forth under such conditions that he must recognize that there could never more be any security for him. To-day Madame Dammauville menaced him; tomorrow it would be some one else. Who? He did not know. Every one. And it was the anguish of his position to be condemned to live hereafter in fear, and on the defensive, without repose, without forgetfulness.

But it was not tomorrow about which he need be uneasy at this moment, it was the present hour; that is to say, Madame Dammauville.

That she should say, with so much firmness at the sight of a single portrait, that the man who drew the curtains was not Florentin, she must have an excellent memory of the eyes; at the same time a resolute mind and a decision in her ideas, which permitted her to affirm without hesitation what she believed to be true.

If they should ever meet, she would recognize him, and recognizing him, she would speak.

Would she be believed?

This was the decisive question, and from what he had heard of her, it seemed that she would be.

Denials would not suffice. He did not go to Caffie's at a quarter past five. Where was he at this moment? What witness could he call upon? Caffie's wound was made by a hand skilled in killing, and this learned hand was his, more even than that of a murderer. Every one knew that his position at that moment was desperate, financially speaking; and, suddenly, he paid his debts. Who would believe the Monte Carlo story?

One word, one little hint, from this Madame Dammauville and he was lost, without defence, without possible struggles.

Truly, and fortunately, since she was paralyzed and confined to her bed, he ran no risk of meeting her face to face at the corner of a street, or at the house of an acquaintance, nor of hearing the cry of surprise that she would not fail to give on recognizing him. But that was not enough to make him sleep in an imprudent security on saying to himself that this meeting was improbable. It was improbable, also, to admit that some one was

exactly opposite to Caffies window at the moment when he drew the curtains; more improbable yet to believe that this fact, insignificant in itself, that this vision, lasting only an instant, would be so solidly engraved in a woman's memory as to be distinctly remembered after several months, as if it dated from the previous evening; and yet, of all these improbabilities, there was formed a reality which enclosed him in such a way that at any moment it might stifle him.

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Despite the importunities of Phillis, Madame Cormier, and Nougarede, and of all those which might arise, he would not be fool enough to confront the danger of a recognition in the room where this paralytic was confined—at least, that was probable, for, after what had happened, he was certain of nothing—but this recognition might take place elsewhere.

In Nougarede's plan Madame Dammauville would come to court to make her declaration; he himself was a witness; they would, therefore, at a given moment, meet each other, and it was not impossible that before the court the recognition would occur with a 'coup de theatre' very different from that arranged by Nougarede.

Without doubt there were chances that Madame Dammauville would not be able to leave her bed to go to court; but were there only one for her leaving it, he must foresee it and take precautions.

A single one offered security: to render himself unrecognizable; to cut his beard and hair; to be no more the long-haired, curled, blond-bearded man that she remembered. Had he been like every one else she would not have remarked him; or, at least, she would have confounded him with others. A man can only permit himself to be original in appearance when he is sure beforehand that he will never have anything to fear.

Assuredly, nothing was easier than to have his hair and beard cut; he had only to enter the first barber shop he came to; in a few minutes the change would be radical.

Among his acquaintances he need not be uneasy at the curiosity that this change might produce; more than one would not remark it, and those who would be surprised at first would soon cease to think of it, without doubt; otherwise, he had an easy answer for them; on the eve of becoming a serious personage, he abandoned the last eccentricities of the old student, and passed the bridge without wish to return by the left bank.

But it was not only to acquaintances that he must account; there were Phillis and Nougarde. Had not the latter already remarked the resemblance between him and the description, and would it not be imprudent to lead him to ask why this resemblance suddenly disappeared?

It would be dangerous to expose himself to this question from the lawyer, but it would be much more dangerous coming from Phillis. Nougarede would only show surprise; Phillis might ask for an explanation.

And he must reply to her so much the more clearly, because four or five times already he had almost betrayed himself as to Madame Dammauville, and if she had let his explanations or embarrassment pass, his hesitations or his refusal, without questioning him frankly, certainly she was not the less astonished. Should he appear before her

with short hair and no beard, it would be a new astonishment which, added to the others, would establish suspicions; and logically, by the force of things, in spite of herself, in spite of her love and her faith, she would arrive at conclusions from

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which she would not be able to free herself. Already, five or six months before, this question of long hair and beard had been agitated between them. As he complained one day of the bourgeois who would not come to him, she gently explained to him that to please and attract these bourgeois it was, perhaps, not quite well to astonish those whom one does not shock. That overcoats less long, hats with less brim, and hair and beard shorter; in fact, a general appearance that more nearly approached their own, would be, perhaps, more agreeable. He became angry, and replied plainly that such concessions were not in keeping with his character. How could he now abruptly make these concessions, and at a time when his success at the examinations placed him above such small compromises? He resisted when he needed help, and when a patient was an affair of life or death to him; he yielded when he had need of no one, and when he did not care for patients. The contradiction was truly too strong, and such that it could not but strike Phillis, whose attention had already had only too much to arouse it.

And yet, as dangerous as it was to come to the decision to make himself unrecognizable, it would be madness on his part to draw back; the sooner the better. His fault had been in not foreseeing, the day after Caffie's death, that circumstances might arise sooner or later which would force it upon him. At that moment it did not present the same dangers as now; but parting from the idea that he had not been seen by any one, that he could not have been seen, he had rejoiced in the security that this conviction gave him, and quietly become benumbed.

The awakening had come; with his eyes open he saw the abyss to the edge of which his stupidity had brought him.

How strong would he not be if during the last three months he had not had this long hair and beard, which was most terrible testimony against him? Instead of taking refuge in miserable makeshifts when Phillis and Nougarede asked him to see Madame Dammauville, he would have boldly held his own, and have gone to see her as they wished. In that case he would be saved, and soon Florentin would be also.

And he believed himself intelligent! And he proudly imagined he could arrange things beforehand so well that he would never be surprised! What he should have foreseen would come to pass, nothing more; the lesson that experience taught him was hard, and this was not the first one; the evening of Caffie's death he saw very clearly that a new situation opened before him, which to the end of his life would make him the prisoner of his crime. To tell the truth, however, this impression became faint soon enough; but now it was stronger than ever, and to a certainty, never to be dismissed again.

But it was useless to look behind; it was the present and the future that he must measure with a clear and firm glance, if he did not wish to be lost.

After carefully examining and weighing the question, he decided to have his hair and beard cut. However adventurous this resolution was, however embarrassing it might become in provoking curiosity and questions, it was the only way of escaping a possible recognition.

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Mechanically, by habit, he bent his steps toward the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, where his barber lived, but he had taken only a few steps when reflection caused him to stop; it would be certainly a mistake to provoke the gossip of this man who, knew him, and who, for the pleasure of talking, would tell every one in the quarter that he had just cut the hair and beard of Dr. Sanie! He returned to the boulevard, where he was not known.

But as he was about to open the door of the shop which he decided to enter, he changed his mind. He happened to find the explanation that he must give Phillis, and as he wished to avoid the surprise that she would not fail to show if she saw him suddenly without hair and beard, he would give this explanation before having them cut, in such a way that all at once and without looking for another reason, she would understand that this operation was indispensable.

And he went to dinner, furious with himself and with things, to see to what miserable expedients he was reduced.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SANIE! VISITS A BARBER

The following day at five o'clock when Phillis rang, he opened the door for her. Hardly had she entered when she was about to throw herself into his arms as usual, with a quickness that told how happy she was to see him. But he checked her with his hand.

"What is the matter?" she asked paralyzed and full of fears.

"Nothing; or, at least nothing much."

"Against me?"

"Certainly not, dear one."

"You are ill?"

"No, not ill, but I must take precautions which prevent me from embracing you. I will explain; do not be uneasy, it is not serious."

"Quick!" she cried, examining him, and trying to anticipate his thought.

"You have something to tell me?"

"Yes, good news. But I beg of you, speak first; do not leave me in suspense."



"I assure you that you need not be uneasy; and when I speak thus, you know that you should believe me. You see that I am not uneasy."

"It is for others that you are alarmed, never for yourself."

"Do you know what the pelagre is?"

"No."

"It is a special disease of the hair and beard, due to the presence in the epidermis of a kind of mushroom. Well, it is probable that I have this disease."

"Is it serious?"

"Troublesome for a man, but disastrous for a woman, because, before any treatment, the hair must be cut. You understand, therefore, that if I have the pelagre, as I believe I have, I am not going to expose you to the risk of catching it in embracing you. It is very easily transmitted, and in that case you would be obliged, probably, to do for yourself what I must do for myself; that is, to cut my hair. With me it is of no consequence; but with you it would be murder to sacrifice your beautiful hair."

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"You say 'probably.'"

"Because I am not yet quite certain that I have the pelagre. For about two weeks I have felt a slight itching in my head and, naturally, I paid no attention to it. I had other things to do; and besides, I was not going to believe I was attacked with a parasitic malady merely on account of an itching. But, after some time, my hair became dry and began to fall out. I had no time to attend to it, and the days passed; besides, the excitement of my examinations was enough to make my hair fall. To-day, just before you came, I had a few minutes to spare, and I examined one of my hairs through a microscope; if I had not been disturbed I should have finished by this time."

"Continue your examination."

"It would take some time to do it thoroughly. If it is really the pelagre, as I have reason to believe, tomorrow you will see me without hair and beard. I would not hesitate, in spite of the astonishment that my appearance would cause."

"What good will that do?"

"I cannot tell people that I had my hair and beard cut because I have a parasitic disease. Every one knows it is contagious."

"When the hair is cut, what will become of the disease?"

"With energetic treatment it will rapidly disappear. Before long you may embrace me if—you do not find me too ugly."

"O dearest!"

"And now for you; you have come from Madame Dammauville?"

He did not need to persist; Phillis accepted his story so readily that he felt reassured on her side; she would not alarm herself about it. As for others, the embarrassment of confessing a contagious malady would be a sufficient explanation, if he were ever obliged to furnish one.

"What did she say to you?" he asked.

"Good and kind words to begin with, which show what an excellent woman she is. After having presented myself twice at her house yesterday, you understand that I was not quite easy on asking her to receive me again to-day. As I tried to excuse myself, she said she was glad to see my devotion to my brother, that I need never excuse myself for asking her assistance, and that she would help me all she could. With this encouragement I explained what we want her to do, but she did not appear disposed to do it. Without giving her Monsieur Nougarede's reasons, I said we were obliged to



conform to the counsels of those who directed the affair, and I begged her to help us. Finally she was won over, but reluctantly, and said she would do as we wished. But she could not assure me that her servants had not talked about it, nor could she promise to leave her bed to go to court, for she had not left her room for a year."

"Does she expect to be able to rise soon?"

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"I repeat her words, to which I paid great attention in order not to forget them: 'I am promised that I shall be better next year, but who can tell? I will urge my doctor to give me an answer, and when you come again I will tell you what he says.' Profiting by the door that she opened to me, I kept the conversation on this doctor. It seems to me, but I am not certain, that she has but little confidence in him. He was the classmate of her husband and of her brother-in-law the notary; he is the friend of every one, curing those who can be cured, or letting them die by accident. You see what kind of a doctor he is."

"I told you I knew him."

"See if I deceive myself, and to what I tell you, add what you already know. Frightened to see in whose hands she is, I undertook to find out, and finished by learning—without asking her directly—that she has seen no other physician during the year. When she was taken with paralysis a consultation was held, and she has had Doctor Balzajette ever since. She says he is very kind, and takes care of her as well as another would."

Saniel improved the opportunity to refer to his stupidity in frankly expressing his opinion on the solemn Balzajette.

"It is probable," he said.

"It is certain? Do you believe that during one year nothing has appeared in Madame Dammauville's disease that should demand new treatment? Do you think the solemn Balzajette is incapable of finding it all by himself?"

"He is not so dull as you suppose."

"It is you who speak of dulness."

"To diagnose a disease and to treat it are two things. It is the consultation you speak of that settled the question of Madame Dammauville's disease, and prescribed the treatment that Balzajette had only to apply; and his capacity, I assure you, is sufficient for this task."

As she appeared but little reassured, he persisted, for it would be an imprudence to let Phillis become enamored of the idea that if he attended Madame Dammauville, he would cure her, even if it required a miracle.

"We have some time before us, since the 'ordonnance de renvoi' before the assizes is not yet given out. Madame Dammauville has promised to question her doctor, to learn if he hopes to put her in condition to leave her bed soon. Let us wait, therefore."

"Would it not be better to act than to wait?"

“At least let us wait for news from Balzajette. Either it will be satisfactory, and then we shall have nothing to do, or it will not be, and in that case I promise you to see Balzajette. I know him well enough to speak to him of your patient, which, above all, enables me, in making your brother intervene, to interest myself openly in his reestablishment.”

“O dearest, dearest!” she murmured, in a spirit of gratitude.

“You cannot doubt my devotion to you first, and to your brother afterward. You asked me an impossible thing, that I was obliged to refuse, to my regret, precisely because it was impossible; but you know that I am yours, and will do all I can for your family.”



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"Forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive; in your place I should think as you do, but I believe that in mine you would act as I do."

"Be sure that I have never had an idea of blame in my heart for what is with you an affair of dignity. It is because you are high and proud that I love you so passionately."

She rose.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"I want to carry Madame Dammauville's words to mamma; you can imagine with what anguish she awaits me."

"Let us, go. I will leave you at the boulevard to go to see Nougarede."

The interview with the advocate was short.

"You see, dear friend, that my plan is good; bring Madame Dammauville to court, and we shall have some pleasant moments."

This time Sanie! had not the hesitation of the previous evening, and he entered the first barber-shop he saw. When he returned to his rooms he lighted two candles, and placing them on the mantle, he looked at himself in the glass.

Coquetry had never been his sin, and often weeks passed without his looking in a mirror, so indifferent was he when making his toilet. However, as a young boy he sometimes looked in his small glass, asking himself what he would become, and he could now recall his looks—an energetic face with clearly drawn features, a physiognomy open and frank, without being pretty, but not disagreeable. His beard had concealed all this; but now that it was gone, he said to himself without much reflection that he would find again, without doubt, the boy he remembered.

What he saw in the glass was a forehead lined transversely; oblique eyebrows, raised at the inside extremity, and a mouth with tightened lips turned down at the corners; furrows were hollowed in the cheeks; and the whole physiognomy, harassed, ravaged, expressed hardness.

What had become of that of the young man of other days? He had before him the man that life had made, and of whom the violent contractions of the muscles of the face had modelled the expression.

"Truly, the mouth of an assassin!" he murmured.



Then, looking at his shaved head, he added with a smile:

“And perhaps that of one condemned to death, whose toilet has just been made for the guillotine.”

CHAPTER XXIX

A BROKEN NEGATIVE

To have made himself unrecognizable was, without doubt, a safe precaution; but having started on this course, he would not be easy until he had destroyed all traces of himself in such a way that Madame Dammauville would never be able to find the man that she had seen so clearly under Caffie's lamp.

Precisely because he was not vain and had no pretension to beauty, he had escaped the photograph mania. Once only he had been photographed in spite of himself, simply to oblige a classmate who had abandoned medicine for photography.

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But now this once was too much, for there was danger that this portrait taken three years before, and showing him with the hair and beard that he wished to suppress, might be discovered. Without doubt there were few chances that a copy of it would be seen by Madame Dammauville; but if there existed only one against a hundred thousand, he must arrange it so that he need have no fear.

He had had a dozen copies of this photograph, but as his relatives were few, he kept the majority of them. One he sent to his mother, who was living at that time; another went to the priest of his village, and later he had given one to Phillis. He must, then, have nine in his possession. He found them and burned them immediately.

Of the three that remained, only one might testify against him, the one belonging to Phillis. But it would be easy for him to get it again on inventing some pretext, while as to the others, truly he had nothing to fear.

The real danger might come from the photographer, who perhaps had some of the photographs, and who undoubtedly preserved the negative. This was his first errand the next day.

On entering the studio of this friend, he experienced a disagreeable feeling, which troubled him and made him uneasy; he had not given his name, and counting on the change made by the cutting of his hair and beard, he said to himself that his friend, who had not seen him for a long time, certainly would not recognize him.

He had taken but a few steps, his hat in his hand, like a stranger who is about to accost another, when the photographer came toward him with outstretched hand, and a friendly smile on his face.

"You, my dear friend! What good fortune is worth the pleasure of your visit to me? Can I be useful to you in any way?"

"You recognize me, then?"

"What! Do I recognize you? Do you ask that because you have cut your hair and beard? Certainly it changes you and gives you a new physiognomy; but I should be unworthy of my business if, by a different arrangement of the hair, I could not recognize you.

"Besides, eyes of steel like yours are not forgotten; they are a description and a signature."

Then this means in which he placed so much confidence was only a new imprudence, as the question, "You recognize me, then?" was a mistake.

“Come, I will pose you at once,” the photographer said. “Very curious, this shaved head, and still more interesting, I think, than with the beard and long hair. The traits of character are more clearly seen.”

“It is not for a new portrait that I have come, but for the old one. Have you any of the proofs?”

“I think not, but I will see. In any case, if you wish some they are easily made, since I have the plate.”

“Will you look them up? For I have not a single proof left of those you gave me, and on looking at myself in the glass this morning I found such changes between my face of to-day and that of three years ago, that I would like to study them. Certain ideas came to me on the expression of the physiognomy, that I wish to study, with something to support them.”

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The search for the proofs made by an assistant led to no results; there were no proofs.

"Exactly; and for several days I have thought of making some," the photographer said. "Because your day of glory will come, when your portrait will be in a distinguished place in the shop-windows and collections. Every one talks of your 'conours'. Although I have abandoned medicine without the wish to return to it, I have not become indifferent to what concerns it, and I learned of your success. Which portrait shall we put in circulation? The old or the new?"

"The new."

"Then let us arrange the pose."

"Not to-day; it is only yesterday that I was shaved, fearing an attack of pelagre, and the skin covered by the beard has a crude whiteness that will accentuate the hardness of my physiognomy, which is really useless. We will wait until the air has tanned me a little, and then I will return, I promise you."

"How many proofs do you want of your old portrait?"

"One will do."

"I will send you a dozen."

"Do not take the trouble; I will take them when I come to pose. But in the mean time, could you not show me the plate?"

"Nothing easier."

When it was brought, Saniel took the glass plate with great care, holding it with the tips of his fingers by the two opposite corners, in order not to efface the portrait. Then, as he was standing in the shadow of a blue curtain, he walked towards the chimney where the light was strong, and began his examination.

"It is very good," he said; "very curious."

"Only a photograph can have this documentary value."

To compare this document with the reality, Saniel approached the chimney more closely, above which was a mirror. When his feet touched the marble hearth he stopped, looking alternately at the plate which he held carefully in his hands, and at his face reflected in the glass. Suddenly he made an exclamation; he let fall the plate, which, falling flat on the marble, broke into little pieces that flew here and there.

"How awkward I am!"

He showed a vexation that should not leave the smallest doubt in the photographer's mind as to its truth.

"You must get one of the proofs that you have given away," his friend said, "for I have not a single one left."

"I will try and find one."

What he did try to find on leaving was whether or no he had succeeded in rendering himself unrecognizable, for he could not trust to this experience, weakened by the fact that this old friend was a photographer. With him it was a matter of business to note the typical traits that distinguish one face from another, and in a long practice he had acquired an accuracy Madame Dammauville could not possess.

Among the persons he knew, it seemed to him that the one in the best condition to give certainty to the proof was Madame Cormier. He knew at this hour she would be alone, and as she had not been, assuredly, warned by her daughter that he intended to shave, the experiment would be presented in a way to give a result as exact as possible.

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In answer to his ring Madame Cormier opened the door, and he saluted her without being recognized; but as the hall was dark this was not of great significance. His hat in his hand, he followed her into the dining-room without speaking, in order that his voice should not betray him.

Then, after she had looked at him a moment, with uneasy surprise at first, she began to smile.

"It is Doctor Saniei!" she cried. "Mon Dieu! How stupid of me not to recognize you; it changes you so much to be shaved! Pardon me."

"It is because I am shaved that I come to ask a favor."

"Of us, my dear sir? Ah! Speak quickly; we should be so happy to prove our gratitude."

"I would ask Mademoiselle Phillis to give me, if she has it, a photograph that I gave her about a year ago."

As Phillis wished the liberty to expose this photograph frankly, in order to have it always before her, she had asked for it, and Saniei had given it to her, in her mother's presence.

"If she has it!" exclaimed *Mme.* Cormier. "Ah! my dear sir, you do not know the place that all your goodness, and the services that you have rendered us, have made for you in our hearts."

And passing into the next room, she brought a small velvet frame in which was the photograph. Saniei took it out, on explaining the study for which he wanted it, and after promising to bring it back soon, he returned to his rooms.

Decidedly, everything was going well. The plate was destroyed, Phillis's proof in his hands; he had nothing more to fear from this side. As to the experiment made on the mother, it was decisive enough to inspire him with confidence. If Madame Cormier, who had seen him so often and for so long a time, and who thought of him at every instant, did not recognize him, how was it possible that Madame Dammauville, who had only seen him from a distance and for a few seconds, could recognize him after several months?

Would he never accustom himself to the idea that his life could not have the tranquil monotony of a bourgeois existence, that it would experience shocks and storms, but that if he knew how to remain always master of his force and will, it would bring him to a safe port?

The calm that was his before this vexation came back to him, and when the last proofs of his concours, confirming the success of the first, had given him the two titles that he

so ardently desired and pursued at the price of so many pains, so many efforts and privations, he could enjoy his triumph in all security.

He held the present in his strong hands, and the future was his.

Now he could walk straight, boldly, his head high, jostling those who annoyed him, according to his natural temperament.

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Although these last months had been full of terrible agitation for him, on account of everything connected with the affair of Caffie and Florentin, and above all, on account of the fatigue, emotion, and the fever of his 'conours', yet he had not interrupted his special works for a day or even an hour, and his experiments followed for so many years had at length produced important results, that prudence alone prevented him from publishing. In opposition to the official teaching of the school, these discoveries would have caused the hair to stand upright on the old heads; and it was not the time, when he asked permission to enter, to draw upon himself the hostility of these venerable doorkeepers, who would bar the way to a revolutionist. But, now that he was in the place for ten or twelve years, he need take no precautions, either for persons or for ideas, and he might speak.

CHAPTER XXX

PHILLIS PRECIPITATES MATTERS

Saniel saw his colleague, the solemn Balzajette, and so adroitly as not to provoke surprise or suspicion, he spoke of Madame Dammauville, in whom he was interested incidentally; without persisting, and only to justify his question, he explained the nature of this interest.

Although solemn, Balzajette was not the less a gossip, and it was his solemnity that made him gossip. He listened to himself talk, and when, his chest bulging, his pink chin freshly shaved resting on his white cravat, his be-ringed hand describing in the air noble and demonstrative gestures, one could, if one had the patience to listen to him, make him say all that one wished; for he was convinced that his interlocutor passed an agreeable moment, whose remembrance would never be forgotten. His patients might wait in pain or anguish, he did not hasten the majestic delivery of his high-sounding phrases with choice adjectives; and unless it was to go to a dinner-party, which he did at least five days in the week, he could not leave you until after he had made you partake of the admiration that he professed for himself.

It was to an affection of the spinal cord that *Mme. Dammauville's* paralysis was due, and consequently it was perfectly curable; even Balzajette was astonished that with his treatment and his care the cure was delayed.

"But what shall I say to you, young 'confrere'? You know better than I that with women everything is possible—above all the impossible."

And during a half-hour he complaisantly related the astonishment that the fashionable women under his care had caused him, in spite of his knowledge and experience.

"Well, to resume, what shall I tell you, young 'confrere'?"

And he repeated and explained what he had already said and explained.

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Although Balzajette read only a morning paper, and never opened a book, he had heard of Saniei's reputation, and because he was young he thought he might manage this 'confrere', who seemed destined to make a good position. In spite of the high esteem that he professed for his own merits and person, he vaguely felt that the doctors of his generation who were eminent did not treat him with all the consideration that he accorded himself, and in order to teach his ancient comrades a lesson, he was glad to enter into friendly relations with a young one 'dans le mouvement'. He would speak of his young confrere Saniei: "You know the one who was appointed 'agregé'," and he would relate the advice that he, Balzajette, had given him.

That Madame Dammauville would be well enough to go to court Saniei doubted, above all, after Balzajette had explained his treatment; and as far as he was concerned, he could not but rejoice. Doubtless, it would be hard for Florentin not to have this testimony, and not to profit by the 'coup de theatre' prepared by Nougarede; but for himself, he could only feel happy over it. In spite of all the precautions he had taken, it would be better not to expose himself to a meeting with Madame Dammauville in the witness-chamber, or even in court. They must depend upon a letter supported by Balzajette's deposition, and Florentin would be not the less acquitted. Only Nougarede would have to regret his 'coup de theatre'. But the satisfaction or disappointment of Nougarede was nothing to him.

But he did not tell Phillis the ideas suggested by his interview with Balzajette; he summed up the conclusions of this interview. Balzajette said that Madame Dammauville would soon be on her feet, and one might have faith in his word; Florentin would be saved, and there was nothing to do but to let things go on as they were going.

Phillis, Madame Cormier, Nougarede, Florentin himself, whom the Mazas cell had reconciled neither with hope nor with providential justice, were all delighted with this idea.

Also, when the chamber of the prosecution sent Florent to the assizes, the emotion of Madame Cormier and Phillis would not be too violent. Madame Dammauville would be in a state to make her deposition, since the evening before she had been able to leave her bed; and although she left it for only an hour, and then to go from her bedroom to her parlor, that was enough. Nougarede said that the affair would come on at the second session in April; between then and now Madame Dammauville would be solid enough on her legs to appear before the jury and carry the acquittal.

To Phillis, Saniei repeated that the cure was certain, and to her, also, he rejoiced aloud. But he was troubled about this cure. This meeting, only the idea of which had alarmed him to the point of losing his head, would be brought about, and under conditions that could not but affect him. Truly, the precautions he had taken should reassure him, but after all there remained no less a troublesome uncertainty. Who could tell? He preferred that she should not leave her room, and that Nougarede should find a way to

obtain her deposition without taking her to court; he would then feel more reassured, more calm in mind, and with a more impassive face he could go to court.

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Was he really unrecognizable? This was the question that beset him now. Many times he compared his reflection in the glass with the photograph that he had given Phillis. The hair and beard were gone, but his eyes of steel, as his friend said, still remained, and nothing could change them. He might wear blue eyeglasses, or injure himself in a chemical experiment and wear a bandage. But such a disguise would provoke curiosity and questions just so much more dangerous, because it would coincide with the disappearance of his hair and beard.

But these fears did not torment him long, for Phillis, who now passed a part of every day in the Rue Sainte-Anne with Madame Dammauville, came one evening in despair, and told him that that day the invalid had been able to leave her bed for a few minutes only.

Then she would not go to court.

This apprehension of meeting Madame Dammauville face to face had begun to exasperate him; he felt like a coward in yielding to it, and since he had not the force to shake it off, he was happy to be relieved from it by the intervention of chance, which, after having been against him so long, now became favorable. The wheel turned.

“See Madame Dammauville often,” he said to Phillis, “and note all that she feels; perhaps I shall find some way to repair this impediment, something that I may suggest to Balzajette without his suspecting it. Besides, it is reasonable to believe that the recrudescence of cold that we are suffering from now may have something to do with the change in her condition; it is probable that with the mild spring weather she may improve.”

He hoped by this counsel to quiet Phillis’s uneasiness and to gain time. But it had the opposite effect. In her anguish, which increased as the time for the trial approached, it was not probabilities, any more than the uncertain influence of the spring, that Phillis could depend on; she must have something more and better; but fearing a refusal, she forbore to tell him what she hoped to obtain.

It was only when she had succeeded that she spoke.

Every day, on leaving Madame Dammauville, she came to tell him what she had learned, and for three successive days her story was the same:

“She was not able to leave her bed.”

And each day he made the same reply:

“It is the cold weather. Surely, we shall soon have a change; this frost and wind will not continue beyond the end of March.”

He was pained at her desolation and anguish, but what could he do? It was not his fault that this relapse occurred at a decisive moment; fate had been against him long enough, and he was not going to counteract it at the time when it seemed to take his side, by yielding to the desire that Phillis dared not express, but which he divined, and by going to see Madame Dammauville.

When she entered his office on the fourth day, he knew at once by her manner that something favorable to Florentin had happened.



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"Madame Dammauville is up," he said.

"No."

"I thought she must be, by your vivacity and lightness." "It is because I am happy; Madame Dammauville wishes to consult you."

He took her hands roughly and shook them.

"You have done that!" he exclaimed.

She looked at him frightened.

"You! You!" he repeated with increasing fury.

"At least listen to me," she murmured. "You will see that I have not compromised you in anything."

Compromised! It was professional dignity of which he thought, truly!

"I do not want to listen to you; I shall not go."

"Do not say that."

"It only needed that you should dispose of me in your own way."

"Victor!"

Anger carried him away.

"I belong to you, then! I am your thing! You do with me what you wish! You decide, and I have only to obey! There is too much of this! You can go; everything is at an end between us."

She listened, crushed; but this last word, which struck her in her love, gave her strength. In her turn she took his hands, and although he wished to withdraw them, she held them closely in her own.

"You may throw in my face all the angry words you please; you may reproach me as much as you think I deserve it, and I will not complain. Without doubt, I have done you wrong, and I feel the weight of it on seeing how profoundly you are wounded; but to send me away, to tell me that all is over between us, no, Victor, you will not do that. You will not say it, for you know that never was a man loved as I love you, adored, respected. And voluntarily, deliberately, even to save my brother, that I should have compromised you!"

He pushed her from him.

“Go!” he said harshly.

She threw herself on her knees, and taking his hands that he had withdrawn, she kissed them passionately.

“But listen to me,” she cried. “Before condemning me, hear my defence. Even if I were a hundred times more guilty than I really am, you could not drive me from you with this unmerciful hardness.”

“Go!”

“You lose your head; anger carries you away. What is the matter? It is impossible that I, by my stupidity, through my fault, could put you in such a state of mad exasperation. What is the matter, my beloved?”

These few words did more than Phillis’s despair of her expressions of love. She was right, he lost his head. And however guilty she might be towards him, it was evident that she could not admit that the fault she committed threw him into this access of furious folly. It was not natural; and in his words and actions all must be natural, all must be capable of explanation.

“Very well, speak!” he said. “I am listening to you. Moreover, it is better to know. Speak!”

CHAPTER XXXI

THE APPOINTMENT

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"You should understand," she said with a little more calmness—for, since he permitted her to speak, she hoped to convince him—"that I have done all I could to bring Madame Dammauville to the idea of calling, in consultation with Monsieur Balzajette, a doctor—"

"Which would be myself."

"You or another; I have not mentioned any name. You should not think me awkward enough to put you forward clumsily; it would not be a good way to make you acceptable to an intelligent woman, and I value your dignity too much to lower it. I believed that another doctor than Monsieur Balzajette would find a remedy, some way, a miracle if you will, to enable Madame Dammauville to go to the Palais de justice, and I said it. I said it in every tone, in every way, with as much persuasion as I could put in my words. Was it not the life of my brother that I defended, our honor? At first, I found Madame Dammauville much opposed to this idea. She would be better soon, she felt it. Otherwise, if it were her duty to be carried to the Palais de justice, she would not hesitate."

"She would do that?"

"Assuredly. No one has a stronger sense of justice. She would feel guilty did she not give her testimony to save an innocent person; not to save him when she could would be to take the responsibility of his loss. It is therefore certain that if she cannot go to court alone, she will do all she can to go, no matter how—on M. Balzajette's arm, or on a stretcher. I was, then, easy enough on this side, but I was not for the stretcher. What would people think to see her in this condition? What impression would she make on the jury? Would not her appearance weaken the value of her testimony? As Madame Dammauville is fond of me, and very kind to me, I determined to profit by this kindness to urge a consultation, but without mentioning any name. I represented to her that, since M. Balzajette might say with every appearance of truth he had cured her, he should not be angry if she desired to ratify this cure. That besides, there was an imperative motive that would not permit her to wait, for it would be very disagreeable to her to present herself at the court of assizes in a theatrical way, which was not at all according to her character or habits. I easily discovered that the fear of giving pain to this old friend of her husband was the chief reason why she was opposed to this consultation. It was then that your name was pronounced."

"You acknowledge it, then?"

"You will see how, and you will not be angry about it. I have often spoken to Madame Dammauville of mamma, and, consequently, of how you cured her paralysis, that resembled hers. It was not wrong, was it, to say what you have done for us? And without letting any one suspect my love, I could praise you, which my gratitude prompted. She asked me many questions, and naturally, as usual when I speak of you,

when I have the joy of pronouncing your name, I answered in detail. That is not a crime?"

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She waited a moment, looking at him. Without softening the hardness of his glance, he made a sign to her to continue.

“When I persisted on the consultation, Madame Dammauville recalled what I had said, and she was the first—you hear?—the first to pronounce your name. As you had cured my mother, I had the right to praise you. With a nature like hers, she would not have understood if I had not done it; she would have believed me ungrateful. I spoke of your book on the diseases of the spinal cord, which was quite natural; and as she manifested a desire to read it, I offered to lend it to her.”

“Was that natural?”

“With any but Madame Dammauville, no; but she is not frivolous. I took the book to her two days ago, and she has just told me that, after reading it, she has decided to send for you.”

“I shall certainly not go; she has her own physician.”

“Do not imagine that I have come to ask you to pay her a visit; all is arranged with Monsieur Balzajette, who will write to you or see you, I do not know which.”

“That will be very extraordinary on the part of Balzajette!”

“Perhaps you judge him harshly. When Madame Dammauville spoke to him of you he did not raise the smallest objection; on the contrary, he praised you. He says that you are one of the rare young men in whom one may have confidence. These are his own words that Madame Dammauville told me.”

“What do I care for the opinion of this old beast!”

“I am explaining how it happens that you are called into consultation; it is not because I spoke of you, but because you have inspired Monsieur Balzajette with confidence. However stupid he may be, he is just to you, and knows your value.”

It was come then, the time for the meeting that he did not wish to believe possible; and it was brought about in such a way that he did not see how he could escape it. He might refuse Phillis; but Balzajette? A colleague called him in consultation, and why should he not go? Had he foreseen this blow he would have left Paris until the trial was over, but he was taken unawares. What could he say to justify a sudden absence? He had no mother or brothers who might send for him, and with whom he would be obliged to remain. Besides, he wished to go to court; and since his testimony would carry considerable weight with the jury, it was his duty to be present on account of Florentin. It would be a contemptible cowardice to fail in this duty, and more, it would be an imprudence. In the eyes of the world he must appear to have nothing to fear, and this assurance, this confidence in himself, was one of the conditions of his safety. Now, if he



went to court, and from every point of view it was impossible that he should not go, he would meet Madame Dammauville, as she intended to be carried there if she were unable to go in any other way. Whether it was at her house, or at the Palais de justice, the meeting was then certain, and in spite of what he had done, circumstances stronger than his will had prepared it and brought it about; nothing that he could do would prevent it.

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The only question that deserved serious consideration just now was to know where this meeting would be the least dangerous for him—at Madame Dammauville’s or at the Palais?

He reflected silently, paying no more attention to Phillis than if she were not present, his eyes fixed, his brow contracted, his lips tightly closed, when the doorbell rang. As Joseph was at his post, Saniel did not move.

“If it is a patient,” Phillis said, who did not wish to go yet, “I will wait in the dining-room.”

And she rose.

Before she could leave the room, Joseph entered.

“Doctor Balzajette,” he said.

“You see!” Phillis cried.

Without replying, Saniel made a sign to Joseph to admit Doctor Balzajette, and while Phillis silently disappeared, he went toward the parlor.

Balzajette came forward with both hands extended.

“Good-day, my young ‘confrere’. I am enchanted to meet you.”

The reception was benevolent, amicable, and protecting, and Saniel replied at his best.

“Since we met the other day,” Balzajette continued, “I have thought of you. And nothing more natural than that, for you inspired me with a quick sympathy. The first time you came to see me you pleased me immediately, and I told you you would make your way. Do you remember?”

Assuredly he remembered; and of all the visits that he made to the doctors and druggists of his quarter, that to Balzajette was the hardest. It was impossible to show more pride, haughtiness, and disdain than Balzajette had put into his reception of the then unknown young man.

“I told you what I thought of you,” continued Balzajette. “It is with regard to this patient of whom you spoke to me; you remember?”

“Madame Dammauville?”

“Exactly. I put her on her feet, as I told you, but since then this bad weather has compelled her to take to her bed again. Without doubt, it is only an affair of a few days; but in the mean time, the poor woman is irritable and impatient. You know women,

young 'confrere'. To calm this impatience, I spontaneously proposed a consultation, and naturally pronounced your name, which is well known by your fine work on the medullary lesions. I supported it, as was proper, with the esteem that it has acquired, and I have the satisfaction to see it accepted."

Saniel thanked him as if he believed in the perfect sincerity of this spontaneous proposition.

"I like the young, and whenever an occasion presents itself, I shall be happy to introduce you to my clientage. For Madame Dammauville, when can you go with me to see her?"

As Saniel appeared to hesitate, Balzajette, mistaking the cause of his silence, persisted.

"She is impatient," he said. "Let us go the first day that is possible."

He must reply, and in these conditions a refusal would be inexplicable.

"Will to-morrow suit you?" he asked.

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"To-morrow, by all means. At what hour?"

Before replying, Saniei went to his desk and consulted an almanac, which appeared perfectly ridiculous to Balzajette.

"Does he imagine, the young 'confrere', that I am going to believe his time so fully occupied that he must make a special arrangement to give me an hour?"

But it was not an arrangement of this kind that Saniei sought. His almanac gave the rising and the setting of the sun, and it was the exact hour of sunset that he wished: "26 March, 6h. 20m." At this moment it would not be dark enough at Madame Dammauville's for lamps to be lighted, and yet it would be dark enough to prevent her from seeing him clearly in the uncertain light of evening.

"Will a quarter past six suit you? I will call for you at six o'clock."

"Very well. Only I shall ask you to be very exact; I have a dinner at seven o'clock in the Rue Royale."

Saniei promised promptness. The dinner was a favorable circumstance, enabling him to escape from Madame Dammauville's before the lamps would be lighted.

When Balzajette was gone, he rejoined Phillis in the dining-room.

"A consultation is arranged for to-morrow at six o'clock, at Madame Dammauville's."

She threw herself on his breast.

"I knew that you would forgive me."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FATAL LIGHT

It was not without emotion that the next day Saniei saw the afternoon slip away, and although he worked to employ his time, he interrupted himself at each instant to look at the clock.

Sometimes he found the time passing quickly, and then all at once it seemed to stand still.

This agitation exasperated him, for calmness had never been more necessary than at this moment. A danger was before him, and it was only in being master of himself that he could be saved. He must have the coolness of a surgeon during an operation, the



glance of a general in a battle; and the coolness and the glance were not found among the nervous and agitated.

Could he escape from this danger?

This was the question that he asked himself unceasingly, although he knew the uselessness of it. What good was it to study the chances for or against him?

Either he had succeeded in rendering himself unrecognizable or he had not; but it was done, and now he could do nothing more. He did the best he could in choosing an hour when the dim evening light put the chances on his side; for the rest he must trust to Fortune.

All day he studied the sky, because for the success of his plan it must be neither too bright nor too dark: if it were too bright Madame Dammauville could see him clearly; if it were too dark the lamps would be lighted. He remembered that it was by lamplight she had seen him. Until evening the weather was uncertain, with a sky sometimes sunny, sometimes cloudy; but at this hour the clouds were driven away by a wind from the north, and the weather became decidedly cold, with the pink and pale clearness of the end of March when it still freezes.

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On examining himself he had the satisfaction to feel that he was calmer than in the morning, and that as the moment of attack approached, his agitation decreased; decision, firmness, and coolness came to him; he felt master of his will, and capable of obeying it.

At six o'clock precisely he rang at Balzajette's door, and they started immediately for the Rue Sainte-Anne. Happy to have a complaisant listener, Balzajette did all the talking, so that Saniei had only to reply "yes" or "no" from time to time, and of course it was not of Madame Dammauville that he spoke, but other matters—of a first representation on the previous evening at the Opera Comique; of politics; of the next salon.

At exactly a quarter past six they reached the house in the Rue Sainte-Anne, where Saniei had not been since Caffie's death. On passing the old concierge's lodge he felt satisfied with himself; his heart did not beat too quickly, his ideas were firm and clear. Should danger arrive, he felt assured of mastery over himself, without excitement, as without brutality.

Balzajette rang the bell, and the door was opened by a maid, who was, evidently, placed in the vestibule to await their arrival. Balzajette entered first, and Saniei followed him, giving a hasty glance at the rooms through which they passed. They reached a door at which Balzajette knocked twice.

"Enter," replied a feminine voice in a firm tone.

This was the decisive moment; the day was everything that could be wished, neither too light nor too dark. What would Madame Dammauville's first glance mean?

"My confrere, Doctor Saniei," Balzajette said on going toward Madame Dammauville, and taking her hand.

She was lying on the little bed of which Phillis had spoken, but not against the windows, rather in the middle of the room, placed there evidently after the experience of a sick person who knows that to be examined she must be easily seen.

Profiting by this arrangement, Saniei immediately passed between the bed and the windows in such a way that the daylight was behind him, and consequently his face was in shadow. This was done naturally, without affectation, and it seemed that he only took this side of the bed because Balzajette took the other.

Directed by Saniei, the examination commenced with a clearness and a precision that pleased Balzajette. He did not lose himself in idle words, the young 'confrere', any more than in useless details. He went straight to the end, only asking and seeking the indispensable; and as Madame Dammauville's replies were as precise as his questions, while listening and putting in a word from time to time he said to himself that his dinner

would not be delayed, which was the chief point of his preoccupation. Decidedly, he understood life, the young 'confrere'; he might be called in consultation with his heavy appearance and careless toilet, there was no danger of rivalry.

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However, when Madame Dammauville began to speak of being sensitive to cold, Balzajette found that Saniei let her lose herself in minute details.

“Have you always been sensitive to cold?”

“Yes; and with a deplorable disposition to take cold if the temperature is lowered one or two degrees.”

“Did you exercise in the open air?”

“Very little.”

“Were you ever advised to try shower-baths of cold water?”

“I should not have been able to bear it.”

“I must tell you,” Balzajette interrupted, “that before occupying this house that belongs to her, Madame Dammauville lived in a more modern apartment which was heated by a furnace, and where consequently it was easier to maintain an even temperature to which she was accustomed.”

“On coming to live in this house, where it is not possible to have a furnace,” Madame Dammauville went on, “I employed every means to shelter me from the cold, which I am sure is my great enemy. You can see that I have had weather-strips put at the doors, as well as at the windows.”

In spite of this invitation and the gesture which accompanied it, Saniei was careful not to turn his head toward the window; he kept his face in the shadow, contenting himself with looking at the door which was opposite to him.

“At the same time,” she continued, “I had hangings put on the walls, carpets on the floors, thick curtains at the windows and doors, and in spite of the large fire in my fireplace, often I am unable to get warm.”

“Do you also have a fire in this little stove?” Saniei asked, pointing to a small movable stove at the corner of the fireplace.

“Only at night, so that my servants need not get up every hour to replenish the fire in the chimney. The fire is made in the evening just before I go to sleep; the pipe is placed in the chimney, and it maintains sufficient heat until morning.”

“I think it will be expedient to suppress this mode of heating, which must be very inconvenient,” Saniei said; “and my ‘confrere’ and myself will consider the question whether it will not be possible to give you the heat you need with this chimney, without



fatiguing your servants, and without waking you too often to take care of the fire. But let us continue.”

When he reached the end of his questions he rose to examine the patient on her bed, but without turning round, and in such a way as still to keep his back to the light.

As little by little the reflection of the setting sun faded,

Balzajette proposed asking for a lamp: without replying too hastily, Sanie! refused; it was useless, the daylight was sufficient.

They passed into the parlor, where they very quickly came to an amicable conclusion, for at everything that Sanie! said Balzajette replied:

“I am happy to see that you partake of my opinion. That is it. Truly, that is so!”

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And, besides, each had his reasons for hurrying—Saniel, for fear of the lamps; Balzajette, uneasiness for his dinner. The diagnosis and the treatment were rapidly settled; Saniel proposed, Balzajette approved. The question of the movable stove was decided in two words: for the night a grate would be placed in the chimney; a fire of coal covered with damp coal-dust would keep the fire until morning.

“Let us return,” Balzajette said, who took the initiative and decided on all material things.

Saniel, who kept his eyes on the windows, was calm; it was yet too light to need lamps, besides, during their tete-a-tete, no servant had crossed the salon to enter Madame Dammauville’s room.

But when Balzajette opened the door to return to the patient, a flood of light filled the parlor and enveloped them. A lamp with a shade was placed on the little table near the bed, and two other lighted lamps with globes were on the mantel, reflecting their light in the mirror. How had he not foreseen that there was another door to Madame Dammauville’s room besides the door from the parlor? But if he had foreseen it, it would not have lessened the danger of the situation.

He would have had time to prepare himself, that was all. But to prepare himself for what? Either to enter the room and brave this danger, or to fly. He entered.

“This is what we have decided,” Balzajette said, who never lost an occasion to put himself forward and to speak.

While he spoke, Madame Dammauville seemed not to listen to him. Her eyes were on Saniel, placed between her and the chimney with his back to the lamps, and she looked at him with a characteristic fixedness.

Balzajette, who listened to himself, observed nothing; but Saniel, who knew what there was behind this glance, could not but be struck with it. Happily for him, he had only to let Balzajette talk, for if he had spoken he would surely have betrayed himself by the quivering of his voice.

However, Balzajette seemed coming to the end of his explanations. Suddenly Saniel saw Madame Dammauville extend her hand toward the lamp on the table, and raise the shade by lowering it toward her in such a way as to form a reflector that threw the light on him. At the same time he received a bright ray full on his face.

Madame Dammauville uttered a small, stifled cry.

Balzajette stopped; then his astonished eyes went from Madame Dammauville to Saniel, and front Saniel to Madame Dammauville.

“Are you suffering?” he asked.

“Not at all.”

What, then, was the matter? But it was seldom that he asked for an explanation of a thing that astonished him, preferring to divine and to explain it himself.

“Ah! I understand it,” he said with a satisfied smile.

“The youth of my young ‘confrere’ astonishes you. It is his fault. Why the devil did he have his long hair and his light curled beard cut?”



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If Madame Dammauville had not released the lampshade, she would have seen Sanie! turned pale and his lips quiver.

“Mais voila!” continued Balzajette. “He made this sacrifice to his new functions; the student has disappeared before the professor.”

He might have continued along time. Neither Madame Dammauville nor Sanie! listened to him; but, thinking of his dinner, he was not going to launch into a discourse that at any other moment he would not have failed to undertake. He rose to go.

As Sanie! bowed, Madame Dammauville stopped him with a movement of her hand.

“Did you not know this unfortunate who was assassinated opposite?” she asked, pointing to the windows.

So serious as was an acknowledgment, Sanie! could not answer in the negative.

“I was called in to prove his death,” he said.

And he took several steps toward the door, but she stopped him again.

“Had you business with him?” she asked.

“I saw him several times.”

Balzajette cut short this conversation, which was idle talk to him.

“Good evening, dear Madame. I will see you tomorrow, but not in the morning, for I go to the country at six o'clock, and shall not return until noon.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

SUSPENSE

“Did you observe how I cut the conversation short?” Balzajette said, as they went downstairs. “If you listen to women they will never let you go. I cannot imagine why she spoke to you of this assassinated man, can you?”

“No.”

“I believe that this assassination has affected her brain to a certain point. In any case, it has given her a horror of this house.”

He continued thus without Sanie! listening to what he said. On reaching the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, Balzajette hailed a passing cab.

“You have had the kindness not to delay me,” he said, pressing the hand of his young ‘confrere’, “but I feel that I must hurry. ‘Au revoir’.”

A good riddance! This babbling gave Saniel the vertigo.

He must recover himself, look the situation in the face, and consider that which might, which must, happen.

The situation was plain; Madame Dammauville’s cry revealed it. When the lamplight struck him full in the face, she found in him the man whom she had seen draw Caffie’s curtains. If, in her amazement, she at first refused to believe it, her questions regarding Caffie, and Balzajette’s explanations about his hair and beard, destroyed her hesitation and replaced doubt by the horror of certainty. He was the assassin; she knew it, she had seen him. And such as she revealed herself to him, it seemed that she was not the woman to challenge the testimony of her eyes, and to let the strength of her memory be shaken by simple denials, supported by Balzajette’s words.

With a vivid clearness he saw to the bottom of the abyss open before him; but what he did not see was in what way she would push him into this giddy whirlpool, that is, to whom she would reveal the discovery that she had made. To Phillis, to Balzajette, or to the judge?

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It was almost a relief to think that for this evening, at least, it would not be to Phillis, for at this moment she would be at his rooms, anxiously awaiting his return. He felt a sadness and a revulsion at the thought that she might be the first to learn the truth. He did not wish that, and he would prevent it.

This preoccupation gave him an object; he reached the Rue Louis-le-Grand thinking more of Phillis than of himself. What distress when she should know all! How could she support this blow, and with what sentiments would it inspire her, with what judgment for the man whom she loved? Poor girl! He grew tender at the thought. As for him, he was lost, and it was his fault; he bore the penalty of his own stupidity. But Phillis—it would be a blow to her love that she must bear. And what a blow to this sensitive heart, to this proud and noble soul!

Perhaps he would now see her for the last time, for this one hour, and never again. Then he would be kind to her, and leave her a memory that, later, would be an alleviation to her sorrow, a warm, bright ray in her time of mourning. During these last few days he had been hard, brutal, irritable, strange, and with her habitual serenity she had overlooked it all. When he pushed her from him with his heavy hand, she had kissed this hand, fastening on him her beautiful, tender eyes, full of passionate caresses. He must make her forget that, and she must carry from their last interview a tender impression that would sustain her.

What could he do for her? He remembered how happy she had been at their impromptu dinners six months before, and he would give her this same pleasure. He would see her happy again, and near her, under her glance, perhaps he would forget tomorrow.

He went to the caterer who furnished him with breakfast, and ordered two dinners to be sent to his rooms immediately.

Before he could put the key in the lock, his door was opened by Phillis, who recognized his step on the landing.

“Well?”

“Your brother is saved.”

“Madame Dammauville will go to court?”

“I promise you that he is saved.”

“By you?”

“Yes, by me—exactly.”

In her access of joy, she did not notice the accent on these last words.

“Then you forgive me?”

He took her in his arms, and kissing her with deep emotion said:

“With all my heart, I swear it!”

“You see it was written that you should see Madame Dammauville, in spite of yourself, in spite of all; it was providential.”

“It is certain that your friend Providence could not interfere more opportunely in my affairs.”

This time she was struck by the tone of his voice; but she imagined that it was only this allusion to superior intervention that had vexed him.

“It was of ourselves that I thought,” she said, “not of you.”

“I understood. But do not let us talk of that; you are happy, and I do not wish to shadow your joy. On the contrary, I thought to associate myself with it by giving you a surprise: we are going to dine together.”

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"Oh, dearest!" she exclaimed, trembling, "how-good you are! I will set the table," she added joyously, "and you light the fire; for we must have a bright fire to enliven us and to keep our dinner warm. What have you ordered?"

"I do not know; two dinners."

"So much the better! We will have surprises. We will leave the dishes covered before the fire, and we will take them anyhow. Perhaps we shall eat the roast before the entree, but that will be all the more funny."

Light, quick, busy, graceful, and charming, she came and went around the table.

When the dinner came, the table was ready, and they sat down opposite to each other.

"What happiness to be alone!" she said. "To be able to talk and to look at each other freely!"

He looked at her with a tenderness in his eyes that she had never before seen, with a depth of serious contemplation that overwhelmed her. From time to time little cries of happiness escaped her.

"Oh! Dearest, dearest!" she murmured.

Yet she knew him too well not to see that a cloud of sadness often veiled these eyes full of love, and that also they were often without any expression, as if they looked within. Suddenly she became quiet; but she could not long remain silent when she was uneasy. Why this melancholy at such a moment?

"What a difference between this dinner," she said, "and those of the end of October! At that time you were harassed by the most trying difficulties, at war with creditors, menaced on all sides, without hope; and now all is smooth. No more creditors, no more struggles. The cares that I brought you are nearly at an end. Life opens easy and glorious. The end that you pursued is reached; you have only to walk straight before you, boldly and proudly. Yet there is a sadness in your face that torments me. What is the matter? Speak, I beg you! To whom should you confess, if not to the woman who adores you?"

He looked at her a long time without replying, asking himself if, for the peace of his own heart, this confession would not be better than silence; but courage failed him, pride closed his lips.

"What should be the matter?" he said. "If my face is sad, it does not indicate faithfully what I feel; for what I feel at this moment is an ineffable sentiment of tenderness for you, an inexpressible gratitude for your love, and for the happiness that you have given me. If I have been happy in my rough and struggling life, it is through you. What I have had



of joy, confidence, hope, memories, I owe to you; and if we had not met I should have the right to say that I have been the most miserable among the miserable. Whatever happens to us, remember these words, my darling, and bury them in the depths of your heart, where you will find them some day when you would judge me.”

“To judge you—I!”

“You love me, therefore you do not know me. But the hour will come when you will wish to know exactly the man whom you have loved; when that time comes remember this evening.”

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"It is too radiant for me to forget it."

"Whatever it may be, remember it. Life is so fragile and so ephemeral a thing, that it is beautiful to be able to concentrate it, to sum it up by remembrance, in one hour that marks it and gives it its scope. Such an hour is this one, which passes while I speak to you with deep sincerity."

Phillis was not accustomed to these 'elanas', for, in the rare effusions to which he sometimes abandoned himself, Saniei always observed a certain reserve, as if he feared to commit himself, and to let her read his whole nature. Many times he rallied her when she became sentimental, as he said, and "chantait sa romance;" and now he himself sang it—this romance of love.

Great as was her happiness to listen to him, she could not help feeling an uneasy astonishment, and asked herself under what melancholy impression he found himself at this moment.

He read her too well not to divine this uneasiness. Not wishing to betray himself, he brought a smile to his eyes, and said:

"You do not recognize me, do you? I am sure you are asking yourself if I am not ill."

"Oh, dearest, do not jest, and do not harden yourself against the sentiment that makes such sweet music on your lips! I am happy, so happy, to hear you speak thus, that I would like to see your happiness equal to mine; to dissipate the dark cloud that veils your glance. Will you never abandon yourself? At this hour, above all, when everything sings and laughs within us as about us! Nothing was more natural than that you should be sad six months ago; but today what more do you want to make you happy?"

"Nothing, it is true."

"Is not the present the radiant morning of a glorious future?"

"What will you? There are sad physiognomies as there are happy ones; mine is not yours. But let us talk no more of that, nor of the past, nor of the future; let us talk of the present."

He rose, and, taking her in his arms, made her sit next to him on the sofa.

The sound of the doorbell made Saniei jump as if he had received an electric shock.

"You will not open the door?" Phillis said. "Do not let any one take our evening from us."

But soon another ring, more decided, brought him to his feet.

"It is better to know," he said, and he went to open the door, leaving Phillis in his office.

A maid handed him a letter.

"From Madame Dammauville," she said; "there is an answer."

He left her in the vestibule, and returned to his office to read the letter. The dream had not lasted long; reality seized him with its pitiless hands. This letter, certainly, would announce the blow that menaced him.

"If Dr. Sanial is disengaged, I beg that he will come to see me this evening on an urgent affair; I will wait for him until ten o'clock. If not, I count on seeing him to-morrow morning after nine o'clock."

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"A. *Dammauville*."

He returned to the vestibule.

"Say to Madame. *Dammauville* that I shall be there in a quarter of an hour."

When he reentered the office he found Phillis before the glass, putting on her hat.

"I heard," she said. "What a disappointment! But I cannot wish you to stay, since it is for Florentin that you leave me."

As she walked toward the door he stopped her.

"Embrace me once more."

Never had he pressed her in such a long and passionate embrace.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ON THE RACK

He had not a second of doubt; Madame *Dammauville* did not wish a professional visit from him. She wished to speak to him of Caffie, and, in the coming crisis, he said to himself that perhaps it was fortunate that it was so; at least he would be first to know what she had decided to do, and he could defend himself. Nothing is hopeless as long as a struggle is possible.

He rang the bell with a firm hand, and the door was opened by the maid who brought the letter. With a small lamp in her hand, she conducted him through the dining-room and the salon to Madame *Dammauville*'s bedroom.

At the threshold, a glance showed him that some changes had been made in the arrangement of the furniture. The small bed where he had seen Madame *Dammauville* was placed between the two windows, and she was lying in a large bed with canopy and curtains. Near her was a table on which were a shaded lamp, some books, a blotting-book, a teapot, and a cup; on the white quilt rested an unusually long bellrope, so that she might pull it without moving. The fire in the chimney was out, but the movable stove sent out a heat that denoted it was arranged for the night.

Saniel felt the heat, and mechanically unbuttoned his overcoat.

"If the heat is uncomfortable, will you not remove your overcoat?" Madame *Dammauville* said.

While he disposed of it and his hat, placing them on a chair by the fireplace, he heard Madame Dammauville say to her maid:

“Remain in the salon, and tell the cook not to go to bed.”

What did this mean? Was she afraid that he would cut her throat?

“Will you come close to my bed?” she said. “It is important that we should talk without raising our voices.”

He took a chair and seated himself at a certain distance from the bed, and in such a way that he was beyond the circle of light thrown by the lamp. Then he waited.

A moment of silence, which he found terribly long, slipped away before she spoke.

“You know,” she said at last, “how I saw, accidentally, from this place”—she pointed to one of the windows—“the face of the assassin of my unfortunate tenant, Monsieur Caffie.”

“Mademoiselle Cormier has told me,” he replied in a tone of ordinary conversation.

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"Perhaps you are astonished that at such a distance I saw the face clearly enough to recognize it after five months, as if it were still before me."

"It is extraordinary."

"Not to those who have a memory for faces and attitudes; with me this memory has always been strongly developed. I remember the playmates of my childhood, and I see them as they were at six and ten years of age, without the slightest confusion in my mind."

"The impressions of childhood are generally vivid and permanent."

"This persistency does not only apply to my childish impressions. Today, I neither forget nor confound a physiognomy. Perhaps if I had had many acquaintances, and if I had seen a number of persons every day, there might be some confusion in my mind; but such is not the case. My delicate health has obliged me to lead a very quiet life, and I remember every one whom I have met. When I think of such a one, it is not of the name at first, but of the physiognomy. Each time that I have been to the Senate or to the Chamber, I did not need to ask the names of the deputies or senators who spoke; I had seen their portraits and I recognized them. If I go into these details it is because they are of great importance, as you will see."

It was not necessary for her to point out their importance; he understood her only too well.

"In fine, I am thus," she continued. "It is, therefore, not astonishing that the physiognomy and the attitude of the man who drew the curtains in Monsieur Caffie's office should not leave my memory. You admit this, do you not?"

"Since you consult me, I must tell you that the operations of the memory are not so simple as people imagine. They comprise three things: the conservation of certain states, their reproduction and localization in the past, which should be reunited to constitute the perfect memory. Now this reunion does not always take place, and often the third is lacking."

"I do not grasp your meaning very well. But what is the third thing?"

"Recognition."

"Well, I can assure you that in this case it is not lacking!"

The action beginning in this way, it was of the utmost importance for Sanie! that he should throw doubts in Madame Dammauville's mind, and should make her think that this memory of which she felt so sure was not, perhaps, as strong or as perfect as she imagined.

"It is," he said, "exactly this third thing that is the most delicate, the most complex of the three, since it supposes, besides the state of consciousness, some secondary states, variable in number and in degree, which, grouped around it, determine it."

Madame Dammauville remained silent a moment, and Sanie! saw that she made an effort to explain these obscure words to herself.

"I do not understand," she said at last.

This was exactly what he wished; yet, as it would not be wise to let her believe that he desired to deceive or confuse her, he thought he might be a little more precise.

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"I wish to ask," he said, "if you are certain that in the mechanism of the vision and that of the recognition, which is a vision of the past, there is no confusion?"

She drew a long breath, evidently satisfied to get rid of these subtleties that troubled her.

"It is exactly because I admit the possibility of this confusion, at least in part, that I sent for you," she said, "in order that you might establish it."

Saniel appeared not to comprehend.

"I, Madame?"

"Yes. When you came herewith Monsieur Balzajette a few hours ago, you must have observed that I examined you in a way that was scarcely natural. Before the lamps were lighted, and when you turned your back to the daylight, I tried in vain to remember where I had seen you. I was certain that I found in you some points of resemblance to a physiognomy I had known, but the name attached to this physiognomy escaped me. When you returned, and I saw you more clearly by lamplight, my recollections became more exact; when I raised the lamp-shade the light struck you full in the face, and then your eyes, so characteristic, and at the same time a violent contraction of your features, made me recall the name. This physiognomy, these eyes, this face, belonged to the man whom from this place" she pointed to the window—"I saw draw Monsieur Caffies curtains."

Saniel did not flinch.

"This is a resemblance that would be hard for me," he said, "if your memory were faithful."

"I tell myself that it may not be. And after the first feeling of surprise which made me cry out, I was confirmed in this thought on recalling the fact that you did not wear the long hair and blond beard that the man wore who drew the curtains; but at that moment Monsieur Balzajette spoke of the hair and beard that you had had cut. I was prostrated. However, I had the strength to ask if you had had any business with Monsieur Caffie. Do you remember your answer?"

"Perfectly."

"After your departure I experienced a cruel anguish. It was you whom I had seen draw the curtains, and it could not be you. I tried to think what I ought to do—to inform the judge or to ask you for an interview. For a long time I wavered. At length I decided on the interview, and I wrote to you."

"I have come at your call, but I declare that I do not know what to reply to this strange communication. You believe that you recognize in me the man who drew the curtains."

"I recognize you."

"Then what do you wish me to say? It is not a consultation that you ask of me?"

She believed she understood the meaning of this reply and divined its end.

"The question does not concern me," she said, "neither my moral nor mental state, but yourself. My eyes, my memory, my conscience, bring a frightful accusation against you. I cannot believe my eyes or my memory. I challenge my conscience, and I ask you to reduce this accusation to nothing."

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"And how, Madame?"

"Oh, not by protestations!"

"How can you expect that a man in my position will lower himself to discuss accusations that rest on an hallucination?"

"Do you believe that I have hallucinations? If you do, call one of your 'confreres' tomorrow in consultation. If he believes as you do, I will submit; if not, I shall be convinced that I saw clearly, and I shall act accordingly."

"If you saw clearly, Madame, and I am ready to concede this to you, it proves that there is some one somewhere who is my double."

"I said this to myself; and it is exactly this idea that made me write to you. I wished to give you the opportunity of proving that you could not be this man."

"You will agree that it is difficult for me to admit a discussion on such an accusation."

"One may find one's self accused by a concourse of fatal circumstances, and be not less innocent. Witness the unfortunate boy imprisoned for five months for a crime of which he is not guilty. And I pass from your innocence as from his, to ask you to prove that the charges against you are false."

"There are no charges against me."

"There may be; that depends upon yourself. Your hair and beard may have been cut at the time of the assassination; in that case it is quite certain that the man I saw was not you, and that I am the victim of an hallucination. Were they or were they not?"

"They were not; it is only a few days since I had them cut on account of a contagious disease."

"It may be," she continued, without appearing to be impressed by this explanation, "that the day of the assassination, at the hour when I saw you, you were occupied somewhere in such a way that you can prove you could not have been in the Rue Sainte-Anne, and that I was the victim of an hallucination. And again, it may be that at the time your position was not that of a man at the last extremity, forced to crime by misery or ambition, and that consequently you had no interest in committing the crime of a desperate man. What do I know? Twenty other means of defence may be in your hands."

"You cited the example of this poor boy who is imprisoned, although innocent. Would it not be applicable to me if you did not recognize the error of your eyes or your memory? Would he not be condemned without your testimony? Should I not be if I do not find



one that destroys your accusation? And I see no one from whom I can ask this testimony. Have you thought of the infamy with which such an accusation will cover me? If I repel it, and I shall repel it, will it not have dishonored me, ruined me forever?"

"It is just because I thought of this that I sent for you, to the end that by an explanation that you would give, it seemed to me, you would prevent me from informing the judge of this suspicion. This explanation you do not give me; I must now think only of him whose innocence is proved for me, and take his side against him whose guilt is not less proved. To-morrow I shall inform the judge."



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"You will not do that!"

"My duty compels me to; and whatever might come, I have always done my duty. For me, in this horrible affair, there is the cause of the innocent and of the guilty, and I place myself on the side of the innocent."

"I can prove to you that it was an aberration of vision—"

"You will prove it to the judge; the law will appreciate it."

He rose brusquely. She put her hand on the bellcord. They looked at each other for a moment, and what their lips did not express their eyes said:

"I do not fear you; my precautions are taken."

"That bell will not save you."

At last he spoke in a hoarse and quivering voice:

"To you the responsibility of whatever happens Madame."

"I accept it before God," she said, with a calm firmness. "Defend yourself."

He went to the armchair on which he had placed his coat and hat, and bending down to take them, he noiselessly turned the draught of the stove.

At the same time Madame Dammauville pulled the bellcord; the maid opened the door of the salon.

"Show Doctor Sanie! to the door."

CHAPTER XXXV

A SECOND VICTIM

On returning to his room Sanie! was very much cast down, and without lighting a candle, he threw himself on the divan, where he remained prostrated.

The frightful part of the affair was the rapidity with which he condemned this poor woman to death, and without hesitation executed her. To save himself she must die; she should die. This time the idea did not turn and deviate as in Caffie's case. Is it not true then, that it is the first crime that costs, and in the path that he had entered, would he go on to the end sowing corpses behind him?

A shudder shook him from head to foot as he thought that this victim might not be the last that his safety demanded. When she threatened to warn the judge, he only saw a threat; if she spoke he was lost; he had closed her mouth. But had not this mouth opened before he closed it? Had she not already spoken? Before deciding on this interview she may have told all to some one of her friends, who, between the time of his departure with Balzajette and his return, might have visited her, or to some one for whom she had sent for advice. In that case, those also were condemned to death.

A useless crime, or a series of crimes?

The horror that rose within him was so strong that he thought of running to the Rue Sainte-Anne; he would awake the sleeping household, open the doors, break the windows, and save her. But between his departure and this moment the carbonic acid and the oxide of carbon had had time to produce asphyxiation, and certainly he would arrive after her death; or, if he found her still living, some one would discover that the draught of the stove had been turned, and seeing it, he would betray himself as surely as by an avowal.

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After all, the maid might have discovered that the draught was turned, and in that case she was saved and he was lost. Chance would decide between them.

There are moments when a shipwrecked man, tired of swimming, not knowing to which side to direct his course, without light, without guide, at the end of strength and hope, floats on his back and lets himself be tossed by the waves, to rest and wait for light. This was his case; he could do nothing but wait.

He would not commit the insane folly of wishing to see and know, as in Caffie's case; he would know the result soon enough, too soon.

Rising, he lighted a candle, and paced up and down his apartment like a caged animal. Then it occurred to him that those underneath would hear his steps; doubtless they would remark this agitated march, would be surprised, and would ask an explanation. In his position he must take care not to give cause for any remark that could not be explained. He took off his boots and continued his walk.

But why had she spoken to him of double weatherstrips at the doors and windows, of hangings on the walls, of thick curtains? It was she who thus suggested to him the idea of the draught of the stove, which would not have come to him spontaneously.

The night passed in such agitating thoughts; at times the hours seemed to stand still, and again they flew with astounding rapidity. One moment the perspiration fell from his forehead on his hands; at another he felt frozen.

When his windows grew light with the dawn, he threw himself prostrated and shuddering on the divan, and leaning on a cushion he detected the odor of Phillis; burying his head in it he remained motionless and slept.

A ring of the bell woke him, horrified, frightened; he did not know where he was. It was broad daylight, carriages rumbled through the street. A second ring sounded stronger, more violent. Shivering, he went to open the door, and recognized the maid who the previous evening brought a note from Madame Dammauville. He did not need to question her: fate was on his side. His eyes became dim; without seeing her he heard the maid explain why she had come.

She had been to Monsieur Balzajette; he was in the country. Her mistress was nearly cold in her bed; she neither spoke nor breathed, yet her face was pink.

"I will go with you."

He did not need to learn more. That rosy color, which has been observed in those asphyxiated by oxide of carbon, decided it. However, he questioned the maid.



Nothing had occurred; she had talked with the cook in the kitchen, who, near midnight, went to her room in the fifth story, and then she went to bed in a small room contiguous to that of her mistress. During the night she heard nothing; in the morning she found her mistress in the state she mentioned, and immediately went for Monsieur Balzajette.

Continuing his questions, Saniel asked her what Madame Dammauville did after the consultation with Monsieur Balzajette.



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"She dined as usual, but less than usual, eating almost nothing; then she received a visit from one of her friends, who remained only a few minutes, before starting on a voyage."

This was what he dreaded: Madame Dammauville might have told this friend. If this were so, his crime would be of no use to him; where would it carry him?

After a few moments, and in a tone that he tried to render indifferent, he asked the name of this friend.

"A friend of her youth, Madame Thezard, living at No. 9, in the Rue des Capucines, the wife of a consul."

Until he reached the house in the Rue Sainte-Anne he repeated this name and address to himself, which he could not write down, and which he must not forget, for it was from there now that the danger would come if Madame Dammauville had spoken.

For a long time he had been habituated to the sight of death, but when he found himself in the presence of this woman stretched on her bed as if she slept, a shiver seized him.

"Give me a mirror and a candle," he said to the maid and the cook who stood at the door, not daring to enter.

While they went in search of these things he walked over to the stove; the draught remained as he had turned it on the previous evening; he opened it and returned to the bed.

His examination was not long; she had succumbed to asphyxiation caused by the gas from the charcoal. Did it proceed from the construction of the stove, or from a defect in the chimney? The inquest would decide this; as for him, he could only prove the death.

On leaving him the evening before, Phillis, uneasy, told him that she would come early in the morning to know what Madame Dammauville wished. When he told her she was dead she was prostrated with despair; in that case Florentin was lost. He tried to reassure her, but without success.

Nougarede, also, was in despair, and regretted that he had not proceeded otherwise. And he tried to reassure Phillis; the prosecution rested on the button and the struggle that had torn it off. Sanieel would destroy this hypothesis; he counted on him.

Sanieel became, then, as he had been before the intervention of Madame Dammauville, the only hope of Phillis and her mother, and to encourage them he exaggerated the influence that his testimony would have.

“When I shall have demonstrated that there was no struggle, the hypothesis of the torn button will crumble by itself.”

“And if it is sustained, how and with what shall we overthrow it?”

If he had appeared as usual, she would have shared the confidence with which he tried to inspire her; but since the death of Madame Dammauville he was so changed, that she could not help being uneasy. Evidently it was Madame Dammauville’s death that made him so gloomy and irritable that he would submit to no opposition. He saw the dangers of the situation that this death created for Florentin, and with his usual generosity he reproached himself for not having consented to take care of her sooner; he would have saved her, certainly, as he had begun by demanding the removal of the stove, and Florentin would have been saved also.

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The day of the trial arrived without a word from Madame Thezard, which proved that Madame Dammauville had said nothing to her friend. It was six months since the assassination occurred, and the affair had lost all interest for the Parisian public; in the provinces it was still spoken of, but at Paris it was a thing of the past. There is no romance about a clerk who cuts the throat of his employer to rob him; there is no woman in the case, no mystery.

Saniel preferred that Phillis should remain at home with her mother, but in spite of his wishes and prayers she insisted on going to court. She must be there so that Florentin would see her and take courage; he would defend himself better if she were there.

He defended himself badly, or at least indifferently, like a man who gives up because he knows beforehand that whatever he may say will be useless.

Until Saniel's deposition the witnesses who testified were insignificant enough, and revealed nothing that was not already known; only Valerius, with his pretensions to a professional secret, which he developed slowly, amused the audience. This deposition Saniel made brief and exact, contenting himself with repeating his report. But then Nougarede rose, and begged the president to ask the witness to explain the struggle which should have taken place between the victim and his assassin; and the president, who had commenced by arguing, before the insistence of the defence, decided to ask this question. Then Saniel slowly explained how the position of the body in the armchair and his condition were scientific proof that there was no struggle.

"This is an opinion," said the president dryly; "the jury will appreciate it."

"Perfectly," replied Nougarede, "and I intend to make the jury feel the weight that it carries on the authority of him who formulated it."

This phrase for effect was destined to invalidate in advance the contradictions that the prosecution would, he believed, raise against the testimony; but nothing of the kind occurred, and Saniel could go and take his place beside Phillis without being called to the bar to sustain his opinion against a physician whose scientific authority would be opposed to his.

In default of Madame Dammauville, Nougarede had summoned the concierge of Rue Sainte-Anne, as well as the maid and the cook, who had heard their mistress say that the man who drew Caffies curtains did not resemble Florentin's portrait; but this was only gossip repeated by persons of no importance, who could not produce the effect of the 'coup de theatre' on which he had based his defence.

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When the advocate-general pronounced his address, it was evident why Saniel's opinion on the absence of a struggle was not contradicted. Although the prosecution believed in this struggle, it wished to abandon it a moment, having no need of this hypothesis to prove that the button had not been torn off on falling from a ladder; it had been done in the act of assassination, in the effort made to cut the throat of the victim who had violently extended the right arm, and, by the shock to the suspenders, the button was torn off. The effect of Saniel's deposition was destroyed, and that one produced by the testimony of Madame Dammauville's maids, far less strong, was also destroyed when the advocate-general proved that this gossip turned against the accused. She had seen, it was said, a man with long hair and curled beard, draw the curtains; very well! Does this description apply to the accused? To tell the truth, it was said that she did not recognize him in a portrait published by an illustrated paper. Well, it was because this portrait did not resemble him. Besides, was it possible to admit that a woman of Madame Dammauville's character would not have informed the judge if she believed her testimony important and decisive? The proof that she considered it insignificant was the fact that she had kept silent.

Nougarede's eloquent appeal did not destroy these two arguments, any more than it effaced the impression produced by the money-lender relative to the theft of forty-five francs. The jury brought in a verdict of "Guilty," but without premeditation, and admitting extenuating circumstances.

On hearing the decree that condemned Florentin to twenty years of forced labor, Phillis, half suffocated, clung to Saniel's arm; but he could not give her the attention he wished, for Brigard, who came to the trial to assist at the triumph of his disciple, accosted him.

"Receive my felicitations for your deposition, my dear friend; it is an act of courage that does you honor. If this poor boy could have been saved, it would have been by you; you may well say you are the man of conscience."

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

It is the first crime that costs

Repeated and explained what he had already said and explained

You love me, therefore you do not know me

CONSCIENCE

By Hector Malot

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CONSCIENCE ASSERTS ITSELF

During the first years of his sojourn in Paris, Saniel had published in a Latin Quarter review an article on the “Pharmacy of Shakespeare”—the poison of Hamlet, and of Romeo and Juliet; and although since his choice of medicine he read but little besides books of science, at that time he was obliged to study the plays of his author. From this study there lingered in his memory a phrase that for ten years had not risen to his lips, and which all at once forced itself uppermost in his mind with exasperating persistency. It was the words of Macbeth:

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“Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep;
Sleep, that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labor’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds.”

He also had lost it, “the innocent sleep, sore labor’s bath, balm of hurt minds.” He had never been a great sleeper; at least he had accustomed himself to the habit, hard at first, of passing only a few hours in bed. But he employed these few hours well, sleeping as the weary sleep, hands clenched, without dreaming, waking, or moving; and the thought that occupied his mind in the evening was with him on waking in the morning, not having been put to flight by others, any more than by dreams.

After Caffie’s death this tranquil and refreshing sleep continued the same; but suddenly, after Madame Dammauville’s death, it became broken.

At first it did not bother him. He did not sleep, so much the better! He would work more. But one can no more work all the time than one can live without eating. Sanie! knew better than any one that the life of every organ is composed of alternate periods of repose and activity, and he did not suppose that he would be able to work indefinitely without sleep. He only hoped that after some days of twenty hours of work daily, overcome by fatigue, he would have, in spite of everything, four hours of solid sleep, that Shakespeare called “sore labor’s bath.”

He had not had these four hours, and the law that every state of prolonged excitement brings exhaustion that should be refreshed by a functional rest, was proved false in his case. After a hard day’s work he would go to bed at one o’clock in the morning and would go to sleep immediately. But very soon he awoke with a start, suffocating, covered with perspiration, in a state of extreme anxiety, his mind agitated by hallucinations of which he could not rid himself all at once. If he did not wake suddenly, he dreamed frightful dreams, always of Madame Dammauville or Caffie. Was it not curious that Caffie, who until then had been completely effaced from his memory, was resuscitated by Madame Dammauville in the night, ghost of the darkness that the daylight dissipated?

Believing that one of the causes of these dreams was the excitement of the brain, occasioned by excessive work at the hour when he should not exercise it, but on the contrary should allow it to rest, he decided to change a plan which produced so little success. Instead of intellectual work he would engage in physical exercise, which, by exhausting his muscular functions, would procure him the sleep of the laboring class; and as he could not roll a wheelbarrow nor chop wood, every evening after dinner he walked seven or eight miles rapidly.

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Physical work succeeded no better than intellectual; he endured the fatigue of butchers and wood-choppers, but he did not obtain their sleep. Decidedly, bodily fatigue was worth no more than that of the brain. It was worth even less. At his table, plunged in his books, or in his laboratory over his microscope, he absorbed himself in his work, and, by the force of a will that had been long exercised and submissive to obedience, he was able to keep his thoughts on the subject in hand, without distraction as without dreams. Time passed. But when walking in the streets of Paris, in the deserted roads on the outskirts, by the Seine or Marne, his mind wandered where it would; it was the mistress, and it always dwelt on Madame Dammauville, Caffie, and Florentin. It seemed as if the heat of walking started his brain. When he returned in this state, after many hours of cerebral excitability, how could he find the tranquil and refreshing sleep, complete and profound, of the laboring classes who work only with their muscles?

Never having been ill, he had never examined nor treated himself: medicine was good for others but useless for him. With a machine organized like his he need fear only accidents, and until now he had been spared them; a true son of peasants, he victoriously resisted Paris life as the destroyer of the intellect. But the time had come to undertake an examination and to try a treatment that would give him rest. He was not a sceptical doctor, and he believed that what he ordered for others was good for himself.

The misfortune was that he could not find in himself any of the causes which resolve into insomnia; he had neither meningitis nor brain fever, nor anything that indicated a cerebral tumor; he was not anaemic; he ate well; he did not suffer with neuralgia, nor with any acute or chronic affection that generally accompanied the absence of sleep; he drank neither tea nor alcohol; and without this state of over-excitement of the encephalic centres, he might have said that he was in good health, a little thin, but that was all.

It was this excitement that he must cure, and as there are many remedies for insomnia, he tried those which, it seemed to him, were suitable to his case; but bromide of potassium, in spite of its hypnotic properties, produced no more effect than the over-working of the brain and body. When he realized this he replaced it with chloral; but chloral, which should create a desire to sleep, after several days had no more effect than the bromide. Then he tried injections of morphine.

It was not without a certain uneasiness that he made this third trial, the first two having met with so little success; and since it is acknowledged that chloral produces a calmer sleep than morphine, it seemed as if the latter would prove as useless as the former. However, he slept without being tormented by dreams or wakings, and the next day he still slept.

But he knew too well the effects produced by a prolonged use of these injections to continue them beyond what was strictly indispensable; he therefore omitted them, and sleep left him.

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He tried them again; then, soon, as the small doses lost their efficacy, he gradually increased them. At the end of a certain time what he feared came to pass—his leanness increased; he lost his appetite, his muscular force, and his moral energy; his pale face began to wear the characteristic expression of the morphomaniac.

Then he stopped, frightened.

Should he continue, he would become a morphomaniac in a given time, and the apathy into which he fell prevented him from resisting the desire to absorb new doses of poison, a desire as imperious, as irresistible in morphinism as that of alcohol for the alcoholic, and more terrible in its effects—the perversion of the intellectual faculties, loss of will, of memory, of judgment, paralysis, or the mania that leads to suicide.

If he did not continue, and these sleepless nights or the agitated sleep which maddened him should return, and following them, this over-excitement of the brain in troubling the nutrition of the encephalic mass, it might be the prelude of some grave cerebral affection.

On one side the morphine habit; on the other, dementia from the constant excitement and disorganization of the brain.

Between a fatally certain result and one that was possible he did not hesitate. He must give up morphine, and this choice forced itself upon him with so much more strength, because if morphine assured him sleep at night, it by no means gave him tranquil days—quite the contrary.

He began to use this remedy at night when he fell under the influence of certain ideas; during the day when applying himself to work, by an effort of will he escaped from these ideas, and was the man he had always been, master of his strength and mind. But the action of the morphine rapidly weakened this all-powerful will, so much so, that when these ideas crossed his mind during his working hours he had not the energy to drive them away. He tried to shake them off, but in vain; they would not leave his brain, to which they clung and encompassed it with increasing strength.

Truly, those two corpses troubled him horribly. Was it not exasperating for a man who had seen and dissected so many, that there should be always two before his eyes, even when they were closed—that of this old rascal and of this unfortunate woman? In order not to complicate this impression with another that humiliated him, he got rid of the packages of bank bills taken from Caffie, by sending them “as restitution” to the director of public charities. But this had no appreciable effect.

The thought of Florentin troubled him also; and if he saw Caffie lying in his chair, Madame Dammauville motionless and pink on her bed, to him it was not less cruel to

see Florentin between the decks of the vessel that would soon carry him to New Caledonia.

The ideas on conscience that he had expressed at Crozat's, and those that he explained to Phillis about remorse, were still his; but he was not the less certain that these two dead persons and the condemned one weighed upon him with a terrible weight, frightful, suffocating, like a nightmare. It was not in accordance with his education nor with his environment to have these corpses behind him and this victim before him.

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But where his former ideas were overthrown, since these dead bodies seized hold of his life, was in his confidence in his strength.

The strong man that he believed himself, he who follows his ambition regardless of things and of persons, looking only before him and never behind, master of his mind as of his heart and of his arm, was not at all the one that reality revealed.

On the contrary, he had been weak in action and yet weaker afterward.

And it was not only humiliation in the present that he felt in acknowledging this weakness, it was also in uneasiness for the future; for, if he lacked this strength that he attributed to himself before having tested it, he should, if his beliefs were true, succumb some day.

Evidently, if he were perfectly strong he would not have complicated his life with love. The strong walk alone because they need no one. And he needed a woman; and so great was the need that it was through her only, near her, when he looked at her, when he listened to her, that he experienced a little calm.

Was he weak and cowardly on account of this? Perhaps not, but only human.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ATTEMPTED REPARATION

Because he felt calm when with Phillis, Saniel wished that she might never leave him.

But, as happy as she was in her sorrow to see that instead of avoiding her—which a less generous man would have done, perhaps—he sought to draw nearer each day, she could not give up her lessons and her work, which was her daily bread, to give all her time to her love, any more than she could leave her mother entirely alone, crushed with shame, who had never needed so much as now to be cheered and sustained.

She did not let a day pass without going to see Saniel; but in spite of her desire she could not remain with him as long as she wished and he asked. When she rose to go and he detained her, she remained, but it was only for a few minutes; they were short, and the time soon came when, after ten attempts, she was obliged to leave him.

At all times these separations had been full of despair to her, the apprehension of which, from the moment of her arrival, paralyzed her; but now they were still more cruel. Formerly, on leaving him, she often saw him deep in his work before she opened the door; now, on the contrary, he conducted her to the vestibule, detained her, and only let her leave him when she tore herself from his embrace, after promising and repeating her promise to come early the next day and stay longer. Formerly, also, she was calm



when she left him, not thinking of his health, nor asking herself how she would find him at their next meeting, strong and powerful, as sound in body as in mind. On the contrary, now she worried herself, wondering how she would find him on the occasion of each visit. Would the sadness, melancholy, and dejection still

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remain? Would he be thinner and paler? It was her care, her anguish, to try to divine the causes of the change in him, which manifested itself as strongly in his sentiments as in his person. Was it not truly extraordinary that he was more grave and uneasy now that his life was assured than during the hard times when he was so worried that he never knew what the morrow would bring? He had obtained the position that his ambition coveted; he had sufficient money for his wants; he admitted that his experiments had succeeded beyond his expectations; the essays that he published on his experiments were loudly discussed, praised by some, contested by others; it seemed that he had attained his object; and he was sad, discontented, unhappy, more tormented than when he exhausted himself with efforts, without other support than his will. At last, when frightened to see him thus, she questioned him as to how he felt, he became angry, and answered brutally—

“Ill? Why do you think that I am—ill? Am I not better able than any one to know how I am? I am overworked, that is all; and as my life of privation does not permit me to repair my forces, I have become anaemic; it is not serious. It is strange, truly, that you ask for explanations of what is natural. Count the teeth of the polytechnicians and look at their hair after their examinations, and tell me what you think of them. Why do you think anything else is the matter with me? One cannot expend one’s self with impunity; that would be too good. Everything must be paid for in this world.”

She was obliged to believe that he was right and understood his condition; however, she could not help worrying. She knew nothing of medicine; she did not know the meaning of the medical terms he used, but she found that this was not sufficient to explain all—neither his roughness of temper and excess of anger without reason, any more than his sudden tenderness, his weakness and dejection, his preoccupation and absence of mind.

She discovered the effect she produced on him, and how, merely by her presence, she cheered this gloomy fancy and raised this depression by not asking him stupid questions on certain subjects which she had not yet determined on, but which she hoped to avoid. Also, she did not wish to leave him, and ingeniously invented excuses to go to see him twice a day; in the morning on going to her lessons, and in the afternoon or evening.

Late one evening she rang his bell with a hand made nervous with joy.

“I have come to stay till to-morrow,” she said, in triumphant tones.

She expected that he would express his joy by an embrace, but he did nothing.

“Are you going out?”

“Not at all; I am not thinking of myself, but of your mother.”

“Do you think that I would have left her alone in her weak and nervous state? A cousin of ours arrived from the country, who will occupy my bed, and I profited by it quick enough, saying that I would remain at the school. And here I am.”

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In spite of his desire for it, he had never dared ask her to pass the night with him. During the day he would only betray himself by his sad or fantastic temper; but at night, with such dreams as came to him, might not some word escape that would betray him?

However, since she was come it was impossible to send her away; he could not do it for her nor for himself. What pretext could he find to say, "Go! I do not want you?" He wanted her above all; he wanted to look at her, to listen to her, to hear her voice that soothed and lulled his anguish, to feel her near him—only to have her there, and not be face to face with his thoughts.

She examined him secretly, asking herself the cause of this singular reception, standing at the entrance of the office, not daring to remove her hat. How could her arrival produce an effect so different from what she expected?

"You do not take off your hat?" he said.

"I was asking myself if you had to work."

"Why do you ask yourself that?"

"For fear of disturbing you."

"What a madness you have for always asking something!" he exclaimed violently.

"What do you expect me to say? What astonishes you? Why should you disturb me? In what? 'Voyons', speak, explain yourself!"

The time was far distant when these explosions surprised her, though they always pained her.

"I speak stupidly," she said. "What will you? I am stupid; forgive me."

These words, "forgive me," were more cruel than numberless reproaches, for he well knew that he had nothing to forgive in her, since she was the victim and he the criminal. Should he never be able to master these explosions, as imprudent as they were unjust?

He took her in his arms and made her sit by him.

"It is for you to forgive," he said.

And he was as tender and caressing as he had been brutal. He was a fool to imagine that she could have suspicions, and the surest way to give birth to them was to show fear that she had them. To betray himself by such awkwardness was as serious as to let a cry escape him while sleeping.

But for this night he had a way which was in reality not difficult, that would not expose him to the danger of talking in his sleep—he would not sleep. After having passed so many nights without closing his eyes, without doubt he could keep them open this entire night.

But he deceived himself; when he heard the calm and regular respiration of Phillis with her head on his shoulder, and felt the mild warmth of her body penetrate his, in the quiet imposed upon him, without being conscious of it, believing himself far from sleep, and convinced that he required no effort to keep awake, he suddenly slept. When he awoke a ray of pale sunlight filled the room, and leaning her elbow on the bolster, Phillis was watching him. He made a brusque movement, throwing himself backward. “What is the matter?” he cried. “What

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have I said?" Instantly his face paled, his lips quivered; he felt his heart beat tumultuously and his throat pressed by painful constriction. "But nothing is the matter," she answered, looking at him tenderly. "You have said nothing." To come to the point, why should he have spoken? During his frightful dreams, his nights of disturbed sleep, he might have cried out, but he did not know if he had ever done so. And besides, he had not just waked from an agitated sleep. All this passed through his mind in an instant, in spite of his alarm. "What time is it?" he asked. "Nearly six o'clock." "Six o'clock!" "Do you not hear the vehicles in the street? The street-venders are calling their wares." It must have been about one o'clock when he closed his eyes; he had then slept five hours, profoundly, and he felt calm, rested, refreshed, his body active and his mind tranquil, the man of former times, in the days of his happy youth, and not the half-insane man of these last frightful months.

He breathed a sigh.

"Ah, if I could have you always!" he murmured, as much to himself as to her.

And he gave her a long look mingled with a sad smile; then, placing his arm around her shoulders, he pressed her to him.

"Dear little wife!"

She had never heard so profound, so vibrating, a tenderness in his voice; never had she been able, until hearing these words, to measure the depth of the love that she had inspired in him; and it even seemed that this was the declaration of a new love.

Pressing her passionately to him, he repeated:

"Dear little wife!"

Distracted, lost in her happiness, she did not reply.

All at once he held her from him gently, and looking at her with the same smile:

"Does this word tell you nothing?"

"It tells me that you love me."

"And is that all?"

"What more can I wish? You say it, I feel it. You give me the greatest joy of which I can dream."

"It is enough for you?"

"It would be enough if it need never be interrupted. But it is the misfortune of our life that we are obliged to separate at the time when the ties that unite us are the most strongly bound."

"Why should we separate?"

"Alas! Mamma? And daily bread?"

"If you did not leave your mother. If you need no longer worry about your life?"

She looked at him, not daring to question him, not betraying the direction of her thoughts except by a trembling that she could not control in spite of her efforts.

"I mean if you become my wife."

"Oh, my beloved!"

"Will you not?"

She threw herself in his arms, fainting; but after a moment she recovered.

"Alas! It is impossible," she murmured.

"Why impossible?"

"Do not ask me; do not oblige me to say it."

"But, on the contrary, I wish you to tell me."



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She turned her head away, and in a voice that was scarcely perceptible, in a stifled sigh:

“My brother—”

“It is greatly on account of your brother that I wish this marriage.”

Then, suddenly: “Do you think me the man to submit to prejudiced blockheads?”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE IMPORTANT QUESTION

Saniel had not waited until this day to acknowledge the salutary influence that Phillis's presence exercised over him, yet the idea of making her his wife never occurred to him. He thought himself ill-adapted to marriage, and but little desirous of being a husband. Until lately he had had no desire for a home.

This idea came to him suddenly and took strong hold of him; at least as much on account of the calmness he felt in her presence, as by the charm of her manner, her health, happiness, and gayety.

It was not only physical calm that she gave him by a mysterious affinity concerning which his studies told him nothing, but of which he did not the less feel all the force; it was also a moral calm.

There were duties he owed her, and terribly heavy were those he owed her mother and Florentin.

He did all he could for Florentin, but this was not all that he owed them. Florentin was in prison; Madame Cormier fell into a mournful despair, growing weaker each day; and Phillis, in spite of her elasticity and courage, bent beneath the weight of injustice.

How much the situation would be changed if he married her—for them, and for him!

When Phillis was a little recovered from her great surprise, she asked him:

“When did you decide on this marriage?”

He did not wish to prevaricate, and he answered that it was at that instant that the idea came to him, exact enough and strong enough to give form to the ideas that had been floating in his brain for several months.

“At least, have you considered it? Have you not yielded to an impulse of love?”

“Would it be better to yield to a long, rational calculation? I marry you because I love you, and also because I am certain that without you I cannot be happy. Frankly, I acknowledge that I need you, your tenderness, your love, your strength of character, your equal temper, your invincible faith in hope, which, for me as I am organized, is worth the largest dot.”

“It is exactly because I have no dot to bring you. When you were at the last extremity, desperate and crushed, I might ask to become the wife of the poor village doctor that you were going to be; but to-day, in your position, above all in the position that you will soon occupy, is poor little Phillis worthy of you? You give me the greatest joy that I can ever know, of which I have only dreamed in telling myself that it would be folly to hope to have it realized. But just that gives me the strength to beg you to reflect, and to consider whether you will ever regret this moment of rapture that makes me so happy.”

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"I have reflected, and what you say proves better than anything that I do not deceive myself. I want a wife who loves me, and you are that wife."

"More than I can tell you at this moment, wild with happiness, but not more than I shall prove to you in the continuance of our love."

"Besides, dearest, do not have any illusions on the splendors of this position of which you speak; it is more than probable that they will never be realized, for I am not a man of money, and will do nothing to gain any. If it does not come by itself—"

"It will come."

"That is not the object for which I work. What I wish I have obtained partly; if now I make money and obtain a rich practice, the jealousy of my confreres will make me lose, or wait too long, for what my ambition prefers to a fortune. For the moment this position will be modest; my four thousand francs of salary, that which I gain at the central bureau while waiting to have the title of hospital physician, and five hundred francs a month more that my editor offers me for work and a review of bacteriology, will give us nearly twelve thousand francs, and we must content ourselves with that for some time."

"That is a fortune to me."

"To me also; but I thought I ought to tell you."

"And when do you wish our marriage to take place?"

"Immediately after the necessary legal delay, and as soon as I am settled in a new apartment; for you could not come here as my wife, where you have been seen so often. It would not be pleasant for you or for me."

"And we will not be so foolish as to put ourselves in the hands of an upholsterer; the first one cost enough."

He said these last words with fierce energy, but continued immediately:

"What do we need? A parlor for the patients, if they come; an office for me, which will do also as a laboratory; a bedroom for us, and one for your mother."

"You wish—"

"But certainly. Do you think that I would ask you to separate from her?"

She took his hand, and kissing it with a passionate impulse: "Oh, the dearest, the most generous of men!"

“Do not let us talk of that,” he said with evident annoyance. “In your mother’s condition of mental prostration it would kill her to be left alone; she needs you, and I promise to help you to soften her grief. We will make her comfortable; and although my nature is not very tender, I will try to replace him from whom she is separated. It will be a happiness to her to see you happy.”

For a long time he enlarged upon what he wished, feeling a sentiment of satisfaction in talking of what he would do for Madame Cormier, in whom at this time he saw the mother of Florentin more than that of Phillis.

“Do you think you can make her forget?” he asked from time to time.

“Forget? No. Neither she nor I can ever forget; but it is certain our sorrow will be drowned in our happiness, and this happiness we shall owe to you. Oh, how you will be adored, respected, blessed!”

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Adored, respected! He repeated these words to himself. One could, then, be happy by making others happy. He had had so little opportunity until this time to do for others, that this was in some sort the revelation of a sentiment that he was astonished to feel, but which, for being new, was only the sweeter to him.

He wished to give himself the satisfaction of tasting all the sweetness.

"Where are you going this morning?" he asked.

"I return to the school to help my pupils prepare their compositions for the prize."

"Very well; while you are at the school this morning, I will go to see your mother. The process of asking in marriage that we make use of is perhaps original, and conforms to the laws of nature, if nature admits marriage, which I ignore; but it certainly is not the way of those of the world. And now I must address this request to your mother."

"What joy you will give her!"

"I hope so."

"I should like to be there to enjoy her happiness. Mamma has a mania for marriage; she spends her time marrying the people she knows or those she does not know. And she has felt convinced that I should die in the yellow skin of an old maid. At last, this evening she will have the happiness of announcing to me your visit and your request. But do not make this visit until the afternoon, because then our cousin will be gone."

Saniel spent his morning in looking for apartments, and found one in a quarter of the Invalides, which he engaged.

It was nearly one o'clock when he reached Madame Cormier's. As usual, when he called, she looked at him with anxious curiosity, thinking of Florentin.

"It is not of him that I wish to speak to you to-day," he said, without pronouncing any name, which was unnecessary. "It is of Mademoiselle Phillis—"

"Do you find her ill?" Madame Cormier said, who thought only of misfortune.

"Not at all. It is of her and of myself that I wish to speak. Do not be uneasy. I hope that what I am going to say will not be a cause of sadness to you."

"Pardon me if I always see something to fear. We have been so frightfully tried, so unjustly!"

He interrupted her, for these complaints did not please him.



"For a long time," he said quickly, "Mademoiselle Phillis has inspired me with a deep sentiment of esteem and tenderness; I have not been able to see her so courageous, so brave in adversity, so decided in her character, so good to you, so charming, without loving her, and I have come to ask you to give her to me as my wife."

At Sanie!l's words, Madame Cormier's hands began to tremble, and the trembling increased.

"Is it possible?" she murmured, beginning to cry. "So great a happiness for my daughter! Such an honor for us, for us, for us!"

"I love her."

"Forgive me if happiness makes me forget the conventionalities, but I lose my head. We are so unhappy that our souls are weak against joy. Perhaps I should hide my daughter's sentiments; but I cannot help telling you that this esteem, this tenderness of which you speak, is felt by her. I discovered it long ago, although she did not tell me. Your request, then, can only be received with joy by mother, as well as daughter."



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This was said brokenly, evidently from an overflowing heart. But all at once her face saddened.

"I must talk to you sincerely," she said. "You are young, I am not; and my age makes it a duty for me not to yield to any impulse. We are unfortunates, you are one of the happy; you will soon be rich and famous. Is it wise to burden your life with a wife who is in my daughter's position?"

With the exception of a few words, this was Phillis's answer. He answered the mother as he had answered the daughter.

"It is not for you that I speak," said Madame Cormier. "I should not permit myself to give you advice; it is in placing myself at the point of view of my daughter that I, her mother, with the experience of my age, should watch over her future. Is it certain that in the struggles of life you will never suffer from this marriage, not because my daughter will not make you happy—from this side I am easy—but because the situation that fate has made for us will weigh on you and fetter you? I know my daughter—her delicacy; her uneasy susceptibility, that of the unfortunate; her pride, that of the irreproachable. It would be a wound for her that would make happiness give way to unhappiness, for she could not bear contempt."

"If that is in human nature, it is not in mine; I give you my word."

He explained how he meant to arrange their life, and when she understood that she was to live with them, she clasped her hands and exclaimed,

"Oh, my God, who hast taken my son, how good thou art to give me another!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

CONCESSION TO CONSCIENCE

He asked nothing better than to be a son to this poor woman; in reality he was worth much more than this unfortunate boy, effeminate and incapable. What did this maternal hunger require? A son to love. She would find one in her son-in-law. In seeing her daughter happy, how could she help being happy herself?

Evidently they would be happy, the mother and daughter; and whatever Phillis might think, still under the influence of the shameful blow, they would forget. They would owe him this.

It was a long time since he had worked with so much serenity as on this day; and when in the evening he went to bed, uneasy as usual about the night, he slept as calmly as if

Phillis were resting her charming head on his shoulder and he breathed the perfume of it.

Decidedly, to make others happy was the best thing in the world, and as long as one could have this satisfaction there was no fear of being unhappy. To create an atmosphere of happiness for others is to profit by it at the same time.

He waited for Phillis impatiently, for she would bring him an echo of her mother's joy, and it was a recompense that she owed him.

She arrived happy, smiling, penetrated with tenderness; but he observed that she was keeping something from him, something that embarrassed her, and yet she would not tell him what it was.

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He was not disposed to admit that she could conceal anything from him, and he questioned her.

“What are you keeping from me?”

“How can you suppose that I should keep anything from you?”

“Well, what is the matter? You know, do you not, that I read all your thoughts in your eyes? Very well your eyes speak when your lips are silent.”

“I have a request to make of you, a prayer.”

“Why do you not tell me?”

“Because I do not dare.”

“Yet it does not seem to me that I show a disposition to make you believe that I could refuse you anything.”

“It is just that which is the cause of my embarrassment and reserve; I fear to pain you at the moment when I would show you all the gratitude and love in my heart.”

“If you are going to give me pain, it is better not to make me wait.”

She hesitated; then, before an impatient gesture, she decided to speak.

“I wish to ask you how you mean to be married?”

He looked at her in surprise.

“But, like every one else!”

“Every one?” she asked, persistently.

“Is there any other way of being married?”

“Yes.”

“I do not in the least understand this manner of asking conundrums; if you are alluding to a fashionable custom of which I know nothing, say so frankly. That will not wound me, since I am the first to declare that I know nothing of it. What do you wish?”

She felt his irritation increase, and yet she could not decide to say what she wished.

“I have begun badly,” she said. “I should have told you at first that you will always find in me a wife who will respect your ideas and beliefs, who will never permit herself to



judge you, and still less to seek to contend with them or to modify them. That you feel, do you not, is neither a part of my nature nor of my love?"

"Conclude!" he said impatiently.

"I think, then," she said with timid hesitation, "that you will not say that I fail in respect to your ideas in asking that our marriage take place in church."

"But that was my intention."

"Truly!" she exclaimed. "O dearest! And I feared to offend you!"

"Why should you think it would offend me?" he asked, smiling.

"You consent to go to confession?"

Instantly the smile in his eyes and on his lips was replaced by a gleam of fury.

"And why should I not go to confession?" he demanded.

"But—"

"Do you suppose that I can be afraid to confess? Why do you suppose that? Tell me why?"

He looked at her with eyes that pierced to her heart, as if they would read her inmost thoughts.

Stupefied by this access of fury, which burst forth without any warning, since he had smilingly replied to her request for a religious marriage, she could find nothing to say, not understanding how the simple word "confess" could so exasperate him. And yet she could not deceive herself: it was indeed this word and no other that put him in this state.

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He continued to look at her, and wishing to explain herself, she said: "I supposed only one thing, and that is that I might offend you by asking you to do what is contrary to your beliefs."

The mad anger that carried him away so stupidly began to lose its first violence; another word added to what had already escaped him would be an avowal.

"Do not let us talk of it anymore," he said. "Above all, do not let us think of it."

"Permit me to say one word," she replied. "Had I been situated like other people I would have asked nothing; my will is yours. But for you, for your future and your honor, you should not appear to marry in secret, as if ashamed, with a pariah."

"Be easy. I feel as you do, more than you, the necessity of consecrated ceremonies for us."

She understood that on this path he would go farther than she.

To destroy the impression of this unfortunate word, he proposed that they should visit the apartment he had engaged the previous day.

For the first time they walked together boldly, with heads held high, side by side in the streets of Paris, without fear of meeting others. How proud she was! Her husband! It was on her husband's arm that she leaned! When they crossed the Tuileries she was almost surprised that people did not turn to see them pass.

In her present state of mind she could not but find the house he chose admirable; the street was admirable, the house was admirable, the apartment was admirable.

As it contained three bedrooms opening on a terrace, where he would keep the animals for his experiments, Sanie! wished to have her decide which one she would choose; as she would share it with him she wished to take the best, but he would not accept this arrangement.

"I want you to choose between the two little ones," he said. "The largest and best must be reserved for your mother, who, not being able to go out, needs more space, air, and light than we do."

She was transported with his kindness, delicacy, and generosity. Never would she be able to love him enough to raise herself up to him.

Fortunately the principal rooms, the parlor and the office, were about the same size as those in the Rue Louis-le-Grand, so there need be but little change in furnishing; and they would bring their furniture from the Rue des Moines.



This feminine talk, interrupted by passionate exclamations and glances, charmed Saniel, who had forgotten the incident of the confession and his anger, thinking only of Phillis, seeing only her, ravished by her gayety, her vivacity, his whole being stirred by the tender caresses of her beautiful dark eyes.

How could he not be happy with this delicious woman who held such sway over him, and who loved him so ardently? For him a single danger henceforth—solitude. She would preserve him from it. With her gayety, good temper, courage, and love, she would not leave him to his thoughts; work would do the rest.

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After the question of furniture was decided, they settled that of the marriage ceremony, and she was surprised to find that his ideas were the same as hers.

She decided upon her toilet, a silk gown as simple as possible, and she would make it herself, as she made all her gowns. And then they discussed the witnesses. "We have no friends," Phillis said.

"You had some formerly; your father had friends and comrades."

"I am no longer the daughter of my father, I am the sister of my brother; I would not dare to ask them to witness my marriage."

"It is just because you are the sister of your brother that they cannot refuse you; it would be cruelty added to rudeness. Cruelty may be overlooked, but rudeness! Among the men of talent, who was your father's best friend?"

"Cintrat."

"Is he not a bohemian, a drunkard?"

"My father regarded him as the greatest painter of our time, the most original."

"It is not a question of talent, but of name; I am sure that he is not even decorated. Your father had other friends, more successful, more commonplace, if you wish."

"Glorient."

"The member of the Institute?"

"Casparis, the sculptor."

"An academician, also; that is what we want, and both are 'archi-decore'. You will write them, and tell them who I am, assistant professor of the school of medicine, and doctor of the hospitals. I promise you they will accept. I will ask my old master Carbonneau, president of the academy of medicine; and Claudet, the ancient minister, who, in his quality of deputy of my department, could not decline any more than the others. And that will give us decorated witnesses, which will look well in the newspapers."

It was not only in the newspapers they looked well, but also in the church of Sainte-Marie des Batignolles.

"Glorient! Casparis! Carbonneau! Claudet! Art, science, and politics."

But the beauty and charm of the bride were not eclipsed by these glorious witnesses. She entered on Glorient's arm, proud in her modesty, radiant with grace.

While the priest celebrated mass at the altar, outside, before the door, a man dressed in a costume of chestnut velvet, and wearing a felt hat, walked up and down, smoking a pipe. It was the Count de Brigard, whose principles forbade him to enter a church for either a wedding or a funeral, and who walked up and down on the sidewalk with his disciples, waiting to congratulate Sanie! When he appeared the Count rushed up to him, and taking his hand pressed it warmly on separating him from his wife, and saying:

“It is good, it is noble. Circumstances made this marriage; without them it would not have taken place. I understand and I excuse it; I do more, I applaud it. My dear friend, you are a man.”

And as it was Wednesday, in the evening at Crozat’s, he publicly expressed his approbation, which, in the conditions in which it had been offered, did not satisfy his conscience.

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"Gentlemen, we have assisted to-day at a grand act of reparation, the marriage of our friend Saniel to the sister of this poor boy, victim of an injustice that cries for vengeance. One evening in this same room, I spoke lightly of Saniel, some of you remember, perhaps, in spite of the time that has passed. I wish to make this public reparation to him. To-day he has shown himself a man of duty and of conscience, bravely putting himself above social weaknesses."

"Is it not a social weakness," asked Gladly, "to have chosen as witnesses of this act of reparation persons who seem to have been selected for the decorative side of their official positions?"

"Profound irony, on the contrary!" said Brigard. "It is a powerful and fruitful lesson, which makes even those who are professional defenders concur in the demolition of the prejudiced. Saniel is a man!"

CHAPTER XL

PHILLIS IS SURPRISED

The Sunday following her marriage, Phillis experienced a surprise on which she reflected a long time without finding a satisfactory explanation.

As she was dressing, Saniel entered her room.

"What are you going to do to-day?" he asked.

"That which I do every day."

"You are not going to mass?"

She looked at him astonished, not being able to control her surprise, and as usual, when she appeared to wish to read his thoughts, he showed temper.

"In what way is my question extraordinary?"

"Mass is not exactly the usual subject of your thoughts, it seems to me."

"It may become so, especially when I think of others, as is the case just now. Do you not often go to mass?"

"When I can."

“Very well, you can go to-day if you wish. Listen to what I have to say to you. I have not forgotten the promise you made to respect my ideas and beliefs. I wish to make you the same; it is very simple.”

“All that is good and generous seems simple to you.”

“Well?”

“I will go at once.”

“Now? At once? It is not eight o’clock. Go to high mass, it is more fashionable.”

Fashionable! What a strange word in his mouth! It was not out of respect to fashion that she went to church, but because there was in her a depth of religious sentiment and of piety, a little vague perhaps, which Florentin’s misfortunes had revived.

“I will go to high mass,” she said, without letting it appear that this word had suggested anything to her, and continuing her dressing.

“Are you going to wear this frock?” he asked, pointing to one that lay on a chair.

“Yes; at least if it does not displease you.”

“I find it rather simple.”

In effect it was of extreme simplicity, made of some cheap stuff, its only charm being an originality that Phillis gave it on making it herself.

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"Do not forget," he continued, "that Saint-Francois-Xavier is not a church for working people; when a woman is as charming as you are she is always noticed. People will ask who you are."

"You are right; I will wear the gown I wore at the distribution of the prices."

"That is it; and your bonnet, will you not, instead of the round hat? The first impression should be the best."

This mixture of religious and worldly things was surprising in him. Had she not understood him, then, until now? After all, perhaps it was only an exception.

But these exactions regarding her dress were repeated. Although before her marriage Phillis had only crossed Saniel's path, she knew him well enough to know that he was entirely given up to work, without thought of anything else, and she believed that after marriage he would continue to work in the same way, not caring for amusements or society. She was correct about his work, but not so regarding society. A short time after their marriage the minister Claudet was cured opportunely of an attack of facial neuralgia by Saniel, for whom he conceived a great friendship. He invited Saniel and his wife to all his reunions and fetes, and Saniel accepted all his invitations.

At first her wedding gown answered very well, but it would not do always. It had to be trimmed, modified, three or four toilets made of one gown; but, however ingenious Phillis might be in arranging several yards of tulle or gauze, she could not make combinations indefinitely.

And besides, they did not please Saniel; they were too simple. He liked lace, beads, flowers, something shining and glittering, such as he saw other women wear.

How could she please him with the small resources at her disposal? In her household expenses she was as economical as possible; Joseph was dismissed, and replaced by a maid who did all the work; the table was extremely simple. But these little economies, saved on one side, were quickly spent on the other in toilets and carriages.

When she expressed a wish to work, to paint menus, he would not consent, and when she insisted he became angry.

He only permitted her to paint pictures. As she had formerly painted for amusement in her father's studio, she might do so now. If trade were a disgrace, art might be honorable. If she had talent he would be glad of it; and if she should sell her pictures it would be original enough to cause her to be talked about.

The salon was partly transformed into a studio, and Phillis painted several little pictures, which, without having any pretensions to great art, were pleasing and painted with a

certain dash. Glorient admired them, and made a picture-dealer buy two of them and order others, at a small price it is true, but it was much more than she expected.

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With the courage and constancy that women put into work that pleases them, she would willingly have painted from morning till night; but the connections that Sanie! had made did not leave her this liberty. Through Claudet they made many acquaintances and accepted invitations that placed her under social obligations, so that almost every day she had a visit to pay, a funeral or a marriage to attend, besides an occasional charity fair, and her own day at home, when she listened for three hours to feminine gossip of no interest to her.

As for him, what pleasure could he take in dressing after a hard day's work to go to a reception? He, son of a peasant, and a peasant himself in so many ways, who formerly understood nothing of fashionable life and felt only contempt for it, finding it as dull as it was ridiculous.

She tried to find a cause for this change, and when lightly, in a roundabout way, she brought him to explain himself, she could only draw one answer from him, which was no answer to her:

"We must be of the world."

Why did he care so much about society? Was it because she was the sister of a criminal that he wished to take her everywhere and make people receive her? She understood this up to a certain point, although the part he made her play was the most cruel that he could give her, and entirely contrary to what she would have chosen if she had been free.

But this was all there was in his desire to be of the world. Because he had married her he was not the brother of a criminal, and on close observation it might be seen that all he desired of these persons in high places whom he sought was their consideration, a part of their importance and honor. But he did not need this; he was some one by himself. The position that he had made was worthy of his merit. His name was honored. His future was envied.

And yet, as if he did not realize this, he sought small satisfactions, unworthy of a serious ambition. One evening she was very much surprised when he told her that the decoration of a Spanish republic was offered to him, and although she had formed a habit of watching over her words she could not help exclaiming:

"What will you do with that?"

"I could not refuse it."

Not only had he not refused it, but he had accepted others, blue, green, yellow, and tricolored; he wore them in his buttonhole, around his neck, and on his breast. What

good could those decorations do that belittled him? And how could a man of his merit hasten to obtain the Legion of Honor before it fell to him naturally?

All this was astonishing, mysterious, and silly, and her mind dwelt upon it when she was alone before her easel; while near her in his laboratory, he continued his experiments, or wrote an article in his office for the Review.

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But it was not without a struggle that she permitted herself to judge him in this way. One does not judge those whom one loves, and she loved him. Was it not failing in respect to her love that she did not admire him in every way? When these ideas oppressed her she left her easel and went to him. Close to him they disappeared. At first, in order not to disturb him, she entered on tiptoe, walking softly and leaning over his shoulder, embraced him before he saw or heard her; but he betrayed such horror, such fear, that she gave up this way of greeting him.

She continued to go to his room, but in a different way. Instead of surprising him she announced her presence by rattling the handle of the door, and walking noisily, and instead of receiving her with uneasy manner he welcomed her joyfully.

“You have finished painting?”

“I have come to see you for a little while.”

“Very well, stay with me, do not go away immediately; I am never so happy, I never work so well, as when I have you near me.”

She felt that this was true. When she was with him, whether she spoke or not, her presence made him happy.

And still she must appear not to look at him too attentively, as if with the manifest intention of studying him; for she did this during the first days of their marriage, and angered him so much that he exclaimed:

“Why do you examine me thus? What do you look for in me?”

She learned to watch herself carefully, and when with him to preserve a discreet attitude that should not offend him. No curious looks, and no questions. But this was not always easy, so she asked leave to assist him in his work, and sometimes drew in larger size the designs that he made for his microscopical studies. In this way the time passed rapidly. If he were but willing to pass the evening hours in this sweet intimacy, without a word about going out, how happy she would be! But he never forgot the hour.

“Allons,” he said, interrupting himself, “we must go.”

She had never dared to ask the true reason for this “must.”

CHAPTER XLI

A TROUBLED SOUL

If she dared not frankly ask him this question: Why must we go out? any more than the others: Why is it proper that I should go to mass to be seen? Why should I wear gowns that ruin us? Why do you accept decorations that are valueless in your eyes? Why do you seek the society of men who have no merit but what they derive from their official position or from their fortune? Why do we take upon ourselves social duties that weary both of us, instead of remaining together in a tender and intelligent intimacy that is sweet to us both? she could not ask herself.

They all appertained to this order of ideas, that she, without doubt, found explained them: disposition of character; the exactions of an ambition in haste to realize its desires; susceptibility or overshadowing pride; but there were others founded on observation or memory, having no connection with those, or so it seemed to her.

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She began to know her husband the day following their marriage, having believed that he was always such as he revealed himself to her; but this was not the case, and the man she had loved was so unlike the man whose wife she had become, that it might almost be thought there were two.

To tell the truth, it was not marriage that made the change in his temper that distressed her; but it was not less characteristic by that, that it dated back to a period anterior to this marriage.

She remembered the commencement with a clearness that left no place for doubt or hesitation; it was at the time when pursued by creditors he entered into relations with Caffie. For the first time he, always so strong that she believed him above weakness, had had a moment of discouragement on announcing that he would probably be obliged to leave Paris; but this depression had neither the anger nor weakness that he had since shown. It was the natural sadness of a man who saw his future destroyed, nothing more. The only surprise that she then felt was caused by the idea of strangling Caffie and taking enough money from his safe to clear himself from debt, and also because he said—as a consequence of this act—speaking of the remorse of an intelligent man, that his conscience would not reproach him, since for him conscience did not exist. But this was evidently a simple philosophical theory, not a trait of character; a jest or an argument for the sake of discussion.

Relieved from his creditors with the money won at Monaco, he returned to his usual calm, working harder than ever, passing his 'concours', and when it seemed excusable that he might be nervous, violent, unjust, he remained the man that he had been ever since she knew him. Then, all at once, a short time before Florlentin went to the assizes, occurred these strange explosions of temper, spasms of anger, and restlessness that she could not explain, manifesting themselves exactly at the time when, by Madame Dammauville's intervention, she hoped Florentin would be saved. She had not forgotten the furious anger, that was inexplicable and unjustifiable, with which he refused her request to see Madame Dammauville. He had thrust her away, wishing to break with her, and until she was a witness of this scene she never imagined that any one could put such violence into exasperation. Then to this scene succeeded another, totally opposed, which had not less impressed her, when, at their little dinner by the fire, he showed such profound desolation on telling her to keep the memory of this evening when she should judge him, and announcing to her, in a prophetic sort of way, that the hour would come when she would know him whom she loved.

And now this hour, the thought of which she had thrown far from her, had sounded; she sought to combine the elements of this judgment which then appeared criminal to her, and now forced itself upon her, whatever she might do to repel it.

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How many times this memory returned to her! It could almost be said that it had never left her, sweet and sad at the same time, less sweet and more sad, according as new subjects for uneasiness were added to the others, in deepening the mysterious and troublous impression that it left with her.

To judge him! Why did he wish that she should judge him? And on what?

And yet with him it was not an insignificant word, but the evidence of a particular state of conscience, which many times since asserted itself. Was it not, in effect, to this order of ideas that the cry belonged that escaped him in the night when, waking suddenly, he asked with emotion, with fright: "What have I said?" And also to the same appertained the anger that carried him away when, 'a propos' of their religious marriage, she spoke of confession: "Why do you think that I should be afraid to go to confession?"

How could he imagine that she could admit the idea of fear in connection with him? The idea never occurred to her mind until this moment; and if now the memory of her astonishment came to her, it was because of other little things added to those of the past that evoked it.

How numerous and significant they were, these things: his constant uneasiness on seeing himself watched by her; his invitation when he thought she was going to question him; his access of passion when, through heedlessness or forgetfulness, or simply by chance, she asked him a question on certain subjects, and immediately the tenderness that followed, so sudden that they appeared rather planned in view of a determined end than natural or spontaneous.

It was a long time before she admitted the calculation under the sweet words that made her so happy; but in the end it was well that she should open her eyes to the evidence, and see that they were with him the consequences of the same and constant preoccupation, that of not committing himself.

It was only one step from this to ask him what he did not wish to yield up.

Yet, as short as it was, she resisted for a long time the curiosity that possessed her. It was her duty as a loving and devoted wife not to seek beyond what he showed her, and this duty was in perfect accord with the dispositions of her love; but the power of things seen carried her beyond will and reason. She could not apply her mind to search for that which agonized her, and she could not close her eyes and ears to what she saw and heard.

And what struck them were the same observations, turning always in the same circle, applied to the same subjects and persons:

Caffie's name irritated him; Madame Dammauville's angered him; Florentin's made him positively unhappy.

As for the two former, she might have prevented the pronunciation of them when she saw the effect they infallibly produced on him.

But she could not prevent the utterance of Florentin's name, even had she wished it. How could she tell her mother never to speak the name of him who was constantly in their thoughts?

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In spite of Saniel's efforts and solicitations, supported by Nougarede's, Florentin had embarked for New Caledonia, whence he wrote as often as he could. His letters related all his sufferings in the terrible galleys, where he was confined during the voyage, and since his arrival they were a series of long complaints, continued from one to the other, like a story without end, turning always on the same subject, his physical sufferings, his humiliation, his discouragement, and his disgust in the midst of the unfortunates whose companion he was.

The arrival of these letters filled the mother and sister with anguish that lasted for several days; and this anguish, that neither of them could dissimulate, angered Saniel.

"What would you do if he were dead?" he asked Phillis.

"Would it not be better for him?"

"But he will return."

"In what condition?"

"Are we the masters of fate?"

"We weep, we do not complain."

But he complained of the weeping faces that surrounded him, the tears they concealed from him, the sighs they stifled. Ordinarily he was tender and affectionate to his mother-in-law, with attention and deference which in some ways seemed affected, as if he were so by will rather than by natural sentiment; but at these times he forgot this tenderness, and treated her with hardness so unjust, that more than once Madame Cormier spoke of it to her daughter.

"How can your husband, who is so good to me, be so merciless regarding Florentin? One would say that our sadness produces on him the effect of a reproach that we would address to him."

One day when things had gone farther than usual, she had the courage to speak to him plainly: "Forgive me for burdening you with the weariness of our disgrace," she said to him. "When I complain of everything, of men and things, you should remember that you are the exception, you who have done everything to save him."

But these few words which she believed would calm the irritation of her son-in-law, had on the contrary exasperated him; he left her, furious.

"I do not understand your husband at all," she said to her daughter. "Will you not explain to me what the matter is with him?"

How could she give her mother the explanation that she could not give herself? Having reached an unfathomable abyss, she dared not even lean over to look into its depths; and instead of going on in the path where she was pledged in spite of herself, she made every effort to return, or at least to stop.

What good would it do to find out why he was so peculiar, and what it was that he took so much pains to conceal? This could only be idle curiosity on her part, for which she would be punished sooner or later.

Turning these thoughts over continually in her mind she lost her gayety, her power to resist blows of fate, such as the small trials of life, which formerly made her courageous; her vigorous elasticity sunk under the heavy weight with which it was charged, and her smiling eyes now more often expressed anxiety than happiness and confidence.

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In spite of her watchfulness over herself she was not able to hide the change from Saniel, for it manifested itself in everything—in her face formerly so open, but which now bore the imprint of a secret sadness; in her concentrated manner, in her silence and abstraction.

What was the matter with her? He questioned her, and she replied with the prudence that she used in all her conversation with him. He examined her medically, but found nothing to indicate a sickly condition which would justify the change in her.

If she did not wish to answer his questions, and he had the proof that she did not wish to; if, on the other hand, she was not ill, and he was convinced that she was not—there must be something serious the matter to make the woman whom but lately he read so easily become an enigma that made him uneasy.

And this thing—if it were that whose crushing weight he himself carried on his bent shoulders? She divined, she understood, if not all, at least a part of the truth.

What an extraordinary situation was hers, and one which might truly destroy her reason.

Nothing to fear from others, everything from himself. Justice, law, the world—on all sides he was let alone; nothing was asked of him; that which was owed was paid; but he by a sickly aberration was going to awake the dead who slept in their tomb, from which no one thought of taking them, and to make spectres of them which he alone saw and heard.

And he believed himself strong. Fool that he was, and still more foolish to have taken such a charge when by the exercise of his will he did not place himself in a condition to carry it! To will! But he had not learned how to will.

CHAPTER XLII

THE POWER OF HYPNOTISM

The relative calm that Saniel had felt since his marriage he owed to Phillis; to the strength, the confidence, the peace that he drew from her. Phillis without strength, without confidence, without interior peace, such as she was now, could not give him what she no longer had herself, and he returned to the distracted condition that preceded his marriage, and felt the same anguish, the same agitation, the same madness. The beautiful relations, worldly consideration, success, decorations, honors, were good for others; but for his happiness he required the tranquillity and serenity of his wife, and her good moral health which passed into him when she slept on his shoulder. In that case there were no sudden awakenings, no sleeplessness; at the sound of her gentle respiration he was reassured, and the spectres remained in their tomb.



But now that this respiration was agitated, and he no longer felt in her this tranquillity and serenity, he was no longer calm; she was weak and uneasy, and she communicated her fever to him, not her sleep.

“You do not sleep. Why do you not sleep?”

“And you?”

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He must know.

He persisted in his questions, but she was always on her guard, so that he was unable to draw anything from her, checked as he was by the fear of betraying himself, which seemed easy at the point he believed she had reached. An awkward word, too much persistence, would let a flood of light into her mind.

He also affected to speak as a physician when questioning her, and to look for medical explanations of her condition.

"If you do not sleep it is because you suffer. What is this suffering? From what does it proceed?"

Having no reasons to give to justify it, since she did not even dare to speak of her brother, she denied it obstinately.

"But nothing is the matter with me, I assure you," she repeated. "What do you think is the matter?"

"That is what I ask you."

"Then I ask you: What do you think I conceal from you?"

He could not say that he suspected her of concealing anything from him.

"You do not watch yourself properly."

"I can do nothing."

"I will force you to watch yourself and to speak."

"How?"

"By putting you to sleep."

The threat was so terrible that she was beside herself.

"Do not do that!" she cried.

They looked at each other for a few moments in silence, both equally frightened, she at the threat, he at what he would learn from her. But to show this fright was on his side to let loose another proof even more grave.

"Why should I not seek to discover in every way the cause of this uneasiness which escapes my examination as well as yours? For that somnambulism offers us an excellent way."

"But since I am not ill, what more could I tell you when I am asleep than when I am awake?"

"We shall see."

"It is an experiment that I ask you not to attempt. Would you try a poison on me?"

"Somnambulism is not a poison."

"Who knows?"

"Those who have made use of it."

"But you have not."

"Still I know enough to know that you will run no danger in my hands."

She believed that he opened a door of escape to her.

"Never mind, I am too much afraid. If you ever want to make me talk in a state of forced somnambulism, ask one of your 'confreres' in whom you have confidence to put me to sleep."

Before a 'confrere' she was certain he would not ask her dangerous questions.

He understood that she wished to escape him.

"Afraid of what?" he asked. "That I shall ask you questions about the past, concerning your life before we knew each other, and demand a confession that would wound my love?"

"O Victor!" she cried, distracted. "What more cruel wound could you give me than these words? My confession! It comprises three words: I love you; I have never loved any one but you; I shall never love any one but you. I have no past; my life began with my love."

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He could not press it without showing the importance that he attached to it.

"I do not insist," he said; "it is a way like any other, but better. You do not wish it, and we will not talk of it."

But he yielded too quickly for her to hope that he renounced his project, and she remained under the influence of a stupefying terror. What would she say if he made her talk? Everything, possibly. She did not even know what thoughts were hidden in the depths of her brain, and she knew absolutely nothing of this forced somnambulism with which she was threatened.

At this time the works of the school of Nancy on sleep, hypnotism, and suggestion, had not yet been published, or at least the book which served as their starting-point was not known, and she knew nothing of processes that were employed to provoke the hypnotic sleep. As soon as her husband left the house she looked for some book in the library that would enlighten her. But the dictionary that she found gave only obscure or confused instructions in which she floundered. The only exact point that struck her was the method employed to produce sleep; to make the subject look at a brilliant object placed from fifteen to twenty centimetres in front of the eyes. If this were true she had no fear of ever being put to sleep.

However, she was not reassured; and when a few days later at a dinner she found herself seated next to one of her husband's 'confreres', who she knew interested himself in somnambulism, she had the courage to conquer her usual timidity concerning medicine, and questioned him.

"Are there not persons with certain diseases who can be put into a state of somnambulism?"

"It was formerly believed by the public and by many physicians that only persons afflicted with hysteria and nervous troubles could be put to sleep in this way, but it was a mistake; artificial somnambulism may be produced on many subjects who are perfectly healthy."

"Is the will preserved in sleep?"

"The subject only preserves the spontaneity and will that his hypnotizer leaves him, who at his pleasure makes him sad, gay, angry, or tender, and plays with his soul as with an instrument."

"But that is frightful."

"Curious, at least. It is certain that there is a local paralysis of such or such a cell, the study of which is the starting-point of many interesting discoveries."

“When he wakes, does the subject remember what he has said?”

“There is a difference of opinion on this point. Some say yes, and others no. As for me, I believe the memory depends upon the degree of sleep: with a light sleep there is remembrance, but with a profound sleep the subject does not remember what he has said or heard or done.”

She would have liked to continue, and her companion, glad to talk of what interested him, would willingly have said more, but she saw her husband at the other end of the table watching them by fits and starts, and fearing that he would suspect the subject of their conversation she remained silent.

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What she had just learned seemed to her frightful. But, at least, as she would not let herself be hypnotized she had nothing to fear; and remembering what she had read, she promised herself that she would never let him place her in a position where he could put her to sleep. It was during the sleep that the will of the hypnotizer controlled that of the subject, not before.

Resting on this belief, and also on his not having again spoken of sending her to sleep, she was reassured. Was not this a sign that he accepted her opposition and renounced his idea of provoked somnambulism?

But she deceived herself.

One night when she had gone to bed at her usual hour while he remained at his work, she awoke suddenly and saw him standing near her, looking at her with eyes whose fixed stare frightened her.

"What is the matter? What do you want?"

"Nothing, I want nothing; I am going to bed."

In spite of the strangeness of his glance she did not persist; questions would have taught her nothing. And besides, now that he no longer went to bed at the same time as she did, there was nothing extraordinary in his attitude.

But a few days from that she woke again in the night with a feeling of distress, and saw him leaning over her as if he would envelop her in his arms.

This time, frightened as she was, she had the strength to say nothing, but her anguish was the more intense. Did he then wish to hypnotize her while she slept? Was it possible? Then the dictionary had deceived her?

In truth it was while she slept that Sanieel tried to transform her natural into an artificial sleep. Would he succeed? He knew nothing about it, for the experience was new. But he risked it.

The first time, instead of putting her into a state of somnambulism, he awoke her; the second, he succeeded no better; the third, when he saw that after a certain time she did not open her eyes, he supposed that she was asleep. To assure himself, he raised her arm, which remained in the air until he placed it on the bed. Then taking her two hands, he turned them backward, and withdrawing his own, the impulsion which he gave lasted until he checked it. Her face had an expression of calmness and tranquillity that it had not had for a long time; she was the pretty Phillis of other days, with the sprightly glance.

"To-morrow I will make you sleep at the same time," he said, "and you will talk."

The next night he put her to sleep even more easily, but when he questioned her she resisted.

“No,” she said, “I will not speak; it is horrible. I will not, I cannot.”

He insisted, but she would not.

“Very well, so be it,” he said; “not to-day, to-morrow. But to-morrow I wish you to speak, and you shall not resist me; I will it!”

If he did not insist it was not only because he knew that habit was necessary to make her submit to his will without being able to defend herself, but because he was ignorant whether, when she awoke, she had any memory of what happened in her sleep, which was an important point.

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The next night she was the same as she had been the previous evening, and nothing indicated that she was conscious of her provoked sleep, any more than what she said in this sleep. He could then continue.

This time she went to sleep sooner and more easily than usual, and her face took the expression of tranquillity and repose he had seen the night before. Would she answer? And if she consented, would she speak sincerely, without attempting to weaken or falsify the truth? Emotion made his voice tremble when he put the first question; it was his life, his peace, the happiness of both which decided him.

"Where do you suffer?" he asked.

"I do not suffer."

"Yet you are agitated, often melancholy or uneasy; you do not sleep well. What troubles you?"

"I am afraid."

"Afraid of what? Of whom?"

"Of you!"

He trembled.

"Afraid of me! Do you think that I could hurt you?"

"No."

His tightened heart relaxed.

"Then why are you afraid?"

"Because there are things in you that frighten me."

"What things? Be exact."

"The change that has taken place in your temper, your character, and your habits."

"And how do these changes make you uneasy?"

"They indicate a serious situation."

"What situation?"

"I do not know; I have never stated exactly."



"Why not?"

"Because I was afraid; and I closed my eyes so that I might not see."

"See what?"

"The explanation of all that is mysterious in your life."

"When did you notice the mystery in my life?"

"At the time of Caffie's death; and before, when you told me that you could kill him without any remorse."

"Do you know who killed Caffie?"

"No."

His relief was so great that for several moments he forgot to continue his interrogations. Then he went on: "And after?"

"A little before Madame Dammauville's death, when you became irritable and furious without cause; when you told me to go because you did not wish to see Madame Dammauville; when, the night before her death, you were so tender, and asked me not to judge you without recalling that hour."

"Yet you have judged me."

"Never. When worry urged me, my love checked me."

"What provoked this uneasiness outside of these facts?"

"Your manner of living since our marriage; your accesses of anger and of tenderness; your fear of being observed; your agitation at night; your complaints—"

"I talked?" he cried.

"Never distinctly; you groan often, and moan, pronouncing broken words without sense, unintelligible—"

His anguish was violent; when he recovered he continued:

"What is it in this way of living that has made you uneasy?"

"Your constant care not to commit yourself—"



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“Commit myself how?”

“I do not know—”

“What else?”

“The anger that you show, or the embarrassment, when the name of Caffie is pronounced, Madame Dammauville’s, and Florentin’s—”

“And you conclude that my anger on hearing these three names—”

“Nothing—I am afraid—”

CHAPTER XLIII

THE TERRIBLE REVELATION

This confession threw him into a state of confusion and agitation, for if it did not go beyond what he feared, yet it revealed a terrible situation.

Clearly, as in an open book, he read her; if she did not know all, she was but one step from the truth, and if she had not taken this step, it was because her love restrained her. If her love had been less strong, less powerful, she certainly would not have withstood the proofs that pressed on her from all sides.

But because she had held back so long, he must not conclude that the struggle would be continued in this way, and that a more violent blow, a stronger proof than the others, would not open her eyes in spite of herself.

It only needed an imprudence, a carelessness on his part, and unluckily he could no longer be relied on.

From what he had just learned it would be easy to watch himself closely, and to avoid dangerous subjects, those that she described to him; but if he could guard his words and looks during the day, neither saying nor letting anything appear that was an accusation, not confirming the suspicions against which she struggled, he could not do it at night.

He had not talked, and when she answered negatively to his question, she lifted a terribly heavy weight from his heart. But he had groaned and moaned, he had pronounced broken words without sense and unintelligible, and there was the danger.

What was necessary to make these sighs, these groans, these broken and unintelligible words become distinct and take a meaning? A nothing, an accident, since his real

cerebral tendency placed him up to a certain point in a somnambulistic state. Was this tendency congenital with him or acquired? He did not know. Before the agitated nights after Madame Dammauville's death and Florentin's condemnation, the idea had never occurred to him that he might talk in his sleep. But now he had the proof that the vague fears which had tormented him on this subject were only too well founded; he had talked, and if the words that escaped were not now comprehensible, they might become so.

Without having made a special study of sleep, natural or induced, he knew that in the case of natural somnambulists a hypnotic sleep is easily produced, and that while holding a conversation with a subject who talks in his sleep one may readily hypnotize him. Without doubt he need not fear this from Phillis; but it was possible that some night when incoherent words escaped him she would not be able to resist the temptation to enter into a conversation with him, and to lead him to confess what she wished to know—what the love that she felt for her brother would drive her to wish to learn.

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If this opportunity presented itself, would the love for her brother or for her husband carry her away? If she questioned him, what would he not say?

For the first time he asked himself if he had done right to marry, and if, on the contrary, he had not committed a mad imprudence in introducing a woman into a life so tormented as his. He had asked calmness from this woman, and now she brought him terror.

To tell the truth, she was dangerous only at night; and if he found a way to occupy another room he would have nothing to fear from her during the day, on condition that he held himself rigorously on the defensive. Loving him as she did, she would resist the curiosity that drew her; if uneasiness drove her, her love would restrain her, as she herself had said; little by little this uneasiness and curiosity, being no longer excited, would die out, and they would again enjoy the sweet days that followed their marriage.

But in the present circumstances this way was difficult to find, for to propose another room to Phillis would be equal to telling her that he was afraid of her, and consequently it would give her a new mystery to study. He reflected, and starting with the idea that the proposition of two rooms must come from Phillis, he arranged a plan which, it seemed to him, would accomplish what he wished.

Ignorant of the fact that she had been hypnotized, and not remembering that she had talked, without doubt Phillis still feared that he would hypnotize her; he would threaten it again, and surely she would find a way to defend herself and escape from him.

This is what happened. The next day, when he told her decidedly that he wished to put her to sleep in order that he might learn what troubled her, she showed the same fright as on the first time.

"All that you have asked of me, everything that you have desired, I have wished as you and with you; but I will never consent to this."

"Your resistance is absurd; I will not yield to it."

"You shall not put me to sleep against my will."

"Easily."

"It is not possible."

Without replying, he took a book from the library, and turning over the leaves, he read: "Is it possible to make a sleeping person, without awaking him, pass from the natural to the hypnotic sleep? The thing is possible, at least with certain subjects."

Then handing her the book:

“You see that to put you to sleep artificially I need only the opportunity of finding you sleeping naturally. It is very simple.”

“That would be odious.”

“Those are merely words.”

He threw her into such a state of terror that she kept awake all night, and as he would not sleep for fear of talking, he felt that she exerted every faculty to keep awake. But had he not gone too far? And by this threat would he not drive her to some desperate act? If she should escape, if she deserted him—what would become of him without her? Was she not his whole life? But he reassured himself by saying that she loved him too much ever to consent to a separation. Without doubt, she herself would come to think as he wished her to think.

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And yet when he returned home in the evening she told him that her mother was not well, and begged him to examine her. This examination proved that Madame Cormier was in her usual health; but she complained that her breath failed her—during the day she had feared syncope.

“If you are willing,” Phillis said, “I will sleep near mamma. I am afraid of not hearing her at night, and she is suffering.”

He began by refusing, then he consented to this arrangement; and to thank him for it she stayed with him in his office, affectionate, full of tenderness and caresses, until he went to his room.

He was then free to sleep or not; whether he groaned or talked she could not hear him, since there was no communicating door between his room and that of his mother-in-law; his voice certainly would not penetrate the partition.

Who could have told him on the night that he decided to marry, that he would come to such a pass—to be afraid, to hide himself from her who brought him the calmness of sleep; and that by his fault, by a chain of imprudences and stupidities, as if it were written that in everything he would owe his sufferings to himself, and that if he ever succumbed to the whirlwind that swept him along, it would be by his own deed, by his own hand? At last he had assured the tranquillity of his nights, and as a further precaution, although he did not fear that Phillis would enter his room while he slept, to surprise him—she who dared not look in the face what suspicion showed her—he locked his door. Naturally, Phillis could not always sleep with her mother; but he would find a way to suggest frankly their sleeping apart, and surely he could find one in the storehouse of medicine.

These cares and similar fears were not of a nature to dispose him to sleep, and besides for a long time he had suffered from an exasperating nervous insomnia. As the night was warm he thought a little fresh air would calm him, and he opened the window; if this freshness did not calm him, at least it would make him sleep.

Obliged to improvise a bed in her mother’s room, Phillis placed it against the partition that separated her from her husband, but without preconcerted intention, simply by accident, because it was the only place where she could put the bed. A little after midnight an unusual noise awoke her; she sat up to listen and to recover herself. It seemed as if this noise came from her husband’s room. Alarmed, she placed her ear against the partition. She was not deceived; they were stifled groans, moans that were repeated at short intervals.

Carefully yet quickly she left her bed, and as the dawn was already shining in the windows, she was able to leave the room without making any noise. Reaching the door of her husband’s room she listened; she was not deceived; they were indeed groans,



but louder and sadder than those she had so often heard during the night. She tried the door, but it was evidently locked on the inside. What was the matter with him? She must know, must go to him, and give him relief. She thought of knocking, of shaking the door; but as he did not reply when she tried to open it, it was because he did not hear or did not wish to hear. Then she thought of the terrace; from there she could see what happened, and if it were necessary she would break a pane to enter.

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She found the window open and saw her husband on the bed, sleeping, his head turned toward her; she stopped and asked herself if she should cross the threshold and wake him.

At this moment, with closed lips, he pronounced several words more distinctly than those that had so many times escaped him: "Phillis—forgive."

He dreamed of her. Poor, dear Victor! for what did he wish her to pardon him? Doubtless for having threatened to hypnotize her:

Overcome by this proof of love she put her head through the opening of the window to give him a look before returning to her mother, but on seeing his face in the full white light of the morning, she was frightened; it expressed the most violent sorrow, the features convulsed with anguish and horror at the same time. Surely he was ill. She must wake him. Just as she took a step toward him he began to speak: "Your brother—or me?"

She stopped as if thunderstruck, then instinctively she drew back and clung to the window in the vestibule to keep herself from falling, repeating those two words that she had just heard, not understanding, not wishing to understand.

Instead of returning to her mother, trembling and holding on to the wall she entered the parlor and let herself fall into a chair, prostrated, crushed.

"Your brother—or me?"

This was, then, the truth, the frightful truth that she had never wished to see.

She stayed there until the noises in the street warned her that it was getting late, and she might be surprised. Then she returned to her mother.

"I am going out," she said; "I will return at half-past eight or nine o'clock."

"But your husband will not see you before going to the hospital."

"You will tell him that I have gone out."

She returned at half-past nine. Madame Cormier had finished dressing.

"At last you have come," she said.

But at sight of her daughter's face she saw that something had happened. "My God! What is the matter?" she asked, trembling.



“Something serious—very serious, but unfortunately it is irreparable. We must leave here, never to return.”

“Your husband—”

“You must never speak to me of him. This the only thing I ask of you.”

“Alas! I understand. It is what I foresaw, what I said would happen. You cannot bear the contempt that he shows us on account of your brother.”

“We must hereafter be strangers to each other, and this is why we leave this house.”

“My God! At my age, to drag my bones—”

“I have engaged a lodging at the Ternes; a wagon will come to take the furniture that belongs to us, what we brought here, only that. We will tell the concierge that we are going to the country. As for Josephine, you need not fear indiscreet questions, for I have given her a day off.”

“But the money?”

“I have two hundred francs from the sale of my last picture; that is enough for the present. Before they are gone I shall have painted and sold another; do not worry, we shall have all we need.”



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All this was said in a hard but resolute tone.

A ring of the bell interrupted them. It was the express wagon.

"See that they do not take what does not belong to us," Phillis said. "While they fill their wagon I will write in the parlor."

At the end of an hour the wagon was ready. Madame Cormier entered the parlor to tell her daughter.

"I have finished," Phillis said.

Having placed her letter in an envelope, she laid it in full view on Sanie's desk.

"Now let us go," she said.

And as her mother sighed, while walking with difficulty

"Lean on me, dear mamma, you know I am strong."

CHAPTER XLIV

AFTER LONG YEARS

Sanie did not return until quite late in the afternoon. When he opened the door with his key he was surprised at not seeing his wife run to him and kiss him.

"She is painting," he said to himself, "she did not hear me."

He passed into the parlor, convinced that he would find her at her easel; but he did not see her, and the easel was not in its usual place, there nor anywhere else.

He knocked at the door of Madame Cormier's room; there was no reply; he knocked louder a second time, and after waiting a moment he entered. The room was empty; there was no bed, no furniture, no one.

Stupefied, he looked around him, then returning to the vestibule he called: "Phillis! Phillis!"

There was no reply. He ran to the kitchen, no one was there; he went into his office, no one there. But as he looked about him, he saw Phillis's letter on his desk, and his heart leaped; he grasped it eagerly, and opened it with a trembling hand. It was as follows:

"I have gone, never to return. My despair and disgust of life are such, that without my mother and the poor being who is so far away, I should kill myself; but in spite of the



horror of my position I was obliged to reflect, and I do not wish to aggravate by folly the wickedness that is going on about me. My mother is no longer young; she is ill and has suffered cruelly. Not only do I owe it to her to brighten her old age by my presence, by the material and moral support that I can give her, but she must have faith that I am there to replace her, and to open my arms to her son, to my brother. The least that I can do for them is to wait courageously for him; and, however weary, terrible, or frightful my life may be hereafter, I shall bear it so that the unfortunate, the pariah, whom a pitiless fate has pursued, will find on his return a hearth, a home, a friend. This will be my only object, my reason for living; and in order to save myself from sluggishness and weariness, my thoughts will always be on the time when he will return, he whom I will call my child, and whom my love must save and cure. I know that long years separate me from that day, and that until

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it comes my broken heart will never have a moment of repose; but I shall employ this time in working for him, for the brother, for the child, for the cherished being who will come to me aged and desperate; and I wish that he may yet believe in something good, that he will not imagine everything in this world is unjust and infamous, for he will return to me weighed down by twenty years of shame, of degrading and undeserved shame. How will he bear these twenty years? What efforts must I not make to prove to him that he should not abandon himself to despair, and that life often offers the remedy, compassion to the most profound, to the most unjust human sorrows? How can I make him believe that? How lead his poor heart, closed to confidence, to feeling, to the tears that alone can relieve it? God who has so sorely tried me, without doubt will come to my aid, and will inspire me with words of consolation, will show me the path to follow, and give me the strength to persevere. Have I not already to thank Him for being alone in the world, outside of a mother and brother who will not betray me? I have no children, and I am spared the terror of seeing a soul growing in evil, an intelligence escaping from me to follow the path of infamy or dishonor. I leave, then, as I came. I was a poor girl, I go away a poor woman. I have taken the clothing and personal effects that I brought into our common home, nothing that was bought with your money; and I forbid you to interfere with my wish in this question of material things, as well as in my resolution to fly from you. Nothing can ever reunite us; nothing shall reunite us, no consideration, no necessity. I reject the past, this guilty past, the responsibility of which weighs so heavily on my conscience, and I should like to lose the memory of the detested time. It would be impossible for me to accept the struggle, or supplications, if you think it expedient to make any. I have cut our bonds, and hereafter we shall be as far apart as if one of us were dead, or even farther. Have no scruples, then, in leaving me alone to face a new life, a beginning that may appear difficult to one not situated as I am. The trials of former times were good for me, since they accustomed me to the difficulties of work. The desolation of to-day will sustain me, in the sense that having suffered all I can suffer, I no longer fear some discouraging catastrophe that will check me in my resolutions. In order not to compromise you, and more fully to become myself again, I shall take my family name—a dishonored name—but I shall bear it without shame. I shall live obscurely, absorbed in work and in trying to forget your existence; do the same yourself. If you think of the past, you will find, perhaps, that I am hard; yet this departure is not an egotistic desertion. I am no good to you, and the repose that you want would shun you hereafter in my presence. On the contrary, strive for forgetfulness, as I shall. If you contrive to wipe out of your life the part

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that is associated with me, perhaps you will be able to banish the remainder, and to recover some of the calm of other days. I can no longer remember that I have loved you, for my position is such that I have not the refuge of memory; at my age I must remain without a past as without a future; the consolation of the unfortunate is lost to me with everything else. I cannot rise out of my sorrow to try to find one hour when life was sweet to me; those hours, on the contrary, make me tremble, and I reproach myself for them as if they were a crime. Thus, whichever way I turn, I find only sadness and sharp regrets; everything is blighted, dishonored for me."

Standing in the middle of his office he read this hastily written letter breathlessly. Arrived at the end he looked about him vaguely. His chair was near his desk; he let himself fall into it and remained there prostrated, holding the letter in his shaking hand.

"Alone!"

It was an October afternoon, dark and muddy; in the Rue des Saints-Peres, in front of the houses that hide the Charity Hospital, coupes were standing, and their long line extended to the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where the coachmen, having left their seats, talked together like persons who were accustomed to meet each other. At half-past four o'clock, in the deepening twilight, men with grave looks and dark clothes—members of the Academy of Medicine—the Tuesday sitting over, issued from the porch, and entered their carriages. Some of them walked alone, briskly, in a great hurry; others demonstrated a skilful tardiness, stopping to talk politely to a journalist, and to give him notes of the day's meeting, or continuing, with a 'confrere' who was not an Academician, the conversation begun in the room of the 'pas-perdus'; it was the Bourse of consultations that was just closed. Not all the members of the Academy have, in truth, a long list of patients to visit; but each one has a vote to give, and they are those whom the candidates surround, trying to win them.

One of the Academicians who appeared the last at the top of the steps was a man of great height but bent figure, with hollow cheeks and pale face lighted by pale blue eyes with a strange expression, both hard and desolate at the same time. He advanced alone, and his heavy gait and dragging step gave him the appearance of a man sixty years of age, while in other ways he retained a certain youthfulness. It was Sanie!, twenty years older.

Without exchanging a bow or a hand-shake with any one, he descended to the pavement and walked to the boulevard, where he opened the door of a coupe whose interior showed a complete ambulant library—a writing table with paper, ink, and lamp, pockets full of books and pamphlets.

Just as he was about to enter, a voice stopped him.

He turned; it was one of his old pupils, who had recently become a physician in the suburb of Gentilly.

“What is it?” asked Sanieł.

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"I want to ask you to come and assist me in a curious case of spasms, where your intervention may be decisive."

"Where?"

"At the Maison-Blanche, a poor woman. What day could you give me?"

"Is it urgent?"

"Yes."

"In that case I will go at once. Give the address to my coachman, and get in with me."

But at this moment a white-haired man dressed in chestnut velvet, wearing a felt hat and sabots, came toward them, accompanied by two young men with whom he discoursed in a loud tone while gesticulating. People turned to look at them, so original was the appearance of old Brigard, the same man from head to foot that he had always been.

He came to Sanie! with outstretched hands, and Sanie!, taking off his hat, received him with marked respect.

"Enchanted to meet you," Brigard said, "for I went to your office yesterday and did not find you."

"Why did you not send me word beforehand? If you need me I am at your disposal."

"Thanks, but happily I do not need your advice, neither for myself nor my family; it was simply that I wished to see you. Arriving at your house before your office hours, I waited in your reception-room and several patients came after me—a young woman who appeared to suffer cruelly, an old lady who was extremely anxious, and lastly a man who had some nervous disease that would not permit him to sit still. And, looking at them, I said to myself that as I was only making a friendly visit I would not remain and prolong the waiting of these unfortunates who counted the minutes, so I came away."

"May I ask to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

The two young men who accompanied Brigard, and Sanie!'s old pupil discreetly withdrew.

"The desire to present you my congratulations. When I learned of your candidature to the Academy of Medicine I said to myself: Here is one who has no chance; friend Sanie! has originality and force; he has succeeded brilliantly; but these qualities are not exactly academic. I was deceived. You have broken open the doors, which is the only

way that I understand of entering these places. That is why I congratulate you. And, besides, I did you wrong formerly—”

“Wrong? You?”

“I accused you of believing yourself stronger than life; in truth you were. My compliments!”

After warmly pressing Saniel’s hands, he went on his way with his two disciples, preaching to them.

The young doctor approached Saniel.

“He is an original,” he said.

“A happy man!” was the only reply.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

He did not sleep, so much the better! He would work more
One does not judge those whom one loves
She could not bear contempt
The strong walk alone because they need no one
We are so unhappy that our souls are weak against joy
We weep, we do not complain

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ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire conscience:

As ignorant as a schoolmaster
As free from prejudices as one may be, one always retains a few
Confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness
Conscience is a bad weighing-machine
Conscience is only an affair of environment and of education
Find it more easy to make myself feared than loved
For the rest of his life he would be the prisoner of his crime
Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life
He did not sleep, so much the better! He would work more
I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me!
In his eyes everything was decided by luck
Intelligent persons have no remorse
It is the first crime that costs
It is only those who own something who worry about the price
Leant—and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money
Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love
Looking for a needle in a bundle of hay
Neither so simple nor so easy as they at first appeared
One does not judge those whom one loves
People whose principle was never to pay a doctor
Power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything
Reason before the deed, and not after
Repeated and explained what he had already said and explained
She could not bear contempt
The strong walk alone because they need no one
We are so unhappy that our souls are weak against joy
We weep, we do not complain
Will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our action
You love me, therefore you do not know me

MADAME CHRYSANTHEME

By Pierre Loti

With a Preface by *Albert Sorel*, of the French Academy

PIERRE LOTI

Louis-Marie-Julien Viaud, "Pierre Loti," was born in Rochefort, of an old French-Protestant family, January 14, 1850. He was connected with the French Navy from

1867 to 1900, and is now a retired officer with full captain's rank. Although of a most energetic character and a veteran of various campaigns—Japan, Tonkin, Senegal, China (1900)—M. Viaud was so timid as a young midshipman that his comrades named him “Loti,” a small Indian flower which seems ever discreetly to hide itself. This is, perhaps, a pleasantry, as elsewhere there is a much more romantic explanation of the word. Suffice it to say that Pierre Loti has been always the nom de plume of M. Viaud.

Lod has no immediate literary ancestor and no pupil worthy of the name. He indulges in a dainty pessimism and is most of all an impressionist, not of the vogue of Zola—although he can be, on occasion, as brutally plain as he—but more in the manner of Victor Hugo, his predecessor, or Alphonse Daudet, his lifelong friend. In Loti's works, however, pessimism is softened to a musical melancholy; the style is direct; the vocabulary exquisite; the moral situations familiar; the characters not complex. In short, his place is unique, apart from the normal lines of novelistic development.

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The vein of Loti is not absolutely new, but is certainly novel. In him it first revealed itself in a receptive sympathy for the rare flood of experiences that his naval life brought on him, experiences which had not fallen to the lot of Bernardin de St. Pierre or Chateaubriand, both of whom he resembles. But neither of those writers possessed Loti's delicate sensitiveness to exotic nature as it is reflected in the foreign mind and heart. Strange but real worlds he has conjured up for us in most of his works and with means that are, as with all great artists, extremely simple. He may be compared to Kipling and to Stevenson: to Kipling, because he has done for the French seaman something that the Englishman has done for "Tommy Atkins," although their methods are often more opposed than similar; like Stevenson, he has gone searching for romance in the ends of the earth; like Stevenson, too, he has put into all of his works a style that is never less than dominant and often irresistible. Charm, indeed, is the one fine quality that all his critics, whether friendly or not, acknowledge, and it is one well able to cover, if need be, a multitude of literary sins.

Pierre Loti was elected a member of the French Academy in 1891, succeeding to the chair of Octave Feuillet. Some of his writings are: 'Aziyade,' written in 1879; the scene is laid in Constantinople. This was followed by 'Rarahu,' a Polynesian idyl (1880; again published under the title *Le Mariage de Loti*, 1882). 'Roman d'un Spahi (1881) deals with Algiers. *Taton-gaye* is a true 'bete-humaine', sunk in moral slumber or quivering with ferocious joys. It is in this book that Loti has eclipsed Zola. One of his masterpieces is 'Mon Freye Yves' (ocean and Brittany), together with 'Pecheur d'Islande' (1886); both translated into German by Elizabeth, Queen of Roumania (Carmen Sylva). In 1884 was published 'Les trois Dames de la Kasbah,' relating also to Algiers, and then came 'Madame Chrysantheme' (1887), crowned by the Academy. 'Japoneries d'automne' (1889), Japanese scenes; then 'Au Maroc' (Morocco; 1890). Partly autobiographical are 'Le Roman d'un Enfant' (1890) and 'Le Livre de la Pitie et de la Mort' (1891). Then followed 'Fantomes d'Orient' (1892), *L'Exilee* (1893), *Le Desert* (Syria; 1895), *Jerusalem*, *La Galilee* (Palestine; 1895), *Pages choisies* (1896), *Ramuntcho* (1897), *Reflets sur la Sombre Route* (1898), and finally 'Derniers Jours de Pekin' (1903). Many exquisite pages are to be found in Loti's work. His composition is now and then somewhat disconnected; the impressions are vague, almost illusory, and the mirage is a little obscure, but the intense and abiding charm of Nature remains. Loti has not again reached the level of *Madame Chrysantheme*, and English critics at least will have to suspend their judgment for a while. In any event, he has given to the world many great books, and is shrined with the Forty "Immortals."

Albert Sorel
de l'Academie Francaise.

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DEDICATION

To Madame la Duchesse de Richelieu
madame la Duchesse,

Permit me to beg your acceptance of this work, as a respectful tribute of my friendship.

I feel some hesitation in offering it, for its theme can not be deemed altogether correct; but I have endeavored to make its expression, at least, in harmony with good taste, and I trust that my endeavors have been successful.

This record is the journal of a summer of my life, in which I have changed nothing, not even the dates, thinking that in our efforts to arrange matters we succeed often only in disarranging them. Although the most important role may appear to devolve on Madame Chrysantheme, it is very certain that the three principal points of interest are myself, Japan, and the effect produced on me by that country.

Do you recollect a certain photograph—rather absurd, I must admit—representing that great fellow Yves, a Japanese girl, and myself, grouped as we were posed by a Nagasaki artist? You smiled when I assured you that the carefully attired little damsel placed between us had been one of our neighbors. Kindly receive my book with the same indulgent smile, without seeking therein a meaning either good or bad, in the same spirit in which you would receive some quaint bit of pottery, some grotesquely carved ivory idol, or some fantastic trifle brought to you from this singular fatherland of all fantasy.

Believe me, with the deepest respect,
Madame la Duchesse,
Your affectionate
Pierre Loti.

INTRODUCTION

We were at sea, about two o'clock in the morning, on a fine night, under a starry sky.

Yves stood beside me on the bridge, and we talked of the country, unknown to both, to which destiny was now carrying us. As we were to cast anchor the next day, we enjoyed our anticipations, and made a thousand plans.

"For myself," I said, "I shall marry at once."

"Ah!" said Yves, with the indifferent air of one whom nothing can surprise.



“Yes—I shall choose a little, creamy-skinned woman with black hair and cat’s eyes. She must be pretty and not much bigger than a doll. You shall have a room in our house. It will be a little paper house, in a green garden, deeply shaded. We shall live among flowers, everything around us shall blossom, and each morning our dwelling shall be filled with nosegays—nosegays such as you have never dreamed of.”

Yves now began to take an interest in these plans for my future household; indeed, he would have listened with as much confidence if I had expressed the intention of taking temporary vows in some monastery of this new country, or of marrying some island queen and shutting myself up with her in a house built of jade, in the middle of an enchanted lake.



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I had quite made up my mind to carry out the scheme I had unfolded to him. Yes, led on by ennui and solitude, I had gradually arrived at dreaming of and looking forward to such a marriage. And then, above all, to live for awhile on land, in some shady nook, amid trees and flowers! How tempting it sounded after the long months we had been wasting at the Pescadores (hot and arid islands, devoid of freshness, woods, or streamlets, full of faint odors of China and of death).

We had made great way in latitude since our vessel had quitted that Chinese furnace, and the constellations in the sky had undergone a series of rapid changes; the Southern Cross had disappeared at the same time as the other austral stars; and the Great Bear, rising on the horizon, was almost on as high a level as it is in the sky above France. The evening breeze soothed and revived us, bringing back to us the memory of our summer-night watches on the coast of Brittany.

What a distance we were, however, from those familiar coasts! What a tremendous distance!

MME. CHRYSANTHEME

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERIOUS LAND

At dawn we beheld Japan.

Precisely at the foretold moment the mysterious land arose before us, afar off, like a black dot in the vast sea, which for so many days had been but a blank space.

At first we saw nothing by the rays of the rising sun but a series of tiny pink-tipped heights (the Fukai Islands). Soon, however, appeared all along the horizon, like a misty veil over the waters, Japan itself; and little by little, out of the dense shadow, arose the sharp, opaque outlines of the Nagasaki mountains.

The wind was dead against us, and the strong breeze, which steadily increased, seemed as if the country were blowing with all its might, in a vain effort to drive us away from its shores. The sea, the rigging, the vessel itself, all vibrated and quivered as if with emotion.

CHAPTER II

STRANGE SCENES

By three o'clock in the afternoon all these far-off objects were close to us, so close that they overshadowed us with their rocky masses and deep green thickets.

We entered a shady channel between two high ranges of mountains, oddly symmetrical—like stage scenery, very pretty, though unlike nature. It seemed as if Japan were opened to our view through an enchanted fissure, allowing us to penetrate into her very heart.

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Nagasaki, as yet unseen, must be at the extremity of this long and peculiar bay. All around us was exquisitely green. The strong sea-breeze had suddenly fallen, and was succeeded by a calm; the atmosphere, now very warm, was laden with the perfume of flowers. In the valley resounded the ceaseless whirr of the cicadas, answering one another from shore to shore; the mountains reechoed with innumerable sounds; the whole country seemed to vibrate like crystal. We passed among myriads of Japanese junks, gliding softly, wafted by imperceptible breezes on the smooth water; their motion could hardly be heard, and their white sails, stretched out on yards, fell languidly in a thousand horizontal folds like window-blinds, their strangely contorted poops, rising up castle-like in the air, reminding one of the towering ships of the Middle Ages. In the midst of the verdure of this wall of mountains, they stood out with a snowy whiteness.

What a country of verdure and shade is Japan; what an unlooked-for Eden!

Beyond us, at sea, it must have been full daylight; but here, in the depths of the valley, we already felt the impression of evening; beneath the summits in full sunlight, the base of the mountains and all the thickly wooded parts near the water's edge were steeped in twilight.

The passing junks, gleaming white against the background of dark foliage, were silently and dexterously manoeuvred by small, yellow, naked men, with long hair piled up on their heads in feminine fashion. Gradually, as we advanced farther up the green channel, the perfumes became more penetrating, and the monotonous chirp of the cicadas swelled out like an orchestral crescendo. Above us, against the luminous sky, sharply delineated between the mountains, a kind of hawk hovered, screaming out, with a deep, human voice, "Ha! Ha! Ha!" its melancholy call prolonged by the echoes.

All this fresh and luxuriant nature was of a peculiar Japanese type, which seemed to impress itself even on the mountain-tops, and produced the effect of a too artificial prettiness. The trees were grouped in clusters, with the pretentious grace shown on lacquered trays. Large rocks sprang up in exaggerated shapes, side by side with rounded, lawn-like hillocks; all the incongruous elements of landscape were grouped together as if artificially created.

When we looked intently, here and there we saw, often built in counterscarp on the very brink of an abyss, some old, tiny, mysterious pagoda, half hidden in the foliage of the overhanging trees, bringing to the minds of new arrivals, like ourselves, a sense of unfamiliarity and strangeness, and the feeling that in this country the spirits, the sylvan gods, the antique symbols, faithful guardians of the woods and forests, were unknown and incomprehensible.

When Nagasaki appeared, the view was rather disappointing. Situated at the foot of green overhanging mountains, it looked like any other ordinary town. In front of it lay a tangled mass of vessels, flying all the flags of the world; steamboats, just as in any

other port, with dark funnels and black smoke, and behind them quays covered with warehouses and factories; nothing was wanting in the way of ordinary, trivial, every-day objects.



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Some time, when man shall have made all things alike, the earth will be a dull, tedious dwelling-place, and we shall have even to give up travelling and seeking for a change which can no longer be found.

About six o'clock we dropped anchor noisily amid the mass of vessels already in the harbor, and were immediately invaded.

We were visited by a mercantile, bustling, comical Japan, which rushed upon us in full boat-loads, in waves, like a rising sea. Little men and little women came in a continuous, uninterrupted stream, but without cries, without squabbles, noiselessly, each one making so smiling a bow that it was impossible to be angry with them, so that by reflex action we smiled and bowed also. They carried on their backs little baskets, tiny boxes, receptacles of every shape, fitting into one another in the most ingenious manner, each containing several others, and multiplying till they filled up everything, in endless number. From these they drew forth all manner of curious and unexpected things: folding screens, slippers, soap, lanterns, sleeve-links, live cicadas chirping in little cages, jewelry, tame white mice turning little cardboard mills, quaint photographs, hot soups and stews in bowls, ready to be served out in rations to the crew;—china, a legion of vases, teapots, cups, little pots and plates. In one moment, all this was unpacked, spread out with astounding rapidity and a certain talent for arrangement; each seller squatting monkey-like, hands touching feet, behind his fancy ware—always smiling, bending low with the most engaging bows. Under the mass of these many-colored things, the deck presented the appearance of an immense bazaar; the sailors, very much amused and full of fun, walked among the heaped-up piles, taking the little women by the chin, buying anything and everything; throwing broadcast their white dollars. But how ugly, mean, and grotesque all those folk were! I began to feel singularly uneasy and disenchanted regarding my possible marriage.

Yves and I were on duty till the next morning, and after the first bustle, which always takes place on board when settling down in harbor—boats to lower, booms to swing out, running rigging to make taut—we had nothing more to do but look on. We said to each other: “Where are we in reality?—In the United States?—In some English colony in Australia, or in New Zealand?”

Consular residences, custom-house offices, manufactories; a dry dock in which a Russian frigate was lying; on the heights the large European concession, sprinkled with villas, and on the quays, American bars for the sailors. Farther off, it is true, far away behind these commonplace objects, in the very depths of the vast green valley, peered thousands upon thousands of tiny black houses, a tangled mass of curious appearance, from which here and there emerged some higher, dark red, painted roofs, probably the true old Japanese Nagasaki, which still exists. And in those quarters—who knows?—there may be, lurking behind a paper screen, some affected, cat’s-eyed little woman, whom perhaps in two or three days (having no time to lose) I shall marry! But no, the picture painted by my fancy has faded. I can no longer see this little creature in my

mind's eye; the sellers of the white mice have blurred her image; I fear now, lest she should be like them.



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At nightfall the decks were suddenly cleared as by enchantment; in a second they had shut up their boxes, folded their sliding screens and their trick fans, and, humbly bowing to each of us, the little men and little women disappeared.

Slowly, as the shades of night closed around us, mingling all things in the bluish darkness, Japan became once more, little by little, a fairy-like and enchanted country. The great mountains, now black, were mirrored and doubled in the still water at their feet, reflecting therein their sharply reversed outlines, and presenting the mirage of fearful precipices, over which we seemed to hang. The stars also were reversed in their order, making, in the depths of the imaginary abyss, a sprinkling of tiny phosphorescent lights.

Then all Nagasaki became profusely illuminated, sparkling with multitudes of lanterns: the smallest suburb, the smallest village was lighted up; the tiniest but perched up among the trees, which in the daytime was invisible, threw out its little glowworm glimmer. Soon there were innumerable lights all over the country on all the shores of the bay, from top to bottom of the mountains; myriads of glowing fires shone out in the darkness, conveying the impression of a vast capital rising around us in one bewildering amphitheatre. Beneath, in the silent waters, another town, also illuminated, seemed to descend into the depths of the abyss. The night was balmy, pure, delicious; the atmosphere laden with the perfume of flowers came wafted to us from the mountains. From the tea-houses and other nocturnal resorts, the sound of guitars reached our ears, seeming in the distance the sweetest of music. And the whirr of the cicalas—which, in Japan, is one of the continuous noises of life, and which in a few days we shall no longer even be aware of, so completely is it the background and foundation of all other terrestrial sounds—was sonorous, incessant, softly monotonous, like the murmur of a waterfall.

CHAPTER III

THE GARDEN OF FLOWERS

The next day the rain fell in torrents, merciless and unceasing, blinding and drenching everything—a rain so dense that it was impossible to see through it from one end of the vessel to the other. It seemed as if the clouds of the whole world had amassed themselves in Nagasaki Bay, and chosen this great green funnel to stream down. And so thickly did the rain fall that it became almost as dark as night. Through a veil of restless water, we still perceived the base of the mountains, but the summits were lost to sight among the great dark masses overshadowing us. Above us shreds of clouds, seemingly torn from the dark vault, dragged across the trees, like gray rags—continually melting away in torrents of water. The wind howled through the ravines with a deep tone. The whole surface of the bay, bespattered by the rain, flogged by the gusts of wind that blew from all quarters, splashed, moaned, and seethed in violent agitation.

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What depressing weather for a first landing, and how was I to find a wife through such a deluge, in an unknown country?

No matter! I dressed myself and said to Yves, who smiled at my obstinate determination in spite of unfavorable circumstances:

“Hail me a ‘sampan,’ brother, please.”

Yves then, by a motion of his arm through the wind and rain, summoned a kind of little, white, wooden sarcophagus which was skipping near us on the waves, sculled by two yellow boys stark naked in the rain. The craft approached us, I jumped into it, then through a little trap-door shaped like a rat-trap that one of the scullers threw open for me, I slipped in and stretched myself at full length on a mat in what is called the “cabin” of a sampan.

There was just room enough for my body to lie in this floating coffin, which was scrupulously clean, white with the whiteness of new deal boards. I was well sheltered from the rain, that fell pattering on my lid, and thus I started for the town, lying in this box, flat on my stomach, rocked by one wave, roughly shaken by another, at moments almost overturned; and through the half-opened door of my rattrap I saw, upside-down, the two little creatures to whom I had entrusted my fate, children of eight or ten years of age at the most, who, with little monkeyish faces, had, however, fully developed muscles, like miniature men, and were already as skilful as regular old salts.

Suddenly they began to shout; no doubt we were approaching the landing-place. And indeed, through my trap-door, which I had now thrown wide open, I saw quite near to me the gray flagstones on the quays. I got out of my sarcophagus and prepared to set foot on Japanese soil for the first time in my life.

All was streaming around us, and the tiresome rain dashed into my eyes.

Hardly had I landed, when there bounded toward me a dozen strange beings, of what description it was almost impossible to distinguish through the blinding rain—a species of human hedgehog, each dragging some large black object; they came screaming around me and stopped my progress. One of them opened and held over my head an enormous, closely-ribbed umbrella, decorated on its transparent surface with paintings of storks; and they all smiled at me in an engaging manner, with an air of expectation.

I had been forewarned; these were only the djins who were touting for the honor of my preference; nevertheless I was startled at this sudden attack, this Japanese welcome on a first visit to land (the djins or djin-richisans, are the runners who drag little carts, and are paid for conveying people to and fro, being hired by the hour or the distance, as cabs are hired in Europe).



Their legs were naked; to-day they were very wet, and their heads were hidden under large, shady, conical hats. By way of waterproofs they wore nothing less than mats of straw, with all the ends of the straws turned outward, bristling like porcupines; they seemed clothed in a thatched roof. They continued to smile, awaiting my choice.

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Not having the honor of being acquainted with any of them in particular, I chose at haphazard the djin with the umbrella and got into his little cart, of which he carefully lowered the hood. He drew an oilcloth apron over my knees, pulling it up to my face, and then advancing, asked me, in Japanese, something which must have meant: "Where to, sir?" To which I replied, in the same language, "To the Garden of Flowers, my friend."

I said this in the three words I had, parrot-like, learned by heart, astonished that such sounds could mean anything, astonished, too, at their being understood. We started, he running at full speed, I dragged along and jerked about in his light chariot, wrapped in oilcloth, shut up as if in a box—both of us unceasingly drenched all the while, and dashing all around us the water and mud of the sodden ground.

"To the Garden of Flowers," I had said, like a habitual frequenter of the place, and quite surprised at hearing myself speak. But I was less ignorant about Japan than might have been supposed. Many of my friends, on their return home from that country, had told me about it, and I knew a great deal; the Garden of Flowers is a tea-house, an elegant rendezvous. There I should inquire for a certain Kangourou-San, who is at the same time interpreter, laundryman, and confidential agent for the intercourse of races. Perhaps this very evening, if all went well, I should be introduced to the bride destined for me by mysterious fate. This thought kept my mind on the alert during the panting journey we made, the djin and I, one dragging the other, under the merciless downpour.

Oh, what a curious Japan I saw that day, through the gaping of my oilcloth coverings, from under the dripping hood of my little cart! A sullen, muddy, half-drowned Japan. All these houses, men, and beasts, hitherto known to me only in drawings; all these, that I had beheld painted on blue or pink backgrounds of fans or vases, now appeared to me in their hard reality, under a dark sky, with umbrellas and wooden shoes, with tucked-up skirts and pitiful aspect.

At times the rain fell so heavily that I closed up tightly every chink and crevice, and the noise and shaking benumbed me, so that I completely forgot in what country I was. In the hood of the cart were holes, through which little streams ran down my back. Then, remembering that I was going for the first time in my life through the very heart of Nagasaki, I cast an inquiring look outside, at the risk of receiving a drenching: we were trotting along through a mean, narrow, little back street (there are thousands like it, a labyrinth of them), the rain falling in cascades from the tops of the roofs on the gleaming flagstones below, rendering everything indistinct and vague through the misty atmosphere. At times we passed a woman struggling with her skirts, unsteadily tripping along in her high wooden shoes, looking exactly like the figures painted on screens, cowering under a gaudily daubed paper umbrella. Again, we passed a pagoda, where an old granite monster, squatting in the water, seemed to make a hideous, ferocious grimace at me.

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How large this Nagasaki is! Here had we been running hard for the last hour, and still it seemed never-ending. It is a flat plain, and one never would suppose from the view in the offing that so vast a plain lies in the depth of this valley.

It would, however, have been impossible for me to say where I was, or in what direction we had run; I abandoned my fate to my djin and to my good luck.

What a steam-engine of a man my djin was! I had been accustomed to the Chinese runners, but they were nothing beside this fellow. When I part my oilcloth to peep at anything, he is naturally always the first object in my foreground; his two naked, brown, muscular legs, scampering along, splashing all around, and his bristling hedgehog back bending low in the rain. Do the passers-by, gazing at this little dripping cart, guess that it contains a suitor in quest of a bride?

At last my vehicle stops, and my djin, with many smiles and precautions lest any fresh rivers should stream down my back, lowers the hood of the cart; there is a break in the storm, and the rain has ceased. I had not yet seen his face; as an exception to the general rule, he is good-looking; a young man of about thirty years of age, of intelligent and strong appearance, and a frank countenance. Who could have foreseen that a few days later this very djin? But no, I will not anticipate, and run the risk of throwing beforehand any discredit on Chrysantheme.

We had therefore reached our destination, and found ourselves at the foot of a high, overhanging mountain; probably beyond the limits of the town, in some suburban district. It apparently became necessary to continue our journey on foot, and to climb up an almost perpendicular narrow path.

Around us, a number of small country-houses, garden-walls, and high bamboo palisades shut off the view. The green hill crushed us with its towering height; the heavy, dark clouds lowering over our heads seemed like a leaden canopy confining us in this unknown spot; it really seemed as if the complete absence of perspective inclined one all the better to notice the details of this tiny corner, muddy and wet, of homely Japan, now lying before our eyes. The earth was very red. The grasses and wild flowers bordering the pathway were strange to me; nevertheless, the palings were covered with convolvuli like our own, and I recognized china asters, zinnias, and other familiar flowers in the gardens. The atmosphere seemed laden with a curiously complicated odor, something besides the perfume of the plants and soil, arising no doubt from the human dwelling-places—a mingled odor, I fancied, of dried fish and incense. Not a creature was to be seen; of the inhabitants, of their homes and life, there was not a vestige, and I might have imagined myself anywhere in the world.

My djin had fastened his little cart under a tree, and together we climbed the steep path on the slippery red soil.

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"We are going to the Garden of Flowers, are we not?" I inquired, desirous to ascertain whether I had been understood.

"Yes, yes," replied the djin, "it is up there, and quite near."

The road turned, steep banks hemming it in and darkening it. On one side it skirted the mountain, all covered with a tangle of wet ferns; on the other appeared a large wooden house almost devoid of openings and of evil aspect; it was there that my djin halted.

What, was that sinister-looking house the Garden of Flowers? He assured me that it was, and seemed very sure of the fact. We knocked at a large door which opened immediately, slipping back in its groove. Then two funny little women appeared, oldish-looking, but with evident pretensions to youth: exact types of the figures painted on vases, with their tiny hands and feet.

On catching sight of me they threw themselves on all fours, their faces touching the floor. Good gracious! What can be the matter? I asked myself. Nothing at all, it was only the ceremonious salute, to which I am as yet unaccustomed. They arose, and proceeded to take off my boots (one never keeps on one's shoes in a Japanese house), wiping the bottoms of my trousers, and feeling my shoulders to see whether I am wet.

What always strikes one on first entering a Japanese dwelling is the extreme cleanliness, the white and chilling bareness of the rooms.

Over the most irreproachable mattings, without a crease, a line, or a stain, I was led upstairs to the first story and ushered into a large, empty room—absolutely empty! The paper walls were mounted on sliding panels, which, fitting into each other, can be made to disappear—and all one side of the apartment opened like a veranda, giving a view of the green country and the gray sky beyond. By way of a chair, they gave me a square cushion of black velvet; and behold me seated low, in the middle of this large, empty room, which by its very vastness is almost chilly. The two little women (who are the servants of the house and my very humble servants, too), awaited my orders, in attitudes expressive of the profoundest humility.

It seemed extraordinary that the quaint words, the curious phrases I had learned during our exile at the Pescadores Islands—by sheer dint of dictionary and grammar, without attaching the least sense to them—should mean anything. But so it seemed, however, for I was at once understood.

I wished in the first place to speak to one M. Kangourou, who is interpreter, laundryman, and matrimonial agent. Nothing could be easier: they knew him and were willing to go at once in search of him; and the elder of the waiting-maids made ready for the purpose her wooden clogs and her paper umbrella.

Next I demanded a well-served repast, composed of the greatest delicacies of Japan. Better and better! they rushed to the kitchen to order it.

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Finally, I beg they will give tea and rice to my djin, who is waiting for me below; I wish, —in short, I wish many things, my dear little dolls, which I will mention by degrees and with due deliberation, when I shall have had time to assemble the necessary words. But the more I look at you the more uneasy I feel as to what my fiancée of to-morrow may be like. Almost pretty, I grant you, you are—in virtue of quaintness, delicate hands, miniature feet, but ugly, after all, and absurdly small. You look like little monkeys, like little china ornaments, like I don't know what. I begin to understand that I have arrived at this house at an ill-chosen moment. Something is going on which does not concern me, and I feel that I am in the way.

From the beginning I might have guessed as much, notwithstanding the excessive politeness of my welcome; for I remember now, that while they were taking off my boots downstairs, I heard a murmuring chatter overhead, then a noise of panels moved quickly along their grooves, evidently to hide from me something not intended for me to see; they were improvising for me the apartment in which I now am just as in menageries they make a separate compartment for some beasts when the public is admitted.

Now I am left alone while my orders are being executed, and I listen attentively, squatted like a Buddha on my black velvet cushion, in the midst of the whiteness of the walls and mats.

Behind the paper partitions, feeble voices, seemingly numerous, are talking in low tones. Then rises the sound of a guitar, and the song of a woman, plaintive and gentle in the echoing sonority of the bare house, in the melancholy of the rainy weather.

What one can see through the wide-open veranda is very pretty; I will admit that it resembles the landscape of a fairytale. There are admirably wooded mountains, climbing high into the dark and gloomy sky, and hiding in it the peaks of their summits, and, perched up among the clouds, is a temple. The atmosphere has that absolute transparency, that distance and clearness which follows a great fall of rain; but a thick pall, still heavy with moisture, remains suspended over all, and on the foliage of the hanging woods still float great flakes of gray fluff, which remain there, motionless. In the foreground, in front of and below this almost fantastic landscape, is a miniature garden where two beautiful white cats are taking the air, amusing themselves by pursuing each other through the paths of a Lilliputian labyrinth, shaking the wet sand from their paws. The garden is as conventional as possible: not a flower, but little rocks, little lakes, dwarf trees cut in grotesque fashion; all this is not natural, but it is most ingeniously arranged, so green, so full of fresh mosses!

In the rain-soaked country below me, to the very farthest end of the vast scene, reigns a great silence, an absolute calm. But the woman's voice, behind the paper wall, continues to sing in a key of gentle sadness, and the accompanying guitar has sombre and even gloomy notes.

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Stay, though! Now the music is somewhat quicker—one might even suppose they were dancing!

So much the worse! I shall try to look between the fragile divisions, through a crack which has revealed itself to my notice.

What a singular spectacle it is; evidently the gilded youth of Nagasaki holding a great clandestine orgy! In an apartment as bare as my own, there are a dozen of them, seated in a circle on the ground, attired in long blue cotton dresses with pagoda sleeves, long, sleek, and greasy hair surmounted by European pot-hats; and beneath these, yellow, worn-out, bloodless, foolish faces. On the floor are a number of little spirit-lamps, little pipes, little lacquer trays, little teapots, little cups—all the accessories and all the remains of a Japanese feast, resembling nothing so much as a doll's tea-party. In the midst of this circle of dandies are three overdressed women, one might say three weird visions, robed in garments of pale and indefinable colors, embroidered with golden monsters; their great coiffures are arranged with fantastic art, stuck full of pins and flowers. Two are seated with their backs turned to me: one is holding the guitar, the other singing with that soft, pretty voice; thus seen furtively, from behind, their pose, their hair, the nape of their necks, all is exquisite, and I tremble lest a movement should reveal to me faces which might destroy the enchantment. The third girl is on her feet, dancing before this areopagus of idiots, with their lanky locks and pot-hats. What a shock when she turns round! She wears over her face the horribly grinning, death-like mask of a spectre or a vampire. The mask unfastened, falls. And behold! a darling little fairy of about twelve or fifteen years of age, slim, and already a coquette, already a woman—dressed in a long robe of shaded dark-blue china crape, covered with embroidery representing bats-gray bats, black bats, golden bats.

Suddenly there are steps on the stairs, the light foot steps of barefooted women pattering over the white mats. No doubt the first course of my luncheon is just about to be served. I fall back quickly, fixed and motionless, upon my black velvet cushion. There are three of them now, three waiting-maids who arrive in single file, with smiles and curtseys. One offers me the spirit-lamp and the teapot; another, preserved fruits in delightful little plates; the third, absolutely indefinable objects upon gems of little trays. And they grovel before me on the floor, placing all this plaything of a meal at my feet.

At this moment, my impressions of Japan are charming enough; I feel myself fairly launched upon this tiny, artificial, fictitious world, which I felt I knew already from the paintings on lacquer and porcelains. It is so exact a representation! The three little squatting women, graceful and dainty, with their narrow slits of eyes, their magnificent coiffures in huge bows, smooth and shining as shoe-polish, and the little

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tea-service on the floor, the landscape seen through the veranda, the pagoda perched among the clouds; and over all the same affectation everywhere, in every detail. Even the woman's melancholy voice, still to be heard behind the paper partition, was evidently the proper way for them to sing—these musicians I had so often seen painted in amazing colors on rice-paper, half closing their dreamy eyes among impossibly large flowers. Long before I arrived there, I had perfectly pictured Japan to myself. Nevertheless, in the reality it almost seems to be smaller, more finicking than I had imagined it, and also much more mournful, no doubt by reason of that great pall of black clouds hanging over us, and this incessant rain.

While awaiting M. Kangourou (who is dressing himself, it appears, and will be here shortly), it may be as well to begin luncheon.

In the daintiest bowl imaginable, adorned with flights of storks, is the most wildly impossible soup made of seaweed. After which there are little fish dried in sugar, crabs in sugar, beans in sugar, and fruits in vinegar and pepper. All this is atrocious, but above all unexpected and unimaginable. The little women make me eat, laughing much, with that perpetual, irritating laugh which is peculiar to Japan—they make me eat, according to their fashion, with dainty chop-sticks, fingered with affected grace. I am becoming accustomed to their faces. The whole effect is refined—a refinement so entirely different from our own that at first sight I understand nothing of it, although in the long run it may end by pleasing me.

Suddenly enters, like a night butterfly awakened in broad daylight, like a rare and surprising moth, the dancing-girl from the other compartment, the child who wore the horrible mask. No doubt she wishes to have a look at me. She rolls her eyes like a timid kitten, and then all at once tamed, nestles against me, with a coaxing air of childishness, which is a delightfully transparent assumption. She is slim, elegant, delicate, and smells sweet; she is drolly painted, white as plaster, with a little circle of rouge marked very precisely in the middle of each cheek, the mouth reddened, and a touch of gilding outlining the under lip. As they could not whiten the back of her neck on account of all the delicate little curls of hair growing there, they had, in their love of exactitude, stopped the white plaster in a straight line, which might have been cut with a knife, and in consequence at the nape appears a square of natural skin of a deep yellow.

An imperious note sounds on the guitar, evidently a summons! Crac! Away she goes, the little fairy, to entertain the drivelling fools on the other side of the screens.

Suppose I marry this one, without seeking any further. I should respect her as a child committed to my care; I should take her for what she is: a fantastic and charming

plaything. What an amusing little household I should set up! Really, short of marrying a china ornament, I should find it difficult to choose better.

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At this moment enters M. Kangourou, clad in a suit of gray tweed, which might have come from La Belle Jardiniere or the Pont Neuf, with a pot-hat and white thread gloves. His countenance is at once foolish and cunning; he has hardly any nose or eyes. He makes a real Japanese salutation: an abrupt dip, the hands placed flat on the knees, the body making a right angle to the legs, as if the fellow were breaking in two; a little snake-like hissing (produced by sucking the saliva between the teeth, which is the highest expression of obsequious politeness in this country).

"You speak French, Monsieur Kangourou?"

"Yes, Monsieur" (renewed bows).

He makes one for each word I utter, as if he were a mechanical toy pulled by a string; when he is seated before me on the ground, he limits himself to a duck of the head—always accompanied by the same hissing noise of the saliva.

"A cup of tea, Monsieur Kangourou?"

Fresh salute and an extra affected gesticulation with the hands, as if to say, "I should hardly dare. It is too great a condescension on your part. However, anything to oblige you."

He guesses at the first words what I require from him.

"Of course," he replies, "we shall see about it at once. In a week's time, as it happens, a family from Simonoseki, in which there are two charming daughters, will be here!"

"What! in a week! You don't know me, Monsieur Kangourou! No, no, either now, tomorrow, or not at all."

Again a hissing bow, and Kangourou-San, understanding my agitation, begins to pass in feverish review all the young persons at his disposal in Nagasaki.

"Let us see—there was Mademoiselle Oeillet. What a pity that you did not speak a few days sooner! So pretty! So clever at playing the guitar! It is an irreparable misfortune; she was engaged only yesterday by a Russian officer.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Abricot!—Would she suit you, Mademoiselle Abricot? She is the daughter of a wealthy China merchant in the Decima Bazaar, a person of the highest merit; but she would be very dear: her parents, who think a great deal of her, will not let her go under a hundred yen—[A yen is equal to four shillings.]—a month. She is very accomplished, thoroughly understands commercial writing, and has at her fingers'-ends more than two thousand characters of learned writing. In a poetical competition she gained the first prize with a sonnet composed in praise of 'the blossoms of the blackthorn hedges seen in the dew of early morning.' Only, she is not very pretty: one

of her eyes is smaller than the other, and she has a hole in her cheek, resulting from an illness of her childhood.”

“Oh, no! on no account that one! Let us seek among a less distinguished class of young persons, but without scars. And how about those on the other side of the screen, in those fine gold-embroidered dresses? For instance, the dancer with the spectre mask, Monsieur Kangourou? or again she who sings in so dulcet a strain and has such a charming nape to her neck?”

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He does not, at first, understand my drift; then when he gathers my meaning, he shakes his head almost in a joking way, and says:

“No, Monsieur, no! Those are only geishas,—[Geishas are professional dancers and singers trained at the Yeddo Conservatory.] —Monsieur—geishas!”

“Well, but why not a geisha? What difference can it make to me whether they are geishas or not?” Later, no doubt, when I understand Japanese affairs better, I shall appreciate myself the enormity of my proposal: one would really suppose I had talked of marrying the devil.

At this point M. Kangourou suddenly calls to mind one Mademoiselle Jasmin. Heavens! how was it he had not thought of her at once? She is absolutely and exactly what I want; he will go to-morrow, or this very evening, to make the necessary overtures to the parents of this young person, who live a long way off, on the opposite hill, in the suburb of Diou-djen-dji. She is a very pretty girl of about fifteen. She can probably be engaged for about eighteen or twenty dollars a month, on condition of presenting her with a few costumes of the best fashion, and of lodging her in a pleasant and well-situated house—all of which a man of gallantry like myself could not fail to do.

Well, let us fix upon Mademoiselle Jasmin, then—and now we must part; time presses. M. Kangourou will come on board to-morrow to communicate to me the result of his first proceedings and to arrange with me for the interview. For the present he refuses to accept any remuneration; but I am to give him my washing, and to procure him the custom of my brother officers of the ‘Triomphante.’ It is all settled. Profound bows—they put on my boots again at the door. My djin, profiting by the interpreter kind fortune has placed in his way, begs to be recommended to me for future custom; his stand is on the quay; his number is 415, inscribed in French characters on the lantern of his vehicle (we have a number 415 on board, one Le Goelec, gunner, who serves the left of one of my guns; happy thought! I shall remember this); his price is sixpence the journey, or five-pence an hour, for his customers. Capital! he shall have my custom, that is promised. And now, let us be off. The waiting-maids, who have escorted me to the door, fall on all fours as a final salute, and remain prostrate on the threshold as long as I am still in sight down the dark pathway, where the rain trickles off the great overarching bracken upon my head.

CHAPTER IV

CHOOSING A BRIDE

Three days have passed. Night is closing, in an apartment which has been mine since yesterday. Yves and I, on the first floor, move restlessly over the white mats, striding to and fro in the great bare room, of which the thin, dry flooring cracks beneath our

footsteps; we are both rather irritated by prolonged expectation. Yves, whose impatience shows itself more freely, from time to time looks out of the window. As for myself, a chill suddenly seizes me, at the idea that I have chosen to inhabit this lonely house, lost in the midst of the suburb of a totally strange town, perched high on the mountain and almost opening upon the woods.

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What wild notion could have taken possession of me, to settle myself in surroundings so foreign and unknown, breathing of isolation and sadness? The waiting unnerves me, and I beguile the time by examining all the little details of the building. The woodwork of the ceiling is complicated and ingenious. On the partitions of white paper which form the walls, are scattered tiny, microscopic, blue-feathered tortoises.

"They are late," said Yves, who is still looking out into the street.

As to being late, that they certainly are, by a good hour already, and night is falling, and the boat which should take us back to dine on board will be gone. Probably we shall have to sup Japanese fashion tonight, heaven only knows where. The people of this country have no sense of punctuality, or of the value of time.

Therefore I continue to inspect the minute and comical details of my dwelling. Here, instead of handles such as we should have made to pull these movable partitions, they have made little oval-holes, just the shape of a finger-end, into which one is evidently to put one's thumb. These little holes have a bronze ornamentation, and, on looking closely, one sees that the bronze is curiously chased: here is a lady fanning herself; there, in the next hole, is represented a branch of cherry in full blossom. What eccentricity there is in the taste of this people! To bestow assiduous labor on such miniature work, and then to hide it at the bottom of a hole to put one's finger in, looking like a mere spot in the middle of a great white panel; to accumulate so much patient and delicate workmanship on almost imperceptible accessories, and all to produce an effect which is absolutely nil, an effect of the most complete bareness and nudity.

Yves still continues to gaze forth, like Sister Anne. From the side on which he leans, my veranda overlooks a street, or rather a road bordered with houses, which climbs higher and higher, and loses itself almost immediately in the verdure of the mountain, in the fields of tea, the underwood and the cemeteries. As for myself, this delay finally irritates me thoroughly, and I turn my glances to the opposite side. The other end of my house, also a veranda, opens first of all upon a garden; then upon a marvellous panorama of woods and mountains, with all the venerable Japanese quarters of Nagasaki lying confusedly like a black ant-heap, six hundred feet below us. This evening, in a dull twilight, notwithstanding that it is a twilight of July, these things are melancholy. Great clouds heavy with rain and showers, ready to fall, are travelling across the sky. No, I can not feel at home in this strange dwelling I have chosen; I feel sensations of extreme solitude and strangeness; the mere prospect of passing the night in it gives me a shudder of horror.

"Ah! at last, brother," said Yves, "I believe—yes, I really believe she is coming at last."

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I look over his shoulder, and I see a back view of a little doll, the finishing touches to whose toilette are being put in the solitary street; a last maternal glance is given the enormous bows of the sash, the folds at the waist. Her dress is of pearl-gray silk, her obi (sash) of mauve satin; a sprig of silver flowers trembles in her black hair; a parting ray of sunlight touches the little figure; five or six persons accompany her. Yes! it is undoubtedly Mademoiselle Jasmin; they are bringing me my fiancée!

I rush to the ground floor, inhabited by old Madame Prune, my landlady, and her aged husband; they are absorbed in prayer before the altar of their ancestors.

"Here they are, Madame Prune," I cry in Japanese; "here they are! Bring at once the tea, the lamp, the embers, the little pipes for the ladies, the little bamboo pots! Bring up, as quickly as possible, all the accessories for my reception!"

I hear the front door open, and hasten upstairs again. Wooden clogs are deposited on the floor, the staircase creaks gently under little bare feet. Yves and I look at each other, with a longing to laugh.

An old lady enters—two old ladies—three old ladies, emerging from the doorway one after another with jerking and mechanical salutations, which we return as best we can, fully conscious of our inferiority in this particular style. Then come persons of intermediate age—then quite young ones, a dozen at least, friends, neighbors, the whole quarter, in fact. And the entire company, on arriving, becomes confusedly engaged in reciprocal salutations: I salute you—you salute me—I salute you again, and you return it—and I re-salute you again, and I express that I shall never, never be able to return it according to your high merit—and I bang my forehead against the ground, and you stick your nose between the planks of the flooring, and there they are, on all fours one before another; it is a polite dispute, all eager to yield precedence as to sitting down, or passing first, and compliments without end are murmured in low tones, with faces against the floor.

They seat themselves at last, smiling, in a ceremonious circle; we two remaining standing, our eyes fixed on the staircase. And at length emerges the little aigrette of silver flowers, the ebony coiffure, the gray silk robe and mauve sash of Mademoiselle Jasmin, my fiancée!

Heavens! why, I know her already! Long before setting foot in Japan, I had met her, on every fan, on every teacup with her silly air, her puffy little face, her tiny eyes, mere gimlet-holes above those expanses of impossible pink and white cheeks.

She is young, that is all I can say in her favor; she is even so young that I should almost scruple to accept her. The wish to laugh leaves me suddenly, and instead, a profound chill seizes my heart. What! share even an hour of my life with that little doll? Never!

The next question is, how to get rid of her.

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She advances smiling, with an air of repressed triumph, and behind her looms M. Kangourou, in his suit of gray tweed. Fresh salutes, and behold her on all fours, she too, before my landlady and before my neighbors. Yves, the big Yves, who is not about to be married, stands behind me, with a comical grimace, hardly repressing his laughter—while to give myself time to collect my ideas, I offer tea in little cups, little spittoons, and embers to the company.

Nevertheless, my discomfited air does not escape my visitors. M. Kangourou anxiously inquires:

“How do you like her?” And I reply in a low voice, but with great resolution:

“Not at all! I won’t have that one. Never!”

I believe that this remark was almost understood in the circle around me. Consternation was depicted on every face, jaws dropped, and pipes went out. And now I address my reproaches to Kangourou: “Why have you brought her to me in such pomp, before friends and neighbors of both sexes, instead of showing her to me discreetly, as if by chance, as I had wished? What an affront you will compel me now to put upon all these polite persons!”

The old ladies (the mamma, no doubt, and aunts), prick up their ears, and M. Kangourou translates to them, softening as much as possible, my heartrending decision. I feel really almost sorry for them; the fact is, that for women who, not to put too fine a point upon it, have come to sell a child, they have an air I was not prepared for: I can hardly say an air of respectability (a word in use with us which is absolutely without meaning in Japan), but an air of unconscious and good-natured simplicity. They are only doing a thing that is perfectly admissible in their world, and really it all resembles, more than I could have thought possible, a bona fide marriage.

“But what fault do you find with the little girl?” asks M. Kangourou, in consternation.

I endeavor to present the matter in the most flattering light:

“She is very young,” I say; “and then she is too white, too much like our own women. I wished for one with an ivory skin, just as a change.”

“But that is only the paint they have put on her, Monsieur! Beneath it, I assure you, she is of an ivory hue.”

Yves leans toward me and whispers:

“Look over there, brother, in that corner by the last panel; have you noticed the one who is sitting down?”



Not I. In my annoyance I had not observed her; she had her back to the light, was dressed in dark colors, and sat in the careless attitude of one who keeps in the background. The fact is, this one pleased me much better. Eyes with long lashes, rather narrow, but which would have been called good in any country in the world; with almost an expression, almost a thought. A coppery tint on her rounded cheeks; a straight nose; slightly thick lips, but well modelled and with pretty corners. A little older than Mademoiselle Jasmin, about eighteen years of age perhaps, already more of a woman. She wore an expression of ennui, also of a little contempt, as if she regretted her attendance at a spectacle which dragged so much, and was so little amusing.

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"Monsieur Kangourou, who is that young lady over there, in dark blue?"

"Over there, Monsieur? She is called Mademoiselle Chrysantheme. She came with the others you see here; she is only here as a spectator. She pleases you?" said he, with eager suddenness, espying a way out of his difficulty. Then, forgetting all his politeness, all his ceremoniousness, all his Japanesery, he takes her by the hand, forces her to rise, to stand in the dying daylight, to let herself be seen. And she, who has followed our eyes and begins to guess what is on foot, lowers her head in confusion, with a more decided but more charming pout, and tries to step back, half-sulky, half-smiling.

"It makes no difference," continues M. Kangourou, "it can be arranged just as well with this one; she is not married either, Monsieur!"

She is not married! Then why didn't the idiot propose her to me at once instead of the other, for whom I have a feeling of the greatest pity, poor little soul, with her pearl-gray dress, her sprig of flowers, her now sad and mortified expression, and her eyes which twinkle like those of a child about to cry.

"It can be arranged, Monsieur!" repeats Kangourou again, who at this moment appears to me a go-between of the lowest type, a rascal of the meanest kind.

Only, he adds, we, Yves and I, are in the way during the negotiations. And, while Mademoiselle Chrysantheme remains with her eyelids lowered, as befits the occasion, while the various families, on whose countenances may be read every degree of astonishment, every phase of expectation, remain seated in a circle on my white mats, he sends us two into the veranda, and we gaze down into the depths below us, upon a misty and vague Nagasaki, a Nagasaki melting into a blue haze of darkness.

Then ensue long discourses in Japanese, arguments without end. M. Kangourou, who is laundryman and low scamp in French only, has returned for these discussions to the long formulas of his country. From time to time I express impatience, I ask this worthy creature, whom I am less and less able to consider in a serious light:

"Come now, tell us frankly, Kangourou, are we any nearer coming to some arrangement? Is all this ever going to end?"

"In a moment, Monsieur, in a moment;" and he resumes his air of political economist seriously debating social problems.

Well, one must submit to the slowness of this people. And, while the darkness falls like a veil over the Japanese town, I have leisure to reflect, with as much melancholy as I please, upon the bargain that is being concluded behind me.

Night has closed in; it has been necessary to light the lamps.

It is ten o'clock when all is finally settled, and M. Kangourou comes to tell me:

"All is arranged, Monsieur: her parents will give her up for twenty dollars a month—the same price as Mademoiselle Jasmin."

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On hearing this, I am possessed suddenly with extreme vexation that I should have made up my mind so quickly to link myself in ever so fleeting and transient a manner with this little creature, and dwell with her in this isolated house.

We return to the room; she is the centre of the circle and seated; and they have placed the aigrette of flowers in her hair. There is actually some expression in her glance, and I am almost persuaded that she—this one—thinks.

Yves is astonished at her modest attitude, at her little timid airs of a young girl on the verge of matrimony; he had imagined nothing like it in such a connection as this, nor I either, I must confess.

“She is really very pretty, brother,” said he; “very pretty, take my word for it!”

These good folks, their customs, this scene, strike him dumb with astonishment; he can not get over it, and remains in a maze. “Oh! this is too much,” he says, and the idea of writing a long letter to his wife at Toulven, describing it all, diverts him greatly.

Chrysantheme and I join hands. Yves, too, advances and touches the dainty little paw. After all, if I wed her, it is chiefly his fault; I never should have remarked her without his observation that she was pretty. Who can tell how this strange arrangement will turn out? Is it a woman or a doll? Well, time will show.

The families, having lighted their many-colored lanterns swinging at the ends of slight sticks, prepare to retire with many compliments, bows, and curtseys. When it is a question of descending the stairs, no one is willing to go first, and at a given moment, the whole party are again on all fours, motionless and murmuring polite phrases in undertones.

“Haul back there!” said Yves, laughing, and employing a nautical term used when there is a stoppage of any kind.

At length they all melt away, descending the stairs with a last buzzing accompaniment of civilities and polite phrases finished from one step to another in voices which gradually die away. He and I remain alone in the unfriendly, empty apartment, where the mats are still littered with the little cups of tea, the absurd little pipes, and the miniature trays.

“Let us watch them go away!” said Yves, leaning out. At the door of the garden is a renewal of the same salutations and curtseys, and then the two groups of women separate, their bedaubed paper lanterns fade away trembling in the distance, balanced at the extremity of flexible canes which they hold in their fingertips as one would hold a fishing-rod in the dark to catch night-birds. The procession of the unfortunate Mademoiselle Jasmin mounts upward toward the mountain, while that of Mademoiselle

Chrysantheme winds downward by a narrow old street, half-stairway, half-goat-path, which leads to the town.

Then we also depart. The night is fresh, silent, exquisite, the eternal song of the cicadas fills the air. We can still see the red lanterns of my new family, dwindling away in the distance, as they descend and gradually become lost in that yawning abyss, at the bottom of which lies Nagasaki.



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Our way, too, lies downward, but on an opposite slope by steep paths leading to the sea.

And when I find myself once more on board, when the scene enacted on the hill above recurs to my mind, it seems to me that my betrothal is a joke, and my new family a set of puppets.

CHAPTER V

A FANTASTIC MARRIAGE

July 10, 1885.

Three days have passed since my marriage was an accomplished fact.

In the lower part of the town, in one of the new cosmopolitan districts, in an ugly, pretentious building, which is a sort of registry office, the deed was signed and countersigned, with marvellous hieroglyphics, in a large book, in the presence of those absurd little creatures, formerly silken-robed Samurai, but now called policemen, dressed up in tight jackets and Russian caps.

The ceremony took place in the full heat of midday; Chrysantheme and her mother arrived together, and I alone. We seemed to have met for the purpose of ratifying some discreditable contract, and the two women trembled in the presence of these ugly little men, who, in their eyes, were the personification of the law.

In the middle of their official scrawl, they made me write in French my name, Christian name, and profession. Then they gave me an extraordinary document on a sheet of rice-paper, which set forth the permission granted me by the civilian authorities of the island of Kiu-Siu, to inhabit a house situated in the suburb of Diou-djen-dji, with a person called Chrysantheme, the said permission being under the protection of the police during the whole of my stay in Japan.

In the evening, however, in our own quarter, our little marriage became a very pretty affair—a procession carrying lanterns, a festive tea and some music. All this seemed quite necessary.

Now we are almost an old married couple, and we are gently settling down into everyday habits.

Chrysantheme tends the flowers in our bronze vases, dresses herself with studied care, proud of her socks with the divided big toe, and strums all day on a kind of long-necked guitar, producing sweet and plaintive sounds.

CHAPTER VI

MY NEW MENAGE

In our home, everything looks like a Japanese picture: we have folding-screens, little odd-shaped stools bearing vases full of flowers, and at the farther end of the apartment, in a nook forming a kind of altar, a large gilded Buddha sits enthroned in a lotus.

The house is just as I had fancied it should be in the many dreams of Japan I had had before my arrival, during the long night watches: perched on high, in a peaceful suburb, in the midst of green gardens; made up of paper panels, and taken to pieces according to one's fancy, like a child's toy. Whole families of cicadas chirp day and night under our old resounding roof. From our veranda we have a bewildering bird's-eye view of Nagasaki, of its streets, its junks, and its great pagodas, which, at certain hours, is illuminated at our feet like some scene in fairyland.

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CHAPTER VII

THE LADIES OF THE FANS

Regarded as a mere outline, little Chrysantheme has been seen everywhere and by everybody. Whoever has looked at one of those paintings on china or silk that are sold in our bazaars, knows perfectly the pretty, stiff head-dress, the leaning figure, ever ready to try some new gracious salutation, the sash fastened behind in an enormous bow, the large, flowing sleeves, the drapery slightly clinging about the ankles with a little crooked train like a lizard's tail.

But her face—no, not every one has seen that; there is something special about it.

Moreover, the type of women the Japanese paint mostly on their vases is an exceptional one in their country. It is almost exclusively among the nobility that these personages are found, with their long, pale faces, painted in tender rose-tints, and silly, long necks which give them the appearance of storks. This distinguished type (which I am obliged to admit was also Mademoiselle Jasmin's) is rare, particularly at Nagasaki.

Among the middle classes and the common people, the ugliness is more pleasant and sometimes becomes a kind of prettiness. The eyes are still too small and hardly able to open, but the faces are rounder, browner, more vivacious; and in the women remains a certain vagueness of feature, something childlike which prevails to the very end of their lives.

They are so laughing, and so merry, all these little Nipponese dolls! Rather a forced mirth, it is true, studied, and at times with a false ring; nevertheless one is attracted by it.

Chrysantheme is an exception, for she is melancholy. What thoughts are running through that little brain? My knowledge of her language is still too limited to enable me to find out. Moreover, it is a hundred to one that she has no thoughts whatever. And even if she had, what do I care?

I have chosen her to amuse me, and I should really prefer that she should have one of those insignificant little thoughtless faces like all the others.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NECESSARY VEIL

When night comes on, we light two hanging lamps of religious symbolism, which burn till daylight, before our gilded idol.



We sleep on the floor, on a thin cotton mattress, which is unfolded and laid out over our white matting. Chrysantheme's pillow is a little wooden block, cut so as to fit exactly the nape of her neck, without disturbing the elaborate head-dress, which must never be taken down; the pretty black hair I shall probably never see undone. My pillow, a Chinese model, is a kind of little square drum covered over with serpent-skin.

We sleep under a gauze mosquito-net of sombre greenish-blue, dark as the shades of night, stretched out on an orange-colored ribbon. (These are the traditional colors, and all respectable families of Nagasaki possess a similar net.) It envelops us like a tent; the mosquitoes and the night-moths whirl around it.



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This sounds very pretty, and written down looks very well. In reality, however, it is not so; something, I know not what, is lacking, and everything is very paltry. In other lands, in the delightful isles of Oceania, in the old, lifeless quarters of Stamboul, it seemed as if mere words could never express all I felt, and I struggled vainly against my own inability to render, in human language, the penetrating charm surrounding me.

Here, on the contrary, words exact and truthful in themselves seem always too thrilling, too great for the subject; seem to embellish it unduly. I feel as if I were acting, for my own benefit, some wretchedly trivial and third-rate comedy; and whenever I try to consider my home in a serious spirit, the scoffing figure of M. Kangourou rises before me—the matrimonial agent, to whom I am indebted for my happiness.

CHAPTER IX

MY PLAYTHING

July 12th

Yves visits us whenever he is free, in the evening at five o'clock, after his duties on board are fulfilled.

He is our only European visitor, and, with the exception of a few civilities and cups of tea, exchanged with our neighbors, we lead a very retired life. Only in the evenings, winding our way through the steep, narrow streets and carrying our lanterns at the end of short sticks, we go down to Nagasaki in search of amusement at the theatres, at the tea-houses, or in the bazaars.

Yves treats my wife as if she were a plaything, and continually assures me that she is charming.

I find her as exasperating as the cicalas on my roof; and when I am alone at home, side by side with this little creature twanging the strings of her long-necked guitar, facing this marvellous panorama of pagodas and mountains, I am overcome by sadness almost to tears.

CHAPTER X

NOCTURNAL TERRORS

July 13th.

Last night, as we reposed under the Japanese roof of Diou-djen-dji—the thin old wooden roof scorched by a hundred years of sunshine, vibrating at the least sound, like

the stretched-out parchment of a tomtom—in the silence which prevails at two o'clock in the morning, we heard overhead a sound like a regular wild huntsman's chase passing at full gallop.

"Nidzoumi!" ("The mice!") said Chrysantheme.

Suddenly the word brings back to my mind yet another phrase, spoken in a very different language, in a country far away from here: "Setchan!" a word heard elsewhere, a word that has likewise been whispered in my ear by a woman's voice, under similar circumstances, in a moment of nocturnal terror—"Setchan!" It was during one of our first nights at Stamboul spent under the mysterious roof of Eyoub, when danger surrounded us on all sides; a noise on the steps of the black staircase had made us tremble, and she also, my dear little Turkish companion, had said to me in her beloved language, "Setchan!" ("the mice!").

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At that fond recollection, a thrill of sweet memories coursed through my veins; it was as if I had been startled out of a long ten years' sleep; I looked down upon the doll beside me with a sort of hatred, wondering why I was there, and I arose, with almost a feeling of remorse, to escape from that blue gauze net.

I stepped out upon the veranda, and there I paused, gazing into the depths of the starlit night. Beneath me Nagasaki lay asleep, wrapped in a soft, light slumber, hushed by the murmuring sound of a thousand insects in the moonlight, and fairy-like with its roseate hues. Then, turning my head, I saw behind me the gilded idol with our lamps burning in front of it; the idol smiling the impassive smile of Buddha; and its presence seemed to cast around it something, I know not what, strange and incomprehensible. Never until now had I slept under the eye of such a god.

In the midst of the calm and silence of the night, I strove to recall my poignant impressions of Stamboul; but, alas, I strove in vain, they would not return to me in this strange, far-off world. Through the transparent blue gauze appeared my little Japanese, as she lay in her sombre night-robe with all the fantastic grace of her country, the nape of her neck resting on its wooden block, and her hair arranged in large, shiny bows. Her amber-tinted arms, pretty and delicate, emerged, bare up to the shoulders, from her wide sleeves.

"What can those mice on the roof have done to him?" thought Chrysantheme. Of course she could not understand. In a coaxing manner, like a playful kitten, she glanced at me with her half-closed eyes, inquiring why I did not come back to sleep—and I returned to my place by her side.

CHAPTER XI

A GAME OF ARCHERY

July 14th.

This is the National Fete day of France. In Nagasaki Harbor, all the ships are adorned with flags, and salutes are fired in our honor.

Alas! All day long, I can not help thinking of that last fourteenth of July, spent in the deep calm and quiet of my old home, the door shut against all intruders, while the gay crowd roared outside; there I had remained till evening, seated on a bench, shaded by an arbor covered with honeysuckle, where, in the bygone days of my childhood's summers, I used to settle myself with my copybooks and pretend to learn my lessons. Oh, those days when I was supposed to learn my lessons! How my thoughts used to rove—what voyages, what distant lands, what tropical forests did I not behold in my dreams! At that time, near the garden-bench, in some of the crevices in the stone wall,



dwelt many a big, ugly, black spider always on the alert, peeping out of his nook ready to pounce upon any giddy fly or wandering centipede. One of my amusements consisted in tickling the spiders gently, very gently, with a blade of grass or a cherry-stalk in their webs. Mystified,

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they would rush out, fancying they had to deal with some sort of prey, while I would rapidly draw back my hand in disgust. Well, last year, on that fourteenth of July, as I recalled my days of Latin themes and translations, now forever flown, and this game of boyish days, I actually recognized the very same spiders (or at least their daughters), lying in wait in the very same places. Gazing at them, and at the tufts of grass and moss around me, a thousand memories of those summers of my early life welled up within me, memories which for years past had lain slumbering under this old wall, sheltered by the ivy boughs. While all that is ourselves perpetually changes and passes away, the constancy with which Nature repeats, always in the same manner, her most infinitesimal details, seems a wonderful mystery; the same peculiar species of moss grows afresh for centuries on precisely the same spot, and the same little insects each summer do the same thing in the same place.

I must admit that this episode of my childhood, and the spiders, have little to do with the story of Chrysantheme. But an incongruous interruption is quite in keeping with the taste of this country; everywhere it is practised, in conversation, in music, even in painting; a landscape painter, for instance, when he has finished a picture of mountains and crags, will not hesitate to draw, in the very middle of the sky, a circle, or a lozenge, or some kind of framework, within which he will represent anything incoherent and inappropriate: a bonze fanning himself, or a lady taking a cup of tea. Nothing is more thoroughly Japanese than such digressions, made without the slightest apopos.

Moreover, if I roused my past memories, it was the better to force myself to notice the difference between that day of July last year, so peacefully spent amid surroundings familiar to me from my earliest infancy, and my present animated life passed in the midst of such a novel world.

To-day, therefore, under the scorching midday sun, at two o'clock, three swift-footed djins dragged us at full speed—Yves, Chrysantheme, and myself—in Indian file, each in a little jolting cart, to the farther end of Nagasaki, and there deposited us at the foot of some gigantic steps that run straight up the mountain.

These are the granite steps leading to the great temple of Osueva, wide enough to give access to a whole regiment; they are as grand and imposing as any work of Babylon or Nineveh, and in complete contrast with all the finical surroundings.

We climb up and up—Chrysantheme listlessly, affecting fatigue, under her paper parasol painted with pink butterflies on a black ground. As we ascended, we passed under enormous monastic porticoes, also in granite of rude and primitive style. In truth, these steps and these temple porticoes are the only imposing works that this people has created, and they astonish, for they do not seem Japanese.

We climb still higher. At this sultry hour of the day, from top to bottom of the enormous gray steps, only we three are to be seen; on all that granite there are but the pink butterflies on Chrysantheme's parasol to give a cheerful and brilliant touch.

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We passed through the first temple yard, in which are two white china turrets, bronze lanterns, and the statue of a large horse in jade. Then, without pausing at the sanctuary, we turned to the left, and entered a shady garden, which formed a terrace halfway up the hill, at the extremity of which was situated the Donko-Tchaya—in English, the Teahouse of the Toads.

This was the place where Chrysantheme had wished to take us. We sat down at a table, under a black linen tent decorated with large white letters (of funereal aspect), and two laughing ‘mousmes’ hastened to wait upon us.

The word ‘mousme’ means a young girl, or very young woman. It is one of the prettiest words in the Nipponese language; it seems almost as if there were a little pout in the very sound—a pretty, taking little pout, such as they put on, and also as if a little pert physiognomy were described by it. I shall often make use of it, knowing none other in our own language that conveys the same meaning.

Some Japanese Watteau must have mapped out this Donko-Tchaya, for it has rather an affected air of rurality, though very pretty. It is well shaded, under a shelter of large trees with dense foliage, and a miniature lake close by, the chosen residence of a few toads, has given it its attractive denomination. Lucky toads, who crawl and croak on the finest of moss, in the midst of tiny artificial islets decked with gardenias in full bloom. From time to time, one of them informs us of his thoughts by a ‘Couac’, uttered in a deep bass croak, infinitely more hollow than that of our own toads.

Under the tent of this tea-house, we sit on a sort of balcony jutting out from the mountain-side, overhanging from on high the grayish town and its suburbs buried in greenery. Around, above, and beneath us cling and hang, on every possible point, clumps of trees and fresh green woods, with the delicate and varying foliage of the temperate zone. We can see, at our feet, the deep roadstead, foreshortened and slanting, diminished in appearance till it looks like a sombre rent in the mass of large green mountains; and farther still, quite low on the black and stagnant waters, are the men-of-war, the steamboats and the junks, with flags flying from every mast. Against the dark green, which is the dominant shade everywhere, stand out these thousand scraps of bunting, emblems of the different nationalities, all displayed, all flying in honor of far-distant France. The colors most prevailing in this motley assemblage are the white flag with a red ball, emblem of the Empire of the Rising Sun, where we now are.

With the exception of three or four ‘mousmes’ at the farther end, who are practising with bows and arrows, we are today the only people in the garden, and the mountain round about is silent.

Having finished her cigarette and her cup of tea, Chrysantheme also wishes to exert her skill; for archery is still held in honor among the young women.

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The old man who keeps the range picks out for her his best arrows tipped with white and red feathers—and she takes aim with a serious air. The mark is a circle, traced in the middle of a picture on which is painted, in flat, gray tones, terrifying chimera flying through the clouds.

Chrysantheme is certainly an adroit markswoman, and we admire her as much as she expected.

Then Yves, who is usually clever at all games of skill, wishes to try his luck, and fails. It is amusing to see her, with her mincing ways and smiles, arrange with the tips of her little fingers the sailor's broad hands, placing them on the bow and the string in order to teach him the proper manner. Never have they seemed to get on so well together, Yves and my doll, and I might even feel anxious, were I less sure of my good brother, and if, moreover, it was not a matter of perfect indifference to me.

In the stillness of the garden, amid the balmy peacefulness of these mountains, a loud noise suddenly startles us; a unique, powerful, terrible sound, which is prolonged in infinite metallic vibrations. It begins again, sounding more appalling: 'Boum!' borne to us by the rising wind.

"Nippon Kane!" exclaims Chrysantheme—and she again takes up her brightly feathered arrows. "Nippon Kane ('the Japanese brass'); it is the Japanese brass that is sounding!" It is the monstrous gong of a monastery, situated in a suburb beneath us. It is powerful indeed, "the Japanese brass"! When the strokes are ended, when it is no longer heard, a vibration seems to linger among the suspended foliage, and a prolonged quiver runs through the air.

I am obliged to admit that Chrysantheme looks very charming shooting her arrows, her figure well bent back the better to bend her bow; her loose-hanging sleeves caught up to her shoulders, showing the graceful bare arms polished like amber and very much the same color. Each arrow whistles by with the rustle of a bird's wing—then a short, sharp little blow is heard, the target is hit, always.

At nightfall, when Chrysantheme has gone up to Diou-djen-dji, we cross, Yves and I, the European concession, on our way to the ship, to take up our watch till the following day. The cosmopolitan quarter, exhaling an odor of absinthe, is dressed up with flags, and squibs are being fired off in honor of France. Long lines of djins pass by, dragging, as fast as their naked legs can carry them, the crew of the 'Triomphante,' who are shouting and fanning themselves. The Marseillaise is heard everywhere; English sailors are singing it, gutturally, with a dull and slow cadence like their own "God Save." In all the American bars, grinding organs are hammering it with many an odious variation and flourish, in order to attract our men.



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One amusing recollection comes back to me of that evening. On our return, we had by mistake turned into a street inhabited by a multitude of ladies of doubtful reputation. I can still see that big fellow Yves, struggling with a whole band of tiny little 'mousmes' of twelve or fifteen years of age, who barely reached up to his waist, and were pulling him by the sleeves, eager to lead him astray. Astonished and indignant, he repeated, as he extricated himself from their clutches, "Oh, this is too much!" so shocked was he at seeing such mere babies, so young, so tiny, already so brazen and shameless.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Efforts to arrange matters we succeed often only in disarranging
Irritating laugh which is peculiar to Japan
Ordinary, trivial, every-day objects
Seeking for a change which can no longer be found

MADAME CHRYSANTHEME

By Pierre Loti

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XII

Happy families!

July 18th.

By this time, four officers of my ship are married like myself, and inhabiting the slopes of the same suburb. This arrangement is quite an ordinary occurrence, and is brought about without difficulties, mystery, or danger, through the offices of the same M. Kangourou.

As a matter of course, we are on visiting terms with all these ladies.

First, there is our very merry neighbor Madame Campanule, who is little Charles N-----'s wife; then Madame Jonquille, who is even merrier than Campanule, like a young bird, and the daintiest fairy of them all; she has married X-----, a fair northerner who adores her; they are a lover-like and inseparable pair, the only one that will probably weep when the hour of parting comes. Then Sikou-San with Doctor Y-----; and lastly the midshipman Z-----with the tiny Madame Touki-San, no taller

than a boot: thirteen years old at the outside, and already a regular woman, full of her own importance, a petulant little gossip. In my childhood I was sometimes taken to the Learned Animals Theatre, and I remember a certain Madame de Pompadour, a principal role, filled by a gayly dressed old monkey; Touki-San reminds me of her.

In the evening, all these folk usually come and fetch us for a long processional walk with lighted lanterns. My wife, more serious, more melancholy, perhaps even more refined, and belonging, I fancy, to a higher class, tries when these friends come to us to play the part of the lady of the house. It is comical to see the entry of these ill-matched pairs, partners for a day, the ladies, with their disjointed bows, falling on all fours before Chrysantheme, the queen of the establishment. When we are all assembled, we set out, arm in arm, one behind another, and always carrying at the end of our short sticks little white or red paper lanterns; it is a pretty custom.

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We are obliged to scramble down the kind of street, or rather goat's-path, which leads to the Japanese Nagasaki—with the prospect, alas! of having to climb up again at night; clamber up all the steps, all the slippery slopes, stumble over all the stones, before we shall be able to get home, go to bed, and sleep. We make our descent in the darkness, under the branches, under the foliage, among dark gardens and venerable little houses that throw but a faint glimmer on the road; and when the moon is absent or clouded over, our lanterns are by no means unnecessary.

When at last we reach the bottom, suddenly, without transition, we find ourselves in the very heart of Nagasaki and its busy throng in a long illuminated street, where vociferating djins hurry along and thousands of paper lanterns swing and gleam in the wind. It is life and animation, after the peace of our silent suburb.

Here, decorum requires that we should separate from our wives. All five take hold of each others' hands, like a batch of little girls out walking. We follow them with an air of indifference. Seen from behind, our dolls are really very dainty, with their back hair so tidily arranged, their tortoiseshell pins so coquettishly placed. They shuffle along, their high wooden clogs making an ugly sound, striving to walk with their toes turned in, according to the height of fashion and elegance. At every minute they burst out laughing.

Yes, seen from behind, they are very pretty; they have, like all Japanese women, the most lovely turn of the head. Moreover, they are very funny, thus drawn up in line. In speaking of them, we say: "Our little trained dogs," and in truth they are singularly like them.

This great Nagasaki is the same from one end to another, with its numberless petroleum lamps burning, its many-colored lanterns flickering, and innumerable panting djins. Always the same narrow streets, lined on each side with the same low houses, built of paper and wood. Always the same shops, without glass windows, open to all the winds, equally rudimentary, whatever may be sold or made in them; whether they display the finest gold lacquer ware, the most marvellous china jars, or old worn-out pots and pans, dried fish, and ragged frippery. All the salesmen are seated on the ground in the midst of their valuable or trumpery merchandise, their legs bared nearly to the waist.

And all kinds of queer little trades are carried on under the public gaze, by strangely primitive means, by workmen of the most ingenious type.

Oh, what wonderful goods are exposed for sale in those streets! What whimsical extravagance in those bazaars!

No horses, no carriages are ever seen in the town; nothing but people on foot, or the comical little carts dragged along by the runners. Some few Europeans straggling hither and thither, wanderers from the ships in harbor; some Japanese (fortunately as

yet but few) dressed up in coats; other natives who content themselves with adding to their national costume the pot-hat, from which their long, sleek locks hang down; and all around, eager haggling, bargaining, and laughter.

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In the bazaars every evening our mousmes make endless purchases; like spoiled children they buy everything they fancy: toys, pins, ribbons, flowers. And then they prettily offer one another presents, with childish little smiles. For instance, Campanule buys for Chrysantheme an ingeniously contrived lantern on which, set in motion by some invisible machinery, Chinese shadows dance in a ring round the flame. In return, Chrysantheme gives Campanule a magic fan, with paintings that change at will from butterflies fluttering around cherry-blossoms to outlandish monsters pursuing each other across black clouds. Touki offers Sikou a cardboard mask representing the bloated countenance of Dai-Cok, god of wealth; and Sikou replies with a present of a long crystal trumpet, by means of which are produced the most extraordinary sounds, like a turkey gobbling. Everything is uncouth, fantastical to excess, grotesquely lugubrious; everywhere we are surprised by incomprehensible conceptions, which seem the work of distorted imaginations.

In the fashionable tea-houses, where we finish our evenings, the little serving-maids now bow to us, on our arrival, with an air of respectful recognition, as belonging to the fast set of Nagasaki. There we carry on desultory conversations, full of misunderstandings and endless 'quid pro quo' of uncouth words, in little gardens lighted up with lanterns, near ponds full of goldfish, with little bridges, little islets, and little ruined towers. They hand us tea and white and pink-colored sweetmeats flavored with pepper that taste strange and unfamiliar, and beverages mixed with snow tasting of flowers or perfumes.

To give a faithful account of those evenings would require a more affected style than our own; and some kind of graphic sign would have also to be expressly invented and scattered at haphazard among the words, indicating the moment when the reader should laugh—rather a forced laugh, perhaps, but amiable and gracious. The evening at an end, it is time to return up there.

Oh! that street, that road, that we must clamber up every evening, under the starlit sky or the heavy thunder-clouds, dragging by the hands our drowsy mousmes in order to regain our homes perched on high halfway up the hill, where our bed of matting awaits us.

CHAPTER XIII

Our "Very tall friend"

The cleverest among us has been Louis de S-----. Having formerly inhabited Japan, and made a marriage Japanese fashion there, he is now satisfied to remain the friend of our wives, of whom he has become the 'Komodachi taksan takai' ("the very tall friend," as they say, on account



of his excessive height and slenderness). Speaking Japanese more readily than we, he is their confidential adviser, disturbs or reconciles our households at will, and has infinite amusement at our expense.

This “very tall friend” of our wives enjoys all the fun that these little creatures can give him, without any of the worries of domestic life. With brother Yves, and little Oyouki (the daughter of Madame Prune, my landlady), he makes up our incongruous party.



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CHAPTER XIV

OUR PIOUS HOSTS

M. Sucre and Madame Prune, my landlord and his wife, two perfectly unique personages recently escaped from the panel of some screen, live below us on the ground floor; and very old they seem to have this daughter of fifteen, Oyouki, who is Chrysantheme's inseparable friend.

Both of them are entirely absorbed in the practices of Shinto religion: perpetually on their knees before their family altar, perpetually occupied in murmuring their lengthy orisons to the spirits, and clapping their hands from time to time to recall around them the inattentive essences floating in the atmosphere. In their spare moments they cultivate, in little pots of gayly painted earthenware, dwarf shrubs and unheard-of flowers which are delightfully fragrant in the evening.

M. Sucre is taciturn, dislikes society, and looks like a mummy in his blue cotton dress. He writes a great deal (his memoirs, I fancy), with a paint-brush held in his fingertips, on long strips of rice-paper of a faint gray tint.

Madame Prune is eagerly attentive, obsequious, and rapacious; her eyebrows are closely shaven, her teeth carefully lacquered with black, as befits a lady of gentility, and at all and no matter what hours, she appears on all fours at the entrance of our apartment, to offer us her services.

As to Oyouki, she rushes upon us ten times a day—whether we are sleeping or dressing—like a whirlwind on a visit, flashing upon us, a very gust of dainty youthfulness and droll gayety—a living peal of laughter. She is round of figure, round of face; half baby, half girl; and so affectionate that she bestows kisses on the slightest occasion with her great puffy lips—a little moist, it is true, like a child's, but nevertheless very fresh and very red.

CHAPTER XV

Our dwelling is open all the night through, and the lamps burning before the gilded Buddha bring us the company of the insect inhabitants of every garden in the neighborhood. Moths, mosquitoes, cicalas, and other extraordinary insects of which I don't even know the names—all this company assembles around us.

It is extremely funny, when some unexpected grasshopper, some free-and-easy beetle presents itself without invitation or excuse, scampering over our white mats, to see the manner in which Chrysantheme indicates it to my righteous vengeance—merely

pointing her finger at it, without another word than “Hou!” said with bent head, a particular pout, and a scandalised air.

There is a fan kept expressly for the purpose of blowing them out of doors again.

CHAPTER XVI

SLEEPING JAPAN

Here I must own that my story must appear to the reader to drag a little.

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Lacking exciting intrigues and tragic adventures, I wish I knew how to infuse into it a little of the sweet perfumes of the gardens which surround me, something of the gentle warmth of the sunshine, of the shade of these graceful trees. Love being wanting, I should like it to breathe of the restful tranquillity of this faraway spot. Then, too, I should like it to reecho the sound of Chrysantheme's guitar, in which I begin to find a certain charm, for want of something better, in the silence of the lovely summer evenings.

All through these moonlit nights of July, the weather has been calm, luminous, and magnificent. Ah, what glorious clear nights! What exquisite roseate tints beneath that wonderful moon, what mystery of blue shadows in the thick tangle of trees! And, from the heights where stood our veranda, how prettily the town lay sleeping at our feet!

After all, I do not positively detest this little Chrysantheme, and when there is no repugnance on either side, habit turns into a makeshift of attachment.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SONG OF THE CICALA

Forever, throughout everything, rises day and night from the whole country the song of the cicalas, ceaseless, strident, and insistent. It is everywhere, and never-ending, at no matter what hour of the burning day, or what hour of the refreshing night. From the harbor, as we approached our anchorage, we had heard it at the same time from both shores, from both walls of green mountains. It is wearisome and haunting; it seems to be the manifestation, the noise expressive of the kind of life peculiar to this region of the world. It is the voice of summer in these islands; it is the song of unconscious rejoicing, always content with itself and always appearing to inflate, to rise, in a greater and greater exultation at the sheer happiness of living.

It is to me the noise characteristic of this country—this, and the cry of the falcon, which had in like manner greeted our entry into Japan. Over the valleys and the deep bay sail these birds, uttering, from time to time, their three cries, "Ha! ha! ha!" in a key of sadness that seems the extreme of painful astonishment. And the mountains around reecho their cry.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY FRIEND AND MY DOLL

Chrysantheme, Yves, and little Oyouki have struck up a friendship so intimate that it amuses me. I even think that in my home life this intimacy is what affords me the greatest entertainment. They form a contrast which gives rise to the most absurd jokes, and unexpected situations. He brings into this fragile little paper house his nautical

freedom and ease of manner, and his Breton accent; and these tiny mousmes, with affected manners and bird-like voices, small as they are, rule the big fellow as they please; make him eat with chop-sticks; teach him Japanese pigeon-vole, cheat him, and quarrel, and almost die of laughter over it all.



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Certainly he and Chrysantheme take a pleasure in each other's society. But I remain serenely undisturbed, and can not imagine that this little doll, with whom I play at married life, could possibly occasion any serious trouble between this "brother" and me.

CHAPTER XIX

MY JAPANESE RELATIVES

Japanese relatives, very numerous and conspicuous, are a great source of amusement to those of my brother officers who visit me in my villa on the hill—most especially to 'komodachi taksan takai' ("the tall friend").

I have a charming mother-in-law—quite a woman of the world—tiny sisters-in-law, little cousins, and aunts who are still quite young.

I have even a poor second cousin, who is a djin. There was some hesitation in owning this latter to me; but, behold! during the ceremony of introduction, we exchanged a smile of recognition. It was Number 415!

Over this poor Number 415 my friends on board crack no end of jokes—one in particular, who, less than any one has the right to make them, little Charles N-----, for his mother-in-law was once a concierge, or something of the kind, at the gateway of a pagoda.

I, however, who have a great respect for strength and agility, much appreciate this new relative of mine. His legs are undoubtedly the best in all Nagasaki, and whenever I am in haste, I always beg Madame Prune to send down to the djin-stand and engage my cousin.

CHAPTER XX

A DEAD FAIRY

Today I arrived unexpectedly at Diou-djen-dji, in the midst of burning noonday heat. At the foot of the stairs lay Chrysantheme's wooden shoes and her sandals of varnished leather.

In our rooms, upstairs, all was open to the air; bamboo blinds hung on the sunny side, and through their transparency came warm air and golden threads of light. Today the flowers Chrysantheme had placed in the bronze vases were lotus, and as I entered, my eyes fell upon their wide rosy cups.



According to her usual custom, Chrysantheme was lying flat on the floor enjoying her daily siesta.

What a singular originality these bouquets of Chrysantheme always have: a something, difficult to define, a Japanese slightness, an artificial grace which we never should succeed in imparting to them.

She was sleeping, face down, upon the mats, her high headdress and tortoise-shell pins standing out boldly from the rest of the horizontal figure. The train of her tunic appeared to prolong her delicate little body, like the tail of a bird; her arms were stretched crosswise, the sleeves spread out like wings, and her long guitar lay beside her.

She looked like a dead fairy; still more did she resemble some great blue dragon-fly, which, having alighted on that spot, some unkind hand had pinned to the floor.

Madame Prune, who had come upstairs after me, always officious and eager, manifested by her gestures her sentiments of indignation on beholding the careless reception accorded by Chrysantheme to her lord and master, and advanced to wake her.

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"Pray do nothing of the kind, my good Madame Prune; you don't know how much I prefer her like that!" I had left my shoes below, according to custom, beside the little shoes and sandals; and I entered on the tips of my toes, very, very, softly to sit awhile on the veranda.

What a pity this little Chrysantheme can not always be asleep; she is really extremely decorative seen in this manner—and like this, at least, she does not bore me. Who knows what may be passing in that little head and heart! If I only had the means of finding out! But strange to say, since we have kept house together, instead of advancing in my study of the Japanese language, I have neglected it, so much have I felt the impossibility of ever interesting myself in the subject.

Seated upon my veranda, my eyes wandered over the temples and cemeteries spread at my feet, over the woods and the green mountains, over Nagasaki lying bathed in the sunlight. The cicadas were chirping their loudest, the strident noise trembling feverishly in the hot air. All was calm, full of light and full of heat.

Nevertheless, to my taste, it is not yet enough so! What, then, can have changed upon the earth? The burning noondays of summer, such as I can recall in days gone by, were more brilliant, more full of sunshine; Nature seemed to me in those days more powerful, more terrible. One would say this was only a pale copy of all that I knew in early years—a copy in which something is wanting. Sadly do I ask myself—Is the splendor of the summer only this? Was it only this? or is it the fault of my eyes, and as time goes on shall I behold everything around me fading still more?

Behind me comes a faint and melancholy strain of music—melancholy enough to make one shiver—and shrill, shrill as the song of the grasshoppers, it began to make itself heard, very softly at first, then growing louder and rising in the silence of the noonday like the diminutive wail of some poor Japanese soul in pain and anguish; it was Chrysantheme and her guitar awaking together.

It pleased me that the idea should have occurred to her to greet me with music, instead of eagerly hastening to wish me good-morning. At no time have I ever given myself the trouble to pretend the slightest affection for her, and a certain coldness even has grown up between us, especially when we are alone. But to-day I turn to her with a smile, and wave my hand for her to continue. "Go on, it amuses me to listen to your quaint little impromptu." It is singular that the music of this essentially merry people should be so plaintive. But undoubtedly that which Chrysantheme is playing at this moment is worth listening to. Whence can it have come to her? What unutterable dreams, forever hidden from me, surge beneath her ivory brow, when she plays or sings in this manner?

Suddenly I hear some one tapping three times, with a harsh and bony finger, against one of the steps of our stairs, and in our doorway appears an idiot, clad in a suit of gray

tweed, who bows low. "Come in, come in, Monsieur Kangourou. You come just in the nick of time! I was actually becoming enthusiastic over your country!"

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M. Kangourou brought a little laundry bill, which he wished respectfully to hand to me, with a profound bend of the whole body, the correct pose of the hands on the knees, and a long, snake-like hiss.

CHAPTER XXI

ANCIENT TOMBS

Pursuing the path that winds past our, dwelling, one passes a dozen or more old villas, a few garden-walls, and then sees nothing but the lonely mountain-side, with little paths winding upward toward the summit through plantations of tea, bushes of camellias, underbrush, and rocks. The mountains round Nagasaki are covered with cemeteries; for centuries and centuries they have brought their dead up here.

But there is neither sadness nor horror in these Japanese sepulchres; it seems as if, among this frivolous and childish people, death itself could not be taken seriously. The monuments are either granite Buddhas, seated on lotus, or upright tombstones with inscriptions in gold. They are grouped together in little enclosures in the midst of the woods, or on natural terraces delightfully situated, and are usually reached by long stairways of stone carpeted with moss. Sometimes these pass under one of the sacred gateways, of which the shape, always the same, rude and simple, is a smaller reproduction of those in the temples.

Above us, the tombs of our mountain are of an antiquity so hoary that they no longer alarm any one, even at night. It is a region of forsaken cemeteries. The dead hidden away there have long since become one with the earth around them; and these thousands of little gray stones, these multitudes of ancient little Buddhas, eaten away by lichens, seem to be now no more than a proof of a series of existences, long anterior to our own, and lost forever and altogether in the mysterious depths of ages.

CHAPTER XXII

DAINTY DISHES FOR A DOLL

The meals that Chrysantheme enjoys are something almost indescribable.

She begins in the morning, when she wakes, with two little green wild plums pickled in vinegar and rolled in powdered sugar. A cup of tea completes this almost traditional breakfast of Japan, the very same that Madame Prune is eating downstairs, the same that is served in the inns to travellers.

At intervals during the day the meals are continued by two little dinners of the drollest description. They are brought up on a tray of red lacquer, in microscopic cups with



covers, from Madame Prune's apartment, where they are cooked: a hashed sparrow, a stuffed prawn, seaweed with a sauce, a salted sweetmeat, a sugared chili! Chrysantheme tastes a little of all, with dainty pecks and the aid of her little chopsticks, raising the tips of her fingers with affected grace. At every dish she makes a face, leaves three parts of it, and dries her finger-tips after it in apparent disgust.



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These menus vary according to the inspiration that may have seized Madame Prune. But one thing never varies, either in our household or in any other, neither in the north nor in the south of the Empire, and that is the dessert and the manner of eating it: after all these little dishes, which are a mere make-believe, a wooden bowl is brought in, bound with copper—an enormous bowl, fit for Gargantua, and filled to the very brim with rice, plainly cooked in water. Chrysantheme fills another large bowl from it (sometimes twice, sometimes three times), darkens its snowy whiteness with a black sauce flavored with fish, which is contained in a delicately shaped blue cruet, mixes it all together, carries the bowl to her lips, and crams down all the rice, shovelling it with her two chopsticks into her very throat. Next the little cups and covers are picked up, as well as the tiniest crumb that may have fallen upon the white mats, the irreproachable purity of which nothing is allowed to tarnish. And so ends the dinner.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FANTASTIC FUNERAL

Below, in the town, a street-singer had established herself in a little thoroughfare; people had gathered around her to listen to her singing, and we three—that is, Yves, Chrysantheme, and I—who happened to be passing, stopped also.

She was quite young, rather fat, and fairly pretty, and she strummed her guitar and sang, rolling her eyes fiercely, like a virtuoso executing feats of difficulty. She lowered her head, stuck her chin into her neck, in order to draw deeper notes from the furthest recesses of her body; and succeeded in bringing forth a great, hoarse voice—a voice that might have belonged to an aged frog, a ventriloquist's voice, coming whence it would be impossible to say (this is the best stage manner, the last touch of art, in the interpretation of tragic pieces).

Yves cast an indignant glance upon her.

“Good gracious,” said he, “she has the voice of a——” (words failed him, in his astonishment) “the voice of a—a monster!”

And he looked at me, almost frightened by this little being, and desirous to know what I thought of it.

Yves was out of temper on this occasion, because I had induced him to come out in a straw hat with a turned-up brim, which did not please him.

“That hat suits you remarkably well, Yves, I assure you,” I said.

“Oh, indeed! You say so, you. For my part, I think it looks like a magpie's nest!”

As a fortunate diversion from the singer and the hat, here comes a cortege, advancing toward us from the end of the street, something remarkably like a funeral. Bonzes march in front, dressed in robes of black gauze, having much the appearance of Catholic priests; the principal object of interest of the procession, the corpse, comes last, laid in a sort of little closed palanquin, which is daintily pretty. This is followed by a band of mousmes, hiding their laughing faces beneath a kind of veil, and carrying in vases of the sacred shape the artificial lotus with silver petals indispensable at a funeral; then come fine ladies, on foot, smirking and stifling a wish to laugh, beneath parasols on which are painted, in the gayest colors, butterflies and storks.



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Now they are quite close to us, we must stand back to give them room. Chrysantheme all at once assumes a suitable air of gravity, and Yves bares his head, taking off the magpie's nest.

Yes, it is true, it is death that is passing!

I had almost lost sight of the fact, so little does this procession recall it.

The procession will climb high above Nagasaki, into the heart of the green mountain covered with tombs. There the poor fellow will be laid at rest, with his palanquin above him, and his vases and his flowers of silvered paper. Well, at least he will lie in a charming spot commanding a lovely view.

Then they will return half laughing, half snivelling, and tomorrow no one will think of it again.

CHAPTER XXIV

SOCIABILITY

August 4th.

Our ship, the 'Triomphante', which has been lying in the harbor almost at the foot of the hill on which stands my house, enters the dock to-day to undergo repairs rendered necessary by the long blockade of Formosa.

I am now a long way from my home, and am compelled to cross by boat the whole breadth of the bay when I wish to see Chrysantheme; for the dock is situated on the shore, opposite to Diou-djen-dji. It is sunk in a little valley, narrow and deep, midst all kinds of foliage—bamboos, camellias, trees of all sorts; our masts and spars, seen from the deck, look as if they were tangled among the branches.

The situation of the vessel—no longer afloat—gives the crew a greater facility for clandestine escapes from the ship at no matter what hour of the night, and our sailors have made friends with all the girls of the villages perched on the mountains above us.

These quarters, and this excessive liberty, give me some uneasiness about my poor Yves; for this country of frivolous pleasure has a little turned his head.

Moreover, I am more and more convinced that he is in love with Chrysantheme.

It is really a pity that the sentiment has not occurred to me instead, since it is I who have gone the length of marrying her.

CHAPTER XXV

UNWELCOME GUESTS

Despite the increased distance, I continue my regular visits to Diou-djen-dji. When night has fallen, and the four couples who compose our society have joined us, as well as Yves and the “amazingly tall friend”—we descend again into the town, stumbling by lantern-light down the steep stairways and slopes of the old suburb.

This nocturnal ramble is always the same, and is accompanied always by the same amusements: we pause before the same queer booths, we drink the same sugared drinks served to us in the same little gardens. But our troop is often more numerous: to begin with, we chaperon Oyouki, who is confided to our care by her parents; then we have two cousins of my wife’s—pretty little creatures; and lastly friends—guests of sometimes only ten or twelve years old, little girls of the neighborhood to whom our mousmes wish to show some politeness.

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Thus a singular company of tiny beings forms our suite and follows us into the tea-gardens in the evenings! The most absurd faces, with sprigs of flowers stuck in the oddest fashion in their comical and childish heads. One might suppose it was a whole school of mousmes out for an evening's frolic under our care.

Yves returns with us, when the time comes to remount our hill; Chrysantheme heaves great sighs like a tired child, and stops on every step, leaning on our arms.

When we have reached our destination he says "Goodnight," just touches Chrysantheme's hand, and descending once more by the slope which leads to the quays and the shipping, he crosses the roadstead in a sampan, to get on board the 'Triomphante.'

Meantime, we, with the aid of a sort of secret key, open the door of our garden, where Madame Prune's pots of flowers, ranged in the darkness, send forth delicious odors in the night air. We cross the garden by moonlight or starlight, and mount to our own rooms.

If it is very late—a frequent occurrence—we find all our wooden panels drawn and tightly shut by the careful M. Sucre (as a precaution against thieves), and our apartment is as close and as private as if it were a real European house.

In this dwelling, when every chink is thus closed, a strange odor mingles with the musk and the lotus—an odor essential to Japan, to the yellow race, belonging to the soil or emanating from the venerable woodwork; almost an odor of wild beasts. The mosquito-curtain of dark-blue gauze, ready hung for the night, falls from the ceiling with the air of a mysterious vellum. The gilded Buddha smiles eternally at the night-lamps burning before him; some great moth, a constant frequenter of the house, which during the day sleeps clinging to our ceiling, flutters at this hour under the very nose of the god, turning and flitting round the thin, quivering flames. And, motionless on the wall, its feelers spread out star-like, sleeps some great garden spider, which one must not kill because it is night. "Hou!" says Chrysantheme, indignantly, pointing it out to me with levelled finger. Quick! where is the fan kept for the purpose, wherewith to hunt it out of doors?

Around us reigns a silence which is almost oppressive after all the joyous noises of the town, and all the laughter, now hushed, of our band of mousmes—a silence of the country, of some sleeping village.

CHAPTER XXVI

A QUIET SMOKE

The sound of the innumerable wooden panels, which at nightfall are pulled and shut in every Japanese house, is one of the peculiarities of the country which will remain



longest imprinted on my memory. From our neighbor's houses these noises reach us one after the other, floating to us over the green gardens, more or less deadened, more or less distant.

Just below us, Madame Prune's panels move very badly, creak and make a hideous noise in their wornout grooves.

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Ours are somewhat noisy too, for the old house is full of echoes, and there are at least twenty screens to run over long slides in order to close in completely the kind of open hall in which we live. Usually, it is Chrysantheme who undertakes this piece of household work, and a great deal of trouble it gives her, for she often pinches her fingers in the singular awkwardness of her too tiny hands, which never have been accustomed to do any work.

Then comes her toilette for the night. With a certain grace she lets fall the day-dress, and slips on a more simple one of blue cotton, which has the same pagoda sleeves, the same shape all but the train, and which she fastens round her waist with a sash of muslin of the same color.

The high head-dress remains untouched, it is needless to say—that is, all but the pins, which are taken out and laid beside her in a lacquer box.

Then there is the little silver pipe that must absolutely be smoked before going to sleep; this is one of the customs which most provoke me, but it has to be borne.

Chrysantheme squats like a gipsy before a certain square box, made of red wood, which contains a little tobacco-jar, a little porcelain stove full of hot embers, and finally a little bamboo pot serving at the same time as ash-tray and cuspidor. (Madame Prune's smoking-box downstairs, and every smoking-box in Japan, is exactly the same, and contains precisely the same objects, arranged in precisely the same manner; and wherever it may be, whether in the house of the rich or the poor, it always lies about somewhere on the floor.)

The word "pipe" is at once too trivial and too big to be applied to this delicate silver tube, which is perfectly straight and at the end of which, in a microscopic receptacle, is placed one pinch of golden tobacco, chopped finer than silken thread.

Two puffs, or at most three; it lasts scarcely a few seconds, and the pipe is finished. Then tap, tap, tap, tap, the little tube is struck smartly against the edge of the smoking-box to knock out the ashes, which never will fall; and this tapping, heard everywhere, in every house, at every hour of the day or night, quick and droll as the scratchings of a monkey, is in Japan one of the noises most characteristic of human life.

"Anata nominase!" ("You must smoke too!") says Chrysantheme.

Having again filled the tiresome little pipe, she puts the silver tube to my lips with a bow. Courtesy forbids my refusal; but I find it detestably bitter.

Before laying myself down under the blue mosquito-net, I open two of the panels in the room, one on the side of the silent and deserted footpath, the other on the garden side,

overlooking the terraces, so that the night air may breathe upon us, even at the risk of bringing the company of some belated cockchafer, or more giddy moth.

Our wooden house, with its thin old walls, vibrates at night like a great dry violin, and the slightest noises have a startling resonance.



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Beneath the veranda are hung two little AEolian harps, which, at the least ruffle of the breeze running through their blades of grass, emit a gentle tinkling sound, like the harmonious murmur of a brook; outside, to the very farthest limits of the distance, the cicadas continue their sonorous and never-ending concert; over our heads, on the black roof, is heard passing, like a witch's sabbath, the raging battle, to the death, of cats, rats, and owls.

Presently, when in the early dawn a fresher breeze, mounting upward from the sea and the deep harbor, reaches us, Chrysantheme rises and slyly shuts the panels I have opened.

Before that, however, she will have risen at least three times to smoke: having yawned like a cat, stretched herself, twisted in every direction her little amber arms, and her graceful little hands, she sits up resolutely, with all the waking sighs and broken syllables of a child, pretty and fascinating enough; then she emerges from the gauze net, fills her little pipe, and breathes a few puffs of the bitter and unpleasant mixture.

Then comes tap, tap, tap, tap, against the box to shake out the ashes. In the silence of the night it makes quite a terrible noise, which wakes Madame Prune. This is fatal. Madame Prune is at once seized also with a longing to smoke which may not be denied; then, to the noise from above, comes an answering tap, tap, tap, tap, from below, exactly like it, exasperating and inevitable as an echo.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PRAYERFUL MADAME PRUNE

More cheerful are the sounds of morning: the cocks crowing, the wooden panels all around the neighborhood sliding back upon their rollers; or the strange cry of some fruit-seller, patrolling our lofty suburb in the early dawn. And the grasshoppers actually seem to chirp more loudly, to celebrate the return of the sunlight.

Above all, rises to our ears from below the sound of Madame Prune's long prayers, ascending through the floor, monotonous as the song of a somnambulist, regular and soothing as the plash of a fountain. It lasts three quarters of an hour at least, it drones along, a rapid flow of words in a high nasal key; from time to time, when the inattentive spirits are not listening, it is accompanied by a clapping of dry palms, or by harsh sounds from a kind of wooden clapper made of two discs of mandragora root. It is an uninterrupted stream of prayer; its flow never ceases, and the quavering continues without stopping, like the bleating of a delirious old goat.

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"After washing the hands and feet," say the sacred books, "the great God Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami, who is the royal power of Japan, must be invoked; the manes of all the defunct emperors descended from him must also be invoked; next, the manes of all his personal ancestors, to the farthest generation; the spirits of the air and the sea; the spirits of all secret and impure places; the spirits of the tombs of the district whence you spring, *etc.*, *etc.*"

"I worship and implore you," sings Madame Prune, "O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami, royal power! Cease not to protect your faithful people, who are ready to sacrifice themselves for their country. Grant that I may become as holy as yourself, and drive from my mind all dark thoughts. I am a coward and a sinner: purge me from my cowardice and sinfulness, even as the north wind drives the dust into the sea. Wash me clean from all my iniquities, as one washes away uncleanness in the river of Kamo. Make me the richest woman in the world. I believe in your glory, which shall be spread over the whole earth, and illuminate it for ever for my happiness. Grant me the continued good health of my family, and above all, my own, who, O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami! do worship and adore you, and only you, *etc.*, *etc.*"

Here follow all the emperors, all the spirits, and the interminable list of ancestors.

In her trembling old woman's falsetto, Madame Prune sings all this, without omitting anything, at a pace which almost takes away her breath.

And very strange it is to hear: at length it seems hardly a human voice; it sounds like a series of magic formulas, unwinding themselves from an inexhaustible roller, and escaping to take flight through the air. By its very weirdness, and by the persistency of its incantation, it ends by producing in my half-awakened brain an almost religious impression.

Every day I wake to the sound of this Shintoist litany chanted beneath me, vibrating through the exquisite clearness of the summer mornings—while our night-lamps burn low before the smiling Buddha, while the eternal sun, hardly risen, already sends through the cracks of our wooden panels its bright rays, which dart like golden arrows through our darkened dwelling and our blue gauze tent.

This is the moment at which I must rise, descend hurriedly to the sea by grassy footpaths all wet with dew, and so regain my ship.

Alas! in the days gone by, it was the cry of the muezzin which used to awaken me in the dark winter mornings in faraway, night-shrouded Stamboul.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DOLL'S CORRESPONDENCE

Chrysantheme has brought but few things with her, knowing that our domestic life would probably be brief.

She has placed her gowns and her fine sashes in little closed recesses, hidden in one of the walls of our apartment (the north wall, the only one of the four which can not be taken to pieces). The doors of these niches are white paper panels; the standing shelves and inside partitions, consisting of light woodwork, are put together almost too finically and too ingeniously, giving rise to suspicions of secret drawers and conjuring tricks. We put there only things without any value, having a vague feeling that the cupboards themselves might spirit them away.



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The box in which Chrysantheme stores away her gewgaws and letters, is one of the things that amuse me most; it is of English make, tin, and bears on its cover the colored representation of some manufactory in the neighborhood of London. Of course, it is as an exotic work of art, as a precious knickknack, that Chrysantheme prefers it to any of her other boxes in lacquer or inlaid work. It contains all that a mousme requires for her correspondence: Indian ink, a paintbrush, very thin, gray-tinted paper, cut up in long narrow strips, and odd-shaped envelopes, into which these strips are slipped (having been folded up in about thirty folds); the envelopes are ornamented with pictures of landscapes, fishes, crabs, or birds.

On some old letters addressed to her, I can make out the two characters that represent her name: Kikousan ("Chrysantheme, Madame"). And when I question her, she replies in Japanese, with an air of importance:

"My dear, they are letters from my woman friends."

Oh, those friends of Chrysantheme, what funny little faces they have! That same box contains their portraits, their photographs stuck on visiting cards, which are printed on the back with the name of Uyeno, the fashionable photographer in Nagasaki—the little creatures fit only to figure daintily on painted fans, who have striven to assume a dignified attitude when once their necks have been placed in the head-rest, and they have been told: "Now, don't move."

It would really amuse me to read the letters of my mousme's friends—and above all her replies!

CHAPTER XXIX

SUDDEN SHOWERS

August 10th.

It rained this evening heavily, and the night was close and dark. About ten o'clock, on our return from one of the fashionable tea-houses we frequent, we arrived—Yves, Chrysantheme and I—at the familiar angle of the principal street, the turn where we must take leave of the lights and noises of the town, to climb up the dark steps and steep paths that lead to our dwelling at Diou-djen-dji.

But before beginning our ascent, we must first buy lanterns from an old tradeswoman called Madame Tres-Propre, whose regular customers we are. It is amazing what a quantity of these paper lanterns we consume. They are invariably decorated in the same way, with painted nightmoths or bats; fastened to the ceiling at the farther end of the shop, they hang in enormous clusters, and the old woman, seeing us arrive, gets upon a table to take them down. Gray or red are our usual choice; Madame Tres-

Propre knows our preferences and leaves the green or blue lanterns aside. But it is always hard work to unhook one, on account of the little short sticks by which they are held, and the strings with which they are tied getting entangled together. In an exaggerated pantomime, Madame Tres-Propre expresses her despair at wasting so much of our valuable time: oh! if it only depended on her personal efforts! but ah! the natural perversity of inanimate things which have no consideration for human dignity! With monkeyish antics, she even deems it her duty to threaten the lanterns and shake her fist at these inextricably tangled strings which have the presumption to delay us.

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It is all very well, but we know this manoeuvre by heart; and if the old lady loses patience, so do we. Chrysantheme, who is half asleep, is seized with a fit of kitten-like yawning which she does not even trouble to hide behind her hand, and which appears to be endless. She pulls a very long face at the thought of the steep hill we must struggle up tonight through the pelting rain.

I have the same feeling, and am thoroughly annoyed. To what purpose do I clamber up every evening to that suburb, when it offers me no attractions whatever?

The rain increases; what are we to do? Outside, djins pass rapidly, calling out: "Take care!" splashing the foot-passengers and casting through the shower streams of light from their many-colored lanterns. Mousmes and elderly ladies pass, tucked up, muddy, laughing nevertheless under their paper umbrellas, exchanging greetings, clacking their wooden pattens on the stone pavement. The whole street is filled with the noise of the pattering feet and pattering rain.

As good luck will have it, at the same moment passes Number 415, our poor relative, who, seeing our distress, stops and promises to help us out of our difficulty; as soon as he has deposited on the quay an Englishman he is conveying, he will come to our aid and bring all that is necessary to relieve us from our lamentable situation.

At last our lantern is unhooked, lighted, and paid for. There is another shop opposite, where we stop every evening; it is that of Madame L'Heure, the woman who sells waffles; we always buy a provision from her, to refresh us on the way. A very lively young woman is this pastry-cook, and most eager to make herself agreeable; she looks quite like a screen picture behind her piled-up cakes, ornamented with little posies. We will take shelter under her roof while we wait; and, to avoid the drops that fall heavily from the waterspouts, wedge ourselves tightly against her display of white and pink sweetmeats, so artistically spread out on fresh and delicate branches of cypress.

Poor Number 415, what a providence he is to us! Already he reappears, most excellent cousin! ever smiling, ever running, while the water streams down his handsome bare legs; he brings us two umbrellas, borrowed from a China merchant, who is also a distant relative of ours. Like me, Yves has till now never consented to use such a thing, but he now accepts one because it is droll: of paper, of course, with innumerable folds waxed and gummed, and the inevitable flight of storks forming a wreath around it.

Chrysantheme, yawning more and more in her kitten-like fashion, becomes coaxing in order to be helped along, and tries to take my arm.

"I beg you, mousme, this evening to take the arm of Yves-San; I am sure that will suit us all three."



And there they go, she, tiny figure, hanging on to the big fellow, and so they climb up. I lead the way, carrying the lantern that lights our steps, whose flame I protect as well as I can under my fantastic umbrella. On each side of the road is heard the roaring torrent of stormy waters rolling down from the mountain-side. To-night the way seems long, difficult, and slippery; a succession of interminable flights of steps, gardens, and houses piled up one above another; waste lands, and trees which in the darkness shake their dripping foliage on our heads.

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One would say that Nagasaki is ascending at the same time as ourselves; but yonder, and very far away, is a vapory mist which seems luminous against the blackness of the sky, and from the town rises a confused murmur of voices and laughter, and a rumbling of gongs.

The summer rain has not yet refreshed the atmosphere. On account of the stormy heat, the little suburban houses have been left open like sheds, and we can see all that is going on. Lamps burn perpetually before the altars dedicated to Buddha and to the souls of the ancestors; but all good Nipponese have already lain down to rest. Under the traditional tents of bluish-green gauze, we can see whole families stretched out in rows; they are either sleeping, or hunting the mosquitoes, or fanning themselves. Nipponese men and women, Nipponese babies too, lying side by side with their parents; each one, young or old, in his little dark-blue cotton nightdress, and with his little wooden block on which to rest the nape of his neck.

A few houses are open, where amusements are still going on; here and there, from the sombre gardens, the sound of a guitar reaches our ears, playing some dance which gives in its weird rhythm a strange impression of sadness.

Here is the well, surrounded by bamboos, where we are wont to make a nocturnal halt for Chrysantheme to take breath. Yves begs me to throw forward the red gleam of my lantern, in order to recognize the place, for it marks our halfway resting-place.

And at last, at last, here is our house! The door is closed, all is silent and dark. Our panels have been carefully shut by M. Sucre and Madame Prune; the rain streams down the wood of our old black walls.

In such weather it is impossible to allow Yves to return down hill, and wander along the shore in quest of a sampan. No, he shall not return on board to-night; we will put him up in our house. His little room has indeed been already provided for in the conditions of our lease, and notwithstanding his discreet refusal, we immediately set to work to make it. Let us go in, take off our boots, shake ourselves like so many cats that have been out in a shower, and step up to our apartment.

In front of Buddha, the little lamps are burning; in the middle of the room, the night-blue gauze is stretched.

On entering, the first impression is favorable; our dwelling is pretty this evening; the late hour and deep silence give it an air of mystery. And then, in such weather, it is always pleasant to get home.

Come, let us at once prepare Yves's room. Chrysantheme, quite elated at the prospect of having her big friend near her, sets to work with a good will; moreover, the task is easy; we have only to slip three or four paper panels in their grooves, to make at once a



separate room or compartment in the great box we live in. I had thought that these panels were entirely white; but no! on each is a group of two storks painted in gray tints in those inevitable attitudes consecrated by Japanese art: one bearing aloft its proud head and haughtily raising its leg, the other scratching itself. Oh, these storks! how tired one gets of them, at the end of a month spent in Japan!



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Yves is now in bed and sleeping under our roof.

Sleep has come to him sooner than to me to-night; for somehow I fancy I had seen long glances exchanged between him and Chrysantheme.

I have left this little creature in his hands like a toy, and I begin to fear lest I should have caused some perturbation in his mind. I do not trouble my head about this little Japanese girl. But Yves—it would be decidedly wrong on his part, and would greatly diminish my faith in him.

We hear the rain falling on our old roof; the cicadas are mute; odors of wet earth reach us from the gardens and the mountain. I feel terribly dreary in this room to-night; the noise of the little pipe irritates me more than usual, and as Chrysantheme crouches in front of her smoking-box, I suddenly discover in her an air of low breeding, in the very worst sense of the word.

I should hate her, my mousme, if she were to entice Yves into committing a fault—a fault which I should perhaps never be able to forgive.

CHAPTER XXX

A LITTLE DOMESTIC DIFFICULTY

August 12th.

The Y—and Sikou-San couple were divorced yesterday. The Charles N—and Campanule household is getting on very badly. They have had some trouble with those prying, grinding, insupportable little men, dressed up in gray suits, who are called police agents, and who, by threatening their landlord, have had them turned out of their house (under the obsequious amiability of this people lurks a secret hatred toward Europeans)—they are therefore obliged to accept their mother-in-law's hospitality, a very disagreeable situation. And then Charles N—fancies his mousme is faithless. It is hardly possible, however, for us to deceive ourselves: these would-be maidens, to whom M. Kangourou has introduced us, have already had in their lives one adventure, at least, and perhaps more; it is therefore only natural that we should have our suspicions.

The Z-----and Touki-San couple jog on, quarrelling all the time.

My household maintains a more dignified air, though it is none the less dreary. I had indeed thought of a divorce, but have really no good reason for offering Chrysantheme

such a gratuitous affront; moreover, there is another more imperative reason why I should remain quiet: I, too, have had difficulties with the civilian authorities.

The day before yesterday, M. Sucre, quite upset, Madame Prune, almost swooning, and Mademoiselle Oyouki, bathed in tears, stormed my rooms. The Nipponese police agents had called and threatened them with the law for letting rooms outside of the European concession to a Frenchman morganatically married to a Japanese; and the terror of being prosecuted brought them to me, with a thousand apologies, but with the humble request that I should leave.

The next day I therefore went off, accompanied by “the wonderfully tall friend”—who expresses himself in Japanese better than I—to the registry office, with the full intention of making a terrible row.



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In the language of this exquisitely polite people, terms of abuse are totally wanting; when very angry, one is obliged to be satisfied with using the 'thou', a mark of inferiority, and the familiar conjugation, habitually used toward those of low birth. Sitting upon the table used for weddings, among the flurried little policemen, I opened the conversation in the following terms:

"In order that thou shouldst leave me in peace in the suburb I am inhabiting, what bribe must I offer thee, oh, little beings more contemptible than any mere street porter?"

Great and general dismay, silent consternation, and low bows greet my words.

They at last reply that my honorable person shall not be molested, indeed, they ask for nothing better. Only, in order to subscribe to the laws of the country, I ought to have come here and given my name and that of the young person that—with whom—

"Oh! that is going too far! I came here for that purpose, contemptible creatures, not three weeks ago!"

Then, taking up myself the civil register, and turning over the pages rapidly, I found my signature and beside it the little hieroglyphics drawn by Chrysantheme:

"There, idiots, look at that!"

Arrival of a very high functionary—a ridiculous little old fellow in a black coat, who from his office had been listening to the row:

"What is the matter? What is it? What is this annoyance put upon the French officers?"

I state my case politely to this personage, who can not make apologies and promises enough. The little agents prostrate themselves on all fours, sink into the earth; and we leave them, cold and dignified, without returning their bows.

M. Sucre and Madame Prune may now make their minds easy; they will not be disturbed again.

CHAPTER XXXI

BUTTERFLIES AND BEETLES

August 23d.

The prolonged sojourn of the Triomphante in the dock, and the distance of our dwelling from the town, have been my excuse these last two or three days for not going up to Diou-djen-dji to see Chrysantheme.

It is dreary work in these docks. At early dawn a legion of little Japanese workmen invade us, bringing their dinners in baskets and gourds like the workmen in our arsenals, but with a poor, shabby appearance, and a ferreting, hurried manner which reminds one of rats. Silently they slip under the keel, at the bottom of the hold, in all the holes, sawing, nailing, repairing.

The heat is intense in this spot, overshadowed by the rocks and tangled masses of foliage.

At two o'clock, in the broad sunlight, we have a new and far prettier invasion: that of the beetles and butterflies.

There are butterflies as wonderful as those on the fans. Some, all black, giddily dash up against us, so light and airy that they seem merely a pair of quivering wings fastened together without any body.



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Yves, astonished, gazes at them, saying, in his boyish manner: "Oh, I saw such a big one just now, such a big one, it quite frightened me; I thought it was a bat attacking me."

A steersman who has captured a very curious specimen carries it off carefully to press between the leaves of his signal-book, like a flower. Another sailor, passing by, taking his small roast to the oven in a mess-bowl, looks at him quizzically and says:

"You had much better give it to me. I'd cook it!"

CHAPTER XXXII

STRANGE YEARNINGS

August 24th.

Nearly five days have passed since I abandoned my little house and Chrysantheme.

Since yesterday we have had a tremendous storm of rain and wind (a typhoon that has passed or is passing over us). We beat to quarters in the middle of the night to lower the topmasts, strike the lower yards, and take every precaution against bad weather. The butterflies no longer hover around us; everything tosses and writhes overhead: on the steep slopes of the mountain the trees shiver, the long grasses bend low as if in pain; terrible gusts rack them with a hissing sound; branches, bamboo leaves, and earth fall like rain upon us.

In this land of pretty little trifles, this violent tempest is out of harmony; it seems as if its efforts were exaggerated and its music too loud.

Toward evening the dark clouds roll by so rapidly that the showers are of short duration and soon pass over. Then I attempt a walk on the mountain above us, in the wet verdure: little pathways lead up it, between thickets of camellias and bamboo.

Waiting till a shower is over, I take refuge in the courtyard of an old temple halfway up the hill, buried in a wood of century plants with gigantic branches; it is reached by granite steps, through strange gateways, as deeply furrowed as the old Celtic dolmens. The trees have also invaded this yard; the daylight is overcast with a greenish tint, and the drenching torrent of rain is full of torn-up leaves and moss. Old granite monsters, of unknown shapes, are seated in the corners, and grimace with smiling ferocity: their faces are full of indefinable mystery that makes me shudder amid the moaning music of the wind, in the gloomy shadows of the clouds and branches.

They could not have resembled the Japanese of our day, the men who had thus conceived these ancient temples, who built them everywhere, and filled the country with them, even in its most solitary nooks.

An hour later, in the twilight of that stormy day, on the same mountain, I encountered a clump of trees somewhat similar to oaks in appearance; they, too, have been twisted by the tempest, and the tufts of undulating grass at their feet are laid low, tossed about in every direction. There was suddenly brought back to my mind my first impression of a strong wind in the woods of Limoise, in the province of Saintonge, twenty-eight years ago, in a month of March of my childhood.

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That, the first wind-storm my eyes ever beheld sweeping over the landscape, blew in just the opposite quarter of the world (and many years have rapidly passed over that memory), the spot where the best part of my life has been spent.

I refer too often, I fancy, to my childhood; I am foolishly fond of it. But it seems to me that then only did I truly experience sensations or impressions; the smallest trifles I saw or heard then were full of deep and hidden meaning, recalling past images out of oblivion, and reawakening memories of prior existences; or else they were presentiments of existences to come, future incarnations in the land of dreams, expectations of wondrous marvels that life and the world held in store for me—for a later period, no doubt, when I should be grown up. Well, I have grown up, and have found nothing that answered to my indefinable expectations; on the contrary, all has narrowed and darkened around me, my vague recollections of the past have become blurred, the horizons before me have slowly closed in and become full of gray darkness. Soon will my time come to return to eternal rest, and I shall leave this world without ever having understood the mysterious cause of these mirages of my childhood; I shall bear away with me a lingering regret for I know not what lost home that I have failed to find, of the unknown beings ardently longed for, whom, alas, I never have embraced.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A GENEROUS HUSBAND

Displaying many affectations, M. Sucre dips the tip of his delicate paint-brush in India-ink and traces a pair of charming storks on a pretty sheet of rice-paper, offering them to me in the most courteous manner, as a souvenir of himself. I have put them in my cabin on board, and when I look at them, I fancy I can see M. Sucre tracing them with an airy touch and with elegant facility.

The saucer in which he mixes his ink is in itself a little gem. It is chiselled out of a piece of jade, and represents a tiny lake with a carved border imitating rockwork. On this border is a little mamma toad, also in jade, advancing as if to bathe in the little lake in which M. Sucre carefully keeps a few drops of very dark liquid. The mamma toad has four little baby toads, in jade, one perched on her head, the other three playing about under her.

M. Sucre has painted many a stork in the course of his lifetime, and he really excels in reproducing groups and duets, if one may so express it, of this bird. Few Japanese possess the art of interpreting this subject in a manner at once so rapid and so tasteful; first he draws the two beaks, then the four claws, then the backs, the feathers, dash, dash, dash—with a dozen strokes of his clever brush, held in his daintily posed hand, it is done, and always perfectly well done!

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M. Kangourou relates, without seeing anything wrong in it whatever, that formerly this talent was of great service to M. Sucre. It appears that Madame Prune—how shall I say such a thing, and, who could guess it now, on beholding so devout and sedate an old lady, with eyebrows so scrupulously shaven?—however, it appears that Madame Prune used to receive a great many visits from gentlemen—gentlemen who always came alone—which led to some gossip. Therefore, when Madame Prune was engaged with one visitor, if a new arrival made his appearance, the ingenious husband, to induce him to wait patiently, and to wile away the time in the anteroom, immediately offered to paint him some storks in a variety of attitudes.

And this is why, in Nagasaki, all the Japanese gentlemen of a certain age have in their collections two or three of these little pictures, for which they are indebted to the delicate and original talent of M. Sucre!

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Ah! the natural perversity of inanimate things
Found nothing that answered to my indefinable expectations
Habit turns into a makeshift of attachment
I know not what lost home that I have failed to find
When the inattentive spirits are not listening

MADAME CHRYSANTHEME

By Pierre Loti

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FEAST OF THE TEMPLE

Sunday, August 25th.

About six o'clock, while I was on duty, the 'Triomphante' abandoned her prison walls between the mountains and came out of dock. After much manoeuvring we took up our old moorings in the harbor, at the foot of the Diou-djen-dji hills. The weather was again calm and cloudless, the sky presenting a peculiar clarity, as if it had been swept by a cyclone, an exceeding transparency bringing out the minutest details in the distance till then unseen; as if the terrible blast had blown away every vestige of the floating mists and left behind it nothing but void and boundless space. The coloring of woods and mountains stood out again in the resplendent verdancy of spring after the torrents of



rain, like the wet colors of some freshly washed painting. The sampans and junks, which for the last three days had been lying under shelter, had now put out to sea, and the bay was covered with their white sails, which looked like a flight of enormous seabirds.

At eight o'clock, at nightfall, our manoeuvres having ended, I embarked with Yves on board a sampan; this time it is he who is carrying me off and taking me back to my home.

On land, a delicious perfume of new-mown hay greets us, and the road across the mountains is bathed in glorious moonlight. We go straight up to Diou-djen-dji to join Chrysantheme; I feel almost remorseful, although I hardly show it, for my neglect of her.

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Looking up, I recognize from afar my little house, perched on high. It is wide open and lighted; I even hear the sound of a guitar. Then I perceive the gilt head of my Buddha between the little bright flames of its two hanging night-lamps. Now Chrysantheme appears on the veranda, looking out as if she expected us; and with her wonderful bows of hair and long, falling sleeves, her silhouette is thoroughly Nipponese.

As I enter, she comes forward to kiss me, in a graceful, though rather hesitating manner, while Oyouki, more demonstrative, throws her arms around me.

Not without a certain pleasure do I see once more this Japanese home, which I wonder to find still mine when I had almost forgotten its existence. Chrysantheme has put fresh flowers in our vases, spread out her hair, donned her best clothes, and lighted our lamps to honor my return. From the balcony she had watched the 'Triomphante' leave the dock, and, in the expectation of our prompt return, she had made her preparations; then, to wile away the time, she was studying a duet on the guitar with Oyouki. Not a question did she ask, nor a reproach did she make. Quite the contrary.

"We understood," she said, "how impossible it was, in such dreadful weather, to undertake so lengthy a crossing in a sampan."

She smiled like a pleased child, and I should be fastidious indeed if I did not admit that to-night she is charming.

I announce my intention of taking a long stroll through Nagasaki; we will take Oyouki-San and two little cousins who happen to be here, as well as some other neighbors, if they wish it; we will buy the most amusing toys, eat all sorts of cakes, and entertain ourselves to our hearts' content.

"How lucky we are to be here, just at the right moment," they exclaim, jumping with joy. "How fortunate we are! This very evening there is to be a pilgrimage to the great temple of the jumping Tortoise! The whole town will be there; all our married friends have already started, the whole set, X——, Y——, Z——, Touki-San, Campanule, and Jonquille, with 'the friend of amazing height.' And these two, poor Chrysantheme and poor Oyouki, would have been obliged to stay at home with heavy hearts, had we not arrived, because Madame Prune had been seized with faintness and hysterics after her dinner."

Quickly the mousmes must deck themselves out. Chrysantheme is ready; Oyouki hurries, changes her dress, and, putting on a mouse-colored gray robe, begs me to arrange the bows of her fine sash-black satin lined with yellow-sticking at the same time in her hair a silver topknot. We light our lanterns, swinging at the end of little sticks; M. Sucre, overwhelming us with thanks for his daughter, accompanies us on all fours to the door, and we go off gayly through the clear and balmy night.



Below, we find the town in all the animation of a great holiday. The streets are thronged; the crowd passes by—a laughing, capricious, slow, unequal tide, flowing onward, however, steadily in the same direction, toward the same goal. From it rises a penetrating but light murmur, in which dominate the sounds of laughter, and the low-toned interchange of polite speeches. Then follow lanterns upon lanterns. Never in my life have I seen so many, so variegated, so complicated, and so extraordinary.

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We follow, drifting with the surging crowd, borne along by it. There are groups of women of every age, decked out in their smartest clothes, crowds of mousmes with aigrettes of flowers in their hair, or little silver topknots like Oyouki—pretty little physiognomies, little, narrow eyes peeping between their slits like those of new-born kittens, fat, pale, little cheeks, round, puffed-out, half-opened lips. They are pretty, nevertheless, these little Nipponese, in their smiles and childishness.

The men, on the other hand, wear many a pot-hat, pompously added to the long national robe, and giving thereby a finishing touch to their cheerful ugliness, resembling nothing so much as dancing monkeys. They carry boughs in their hands, whole shrubs even, amid the foliage of which dangle all sorts of curious lanterns in the shapes of imps and birds.

As we advance in the direction of the temple, the streets become more noisy and crowded. All along the houses are endless stalls raised on trestles, displaying sweetmeats of every color, toys, branches of flowers, nosegays and masks. There are masks everywhere, boxes full of them, carts full of them; the most popular being the one that represents the livid and cunning muzzle, contracted as by a deathlike grimace, the long straight ears and sharp-pointed teeth of the white fox, sacred to the God of Rice. There are also others symbolic of gods or monsters, livid, grimacing, convulsed, with wigs and beards of natural hair. All manner of folk, even children, purchase these horrors, and fasten them over their faces. Every sort of instrument is for sale, among them many of those crystal trumpets which sound so strangely—this evening they are enormous, six feet long at least—and the noise they make is unlike anything ever heard before: one would say gigantic turkeys were gobbling amid the crowd, striving to inspire fear.

In the religious amusements of this people it is not possible for us to penetrate the mysteriously hidden meaning of things; we can not divine the boundary at which jesting stops and mystic fear steps in. These customs, these symbols, these masks, all that tradition and atavism have jumbled together in the Japanese brain, proceed from sources utterly dark and unknown to us; even the oldest records fail to explain them to us in anything but a superficial and cursory manner, simply because we have absolutely nothing in common with this people. We pass through the midst of their mirth and their laughter without understanding the wherefore, so totally do they differ from our own.

Chrysantheme with Yves, Oyouki with me, Fraise and Zinnia, our cousins, walking before us under our watchful eyes, move slowly through the crowd, holding hands lest we should lose one another.

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Along the streets leading to the temple, the wealthy inhabitants have decorated the fronts of their houses with vases and nosegays. The peculiar shed-like buildings common in this country, with their open platform frontage, are particularly well suited for the display of choice objects; all the houses have been thrown open, and the interiors are hung with draperies that hide the back of the apartments. In front of these hangings, and standing slightly back from the movement of the passing crowd, the various exhibited articles are placed methodically in a row, under the full glare of hanging lamps. Hardly any flowers compose the nosegays, nothing but foliage—some rare and priceless, others chosen, as if purposely, from the commonest plants, arranged, however, with such taste as to make them appear new and choice; ordinary lettuce-leaves, tall cabbage-stalks are placed with exquisite artificial taste in vessels of marvellous workmanship. All the vases are of bronze, but the designs are varied according to each changing fancy: some complicated and twisted, others, and by far the larger number, graceful and simple, but of a simplicity so studied and exquisite that to our eyes they seem the revelation of an unknown art, the subversion of all acquired notions of form.

On turning a corner of a street, by good luck we meet our married comrades of the Triomphante and Jonquille, Toukisan and Campanule! Bows and curtseys are exchanged by the mousmes, reciprocal manifestations of joy at meeting; then, forming a compact band, we are carried off by the ever-increasing crowd and continue our progress in the direction of the temple.

The streets gradually ascend (the temples are always built on a height); and by degrees, as we mount, there is added to the brilliant fairyland of lanterns and costumes yet another, ethereally blue in the haze of distance; all Nagasaki, its pagodas, its mountains, its still waters full of the rays of moonlight, seem to rise with us into the air. Slowly, step by step, one may say it springs up around, enveloping in one great shimmering veil all the foreground, with its dazzling red lights and many-colored streamers.

No doubt we are drawing near, for here are steps, porticoes and monsters hewn out of enormous blocks of granite. We now have to climb a series of steps, almost carried by the surging crowd ascending with us.

We have arrived at the temple courtyard.

This is the last and most astonishing scene in the evening's fairy-tale—a luminous and weird scene, with fantastic distances lighted up by the moon, with the gigantic trees, the sacred cryptomerias, elevating their sombre boughs into a vast dome.

Here we are all seated with our mousmes, beneath the light awning, wreathed in flowers, of one of the many little teahouses improvised in this courtyard. We are on a terrace at the top of the great steps, up which the crowd continues to flock, and at the



foot of a portico which stands erect with the rigid massiveness of a colossus against the dark night sky; at the foot also of a monster, who stares down upon us, with his big stony eyes, his cruel grimace and smile.

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This portico and the monster are the two great overwhelming masses in the foreground of the incredible scene before us; they stand out with dazzling boldness against the vague and ashy blue of the distant sphere beyond; behind them, Nagasaki is spread out in a bird's-eye view, faintly outlined in the transparent darkness with myriads of little colored lights, and the extravagantly dented profile of the mountains is delineated on the starlit sky, blue upon blue, transparency upon transparency. A corner of the harbor also is visible, far up, undefined, like a lake lost in clouds the water, faintly illumined by a ray of moonlight, making it shine like a sheet of silver.

Around us the long crystal trumpets keep up their gobble. Groups of polite and frivolous persons pass and repass like fantastic shadows: childish bands of small-eyed mousmes with smile so candidly meaningless and coiffures shining through their bright silver flowers; ugly men waving at the end of long branches their eternal lanterns shaped like birds, gods, or insects.

Behind us, in the illuminated and wide-open temple, the bonzes sit, immovable embodiments of doctrine, in the glittering sanctuary inhabited by divinities, chimeras, and symbols. The crowd, monotonously droning its mingled prayers and laughter, presses around them, sowing its alms broadcast; with a continuous jingle, the money rolls on the ground into the precincts reserved to the priests, where the white mats entirely disappear under the mass of many-sized coins accumulated there as if after a deluge of silver and bronze.

We, however, feel thoroughly at sea in the midst of this festivity; we look on, we laugh like the rest, we make foolish and senseless remarks in a language insufficiently learned, which this evening, I know not why, we can hardly understand. Notwithstanding the night breeze, we find it very hot under our awning, and we absorb quantities of odd-looking water-ices, served in cups, which taste like scented frost, or rather like flowers steeped in snow. Our mousmes order for themselves great bowls of candied beans mixed with hail—real hailstones, such as we might pick up after a hailstorm in March.

Glou! glou! glou! the crystal trumpets slowly repeat their notes, the powerful sonority of which has a labored and smothered sound, as if they came from under water; they mingle with the jingling of rattles and the noise of castanets. We have also the impression of being carried away in the irresistible swing of this incomprehensible gayety, composed, in proportions we can hardly measure, of elements mystic, puerile, and even ghastly. A sort of religious terror is diffused by the hidden idols divined in the temple behind us; by the mumbled prayers, confusedly heard; above all, by the horrible heads in lacquered wood, representing foxes, which, as they pass, hide human faces—hideous livid masks.

In the gardens and outbuildings of the temple the most inconceivable mountebanks have taken up their quarters, their black streamers, painted with white letters, looking

like funeral trappings as they float in the wind from the tops of their tall flagstaffs.
Thither we turn our steps, as soon as our mousmes have ended their orisons and
bestowed their alms.



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In one of the booths a man, stretched on a table, flat on his back, is alone on the stage; puppets of almost human size, with horribly grinning masks, spring out of his body; they speak, gesticulate, then fall back like empty rags; with a sudden spring they start up again, change their costumes, change their faces, tearing about in one continual frenzy. Suddenly three, even four, appear at the same time; they are nothing more than the four limbs of the outstretched man, whose legs and arms, raised on high, are each dressed up and capped with a wig under which peers a mask; between these phantoms tremendous fighting and battling take place, and many a sword-thrust is exchanged. The most fearful of all is a certain puppet representing an old hag; every time she appears, with her weird head and ghastly grin, the lights burn low, the music of the accompanying orchestra moans forth a sinister strain given by the flutes, mingled with a rattling tremolo which sounds like the clatter of bones. This creature evidently plays an ugly part in the piece—that of a horrible old ghoul, spiteful and famished. Still more appalling than her person is her shadow, which, projected upon a white screen, is abnormally and vividly distinct; by means of some unknown process this shadow, which nevertheless follows all her movements, assumes the aspect of a wolf. At a given moment the hag turns round and presents the profile of her distorted snub nose as she accepts the bowl of rice which is offered to her; on the screen at the very same instant appears the elongated outline of the wolf, with its pointed ears, its muzzle and chops, its great teeth and hanging tongue. The orchestra grinds, wails, quivers; then suddenly bursts out into funereal shrieks, like a concert of owls; the hag is now eating, and her wolfish shadow is eating also, greedily moving its jaws and nibbling at another shadow easy to recognize—the arm of a little child.

We now go on to see the great salamander of Japan, an animal rare in this country, and quite unknown elsewhere, a great, cold mass, sluggish and benumbed, looking like some antediluvian experiment, forgotten in the inner seas of this archipelago.

Next comes the trained elephant, the terror of our mousmes, the equilibrists, the menagerie.

It is one o'clock in the morning before we are back at Diou-djen-dji.

We first get Yves to bed in the little paper room he has already once occupied. Then we go to bed ourselves, after the inevitable preparations, the smoking of the little pipe, and the tap! tap! tap! tap! on the edge of the box.

Suddenly Yves begins to move restlessly in his sleep, to toss about, giving great kicks on the wall, and making a frightful noise.

What can be the matter? I imagine at once that he must be dreaming of the old hag and her wolfish shadow. Chrysantheme raises herself on her elbow and listens, with astonishment depicted on her face.

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Ah, happy thought! she has guessed what is tormenting him:

“Ka!” (“mosquitoes”) she says.

And, to impress the more forcibly her meaning on my mind, she pinches my arm so hard with her little pointed nails, at the same time imitating, with such an amusing play of her features, the grimace of a person who is stung, that I exclaim:

“Oh! stop, Chrysantheme, this pantomime is too expressive, and indeed useless! I know the word ‘Ka’, and had quite understood, I assure you.”

It is done so drolly and so quickly, with such a pretty pout, that in truth I can not think of being angry, although I shall certainly have tomorrow a blue mark on my arm; about that there is no doubt.

“Come, we must get up and go to Yves’s rescue; he must not be allowed to go on thumping in that manner. Let us take a lantern, and see what has happened.”

It was indeed the mosquitoes. They are hovering in a thick cloud about him; those of the house and those of the garden all seem collected together, swarming and buzzing. Chrysantheme indignantly burns several at the flame of her lantern, and shows me others (Hou!) covering the white paper walls.

He, tired out with his day’s amusement, sleeps on; but his slumbers are restless, as may be easily imagined. Chrysantheme gives him a shake, wishing him to get up and share our blue mosquito-net.

After a little pressing he does as he is bid and follows us, looking like an overgrown boy only half awake. I make no objection to this singular hospitality; after all, it looks so little like a bed, the matting we are to share, and we sleep in our clothes, as we always do, according to the Nipponese fashion. After all, on a journey in a railway, do not the most estimable ladies stretch themselves without demur by the side of gentlemen unknown to them?

I have, however, placed Chrysantheme’s little wooden block in the centre of the gauze tent, between our two pillows.

Without saying a word, in a dignified manner, as if she were rectifying an error of etiquette that I had inadvertently committed, Chrysantheme takes up her piece of wood, putting in its place my snake-skin drum; I shall therefore be in the middle between the two. It is really more correct, decidedly more proper; Chrysantheme is evidently a very decorous young person.

Returning on board next morning, in the clear morning sun, we walk through pathways full of dew, accompanied by a band of funny little mousmes of six or eight years of age, who are going to school.

Needless to say, the cicadas around us keep up their perpetual sonorous chirping. The mountain smells delicious. The atmosphere, the dawning day, the infantine grace of these little girls in their long frocks and shiny coiffures-all is redundant with freshness and youth. The flowers and grasses on which we tread sparkle with dewdrops, exhaling a perfume of freshness. What undying beauty there is, even in Japan, in the fresh morning hours in the country, and the dawning hours of life!

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Besides, I am quite ready to admit the attractiveness of the little Japanese children; some of them are most fascinating. But how is it that their charm vanishes so rapidly and is so quickly replaced by the elderly grimace, the smiling ugliness, the monkeyish face?

CHAPTER XXXV

THROUGH A MICROSCOPE

The small garden of my mother-in-law, Madame Renoncule, is, without exception, one of the most melancholy spots I have seen in all my travels through the world.

Oh, the slow, enervating, dull hours spent in idle and diffuse conversation on the dimly lighted veranda! Oh, the detestable peppered jam in the tiny pots! In the middle of the town, enclosed by four walls, is this park of five yards square, with little lakes, little mountains, and little rocks, where all wears an antiquated appearance, and everything is covered with a greenish mold from want of sunlight.

Nevertheless, a true feeling for nature has inspired this tiny representation of a wild spot. The rocks are well placed, the dwarf cedars, no taller than cabbages, stretch their gnarled boughs over the valleys in the attitude of giants wearied by the weight of centuries; and their look of full-grown trees perplexes one and falsifies the perspective. When from the dark recesses of the apartment one perceives at a certain distance this diminutive landscape dimly lighted, the wonder is whether it is all artificial, or whether one is not one's self the victim of some morbid illusion; and whether it is not indeed a real country view seen through a distorted vision out of focus, or through the wrong end of a telescope.

To any one familiar with Japanese life, my mother-in-law's house in itself reveals a refined nature—complete bareness, two or three screens placed here and there, a teapot, a vase full of lotus-flowers, and nothing more. Woodwork devoid of paint or varnish, but carved in most elaborate and capricious openwork, the whiteness of the pinewood being preserved by constant scrubbing with soap and water. The posts and beams of the framework are varied by the most fanciful taste: some are cut in precise geometrical forms; others are artificially twisted, imitating trunks of old trees covered with tropical creepers. Everywhere are little hiding-places, little nooks, little closets concealed in the most ingenious and unexpected manner under the immaculate uniformity of the white paper panels.

I can not help smiling when I think of some of the so-called "Japanese" drawing-rooms of our Parisian fine ladies, overcrowded with knickknacks and curios and hung with coarse gold embroideries on exported satins. I would advise those persons to come and look at the houses of people of taste out here; to visit the white solitudes of the

palaces at Yeddo. In France we have works of art in order to enjoy them; here they possess them merely to ticket them and lock them up carefully in a kind of mysterious

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underground room called a 'godoun', shut in by iron gratings. On rare occasions, only to honor some visitor of distinction, do they open this impenetrable depository. The true Japanese manner of understanding luxury consists in a scrupulous and indeed almost excessive cleanliness, white mats and white woodwork; an appearance of extreme simplicity, and an incredible nicety in the most infinitesimal details.

My mother-in-law seems to be really a very good woman, and were it not for the insurmountable feeling of spleen the sight of her garden produces on me, I should often go to see her. She has nothing in common with the mammas of Jonquille, Campanule, or Touki she is vastly their superior; and then I can see that she has been very good-looking and fashionable. Her past life puzzles me; but, in my position as a son-in-law, good manners prevent my making further inquiries.

Some assert that she was formerly a celebrated geisha in Yeddo, who lost public favor by her folly in becoming a mother. This would account for her daughter's talent on the guitar; she had probably herself taught her the touch and style of the Conservatory.

Since the birth of Chrysantheme (her eldest child and first cause of this loss of favor), my mother-in-law, an expansive although distinguished nature, has fallen seven times into the same fatal error, and I have two little sisters-in-law: Mademoiselle La Neige,—[Oyouki-San]—and Mademoiselle La Lune,—[Tsouki-San.]—as well as five little brothers-in-law: Cerisier, Pigeon, Liseron, Or, and Bambou.

Little Bambou is four years old—a yellow baby, fat and round all over, with fine bright eyes; coaxing and jolly, sleeping whenever he is not laughing. Of all my Nipponese family, Bambou is the one I love the most.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MY NAUGHTY DOLL

Tuesday, August 27th.

During this whole day we—Yves, Chrysantheme, Oyouki and myself—have spent the time wandering through dark and dusty nooks, dragged hither and thither by four quick-footed djins, in search of antiquities in the bric-a-brac shops.

Toward sunset, Chrysantheme, who has wearied me more than ever since morning, and who doubtless has perceived it, pulls a very long face, declares herself ill, and begs leave to spend the night with her mother, Madame Renoncule.



I agree to this with the best grace in the world; let her go, tiresome little mousme! Oyouki will carry a message to her parents, who will shut up our rooms; we shall spend the evening, Yves and I, in roaming about as fancy takes us, without any mousme dragging at our heels, and shall afterward regain our own quarters on board the 'Triomphante', without having the trouble of climbing up that hill.

First of all, we make an attempt to dine together in some fashionable tea-house. Impossible! not a place is to be had; all the absurd paper rooms, all the compartments contrived by so many ingenious tricks of slipping and sliding panels, all the nooks and corners in the little gardens are filled with Japanese men and women eating impossible and incredible little dishes. Numberless young dandies are dining tete-a-tete with the ladies of their choice, and sounds of dancing-girls and music issue from the private rooms.



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The fact is, to-day is the third and last day of the great pilgrimage to the temple of the jumping Tortoise, of which we saw the beginning yesterday; and all Nagasaki is at this time given over to amusement.

At the tea-house of the Indescribable Butterflies, which is also full to overflowing, but where we are well known, they have had the bright idea of throwing a temporary flooring over the little lake—the pond where the goldfish live—and our meal is served here, in the pleasant freshness of the fountain which continues its murmur under our feet.

After dinner, we follow the faithful and ascend again to the temple.

Up there we find the same elfin revelry, the same masks, the same music. We seat ourselves, as before, under a gauze tent and sip odd little drinks tasting of flowers. But this evening we are alone, and the absence of the band of mousmes, whose familiar little faces formed a bond of union between this holiday-making people and ourselves, separates and isolates us more than usual from the profusion of oddities in the midst of which we seem to be lost. Beneath us lies always the immense blue background: Nagasaki illumined by moonlight, and the expanse of silvered, glittering water, which seems like a vaporous vision suspended in mid-air. Behind us is the great open temple, where the bonzes officiate, to the accompaniment of sacred bells and wooden clappers-looking, from where we sit, more like puppets than anything else, some squatting in rows like peaceful mummies, others executing rhythmical marches before the golden background where stand the gods. We do not laugh to-night, and speak but little, more forcibly struck by the scene than we were on the first night; we only look on, trying to understand. Suddenly, Yves, turning round, says:

“Hullo! brother, there is your mousme!”

Actually, there she is, behind him; Chrysantheme, almost on all fours, hidden between the paws of a great granite beast, half tiger, half dog, against which our fragile tent is leaning.

“She pulled my trousers with her nails, for all the world like a little cat,” said Yves, still full of surprise, “positively like a cat!”

She remains bent double in the most humble form of salutation; she smiles timidly, afraid of being ill received, and the head of my little brother-in-law, Bambou, appears smiling too, just above her own. She has brought this little mousko—[Mousko is the masculine of mousme, and signifies little boy. Excessive politeness makes it mousko-san (Mr. little boy).]—with her, perched astride her back; he looks as absurd as ever, with his shaven head, his long frock and the great bows of his silken sash. There they stand gazing at us, anxious to know how their joke will be taken.



For my part, I have not the least idea of giving them a cold reception; on the contrary, the meeting amuses me. It even strikes me that it is rather pretty of Chrysantheme to come around in this way, and to bring Bambou-San to the festival; though it savors somewhat of her low breeding, to tell the truth, to carry him on her back, as the poorer Japanese women carry their little ones.



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However, let her sit down between Yves and myself and let them bring her those iced beans she loves so much; and we will take the jolly little mousko on our knees and cram him with sugar and sweetmeats to his heart's content.

When the evening is over, and we begin to think of leaving, and of going down again, Chrysantheme replaces her little Bambou astride upon her back, and sets forth, bending forward under his weight and painfully dragging her Cinderella slippers over the granite steps and flagstones. Yes, decidedly low, this conduct! but low in the best sense of the word: nothing in it displeases me; I even consider Chrysantheme's affection for Bambou-San engaging and attractive in its simplicity.

One can not deny this merit to the Japanese—a great love for little children, and a talent for amusing them, for making them laugh, inventing comical toys for them, making the morning of their life happy; for a specialty in dressing them, arranging their heads, and giving to the whole personage the most fascinating appearance possible. It is the only thing I really like about this country: the babies and the manner in which they are understood.

On our way we meet our married friends of the Triomphante, who, much surprised at seeing me with this mousko, jokingly exclaim:

“What! a son already?”

Down in the town, we make a point of bidding goodby to Chrysantheme at the turning of the street where her mother lives. She smiles, undecided, declares herself well again, and begs to return to our house on the heights. This did not precisely enter into my plans, I confess. However, it would look very ungracious to refuse.

So be it! But we must carry the mousko home to his mamma, and then begin, by the flickering light of a new lantern bought from Madame Tres-Propre, our weary homeward ascent.

Here, however, we find ourselves in another predicament: this ridiculous little Bambou insists upon coming with us! No, he will take no denial, we must take him with us. This is out of all reason, quite impossible!

However, it will not do to make him cry, on the night of a great festival too, poor little mousko! So we must send a message to Madame Renoncule, that she may not be uneasy about him, and as there will soon not be a living creature on the footpaths of Diou-djen-dji to laugh at us, we will take it in turn, Yves and I, to carry him on our backs, all the way up that climb in the darkness.

And here am I, who did not wish to return this way tonight, dragging a mousme by the hand, and actually carrying an extra burden in the shape of a mousko on my back. What an irony of fate!

As I had expected, all our shutters and doors are closed, bolted, and barred; no one expects us, and we have to make a prodigious noise at the door. Chrysantheme sets to work and calls with all her might:

“Hou Oume-San-an-an-an!” (In English: “Hi! Madame Pru-u-uu-une!”)



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These intonations in her little voice are unknown to me; her long-drawn call in the echoing darkness of midnight has so strange an accent, something so unexpected and wild, that it impresses me with a dismal feeling of far-off exile.

At last Madame Prune appears to open the door to us, only half awake and much astonished; by way of a nightcap she wears a monstrous cotton turban, on the blue ground of which a few white storks are playfully disporting themselves. Holding in the tips of her fingers, with an affectation of graceful fright, the long stalk of her beflowered lantern, she gazes intently into our faces, one after another, to reassure herself of our identity; but the poor old lady can not get over her surprise at the sight of the mousko I am carrying.

CHAPTER XXXVII

COMPLICATIONS

At first it was only to Chrysantheme's guitar that I listened with pleasure now I am beginning to like her singing also.

She has nothing of the theatrical, or the deep, assumed voice of the virtuoso; on the contrary, her notes, always very high, are soft, thin, and plaintive.

She often teaches Oyouki some romance, slow and dreamy, which she has composed, or which comes back to her mind. Then they both astonish me, for on their well-tuned guitars they will pick out accompaniments in parts, and try again each time that the chords are not perfectly true to their ear, without ever losing themselves in the confusion of these dissonant harmonies, always weird and always melancholy.

Usually, while their music is going on, I am writing on the veranda, with the superb panorama before me. I write, seated on a mat on the floor and leaning upon a little Japanese desk, ornamented with swallows in relief; my ink is Chinese, my inkstand, just like that of my landlord, is in jade, with dear little frogs and toads carved on the rim. In short, I am writing my memoirs,—exactly as M. Sucre does downstairs! Occasionally I fancy I resemble him—a very disagreeable fancy.

My memoirs are composed of incongruous details, minute observations of colors, shapes, scents, and sounds.

It is true that a complete imbroglio, worthy of a romance, seems ever threatening to appear upon my monotonous horizon; a regular intrigue seems ever ready to explode in the midst of this little world of mousmes and grasshoppers: Chrysantheme in love with Yves; Yves with Chrysantheme; Oyouki with me; I with no one. We might even find here, ready to hand, the elements of a fratricidal drama, were we in any other country

than Japan; but we are in Japan, and under the narrowing and dwarfing influence of the surroundings, which turn everything into ridicule, nothing will come of it all.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The height of sociability!



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In this fine town of Nagasaki, about five or six o'clock in the evening, one hour of the day is more comical than any other. At that moment every human being is naked: children, young people, old people, old men, old women—every one is seated in a tub of some sort, taking a bath. This ceremony takes place no matter where, without the slightest screen, in the gardens, the courtyards, in the shops, even upon the thresholds, in order to give greater facility for conversation among the neighbors from one side of the street to the other. In this situation visitors are received; and the bather, without any hesitation, leaves his tub, holding in his hand his little towel (invariably blue), to offer the caller a seat, and to exchange with him some polite remarks. Nevertheless, neither the mousmes nor the old ladies gain anything by appearing in this primeval costume. A Japanese woman, deprived of her long robe and her huge sash with its pretentious bows, is nothing but a diminutive yellow being, with crooked legs and flat, unshapely bust; she has no longer a remnant of her little artificial charms, which have completely disappeared in company with her costume.

There is yet another hour, at once joyous and melancholy, a little later, when twilight falls, when the sky seems one vast veil of yellow, against which stand the clear-cut outlines of jagged mountains and lofty, fantastic pagodas. It is the hour at which, in the labyrinth of little gray streets below, the sacred lamps begin to twinkle in the ever-open houses, in front of the ancestor's altars and the familiar Buddhas; while, outside, darkness creeps over all, and the thousand and one indentations and peaks of the old roofs are depicted, as if in black festoons, on the clear golden sky. At this moment, over merry, laughing Japan, suddenly passes a sombre shadow, strange, weird, a breath of antiquity, of savagery, of something indefinable, which casts a gloom of sadness. And then the only gayety that remains is the gayety of the young children, of little mouskos and little mousmes, who spread themselves like a wave through the streets filled with shadow, as they swarm from schools and workshops. On the dark background of all these wooden buildings, the little blue and scarlet dresses stand out in startling contrast,—drolly bedizened, drolly draped; and the fine loops of the sashes, the flowers, the silver or gold topknots stuck in these baby chignons, add to the vivid effect.

They amuse themselves, they chase one another, their great pagoda sleeves fly wide open, and these tiny little mousmes of ten, of five years old, or even younger still, have lofty head-dresses and imposing bows of hair arranged on their little heads, like grown-up women. Oh! what loves of supremely absurd dolls at this hour of twilight gambol through the streets, in their long frocks, blowing their crystal trumpets, or running with all their might to start their fanciful kites. This juvenile world of Japan—ludicrous by birth, and fated to become more so as the years roll on—starts in life with singular amusements, with strange cries and shouts; its playthings are somewhat ghastly, and would frighten the children of other countries; even the kites have great squinting eyes and vampire shapes.

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And every evening, in the little dark streets, bursts forth the overflow of joyousness, fresh, childish, but withal grotesque to excess. It would be difficult to form any idea of the incredible things which, carried by the wind, float in the evening air.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A LADY OF JAPAN

My little Chrysantheme is always attired in dark colors, a sign here of aristocratic distinction. While her friends Oyouki-San, Madame Touki, and others, delight in gay-striped stuffs, and thrust gorgeous ornaments in their chignons, she always wears navy-blue or neutral gray, fastened round her waist with great black sashes brocaded in tender shades, and she puts nothing in her hair but amber-colored tortoiseshell pins. If she were of noble descent she would wear embroidered on her dress in the middle of the back a little white circle looking like a postmark with some design in the centre of it—usually the leaf of a tree; and this would be her coat-of-arms. There is really nothing wanting but this little heraldic blazon on the back to give her the appearance of a lady of the highest rank.

In Japan the smart dresses of bright colors shaded in clouds, embroidered with monsters of gold or silver, are reserved by the great ladies for home use on state occasions; or else they are used on the stage for dancers and courtesans.

Like all Japanese women, Chrysantheme carries a quantity of things in her long sleeves, in which pockets are cunningly hidden. There she keeps letters, various notes written on delicate sheets of rice-paper, prayer amulets drawn up by the bonzes; and above all a number of squares of a silky paper which she puts to the most unexpected uses—to dry a teacup, to hold the damp stalk of a flower, or to blow her quaint little nose, when the necessity presents itself. After the operation she at once crumples up the piece of paper, rolls it into a ball, and throws it out of the window with disgust.

The very smartest people in Japan blow their noses in this manner.

CHAPTER XL

OUR FRIENDS THE BONZES

September 2d.

Fate has favored us with a friendship as strange as it is rare: that of the head bonzes of the temple of the jumping Tortoise, where we witnessed last month such a surprising pilgrimage.



The approach to this place is as solitary now as it was thronged and bustling on the evenings of the festival; and in broad daylight one is surprised at the deathlike decay of the sacred surroundings which at night had seemed so full of life. Not a creature to be seen on the time-worn granite steps; not a creature beneath the vast, sumptuous porticoes; the colors, the gold-work are dim with dust. To reach the temple one must cross several deserted courtyards terraced on the mountain-side, pass through several solemn gateways, and up and up endless stairs rising far above the town and the noises of humanity into a sacred region filled with innumerable tombs. On all the pavements, in all the walls, are lichen and stonecrop; and over all the, gray tint of extreme age spreads like a fall of ashes.

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In a side temple near the entrance is enthroned a colossal Buddha seated in his lotus—a gilded idol from forty-five to sixty feet high, mounted on an enormous bronze pedestal.

At length appears the last doorway with the two traditional giants, guardians of the sacred court, which stand the one on the right hand, the other on the left, shut up like wild beasts, each in an iron cage. They are in attitudes of fury, with fists upraised as if to strike, and features atrociously fierce and distorted. Their bodies are covered with bullets of crumbled paper, which have been aimed at them through the bars, and which have stuck to their monstrous limbs, producing an appearance of white leprosy: this is the manner in which the faithful strive to appease them, by conveying to them their prayers written upon delicate leaflets by the pious bonzes.

Passing between these alarming scarecrows, one reaches the innermost court. The residence of our friends is on the right, the great hall of the pagoda is before us.

In this paved court are bronze torch-holders as high as turrets. Here, too, stand, and have stood for centuries, cyca palms with fresh, green plumes, their numerous stalks curving with a heavy symmetry, like the branches of massive candelabra. The temple, which is open along its entire length, is dark and mysterious, with touches of gilding in distant corners melting away into the gloom. In the very remotest part are seated idols, and from outside one can vaguely see their clasped hands and air of rapt mysticism; in front are the altars, loaded with marvellous vases in metalwork, whence spring graceful clusters of gold and silver lotus. From the very entrance one is greeted by the sweet odor of the incense-sticks unceasingly burned by the priests before the gods.

To penetrate into the dwelling of our friends the bonzes, which is situated on the right side as you enter, is by no means an easy matter.

A monster of the fish tribe, but having claws and horns, is hung over their door by iron chains; at the least breath of wind he swings creakingly. We pass beneath him and enter the first vast and lofty hall, dimly lighted, in the corners of which gleam gilded idols, bells, and incomprehensible objects of religious use.

Quaint little creatures, choir-boys or pupils, come forward with a doubtful welcome to ask what is wanted.

“Matsou-San!! Dondta-San!!” they repeat, much astonished, when they understand to whom we wish to be conducted. Oh! no, impossible, they can not be seen; they are resting or are in contemplation. “Orimas! Orimas!” say they, clasping their hands and sketching a genuflection or two to make us understand better. (“They are at prayer! the most profound prayer!”)

We insist, speak more imperatively; even slip off our shoes like people determined to take no refusal.

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At last Matsou-San and Donata-San make their appearance from the tranquil depths of their bonze-house. They are dressed in black crape and their heads are shaved. Smiling, amiable, full of excuses, they offer us their hands, and we follow, with our feet bare like theirs, to the interior of their mysterious dwelling, through a series of empty rooms spread with mats of the most unimpeachable whiteness. The successive halls are separated one from the other only by bamboo curtains of exquisite delicacy, caught back by tassels and cords of red silk.

The whole wainscoting of the interior is of the same wood, of a pale yellow shade made with extreme nicety, without the least ornament, the least carving; everything seems new and unused, as if it had never been touched by human hand. At distant intervals in this studied bareness, costly little stools, marvellously inlaid, uphold some antique bronze monster or a vase of flowers; on the walls hang a few masterly sketches, vaguely tinted in Indian ink, drawn upon strips of gray paper most accurately cut but without the slightest attempt at a frame. This is all: not a seat, not a cushion, not a scrap of furniture. It is the very acme of studied simplicity, of elegance made out of nothing, of the most immaculate and incredible cleanliness. And while following the bonzes through this long suite of empty halls, we are struck by their contrast with the overflow of knickknacks scattered about our rooms in France, and we take a sudden dislike to the profusion and crowding delighted in at home.

The spot where this silent march of barefooted folk comes to an end, the spot where we are to seat ourselves in the delightful coolness of a semi-darkness, is an interior veranda opening upon an artificial site. We might suppose it the bottom of a well; it is a miniature garden no bigger than the opening of an oubliette, overhung on all sides by the crushing height of the mountain and receiving from on high but the dim light of dreamland. Nevertheless, here is simulated a great natural ravine in all its wild grandeur: here are caverns, abrupt rocks, a torrent, a cascade, islands. The trees, dwarfed by a Japanese process of which we have not the secret, have tiny little leaves on their decrepit and knotty branches. A pervading hue of the mossy green of antiquity harmonizes all this medley, which is undoubtedly centuries old.

Families of goldfish swim round and round in the clear water, and tiny tortoises (jumpers probably) sleep upon the granite islands, which are of the same color as their own gray shells.

There are even blue dragon-flies which have ventured to descend, heaven knows whence, and alight with quivering wings upon the miniature water-lilies.

Our friends the bonzes, notwithstanding an unctuousness of manner thoroughly ecclesiastical, are very ready to laugh—a simple, pleased, childish laughter; plump, chubby, shaven and shorn, they dearly love our French liqueurs and know how to take a joke.

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We talk first of one thing and then another. To the tranquil music of their little cascade, I launch out before them with phrases of the most erudite Japanese, I try the effect of a few tenses of verbs: 'desideratives, concessives, hypothetics in ba'. While they chant they despatch the affairs of the church: the order of services sealed with complicated seals for inferior pagodas situated in the neighborhood; or trace little prayers with a cunning paint-brush, as medical remedies to be swallowed like pills by invalids at a distance. With their white and dimpled hands they play with a fan as cleverly as any woman, and when we have tasted different native drinks, flavored with essences of flowers, they bring up as a finish a bottle of Benedictine or Chartreuse, for they appreciate the liqueurs composed by their Western colleagues.

When they come on board to return our visits, they by no means disdain to fasten their great round spectacles on their flat noses in order to inspect the profane drawings in our illustrated papers, the 'Vie Parisienne' for instance. And it is even with a certain complacency that they let their fingers linger upon the pictures representing women.

The religious ceremonies in their great temple are magnificent, and to one of these we are now invited. At the sound of the gong they make their entrance before the idols with a stately ritual; twenty or thirty priests officiate in gala costumes, with genuflections, clapping of hands and movements to and fro, which look like the figures of some mystic quadrille.

But for all that, let the sanctuary be ever so immense and imposing in its sombre gloom, the idols ever so superb, all seems in Japan but a mere semblance of grandeur. A hopeless pettiness, an irresistible effect the ludicrous, lies at the bottom of all things.

And then the congregation is not conducive to thoughtful contemplation, for among it we usually discover some acquaintance: my mother-in-law, or a cousin, or the woman from the china-shop who sold us a vase only yesterday. Charming little mousmes, monkeyish-looking old ladies enter with their smoking-boxes, their gayly daubed parasols, their curtsies, their little cries and exclamations; prattling, complimenting one another, full of restless movement, and having the greatest difficulty in maintaining a serious demeanor.

CHAPTER XLI

AN UNEXPECTED CALL

September 3d.

My little Chrysantheme for the first time visited me on board-ship to day, chaperoned by Madame Prune, and followed by my youngest sister in-law, Mademoiselle La Neige. These ladies had the tranquil manners of the highest gentility. In my cabin is a great



Buddha on his throne, and before him is a lacquer tray, on which my faithful sailor servant places any small change he may find in the pockets of my clothes. Madame Prune, whose mind is much swayed by mysticism, at once supposed herself before a regular altar; in the gravest manner possible she addressed a brief prayer to the god; then drawing out her purse (which, according to custom, was attached to her sash behind her back, along with her little pipe and tobacco-pouch), placed a pious offering in the tray, while executing a low curtsy.

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They were on their best behavior throughout the visit. But when the moment of departure came, Chrysantheme, who would not go away without seeing Yves, asked for him with a thinly veiled persistency which was remarkable. Yves, for whom I then sent, made himself particularly charming to her, so much so that this time I felt a shade of more serious annoyance; I even asked myself whether the laughably pitiable ending, which I had hitherto vaguely foreseen, might not, after all, soon break upon us.

CHAPTER XLII

AN ORIENTAL VISION

September 4th.

Yesterday I encountered, in an ancient and ruined quarter of the town, a perfectly exquisite mousme, charmingly dressed; a fresh touch of color against the sombre background of decayed buildings.

I met her at the farthest end of Nagasaki, in the most ancient part of the town. In this region are trees centuries old, antique temples of Buddha, of Amiddah, of Benten, or Kwanon, with steep and pompous roofs; monsters carved in granite sit there in courtyards silent as the grave, where the grass grows between the stones. This deserted quarter is traversed by a narrow torrent running in a deep channel, across which are thrown little curved bridges with granite balustrades eaten away by lichen. All the objects there wear the strange grimace, the quaint arrangement familiar to us in the most antique Japanese drawings.

I walked through it all at the burning hour of midday, and saw not a soul, unless, indeed, through the open windows of the bonze-houses, I caught sight of some few priests, guardians of tombs or sanctuaries, taking their siesta under dark-blue gauze nets.

Suddenly this little mousme appeared, a little above me, just at the point of the arch of one of these bridges carpeted with gray moss; she was in full sunshine, and stood out in brilliant clearness, like a fairy vision, against the background of old black temples and deep shadows. She was holding her robe together with one hand, gathering it close round her ankles to give herself an air of greater slimness. Over her quaint little head, her round umbrella with its thousand ribs threw a great halo of blue and red, edged with black, and an oleander-tree full of flowers, growing among the stones of the bridge, spread its glory beside her, bathed, like herself, in the sunshine. Behind this youthful figure and this flowering shrub all was blackness. Upon the pretty red and blue parasol great white letters formed this inscription, much used among the mousmes, and which I have learned to recognize: 'Stop! clouds, to see her pass!' And it was really worth the trouble to stop and look at this exquisite little person, of a type so ideally Japanese.

However, it will not do to stop too long and be ensnared—it would only be another delusion. A doll like the rest, evidently, an ornament for a china shelf, and nothing more. While I gaze at her, I say to myself that Chrysantheme, appearing in this same place, with this dress, this play of light, and this aureole of sunshine, would produce just as delightful an effect.



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For Chrysantheme is pretty, there can be no doubt about it. Yesterday evening, in fact, I positively admired her. It was quite night; we were returning with the usual escort of little married couples like ourselves, from the inevitable tour of the tea-houses and bazaars. While the other mousmes walked along hand in hand, adorned with new silver topknots which they had succeeded in having presented to them, and amusing themselves with playthings, she, pleading fatigue, followed, half reclining, in a djin carriage. We had placed beside her great bunches of flowers destined to fill our vases, late iris and long-stemmed lotus, the last of the season, already smelling of autumn. And it was really very pretty to see this Japanese girl in her little car, lying carelessly among all these water-flowers, lighted by gleams of ever-changing colors, as they chanced from the lanterns we met or passed. If, on the evening of my arrival in Japan, any one had pointed her out to me, and said: "That shall be your mousme," there can not be a doubt I should have been charmed. In reality, however, I am not charmed; it is only Chrysantheme, always Chrysantheme, nothing but Chrysantheme: a mere plaything to laugh at, a little creature of finical forms and thoughts, with whom the agency of M. Kangourou has supplied me.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CATS AND THE DOLLS

The water used for drinking in our house, for making tea, and for lesser washing purposes, is kept in large white china tubs, decorated with paintings representing blue fish borne along by a swift current through distorted rushes. In order to keep them cool, the tubs are kept out of doors on Madame Prune's roof, at a place where we can, from the top of our projecting balcony, easily reach them by stretching out an arm. A real godsend for all the thirsty cats in the neighborhood, on warm summer nights, is this corner of the roof with our gayly painted tubs, and it proves a delightful trysting-place for them, after all their caterwauling and long solitary rambles on the tops of the walls.

I had thought it my duty to warn Yves the first time he wished to drink this water.

"Oh!" he replied, rather surprised, "cats, do you say? But they are not dirty!"

On this point Chrysantheme and I agree with him: we do not consider cats unclean animals, and we do not object to drink after them.

Yves considers Chrysantheme much in the same light. "She is not dirty, either," he says; and he willingly drinks after her, out of the same cup, putting her in the same category with the cats.

These china tubs are one of the daily preoccupations of our household: in the evening, when we return from our walk, after the clamber up, which makes us thirsty, and

Madame L'Heure's waffles, which we have been eating to beguile the way, we always find them empty. It seems impossible for Madame Prune, or Mademoiselle Oyouki, or their young servant, Mademoiselle Dede,—[Dede-San means "Miss Young Girl," a very common name.]—to have forethought enough to fill them while it is still daylight. And when we are late in returning home, these three ladies are asleep, so we are obliged to attend to the business ourselves.



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We must therefore open all the closed doors, put on our boots, and go down into the garden to draw water.

As Chrysantheme would die of fright all alone in the dark, in the midst of the trees and buzzing of insects, I am obliged to accompany her to the well. For this expedition we require a light, and must seek among the quantity of lanterns purchased at Madame Tres-Propre's booth, which have been thrown night after night into the bottom of one of our little paper closets; but alas, all the candles are burned down! I thought as much! Well, we must resolutely take the first lantern to hand, and stick a fresh candle on the iron point at the bottom; Chrysantheme puts forth all her strength, the candle splits, breaks; the mousme pricks her fingers, pouts and whimpers. Such is the inevitable scene that takes place every evening, and delays our retiring to rest under the dark-blue gauze net for a good quarter of an hour; while the cicalas on the roof seem to mock us with their ceaseless song.

All this, which I should find amusing in any one else,—any one I loved—irritates me in her.

CHAPTER XLIV

TENDER MINISTRATIONS

September 11th.

A week has passed very quietly, during which I have written nothing.

By degrees I am becoming accustomed to my Japanese household, to the strangeness of the language, costumes, and faces. For the last three weeks no letters have arrived from Europe; they have no doubt miscarried, and their absence contributes, as is usually the case, to throw a veil of oblivion over the past.

Every day, therefore, I climb up to my villa, sometimes by beautiful starlit nights, sometimes through downpours of rain. Every morning as the sound of Madame Prune's chanted prayer rises through the reverberating air, I awake and go down toward the sea, by grassy pathways full of dew.

The chief occupation in Japan seems to be a perpetual hunt after curios. We sit down on the mattings, in the antique-sellers' little booths, taking a cup of tea with the salesmen, and rummage with our own hands in the cupboards and chests, where many a fantastic piece of old rubbish is huddled away. The bargaining, much discussed, is laughingly carried on for several days, as if we were trying to play off some excellent little practical joke upon each other.



I really make a sad abuse of the adjective little; I am quite aware of it, but how can I do otherwise? In describing this country, the temptation is great to use it ten times in every written line. Little, finical; affected,—all Japan is contained, both physically and morally, in these three words.

My purchases are accumulating in my little wood and paper house; but how much more Japanese it really was, in its bare emptiness, such as M. Sucre and Madame Prune had conceived it. There are now many lamps of sacred symbolism hanging from the ceiling; many stools and many vases, as many gods and goddesses as in a pagoda.

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There is even a little Shintoist altar, before which Madame Prune has not been able to restrain her feelings, and before which she has fallen down and chanted her prayers in her bleating, goat-like voice:

“Wash me clean from all my impurity, O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami! as one washes away uncleanness in the river of Kamo.”

Alas for poor Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami to have to wash away the impurities of Madame Prune! What a tedious and ungrateful task!!

Chrysantheme, who is a Buddhist, prays sometimes in the evening before lying down; although overcome with sleep, she prays clapping her hands before the largest of our gilded idols. But she smiles with a childish disrespect for her Buddha, as soon as her prayer is ended. I know that she has also a certain veneration for her Ottokes (the spirits of her ancestors), whose rather sumptuous altar is set up at the house of her mother, Madame Renoncule. She asks for their blessings, for fortune and wisdom.

Who can fathom her ideas about the gods, or about death? Does she possess a soul? Does she think she has one? Her religion is an obscure chaos of theogonies as old as the world, treasured up out of respect for ancient customs; and of more recent ideas about the blessed final annihilation, imported from India by saintly Chinese missionaries at the epoch of our Middle Ages. The bonzes themselves are puzzled; what a muddle, therefore, must not all this become, when jumbled together in the childish brain of a sleepy mousme!

Two very insignificant episodes have somewhat attached me to her—(bonds of this kind seldom fail to draw closer in the end). The first occasion was as follows:

Madame Prune one day brought forth a relic of her gay youth, a tortoise-shell comb of rare transparency, one of those combs that it is good style to place on the summit of the head, lightly poised, hardly stuck at all in the hair, with all the teeth showing. Taking it out of a pretty little lacquered box, she held it up in the air and blinked her eyes, looking through it at the sky—a bright summer sky—as one does to examine the quality of a precious stone.

“Here is,” she said, “an object of great value that you should offer to your little wife.”

My mousme, very much taken by it, admired the clearness of the comb and its graceful shape.

The lacquered box, however, pleased me more. On the cover was a wonderful painting in gold on gold, representing a field of rice, seen very close, on a windy day; a tangle of ears and grass beaten down and twisted by a terrible squall; here and there, between the distorted stalks, the muddy earth of the rice-swamp was visible; there were even

little pools of water, produced by bits of the transparent lacquer on which tiny particles of gold seemed to float about like chaff in a thick liquid; two or three insects, which required a microscope to be well seen, were clinging in a terrified manner to the rushes, and the whole picture was no larger than a woman's hand.

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As for Madame Prune's comb, I confess it left me indifferent, and I turned a deaf ear, thinking it very insignificant and expensive. Then Chrysantheme answered, mournfully:

"No, thank you, I don't want it; take it away, dear Madame Prune."

And at the same time she heaved a deep sigh, full of meaning, which plainly said:

"He is not so fond of me as all that.—Useless to bother him."

I immediately made the wished-for purchase.

Later when Chrysantheme will have become an old monkey like Madame Prune, with her black teeth and long orisons, she, in her turn, will retail that comb to some fine lady of a fresh generation.

On another occasion the sun had given me a headache; I lay on the floor resting my head on my snake-skin pillow. My eyes were dim; and everything appeared to turn around: the open veranda, the big expanse of luminous evening sky, and a variety of kites hovering against its background. I felt myself vibrating painfully to the rhythmical sound of the cicalas which filled the atmosphere.

She, crouching by my side, strove to relieve me by a Japanese process, pressing with all her might on my temples with her little thumbs and turning them rapidly around, as if she were boring a hole with a gimlet. She had become quite hot and red over this hard work, which procured me real comfort, something similar to the dreamy intoxication of opium.

Then, anxious and fearful lest I should have an attack of fever, she rolled into a pellet and thrust into my mouth a very efficacious prayer written on rice-paper, which she had kept carefully in the lining of one of her sleeves.

Well, I swallowed that prayer without a smile, not wishing to hurt her feelings or shake her funny little faith.

CHAPTER XLV

TWO FAIR ARISTOCRATS

Today, Yves, my mousme and I went to the best photographer in Nagasaki, to be taken in a group. We shall send the picture to France. Yves laughs as he thinks of his wife's astonishment when she sees Chrysantheme's little face between us, and he wonders how he shall explain it to her.

"I shall just say it is one of your friends, that's all!" he says to me.

In Japan there are many photographers like our own, with this difference, that they are Japanese, and inhabit Japanese houses. The one we intend to honor to-day carries on his business in the suburbs, in that ancient quarter of big trees and gloomy pagodas where, the other day, I met the pretty little mousme. His signboard, written in several languages, is posted against a wall on the edge of the little torrent which, rushing down from the green mountain above, is crossed by many a curved bridge of old granite and lined on either side with light bamboos or oleanders in full bloom.

It is astonishing and puzzling to find a photographer perched there, in the very heart of old Japan.

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We have come at the wrong moment; there is a file of people at the door. Long rows of djins' cars are stationed there, awaiting the customers they have brought, who will all have their turn before us. The runners, naked and tattooed, their hair carefully combed in sleek bands and shiny chignons, are chatting, smoking little pipes, or bathing their muscular legs in the fresh water of the torrent.

The courtyard is irreproachably Japanese, with its lanterns and dwarf trees. But the studio where one poses might be in Paris or Pontoise; the self-same chair in "old oak," the same faded "poufs," plaster columns, and pasteboard rocks.

The people who are being photographed at this moment are two ladies of quality, evidently mother and daughter, who are sitting together for a cabinet-size portrait, with accessories of the time of Louis XV. A strange group this, the first great ladies of this country I have seen so near, with their long, aristocratic faces, dull, lifeless, almost gray by dint of rice-powder, and their mouths painted heart-shape in vivid carmine. Withal they have an undeniable look of good breeding that strongly impresses us, notwithstanding the intrinsic differences of race and acquired notions.

They scanned Chrysantheme with a look of obvious scorn, although her costume was as ladylike as their own. For my part, I could not take my eyes off these two creatures; they captivated me like incomprehensible things that one never had seen before. Their fragile bodies, outlandishly graceful in posture, are lost in stiff materials and redundant sashes, of which the ends droop like tired wings. They make me think, I know not why, of great rare insects; the extraordinary patterns on their garments have something of the dark motley of night-moths. Above all, I ponder over the mystery of their tiny slits of eyes, drawn back and up so far that the tight-drawn lids can hardly open; the mystery of their expression, which seems to denote inner thoughts of a silly, vague, complacent absurdity, a world of ideas absolutely closed to ourselves. And I think as I gaze at them: "How far we are from this Japanese people! how totally dissimilar are our races!"

We are compelled to let several English sailors pass before us, decked out in their white drill clothes, fresh, fat, and pink, like little sugar figures, who attitudinize in a sheepish manner around the shafts of the columns.

At last it is our turn; Chrysantheme settles herself slowly in a very affected style, turning in the points of her toes as much as possible, according to the fashion.

And on the negative shown to us we look like a supremely ridiculous little family drawn up in a line by a common photographer at a fair.

CHAPTER XLVI

GRAVE SUSPICIONS

September 13th.

Tonight Yves is off duty three hours earlier than I; occasionally this happens, according to the arrangement of the watches. At those times he lands first, and goes up to wait for me at Diou-djen-dji.

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From the deck I can see him through my glass, climbing up the green mountain-path; he walks with a brisk, rapid step, almost running; what a hurry he seems in to rejoin little Chrysantheme!

When I arrive, about nine o'clock, I find him seated on the floor, in the middle of my rooms, with naked torso (this is a sufficiently proper costume for private life here, I admit). Around him are grouped Chrysantheme, Oyouki, and Mademoiselle Dede the maid, all eagerly rubbing his back with little blue towels decorated with storks and humorous subjects.

Good heavens! what can he have been doing to be so hot, and to have put himself in such a state?

He tells me that near our house, a little farther up the mountain, he has discovered a fencing-gallery: that till nightfall he had been engaged in a fencing-bout against Japanese, who fought with two-handed swords, springing like cats, as is the custom of their country. With his French method of fencing, he had given them a good drubbing. Upon which, with many a low bow, they had shown him their admiration by bringing him a quantity of nice little iced things to drink. All this combined had thrown him into a fearful perspiration.

Ah, very well! Nevertheless, this did not quite explain to me!

He is delighted with his evening; intends to go and amuse himself every day by beating them; he even thinks of taking pupils.

Once his back is dried, all together, the three mousmes and himself, play at Japanese pigeon-vole. Really I could not wish for anything more innocent, or more correct in every respect.

Charles N——and Madame Jonquille, his wife, arrived unexpectedly about ten o'clock. (They were wandering about in the dark shrubberies in our neighborhood, and, seeing our lights, came up to us.)

They intend to finish the evening at the tea-house of the toads, and they try to induce us to go and drink some iced sherbets with them. It is at least an hour's walk from here, on the other side of the town, halfway up the hill, in the gardens of the large pagoda dedicated to Osueva; but they stick to their idea, pretending that in this clear night and bright moonlight we shall have a lovely view from the terrace of the temple.

Lovely, I have no doubt, but we had intended going to bed. However, be it so, let us go with them.

We hire five djins and five cars down below, in the principal street, in front of Madame Tres-Propre's shop, who, for this late expedition, chooses for us her largest round lanterns-big, red balloons, decorated with starfish, seaweed, and green sharks.

It is nearly eleven o'clock when we make our start. In the central quarters the virtuous Nipponese are already closing their little booths, putting out their lamps, shutting the wooden framework, drawing their paper panels.

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Farther on, in the old-fashioned suburban streets, all is shut up long ago, and our carts roll on through the black night. We cry out to our djins: "Ayakou! ayakou!" ("Quick! quick!") and they run as hard as they can, uttering little shrieks, like merry animals full of wild gayety. We rush like a whirlwind through the darkness, all five in Indian file, dashing and jolting over the old, uneven flagstones, dimly lighted up by our red balloons fluttering at the end of their bamboo stems. From time to time some Japanese, night-capped in his blue kerchief, opens a window to see who these noisy madcaps can be, dashing by so rapidly and so late. Or else some faint glimmer, thrown by us on our passage, discovers the hideous smile of a large stone animal seated at the gate of a pagoda.

At last we arrive at the foot of Osueva's temple, and, leaving our djins with our little gigs, we clamber up the gigantic steps, completely deserted at this hour of the night.

Chrysantheme, who always likes to play the part of a tired little girl, of a spoiled and pouting child, ascends slowly between Yves and myself, clinging to our arms.

Jonquille, on the contrary, skips up like a bird, amusing herself by counting the endless steps.

She lays a great stress on the accentuations, as if to make the numbers sound even more droll.

A little silver aigrette glitters in her beautiful black coiffure; her delicate and graceful figure seems strangely fantastic, and the darkness that envelops us conceals the fact that her face is quite ugly, and almost without eyes.

This evening Chrysantheme and Jonquille really look like little fairies; at certain moments the most insignificant Japanese have this appearance, by dint of whimsical elegance and ingenious arrangement.

The granite stairs, imposing, deserted, uniformly gray under the nocturnal sky, appear to vanish into the empty space above us, and, when we turn round, to disappear in the depths beneath, to fall into the abyss with the dizzy rapidity of a dream. On the sloping steps the black shadows of the gateways through which we must pass stretch out indefinitely; and the shadows, which seem to be broken at each projecting step, look like the regular creases of a fan. The porticoes stand up separately, rising one above another; their wonderful shapes are at once remarkably simple and studiously affected; their outlines stand out sharp and distinct, having nevertheless the vague appearance of all very large objects in the pale moonlight. The curved architraves rise at each extremity like two menacing horns, pointing upward toward the far-off blue canopy of the star-spangled sky, as if they would communicate to the gods the knowledge they have acquired in the depths of their foundations from the earth, full of sepulchres and death, which surrounds them.

We are, indeed, a very small group, lost now in the immensity of the colossal acclivity as we move onward, lighted partly by the wan moon, partly by the red lanterns we hold in our hands, floating at the ends of their long sticks.

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A deep silence reigns in the precincts of the temple, even the sound of insects is hushed as we ascend. A sort of reverence, a kind of religious fear steals over us, and, at the same moment, a delicious coolness suddenly pervades the air, and passes over us.

On entering the courtyard above, we feel a little daunted. Here we find the horse in jade, and the china turrets. The enclosing walls make it the more gloomy, and our arrival seems to disturb I know not what mysterious council held between the spirits of the air and the visible symbols that are there, chimeras and monsters illuminated by the blue rays of the moon.

We turn to the left, and go through the terraced gardens, to reach the tea-house of the toads, which this evening is our goal; we find it shut up—I expected as much—closed and dark, at this hour! We drum all together on the door; in the most coaxing tones we call by name the waiting-maids we know so well: Mademoiselle Transparente, Mademoiselle Etoile, Mademoiselle Rosee-matinala, and Mademoiselle Margueritereine. Not an answer. Good-by, perfumed sherbets and frosted beans!

In front of the little archery-house our mousmes suddenly jump aside, terrified, declaring that there is a dead body on the ground. Yes, indeed, some one is lying there. We cautiously examine the place by the light of our red balloons, carefully held out at arm's length for fear of this dead man. It is only the marksman, he who on the 4th of July chose such magnificent arrows for Chrysantheme; and he sleeps, good man! with his chignon somewhat dishevelled, a sound sleep, which it would be cruel to disturb.

Let us go to the end of the terrace, contemplate the harbor at our feet, and then return home. To-night the harbor looks like only a dark and sinister rent, which the moonbeams can not fathom—a yawning crevasse opening into the very bowels of the earth, at the bottom of which lie faint, small glimmers, an assembly of glowworms in a ditch—the lights of the different vessels lying at anchor.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Dull hours spent in idle and diffuse conversation
Prayers swallowed like pills by invalids at a distance
Trees, dwarfed by a Japanese process
Which I should find amusing in any one else,—any one I loved

MADAME CHRYSANTHEME

By Pierre Loti

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XLVII

A MIDNIGHT ALARM

It is the middle of the night, perhaps about two o'clock in the morning. Our lamps are burning somewhat dimly before our placid idols. Chrysantheme wakes me suddenly, and I turn to look at her: she has raised herself on one arm, and her face expresses the most intense terror; she makes a sign, without daring to speak, that some one or something is near, creeping up to us. What ill-timed visit is this? A feeling of fear gains possession of me also. I have a rapid impression of some great unknown danger, in this isolated spot, in this strange country of which I do not even yet comprehend the inhabitants and the mysteries. It must be something very frightful to hold her there, rooted to the spot, half dead with fright, she who does comprehend all these things.



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It seems to be outside; it is coming from the garden; with trembling hand she indicates to me that it will come through the veranda, over Madame Prune's roof. Certainly, I hear faint noises, and they do approach us.

I suggest to her

"Neko-San?" ("It is Messieurs the cats?")

"No!" she replies, still terrified, and in an alarmed tone.

"Bakemono-Sama?" ("Is it my lords the ghosts?") I have already the Japanese habit of expressing myself with excessive politeness.

"No! 'Dorobo'!" ("Thieves!")

Thieves! Ah! this is better; I much prefer this to a visit such as I have just been dreading in the sudden awakening from sleep: from ghosts or spirits of the dead; thieves, that is to say, worthy fellows very much alive, and having, undoubtedly, inasmuch as they are Japanese thieves, faces of the most meritorious oddity. I am not in the least frightened, now that I know precisely what to expect, and we will immediately set to work to ascertain the truth, for something is certainly moving on Madame Prune's roof; some one is walking upon it.

I open one of our wooden panels and look out.

I can see only a vast expanse, calm, peaceful, and exquisite under the full brilliance of the moonlight; sleeping Japan, lulled by the sonorous song of the grasshoppers, is charming indeed to-night, and the free, pure air is delicious.

Chrysantheme, half hidden behind my shoulder, listens tremblingly, peering forward to examine the gardens and the roofs with dilated eyes like a frightened cat. No, nothing! not a thing moves. Here and there are a few strangely substantial shadows, which at first glance were not easy to explain, but which turn out to be real shadows, thrown by bits of wall, by boughs of trees, and which preserve an extremely reassuring stillness. Everything seems absolutely tranquil, and profound silence reigns in the dreamy vagueness which moonlight sheds over all.

Nothing; nothing to be seen anywhere. It was Messieurs the cats after all, or perhaps my ladies the owls; sounds increase in volume in the most amazing manner at night, in this house of ours.

Let us close the panel again carefully, as a measure of prudence, and then light a lantern and go downstairs to see whether there may be any one hidden in corners, and whether the doors are tightly shut; in short, to reassure Chrysantheme we will go the round of the house.



Behold us, then, on tiptoe, searching together every hole and corner of the house, which, to judge by its foundations, must be very ancient, notwithstanding the fragile appearance of its panels of white paper. It contains the blackest of cavities, little vaulted cellars with worm-eaten beams; cupboards for rice which smell of mould and decay; mysterious hollows where lies accumulated the dust of centuries. In the middle of the night, and during a hunt for thieves, this part of the house, as yet unknown to me, has an ugly look.

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Noiselessly we step across the apartment of our landlord and landlady. Chrysantheme drags me by the hand, and I allow myself to be led. There they are, sleeping in a row under their blue gauze tent, lighted by the night-lamps burning before the altars of their ancestors. Ha! I observe that they are arranged in an order which might give rise to gossip. First comes Mademoiselle Oyouki, very taking in her attitude of rest! Then Madame Prune, who sleeps with her mouth wide open, showing her rows of blackened teeth; from her throat arises an intermittent sound like the grunting of a sow. Oh! poor Madame Prune! how hideous she is!! Next, M. Sucre, a mere mummy for the time being. And finally, at his side, last of the row, is their servant, Mademoiselle Dede!

The gauze hanging over them throws reflections as of the sea upon them; one might suppose them victims drowned in an aquarium. And withal the sacred lamps, the altar crowded with strange Shintoist symbols, give a mock religious air to this family tableau.

'Honi soit qui mal y pense', but why is not that maidservant rather laid by the side of her mistresses? Now, when we on the floor above offer our hospitality to Yves, we are careful to place ourselves under our mosquito-net in a more correct style!

One corner, which as a last resort we inspect, inspires me with a certain amount of apprehension. It is a low, mysterious loft, against the door of which is stuck, as a thing no longer wanted, a very old, pious image Kwanon with the thousand arms, and Kwanon with the horses' head, seated among clouds and flames, both horrible to behold with their spectral grins.

We open the door, and Chrysantheme starts back uttering a fearful cry. I should have thought the robbers were there, had I not seen a little gray creature, rapid and noiseless, rush by her and disappear; a young rat that had been eating rice on the top of a shelf, and, in its alarm, had dashed in her face.

CHAPTER XLVIII

UNUSUAL HOSPITALITY

September 16th.

Yves has let fall his silver whistle in the ocean, the whistle so absolutely indispensable for the manoeuvres; and we search the town all day long, followed by Chrysantheme and Mesdemoiselles La Neige and La Lune, her sisters, in the endeavor to find another.

It is, however, very difficult to find such a thing in Nagasaki; above all, very difficult to explain in Japanese what is a sailor's whistle of the traditional shape, curved, and with a little ball at the end to modulate the trills and the various sounds of official orders. For three hours we are sent from shop to shop; at each one they pretend to understand perfectly what is wanted and trace on tissue-paper, with a paint-brush, the addresses of

the shops where we shall without fail meet with what we require. Away we go, full of hope, only to encounter some fresh mystification, till our breathless djins get quite bewildered.

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They understand admirably that we want a thing that will make a noise, music, in short; thereupon they offer us instruments of every, and of the most unexpected, shape—squeakers for Punch-and-Judy voices, dog-whistles, trumpets. Each time it is something more and more absurd, so that at last we are overcome with uncontrollable fits of laughter. Last of all, an aged Japanese optician, who assumes a most knowing air, a look of sublime wisdom, goes off to forage in his back shop, and brings to light a steam fog-horn, a relict from some wrecked steamer.

After dinner, the chief event of the evening is a deluge of rain, which takes us by surprise as we leave the teahouses, on our return from our fashionable stroll. It so happened that we were a large party, having with us several mousme guests, and from the moment that the rain began to fall from the skies, as if out of a watering-pot turned upside down, the band became disorganized. The mousmes run off, with bird-like cries, and take refuge under doorways, in the shops, under the hoods of the djins.

Then, before long—when the shops shut up in haste, when the emptied streets are flooded, and almost black, and the paper lanterns, piteous objects, wet through and extinguished—I find myself, I know not how it happens, flattened against a wall, under the projecting eaves, alone in the company of Mademoiselle Fraise, my cousin, who is crying bitterly because her fine robe is wet through. And in the noise of the rain, which is still falling, and splashing everything with the spouts and gutters, which in the darkness plaintively murmur like running streams, the town appears to me suddenly an abode of the gloomiest sadness.

The shower is soon over, and the mousmes come out of their holes like so many mice; they look for one another, call one another, and their little voices take the singular, melancholy, dragging inflections they assume whenever they have to call from afar.

“Hi! Mademoiselle Lu-u-u-u-une!”

“Hi! Madame Jonqui-i-i-i-ille!”

They shout from one to another their outlandish names, prolonging them indefinitely in the now silent night, in the reverberations of the damp air after the great summer rain.

At length they are all collected and united again, these tiny personages with narrow eyes and no brains, and we return to Diou-djen-dji all wet through.

For the third time, we have Yves sleeping beside us under our blue tent.

There is a great noise shortly after midnight in the apartment beneath us: our landlord's family have returned from a pilgrimage to a far-distant temple of the Goddess of Grace. (Although Madame Prune is a Shintoist, she reveres this deity, who, scandal says, watched over her youth.) A moment after, Mademoiselle Oyouki bursts into our room

like a rocket, bringing, on a charming little tray, sweetmeats which have been blessed and bought at the gates of the temple yonder, on purpose for us, and which we must positively eat at once, before the virtue is gone out of them. Hardly rousing ourselves, we absorb these little edibles flavored with sugar and pepper, and return a great many sleepy thanks.

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Yves sleeps quietly on this occasion, without dealing any blows to the floor or the panels with either fists or feet. He has hung his watch on one of the hands of our gilded idol in order to be more sure of seeing the hour at any time of the night, by the light of the sacred lamps. He gets up betimes in the morning, asking: "Well, did I behave properly?" and dresses in haste, preoccupied about duty and the roll-call.

Outside, no doubt, it is daylight already: through the tiny holes which time has pierced in our wooden panels, threads of morning light penetrate our chamber, and in the atmosphere of our room where night still lingers, they trace vague white rays. Soon, when the sun shall have risen, these rays will lengthen and become beautifully golden. The cocks and the cicalas make themselves heard, and now Madame Prune will begin her mystic drone.

Nevertheless, out of politeness for Yves-San, Chrysantheme lights a lantern and escorts him to the foot of the dark staircase. I even fancy that, on parting, I hear a kiss exchanged. In Japan this is of no consequence, I know; it is very usual, and quite admissible; no matter where one goes, in houses one enters for the first time, one is quite at liberty to kiss any mousme who may be present, without any notice being taken of it. But with regard to Chrysantheme, Yves is in a delicate position, and he ought to understand it better. I begin to feel uneasy about the hours they have so often spent together alone; and I make up my mind that this very day I will not play the spy upon them, but speak frankly to Yves, and make a clean breast of it.

Suddenly from below, clac! clac! two dry hands are clapped together; it is Madame Prune's warning to the Great Spirit. And immediately after her prayer breaks forth, soars upward in a shrill nasal falsetto, like a morning alarum when the hour for waking has come, the mechanical noise of a spring let go and running down.

" . . . The richest woman in the world! Cleansed from all my sins, O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami! in the river of Kamo."

And this extraordinary bleating, hardly human, scatters and changes my ideas, which were very nearly clear at the moment I awoke.

CHAPTER XLIX

RUMORS OF DEPARTURE

September 15th.

Rumor of departure is in the air. Since yesterday there has been vague talk of our being sent to China, to the Gulf of Peking; one of those rumors which spread, no one knows how, from one end of the ship to the other, two or three days before the official orders arrive, and which usually turn out tolerably correct. What will the last act of my



little Japanese comedy be? the denouement, the separation? Will there be any touch of sadness on the part of my mousme, or on my own, just a tightening of the heartstrings at the moment of our final farewell? At this moment I can imagine nothing of the sort. And then the adieus of Yves and Chrysantheme, what will they be? This question preoccupies me more than all.

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Nothing very definite has been learned as yet, but it is certain that, one way or another, our stay in Japan is drawing to a close. It is this, perhaps, which disposes me this evening to look more kindly on my surroundings. It is about six o'clock, after a day spent on duty, when I reach Diou-djen-dji. The evening sun, low in the sky, on the point of setting, pours into my room, and floods it with rays of red gold, lighting up the Buddhas and the great sheaves of quaintly arranged flowers in the antique vases. Here are assembled five or six little dolls, my neighbors, amusing themselves by dancing to the sound of Chrysantheme's guitar. And this evening I experienced a real charm in feeling that this dwelling and the woman who leads the dance are mine. On the whole, I have perhaps been unjust to this country; it seems to me that my eyes are at last opened to see it in its true light, that all my senses are undergoing a strange and abrupt transition. I suddenly have a better perception and appreciation of all the infinity of dainty trifles among which I live; of the fragile and studied grace of their forms, the oddity of their drawings, the refined choice of their colors.

I stretch myself upon the white mats; Chrysantheme, always eagerly attentive, brings me my pillow of serpent's-skin; and the smiling mousmes, with the interrupted rhythm of a while ago still running in their heads, move around me with measured steps.

Their immaculate socks with the separate great toes make no noise; nothing is heard, as they glide by, but a 'froufrou' of silken stuffs. I find them all pleasant to look upon; their dollish air pleases me now, and I fancy I have discovered what it is that gives it to them: it is not only their round, inexpressive faces with eyebrows far removed from the eyelids, but the excessive amplitude of their dress. With those huge sleeves, it might be supposed they have neither back nor shoulders; their delicate figures are lost in these wide robes, which float around what might be little marionettes without bodies at all, and which would slip to the ground of themselves were they not kept together midway, about where a waist should be, by the wide silken sashes—a very different comprehension of the art of dressing to ours, which endeavors as much as possible to bring into relief the curves, real or false, of the figure.

And then, how much I admire the flowers in our vases, arranged by Chrysantheme, with her Japanese taste lotus-flowers, great, sacred flowers of a tender, veined rose color, the milky rose-tint seen on porcelain; they resemble, when in full bloom, great water-lilies, and when only in bud might be taken for long pale tulips. Their soft but rather cloying scent is added to that other indefinable odor of mousmes, of yellow race, of Japan, which is always and everywhere in the air. The late flowers of September, at this season very rare and expensive, grow on longer stems than the summer blooms; Chrysantheme has left them in their large aquatic leaves of a melancholy seaweed-green, and mingled with them tall, slight rushes. I look at them, and recall with some irony those great round bunches in the shape of cauliflowers, which our florists sell in France, wrapped in white lace-paper!

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Still no letters from Europe, from any one. How things change, become effaced and forgotten! Here am I, accommodating myself to this finical Japan and dwindling down to its affected mannerism; I feel that my thoughts run in smaller grooves, my tastes incline to smaller things-things which suggest nothing greater than a smile. I am becoming used to tiny and ingenious furniture, to doll-like desks, to miniature bowls with which to play at dinner, to the immaculate monotony of the mats, to the finely finished simplicity of the white woodwork. I am even losing my Western prejudices; all my preconceived ideas are this evening evaporating and vanishing; crossing the garden I have courteously saluted M. Sucre, who was watering his dwarf shrubs and his deformed flowers; and Madame Prune appears to me a highly respectable old lady, in whose past there is nothing to criticise.

We shall take no walk to-night; my only wish is to remain stretched out where I am, listening to the music of my mousme's 'chamecen'.

Till now I have always used the word guitar, to avoid exotic terms, for the abuse of which I have been so reproached. But neither the word guitar nor mandolin suffices to designate this slender instrument with its long neck, the high notes of which are shriller than the voice of the grasshopper; and henceforth, I will write 'chamecen'.

I will also call my mousme Kikou, Kikou-San; this name suits her better than Chrysantheme, which, though translating the sense exactly, does not preserve the strange-sounding euphony of the original.

I therefore say to Kikou, my wife:

"Play, play on for me; I shall remain here all the evening and listen to you."

Astonished to find me in so amiable a mood, she requires pressing a little, and with almost a bitter curve of triumph and disdain upon her lips, she seats herself in the attitude of an idol, raises her long, dark-colored sleeves, and begins. The first hesitating notes are murmured faintly and mingle with the music of the insects humming outside, in the quiet air of the warm and golden twilight. First she plays slowly, a confused medley of fragments which she does not seem to remember perfectly, of which one waits for the finish and waits in vain; while the other girls giggle, inattentive, and regretful of their interrupted dance. She herself is absent, sulky, as if she were only performing a duty.

Then by degrees, little by little, the music becomes more animated, and the mousmes begin to listen. Now, tremblingly, it grows into a feverish rapidity, and her gaze has no longer the vacant stare of a doll. Then the music changes again; in it there is the sighing of the wind, the hideous laughter of ghouls; tears, heartrending plaints, and her dilated pupils seem to be directed inwardly in settled gaze on some indescribable Japanesery within her own soul.



I listen, lying there with eyes half shut, looking out between my drooping eyelids, which are gradually lowering, in involuntary heaviness, upon the enormous red sun dying away over Nagasaki. I have a somewhat melancholy feeling that my past life and all other places in the world are receding from my view and fading away. At this moment of nightfall I feel almost at home in this corner of Japan, amidst the gardens of this suburb. I never have had such an impression before.



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CHAPTER L

A DOLLS' DUET

September 16th.

Seven o'clock in the evening. We shall not go down into Nagasaki tonight; but, like good Japanese citizens, remain in our lofty suburb.

In undress uniform we shall go, Yves and I, in a neighborly way, as far as the fencing-gallery, which is only two steps away, just above our villa, and almost abutting on our fresh and scented garden.

The gallery is closed already, and a little mousko, seated at the door, explains, with many low bows, that we come too late, all the amateurs are gone; we must come again tomorrow.

The evening is so mild and fine that we remain out of doors, following, without any definite purpose, the pathway which rises ever higher and higher, and loses itself at length in the solitary regions of the mountain among the upper peaks.

For an hour at least we wander on—an unintended walk—and finally find ourselves at a great height commanding an endless perspective lighted by the last gleams of daylight; we are in a desolate and mournful spot, in the midst of the little Buddhist cemeteries, which are scattered over the country in every direction.

We meet a few belated laborers, who are returning from the fields with bundles of tea upon their shoulders. These peasants have a half-savage air. They are half naked, too, or clothed only in long robes of blue cotton; as they pass, they salute us with humble bows.

No trees in this elevated region. Fields of tea alternate with tombs: old granite statues which represent Buddha in his lotus, or else old monumental stones on which gleam remains of inscriptions in golden letters. Rocks, brushwood, uncultivated spaces, surround us on all sides.

We meet no more passers-by, and the light is failing. We will halt for a moment, and then it will be time to turn our steps homeward.

But, close to the spot where we stand, a box of white wood provided with handles, a sort of sedan-chair, rests on the freshly disturbed earth, with its lotus of silvered paper, and the little incense-sticks, burning yet, by its side; clearly some one has been buried here this very evening.

I can not picture this personage to myself; the Japanese are so grotesque in life that it is almost impossible to imagine them in the calm majesty of death. Nevertheless, let us move farther on, we might disturb him; he is too recently dead, his presence unnerves us. We will go and seat ourselves on one of these other tombs, so unutterably ancient that there can no longer be anything within it but dust. And there, seated in the dying sunlight, while the valleys and plains of the earth below are already lost in shadow, we will talk together.

I wish to speak to Yves about Chrysantheme; it is indeed somewhat in view of this that I have persuaded him to sit down; but how to set about it without hurting his feelings, and without making myself ridiculous, I hardly know. However, the pure air playing round me up here, and the magnificent landscape spread beneath my feet, impart a certain serenity to my thoughts which makes me feel a contemptuous pity, both for my suspicions and the cause of them.

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We speak, first of all, of the order for departure, which may arrive at any moment, for China or for France. Soon we shall have to leave this easy and almost amusing life, this Japanese suburb where chance has installed us, and our little house buried among flowers. Yves perhaps will regret all this more than I. I know that well enough; for it is the first time that any such interlude has broken the rude monotony of his hard-worked career. Formerly, when in an inferior rank, he was hardly more often on shore, in foreign countries, than the sea-gulls themselves; while I, from the very beginning, have been spoiled by residence in all sorts of charming spots, infinitely superior to this, in all sorts of countries, and the remembrance still haunts me pleasurably.

In order to discover how the land lies, I risk the remark:

“You will perhaps be more sorry to leave little Chrysantheme than I.”

Silence reigns between us.

After which I go on, and, burning my ships, I add:

“You know, after all, if you have such a fancy for her, I haven’t really married her; one can’t really consider her my wife.”

In great surprise he looks in my face.

“Not your wife, you say? But, by Jove, though, that’s just it; she is your wife.”

There is no need of many words at any time between us two; I know exactly now, by his tone, by his great good-humored smile, how the case stands; I understand all that lies in the little phrase: “That’s just it, she is your wife.” If she were not, well, then, he could not answer for what might happen—notwithstanding any remorse he might have in the depths of his heart, since he is no longer a bachelor and free as air, as in former days. But he considers her my wife, and she is sacred. I have the fullest faith in his word, and I experience a positive relief, a real joy, at finding my staunch Yves of bygone days. How could I have so succumbed to the demeaning influence of my surroundings as to suspect him even, and to invent for myself such a mean, petty anxiety?

We never shall even mention that doll again.

We remain up there very late, talking of other things, gazing at the immense depths below, at the valleys and mountains as they become, one by one, indistinct and lost in the deepening darkness. Placed as we are at an enormous height, in the wide, free atmosphere, we seem already to have quitted this miniature country, already to be freed from the impression of littleness which it has given us, and from the little links by which it was beginning to bind—us to itself.

Seen from such heights as these, all the countries of the globe bear a strong resemblance to one another; they lose the imprint made upon them by man, and by races; by all the atoms swarming on the surface.

As of old, in the Breton marshes, in the woods of Toulven, or at sea in the night-watches, we talk of all those things to which thoughts naturally revert in darkness; of ghosts, of spirits, of eternity, of the great hereafter, of chaos—and we entirely forget little Chrysantheme!

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When we arrive at Diou-djen-dji in the starry night, the music of her 'chamecen', heard from afar, recalls to us her existence; she is studying some vocal duet with Mademoiselle Oyouki, her pupil.

I feel myself in very good humor this evening, and, relieved from my absurd suspicions about my poor Yves, am quite disposed to enjoy without reserve my last days in Japan, and to derive therefrom all the amusement possible.

Let us then repose ourselves on the dazzling white mats, and listen to the singular duet sung by those two mousmes: a strange musical medley, slow and mournful, beginning with two or three high notes, and descending at each couplet, in an almost imperceptible manner, into actual solemnity. The song keeps its dragging slowness; but the accompaniment, becoming more and more accentuated, is like the impetuous sound of a far-off hurricane. At the end, when these girlish voices, usually so soft, give out their hoarse and guttural notes, Chrysantheme's hands fly wildly and convulsively over the quivering strings. Both of them lower their heads, pout their underlips in the effort to bring out these astonishingly deep notes. And at these moments their little narrow eyes open, and seem to reveal an unexpected something, almost a soul, under these trappings of marionettes.

But it is a soul which more than ever appears to me of a different species from my own; I feel my thoughts to be as far removed from theirs as from the flitting conceptions of a bird, or the dreams of a monkey; I feel there is between them and myself a great gulf, mysterious and awful.

Other sounds of music, wafted to us from the distance, interrupt for a moment those of our mousmes. From the depths below, in Nagasaki, arises a sudden noise of gongs and guitars; we rush to the balcony of the veranda to hear it better.

It is a 'matsouri', a fete, a procession passing through the quarter which is not so virtuous as our own, so our mousmes tell us, with a disdainful toss of the head. Nevertheless, from the heights on which we dwell, seen thus in a bird's-eye view, by the uncertain light of the stars, this district has a singularly chaste air, and the concert going on therein, purified in its ascent from the depths of the abyss to our lofty altitudes, reaches us confusedly, a smothered, enchanted, enchanting sound.

Then it diminishes, and dies away into silence.

The two little friends return to their seats on the mats, and once more take up their melancholy duet. An orchestra, discreetly subdued but innumerable, of crickets and cicalas, accompanies them in an unceasing tremolo—the immense, far-reaching tremolo, which, gentle and eternal, never ceases in Japan.



CHAPTER LI

THE LAST DAY

September 17th

At the hour of siesta, a peremptory order arrives to start tomorrow for China, for Tchefou (a terrible place, in the gulf of Pekin). Yves comes to wake me in my cabin to bring me the news.



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"I must positively get leave to go on shore this evening," he says, while I endeavor to shake myself awake, "if it is only to help you to dismantle and pack up."

He gazes through my port-hole, raising his glance toward the green summits, in the direction of Diou-djen-dji and our echoing old cottage, hidden from us by a turn of the mountain.

It is very nice of him to wish to help me in my packing; but I think he counts also upon saying farewell to his little Japanese friends up there, and I really can not find fault with that.

He finishes his work, and does in fact obtain leave, without help from me, to go on shore at five o'clock, after drill and manoeuvres.

As for myself I start at once, in a hired sampan. In the vast flood of midday sunshine, to the quivering noise of the cicalas, I mount to Diou-djen-dji.

The paths are solitary, the plants are drooping in the heat. Here, however, is Madame Jonquille, taking the air in the bright, grasshoppers' sunshine, sheltering her dainty figure and her charming face under an enormous paper parasol, a huge circle, closely ribbed and fantastically striped.

She recognizes me from afar, and, laughing as usual, runs to meet me.

I announce our departure, and a tearful pout suddenly contracts her childish face. After all, does this news grieve her? Is she about to shed tears over it? No! it turns to a fit of laughter, a little nervous perhaps, but unexpected and disconcerting—dry and clear, peeling through the silence and warmth of the narrow paths, like a cascade of little mock pearls.

Ah, there indeed is a marriage-tie which will be broken without much pain! But she fills me with impatience, poor empty-headed linnet, with her laughter, and I turn my back upon her to continue my journey.

Above-stairs, Chrysantheme sleeps, stretched out on the floor; the house is wide open, and the soft mountain breeze rustles gently through it.

That same evening we had intended to give a tea-party, and by my orders flowers had already been placed in every nook and corner of the house. There were lotus in our vases, beautifully colored lotus, the last of the season, I verily believe. They must have been ordered from a special gardener, out yonder near the Great Temple, and they will cost me dear.

With a few gentle taps of a fan I awake my surprised mousme; and, curious to catch her first impressions, I announce my departure. She starts up, rubs her eyelids with the



backs of her little hands, looks at me, and hangs her head: something like an expression of sadness passes in her eyes.

This little sinking at the heart is for Yves, no doubt!

The news spreads through the house.

Mademoiselle Oyouki dashes upstairs, with half a tear in each of her babyish eyes; kisses me with her full red lips, which always leave a wet ring on my cheek; then quickly draws from her wide sleeve a square of tissue-paper, wipes away her stealthy tears, blows her little nose, rolls the bit of paper in a ball, and throws it into the street on the parasol of a passer-by.

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Then Madame Prune makes her appearance; in an agitated and discomposed manner she successively adopts every attitude expressive of dismay. What on earth is the matter with the old lady, and why does she keep getting closer and closer to me, till she is almost in my way?

It is wonderful to think of all that I still have to do this last day, and the endless drives I have to make to the old curiosity-shops, to my tradespeople, and to the packers.

Nevertheless, before my rooms are dismantled, I intend making a sketch of them, as I did formerly at Stamboul. It really seems to me as if all I do here is a bitter parody of all I did over there.

This time, however, it is not that I care for this dwelling; it is only because it is pretty and uncommon, and the sketch will be an interesting souvenir.

I fetch, therefore, a leaf out of my album, and begin at once, seated on the floor and leaning on my desk, ornamented with grasshoppers in relief, while behind me, very, very close to me, the three women follow the movements of my pencil with astonished attention. Japanese art being entirely conventional, they have never before seen any one draw from nature, and my style delights them. I may not perhaps possess the steady and nimble touch of M. Sucre, as he groups his charming storks, but I am master of a few notions of perspective which are wanting in him; and I have been taught to draw things as I see them, without giving them an ingeniously distorted and grimacing attitudes; and the three Japanese are amazed at the air of reality displayed in my sketch.

With little shrieks of admiration, they point out to one another the different things, as little by little their shape and form are outlined in black on my paper. Chrysantheme gazes at me with a new kind of interest "Anata itchiban!" she says (literally "Thou first!" meaning: "You are really quite wonderful!")

Mademoiselle Oyouki is carried away by her admiration, and exclaims, in a burst of enthusiasm:

"Anata bakari!" ("Thou alone!" that is to say: "There is no one like you in the world, all the rest are mere rubbish!")

Madame Prune says nothing, but I can see that she does not think the less; her languishing attitudes, her hand that at each moment gently touches mine, confirm the suspicions that her look of dismay a few moments ago awoke within me: evidently my physical charms speak to her imagination, which in spite of years has remained full of romance! I shall leave with the regret of having understood her too late!



Although the ladies are satisfied with my sketch, I am far from being so. I have put everything in its place most exactly, but as a whole, it has an ordinary, indifferent, French look which does not suit. The sentiment is not given, and I almost wonder whether I should not have done better to falsify the perspective—Japanese style—exaggerating to the very utmost the already abnormal outlines of

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what I see before me. And then the pictured dwelling lacks the fragile look and its sonority, that reminds one of a dry violin. In the pencilled delineation of the woodwork, the minute delicacy with which it is wrought is wanting; neither have I been able to give an idea of the extreme antiquity, the perfect cleanliness, nor the vibrating song of the cicalas that seems to have been stored away within it, in its parched-up fibres, during hundreds of summers. It does not convey, either, the impression this place gives of being in a far-off suburb, perched aloft among trees, above the drollest of towns. No, all this can not be drawn, can not be expressed, but remains undemonstrable, indefinable.

Having sent out our invitations, we shall, in spite of everything, give our tea-party this evening—a parting tea, therefore, in which we shall display as much pomp as possible. It is, moreover, rather my custom to wind up my exotic experiences with a fete; in other countries I have done the same.

Besides our usual set, we shall have my mother-in-law, my relatives, and all the mousmes of the neighborhood. But, by an extra Japanese refinement, we shall not admit a single European friend—not even the “amazingly tall” one. Yves alone shall be admitted, and even he shall be hidden away in a corner behind some flowers and works of art.

In the last glimmer of twilight, by the light of the first twinkling star, the ladies, with many charming curtseys, make their appearance. Our house is soon full of the little crouching women, with their tiny slit eyes vaguely smiling; their beautifully dressed hair shining like polished ebony; their fragile bodies lost in the many folds of the exaggerated, wide garments, that gape as if ready to drop from their little tapering backs and reveal the exquisite napes of their little necks.

Chrysantheme, with somewhat a melancholy air, and my mother-in-law, Madame Renoncule, with many affected graces busy themselves in the midst of the different groups, where ere long the miniature pipes are lighted. Soon there arises a murmuring sound of discreet laughter, expressing nothing, but having a pretty exotic ring about it, and then begins a harmony of tap! tap! tap!—sharp, rapid taps against the edges of the finely lacquered smoking-boxes. Pickled and spiced fruits are handed round on trays of quaint and varied shapes. Then transparent china teacups, no larger than half an egg-shell, make their appearance, and the ladies are offered a few drops of sugarless tea, poured out of toy kettles, or a sip of ‘saki’—(a spirit made from rice which it is the custom to serve hot, in elegantly shaped vases, long-necked like a heron’s throat).

Several mousmes execute, one after another, improvisations on the ‘chamecen’. Others sing in sharp, high voices, hopping about continually, like cicalas in delirium.



Madame Prune, no longer able to make a mystery of the long-pent up feelings that agitate her, pays me the most marked and tender attentions, and begs my acceptance of a quantity of little souvenirs: an image, a little vase, a little porcelain goddess of the moon in Satsuma ware, a marvellously grotesque ivory figure;—I tremblingly follow her into the dark corners whither she calls me to give me these presents in tete-a-tete.



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About nine o'clock, with a silken rustling, arrive the three geishas in vogue in Nagasaki: Mesdemoiselles Purete, Orange, and Printemps, whom I have hired at four dollars each—an enormous price in this country.

These three geishas are indeed the very same little creatures I heard singing on the rainy day of my arrival, through the thin panelling of the Garden of Flowers. But as I have now become thoroughly Japanized, today they appear to me more diminutive, less outlandish, and in no way mysterious. I treat them rather as dancers that I have hired, and the idea that I ever had thought of marrying one of them now makes me shrug my shoulders—as it formerly made M. Kangourou.

The excessive heat caused by the respiration of the mousmes and the burning lamps, brings out the perfume of the lotus, which fills the heavy-laden atmosphere; and the scent of camellia-oil, which the ladies use in profusion to make their hair glisten, is also strong in the room.

Mademoiselle Orange, the youngest geisha, tiny and dainty, her lips outlined with gilt paint, executes some delightful steps, donning the most extraordinary wigs and masks of wood or cardboard. She has masks imitating old, noble ladies which are valuable works of art, signed by well-known artists. She has also magnificent long robes, fashioned in the old style, with trains trimmed at the bottom with thick pads, in order to give to the movements of the costume something rigid and unnatural which, however, is becoming.

Now the soft balmy breezes blow through the room, from one veranda to the other, making the flames of the lamps flicker. They scatter the lotus flowers faded by the artificial heat, which, falling in pieces from every vase, sprinkle the guests with their pollen and large pink petals, looking like bits of broken, opal-colored glass.

The sensational piece, reserved for the end, is a trio on the 'chamecen', long and monotonous, that the geishas perform as a rapid pizzicato on the highest strings, very sharply struck. It sounds like the very quintessence, the paraphrase, the exasperation, if I may so call it, of the eternal buzz of insects, which issues from the trees, old roofs, old walls, from everything in fact, and which is the foundation of all Japanese sounds.

Half-past ten! The programme has been carried out, and the reception is over. A last general tap! tap! tap! the little pipes are stowed away in their chased sheaths, tied up in the sashes, and the mousmes rise to depart.

They light, at the end of short sticks, a quantity of red, gray, or blue lanterns, and after a series of endless bows and curtseys, the guests disperse in the darkness of the lanes and trees.

We also go down to the town, Yves, Chrysantheme, Oyouki and I—in order to conduct my mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and my youthful aunt, Madame Nenufar, to their house.

We wish to take one last stroll together in our old familiar pleasure-haunts, to drink one more iced sherbet at the house of the Indescribable Butterflies, buy one more lantern at Madame Tres-Propre's, and eat some parting waffles at Madame L'Heure's!

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I try to be affected, moved, by this leave-taking, but without success. In regard to Japan, as with the little men and women who inhabit it, there is something decidedly wanting; pleasant enough as a mere pastime, it begets no feeling of attachment.

On our return, when I am once more with Yves and the two mousmes climbing up the road to Diou-djen-dji, which I shall probably never see again, a vague feeling of melancholy pervades my last stroll.

It is, however, but the melancholy inseparable from all things that are about to end without possibility of return.

Moreover, this calm and splendid summer is also drawing to a close for us—since tomorrow we shall go forth to meet the autumn, in Northern China. I am beginning, alas! to count the youthful summers I may still hope for; I feel more gloomy each time another fades away, and flies to rejoin the others already disappeared in the dark and bottomless abyss, where all past things lie buried.

At midnight we return home, and my removal begins; while on board the “amazingly tall friend” kindly takes my watch.

It is a nocturnal, rapid, stealthy removal—“doyobo (thieves) fashion,” remarks Yves, who in visiting the mousmes has picked up a smattering of the Nipponese language.

Messieurs the packers have, at my request, sent in the evening several charming little boxes, with compartments and false bottoms, and several paper bags (in the untearable Japanese paper), which close of themselves and are fastened by strings, also in paper, arranged beforehand in the most ingenious manner—quite the cleverest and most handy thing of its kind; for little useful trifles these people are unrivalled.

It is a real treat to pack them, and everybody lends a helping hand—Yves, Chrysantheme, Madame Prune, her daughter, and M. Sucre. By the glimmer of the reception-lamps, which are still burning, every one wraps, rolls, and ties up expeditiously, for it is already late.

Although Oyouki has a heavy heart, she can not prevent herself from indulging in a few bursts of childish laughter while she works.

Madame Prune, bathed in tears, no longer restrains her feelings; poor old lady, I really very much regret

Chrysantheme is absent-minded and silent.

But what a fearful amount of luggage! Eighteen cases or parcels, containing Buddhas, chimeras, and vases, without mentioning the last lotus that I carry away tied up in a pink cluster.

All this is piled up in the djins' carts, hired at sunset, which are waiting at the door, while their runners lie asleep on the grass.

A starlit and exquisite night. We start off with lighted lanterns, followed by the three sorrowful ladies who accompany us, and by abrupt slopes, dangerous in the darkness, we descend toward the sea.

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The djins, stiffening their muscular legs, hold back with all their might the heavily loaded little cars which would run down by themselves if let alone, and that so rapidly that they would rush into empty space with my most valuable chattels. Chrysantheme walks by my side, and expresses, in a soft and winning manner, her regret that the “wonderfully tall friend” did not offer to replace me for the whole of my night-watch, as that would have allowed me to spend this last night, even till morning, under our roof.

“Listen!” she says, “come back to-morrow in the daytime, before getting under way, to bid one good-by; I shall not return to my mother until evening; you will find me still up there.”

And I promise.

They stop at a certain turn, whence we have a bird's-eye view of the whole harbor. The black, stagnant waters reflect innumerable distant fires, and the ships—tiny, immovable objects, which, seen from our point of view, take the shape of fish, seem also to slumber,—little objects which serve to bear us elsewhere, to go far away, and to forget.

The three ladies are about to turn back home, for the night is already far advanced and, farther down, the cosmopolitan quarters near the quays are not safe at this unusual hour.

The moment has therefore come for Yves—who will not land again—to make his last tragic farewells to his friends the little mousmes.

I am very curious to see the parting between Yves and Chrysantheme; I listen with all my ears, I look with all my eyes, but it takes place in the simplest and quietest fashion: none of that heartbreaking which will be inevitable between Madame Prune and myself; I even notice in my mousme an indifference, an unconcern which puzzles me; I positively am at a loss to understand what it all means.

And I muse as I continue to descend toward the sea. “Her appearance of sadness was not, therefore, on Yves’s account. On whose, then?” and the phrase runs through my head:

“Come back to-morrow before setting sail, to bid me goodbye; I shall not return to my mother until evening; you will find me still up there.”

Japan is indeed most delightful this evening, so fresh and so sweet; and little Chrysantheme was very charming just now, as she silently walked beside me through the darkness of the lane.

It is about two o'clock when we reach the ‘Triomphante’ in a hired sampan, where I have heaped up all my cases till there is danger of sinking. The “very tall friend” gives over to



me the watch that I must keep till four o'clock; and the sailors on duty, but half awake, make a chain in the darkness, to haul on board all my fragile luggage.

CHAPTER LII

"Farewell!"

September 18th.

I intended to sleep late this morning, in order to make up for my lost sleep of last night.

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But at eight o'clock three persons of the most extraordinary appearance, led by M. Kangourou, present themselves with profound bows at the door of my cabin. They are arrayed in long robes bedizened with dark patterns; they have the flowing locks, high foreheads, and pallid countenances of persons too exclusively devoted to the fine arts; and, perched on the top of their coiffures, they wear sailor hats of English shape tipped jauntily on one side. Tucked under their arms, they carry portfolios filled with sketches; in their hands are boxes of water-colors, pencils, and, bound together like fasces, a bundle of fine stylets with the sharp and glittering points.

At the first glance, even in the bewilderment of waking up, I gather from their appearance what their errand is, and guessing with what visitors I have to deal, I say: "Come in, Messieurs the tattooers!"

These are the specialists most in renown in Nagasaki; I had engaged them two days ago, not knowing that we were about to leave, and since they are here I will not turn them away.

My friendly and intimate relations with primitive man, in Oceania and elsewhere, have imbued me with a deplorable taste for tattoo-work; and I had wished to carry away on my own person, as a curiosity, an ornament, a specimen of the work of the Japanese tattooers, who have a delicacy of finish which is unequalled.

From their albums spread out upon my table I make my choice. There are some remarkably odd designs among them, appropriate to the different parts of the human body: emblems for the arms and legs, sprays of roses for the shoulders, great grinning faces for the middle of the back. There are even, to suit the taste of their clients who belong to foreign navies, trophies of arms, American and French flags entwined, a "God Save the Queen" amid encircling stars, and figures of women taken from Grevin's sketches in the Journal Amusant.

My choice rests upon a singular blue and pink dragon two inches long, which will have a fine effect upon my chest on the side opposite the heart.

Then follows an hour and a half of irritation and positive pain. Stretched out on my bunk and delivered over to the tender mercies of these personages, I stiffen myself and submit to the million imperceptible pricks they inflict. When by chance a little blood flows, confusing the outline by a stream of red, one of the artists hastens to stanch it with his lips, and I make no objections, knowing that this is the Japanese manner, the method used by their doctors for the wounds of both man and beast.

A piece of work, as minute and fine as that of an engraver upon stone, is slowly executed on my person; and their lean hands harrow and worry me with automatic precision.

Finally it is finished, and the tattooers, falling back with an air of satisfaction to contemplate their work, declare it to be lovely.

I dress myself quickly to go on shore, to take advantage of my last hours in Japan.

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The heat is fearful to-day: the powerful September sun falls with a certain melancholy upon the yellowing leaves; it is a day of clear burning heat after an almost chilly morning.

As I did yesterday, I ascend to my lofty suburb, during the drowsy noontime, by deserted pathways filled only with light and silence.

I noiselessly open the door of my dwelling, and enter cautiously on tiptoe, for fear of Madame Prune.

At the foot of the staircase, upon the white mats, beside the little sabots and tiny sandals which are always lying about in the vestibule, a great array of luggage is ready for departure, which I recognize at a glance-pretty, dark robes, familiar to my sight, carefully folded and wrapped in blue towels tied at the four corners. I even fancy I feel a little sad when I catch sight of a corner of the famous box of letters and souvenirs peeping out of one of these bundles, in which my portrait by Ureno now reposes among divers photographs of mousmes. A sort of long-necked mandolin, also ready for departure, lies on the top of the pile in its case of figured silk. It resembles the flitting of some gipsy, or rather it reminds me of an engraving in a book of fables I owned in my childhood: the whole thing is exactly like the slender wardrobe and the long guitar which the cicala who had sung all the summer, carried upon her back when she knocked at the door of her neighbor the ant.

Poor little gipsy!

I mount the steps on tiptoe, and stop at the sound of singing that I hear in my room.

It is undoubtedly Chrysantheme's voice, and the song is quite cheerful! This chills me and changes the current of my thoughts. I am almost sorry I have taken the trouble to come.

Mingled with the song is a noise I can not understand: Chink! chink! a clear metallic ring as of coins flung vigorously on the floor. I am well aware that this vibrating house exaggerates every sound during the silence of night; but all the same, I am puzzled to know what my mousme can be doing. Chink! chink! is she amusing herself with quoits, or the 'jeu du crapaud', or pitch-and-toss?

Nothing of the kind! I fancy I have guessed, and I continue my upward progress still more gently, on all fours, with the precautions of a red Indian, to give myself for the last time the pleasure of surprising her.

She has not heard me come in. In our great white room, emptied and swept out, where the clear sunshine pours in, and the soft wind, and the yellowed leaves of the garden,

she is sitting all alone, her back turned to the door; she is dressed for walking, ready to go to her mother's, her rose-colored parasol beside her.

On the floor are spread out all the fine silver dollars which, according to our agreement, I had given her the evening before. With the competent dexterity of an old money-changer she fingers them, turns them over, throws them on the floor, and, armed with a little mallet ad hoc, rings them vigorously against her ear, singing the while I know not what little pensive bird-like song which I daresay she improvises as she goes along.

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Well, after all, it is even more completely Japanese than I could possibly have imagined it—this last scene of my married life! I feel inclined to laugh. How simple I have been, to allow myself to be taken in by the few clever words she whispered yesterday, as she walked beside me, by a tolerably pretty little phrase embellished as it was by the silence of two o'clock in the morning, and all the wonderful enchantments of night.

Ah! not more for Yves than for me, not more for me than for Yves, has any feeling passed through that little brain, that little heart.

When I have looked at her long enough, I call:

“Hi! Chrysantheme!”

She turns confused, and reddening even to her ears at having been caught at this work.

She is quite wrong, however, to be so much troubled, for I am, on the contrary, delighted. The fear that I might be leaving her in some sadness had almost given me a pang, and I infinitely prefer that this marriage should end as it had begun, in a joke.

“That is a good idea of yours,” I say; “a precaution which should always be taken in this country of yours, where so many evil-minded people are clever in forging money. Make haste and get through it before I start, and if any false pieces have found their way into the number, I will willingly replace them.”

However, she refuses to continue before me, and I expected as much; to do so would have been contrary to all her notions of politeness, hereditary and acquired, all her conventionality, all her Japanesery. With a disdainful little foot, clothed as usual in exquisite socks, with a special hood for the great toe, she pushes away the piles of white dollars and scatters them on the mats.

“We have hired a large, covered sampan,” she says to change the conversation, “and we are all going together—Campanule, Jonquille, Touki, all your mousmes—to watch your vessel set sail. Pray sit down and stay a few minutes.”

“No, I really can not stay. I have several things to do in the town, you see, and the order was given for every one to be on board by three o'clock in time for muster before starting. Moreover, I would prefer to escape, as you can imagine, while Madame Prune is still enjoying her siesta; I should be afraid of being drawn into some corner, or of provoking some heartrending parting scene.”

Chrysantheme bows her head and says no more, but seeing that I am really going, rises to escort me.



Without speaking, without the slightest noise, she follows me as we descend the staircase and cross the garden full of sunshine, where the dwarf shrubs and the deformed flowers seem, like the rest of the household, plunged in warm somnolence.

At the outer gate I stop for the last adieu: the little sad pout has reappeared, more accentuated than ever, on Chrysantheme's face; it is the right thing, it is correct, and I should feel offended now were it absent.



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Well, little mousme, let us part good friends; one last kiss even, if you like. I took you to amuse me; you have not perhaps succeeded very well, but after all you have done what you could: given me your little face, your little curtseys, your little music; in short, you have been pleasant enough in your Japanese way. And who knows, perchance I may yet think of you sometimes when I recall this glorious summer, these pretty, quaint gardens, and the ceaseless concert of the cicalas.

She prostrates herself on the threshold of the door, her forehead against the ground, and remains in this attitude of superlatively polite salute as long as I am in sight, while I go down the pathway by which I am to disappear for ever.

As the distance between us increases, I turn once or twice to look at her again; but it is a mere civility, and meant to return as it deserves her grand final salutation.

CHAPTER LIII

OFF FOR CHINA

When I entered the town, at the turn of the principal street, I had the good luck to meet Number 415, my poor relative. I was just at that moment in want of a speedy djin, and I at once got into his vehicle; besides, it was an alleviation to my feelings, in this hour of departure, to take my last drive in company with a member of my family.

Unaccustomed as I was to be out of doors during the hours of siesta, I had never yet seen the streets of the town thus overwhelmed by the sunshine, thus deserted in the silence and solitary brilliancy peculiar to all hot countries.

In front of all the shops hang white shades, adorned here and there with slight designs in black, in the quaintness of which lurks I know not what—something mysterious: dragons, emblems, symbolical figures. The sky is too glaring; the light crude, implacable; never has this old town of Nagasaki appeared to me so old, so worm-eaten, so bald, notwithstanding all its veneer of new papers and gaudy paintings. These little wooden houses, of such marvellous cleanly whiteness inside, are black outside, timeworn, disjointed and grimacing. When one looks closely, this grimace is to be found everywhere: in the hideous masks laughing in the shop-fronts of the innumerable curios-shops; in the grotesque figures, the playthings, the idols, cruel, suspicious, mad; it is even found in the buildings: in the friezes of the religious porticoes, in the roofs of the thousand pagodas, of which the angles and cable-ends writhe and twist like the yet dangerous remains of ancient and malignant beasts.

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And the disturbing intensity of expression reigning over inanimate nature, contrasts with the almost absolute blank of the human countenance, with the smiling foolishness of the simple little folk who meet one's gaze, as they patiently carry on their minute trades in the gloom of their tiny open-fronted houses. Workmen squatted on their heels, carving with their imperceptible tools the droll or odiously obscene ivory ornaments, marvellous cabinet curiosities which have made Japan so famous with the European amateurs who have never seen it. Unconscious artists tracing with steady hand on a background of lacquer or of porcelain traditional designs learned by heart, or transmitted to their brains by a process of heredity through thousands of years; automatic painters, whose storks are similar to those of M. Sucre, with the inevitable little rocks, or little butterflies eternally the same. The least of these illuminators, with his insignificant, eyeless face, possesses at his fingers' ends the maximum of dexterity in this art of decoration, light and wittily incongruous, which threatens to invade us in France, in this epoch of imitative decadence, and which has become the great resource of our manufacturers of cheap "objects of art."

Is it because I am about to leave this country, because I have no longer any link to bind me to it, any resting-place on its soil, that my spirit is ready on the wing? I know not, but it seems to me I have never as clearly seen and comprehended it as to-day. And more even than ever do I find it little, aged, with worn-out blood and worn-out sap; I feel more fully its antediluvian antiquity, its centuries of mummification, which will soon degenerate into hopeless and grotesque buffoonery, as it comes into contact with Western novelties.

It is getting late; little by little, the siestas are everywhere coming to an end; the queer little streets brighten up and begin to swarm in the sunshine with manycolored parasols. Now begins the procession of ugliness of the most impossible description—a procession of long-robed, grotesque figures capped with pot-hats or sailors' headgear. Business transactions begin again, and the struggle for existence, close and bitter here as in one of our own artisan quarters, but meaner and smaller.

At the moment of my departure, I find within myself only a smile of careless mockery for the swarming crowd of this Lilliputian curtseying people—laborious, industrious, greedy of gain, tainted with a constitutional affectation, hereditary insignificance, and incurable monkeyishness.

Poor cousin Number 415! how right I was to have held him in good esteem! He was by far the best and most disinterested of my Japanese family. When all my commissions are finished, he puts up his little vehicle under a tree, and, much touched by my departure, insists upon escorting me on board the 'Triomphante', to watch over my final purchases in the sampan which conveys me to the ship, and to see them himself safely into my cabin.



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His, indeed, is the only hand I clasp with a really friendly feeling, without a suppressed smile, on quitting Japan.

No doubt in this country, as in many others, there is more honest friendship and less ugliness among the simple beings devoted to purely physical work.

At five o'clock in the afternoon we set sail.

Along the line of the shore are two or three sampans; in them the mousmes, shut up in the narrow cabins, peep at us through the tiny windows, half hiding their faces on account of the sailors; these are our wives, who have wished, out of politeness, to look upon us once more.

There are other sampans as well, in which other Japanese women are also watching our departure. These stand upright, under great parasols decorated with big black letters and daubed over with clouds of varied and startling colors.

CHAPTER LIV

A FADING PICTURE

We move slowly out of the wide green bay. The groups of women grow smaller in the distance. The country of round umbrellas with a thousand ribs fades gradually from our sight.

Now the vast ocean opens before us, immense, colorless, solitary; a solemn repose after so much that is too ingenious and too small.

The wooded mountains, the flowery capes disappear. And Japan remains faithful to itself, with its picturesque rocks, its quaint islands on which the trees tastefully arrange themselves in groups—studied, perhaps, but charmingly pretty.

CHAPTER LV

A WITHERED LOTUS-FLOWER

One evening, in my cabin, in the midst of the Yellow Sea, my eyes fall upon the lotus-blossoms brought from Diou-djen-dji; they had lasted several days; but now they are withered, and strew my carpet pathetically with their pale pink petals.

I, who have carefully kept so many faded flowers, fallen, alas! into dust, stolen here and there, at moments of parting in different parts of the world; I, who have kept so many that the collection is now an absurd, an indistinguishable herbarium—I try hard, but

without success, to awaken some sentiment for these lotus—and yet they are the last living souvenirs of my summer at Nagasaki.

I pick them up, however, with a certain amount of consideration, and I open my port-hole.

From the gray misty sky a strange light falls upon the waters; a dim and gloomy twilight descends, yellowish upon this Yellow Sea. We feel that we are moving northward, that autumn is approaching.

I throw the poor lotus into the boundless waste of waters, making them my best excuses for consigning them, natives of Japan, to a grave so solemn and so vast.

An Appeal to the Gods

Oama-Terace-Omi-Kami, wash me clean
from this little marriage of mine,
in the waters of the river of Kamo!

ETEXT *editors bookmarks:*



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Japanese habit of expressing myself with excessive politeness
Contemptuous pity, both for my suspicions and the cause of them

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire Chrysantheme:

Ah! the natural perversity of inanimate things
Contemptuous pity, both for my suspicions and the cause of them
Dull hours spent in idle and diffuse conversation
Efforts to arrange matters we succeed often only in disarranging
Found nothing that answered to my indefinable expectations
Habit turns into a makeshift of attachment
I know not what lost home that I have failed to find
Irritating laugh which is peculiar to Japan
Japanese habit of expressing myself with excessive politeness
Ordinary, trivial, every-day objects
Prayers swallowed like pills by invalids at a distance
Seeking for a change which can no longer be found
Trees, dwarfed by a Japanese process
When the inattentive spirits are not listening
Which I should find amusing in any one else,—any one I loved

AN "ATTIC" PHILOSOPHER

(Un Philosophe sous les Toits)

By *Emile Souvestre*

With a Preface by *Joseph Bertrand*, of the French Academy

EMILE SOUVESTRE

No one succeeds in obtaining a prominent place in literature, or in surrounding himself with a faithful and steady circle of admirers drawn from the fickle masses of the public, unless he possesses originality, constant variety, and a distinct personality. It is quite possible to gain for a moment a few readers by imitating some original feature in another; but these soon vanish and the writer remains alone and forgotten. Others, again, without belonging to any distinct group of authors, having found their standard in themselves, moralists and educators at the same time, have obtained undying recognition.

Of the latter class, though little known outside of France, is Emile Souvestre, who was born in Morlaix, April 15, 1806, and died at Paris July 5, 1854. He was the son of a civil engineer, was educated at the college of Pontivy, and intended to follow his father's

career by entering the Polytechnic School. His father, however, died in 1823, and Souvestre matriculated as a law-student at Rennes. But the young student soon devoted himself entirely to literature. His first essay, a tragedy, 'Le Siege de Missolonghi' (1828), was a pronounced failure. Disheartened and disgusted he left Paris and established himself first as a lawyer in Morlaix. Then he became proprietor of a newspaper, and was afterward appointed a professor in Brest and in Mulhouse. In 1836 he contributed to the 'Revue des Deux Mondes' some sketches of life in Brittany, which obtained a brilliant success. Souvestre was soon made editor of La Revue de Paris, and in consequence early found a publisher for his first novel, 'L'Echelle de Femmes', which, as was the case with his second work, 'Riche et Pauvre', met with a very favorable reception. His reputation was now made, and between this period and his death he gave to France about sixty volumes—tales, novels, essays, history, and drama.

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A double purpose was always very conspicuous in his books: he aspired to the role of a moralist and educator, and was likewise a most impressive painter of the life, character, and morals of the inhabitants of Brittany.

The most significant of his books are perhaps 'Les Derniers Bretons (1835-1837, 4 vols.), Pierre Landais (1843, 2 vols.), Le Foyer Breton (1844, 2 vols.), Un Philosophe sous les Toits, crowned by the Academy (1850), Confessions d'un Ouvrier (1851), Recits et Souvenirs (1853), Souvenirs d'un Vieillard (1854); also La Bretagne Pittoresque (1845), and, finally, Causeries Historiques et Litteraires (1854, 2 vols.)'. His comedies deserve honorable mention: 'Henri Hamelin, L'Oncle Baptiste (1842), La Parisienne, Le Mousse, etc'. In 1848, Souvestre was appointed professor of the newly created school of administration, mostly devoted to popular lectures. He held this post till 1853, lecturing partly in Paris, partly in Switzerland.

His death, when comparatively young, left a distinct gap in the literary world. A life like his could not be extinguished without general sorrow. Although he was unduly modest, and never aspired to the role of a beacon-light in literature, always seeking to remain in obscurity, the works of Emile Souvestre must be placed in the first rank by their morality and by their instructive character. They will always command the entire respect and applause of mankind. And thus it happens that, like many others, he was only fully appreciated after his death.

Even those of his 'confreres' who did not seem to esteem him, when alive, suddenly found out that they had experienced a great loss in his demise. They expressed it in emotional panegyrics; contemporaneous literature discovered that virtue had flown from its bosom, and the French Academy, which had at its proper time crowned his 'Philosophe sous les Toits' as a work contributing supremely to morals, kept his memory green by bestowing on his widow the "Prix Lambert," designed for the "families of authors who by their integrity, and by the probity of their efforts have well deserved this token from the Republique des Lettres."

Joseph Bertrand
de 'Academie Francaise.

AN "ATTIC" PHILOSOPHER

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

NEW-YEAR'S GIFTS

January 1st

The day of the month came into my mind as soon as I awoke. Another year is separated from the chain of ages, and drops into the gulf of the past! The crowd hasten to welcome her young sister. But while all looks are turned toward the future, mine revert to the past. Everyone smiles upon the new queen; but, in spite of myself, I think of her whom time has just wrapped in her winding-sheet. The past year!—at least I know what she was, and what she has given me; while this one comes surrounded by all the forebodings of the unknown. What does she hide in the clouds that mantle her? Is it the storm or the sunshine? Just now it rains, and I feel my mind as gloomy as the sky. I have a holiday today; but what can one do on a rainy day? I walk up and down my attic out of temper, and I determine to light my fire.



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Unfortunately the matches are bad, the chimney smokes, the wood goes out! I throw down my bellows in disgust, and sink into my old armchair.

In truth, why should I rejoice to see the birth of a new year? All those who are already in the streets, with holiday looks and smiling faces—do they understand what makes them so gay? Do they even know what is the meaning of this holiday, or whence comes the custom of New-Year's gifts?

Here my mind pauses to prove to itself its superiority over that of the vulgar. I make a parenthesis in my ill-temper in favor of my vanity, and I bring together all the evidence which my knowledge can produce.

(The old Romans divided the year into ten months only; it was Numa Pompilius who added January and February. The former took its name from Janus, to whom it was dedicated. As it opened the new year, they surrounded its beginning with good omens, and thence came the custom of visits between neighbors, of wishing happiness, and of New-Year's gifts. The presents given by the Romans were symbolic. They consisted of dry figs, dates, honeycomb, as emblems of "the sweetness of the auspices under which the year should begin its course," and a small piece of money called *stips*, which foreboded riches.)

Here I close the parenthesis, and return to my ill-humor. The little speech I have just addressed to myself has restored me my self-satisfaction, but made me more dissatisfied with others. I could now enjoy my breakfast; but the portress has forgotten my morning's milk, and the pot of preserves is empty! Anyone else would have been vexed: as for me, I affect the most supreme indifference. There remains a hard crust, which I break by main strength, and which I carelessly nibble, as a man far above the vanities of the world and of fresh rolls.

However, I do not know why my thoughts should grow more gloomy by reason of the difficulties of mastication. I once read the story of an Englishman who hanged himself because they had brought him his tea without sugar. There are hours in life when the most trifling cross takes the form of a calamity. Our tempers are like an opera-glass, which makes the object small or great according to the end you look through.

Usually, the prospect that opens out before my window delights me. It is a mountain-range of roofs, with ridges crossing, interlacing, and piled on one another, and upon which tall chimneys raise their peaks. It was but yesterday that they had an Alpine aspect to me, and I waited for the first snowstorm to see glaciers among them; to-day, I only see tiles and stone flues. The pigeons, which assisted my rural illusions, seem no more than miserable birds which have mistaken the roof for the back yard; the smoke, which rises in light clouds, instead of making me dream of the panting of Vesuvius, reminds me of kitchen preparations and dishwater; and lastly, the telegraph, that I see

far off on the old tower of Montmartre, has the effect of a vile gallows stretching its arms over the city.

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My eyes, thus hurt by all they meet, fall upon the great man's house which faces my attic.

The influence of New-Year's Day is visible there. The servants have an air of eagerness proportioned to the value of their New-Year's gifts, received or expected. I see the master of the house crossing the court with the morose look of a man who is forced to be generous; and the visitors increase, followed by shop porters who carry flowers, bandboxes, or toys. Suddenly the great gates are opened, and a new carriage, drawn by thoroughbred horses, draws up before the doorsteps. They are, without doubt, the New-Year's gift presented to the mistress of the house by her husband; for she comes herself to look at the new equipage. Very soon she gets into it with a little girl, all streaming with laces, feathers and velvets, and loaded with parcels which she goes to distribute as New-Year's gifts. The door is shut, the windows are drawn up, the carriage sets off.

Thus all the world are exchanging good wishes and presents to-day. I alone have nothing to give or to receive. Poor Solitary! I do not even know one chosen being for whom I might offer a prayer.

Then let my wishes for a happy New Year go and seek out all my unknown friends—lost in the multitude which murmurs like the ocean at my feet!

To you first, hermits in cities, for whom death and poverty have created a solitude in the midst of the crowd! unhappy laborers, who are condemned to toil in melancholy, and eat your daily bread in silence and desertion, and whom God has withdrawn from the intoxicating pangs of love and friendship!

To you, fond dreamers, who pass through life with your eyes turned toward some polar star, while you tread with indifference over the rich harvests of reality!

To you, honest fathers, who lengthen out the evening to maintain your families! to you, poor widows, weeping and working by a cradle! to you, young men, resolutely set to open for yourselves a path in life, large enough to lead through it the wife of your choice! to you, all brave soldiers of work and of self-sacrifice!

To you, lastly, whatever your title and your name, who love good, who pity the suffering; who walk through the world like the symbolical Virgin of Byzantium, with both arms open to the human race!

Here I am suddenly interrupted by loud and increasing chirpings. I look about me: my window is surrounded with sparrows picking up the crumbs of bread which in my brown study I had just scattered on the roof. At this sight a flash of light broke upon my saddened heart. I deceived myself just now, when I complained that I had nothing to give: thanks to me, the sparrows of this part of the town will have their New-Year's gifts!



Twelve o'clock.—A knock at my door; a poor girl comes in, and greets me by name. At first I do not recollect her; but she looks at me, and smiles. Ah! it is Paulette! But it is almost a year since I have seen her, and Paulette is no longer the same: the other day she was a child, now she is almost a young woman.

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Paulette is thin, pale, and miserably clad; but she has always the same open and straightforward look—the same mouth, smiling at every word, as if to court your sympathy—the same voice, somewhat timid, yet expressing fondness. Paulette is not pretty—she is even thought plain; as for me, I think her charming. Perhaps that is not on her account, but on my own. Paulette appears to me as one of my happiest recollections.

It was the evening of a public holiday. Our principal buildings were illuminated with festoons of fire, a thousand flags waved in the night winds, and the fireworks had just shot forth their spouts of flame into the midst of the Champ de Mars. Suddenly, one of those unaccountable alarms which strike a multitude with panic fell upon the dense crowd: they cry out, they rush on headlong; the weaker ones fall, and the frightened crowd tramples them down in its convulsive struggles. I escaped from the confusion by a miracle, and was hastening away, when the cries of a perishing child arrested me: I reentered that human chaos, and, after unheard-of exertions, I brought Paulette out of it at the peril of my life.

That was two years ago: since then I had not seen the child again but at long intervals, and I had almost forgotten her; but Paulette's memory was that of a grateful heart, and she came at the beginning of the year to offer me her wishes for my happiness. She brought me, besides, a wallflower in full bloom; she herself had planted and reared it: it was something that belonged wholly to herself; for it was by her care, her perseverance, and her patience, that she had obtained it.

The wallflower had grown in a common pot; but Paulette, who is a bandbox-maker, had put it into a case of varnished paper, ornamented with arabesques. These might have been in better taste, but I did not feel the attention and good-will the less.

This unexpected present, the little girl's modest blushes, the compliments she stammered out, dispelled, as by a sunbeam, the kind of mist which had gathered round my mind; my thoughts suddenly changed from the leaden tints of evening to the brightest colors of dawn. I made Paulette sit down, and questioned her with a light heart.

At first the little girl replied in monosyllables; but very soon the tables were turned, and it was I who interrupted with short interjections her long and confidential talk. The poor child leads a hard life. She was left an orphan long since, with a brother and sister, and lives with an old grandmother, who has "brought them up to poverty," as she always calls it.

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However, Paulette now helps her to make bandboxes, her little sister Perrine begins to use the needle, and her brother Henry is apprentice to a printer. All would go well if it were not for losses and want of work—if it were not for clothes which wear out, for appetites which grow larger, and for the winter, when you cannot get sunshine for nothing. Paulette complains that her candles go too quickly, and that her wood costs too much. The fireplace in their garret is so large that a fagot makes no more show in it than a match; it is so near the roof that the wind blows the rain down it, and in winter it hails upon the hearth; so they have left off using it. Henceforth they must be content with an earthen chafing-dish, upon which they cook their meals. The grandmother had often spoken of a stove that was for sale at the broker's close by; but he asked seven francs for it, and the times are too hard for such an expense: the family, therefore, resign themselves to cold for economy!

As Paulette spoke, I felt more and more that I was losing my fretfulness and low spirits. The first disclosures of the little bandbox-maker created within me a wish that soon became a plan. I questioned her about her daily occupations, and she informed me that on leaving me she must go, with her brother, her sister, and grandmother, to the different people for whom they work. My plan was immediately settled. I told the child that I would go to see her in the evening, and I sent her away with fresh thanks.

I placed the wallflower in the open window, where a ray of sunshine bid it welcome; the birds were singing around, the sky had cleared up, and the day, which began so loweringly, had become bright. I sang as I moved about my room, and, having hastily put on my hat and coat, I went out.

Three o'clock.—All is settled with my neighbor, the chimney-doctor; he will repair my old stove, and answers for its being as good as new. At five o'clock we are to set out, and put it up in Paulette's grandmother's room.

Midnight.—All has gone off well. At the hour agreed upon, I was at the old bandbox-maker's; she was still out. My Piedmontese

[In Paris a chimney-sweeper is named "Piedmontese" or "Savoyard," as they usually come from that country.]

fixed the stove, while I arranged a dozen logs in the great fireplace, taken from my winter stock. I shall make up for them by warming myself with walking, or by going to bed earlier.

My heart beat at every step that was heard on the staircase; I trembled lest they should interrupt me in my preparations, and should thus spoil my intended surprise. But no!—see everything ready: the lighted stove murmurs gently, the little lamp burns upon the table, and a bottle of oil for it is provided on the shelf. The chimney-doctor is gone. Now my fear lest they should come is changed into impatience at their not coming. At

last I hear children's voices; here they are: they push open the door and rush in—but they all stop in astonishment.



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At the sight of the lamp, the stove, and the visitor, who stands there like a magician in the midst of these wonders, they draw back almost frightened. Paulette is the first to comprehend it, and the arrival of the grandmother, who is more slowly mounting the stairs, finishes the explanation. Then come tears, ecstasies, thanks!

But the wonders are not yet ended. The little sister opens the oven, and discovers some chestnuts just roasted; the grandmother puts her hand on the bottles of cider arranged on the dresser; and I draw forth from the basket that I have hidden a cold tongue, a pot of butter, and some fresh rolls.

Now their wonder turns into admiration; the little family have never seen such a feast! They lay the cloth, they sit down, they eat; it is a complete banquet for all, and each contributes his share to it. I had brought only the supper: and the bandbox-maker and her children supplied the enjoyment.

What bursts of laughter at nothing! What a hubbub of questions which waited for no reply, of replies which answered no question! The old woman herself shared in the wild merriment of the little ones! I have always been struck at the ease with which the poor forget their wretchedness. Being used to live only for the present, they make a gain of every pleasure as soon as it offers itself. But the surfeited rich are more difficult to satisfy: they require time and everything to suit before they will consent to be happy.

The evening has passed like a moment. The old woman told me the history of her life, sometimes smiling, sometimes drying her eyes. Perrine sang an old ballad with her fresh young voice. Henry told us what he knows of the great writers of the day, to whom he has to carry their proofs. At last we were obliged to separate, not without fresh thanks on the part of the happy family.

I have come home slowly, ruminating with a full heart, and pure enjoyment, on the simple events of my evening. It has given me much comfort and much instruction. Now, no New-Year's Day will come amiss to me; I know that no one is so unhappy as to have nothing to give and nothing to receive.

As I came in, I met my rich neighbor's new equipage. She, too, had just returned from her evening's party; and, as she sprang from the carriage-step with feverish impatience, I heard her murmur "At last!"

I, when I left Paulette's family, said "So soon!"

CHAPTER II

THE CARNIVAL

February 20th

What a noise out of doors! What is the meaning of these shouts and cries? Ah! I recollect: this is the last day of the Carnival, and the maskers are passing.

Christianity has not been able to abolish the noisy bacchanalian festivals of the pagan times, but it has changed the names. That which it has given to these “days of liberty” announces the ending of the feasts, and the month of fasting which should follow; carnival means, literally, “farewell to flesh!” It is a forty days’ farewell to the “blessed pullets and fat hams,” so celebrated by Pantagrue’s minstrel. Man prepares for privation by satiety, and finishes his sin thoroughly before he begins to repent.

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Why, in all ages and among every people, do we meet with some one of these mad festivals? Must we believe that it requires such an effort for men to be reasonable, that the weaker ones have need of rest at intervals? The monks of La Trappe, who are condemned to silence by their rule, are allowed to speak once in a month, and on this day they all talk at once from the rising to the setting of the sun.

Perhaps it is the same in the world. As we are obliged all the year to be decent, orderly, and reasonable, we make up for such a long restraint during the Carnival. It is a door opened to the incongruous fancies and wishes that have hitherto been crowded back into a corner of our brain. For a moment the slaves become the masters, as in the days of the Saturnalia, and all is given up to the “fools of the family.”

The shouts in the square redouble; the troops of masks increase—on foot, in carriages, and on horseback. It is now who can attract the most attention by making a figure for a few hours, or by exciting curiosity or envy; to-morrow they will all return, dull and exhausted, to the employments and troubles of yesterday.

Alas! thought I with vexation, each of us is like these masqueraders; our whole life is often but an unsightly Carnival! And yet man has need of holidays, to relax his mind, rest his body, and open his heart. Can he not have them, then, with these coarse pleasures? Economists have been long inquiring what is the best disposal of the industry of the human race. Ah! if I could only discover the best disposal of its leisure! It is easy enough to find it work; but who will find it relaxation? Work supplies the daily bread; but it is cheerfulness that gives it a relish. O philosophers! go in quest of pleasure! find us amusements without brutality, enjoyments without selfishness; in a word, invent a Carnival that will please everybody, and bring shame to no one.

Three o'clock.—I have just shut my window, and stirred up my fire. As this is a holiday for everybody, I will make it one for myself, too. So I light the little lamp over which, on grand occasions, I make a cup of the coffee that my portress's son brought from the Levant, and I look in my bookcase for one of my favorite authors.

First, here is the amusing parson of Meudon; but his characters are too fond of talking slang:—Voltaire; but he disheartens men by always bantering them:—Moliere; but he hinders one's laughter by making one think:—Lesage; let us stop at him. Being profound rather than grave, he preaches virtue while ridiculing vice; if bitterness is sometimes to be found in his writings, it is always in the garb of mirth: he sees the miseries of the world without despising it, and knows its cowardly tricks without hating it.

Let us call up all the heroes of his book.... Gil Blas, Fabrice, Sangrado, the Archbishop of Granada, the Duke of Lerma, Aurora, Scipio! Ye gay or graceful figures, rise before my eyes, people my solitude; bring hither for my amusement the world-carnival, of which you are the brilliant maskers!

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Unfortunately, at the very moment I made this invocation, I recollected I had a letter to write which could not be put off. One of my attic neighbors came yesterday to ask me to do it. He is a cheerful old man, and has a passion for pictures and prints. He comes home almost every day with a drawing or painting—probably of little value; for I know he lives penuriously, and even the letter that I am to write for him shows his poverty. His only son, who was married in England, is just dead, and his widow—left without any means, and with an old mother and a child—had written to beg for a home. M. Antoine asked me first to translate the letter, and then to write a refusal. I had promised that he should have this answer to-day: before everything, let us fulfil our promises.

The sheet of “Bath” paper is before me, I have dipped my pen into the ink, and I rub my forehead to invite forth a sally of ideas, when I perceive that I have not my dictionary. Now, a Parisian who would speak English without a dictionary is like a child without leading-strings; the ground trembles under him, and he stumbles at the first step. I run then to the bookbinder’s, where I left my Johnson, who lives close by in the square.

The door is half open; I hear low groans; I enter without knocking, and I see the bookbinder by the bedside of his fellow-lodger. This latter has a violent fever and delirium. Pierre looks at him perplexed and out of humor. I learn from him that his comrade was not able to get up in the morning, and that since then he has become worse every hour.

I ask whether they have sent for a doctor.

“Oh, yes, indeed!” replied Pierre, roughly; “one must have money in one’s pocket for that, and this fellow has only debts instead of savings.”

“But you,” said I, rather astonished; “are you not his friend?”

“Friend!” interrupted the bookbinder. “Yes, as much as the shaft-horse is friend to the leader—on condition that each will take his share of the draught, and eat his feed by himself.”

“You do not intend, however, to leave him without any help?”

“Bah! he may keep in his bed till to-morrow, as I’m going to the ball.”

“You mean to leave him alone?”

“Well! must I miss a party of pleasure at Courtville—[A Parisian summer resort.]—because this fellow is lightheaded?” asked Pierre, sharply. “I have promised to meet some friends at old Desnoyer’s. Those who are sick may take their broth; my physic is white wine.”

So saying, he untied a bundle, out of which he took the fancy costume of a waterman, and proceeded to dress himself in it.

In vain I tried to awaken some fellow-feeling for the unfortunate man who lay groaning there close by him; being entirely taken up with the thoughts of his expected pleasure, Pierre would hardly so much as hear me. At last his coarse selfishness provoked me. I began reproaching instead of remonstrating with him, and I declared him responsible for the consequences which such a desertion must bring upon the sick man.

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At this the bookbinder, who was just going, stopped with an oath, and stamped his foot. "Am I to spend my Carnival in heating water for footbaths, pray?"

"You must not leave your comrade to die without help!" I replied.

"Let him go to the hospital, then!"

"How can he by himself?"

Pierre seemed to make up his mind.

"Well, I'm going to take him," resumed he; "besides, I shall get rid of him sooner. Come, get up, comrade!" He shook his comrade, who had not taken off his clothes. I observed that he was too weak to walk, but the bookbinder would not listen: he made him get up, and half dragged, half supported him to the lodge of the porter, who ran for a hackney carriage. I saw the sick man get into it, almost fainting, with the impatient waterman; and they both set off, one perhaps to die, the other to dine at Courtville Gardens!

Six o'clock.—I have been to knock at my neighbor's door, who opened it himself; and I have given him his letter, finished at last, and directed to his son's widow. M. Antoine thanked me gratefully, and made me sit down.

It was the first time I had been into the attic of the old amateur. Curtains stained with damp and hanging down in rags, a cold stove, a bed of straw, two broken chairs, composed all the furniture. At the end of the room were a great number of prints in a heap, and paintings without frames turned against the wall.

At the moment I came in, the old man was making his dinner on some hard crusts of bread, which he was soaking in a glass of 'eau sucrée'. He perceived that my eyes fell upon his hermit fare, and he looked a little ashamed.

"There is nothing to tempt you in my supper, neighbor," said he, with a smile.

I replied that at least I thought it a very philosophical one for the Carnival.

M. Antoine shook his head, and went on again with his supper.

"Every one keeps his holidays in his own way," resumed he, beginning again to dip a crust into his glass. "There are several sorts of epicures, and not all feasts are meant to regale the palate; there are some also for the ears and the eyes."

I looked involuntarily round me, as if to seek for the invisible banquet which could make up to him for such a supper.

Without doubt he understood me; for he got up slowly, and, with the magisterial air of a man confident in what he is about to do, he rummaged behind several picture frames, drew forth a painting, over which he passed his hand, and silently placed it under the light of the lamp.

It represented a fine-looking old man, seated at table with his wife, his daughter, and his children, and singing to the accompaniment of musicians who appeared in the background. At first sight I recognized the subject, which I had often admired at the Louvre, and I declared it to be a splendid copy of Jordaens.

“A copy!” cried M. Antoine; “say an original, neighbor, and an original retouched by Rubens! Look closer at the head of the old man, the dress of the young woman, and the accessories. One can count the pencil-strokes of the Hercules of painters. It is not only a masterpiece, sir; it is a treasure—a relic! The picture at the Louvre may be a pearl, this is a diamond!”



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And resting it against the stove, so as to place it in the best light, he fell again to soaking his crusts, without taking his eyes off the wonderful picture. One would have said that the sight of it gave the crusts an unexpected relish, for he chewed them slowly, and emptied his glass by little sips. His shrivelled features became smooth, his nostrils expanded; it was indeed, as he said himself, "a feast for the eyes."

"You see that I also have my treat," he resumed, nodding his head with an air of triumph. "Others may run after dinners and balls; as for me, this is the pleasure I give myself for my Carnival."

"But if this painting is really so precious," replied I, "it ought to be worth a high price."

"Eh! eh!" said M. Antoine, with an air of proud indifference. "In good times, a good judge might value it at somewhere about twenty thousand francs."

I started back.

"And you have bought it?" cried I.

"For nothing," replied he, lowering his voice. "These brokers are asses; mine mistook this for a student's copy; he let me have it for fifty louis, ready money! This morning I took them to him, and now he wishes to be off the bargain."

"This morning!" repeated I, involuntarily casting my eyes on the letter containing the refusal that M. Antoine had made me write to his son's widow, which was still on the little table.

He took no notice of my exclamation, and went on contemplating the work of Jordaens in an ecstasy.

"What a knowledge of chiaroscuro!" he murmured, biting his last crust in delight. "What relief! what fire! Where can one find such transparency of color! such magical lights! such force! such nature!"

As I was listening to him in silence, he mistook my astonishment for admiration, and clapped me on the shoulder.

"You are dazzled," said he merrily; "you did not expect such a treasure! What do you say to the bargain I have made?"

"Pardon me," replied I, gravely; "but I think you might have done better."

M. Antoine raised his head.

“How!” cried he; “do you take me for a man likely to be deceived about the merit or value of a painting?”

“I neither doubt your taste nor your skill; but I cannot help thinking that, for the price of this picture of a family party, you might have had—”

“What then?”

“The family itself, sir.”

The old amateur cast a look at me, not of anger, but of contempt. In his eyes I had evidently just proved myself a barbarian, incapable of understanding the arts, and unworthy of enjoying them. He got up without answering me, hastily took up the Jordaens, and replaced it in its hiding-place behind the prints.

It was a sort of dismissal; I took leave of him, and went away.

Seven o'clock.—When I come in again, I find my water boiling over my lamp, and I busy myself in grinding my Mocha, and setting out my coffee-things.

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The getting coffee ready is the most delicate and most attractive of domestic operations to one who lives alone: it is the grand work of a bachelor's housekeeping.

Coffee is, so to say, just the mid-point between bodily and spiritual nourishment. It acts agreeably, and at the same time, upon the senses and the thoughts. Its very fragrance gives a sort of delightful activity to the wits; it is a genius that lends wings to our fancy, and transports it to the land of the Arabian Nights.

When I am buried in my old easy-chair, my feet on the fender before a blazing fire, my ear soothed by the singing of the coffee-pot, which seems to gossip with my fire-irons, the sense of smell gently excited by the aroma of the Arabian bean, and my eyes shaded by my cap pulled down over them, it often seems as if each cloud of the fragrant steam took a distinct form. As in the mirages of the desert, in each as it rises, I see some image of which my mind had been longing for the reality.

At first the vapor increases, and its color deepens. I see a cottage on a hillside: behind is a garden shut in by a whitethorn hedge, and through the garden runs a brook, on the banks of which I hear the bees humming.

Then the view opens still more. See those fields planted with apple-trees, in which I can distinguish a plough and horses waiting for their master! Farther on, in a part of the wood which rings with the sound of the axe, I perceive the woodsman's hut, roofed with turf and branches; and, in the midst of all these rural pictures, I seem to see a figure of myself gliding about. It is my ghost walking in my dream!

The bubbling of the water, ready to boil over, compels me to break off my meditations, in order to fill up the coffee-pot. I then remember that I have no cream; I take my tin can off the hook and go down to the milkwoman's.

Mother Denis is a hale countrywoman from Savoy, which she left when quite young; and, contrary to the custom of the Savoyards, she has not gone back to it again. She has neither husband nor child, notwithstanding the title they give her; but her kindness, which never sleeps, makes her worthy of the name of mother.

A brave creature! Left by herself in the battle of life, she makes good her humble place in it by working, singing, helping others, and leaving the rest to God.

At the door of the milk-shop I hear loud bursts of laughter. In one of the corners of the shop three children are sitting on the ground. They wear the sooty dress of Savoyard boys, and in their hands they hold large slices of bread and cheese. The youngest is besmeared up to the eyes with his, and that is the reason of their mirth.

Mother Denis points them out to me.

“Look at the little lambs, how they enjoy themselves!” said she, putting her hand on the head of the little glutton.

“He has had no breakfast,” puts in one of the others by way of excuse.



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"Poor little thing," said the milkwoman; "he is left alone in the streets of Paris, where he can find no other father than the All-good God!"

"And that is why you make yourself a mother to them?" I replied, gently.

"What I do is little enough," said Mother Denis, measuring out my milk; "but every day I get some of them together out of the street, that for once they may have enough to eat. Dear children! their mothers will make up for it in heaven. Not to mention that they recall my native mountains to me: when they sing and dance, I seem to see our old father again."

Here her eyes filled with tears.

"So you are repaid by your recollections for the good you do them?" resumed I.

"Yes! yes!" said she, "and by their happiness, too! The laughter of these little ones, sir, is like a bird's song; it makes you gay, and gives you heart to live."

As she spoke she cut some fresh slices of bread and cheese, and added some apples and a handful of nuts to them.

"Come, my little dears," she cried, "put these into your pockets against to-morrow."

Then, turning to me:

"To-day I am ruining myself," added she; "but we must all have our Carnival."

I came away without saying a word: I was too much affected.

At last I have discovered what true pleasure is. After beholding the egotism of sensuality and of intellect, I have found the happy self-sacrifice of goodness. Pierre, M. Antoine, and Mother Denis had all kept their Carnival; but for the first two, it was only a feast for the senses or the mind; while for the third, it was a feast for the heart.

CHAPTER III

WHAT WE MAY LEARN BY LOOKING OUT OF WINDOW

March 3d

A poet has said that life is the dream of a shadow: he would better have compared it to a night of fever! What alternate fits of restlessness and sleep! what discomfort! what sudden starts! what ever-returning thirst! what a chaos of mournful and confused fancies! We can neither sleep nor wake; we seek in vain for repose, and we stop short

on the brink of action. Two thirds of human existence are wasted in hesitation, and the last third in repenting.

When I say human existence, I mean my own! We are so made that each of us regards himself as the mirror of the community: what passes in our minds infallibly seems to us a history of the universe. Every man is like the drunkard who reports an earthquake, because he feels himself staggering.

And why am I uncertain and restless—I, a poor day-laborer in the world—who fill an obscure station in a corner of it, and whose work it avails itself of, without heeding the workman? I will tell you, my unseen friend, for whom these lines are written; my unknown brother, on whom the solitary call in sorrow; my imaginary confidant, to whom all monologues are addressed and who is but the shadow of our own conscience.

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A great event has happened in my life! A crossroad has suddenly opened in the middle of the monotonous way along which I was travelling quietly, and without thinking of it. Two roads present themselves, and I must choose between them. One is only the continuation of that I have followed till now; the other is wider, and exhibits wondrous prospects. On the first there is nothing to fear, but also little to hope; on the other are great dangers and great fortune. Briefly, the question is, whether I shall give up the humble office in which I thought to die, for one of those bold speculations in which chance alone is banker! Ever since yesterday I have consulted with myself; I have compared the two and I remain undecided.

Where shall I find light—who will advise me?

Sunday, 4th.—See the sun coming out from the thick fogs of winter! Spring announces its approach; a soft breeze skims over the roofs, and my wallflower begins to blow again.

We are near that sweet season of fresh green, of which the poets of the sixteenth century sang with so much feeling:

Now the gladsome month of May
All things newly doth array;
Fairest lady, let me too
In thy love my life renew.

The chirping of the sparrows calls me: they claim the crumbs I scatter to them every morning. I open my window, and the prospect of roofs opens out before me in all its splendor.

He who has lived only on a first floor has no idea of the picturesque variety of such a view. He has never contemplated these tile-colored heights which intersect each other; he has not followed with his eyes these gutter-valleys, where the fresh verdure of the attic gardens waves, the deep shadows which evening spreads over the slated slopes, and the sparkling of windows which the setting sun has kindled to a blaze of fire. He has not studied the flora of these Alps of civilization, carpeted by lichens and mosses; he is not acquainted with the myriad inhabitants that people them, from the microscopic insect to the domestic cat—that reynard of the roofs who is always on the prowl, or in ambush; he has not witnessed the thousand aspects of a clear or a cloudy sky; nor the thousand effects of light, that make these upper regions a theatre with ever-changing scenes! How many times have my days of leisure passed away in contemplating this wonderful sight; in discovering its darker or brighter episodes; in seeking, in short, in this unknown world for the impressions of travel that wealthy tourists look for lower!

Nine o'clock.—But why, then, have not my winged neighbors picked up the crumbs I have scattered for them before my window? I see them fly away, come back, perch



upon the ledges of the windows, and chirp at the sight of the feast they are usually so ready to devour! It is not my presence that frightens them; I have accustomed them to eat out of my hand. Then, why this fearful suspense? In vain I look around: the roof is clear, the windows near are closed. I crumble the bread that remains from my breakfast to attract them by an ampler feast. Their chirpings increase, they bend down their heads, the boldest approach upon the wing, but without daring to alight.

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Come, come, my sparrows are the victims of one of the foolish panics which make the funds fall at the Bourse! It is plain that birds are not more reasonable than men!

With this reflection I was about to shut my window, when suddenly I perceived, in a spot of sunshine on my right, the shadow of two pricked-up ears; then a paw advanced, then the head of a tabby-cat showed itself at the corner of the gutter. The cunning fellow was lying there in wait, hoping the crumbs would bring him some game.

And I had accused my guests of cowardice! I was so sure that no danger could menace them! I thought I had looked well everywhere! I had only forgotten the corner behind me!

In life, as on the roofs, how many misfortunes come from having forgotten a single corner!

Ten o'clock.—I cannot leave my window; the rain and the cold have kept it shut so long that I must reconnoitre all the environs to be able to take possession of them again. My eyes search in succession all the points of the jumbled and confused prospect, passing on or stopping according to what they light upon.

Ah! see the windows upon which they formerly loved to rest; they are those of two unknown neighbors, whose different habits they have long remarked.

One is a poor work-woman, who rises before sunrise, and whose profile is shadowed upon her little muslin window-curtain far into the evening; the other is a young songstress, whose vocal flourishes sometimes reach my attic by snatches. When their windows are open, that of the work-woman discovers a humble but decent abode; the other, an elegantly furnished room. But to-day a crowd of tradespeople throng the latter: they take down the silk hangings and carry off the furniture, and I now remember that the young singer passed under my window this morning with her veil down, and walking with the hasty step of one who suffers some inward trouble. Ah! I guess it all. Her means are exhausted in elegant fancies, or have been taken away by some unexpected misfortune, and now she has fallen from luxury to indigence. While the work-woman manages not only to keep her little room, but also to furnish it with decent comfort by her steady toil, that of the singer is become the property of brokers. The one sparkled for a moment on the wave of prosperity; the other sails slowly but safely along the coast of a humble and laborious industry.

Alas! is there not here a lesson for us all? Is it really in hazardous experiments, at the end of which we shall meet with wealth or ruin, that the wise man should employ his years of strength and freedom? Ought he to consider life as a regular employment which brings its daily wages, or as a game in which the future is determined by a few throws? Why seek the risk of extreme chances? For what end hasten to riches by dangerous roads? Is it really certain that happiness is the prize of brilliant successes,

rather than of a wisely accepted poverty? Ah! if men but knew in what a small dwelling joy can live, and how little it costs to furnish it!

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Twelve o'clock.—I have been walking up and down my attic for a long time, with my arms folded and my eyes on the ground! My doubts increase, like shadows encroaching more and more on some bright space; my fears multiply; and the uncertainty becomes every moment more painful to me! It is necessary for me to decide to-day, and before the evening! I hold the dice of my future fate in my hands, and I dare not throw them.

Three o'clock.—The sky has become cloudy, and a cold wind begins to blow from the west; all the windows which were opened to the sunshine of a beautiful day are shut again. Only on the opposite side of the street, the lodger on the last story has not yet left his balcony.

One knows him to be a soldier by his regular walk, his gray moustaches, and the ribbon that decorates his buttonhole. Indeed, one might have guessed as much from the care he takes of the little garden which is the ornament of his balcony in mid-air; for there are two things especially loved by all old soldiers—flowers and children. They have been so long, obliged to look upon the earth as a field of battle, and so long cut off from the peaceful pleasures of a quiet lot, that they seem to begin life at an age when others end it. The tastes of their early years, which were arrested by the stern duties of war, suddenly break out again with their white hairs, and are like the savings of youth which they spend again in old age. Besides, they have been condemned to be destroyers for so long that perhaps they feel a secret pleasure in creating, and seeing life spring up again: the beauty of weakness has a grace and an attraction the more for those who have been the agents of unbending force; and the watching over the frail germs of life has all the charms of novelty for these old workmen of death.

Therefore the cold wind has not driven my neighbor from his balcony. He is digging up the earth in his green boxes, and carefully sowing the seeds of the scarlet nasturtium, convolvulus, and sweet-pea. Henceforth he will come every day to watch for their first sprouting, to protect the young shoots from weeds or insects, to arrange the strings for the tendrils to climb on, and carefully to regulate their supply of water and heat!

How much labor to bring in the desired harvest! For that, how many times shall I see him brave cold or heat, wind or sun, as he does to-day! But then, in the hot summer days, when the blinding dust whirls in clouds through our streets, when the eye, dazzled by the glare of white stucco, knows not where to rest, and the glowing roofs reflect their heat upon us to burning, the old soldier will sit in his arbor and perceive nothing but green leaves and flowers around him, and the breeze will come cool and fresh to him through these perfumed shades. His assiduous care will be rewarded at last.

We must sow the seeds, and tend the growth, if we would enjoy the flower.

Four o'clock.—The clouds that have been gathering in the horizon for a long time are become darker; it thunders loudly, and the rain pours down! Those who are caught in it fly in every direction, some laughing and some crying.

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I always find particular amusement in these helter-skelters, caused by a sudden storm. It seems as if each one, when thus taken by surprise, loses the factitious character that the world or habit has given him, and appears in his true colors.

See, for example, that big man with deliberate step, who suddenly forgets his indifference, made to order, and runs like a schoolboy! He is a thrifty city gentleman, who, with all his fashionable airs, is afraid to spoil his hat.

That pretty woman yonder, on the contrary, whose looks are so modest, and whose dress is so elaborate, slackens her pace with the increasing storm. She seems to find pleasure in braving it, and does not think of her velvet cloak spotted by the hail! She is evidently a lioness in sheep's clothing.

Here, a young man, who was passing, stops to catch some of the hailstones in his hand, and examines them. By his quick and business-like walk just now, you would have taken him for a tax-gatherer on his rounds, when he is a young philosopher, studying the effects of electricity. And those schoolboys who leave their ranks to run after the sudden gusts of a March whirlwind; those girls, just now so demure, but who now fly with bursts of laughter; those national guards, who quit the martial attitude of their days of duty to take refuge under a porch! The storm has caused all these transformations.

See, it increases! The hardiest are obliged to seek shelter. I see every one rushing toward the shop in front of my window, which a bill announces is to let. It is for the fourth time within a few months. A year ago all the skill of the joiner and the art of the painter were employed in beautifying it, but their works are already destroyed by the leaving of so many tenants; the cornices of the front are disfigured by mud; the arabesques on the doorway are spoiled by bills posted upon them to announce the sale of the effects. The splendid shop has lost some of its embellishments with each change of the tenant. See it now empty, and left open to the passersby. How much does its fate resemble that of so many who, like it, only change their occupation to hasten the faster to ruin!

I am struck by this last reflection: since the morning everything seems to speak to me, and with the same warning tone. Everything says: "Take care! be content with your happy, though humble lot; happiness can be retained only by constancy; do not forsake your old patrons for the protection of those who are unknown!"

Are they the outward objects which speak thus, or does the warning come from within? Is it not I myself who give this language to all that surrounds me? The world is but an instrument, to which we give sound at will. But what does it signify if it teaches us wisdom? The low voice that speaks in our breasts is always a friendly voice, for it tells us what we are, that is to say, what is our capability. Bad conduct results, for the most part, from mistaking our calling. There are so many fools and knaves, because there

are so few men who know themselves. The question is not to discover what will suit us, but for what we are suited!

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What should I do among these many experienced financial speculators? I am only a poor sparrow, born among the housetops, and should always fear the enemy crouching in the dark corner; I am a prudent workman, and should think of the business of my neighbors who so suddenly disappeared; I am a timid observer, and should call to mind the flowers so slowly raised by the old soldier, or the shop brought to ruin by constant change of masters. Away from me, ye banquets, over which hangs the sword of Damocles! I am a country mouse. Give me my nuts and hollow tree, and I ask nothing besides—except security.

And why this insatiable craving for riches? Does a man drink more when he drinks from a large glass? Whence comes that universal dread of mediocrity, the fruitful mother of peace and liberty? Ah! there is the evil which, above every other, it should be the aim of both public and private education to anticipate! If that were got rid of, what treasons would be spared, what baseness avoided, what a chain of excess and crime would be forever broken! We award the palm to charity, and to self-sacrifice; but, above all, let us award it to moderation, for it is the great social virtue. Even when it does not create the others, it stands instead of them.

Six o'clock.—I have written a letter of thanks to the promoters of the new speculation, and have declined their offer! This decision has restored my peace of mind. I stopped singing, like the cobbler, as long as I entertained the hope of riches: it is gone, and happiness is come back!

O beloved and gentle Poverty! pardon me for having for a moment wished to fly from thee, as I would from Want. Stay here forever with thy charming sisters, Pity, Patience, Sobriety, and Solitude; be ye my queens and my instructors; teach me the stern duties of life; remove far from my abode the weakness of heart and giddiness of head which follow prosperity. Holy Poverty! teach me to endure without complaining, to impart without grudging, to seek the end of life higher than in pleasure, farther off than in power. Thou givest the body strength, thou makest the mind more firm; and, thanks to thee, this life, to which the rich attach themselves as to a rock, becomes a bark of which death may cut the cable without awakening all our fears. Continue to sustain me, O thou whom Christ hath called Blessed!

CHAPTER IV

LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER

April 9th

The fine evenings are come back; the trees begin to put forth their shoots; hyacinths, jonquils, violets, and lilacs perfume the baskets of the flower-girls—all the world have

begun their walks again on the quays and boulevards. After dinner, I, too, descend from my attic to breathe the evening air.

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It is the hour when Paris is seen in all its beauty. During the day the plaster fronts of the houses weary the eye by their monotonous whiteness; heavily laden carts make the streets shake under their huge wheels; the eager crowd, taken up by the one fear of losing a moment from business, cross and jostle one another; the aspect of the city altogether has something harsh, restless, and flurried about it. But, as soon as the stars appear, everything is changed; the glare of the white houses is quenched in the gathering shades; you hear no more any rolling but that of the carriages on their way to some party of pleasure; you see only the loungee or the light-hearted passing by; work has given place to leisure. Now each one may breathe after the fierce race through the business of the day, and whatever strength remains to him he gives to pleasure! See the ballrooms lighted up, the theatres open, the eating-shops along the walks set out with dainties, and the twinkling lanterns of the newspaper criers. Decidedly Paris has laid aside the pen, the ruler, and the apron; after the day spent in work, it must have the evening for enjoyment; like the masters of Thebes, it has put off all serious matter till tomorrow.

I love to take part in this happy hour; not to mix in the general gayety, but to contemplate it. If the enjoyments of others embitter jealous minds, they strengthen the humble spirit; they are the beams of sunshine, which open the two beautiful flowers called trust and hope.

Although alone in the midst of the smiling multitude, I do not feel myself isolated from it, for its gayety is reflected upon me: it is my own kind, my own family, who are enjoying life, and I take a brother's share in their happiness. We are all fellow-soldiers in this earthly battle, and what does it matter on whom the honors of the victory fall? If Fortune passes by without seeing us, and pours her favors on others, let us console ourselves, like the friend of Parmenio, by saying, "Those, too, are Alexanders."

While making these reflections, I was going on as chance took me. I crossed from one pavement to another, I retraced my steps, I stopped before the shops or to read the handbills. How many things there are to learn in the streets of Paris! What a museum it is! Unknown fruits, foreign arms, furniture of old times or other lands, animals of all climates, statues of great men, costumes of distant nations! It is the world seen in samples!

Let us then look at this people, whose knowledge is gained from the shop-windows and the tradesman's display of goods. Nothing has been taught them, but they have a rude notion of everything. They have seen pineapples at Chevet's, a palm-tree in the Jardin des Plantes, sugar-canes selling on the Pont-Neuf. The Redskins, exhibited in the Valentine Hall, have taught them to mimic the dance of the bison, and to smoke the calumet of peace; they have seen Carter's lions fed; they know the

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principal national costumes contained in Babin's collection; Goupil's display of prints has placed the tiger-hunts of Africa and the sittings of the English Parliament before their eyes; they have become acquainted with Queen Victoria, the Emperor of Austria, and Kossuth, at the office-door of the Illustrated News. We can certainly instruct them, but not astonish them; for nothing is completely new to them. You may take the Paris ragamuffin through the five quarters of the world, and at every wonder with which you think to surprise him, he will settle the matter with that favorite and conclusive answer of his class—"I know."

But this variety of exhibitions, which makes Paris the fair of the world, does not offer merely a means of instruction to him who walks through it; it is a continual spur for rousing the imagination, a first step of the ladder always set up before us in a vision. When we see them, how many voyages do we take in imagination, what adventures do we dream of, what pictures do we sketch! I never look at that shop near the Chinese baths, with its tapestry hangings of Florida jessamine, and filled with magnolias, without seeing the forest glades of the New World, described by the author of *Atala*, opening themselves out before me.

Then, when this study of things and this discourse of reason begin to tire you, look around you! What contrasts of figures and faces you see in the crowd! What a vast field for the exercise of meditation! A half-seen glance, or a few words caught as the speaker passes by, open a thousand vistas to your imagination. You wish to comprehend what these imperfect disclosures mean, and, as the antiquary endeavors to decipher the mutilated inscription on some old monument, you build up a history on a gesture or on a word! These are the stirring sports of the mind, which finds in fiction a relief from the wearisome dullness of the actual.

Alas! as I was just now passing by the carriage-entrance of a great house, I noticed a sad subject for one of these histories. A man was sitting in the darkest corner, with his head bare, and holding out his hat for the charity of those who passed. His threadbare coat had that look of neatness which marks that destitution has been met by a long struggle. He had carefully buttoned it up to hide the want of a shirt. His face was half hid under his gray hair, and his eyes were closed, as if he wished to escape the sight of his own humiliation, and he remained mute and motionless. Those who passed him took no notice of the beggar, who sat in silence and darkness! They had been so lucky as to escape complaints and importunities, and were glad to turn away their eyes too.

Suddenly the great gate turned on its hinges; and a very low carriage, lighted with silver lamps and drawn by two black horses, came slowly out, and took the road toward the Faubourg St. Germain. I could just distinguish, within, the sparkling diamonds and the flowers of a ball-dress; the glare of the lamps passed like a bloody streak over the pale

face of the beggar, and showed his look as his eyes opened and followed the rich man's equipage until it disappeared in the night.

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I dropped a small piece of money into the hat he was holding out, and passed on quickly.

I had just fallen unexpectedly upon the two saddest secrets of the disease which troubles the age we live in: the envious hatred of him who suffers want, and the selfish forgetfulness of him who lives in affluence.

All the enjoyment of my walk was gone; I left off looking about me, and retired into my own heart. The animated and moving sight in the streets gave place to inward meditation upon all the painful problems which have been written for the last four thousand years at the bottom of each human struggle, but which are propounded more clearly than ever in our days.

I pondered on the uselessness of so many contests, in which defeat and victory only displace each other by turns, and on the mistaken zealots who have repeated from generation to generation the bloody history of Cain and Abel; and, saddened with these mournful reflections, I walked on as chance took me, until the silence all around insensibly drew me out from my own thoughts.

I had reached one of the remote streets, in which those who would live in comfort and without ostentation, and who love serious reflection, delight to find a home. There were no shops along the dimly lighted street; one heard no sounds but of distant carriages, and of the steps of some of the inhabitants returning quietly home.

I instantly recognized the street, though I had been there only once before.

That was two years ago. I was walking at the time by the side of the Seine, to which the lights on the quays and bridges gave the aspect of a lake surrounded by a garland of stars; and I had reached the Louvre, when I was stopped by a crowd collected near the parapet they had gathered round a child of about six, who was crying, and I asked the cause of his tears.

"It seems that he was sent to walk in the Tuileries," said a mason, who was returning from his work with his trowel in his hand; "the servant who took care of him met with some friends there, and told the child to wait for him while he went to get a drink; but I suppose the drink made him more thirsty, for he has not come back, and the child cannot find his way home."

"Why do they not ask him his name, and where he lives?"

"They have been doing it for the last hour; but all he can say is, that he is called Charles, and that his father is Monsieur Duval—there are twelve hundred Duvals in Paris."

"Then he does not know in what part of the town he lives?"

"I should not think, indeed! Don't you see that he is a gentleman's child? He has never gone out except in a carriage or with a servant; he does not know what to do by himself."

Here the mason was interrupted by some of the voices rising above the others.

"We cannot leave him in the street," said some.

"The child-stealers would carry him off," continued others.

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"We must take him to the overseer."

"Or to the police-office."

"That's the thing. Come, little one!"

But the child, frightened by these suggestions of danger, and at the names of police and overseer, cried louder, and drew back toward the parapet. In vain they tried to persuade him; his fears made him resist the more, and the most eager began to get weary, when the voice of a little boy was heard through the confusion.

"I know him well—I do," said he, looking at the lost child; "he belongs in our part of the town."

"What part is it?"

"Yonder, on the other side of the Boulevards—Rue des Magasins."

"And you have seen him before?"

"Yes, yes! he belongs to the great house at the end of the street, where there is an iron gate with gilt points."

The child quickly raised his head, and stopped crying. The little boy answered all the questions that were put to him, and gave such details as left no room for doubt. The other child understood him, for he went up to him as if to put himself under his protection.

"Then you can take him to his parents?" asked the mason, who had listened with real interest to the little boy's account.

"I don't care if I do," replied he; "it's the way I'm going."

"Then you will take charge of him?"

"He has only to come with me."

And, taking up the basket he had put down on the pavement, he set off toward the postern-gate of the Louvre.

The lost child followed him.

"I hope he will take him right," said I, when I saw them go away.

“Never fear,” replied the mason; “the little one in the blouse is the same age as the other; but, as the saying is, he knows black from white;’ poverty, you see, is a famous schoolmistress!”

The crowd dispersed. For my part, I went toward the Louvre; the thought came into my head to follow the two children, so as to guard against any mistake.

I was not long in overtaking them; they were walking side by side, talking, and already quite familiar with each other. The contrast in their dress then struck me. Little Duval wore one of those fanciful children’s dresses which are expensive as well as in good taste; his coat was skilfully fitted to his figure, his trousers came down in plaits from his waist to his boots of polished leather with mother-of-pearl buttons, and his ringlets were half hid by a velvet cap. The appearance of his guide, on the contrary, was that of the class who dwell on the extreme borders of poverty, but who there maintain their ground with no surrender. His old blouse, patched with pieces of different shades, indicated the perseverance of an industrious mother struggling against the wear and tear of time; his trousers were become too short, and showed his stockings darned over and over again; and it was evident that his shoes were not made for him.

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The countenances of the two children were not less different than their dress. That of the first was delicate and refined; his clear blue eye, his fair skin, and his smiling mouth gave him a charming look of innocence and happiness. The features of the other, on the contrary, had something rough in them; his eye was quick and lively, his complexion dark, his smile less merry than shrewd; all showed a mind sharpened by too early experience; he walked boldly through the middle of the streets thronged by carriages, and followed their countless turnings without hesitation.

I found, on asking him, that every day he carried dinner to his father, who was then working on the left bank of the Seine; and this responsible duty had made him careful and prudent. He had learned those hard but forcible lessons of necessity which nothing can equal or supply the place of. Unfortunately, the wants of his poor family had kept him from school, and he seemed to feel the loss; for he often stopped before the printshops, and asked his companion to read him the names of the engravings. In this way we reached the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, which the little wanderer seemed to know again. Notwithstanding his fatigue, he hurried on; he was agitated by mixed feelings; at the sight of his house he uttered a cry, and ran toward the iron gate with the gilt points; a lady who was standing at the entrance received him in her arms, and from the exclamations of joy, and the sound of kisses, I soon perceived she was his mother.

Not seeing either the servant or child return, she had sent in search of them in every direction, and was waiting for them in intense anxiety.

I explained to her in a few words what had happened. She thanked me warmly, and looked round for the little boy who had recognized and brought back her son; but while we were talking, he had disappeared.

It was for the first time since then that I had come into this part of Paris. Did the mother continue grateful? Had the children met again, and had the happy chance of their first meeting lowered between them that barrier which may mark the different ranks of men, but should not divide them?

While putting these questions to myself, I slackened my pace, and fixed my eyes on the great gate, which I just perceived. Suddenly I saw it open, and two children appeared at the entrance. Although much grown, I recognized them at first sight; they were the child who was found near the parapet of the Louvre, and his young guide. But the dress of the latter was greatly changed: his blouse of gray cloth was neat, and even spruce, and was fastened round the waist by a polished leather belt; he wore strong shoes, but made for his feet, and had on a new cloth cap. Just at the moment I saw him, he held in his two hands an enormous bunch of lilacs, to which his companion was trying to add narcissuses and primroses; the two children laughed, and parted with a friendly good-by. M. Duval's son did not go in till he had seen the other turn the corner of the street.

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Then I accosted the latter, and reminded him of our former meeting; he looked at me for a moment, and then seemed to recollect me.

"Forgive me if I do not make you a bow," said he, merrily, "but I want both my hands for the nosegay Monsieur Charles has given me."

"You are, then, become great friends?" said I.

"Oh! I should think so," said the child; "and now my father is rich too!"

"How's that?"

"Monsieur Duval lent him some money; he has taken a shop, where he works on his own account; and, as for me, I go to school."

"Yes," replied I, remarking for the first time the cross that decorated his little coat; "and I see that you are head-boy!"

"Monsieur Charles helps me to learn, and so I am come to be the first in the class."

"Are you now going to your lessons?"

"Yes, and he has given me some lilacs; for he has a garden where we play together, and where my mother can always have flowers."

"Then it is the same as if it were partly your own."

"So it is! Ah! they are good neighbors indeed. But here I am; good-by, sir."

He nodded to me with a smile, and disappeared.

I went on with my walk, still pensive, but with a feeling of relief. If I had elsewhere witnessed the painful contrast between affluence and want, here I had found the true union of riches and poverty. Hearty good-will had smoothed down the more rugged inequalities on both sides, and had opened a road of true neighborhood and fellowship between the humble workshop and the stately mansion. Instead of hearkening to the voice of interest, they had both listened to that of self-sacrifice, and there was no place left for contempt or envy. Thus, instead of the beggar in rags, that I had seen at the other door cursing the rich man, I had found here the happy child of the laborer loaded with flowers and blessing him! The problem, so difficult and so dangerous to examine into with no regard but for the rights of it, I had just seen solved by love.

CHAPTER V

COMPENSATION

Sunday, May 27th

Capital cities have one thing peculiar to them: their days of rest seem to be the signal for a general dispersion and flight. Like birds that are just restored to liberty, the people come out of their stone cages, and joyfully fly toward the country. It is who shall find a green hillock for a seat, or the shade of a wood for a shelter; they gather May flowers, they run about the fields; the town is forgotten until the evening, when they return with sprigs of blooming hawthorn in their hats, and their hearts gladdened by pleasant thoughts and recollections of the past day; the next day they return again to their harness and to work.

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These rural adventures are most remarkable at Paris. When the fine weather comes, clerks, shop keepers, and workingmen look forward impatiently for the Sunday as the day for trying a few hours of this pastoral life; they walk through six miles of grocers' shops and public-houses in the faubourgs, in the sole hope of finding a real turnip-field. The father of a family begins the practical education of his son by showing him wheat which has not taken the form of a loaf, and cabbage "in its wild state." Heaven only knows the encounters, the discoveries, the adventures that are met with! What Parisian has not had his Odyssey in an excursion through the suburbs, and would not be able to write a companion to the famous Travels by Land and by Sea from Paris to St. Cloud?

We do not now speak of that floating population from all parts, for whom our French Babylon is the caravansary of Europe: a phalanx of thinkers, artists, men of business, and travellers, who, like Homer's hero, have arrived in their intellectual country after beholding "many peoples and cities;" but of the settled Parisian, who keeps his appointed place, and lives on his own floor like the oyster on his rock, a curious vestige of the credulity, the slowness, and the simplicity of bygone ages.

For one of the singularities of Paris is, that it unites twenty populations completely different in character and manners. By the side of the gypsies of commerce and of art, who wander through all the several stages of fortune or fancy, live a quiet race of people with an independence, or with regular work, whose existence resembles the dial of a clock, on which the same hand points by turns to the same hours. If no other city can show more brilliant and more stirring forms of life, no other contains more obscure and more tranquil ones. Great cities are like the sea: storms agitate only the surface; if you go to the bottom, you find a region inaccessible to the tumult and the noise.

For my part, I have settled on the verge of this region, but do not actually live in it. I am removed from the turmoil of the world, and live in the shelter of solitude, but without being able to disconnect my thoughts from the struggle going on. I follow at a distance all its events of happiness or grief; I join the feasts and the funerals; for how can he who looks on, and knows what passes, do other than take part? Ignorance alone can keep us strangers to the life around us: selfishness itself will not suffice for that.

These reflections I made to myself in my attic, in the intervals of the various household works to which a bachelor is forced when he has no other servant than his own ready will. While I was pursuing my deductions, I had blacked my boots, brushed my coat, and tied my cravat; I had at last arrived at the important moment when we pronounce complacently that all is finished, and that well.

A grand resolve had just decided me to depart from my usual habits. The evening before, I had seen by the advertisements that the next day was a holiday at Sevres, and that the china manufactory would be open to the public. I was tempted by the beauty of the morning, and suddenly decided to go there.

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On my arrival at the station on the left bank, I noticed the crowd hurrying on in the fear of being late. Railroads, besides many other advantages, possess that of teaching the French punctuality. They will submit to the clock when they are convinced that it is their master; they will learn to wait when they find they will not be waited for. Social virtues, are, in a great degree, good habits. How many great qualities are grafted into nations by their geographical position, by political necessity, and by institutions! Avarice was destroyed for a time among the Lacedaemonians by the creation of an iron coinage, too heavy and too bulky to be conveniently hoarded.

I found myself in a carriage with two middle-aged women belonging to the domestic and retired class of Parisians I have spoken of above. A few civilities were sufficient to gain me their confidence, and after some minutes I was acquainted with their whole history.

They were two poor sisters, left orphans at fifteen, and had lived ever since, as those who work for their livelihood must live, by economy and privation. For the last twenty or thirty years they had worked in jewelry in the same house; they had seen ten masters succeed one another, and make their fortunes in it, without any change in their own lot. They had always lived in the same room, at the end of one of the passages in the Rue St. Denis, where the air and the sun are unknown. They began their work before daylight, went on with it till after nightfall, and saw year succeed to year without their lives being marked by any other events than the Sunday service, a walk, or an illness.

The younger of these worthy work-women was forty, and obeyed her sister as she did when a child. The elder looked after her, took care of her, and scolded her with a mother's tenderness. At first it was amusing; afterward one could not help seeing something affecting in these two gray-haired children, one unable to leave off the habit of obeying, the other that of protecting.

And it was not in that alone that my two companions seemed younger than their years; they knew so little that their wonder never ceased. We had hardly arrived at Clamart before they involuntarily exclaimed, like the king in the children's game, that they "did not think the world was so great"!

It was the first time they had trusted themselves on a railroad, and it was amusing to see their sudden shocks, their alarms, and their courageous determinations: everything was a marvel to them! They had remains of youth within them, which made them sensible to things which usually only strike us in childhood. Poor creatures! they had still the feelings of another age, though they had lost its charms.

But was there not something holy in this simplicity, which had been preserved to them by abstinence from all the joys of life? Ah! accursed be he who first had the had courage to attach ridicule to that name of "old maid," which recalls so many images of grievous deception, of dreariness, and of abandonment! Accursed be he who can find a

subject for sarcasm in involuntary misfortune, and who can crown gray hairs with thorns!

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The two sisters were called Frances and Madeleine. This day's journey was a feat of courage without example in their lives. The fever of the times had infected them unawares. Yesterday Madeleine had suddenly proposed the idea of the expedition, and Frances had accepted it immediately. Perhaps it would have been better not to yield to the great temptation offered by her younger sister; but "we have our follies at all ages," as the prudent Frances philosophically remarked. As for Madeleine, there are no regrets or doubts for her; she is the life-guardsmen of the establishment.

"We really must amuse ourselves," said she; "we live but once."

And the elder sister smiled at this Epicurean maxim. It was evident that the fever of independence was at its crisis in both of them.

And in truth it would have been a great pity if any scruple had interfered with their happiness, it was so frank and genial! The sight of the trees, which seemed to fly on both sides of the road, caused them unceasing admiration. The meeting a train passing in the contrary direction, with the noise and rapidity of a thunderbolt, made them shut their eyes and utter a cry; but it had already disappeared! They look around, take courage again, and express themselves full of astonishment at the marvel.

Madeleine declares that such a sight is worth the expense of the journey, and Frances would have agreed with her if she had not recollected, with some little alarm, the deficit which such an expense must make in their budget. The three francs spent upon this single expedition were the savings of a whole week of work. Thus the joy of the elder of the two sisters was mixed with remorse; the prodigal child now and then turned its eyes toward the back street of St. Denis.

But the motion and the succession of objects distract her. See the bridge of the Val surrounded by its lovely landscape: on the right, Paris with its grand monuments, which rise through the fog, or sparkle in the sun; on the left, Meudon, with its villas, its woods, its vines, and its royal castle! The two work-women look from one window to the other with exclamations of delight. One fellow-passenger laughs at their childish wonder; but to me it is deeply touching, for I see in it the sign of a long and monotonous seclusion: they are the prisoners of work, who have recovered liberty and fresh air for a few hours.

At last the train stops, and we get out. I show the two sisters the path that leads to Sevres, between the railway and the gardens, and they go on before, while I inquire about the time of returning.

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I soon join them again at the next station, where they have stopped at the little garden belonging to the gatekeeper; both are already in deep conversation with him while he digs his garden-borders, and marks out the places for flower-seeds. He informs them that it is the time for hoeing out weeds, for making grafts and layers, for sowing annuals, and for destroying the insects on the rose-trees. Madeleine has on the sill of her window two wooden boxes, in which, for want of air and sun, she has never been able to make anything grow but mustard and cress; but she persuades herself that, thanks to this information, all other plants may henceforth thrive in them. At last the gatekeeper, who is sowing a border with mignonette, gives her the rest of the seeds which he does not want, and the old maid goes off delighted, and begins to act over again the dream of Paired and her can of milk, with these flowers of her imagination.

On reaching the grove of acacias, where the fair was going on, I lost sight of the two sisters. I went alone among the sights: there were lotteries going on, mountebank shows, places for eating and drinking, and for shooting with the cross-bow. I have always been struck by the spirit of these out-of-door festivities. In drawing-room entertainments, people are cold, grave, often listless, and most of those who go there are brought together by habit or the obligations of society; in the country assemblies, on the contrary, you only find those who are attracted by the hope of enjoyment. There, it is a forced conscription; here, they are volunteers for gayety! Then, how easily they are pleased! How far this crowd of people is yet from knowing that to be pleased with nothing, and to look down on everything, is the height of fashion and good taste! Doubtless their amusements are often coarse; elegance and refinement are wanting in them; but at least they have heartiness. Oh, that the hearty enjoyments of these merry-makings could be retained in union with less vulgar feeling! Formerly religion stamped its holy character on the celebration of country festivals, and purified the pleasures without depriving them of their simplicity.

The hour arrives at which the doors of the porcelain manufactory and the museum of pottery are open to the public. I meet Frances and Madeleine again in the first room. Frightened at finding themselves in the midst of such regal magnificence, they hardly dare walk; they speak in a low tone, as if they were in a church.

"We are in the king's house," said the eldest sister, forgetting that there is no longer a king in France.

I encourage them to go on; I walk first, and they make up their minds to follow me.

What wonders are brought together in this collection! Here we see clay moulded into every shape, tinted with every color, and combined with every sort of substance!

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Earth and wood are the first substances worked upon by man, and seem more particularly meant for his use. They, like the domestic animals, are the essential accessories of his life; therefore there must be a more intimate connection between them and us. Stone and metals require long preparations; they resist our first efforts, and belong less to the individual than to communities. Earth and wood are, on the contrary, the principal instruments of the isolated being who must feed and shelter himself.

This, doubtless, makes me feel so much interested in the collection I am examining. These cups, so roughly modelled by the savage, admit me to a knowledge of some of his habits; these elegant yet incorrectly formed vases of the Indian tell me of a declining intelligence,—in which still glimmers the twilight of what was once bright sunshine; these jars, loaded with arabesques, show the fancy of the Arab rudely and ignorantly copied by the Spaniard! We find here the stamp of every race, every country, and every age.

My companions seemed little interested in these historical associations; they looked at all with that credulous admiration which leaves no room for examination or discussion. Madeleine read the name written under every piece of workmanship, and her sister answered with an exclamation of wonder.

In this way we reached a little courtyard, where they had thrown away the fragments of some broken china.

Frances perceived a colored saucer almost whole, of which she took possession as a record of the visit she was making; henceforth she would have a specimen of the Sevres china, “which is only made for kings!” I would not undeceive her by telling her that the products of the manufactory are sold all over the world, and that her saucer, before it was cracked, was the same as those that are bought at the shops for sixpence! Why should I destroy the illusions of her humble existence? Are we to break down the hedge-flowers that perfume our paths? Things are oftenest nothing in themselves; the thoughts we attach to them alone give them value. To rectify innocent mistakes, in order to recover some useless reality, is to be like those learned men who will see nothing in a plant but the chemical elements of which it is composed.

On leaving the manufactory, the two sisters, who had taken possession of me with the freedom of artlessness, invited me to share the luncheon they had brought with them. I declined at first, but they insisted with so much good-nature, that I feared to pain them, and with some awkwardness gave way.

We had only to look for a convenient spot. I led them up the hill, and we found a plot of grass enamelled with daisies, and shaded by two walnut-trees.

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Madeleine could not contain herself for joy. All her life she had dreamed of a dinner out on the grass! While helping her sister to take the provisions from the basket, she tells me of all her expeditions into the country that had been planned, and put off. Frances, on the other hand, was brought up at Montmorency, and before she became an orphan she had often gone back to her nurse's house. That which had the attraction of novelty for her sister, had for her the charm of recollection. She told of the vintage harvests to which her parents had taken her; the rides on Mother Luret's donkey, that they could not make go to the right without pulling him to the left; the cherry-gathering; and the sails on the lake in the innkeeper's boat.

These recollections have all the charm and freshness of childhood. Frances recalls to herself less what she has seen than what she has felt. While she is talking the cloth is laid, and we sit down under a tree. Before us winds the valley of Sevres, its many-storied houses abutting upon the gardens and the slopes of the hill; on the other side spreads out the park of St. Cloud, with its magnificent clumps of trees interspersed with meadows; above stretch the heavens like an immense ocean, in which the clouds are sailing! I look at this beautiful country, and I listen to these good old maids; I admire, and I am interested; and time passes gently on without my perceiving it.

At last the sun sets, and we have to think of returning. While Madeleine and Frances clear away the dinner, I walk down to the manufactory to ask the hour. The merrymaking is at its height; the blasts of the trombones resound from the band under the acacias. For a few moments I forget myself with looking about; but I have promised the two sisters to take them back to the Bellevue station; the train cannot wait, and I make haste to climb the path again which leads to the walnut-trees.

Just before I reached them, I heard voices on the other side of the hedge. Madeleine and Frances were speaking to a poor girl whose clothes were burned, her hands blackened, and her face tied up with bloodstained bandages. I saw that she was one of the girls employed at the gunpowder mills, which are built further up on the common. An explosion had taken place a few days before; the girl's mother and elder sister were killed; she herself escaped by a miracle, and was now left without any means of support. She told all this with the resigned and unhopeful manner of one who has always been accustomed to suffer. The two sisters were much affected; I saw them consulting with each other in a low tone: then Frances took thirty sous out of a little coarse silk purse, which was all they had left, and gave them to the poor girl. I hastened on to that side of the hedge; but, before I reached it, I met the two old sisters, who called out to me that they would not return by the railway, but on foot!

I then understood that the money they had meant for the journey had just been given to the beggar! Good, like evil, is contagious: I run to the poor wounded girl, give her the sum that was to pay for my own place, and return to Frances and Madeleine, and tell them I will walk with them.

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I am just come back from taking them home; and have left them delighted with their day, the recollection of which will long make them happy. This morning I was pitying those whose lives are obscure and joyless; now, I understand that God has provided a compensation with every trial. The smallest pleasure derives from rarity a relish otherwise unknown. Enjoyment is only what we feel to be such, and the luxurious man feels no longer: satiety has destroyed his appetite, while privation preserves to the other that first of earthly blessings: the being easily made happy. Oh, that I could persuade every one of this! that so the rich might not abuse their riches, and that the poor might have patience. If happiness is the rarest of blessings, it is because the reception of it is the rarest of virtues.

Madeleine and Frances! ye poor old maids whose courage, resignation, and generous hearts are your only wealth, pray for the wretched who give themselves up to despair; for the unhappy who hate and envy; and for the unfeeling into whose enjoyments no pity enters.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Brought them up to poverty
Carn-ival means, literally, "farewell to flesh!"
Coffee is the grand work of a bachelor's housekeeping
Defeat and victory only displace each other by turns
Did not think the world was so great
Do they understand what makes them so gay?
Each of us regards himself as the mirror of the community
Ease with which the poor forget their wretchedness
Every one keeps his holidays in his own way
Favorite and conclusive answer of his class—"I know"
Fear of losing a moment from business
Finishes his sin thoroughly before he begins to repent
Her kindness, which never sleeps
Hubbub of questions which waited for no reply
Moderation is the great social virtue
No one is so unhappy as to have nothing to give
Our tempers are like an opera-glass
Poverty, you see, is a famous schoolmistress
Prisoners of work
Question is not to discover what will suit us
Ruining myself, but we must all have our Carnival

Two thirds of human existence are wasted in hesitation
What a small dwelling joy can live

AN “ATTIC” PHILOSOPHER

(Un Philosophe sous les Toits)

By *Emile Souvestre*

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VI

UNCLE MAURICE

June 7th, Four O'clock A.M.

I am not surprised at hearing, when I awake, the birds singing so joyfully outside my window; it is only by living, as they and I do, in a top story, that one comes to know how cheerful the mornings really are up among the roofs. It is there that the sun sends his first rays, and the breeze comes with the fragrance of the gardens and woods; there that a wandering butterfly sometimes ventures among the flowers of the attic, and that the songs of the industrious work-woman welcome the dawn of day. The lower stories are still deep in sleep, silence, and shadow, while here labor, light, and song already reign.

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What life is around me! See the swallow returning from her search for food, with her beak full of insects for her young ones; the sparrows shake the dew from their wings while they chase one another in the sunshine; and my neighbors throw open their windows, and welcome the morning with their fresh faces! Delightful hour of waking, when everything returns to feeling and to motion; when the first light of day strikes upon creation, and brings it to life again, as the magic wand struck the palace of the Sleeping Beauty in the wood! It is a moment of rest from every misery; the sufferings of the sick are allayed, and a breath of hope enters into the hearts of the despairing. But, alas! it is but a short respite! Everything will soon resume its wonted course: the great human machine, with its long strains, its deep gasps, its collisions, and its crashes, will be again put in motion.

The tranquillity of this first morning hour reminds me of that of our first years of life. Then, too, the sun shines brightly, the air is fragrant, and the illusions of youth—those birds of our life's morning—sing around us. Why do they fly away when we are older? Where do this sadness and this solitude, which gradually steal upon us, come from? The course seems to be the same with individuals and with communities: at starting, so readily made happy, so easily enchanted; and at the goal, the bitter disappointment or reality! The road, which began among hawthorns and primroses, ends speedily in deserts or in precipices! Why is there so much confidence at first, so much doubt at last? Has, then, the knowledge of life no other end but to make it unfit for happiness? Must we condemn ourselves to ignorance if we would preserve hope? Is the world and is the individual man intended, after all, to find rest only in an eternal childhood?

How many times have I asked myself these questions! Solitude has the advantage or the danger of making us continually search more deeply into the same ideas. As our discourse is only with ourself, we always give the same direction to the conversation; we are not called to turn it to the subject which occupies another mind, or interests another's feelings; and so an involuntary inclination makes us return forever to knock at the same doors!

I interrupted my reflections to put my attic in order. I hate the look of disorder, because it shows either a contempt for details or an unaptness for spiritual life. To arrange the things among which we have to live, is to establish the relation of property and of use between them and us: it is to lay the foundation of those habits without which man tends to the savage state. What, in fact, is social organization but a series of habits, settled in accordance with the dispositions of our nature?

I distrust both the intellect and the morality of those people to whom disorder is of no consequence—who can live at ease in an Augean stable. What surrounds us, reflects more or less that which is within us. The mind is like one of those dark lanterns which, in spite of everything, still throw some light around. If our tastes did not reveal our character, they would be no longer tastes, but instincts.



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While I was arranging everything in my attic, my eyes rested on the little almanac hanging over my chimney-piece. I looked for the day of the month, and I saw these words written in large letters: "*Fete dieu!*"

It is to-day! In this great city, where there are no longer any public religious solemnities, there is nothing to remind us of it; but it is, in truth, the period so happily chosen by the primitive church. "The day kept in honor of the Creator," says Chateaubriand, "happens at a time when the heaven and the earth declare His power, when the woods and fields are full of new life, and all are united by the happiest ties; there is not a single widowed plant in the fields."

What recollections these words have just awakened! I left off what I was about, I leaned my elbows on the windowsill, and, with my head between my two hands, I went back in thought to the little town where the first days of my childhood were passed.

The 'Fete Dieu' was then one of the great events of my life! It was necessary to be diligent and obedient a long time beforehand, to deserve to share in it. I still recollect with what raptures of expectation I got up on the morning of the day. There was a holy joy in the air. The neighbors, up earlier than usual, hung cloths with flowers or figures, worked in tapestry, along the streets. I went from one to another, by turns admiring religious scenes of the Middle Ages, mythological compositions of the Renaissance, old battles in the style of Louis XIV, and the Arcadias of Madame de Pompadour. All this world of phantoms seemed to be coming forth from the dust of past ages, to assist—silent and motionless—at the holy ceremony. I looked, alternately in fear and wonder, at those terrible warriors with their swords always raised, those beautiful huntresses shooting the arrow which never left the bow, and those shepherds in satin breeches always playing the flute at the feet of the perpetually smiling shepherdess. Sometimes, when the wind blew behind these hanging pictures, it seemed to me that the figures themselves moved, and I watched to see them detach themselves from the wall, and take their places in the procession! But these impressions were vague and transitory. The feeling that predominated over every other was that of an overflowing yet quiet joy. In the midst of all the floating draperies, the scattered flowers, the voices of the maidens, and the gladness which, like a perfume, exhaled from everything, you felt transported in spite of yourself. The joyful sounds of the festival were repeated in your heart, in a thousand melodious echoes. You were more indulgent, more holy, more loving! For God was not only manifesting himself without, but also within us.

And then the altars for the occasion! the flowery arbors! the triumphal arches made of green boughs! What competition among the different parishes for the erection of the resting-places where the procession was to halt! It was who should contribute the rarest and the most beautiful of his possessions!

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It was there I made my first sacrifice!

The wreaths of flowers were arranged, the candles lighted, and the Tabernacle dressed with roses; but one was wanting fit to crown the whole! All the neighboring gardens had been ransacked. I alone possessed a flower worthy of such a place. It was on the rose-tree given me by my mother on my birthday. I had watched it for several months, and there was no other bud to blow on the tree. There it was, half open, in its mossy nest, the object of such long expectations, and of all a child's pride! I hesitated for some moments. No one had asked me for it; I might easily avoid losing it. I should hear no reproaches, but one rose noiselessly within me. When every one else had given all they had, ought I alone to keep back my treasure? Ought I to grudge to God one of the gifts which, like all the rest, I had received from him? At this last thought I plucked the flower from the stem, and took it to put at the top of the Tabernacle. Ah! why does the recollection of this sacrifice, which was so hard and yet so sweet to me, now make me smile? Is it so certain that the value of a gift is in itself, rather than in the intention? If the cup of cold water in the gospel is remembered to the poor man, why should not the flower be remembered to the child? Let us not look down upon the child's simple act of generosity; it is these which accustom the soul to self-denial and to sympathy. I cherished this moss-rose a long time as a sacred talisman; I had reason to cherish it always, as the record of the first victory won over myself.

It is now many years since I witnessed the celebration of the 'Fete Dieu'; but should I again feel in it the happy sensations of former days? I still remember how, when the procession had passed, I walked through the streets strewn with flowers and shaded with green boughs. I felt intoxicated by the lingering perfumes of the incense, mixed with the fragrance of syringas, jessamine, and roses, and I seemed no longer to touch the ground as I went along. I smiled at everything; the whole world was Paradise in my eyes, and it seemed to me that God was floating in the air!

Moreover, this feeling was not the excitement of the moment: it might be more intense on certain days, but at the same time it continued through the ordinary course of my life. Many years thus passed for me in an expansion of heart, and a trustfulness which prevented sorrow, if not from coming, at least from staying with me. Sure of not being alone, I soon took heart again, like the child who recovers its courage, because it hears its mother's voice close by. Why have I lost that confidence of my childhood? Shall I never feel again so deeply that God is here?

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How strange the association of our thoughts! A day of the month recalls my infancy, and see, all the recollections of my former years are growing up around me! Why was I so happy then? I consider well, and nothing is sensibly changed in my condition. I possess, as I did then, health and my daily bread; the only difference is, that I am now responsible for myself! As a child, I accepted life when it came; another cared and provided for me. So long as I fulfilled my present duties I was at peace within, and I left the future to the prudence of my father! My destiny was a ship, in the directing of which I had no share, and in which I sailed as a common passenger. There was the whole secret of childhood's happy security. Since then worldly wisdom has deprived me of it. When my lot was intrusted to my own and sole keeping, I thought to make myself master of it by means of a long insight into the future. I have filled the present hour with anxieties, by occupying my thoughts with the future; I have put my judgment in the place of Providence, and the happy child is changed into the anxious man.

A melancholy course, yet perhaps an important lesson. Who knows that, if I had trusted more to Him who rules the world, I should not have been spared all this anxiety? It may be that happiness is not possible here below, except on condition of living like a child, giving ourselves up to the duties of each day as it comes, and trusting in the goodness of our heavenly Father for all besides.

This reminds me of my Uncle Maurice! Whenever I have need to strengthen myself in all that is good, I turn my thoughts to him; I see again the gentle expression of his half-smiling, half-mournful face; I hear his voice, always soft and soothing as a breath of summer! The remembrance of him protects my life, and gives it light. He, too, was a saint and martyr here below. Others have pointed out the path of heaven; he has taught us to see those of earth aright.

But, except the angels, who are charged with noting down the sacrifices performed in secret, and the virtues which are never known, who has ever heard of my Uncle Maurice? Perhaps I alone remember his name, and still recall his history.

Well! I will write it, not for others, but for myself! They say that, at the sight of the Apollo, the body erects itself and assumes a more dignified attitude: in the same way, the soul should feel itself raised and ennobled by the recollection of a good man's life!

A ray of the rising sun lights up the little table on which I write; the breeze brings me in the scent of the mignonette, and the swallows wheel about my window with joyful twitterings. The image of my Uncle Maurice will be in its proper place amid the songs, the sunshine, and the fragrance.

Seven o'clock.—It is with men's lives as with days: some dawn radiant with a thousand colors, others dark with gloomy clouds. That of my Uncle Maurice was one of the latter. He was so sickly, when he came into the world, that they thought he must die; but

notwithstanding these anticipations, which might be called hopes, he continued to live, suffering and deformed.

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He was deprived of all joys as well as of all the attractions of childhood. He was oppressed because he was weak, and laughed at for his deformity. In vain the little hunchback opened his arms to the world: the world scoffed at him, and went its way.

However, he still had his mother, and it was to her that the child directed all the feelings of a heart repelled by others. With her he found shelter, and was happy, till he reached the age when a man must take his place in life; and Maurice had to content himself with that which others had refused with contempt. His education would have qualified him for any course of life; and he became an octroi-clerk—[The octroi is the tax on provisions levied at the entrance of the town]—in one of the little toll-houses at the entrance of his native town.

He was always shut up in this dwelling of a few feet square, with no relaxation from the office accounts but reading and his mother's visits. On fine summer days she came to work at the door of his hut, under the shade of a clematis planted by Maurice. And, even when she was silent, her presence was a pleasant change for the hunchback; he heard the clinking of her long knitting-needles; he saw her mild and mournful profile, which reminded him of so many courageously-borne trials; he could every now and then rest his hand affectionately on that bowed neck, and exchange a smile with her!

This comfort was soon to be taken from him. His old mother fell sick, and at the end of a few days he had to give up all hope. Maurice was overcome at the idea of a separation which would henceforth leave him alone on earth, and abandoned himself to boundless grief. He knelt by the bedside of the dying woman, he called her by the fondest names, he pressed her in his arms, as if he could so keep her in life. His mother tried to return his caresses, and to answer him; but her hands were cold, her voice was already gone. She could only press her lips against the forehead of her son, heave a sigh, and close her eyes forever!

They tried to take Maurice away, but he resisted them and threw himself on that now motionless form.

"Dead!" cried he; "dead! She who had never left me, she who was the only one in the world who loved me! You, my mother, dead! What then remains for me here below?"

A stifled voice replied:

"God!"

Maurice, startled, raised himself! Was that a last sigh from the dead, or his own conscience, that had answered him? He did not seek to know, but he understood the answer, and accepted it.

It was then that I first knew him. I often went to see him in his little toll-house. He joined in my childish games, told me his finest stories, and let me gather his flowers. Deprived as he was of all external attractiveness, he showed himself full of kindness to all who came to him, and, though he never would put himself forward, he had a welcome for everyone. Deserted, despised, he submitted to everything with a gentle patience; and while he was thus stretched on the cross of life, amid the insults of his executioners, he repeated with Christ, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

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No other clerk showed so much honesty, zeal, and intelligence; but those who otherwise might have promoted him as his services deserved were repelled by his deformity. As he had no patrons, he found his claims were always disregarded. They preferred before him those who were better able to make themselves agreeable, and seemed to be granting him a favor when letting him keep the humble office which enabled him to live. Uncle Maurice bore injustice as he had borne contempt; unfairly treated by men, he raised his eyes higher, and trusted in the justice of Him who cannot be deceived.

He lived in an old house in the suburb, where many work-people, as poor but not as forlorn as he, also lodged. Among these neighbors there was a single woman, who lived by herself in a little garret, into which came both wind and rain. She was a young girl, pale, silent, and with nothing to recommend her but her wretchedness and her resignation to it. She was never seen speaking to any other woman, and no song cheered her garret. She worked without interest and without relaxation; a depressing gloom seemed to envelop her like a shroud. Her dejection affected Maurice; he attempted to speak to her; she replied mildly, but in few words. It was easy to see that she preferred her silence and her solitude to the little hunchback's good-will; he perceived it, and said no more.

But Toinette's needle was hardly sufficient for her support, and presently work failed her! Maurice learned that the poor girl was in want of everything, and that the tradesmen refused to give her credit. He immediately went to them privately and engaged to pay them for what they supplied Toinette with.

Things went on in this way for several months. The young dressmaker continued out of work, until she was at last frightened at the bills she had contracted with the shopkeepers. When she came to an explanation with them, everything was discovered. Her first impulse was to run to Uncle Maurice, and thank him on her knees. Her habitual reserve had given way to a burst of deepest feeling. It seemed as if gratitude had melted all the ice of that numbed heart.

Being now no longer embarrassed with a secret, the little hunchback could give greater efficacy to his good offices. Toinette became to him a sister, for whose wants he had a right to provide. It was the first time since the death of his mother that he had been able to share his life with another. The young woman received his attentions with feeling, but with reserve. All Maurice's efforts were insufficient to dispel her gloom: she seemed touched by his kindness, and sometimes expressed her sense of it with warmth; but there she stopped. Her heart was a closed book, which the little hunchback might bend over, but could not read. In truth he cared little to do so; he gave himself up to the happiness of being no longer alone, and took Toinette such as her long trials had made her; he loved her as she was, and wished for nothing else but still to enjoy her company.

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This thought insensibly took possession of his mind, to the exclusion of all besides. The poor girl was as forlorn as himself; she had become accustomed to the deformity of the hunchback, and she seemed to look on him with an affectionate sympathy! What more could he wish for? Until then, the hopes of making himself acceptable to a helpmate had been repelled by Maurice as a dream; but chance seemed willing to make it a reality. After much hesitation he took courage, and decided to speak to her.

It was evening; the little hunchback, in much agitation, directed his steps toward the work-woman's garret just as he was about to enter, he thought he heard a strange voice pronouncing the maiden's name. He quickly pushed open the door, and perceived Toinette weeping, and leaning on the shoulder of a young man in the dress of a sailor.

At the sight of my uncle, she disengaged herself quickly, and ran to him, crying out:

"Ah! come in—come in! It is he that I thought was dead: it is Julien; it is my betrothed!"

Maurice tottered, and drew back. A single word had told him all!

It seemed to him as if the ground shook and his heart was about to break; but the same voice that he had heard by his mother's deathbed again sounded in his ears, and he soon recovered himself. God was still his friend!

He himself accompanied the newly-married pair on the road when they left the town, and, after wishing them all the happiness which was denied to him, he returned with resignation to the old house in the suburb.

It was there that he ended his life, forsaken by men, but not as he said by the Father which is in heaven. He felt His presence everywhere; it was to him in the place of all else. When he died, it was with a smile, and like an exile setting out for his own country. He who had consoled him in poverty and ill-health, when he was suffering from injustice and forsaken by all, had made death a gain and blessing to him.

Eight o'clock.—All I have just written has pained me! Till now I have looked into life for instruction how to live. Is it then true that human maxims are not always sufficient? that beyond goodness, prudence, moderation, humility, self-sacrifice itself, there is one great truth, which alone can face great misfortunes? and that, if man has need of virtues for others, he has need of religion for himself?

When, in youth, we drink our wine with a merry heart, as the Scripture expresses it, we think we are sufficient for ourselves; strong, happy, and beloved, we believe, like Ajax, we shall be able to escape every storm in spite of the gods. But later in life, when the back is bowed, when happiness proves a fading flower, and the affections grow chill—then, in fear of the void and the darkness, we stretch out our arms, like the child overtaken by night, and we call for help to Him who is everywhere.

I was asking this morning why this growing confusion alike for society and for the individual? In vain does human reason from hour to hour light some new torch on the roadside: the night continues to grow ever darker! Is it not because we are content to withdraw farther and farther from God, the Sun of spirits?

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But what do these hermit's reveries signify to the world? The inward turmoils of most men are stifled by the outward ones; life does not give them time to question themselves. Have they time to know what they are, and what they should be, whose whole thoughts are in the next lease or the last price of stock? Heaven is very high, and wise men look only at the earth.

But I—poor savage amid all this civilization, who seek neither power nor riches, and who have found in my own thoughts the home and shelter of my spirit—I can go back with impunity to these recollections of my childhood; and, if this our great city no longer honors the name of God with a festival, I will strive still to keep the feast to Him in my heart.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRICE OF POWER AND THE WORTH OF FAME

Sunday, July 1st

Yesterday the month dedicated to Juno (Junius, June) by the Romans ended. To-day we enter on July.

In ancient Rome this latter month was called Quintiles (the fifth), because the year, which was then divided into only ten parts, began in March. When Numa Pompilius divided it into twelve months this name of Quintiles was preserved, as well as those that followed—Sexteles, September, October, November, December—although these designations did not accord with the newly arranged order of the months. At last, after a time the month Quintiles, in which Julius Caesar was born, was called Julius, whence we have July. Thus this name, placed in the calendar, is become the imperishable record of a great man; it is an immortal epitaph on Time's highway, engraved by the admiration of man.

How many similar inscriptions are there! Seas, continents, mountains, stars, and monuments, have all in succession served the same purpose! We have turned the whole world into a Golden Book, like that in which the state of Venice used to enroll its illustrious names and its great deeds. It seems that mankind feels a necessity for honoring itself in its elect ones, and that it raises itself in its own eyes by choosing heroes from among its own race. The human family love to preserve the memory; of the parvenus of glory, as we cherish that of a great ancestor, or of a benefactor.

In fact, the talents granted to a single individual do not benefit himself alone, but are gifts to the world; everyone shares them, for everyone suffers or benefits by his actions. Genius is a lighthouse, meant to give light from afar; the man who bears it is but the rock upon which this lighthouse is built.



I love to dwell upon these thoughts; they explain to me in what consists our admiration for glory. When glory has benefited men, that admiration is gratitude; when it is only remarkable in itself, it is the pride of race; as men, we love to immortalize the most shining examples of humanity.

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Who knows whether we do not obey the same instinct in submitting to the hand of power? Apart from the requirements of a gradation of ranks, or the consequences of a conquest, the multitude delight to surround their chiefs with privileges—whether it be that their vanity makes them thus to aggrandize one of their own creations, or whether they try to conceal the humiliation of subjection by exaggerating the importance of those who rule them. They wish to honor themselves through their master; they elevate him on their shoulders as on a pedestal; they surround him with a halo of light, in order that some of it may be reflected upon themselves. It is still the fable of the dog who contents himself with the chain and collar, so that they are of gold.

This servile vanity is not less natural or less common than the vanity of dominion. Whoever feels himself incapable of command, at least desires to obey a powerful chief. Serfs have been known to consider themselves dishonored when they became the property of a mere count after having been that of a prince, and Saint-Simon mentions a valet who would only wait upon marquises.

July 7th, seven o'clock P. M.—I have just now been up the Boulevards; it was the opera night, and there was a crowd of carriages in the Rue Lepelletier. The foot-passengers who were stopped at a crossing recognized the persons in some of these as we went by, and mentioned their names; they were those of celebrated or powerful men, the successful ones of the day.

Near me there was a man looking on with hollow cheeks and eager eyes, whose thin black coat was threadbare. He followed with envious looks these possessors of the privileges of power or of fame, and I read on his lips, which curled with a bitter smile, all that passed in his mind.

“Look at them, the lucky fellows!” thought he; “all the pleasures of wealth, all the enjoyments of pride, are theirs. Their names are renowned, all their wishes fulfilled; they are the sovereigns of the world, either by their intellect or their power; and while I, poor and unknown, toil painfully along the road below, they wing their way over the mountain-tops gilded by the broad sunshine of prosperity.”

I have come home in deep thought. Is it true that there are these inequalities, I do not say in the fortunes, but in the happiness of men? Do genius and authority really wear life as a crown, while the greater part of mankind receive it as a yoke? Is the difference of rank but a different use of men's dispositions and talents, or a real inequality in their destinies? A solemn question, as it regards the verification of God's impartiality.

July 8th, noon.—I went this morning to call upon a friend from the same province as myself, who is the first usher-in-waiting to one of our ministers. I took him some letters from his family, left for him by a traveller just come from Brittany. He wished me to stay.



"To-day," said he, "the Minister gives no audience: he takes a day of rest with his family. His younger sisters are arrived; he will take them this morning to St. Cloud, and in the evening he has invited his friends to a private ball. I shall be dismissed directly for the rest of the day. We can dine together; read the news while you are waiting for me."

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I sat down at a table covered with newspapers, all of which I looked over by turns. Most of them contained severe criticisms on the last political acts of the minister; some of them added suspicions as to the honor of the minister himself.

Just as I had finished reading, a secretary came for them to take them to his master.

He was then about to read these accusations, to suffer silently the abuse of all those tongues which were holding him up to indignation or to scorn! Like the Roman victor in his triumph, he had to endure the insults of him who followed his car, relating to the crowd his follies, his ignorance, or his vices.

But, among the arrows shot at him from every side, would no one be found poisoned? Would not one reach some spot in his heart where the wound would be incurable? What is the worth of a life exposed to the attacks of envious hatred or furious conviction? The Christians yielded only the fragments of their flesh to the beasts of the amphitheatres; the man in power gives up his peace, his affections, his honor, to the cruel bites of the pen.

While I was musing upon these dangers of greatness, the usher entered hastily. Important news had been received: the minister is just summoned to the council; he will not be able to take his sisters to St. Cloud.

I saw, through the windows, the young ladies, who were waiting at the door, sorrowfully go upstairs again, while their brother went off to the council. The carriage, which should have gone filled with so much family happiness, is just out of sight, carrying only the cares of a statesman in it.

The usher came back discontented and disappointed. The more or less of liberty which he is allowed to enjoy, is his barometer of the political atmosphere. If he gets leave, all goes well; if he is kept at his post, the country is in danger. His opinion on public affairs is but a calculation of his own interest. My friend is almost a statesman.

I had some conversation with him, and he told me several curious particulars of public life.

The new minister has old friends whose opinions he opposes, though he still retains his personal regard for them. Though separated from them by the colors he fights under, they remain united by old associations; but the exigencies of party forbid him to meet them. If their intercourse continued, it would awaken suspicion; people would imagine that some dishonorable bargain was going on; his friends would be held to be traitors desirous to sell themselves, and he the corrupt minister prepared to buy them. He has, therefore, been obliged to break off friendships of twenty years' standing, and to sacrifice attachments which had become a second nature.

Sometimes, however, the minister still gives way to his old feelings; he receives or visits his friends privately; he shuts himself up with them, and talks of the times when they could be open friends. By dint of precautions they have hitherto succeeded in concealing this blot of friendship against policy; but sooner or later the newspapers will be informed of it, and will denounce him to the country as an object of distrust.



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For whether hatred be honest or dishonest, it never shrinks from any accusation. Sometimes it even proceeds to crime. The usher assured me that several warnings had been given the minister which had made him fear the vengeance of an assassin, and that he no longer ventured out on foot.

Then, from one thing to another, I learned what temptations came in to mislead or overcome his judgment; how he found himself fatally led into obliquities which he could not but deplore. Misled by passion, over-persuaded by entreaties, or compelled for reputation's sake, he has many times held the balance with an unsteady hand. How sad the condition of him who is in authority! Not only are the miseries of power imposed upon him, but its vices also, which, not content with torturing, succeed in corrupting him.

We prolonged our conversation till it was interrupted by the minister's return. He threw himself out of the carriage with a handful of papers, and with an anxious manner went into his own room. An instant afterward his bell was heard; his secretary was called to send off notices to all those invited for the evening; the ball would not take place; they spoke mysteriously of bad news transmitted by the telegraph, and in such circumstances an entertainment would seem to insult the public sorrow.

I took leave of my friend, and here I am at home. What I have just seen is an answer to my doubts the other day. Now I know with what pangs men pay for their dignities; now I understand

That Fortune sells what we believe she gives.

This explains to me the reason why Charles V. aspired to the repose of the cloister.

And yet I have only glanced at some of the sufferings attached to power. What shall I say of the falls in which its possessors are precipitated from the heights of heaven to the very depths of the earth? of that path of pain along which they must forever bear the burden of their responsibility? of that chain of decorums and ennui which encompasses every act of their lives, and leaves them so little liberty?

The partisans of despotism adhere with reason to forms and ceremonies. If men wish to give unlimited power to their fellow-man, they must keep him separated from ordinary humanity; they must surround him with a continual worship, and, by a constant ceremonial, keep up for him the superhuman part they have granted him. Our masters cannot remain absolute, except on condition of being treated as idols.

But, after all, these idols are men, and, if the exclusive life they must lead is an insult to the dignity of others, it is also a torment to themselves. Everyone knows the law of the Spanish court, which used to regulate, hour by hour, the actions of the king and queen; "so that," says Voltaire, "by reading it one can tell all that the sovereigns of Spain have done, or will do, from Philip II to the day of judgment." It was by this law that Philip III,



when sick, was obliged to endure such an excess of heat that he died in consequence, because the Duke of Uzeda, who alone had the right to put out the fire in the royal chamber, happened to be absent.

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When the wife of Charles II was run away with on a spirited horse, she was about to perish before anyone dared to save her, because etiquette forbade them to touch the queen. Two young officers endangered their lives for her by stopping the horse. The prayers and tears of her whom they had just snatched from death were necessary to obtain pardon for their crime. Every one knows the anecdote related by Madame Campan of Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI. One day, being at her toilet, when the chemise was about to be presented to her by one of the assistants, a lady of very ancient family entered and claimed the honor, as she had the right by etiquette; but, at the moment she was about to fulfil her duty, a lady of higher rank appeared, and in her turn took the garment she was about to offer to the queen; when a third lady of still higher title came in her turn, and was followed by a fourth, who was no other than the king's sister. The chemise was in this manner passed from hand to hand, with ceremonies, courtesies, and compliments, before it came to the queen, who, half naked and quite ashamed, was shivering with cold for the great honor of etiquette.

12th, seven o'clock, P.M.—On coming home this evening, I saw, standing at the door of a house, an old man, whose appearance and features reminded me of my father. There was the same beautiful smile, the same deep and penetrating eye, the same noble bearing of the head, and the same careless attitude.

I began living over again the first years of my life, and recalling to myself the conversations of that guide whom God in his mercy had given me, and whom in his severity he had too soon withdrawn.

When my father spoke, it was not only to bring our two minds together by an interchange of thought, but his words always contained instruction.

Not that he endeavored to make me feel it so: my father feared everything that had the appearance of a lesson. He used to say that virtue could make herself devoted friends, but she did not take pupils: therefore he was not desirous to teach goodness; he contented himself with sowing the seeds of it, certain that experience would make them grow.

How often has good grain fallen thus into a corner of the heart, and, when it has been long forgotten, all at once put forth the blade and come into ear! It is a treasure laid aside in a time of ignorance, and we do not know its value till we find ourselves in need of it.

Among the stories with which he enlivened our walks or our evenings, there is one which now returns to my memory, doubtless because the time is come to derive its lesson from it.

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My father, who was apprenticed at the age of twelve to one of those trading collectors who call themselves naturalists, because they put all creation under glasses that they may sell it by retail, had always led a life of poverty and labor. Obligated to rise before daybreak, by turns shop-boy, clerk, and laborer, he was made to bear alone all the work of a trade of which his master reaped all the profits. In truth, this latter had a peculiar talent for making the most of the labor of other people. Though unfit himself for the execution of any kind of work, no one knew better how to sell it. His words were a net, in which people found themselves taken before they were aware. And since he was devoted to himself alone, and looked on the producer as his enemy, and the buyer as prey, he used them both with that obstinate perseverance which avarice teaches.

My father was a slave all the week, and could call himself his own only on Sunday. The master naturalist, who used to spend the day at the house of an old female relative, then gave him his liberty on condition that he dined out, and at his own expense. But my father used secretly to take with him a crust of bread, which he hid in his botanizing-box, and, leaving Paris as soon as it was day, he would wander far into the valley of Montmorency, the wood of Meudon, or among the windings of the Marne. Excited by the fresh air, the penetrating perfume of the growing vegetation, or the fragrance of the honeysuckles, he would walk on until hunger or fatigue made itself felt. Then he would sit under a hedge, or by the side of a stream, and would make a rustic feast, by turns on watercresses, wood strawberries, and blackberries picked from the hedges; he would gather a few plants, read a few pages of Florian, then in greatest vogue, of Gessner, who was just translated, or of Jean Jacques, of whom he possessed three old volumes. The day was thus passed alternately in activity and rest, in pursuit and meditation, until the declining sun warned him to take again the road to Paris, where he would arrive, his feet torn and dusty, but his mind invigorated for a whole week.

One day, as he was going toward the wood of Viroflay, he met, close to it, a stranger who was occupied in botanizing and in sorting the plants he had just gathered. He was an elderly man with an honest face; but his eyes, which were rather deep-set under his eyebrows, had a somewhat uneasy and timid expression. He was dressed in a brown cloth coat, a gray waistcoat, black breeches, and worsted stockings, and held an ivory-headed cane under his arm. His appearance was that of a small retired tradesman who was living on his means, and rather below the golden mean of Horace.

My father, who had great respect for age, civilly raised his hat to him as he passed. In doing so, a plant he held fell from his hand; the stranger stooped to take it up, and recognized it.

"It is a *Deutaria heptaphyllos*," said he; "I have not yet seen any of them in these woods; did you find it near here, sir?"

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My father replied that it was to be found in abundance on the top of the hill, toward Sevres, as well as the great Laserpitium.

“That, too!” repeated the old man more briskly. “Ah! I shall go and look for them; I have gathered them formerly on the hillside of Robaila.”

My father proposed to take him. The stranger accepted his proposal with thanks, and hastened to collect together the plants he had gathered; but all of a sudden he appeared seized with a scruple. He observed to his companion that the road he was going was halfway up the hill, and led in the direction of the castle of the Dames Royales at Bellevue; that by going to the top he would consequently turn out of his road, and that it was not right he should take this trouble for a stranger.

My father insisted upon it with his habitual good-nature; but, the more eagerness he showed, the more obstinately the old man refused; it even seemed to my father that his good intention at last excited his suspicion. He therefore contented himself with pointing out the road to the stranger, whom he saluted, and he soon lost sight of him.

Many hours passed by, and he thought no more of the meeting. He had reached the copses of Chaville, where, stretched on the ground in a mossy glade, he read once more the last volume of Emile. The delight of reading it had so completely absorbed him that he had ceased to see or hear anything around him. With his cheeks flushed and his eyes moist, he repeated aloud a passage which had particularly affected him.

An exclamation uttered close by him awoke him from his ecstasy; he raised his head, and perceived the tradesman-looking person he had met before on the crossroad at Viroflay.

He was loaded with plants, the collection of which seemed to have put him into high good-humor.

“A thousand thanks, sir,” said he to my father. “I have found all that you told me of, and I am indebted to you for a charming walk.”

My father respectfully rose, and made a civil reply. The stranger had grown quite familiar, and even asked if his young “brother botanist” did not think of returning to Paris. My father replied in the affirmative, and opened his tin box to put his book back in it.

The stranger asked him with a smile if he might without impertinence ask the name of it. My father answered that it was Rousseau’s Emile.

The stranger immediately became grave.



They walked for some time side by side, my father expressing, with the warmth of a heart still throbbing with emotion, all that this work had made him feel; his companion remaining cold and silent. The former extolled the glory of the great Genevese writer, whose genius had made him a citizen of the world; he expatiated on this privilege of great thinkers, who reign in spite of time and space, and gather together a people of willing subjects out of all nations; but the stranger suddenly interrupted him:

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"And how do you know," said he, mildly, "whether Jean Jacques would not exchange the reputation which you seem to envy for the life of one of the wood-cutters whose chimneys' smoke we see? What has fame brought him except persecution? The unknown friends whom his books may have made for him content themselves with blessing him in their hearts, while the declared enemies that they have drawn upon him pursue him with violence and calumny! His pride has been flattered by success: how many times has it been wounded by satire? And be assured that human pride is like the Sybarite who was prevented from sleeping by a crease in a roseleaf. The activity of a vigorous mind, by which the world profits, almost always turns against him who possesses it. He expects more from it as he grows older; the ideal he pursues continually disgusts him with the actual; he is like a man who, with a too-refined sight, discerns spots and blemishes in the most beautiful face. I will not speak of stronger temptations and of deeper downfalls. Genius, you have said, is a kingdom; but what virtuous man is not afraid of being a king? He who feels only his great powers, is—with the weaknesses and passions of our nature—preparing for great failures. Believe me, sir, the unhappy man who wrote this book is no object of admiration or of envy; but, if you have a feeling heart, pity him!"

My father, astonished at the excitement with which his companion pronounced these last words, did not know what to answer.

Just then they reached the paved road which led from Meudon Castle to that of Versailles; a carriage was passing.

The ladies who were in it perceived the old man, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and leaning out of the window repeated:

"There is Jean Jacques—there is Rousseau!"

Then the carriage disappeared in the distance.

My father remained motionless, confounded, and amazed, his eyes wide open, and his hands clasped.

Rousseau, who had shuddered on hearing his name spoken, turned toward him:

"You see," said he, with the bitter misanthropy which his later misfortunes had produced in him, "Jean Jacques cannot even hide himself: he is an object of curiosity to some, of malignity to others, and to all he is a public thing, at which they point the finger. It would signify less if he had only to submit to the impertinence of the idle; but, as soon as a man has had the misfortune to make himself a name, he becomes public property. Every one rakes into his life, relates his most trivial actions, and insults his feelings; he becomes like those walls, which every passer-by may deface with some abusive writing. Perhaps you will say that I have myself encouraged this curiosity by publishing

my Confessions. But the world forced me to it. They looked into my house through the blinds, and they slandered me; I have opened the doors and windows, so that they should at least know me such as I am. Adieu, sir. Whenever you wish to know the worth of fame, remember that you have seen Rousseau."

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Nine o'clock.—Ah! now I understand my father's story! It contains the answer to one of the questions I asked myself a week ago. Yes, I now feel that fame and power are gifts that are dearly bought; and that, when they dazzle the soul, both are oftenest, as Madame de Stael says, but 'un deuil eclatant de bonheur!

'Tis better to be lowly born,
And range with humble livers in content,
Than to be perk'd up in a glistening grief,
And wear a golden sorrow.

[Henry VIII., Act II., Scene 3.]

CHAPTER VIII

MISANTHROPY AND REPENTANCE

August 3d, Nine O'clock P.M.

There are days when everything appears gloomy to us; the world, like the sky, is covered by a dark fog. Nothing seems in its place; we see only misery, improvidence, and cruelty; the world seems without God, and given up to all the evils of chance.

Yesterday I was in this unhappy humor. After a long walk in the faubourgs, I returned home, sad and dispirited.

Everything I had seen seemed to accuse the civilization of which we are so proud! I had wandered into a little by-street, with which I was not acquainted, and I found myself suddenly in the middle of those dreadful abodes where the poor are born, to languish and die. I looked at those decaying walls, which time has covered with a foul leprosy; those windows, from which dirty rags hang out to dry; those fetid gutters, which coil along the fronts of the houses like venomous reptiles! I felt oppressed with grief, and hastened on.

A little farther on I was stopped by the hearse of a hospital; a dead man, nailed down in his deal coffin, was going to his last abode, without funeral pomp or ceremony, and without followers. There was not here even that last friend of the outcast—the dog, which a painter has introduced as the sole attendant at the pauper's burial! He whom they were preparing to commit to the earth was going to the tomb, as he had lived, alone; doubtless no one would be aware of his end. In this battle of society, what signifies a soldier the less?

But what, then, is this human society, if one of its members can thus disappear like a leaf carried away by the wind?



The hospital was near a barrack, at the entrance of which old men, women, and children were quarrelling for the remains of the coarse bread which the soldiers had given them in charity! Thus, beings like ourselves daily wait in destitution on our compassion till we give them leave to live! Whole troops of outcasts, in addition to the trials imposed on all God's children, have to endure the pangs of cold, hunger, and humiliation. Unhappy human commonwealth! Where man is in a worse condition than the bee in its hive, or the ant in its subterranean city!

Ah! what then avails our reason? What is the use of so many high faculties, if we are neither the wiser nor the happier for them? Which of us would not exchange his life of labor and trouble with that of the birds of the air, to whom the whole world is a life of joy?

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How well I understand the complaint of Mao, in the popular tales of the 'Foyer Breton' who, when dying of hunger and thirst, says, as he looks at the bullfinches rifling the fruit-trees:

"Alas! those birds are happier than Christians; they have no need of inns, or butchers, or bakers, or gardeners. God's heaven belongs to them, and earth spreads a continual feast before them! The tiny flies are their game, ripe grass their cornfields, and hips and haws their store of fruit. They have the right of taking everywhere, without paying or asking leave: thus comes it that the little birds are happy, and sing all the livelong day!"

But the life of man in a natural state is like that of the birds; he equally enjoys nature. "The earth spreads a continual feast before him." What, then, has he gained by that selfish and imperfect association which forms a nation? Would it not be better for every one to turn again to the fertile bosom of nature, and live there upon her bounty in peace and liberty?

August 20th, four o'clock A.M.—The dawn casts a red glow on my bed-curtains; the breeze brings in the fragrance of the gardens below. Here I am again leaning on my elbows by the windows, inhaling the freshness and gladness of this first wakening of the day.

My eye always passes over the roofs filled with flowers, warbling, and sunlight, with the same pleasure; but to-day it stops at the end of a buttress which separates our house from the next.

The storms have stripped the top of its plaster covering, and dust carried by the wind has collected in the crevices, and, being fixed there by the rain, has formed a sort of aerial terrace, where some green grass has sprung up. Among it rises a stalk of wheat, which to-day is surmounted by a sickly ear that droops its yellow head.

This poor stray crop on the roofs, the harvest of which will fall to the neighboring sparrows, has carried my thoughts to the rich crops which are now falling beneath the sickle; it has recalled to me the beautiful walks I took as a child through my native province, when the threshing-floors at the farmhouses resounded from every part with the sound of a flail, and when the carts, loaded with golden sheaves, came in by all the roads. I still remember the songs of the maidens, the cheerfulness of the old men, the open-hearted merriment of the laborers. There was, at that time, something in their looks both of pride and feeling. The latter came from thankfulness to God, the former from the sight of the harvest, the reward of their labor. They felt indistinctly the grandeur and the holiness of their part in the general work of the world; they looked with pride upon their mountains of corn-sheaves, and they seemed to say, Next to God, it is we who feed the world!

What a wonderful order there is in all human labor!

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While the husbandman furrows his land, and prepares for every one his daily bread, the town artizan, far away, weaves the stuff in which he is to be clothed; the miner seeks underground the iron for his plow; the soldier defends him against the invader; the judge takes care that the law protects his fields; the tax-comptroller adjusts his private interests with those of the public; the merchant occupies himself in exchanging his products with those of distant countries; the men of science and of art add every day a few horses to this ideal team, which draws along the material world, as steam impels the gigantic trains of our iron roads! Thus all unite together, all help one another; the toil of each one benefits himself and all the world; the work has been apportioned among the different members of the whole of society by a tacit agreement. If, in this apportionment, errors are committed, if certain individuals have not been employed according to their capacities, those defects of detail diminish in the sublime conception of the whole. The poorest man included in this association has his place, his work, his reason for being there; each is something in the whole.

There is nothing like this for man in the state of nature. As he depends only upon himself, it is necessary that he be sufficient for everything. All creation is his property; but he finds in it as many hindrances as helps. He must surmount these obstacles with the single strength that God has given him; he cannot reckon on any other aid than chance and opportunity. No one reaps, manufactures, fights, or thinks for him; he is nothing to any one. He is a unit multiplied by the cipher of his own single powers; while the civilized man is a unit multiplied by the whole of society.

But, notwithstanding this, the other day, disgusted by the sight of some vices in detail, I cursed the latter, and almost envied the life of the savage.

One of the infirmities of our nature is always to mistake feeling for evidence, and to judge of the season by a cloud or a ray of sunshine.

Was the misery, the sight of which made me regret a savage life, really the effect of civilization? Must we accuse society of having created these evils, or acknowledge, on the contrary, that it has alleviated them? Could the women and children, who were receiving the coarse bread from the soldier, hope in the desert for more help or pity? That dead man, whose forsaken state I deplored, had he not found, by the cares of a hospital, a coffin and the humble grave where he was about to rest? Alone, and far from men, he would have died like the wild beast in his den, and would now be serving as food for vultures! These benefits of human society are shared, then, by the most destitute. Whoever eats the bread that another has reaped and kneaded, is under an obligation to his brother, and cannot say he owes him nothing in return. The poorest of us has received from society much more than his own single strength would have permitted him to wrest from nature.

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But cannot society give us more? Who doubts it? Errors have been committed in this distribution of tasks and workers. Time will diminish the number of them; with new lights a better division will arise; the elements of society go on toward perfection, like everything else. The difficulty is to know how to adapt ourselves to the slow step of time, whose progress can never be forced on without danger.

August 14th, six o'clock A.M.—My garret window rises upon the roof like a massive watch-tower. The corners are covered by large sheets of lead, which run into the tiles; the successive action of cold and heat has made them rise, and so a crevice has been formed in an angle on the right side. There a sparrow has built her nest.

I have followed the progress of this aerial habitation from the first day. I have seen the bird successively bring the straw, moss, and wool designed for the construction of her abode; and I have admired the persevering skill she expended in this difficult work. At first, my new neighbor spent her days in fluttering over the poplar in the garden, and in chirping along the gutters; a fine lady's life seemed the only one to suit her. Then all of a sudden, the necessity of preparing a shelter for her brood transformed our idler into a worker; she no longer gave herself either rest or relaxation. I saw her always either flying, fetching, or carrying; neither rain nor sun stopped her. A striking example of the power of necessity! We are indebted to it not only for most of our talents, but for many of our virtues!

Is it not necessity that has given the people of less favored climates that constant activity which has placed them so quickly at the head of nations? As they are deprived of most of the gifts of nature, they have supplied them by their industry; necessity has sharpened their understanding, endurance awakened their foresight. While elsewhere man, warmed by an ever brilliant sun, and loaded with the bounties of the earth, was remaining poor, ignorant, and naked, in the midst of gifts he did not attempt to explore, here he was forced by necessity to wrest his food from the ground, to build habitations to defend himself from the intemperance of the weather, and to warm his body by clothing himself with the wool of animals. Work makes him both more intelligent and more robust: disciplined by it, he seems to mount higher on the ladder of creation, while those more favored by nature remain on the step nearest to the brutes.

I made these reflections while looking at the bird, whose instinct seemed to have become more acute since she had been occupied in work. At last the nest was finished; she set up her household there, and I followed her through all the phases of her new existence.

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When she had sat on the eggs, and the young ones were hatched, she fed them with the most attentive care. The corner of my window had become a stage of moral action, which fathers and mothers might come to take lessons from. The little ones soon became large, and this morning I have seen them take their first flight. One of them, weaker than the others, was not able to clear the edge of the roof, and fell into the gutter. I caught him with some difficulty, and placed him again on the tile in front of his house, but the mother has not noticed him. Once freed from the cares of a family, she has resumed her wandering life among the trees and along the roofs. In vain I have kept away from my window, to take from her every excuse for fear; in vain the feeble little bird has called to her with plaintive cries; his bad mother has passed by, singing and fluttering with a thousand airs and graces. Once only the father came near; he looked at his offspring with contempt, and then disappeared, never to return!

I crumbled some bread before the little orphan, but he did not know how to peck it with his bill. I tried to catch him, but he escaped into the forsaken nest. What will become of him there, if his mother does not come back!

August 15th, six o'clock.—This morning, on opening my window, I found the little bird dying upon the tiles; his wounds showed me that he had been driven from the nest by his unworthy mother. I tried in vain to warm him again with my breath; I felt the last pulsations of life; his eyes were already closed, and his wings hung down! I placed him on the roof in a ray of sunshine, and I closed my window. The struggle of life against death has always something gloomy in it: it is a warning to us.

Happily I hear some one in the passage; without doubt it is my old neighbor; his conversation will distract my thoughts.

It was my portress. Excellent woman! She wished me to read a letter from her son the sailor, and begged me to answer it for her.

I kept it, to copy it in my journal. Here it is:

"Dear mother: This is to tell you that I have been very well ever since the last time, except that last week I was nearly drowned with the boat, which would have been a great loss, as there is not a better craft anywhere."A gust of wind capsized us; and just as I came up above water, I saw the captain sinking. I went after him, as was my duty, and, after diving three times, I brought him to the surface, which pleased him much; for when we were hoisted on board, and he had recovered his senses, he threw his arms round my neck, as he would have done to an officer."I do not hide from you, dear mother, that this has delighted me. But it isn't all; it seems that fishing up the captain has reminded them that I had a good character, and they have just told me that I am promoted to be a sailor

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of the first class! Directly I knew it, I cried out, 'My mother shall have coffee twice a day!' And really, dear mother, there is nothing now to hinder you, as I shall now have a larger allowance to send you.

"I include by begging you to take care of yourself if you wish to do me good; for nothing makes me feel so well as to think that you want for nothing.

"Your son, from the bottom of my heart,

"Jacques."

This is the answer that the portress dictated to me:

"My good Jacquot: It makes me very happy to see that your heart is still as true as ever, and that you will never shame those who have brought you up. I need not tell you to take care of your life, because you know it is the same as my own, and that without you, dear child, I should wish for nothing but the grave; but we are not bound to live, while we are bound to do our duty. "Do not fear for my health, good Jacques; I was never better! I do not grow old at all, for fear of making you unhappy. I want nothing, and I live like a lady. I even had some money over this year, and as my drawers shut very badly, I put it into the savings' bank, where I have opened an account in your name. So, when you come back, you will find yourself with an income. I have also furnished your chest with new linen, and I have knitted you three new sea-jackets. "All your friends are well. Your cousin is just dead, leaving his widow in difficulties. I gave her your thirty francs' remittance and said that you had sent it her; and the poor woman remembers you day and night in her prayers. So, you see, I have put that money in another sort of savings' bank; but there it is our hearts that get the interest.

"Good-bye, dear Jacquot. Write to me often, and always remember the good God, and your old mother,

"PHROSINE Millot."

Good son, and worthy mother! how such examples bring us back to a love for the human race! In a fit of fanciful misanthropy, we may envy the fate of the savage, and prefer that of the bird to such as he; but impartial observation soon does justice to such paradoxes. We find, on examination, that in the mixed good and evil of human nature, the good so far abounds that we are not in the habit of noticing it, while the evil strikes us precisely on account of its being the exception. If nothing is perfect, nothing is so bad as to be without its compensation or its remedy. What spiritual riches are there in the midst of the evils of society! how much does the moral world redeem the material!



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That which will ever distinguish man from the rest of creation, is his power of deliberate affection and of enduring self-sacrifice. The mother who took care of her brood in the corner of my window devoted to them the necessary time for accomplishing the laws which insure the preservation of her kind; but she obeyed an instinct, and not a rational choice. When she had accomplished the mission appointed her by Providence, she cast off the duty as we get rid of a burden, and she returned again to her selfish liberty. The other mother, on the contrary, will go on with her task as long as God shall leave her here below: the life of her son will still remain, so to speak, joined to her own; and when she disappears from the earth, she will leave there that part of herself.

Thus, the affections make for our species an existence separate from all the rest of creation. Thanks to them, we enjoy a sort of terrestrial immortality; and if other beings succeed one another, man alone perpetuates himself.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAMILY OF MICHAEL AROUT

September 15th, Eight O'clock

This morning, while I was arranging my books, Mother Genevieve came in, and brought me the basket of fruit I buy of her every Sunday. For the nearly twenty years that I have lived in this quarter, I have dealt in her little fruit-shop. Perhaps I should be better served elsewhere, but Mother Genevieve has but little custom; to leave her would do her harm, and cause her unnecessary pain. It seems to me that the length of our acquaintance has made me incur a sort of tacit obligation to her; my patronage has become her property.

She has put the basket upon my table, and as I want her husband, who is a joiner, to add some shelves to my bookcase, she has gone downstairs again immediately to send him to me.

At first I did not notice either her looks or the sound of her voice: but, now that I recall them, it seems to me that she was not as jovial as usual. Can Mother Genevieve be in trouble about anything?

Poor woman! All her best years were subject to such bitter trials, that she might think she had received her full share already. Were I to live a hundred years, I should never forget the circumstances which made her known to me, and which obtained for her my respect.

It was at the time of my first settling in the faubourg. I had noticed her empty fruit-shop, which nobody came into, and, being attracted by its forsaken appearance, I made my little purchases in it. I have always instinctively preferred the poor shops; there is less



choice in them, but it seems to me that my purchase is a sign of sympathy with a brother in poverty. These little dealings are almost always an anchor of hope to those whose very existence is in peril—the only means by which some orphan gains a livelihood. There the aim of the tradesman is not to enrich himself, but to live! The purchase you make of him is more than an exchange—it is a good action.

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Mother Genevieve at that time was still young, but had already lost that fresh bloom of youth which suffering causes to wither so soon among the poor. Her husband, a clever joiner, gradually left off working to become, according to the picturesque expression of the workshops, a worshipper of Saint Monday. The wages of the week, which was always reduced to two or three working days, were completely dedicated by him to the worship of this god of the Barriers,—[The cheap wine shops are outside the Barriers, to avoid the octroi, or municipal excise.]—and Genevieve was obliged herself to provide for all the wants of the household.

One evening, when I went to make some trifling purchases of her, I heard a sound of quarrelling in the back shop. There were the voices of several women, among which I distinguished that of Genevieve, broken by sobs. On looking farther in, I perceived the fruit-woman holding a child in her arms, and kissing it, while a country nurse seemed to be claiming her wages from her. The poor woman, who without doubt had exhausted every explanation and every excuse, was crying in silence, and one of her neighbors was trying in vain to appease the countrywoman. Excited by that love of money which the evils of a hard peasant life but too well excuse, and disappointed by the refusal of her expected wages, the nurse was launching forth in recriminations, threats, and abuse. In spite of myself, I listened to the quarrel, not daring to interfere, and not thinking of going away, when Michael Arout appeared at the shop-door.

The joiner had just come from the Barriers, where he had passed part of the day at a public-house. His blouse, without a belt, and untied at the throat, showed none of the noble stains of work: in his hand he held his cap, which he had just picked up out of the mud; his hair was in disorder, his eye fixed, and the pallor of drunkenness in his face. He came reeling in, looked wildly around him, and called Genevieve.

She heard his voice, gave a start, and rushed into the shop; but at the sight of the miserable man, who was trying in vain to steady himself, she pressed the child in her arms, and bent over it with tears.

The countrywoman and the neighbor had followed her.

“Come! come!” cried the former in a rage, “do you intend to pay me, after all?”

“Ask the master for the money,” ironically answered the woman from the next door, pointing to the joiner, who had just fallen against the counter.

The countrywoman looked at him.

“Ah! he is the father,” returned she. “Well, what idle beggars! not to have a penny to pay honest people; and get tipsy with wine in that way.”

The drunkard raised his head.

“What! what!” stammered he; “who is it that talks of wine? I’ve had nothing but brandy! But I am going back again to get some wine! Wife, give me your money; there are some friends waiting for me at the ‘Pere la Tuille’.”

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Genevieve did not answer: he went round the counter, opened the till, and began to rummage in it.

“You see where the money of the house goes!” observed the neighbor to the countrywoman; “how can the poor unhappy woman pay you when he takes all?”

“Is that my fault?” replied the nurse, angrily. “They owe to me, and somehow or other they must pay me!”

And letting loose her tongue, as these women out of the country do, she began relating at length all the care she had taken of the child, and all the expense it had been to her. In proportion as she recalled all she had done, her words seemed to convince her more than ever of her rights, and to increase her anger. The poor mother, who no doubt feared that her violence would frighten the child, returned into the back shop, and put it into its cradle.

Whether it is that the countrywoman saw in this act a determination to escape her claims, or that she was blinded by passion, I cannot say; but she rushed into the next room, where I heard the sounds of quarrelling, with which the cries of the child were soon mingled. The joiner, who was still rummaging in the till, was startled, and raised his head.

At the same moment Genevieve appeared at the door, holding in her arms the baby that the countrywoman was trying to tear from her. She ran toward the counter, and throwing herself behind her husband, cried:

“Michael, defend your son!”

The drunken man quickly stood up erect, like one who awakes with a start.

“My son!” stammered he; “what son?”

His looks fell upon the child; a vague ray of intelligence passed over his features.

“Robert,” resumed he; “it is Robert!”

He tried to steady himself on his feet, that he might take the baby, but he tottered. The nurse approached him in a rage.

“My money, or I shall take the child away!” cried she. “It is I who have fed and brought it up: if you don’t pay me for what has made it live, it ought to be the same to you as if it were dead. I shall not go until I have my due, or the baby.”

“And what would you do with him?” murmured Genevieve, pressing Robert against her bosom.

“Take it to the Foundling!” replied the countrywoman, harshly; “the hospital is a better mother than you are, for it pays for the food of its little ones.”

At the word “Foundling,” Genevieve had exclaimed aloud in horror. With her arms wound round her son, whose head she hid in her bosom, and her two hands spread over him, she had retreated to the wall, and remained with her back against it, like a lioness defending her young. The neighbor and I contemplated this scene, without knowing how we could interfere. As for Michael, he looked at us by turns, making a visible effort to comprehend it all. When his eye rested upon Genevieve and the child, it lit up with a gleam of pleasure; but when he turned toward us, he again became stupid and hesitating.

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At last, apparently making a prodigious effort, he cried out, "Wait!"

And going to a tub filled with water, he plunged his face into it several times.

Every eye was turned upon him; the countrywoman herself seemed astonished. At length he raised his dripping head. This ablution had partly dispelled his drunkenness; he looked at us for a moment, then he turned to Genevieve, and his face brightened up.

"Robert!" cried he, going up to the child, and taking him in his arms. "Ah! give him me, wife; I must look at him."

The mother seemed to give up his son to him with reluctance, and stayed before him with her arms extended, as if she feared the child would have a fall. The nurse began again in her turn to speak, and renewed her claims, this time threatening to appeal to law. At first Michael listened to her attentively, and when he comprehended her meaning, he gave the child back to its mother.

"How much do we owe you?" asked he.

The countrywoman began to reckon up the different expenses, which amounted to nearly thirty francs. The joiner felt to the bottom of his pockets, but could find nothing. His forehead became contracted by frowns; low curses began to escape him. All of a sudden he rummaged in his breast, drew forth a large watch, and holding it up above his head:

"Here it is—here's your money!" cried he with a joyful laugh; "a watch, a good one! I always said it would keep for a drink on a dry day; but it is not I who will drink it, but the young one. Ah! ah! ah! go and sell it for me, neighbor, and if that is not enough, I have my earrings. Eh! Genevieve, take them off for me; the earrings will square all! They shall not say you have been disgraced on account of the child—no, not even if I must pledge a bit of my flesh! My watch, my earrings, and my ring—get rid of all of them for me at the goldsmith's; pay the woman, and let the little fool go to sleep. Give him me, Genevieve; I will put him to bed."

And, taking the baby from the arms of his mother, he carried him with a firm step to his cradle.

It was easy to perceive the change which took place in Michael from this day. He cut all his old drinking acquaintances. He went early every morning to his work, and returned regularly in the evening to finish the day with Genevieve and Robert. Very soon he would not leave them at all, and he hired a place near the fruit-shop, and worked in it on his own account.

They would soon have been able to live in comfort, had it not been for the expenses which the child required. Everything was given up to his education. He had gone

through the regular school training, had studied mathematics, drawing, and the carpenter's trade, and had only begun to work a few months ago. Till now, they had been exhausting every resource which their laborious industry could provide to push him forward in his business; and, happily, all these exertions had not proved useless: the seed had brought forth fruit, and the days of harvest were close by.

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While I was thus recalling these remembrances to my mind, Michael had come in, and was occupied in fixing shelves where they were wanted.

During the time I was writing the notes of my journal, I was also scrutinizing the joiner.

The excesses of his youth and the labor of his manhood have deeply marked his face; his hair is thin and gray, his shoulders stoop, his legs are shrunken and slightly bent. There seems a sort of weight in his whole being. His very features have an expression of sorrow and despondency. He answers my questions by monosyllables, and like a man who wishes to avoid conversation. Whence comes this dejection, when one would think he had all he could wish for? I should like to know!

Ten o'clock.—Michael is just gone downstairs to look for a tool he has forgotten. I have at last succeeded in drawing from him the secret of his and Genevieve's sorrow. Their son Robert is the cause of it!

Not that he has turned out ill after all their care—not that he is idle or dissipated; but both were in hopes he would never leave them any more. The presence of the young man was to have renewed and made glad their lives once more; his mother counted the days, his father prepared everything to receive their dear associate in their toils; and at the moment when they were thus about to be repaid for all their sacrifices, Robert had suddenly informed them that he had just engaged himself to a contractor at Versailles.

Every remonstrance and every prayer were useless; he brought forward the necessity of initiating himself into all the details of an important contract, the facilities he should have in his new position of improving himself in his trade, and the hopes he had of turning his knowledge to advantage. At last, when his mother, having come to the end of her arguments, began to cry, he hastily kissed her, and went away that he might avoid any further remonstrances.

He had been absent a year, and there was nothing to give them hopes of his return. His parents hardly saw him once a month, and then he only stayed a few moments with them.

"I have been punished where I had hoped to be rewarded," Michael said to me just now. "I had wished for a saving and industrious son, and God has given me an ambitious and avaricious one! I had always said to myself that when once he was grown up we should have him always with us, to recall our youth and to enliven our hearts. His mother was always thinking of getting him married, and having children again to care for. You know women always will busy themselves about others. As for me, I thought of him working near my bench, and singing his new songs; for he has learnt music, and is one of the best singers at the Orpheon.

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"A dream, sir, truly! Directly the bird was fledged, he took to flight, and remembers neither father nor mother. Yesterday, for instance, was the day we expected him; he should have come to supper with us. No Robert to-day, either! He has had some plan to finish, or some bargain to arrange, and his old parents are put down last in the accounts, after the customers and the joiner's work. Ah! if I could have guessed how it would have turned out! Fool! to have sacrificed my likings and my money, for nearly twenty years, to the education of a thankless son! Was it for this I took the trouble to cure myself of drinking, to break with my friends, to become an example to the neighborhood? The jovial good fellow has made a goose of himself. Oh! if I had to begin again! No, no! you see women and children are our bane. They soften our hearts; they lead us a life of hope and affection; we pass a quarter of our lives in fostering the growth of a grain of corn which is to be everything to us in our old age, and when the harvest-time comes—good-night, the ear is empty!"

While he was speaking, Michael's voice became hoarse, his eyes fierce, and his lips quivered. I wished to answer him, but I could only think of commonplace consolations, and I remained silent. The joiner pretended he needed a tool, and left me.

Poor father! Ah! I know those moments of temptation when virtue has failed to reward us, and we regret having obeyed her! Who has not felt this weakness in hours of trial, and who has not uttered, at least once, the mournful exclamation of Brutus?

But if virtue is only a word, what is there then in life that is true and real? No, I will not believe that goodness is in vain! It does not always give the happiness we had hoped for, but it brings some other. In the world everything is ruled by order, and has its proper and necessary consequences, and virtue cannot be the sole exception to the general law. If it had been prejudicial to those who practised it, experience would have avenged them; but experience has, on the contrary, made it more universal and more holy. We only accuse it of being a faithless debtor because we demand an immediate payment, and one apparent to our senses. We always consider life as a fairytale, in which every good action must be rewarded by a visible wonder. We do not accept as payment a peaceful conscience, self-content, or a good name among men—treasures that are more precious than any other, but the value of which we do not feel till after we have lost them!

Michael is come back, and has returned to his work. His son has not yet arrived.

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By telling me of his hopes and his grievous disappointments, he became excited; he unceasingly went over again the same subject, always adding something to his griefs. He had just wound up his confidential discourse by speaking to me of a joiner's business which he had hoped to buy, and work to good account with Robert's help. The present owner had made a fortune by it, and, after thirty years of business, he was thinking of retiring to one of the ornamental cottages in the outskirts of the city, a usual retreat for the frugal and successful workingman. Michael had not indeed the two thousand francs which must be paid down; but perhaps he could have persuaded Master Benoit to wait. Robert's presence would have been a security for him, for the young man could not fail to insure the prosperity of a workshop; besides science and skill, he had the power of invention and bringing to perfection. His father had discovered among his drawings a new plan for a staircase, which had occupied his thoughts for a long time; and he even suspected him of having engaged himself to the Versailles contractor for the very purpose of executing it. The youth was tormented by this spirit of invention, which took possession of all his thoughts, and, while devoting his mind to study, he had no time to listen to his feelings.

Michael told me all this with a mixed feeling of pride and vexation. I saw he was proud of the son he was abusing, and that his very pride made him more sensitive to that son's neglect.

Six o'clock P.M.—I have just finished a happy day. How many events have happened within a few hours, and what a change for Genevieve and Michael!

He had just finished fixing the shelves, and telling me of his son, while I laid the cloth for my breakfast.

Suddenly we heard hurried steps in the passage, the door opened, and Genevieve entered with Robert.

The joiner gave a start of joyful surprise, but he repressed it immediately, as if he wished to keep up the appearance of displeasure.

The young man did not appear to notice it, but threw himself into his arms in an open-hearted manner, which surprised me. Genevieve, whose face shone with happiness, seemed to wish to speak, and to restrain herself with difficulty.

I told Robert I was glad to see him, and he answered me with ease and civility.

"I expected you yesterday," said Michael Arout, rather dryly.

"Forgive me, father," replied the young workman, "but I had business at St. Germain's. I was not able to come back till it was very late, and then the master kept me."

The joiner looked at his son sidewise, and then took up his hammer again.

“All right,” muttered he, in a grumbling tone; “when we are with other people we must do as they wish; but there are some who would like better to eat brown bread with their own knife than partridges with the silver fork of a master.”

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"And I am one of those, father," replied Robert, merrily, "but, as the proverb says, 'you must shell the peas before you can eat them.' It was necessary that I should first work in a great workshop—"

"To go on with your plan of the staircase," interrupted Michael, ironically.

"You must now say Monsieur Raymond's plan, father," replied Robert, smiling.

"Why?"

"Because I have sold it to him."

The joiner, who was planing a board, turned round quickly.

"Sold it!" cried he, with sparkling eyes.

"For the reason that I was not rich enough to give it him."

Michael threw down the board and tool.

"There he is again!" resumed he, angrily; "his good genius puts an idea into his head which would have made him known, and he goes and sells it to a rich man, who will take the honor of it himself."

"Well, what harm is there done?" asked Genevieve.

"What harm!" cried the joiner, in a passion. "You understand nothing about it—you are a woman; but he—he knows well that a true workman never gives up his own inventions for money, no more than a soldier would give up his cross. That is his glory; he is bound to keep it for the honor it does him! Ah, thunder! if I had ever made a discovery, rather than put it up at auction I would have sold one of my eyes! Don't you see that a new invention is like a child to a workman? He takes care of it, he brings it up, he makes a way for it in the world, and it is only a poor creature who sells it."

Robert colored a little.

"You will think differently, father," said he, "when you know why I sold my plan."

"Yes, and you will thank him for it," added Genevieve, who could no longer keep silence.

"Never!" replied Michael.

"But, wretched man!" cried she, "he sold it only for our sakes!"

The joiner looked at his wife and son with astonishment. It was necessary to come to an explanation. The latter related how he had entered into a negotiation with Master

Benoit, who had positively refused to sell his business unless one half of the two thousand francs were first paid down. It was in the hopes of obtaining this sum that he had gone to work with the contractor at Versailles; he had had an opportunity of trying his invention, and of finding a purchaser. Thanks to the money he received for it, he had just concluded the bargain with Benoit, and had brought his father the key of the new work-yard.

This explanation was given by the young workman with so much modesty and simplicity that I was quite affected by it. Genevieve cried; Michael pressed his son to his heart, and in a long embrace he seemed to ask his pardon for having unjustly accused him.

All was now explained with honor to Robert. The conduct which his parents had ascribed to indifference really sprang from affection; he had neither obeyed the voice of ambition nor of avarice, nor even the nobler inspiration of inventive genius: his whole motive and single aim had been the happiness of Genevieve and Michael. The day for proving his gratitude had come, and he had returned them sacrifice for sacrifice!

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After the explanations and exclamations of joy were over, all three were about to leave me; but, the cloth being laid, I added three more places, and kept them to breakfast.

The meal was prolonged: the fare was only tolerable; but the over-flowings of affection made it delicious. Never had I better understood the unspeakable charm of family love. What calm enjoyment in that happiness which is always shared with others; in that community of interests which unites such various feelings; in that association of existences which forms one single being of so many! What is man without those home affections, which, like so many roots, fix him firmly in the earth, and permit him to imbibe all the juices of life? Energy, happiness—do not all these come from them? Without family life where would man learn to love, to associate, to deny himself? A community in little, is it not this which teaches us how to live in the great one? Such is the holiness of home, that, to express our relation with God, we have been obliged to borrow the words invented for our family life. Men have named themselves the sons of a heavenly Father!

Ah! let us carefully preserve these chains of domestic union. Do not let us unbind the human sheaf, and scatter its ears to all the caprices of chance and of the winds; but let us rather enlarge this holy law; let us carry the principles and the habits of home beyond set bounds; and, if it may be, let us realize the prayer of the Apostle of the Gentiles when he exclaimed to the newborn children of Christ: “Be ye like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Always to mistake feeling for evidence
Fame and power are gifts that are dearly bought
Fortune sells what we believe she gives
Make himself a name: he becomes public property
My patronage has become her property
Not desirous to teach goodness
Power of necessity
Progress can never be forced on without danger
So much confidence at first, so much doubt at last
The man in power gives up his peace
Virtue made friends, but she did not take pupils
We are not bound to live, while we are bound to do our duty

AN “ATTIC” PHILOSOPHER

(Un Philosophe sous les Toits)

By *Emile Souvestre*

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER X

OUR COUNTRY

October 12th, Seven O'clock A.M.

The nights are already become cold and long; the sun, shining through my curtains, no more wakens me long before the hour for work; and even when my eyes are open, the pleasant warmth of the bed keeps me fast under my counterpane. Every morning there begins a long argument between my activity and my indolence; and, snugly wrapped up to the eyes, I wait like the Gascon, until they have succeeded in coming to an agreement.

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This morning, however, a light, which shone from my door upon my pillow, awoke me earlier than usual. In vain I turned on my side; the persevering light, like a victorious enemy, pursued me into every position. At last, quite out of patience, I sat up and hurled my nightcap to the foot of the bed!

(I will observe, by way of parenthesis, that the various evolutions of this pacific headgear seem to have been, from the remotest time, symbols of the vehement emotions of the mind; for our language has borrowed its most common images from them.)

But be this as it may, I got up in a very bad humor, grumbling at my new neighbor, who took it into his head to be wakeful when I wished to sleep. We are all made thus; we do not understand that others may live on their own account. Each one of us is like the earth, according to the old system of Ptolemy, and thinks he can have the whole universe revolve around himself. On this point, to make use of the metaphor alluded to: 'Tous les hommes ont la tete dans le meme bonnet'.

I had for the time being, as I have already said, thrown mine to the other end of my bed; and I slowly disengaged my legs from the warm bedclothes, while making a host of evil reflections upon the inconvenience of having neighbors.

For more than a month I had not had to complain of those whom chance had given me; most of them only came in to sleep, and went away again on rising. I was almost always alone on this top story—alone with the clouds and the sparrows!

But at Paris nothing lasts; the current of life carries us along, like the seaweed torn from the rock; the houses are vessels which take mere passengers. How many different faces have I already seen pass along the landing-place belonging to our attics! How many companions of a few days have disappeared forever! Some are lost in that medley of the living which whirls continually under the scourge of necessity, and others in that resting-place of the dead, who sleep under the hand of God!

Peter the bookbinder is one of these last. Wrapped up in selfishness, he lived alone and friendless, and he died as he had lived. His loss was neither mourned by any one, nor disarranged anything in the world; there was merely a ditch filled up in the graveyard, and an attic emptied in our house.

It is the same which my new neighbor has inhabited for the last few days.

To say truly (now that I am quite awake, and my ill humor is gone with my nightcap)—to say truly, this new neighbor, although rising earlier than suits my idleness, is not the less a very good man: he carries his misfortunes, as few know how to carry their good fortunes, with cheerfulness and moderation.



But fate has cruelly tried him. Father Chaufour is but the wreck of a man. In the place of one of his arms hangs an empty sleeve; his left leg is made by the turner, and he drags the right along with difficulty; but above these ruins rises a calm and happy face. While looking upon his countenance, radiant with a serene energy, while listening to his voice, the tone of which has, so to speak, the accent of goodness, we see that the soul has remained entire in the half-destroyed covering. The fortress is a little damaged, as Father Chaufour says, but the garrison is quite hearty.

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Decidedly, the more I think of this excellent man, the more I reproach myself for the sort of malediction I bestowed on him when I awoke.

We are generally too indulgent in our secret wrongs toward our neighbor. All ill-will which does not pass the region of thought seems innocent to us, and, with our clumsy justice, we excuse without examination the sin which does not betray itself by action!

But are we then bound to others only by the enforcement of laws? Besides these external relations, is there not a real relation of feeling between men? Do we not owe to all those who live under the same heaven as ourselves the aid not only of our acts but of our purposes? Ought not every human life to be to us like a vessel that we accompany with our prayers for a happy voyage? It is not enough that men do not harm one another; they must also help and love one another! The papal benediction, 'Urbi et orbi'! should be the constant cry from all hearts. To condemn him who does not deserve it, even in the mind, even by a passing thought, is to break the great law, that which has established the union of souls here below, and to which Christ has given the sweet name of charity.

These thoughts came into my mind as I finished dressing, and I said to myself that Father Chaufour had a right to reparation from me. To make amends for the feeling of ill-will I had against him just now, I owed him some explicit proof of sympathy. I heard him humming a tune in his room; he was at work, and I determined that I would make the first neighborly call.

Eight o'clock P.M.—I found Father Chaufour at a table lighted by a little smoky lamp, without a fire, although it is already cold, and making large pasteboard boxes; he was humming a popular song in a low tone. I had hardly entered the room when he uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Eh! is it you, neighbor? Come in, then! I did not think you got up so early, so I put a damper on my music; I was afraid of waking you."

Excellent man! while I was sending him to the devil he was putting himself out of his way for me!

This thought touched me, and I paid my compliments on his having become my neighbor with a warmth which opened his heart.

"Faith! you seem to me to have the look of a good Christian," said he in a voice of soldierlike cordiality, and shaking me by the hand. "I do not like those people who look on a landing-place as a frontier line, and treat their neighbors as if they were Cossacks. When men snuff the same air, and speak the same lingo, they are not meant to turn their backs to each other. Sit down there, neighbor; I don't mean to order you; only take care of the stool; it has but three legs, and we must put good-will in place of the fourth."

“It seems that that is a treasure which there is no want of here,” I observed.

“Good-will!” repeated Chaufour; “that is all my mother left me, and I take it no son has received a better inheritance. Therefore they used to call me Monsieur Content in the batteries.”

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"You are a soldier, then?"

"I served in the Third Artillery under the Republic, and afterward in the Guard, through all the commotions. I was at Jemappes and at Waterloo; so I was at the christening and at the burial of our glory, as one may say!"

I looked at him with astonishment.

"And how old were you then, at Jemappes?" asked I.

"Somewhere about fifteen," said he.

"How came you to think of being a soldier so early?"

"I did not really think about it. I then worked at toy-making, and never dreamed that France would ask me for anything else than to make her draught-boards, shuttlecocks, and cups and balls. But I had an old uncle at Vincennes whom I went to see from time to time—a Fontenoy veteran in the same rank of life as myself, but with ability enough to have risen to that of a marshal. Unluckily, in those days there was no way for common people to get on. My uncle, whose services would have got him made a prince under the other, had then retired with the mere rank of sub-lieutenant. But you should have seen him in his uniform, his cross of St. Louis, his wooden leg, his white moustaches, and his noble countenance. You would have said he was a portrait of one of those old heroes in powdered hair which are at Versailles!

"Every time I visited him, he said something which remained fixed in my memory. But one day I found him quite grave.

"'Jerome,' said he, 'do you know what is going on on the frontier?'

"'No, lieutenant,' replied I.

"'Well,' resumed he, 'our country is in danger!'

"I did not well understand him, and yet it seemed something to me.

"'Perhaps you have never thought what your country means,' continued he, placing his hand on my shoulder; 'it is all that surrounds you, all that has brought you up and fed you, all that you have loved! This ground that you see, these houses, these trees, those girls who go along there laughing—this is your country! The laws which protect you, the bread which pays for your work, the words you interchange with others, the joy and grief which come to you from the men and things among which you live—this is your country! The little room where you used to see your mother, the remembrances she has left you, the earth where she rests—this is your country! You see it, you breathe it, everywhere! Think to yourself, my son, of your rights and your duties, your affections



and your wants, your past and your present blessings; write them all under a single name—and that name will be your country!"

"I was trembling with emotion, and great tears were in my eyes.

"Ah! I understand," cried I; "it is our home in large; it is that part of the world where God has placed our body and our soul."

"You are right, Jerome," continued the old soldier; "so you comprehend also what we owe it."

"Truly," resumed I, "we owe it all that we are; it is a question of love."

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“And of honesty, my son,” concluded he. “The member of a family who does not contribute his share of work and of happiness fails in his duty, and is a bad kinsman; the member of a partnership who does not enrich it with all his might, with all his courage, and with all his heart, defrauds it of what belongs to it, and is a dishonest man. It is the same with him who enjoys the advantages of having a country, and does not accept the burdens of it; he forfeits his honor, and is a bad citizen!”

“And what must one do, lieutenant, to be a good citizen?” asked I.

“Do for your country what you would do for your father and mother,” said he.

“I did not answer at the moment; my heart was swelling, and the blood boiling in my veins; but on returning along the road, my uncle’s words were, so to speak, written up before my eyes. I repeated, ‘Do for your country what you would do for your father and mother.’ And my country is in danger; an enemy attacks it, while I—I turn cups and balls!”

“This thought tormented me so much all night that the next day I returned to Vincennes to announce to the lieutenant that I had just enlisted, and was going off to the frontier. The brave man pressed upon me his cross of St. Louis, and I went away as proud as an ambassador.

“That is how, neighbor, I became a volunteer under the Republic before I had cut my wisdom teeth.”

All this was told quietly, and in the cheerful spirit of him who looks upon an accomplished duty neither as a merit nor a grievance.

While he spoke, Father Chaufour grew animated, not on account of himself, but of the general subject. Evidently that which occupied him in the drama of life was not his own part, but the drama itself.

This sort of disinterestedness touched me. I prolonged my visit, and showed myself as frank as possible, in order to win his confidence in return. In an hour’s time he knew my position and my habits; I was on the footing of an old acquaintance.

I even confessed the ill-humor the light of his lamp put me into a short time before. He took what I said with the touching cheerfulness which comes from a heart in the right place, and which looks upon everything on the good side. He neither spoke to me of the necessity which obliged him to work while I could sleep, nor of the deprivations of the old soldier compared to the luxury of the young clerk; he only struck his forehead, accused himself of thoughtlessness, and promised to put list round his door!

O great and beautiful soul! with whom nothing turns to bitterness, and who art peremptory only in duty and benevolence!



October 15th.—This morning I was looking at a little engraving I had framed myself, and hung over my writing-table; it is a design of Gavarni's; in which, in a grave mood, he has represented a veteran and a conscript.

By often contemplating these two figures, so different in expression, and so true to life, both have become living in my eyes; I have seen them move, I have heard them speak; the picture has become a real scene, at which I am present as spectator.

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The veteran advances slowly, his hand leaning on the shoulder of the young soldier. His eyes, closed for ever, no longer perceive the sun shining through the flowering chestnut-trees. In the place of his right arm hangs an empty sleeve, and he walks with a wooden leg, the sound of which on the pavement makes those who pass turn to look.

At the sight of this ancient wreck from our patriotic wars, the greater number shake their heads in pity, and I seem to hear a sigh or an imprecation.

"See the worth of glory!" says a portly merchant, turning away his eyes in horror.

"What a deplorable use of human life!" rejoins a young man who carries a volume of philosophy under his arm.

"The trooper would better not have left his plow," adds a countryman, with a cunning air.

"Poor old man!" murmurs a woman, almost crying.

The veteran has heard, and he knits his brow; for it seems to him that his guide has grown thoughtful. The latter, attracted by what he hears around him, hardly answers the old man's questions, and his eyes, vaguely lost in space, seem to be seeking there for the solution of some problem.

I seem to see a twitching in the gray moustaches of the veteran; he stops abruptly, and, holding back his guide with his remaining arm:

"They all pity me," says he, "because they do not understand it; but if I were to answer them—"

"What would you say to them, father?" asks the young man, with curiosity.

"I should say first to the woman who weeps when she looks at me, to keep her tears for other misfortunes; for each of my wounds calls to mind some struggle for my colors. There is room for doubting how some men have done their duty; with me it is visible. I carry the account of my services, written with the enemy's steel and lead, on myself; to pity me for having done my duty is to suppose I would better have been false to it."

"And what would you say to the countryman, father?"

"I should tell him that, to drive the plow in peace, we must first secure the country itself; and that, as long as there are foreigners ready to eat our harvest, there must be arms to defend it."

"But the young student, too, shook his head when he lamented such a use of life."

“Because he does not know what self-sacrifice and suffering can teach. The books that he studies we have put in practice, though we never read them: the principles he applauds we have defended with powder and bayonet.”

“And at the price of your limbs and your blood. The merchant said, when he saw your maimed body, ‘See the worth of glory!’”

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“Do not believe him, my son: the true glory is the bread of the soul; it is this which nourishes self-sacrifice, patience, and courage. The Master of all has bestowed it as a tie the more between men. When we desire to be distinguished by our brethren, do we not thus prove our esteem and our sympathy for them? The longing for admiration is but one side of love. No, no; the true glory can never be too dearly paid for! That which we should deplore, child, is not the infirmities which prove a generous self-sacrifice, but those which our vices or our imprudence have called forth. Ah! if I could speak aloud to those who, when passing, cast looks of pity upon me, I should say to the young man whose excesses have dimmed his sight before he is old, ‘What have you done with your eyes?’ To the slothful man, who with difficulty drags along his enervated mass of flesh, ‘What have you done with your feet?’ To the old man, who is punished for his intemperance by the gout, ‘What have you done with your hands?’ To all, ‘What have you done with the days God granted you, with the faculties you should have employed for the good of your brethren?’ If you cannot answer, bestow no more of your pity upon the old soldier maimed in his country’s cause; for he—he at least—can show his scars without shame.”

October 16th.—The little engraving has made me comprehend better the merits of Father Chaufour, and I therefore esteem him all the more.

He has just now left my attic. There no longer passes a single day without his coming to work by my fire, or my going to sit and talk by his board.

The old artilleryman has seen much, and likes to tell of it. For twenty years he was an armed traveller throughout Europe, and he fought without hatred, for he was possessed by a single thought—the honor of the national flag! It might have been his superstition, if you will; but it was, at the same time, his safeguard.

The word *France*, which was then resounding so gloriously through the world, served as a talisman to him against all sorts of temptation. To have to support a great name may seem a burden to vulgar minds, but it is an encouragement to vigorous ones.

“I, too, have had many moments,” said he to me the other day, “when I have been tempted to make friends with the devil. War is not precisely the school for rural virtues. By dint of burning, destroying, and killing, you grow a little tough as regards your feelings; and, when the bayonet has made you king, the notions of an autocrat come into your head a little strongly. But at these moments I called to mind that country which the lieutenant spoke of to me, and I whispered to myself the well-known phrase, ‘Toujours Français! It has been laughed at since. People who would make a joke of the death of their mother have turned it into ridicule, as if the name of our country was not also a noble and a binding thing. For my part, I shall never forget from how many follies the title of Frenchman

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has kept me. When, overcome with fatigue, I have found myself in the rear of the colors, and when the musketry was rattling in the front ranks, many a time I heard a voice, which whispered in my ear, 'Leave the others to fight, and for today take care of your own hide!' But then, that word *Français!* murmured within me, and I pressed forward to help my comrades. At other times, when, irritated by hunger, cold, and wounds, I have arrived at the hovel of some *Meinherr*, I have been seized by an itching to break the master's back, and to burn his hut; but I whispered to myself, *Français!* and this name would not rhyme with either incendiary or murderer. I have, in this way, passed through kingdoms from east to west, and from north to south, always determined not to bring disgrace upon my country's flag. The lieutenant, you see, had taught me a magic word—My country! Not only must we defend it, but we must also make it great and loved."

October 17th.—To-day I have paid my neighbor a long visit. A chance expression led the way to his telling me more of himself than he had yet done.

I asked him whether both his limbs had been lost in the same battle.

"No, no!" replied he; "the cannon only took my leg; it was the Clamart quarries that my arm went to feed."

And when I asked him for the particulars—

"That's as easy as to say good-morning," continued he. "After the great break-up at Waterloo, I stayed three months in the camp hospital to give my wooden leg time to grow. As soon as I was able to hobble a little, I took leave of headquarters, and took the road to Paris, where I hoped to find some relative or friend; but no—all were gone, or underground. I should have found myself less strange at Vienna, Madrid, or Berlin. And although I had a leg the less to provide for, I was none the better off; my appetite had come back, and my last sous were taking flight.

"I had indeed met my old colonel, who recollected that I had helped him out of the skirmish at Montereau by giving him my horse, and he had offered me bed and board at his house. I knew that the year before he had married a castle and no few farms, so that I might become permanent coat-brusher to a millionaire, which was not without its temptations. It remained to see if I had not anything better to do. One evening I set myself to reflect upon it.

"'Let us see, *Chaufour*,' said I to myself; 'the question is to act like a man. The colonel's place suits you, but cannot you do anything better? Your body is still in good condition, and your arms strong; do you not owe all your strength to your country, as your Vincennes uncle said? Why not leave some old soldier, more cut up than you are, to

get his hospital at the colonel's? Come, trooper, you are still fit for another stout charge or two! You must not lay up before your time.'

"Whereupon I went to thank the colonel, and to offer my services to an old artilleryman, who had gone back to his home at Clamart, and who had taken up the quarryman's pick again.

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"For the first few months I played the conscript's part—that is to say, there was more stir than work; but with a good will one gets the better of stones, as of everything else. I did not become, so to speak, the leader of a column, but I brought up the rank among the good workmen, and I ate my bread with a good appetite, seeing I had earned it with a good will. For even underground, you see, I still kept my pride. The thought that I was working to do my part in changing rocks into houses pleased my heart. I said to myself, 'Courage, Chaufour, my old boy; you are helping to beautify your country.' And that kept up my spirit.

"Unfortunately, some of my companions were rather too sensible to the charms of the brandy-bottle; so much so, that one day one of them, who could hardly distinguish his right hand from his left, thought proper to strike a light close to a charged mine. The mine exploded suddenly, and sent a shower of stone grape among us, which killed three men, and carried away the arm of which I have now only the sleeve."

"So you were again without means of living?" said I to the old soldier.

"That is to say, I had to change them," replied he, quietly. "The difficulty was to find one which would do with five fingers instead of ten; I found it, however."

"How was that?"

"Among the Paris street-sweepers."

"What! you have been one—"

"Of the pioneers of the health force for a while, neighbor, and that was not my worst time either. The corps of sweepers is not so low as it is dirty, I can tell you! There are old actresses in it who could never learn to save their money, and ruined merchants from the exchange; we even had a professor of classics, who for a little drink would recite Latin to you, or Greek tragedies, as you chose. They could not have competed for the Monthyon prize; but we excused faults on account of poverty, and cheered our poverty by our good-humor and jokes. I was as ragged and as cheerful as the rest, while trying to be something better. Even in the mire of the gutter I preserved my faith that nothing is dishonorable which is useful to our country.

"'Chaufour,' said I to myself with a smile, 'after the sword, the hammer; after the hammer, the broom; you are going downstairs, my old boy, but you are still serving your country.'"

"'However, you ended by leaving your new profession?' said I."

"A reform was required, neighbor. The street-sweepers seldom have their feet dry, and the damp at last made the wounds in my good leg open again. I could no longer follow

the regiment, and it was necessary to lay down my arms. It is now two months since I left off working in the sanitary department of Paris.

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"At the first moment I was daunted. Of my four limbs, I had now only my right hand, and even that had lost its strength; so it was necessary to find some gentlemanly occupation for it. After trying a little of everything, I fell upon card-box making, and here I am at cases for the lace and buttons of the national guard; it is work of little profit, but it is within the capacity of all. By getting up at four and working till eight, I earn sixty-five centimes; my lodging and bowl of soup take fifty of them, and there are three sous over for luxuries. So I am richer than France herself, for I have no deficit in my budget; and I continue to serve her, as I save her lace and buttons."

At these words Father Chaufour looked at me with a smile, and with his great scissors began cutting the green paper again for his cardboard cases. My heart was touched, and I remained lost in thought.

Here is still another member of that sacred phalanx who, in the battle of life, always march in front for the example and the salvation of the world! Each of these brave soldiers has his war-cry; for this one it is "Country," for that "Home," for a third "Mankind;" but they all follow the same standard—that of duty; for all the same divine law reigns—that of self-sacrifice. To love something more than one's self—that is the secret of all that is great; to know how to live for others—that is the aim of all noble souls.

CHAPTER XI

MORAL USE OF INVENTORIES

November 13th, Nine O'clock P.M.

I had well stopped up the chinks of my window; my little carpet was nailed down in its place; my lamp, provided with its shade, cast a subdued light around, and my stove made a low, murmuring sound, as if some live creature was sharing my hearth with me.

All was silent around me. But, out of doors the snow and rain swept the roofs, and with a low, rushing sound ran along the gurgling gutters; sometimes a gust of wind forced itself beneath the tiles, which rattled together like castanets, and afterward it was lost in the empty corridor. Then a slight and pleasurable shiver thrilled through my veins: I drew the flaps of my old wadded dressing-gown around me, I pulled my threadbare velvet cap over my eyes, and, letting myself sink deeper into my easy-chair, while my feet basked in the heat and light which shone through the door of the stove, I gave myself up to a sensation of enjoyment, made more lively by the consciousness of the storm which raged without. My eyes, swimming in a sort of mist, wandered over all the details of my peaceful abode; they passed from my prints to my bookcase, resting upon the little chintz sofa, the white curtains of the iron bedstead, and the portfolio of loose papers—those archives of the attics; and then, returning to the book I held in my hand,

they attempted to seize once more the thread of the reading which had been thus interrupted.

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In fact, this book, the subject of which had at first interested me, had become painful to me. I had come to the conclusion that the pictures of the writer were too sombre. His description of the miseries of the world appeared exaggerated to me; I could not believe in such excess of poverty and of suffering; neither God nor man could show themselves so harsh toward the sons of Adam. The author had yielded to an artistic temptation: he was making a show of the sufferings of humanity, as Nero burned Rome for the sake of the picturesque.

Taken altogether, this poor human house, so often repaired, so much criticised, is still a pretty good abode; we may find enough in it to satisfy our wants, if we know how to set bounds to them; the happiness of the wise man costs but little, and asks but little space.

These consoling reflections became more and more confused. At last my book fell on the ground without my having the resolution to stoop and take it up again; and insensibly overcome by the luxury of the silence, the subdued light, and the warmth, I fell asleep.

I remained for some time lost in the sort of insensibility belonging to a first sleep; at last some vague and broken sensations came over me. It seemed to me that the day grew darker, that the air became colder. I half perceived bushes covered with the scarlet berries which foretell the coming of winter. I walked on a dreary road, bordered here and there with juniper-trees white with frost. Then the scene suddenly changed. I was in the diligence; the cold wind shook the doors and windows; the trees, loaded with snow, passed by like ghosts; in vain I thrust my benumbed feet into the crushed straw. At last the carriage stopped, and, by one of those stage effects so common in sleep, I found myself alone in a barn, without a fireplace, and open to the winds on all sides. I saw again my mother's gentle face, known only to me in my early childhood, the noble and stern countenance of my father, the little fair head of my sister, who was taken from us at ten years old; all my dead family lived again around me; they were there, exposed to the bitings of the cold and to the pangs of hunger. My mother prayed by the resigned old man, and my sister, rolled up on some rags of which they had made her a bed, wept in silence, and held her naked feet in her little blue hands.

It was a page from the book I had just read transferred into my own existence.

My heart was oppressed with inexpressible anguish. Crouched in a corner, with my eyes fixed upon this dismal picture, I felt the cold slowly creeping upon me, and I said to myself with bitterness:

"Let us die, since poverty is a dungeon guarded by suspicion, apathy, and contempt, and from which it is vain to try to escape; let us die, since there is no place for us at the banquet of the living!"

And I tried to rise to join my mother again, and to wait at her feet for the hour of release.

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This effort dispelled my dream, and I awoke with a start.

I looked around me; my lamp was expiring, the fire in my stove extinguished, and my half-opened door was letting in an icy wind. I got up, with a shiver, to shut and double-lock it; then I made for the alcove, and went to bed in haste.

But the cold kept me awake a long time, and my thoughts continued the interrupted dream.

The pictures I had lately accused of exaggeration now seemed but a too faithful representation of reality; and I went to sleep without being able to recover my optimism—or my warmth.

Thus did a cold stove and a badly closed door alter my point of view. All went well when my blood circulated properly; all looked gloomy when the cold laid hold on me.

This reminds me of the story of the duchess who was obliged to pay a visit to the neighboring convent on a winter's day. The convent was poor, there was no wood, and the monks had nothing but their discipline and the ardor of their prayers to keep out the cold. The duchess, who was shivering with cold, returned home, greatly pitying the poor monks. While the servants were taking off her cloak and adding two more logs to her fire, she called her steward, whom she ordered to send some wood to the convent immediately. She then had her couch moved close to the fireside, the warmth of which soon revived her. The recollection of what she had just suffered was speedily lost in her present comfort, when the steward came in again to ask how many loads of wood he was to send.

“Oh! you may wait,” said the great lady carelessly; “the weather is very much milder.”

Thus, man's judgments are formed less from reason than from sensation; and as sensation comes to him from the outward world, so he finds himself more or less under its influence; by little and little he imbibes a portion of his habits and feelings from it.

It is not, then, without cause that, when we wish to judge of a stranger beforehand, we look for indications of his character in the circumstances which surround him. The things among which we live are necessarily made to take our image, and we unconsciously leave in them a thousand impressions of our minds. As we can judge by an empty bed of the height and attitude of him who has slept in it, so the abode of every man discovers to a close observer the extent of his intelligence and the feelings of his heart. Bernardin de St.-Pierre has related the story of a young girl who refused a suitor because he would never have flowers or domestic animals in his house. Perhaps the sentence was severe, but not without reason. We may presume that a man insensible to beauty and to humble affection must be ill prepared to feel the enjoyments of a happy marriage.



14th, seven o'clock P.M.—This morning, as I was opening my journal to write, I had a visit from our old cashier.

His sight is not so good as it was, his hand begins to shake, and the work he was able to do formerly is now becoming somewhat laborious to him. I had undertaken to write out some of his papers, and he came for those I had finished.

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We conversed a long time by the stove, while he was drinking a cup of coffee which I made him take.

M. Rateau is a sensible man, who has observed much and speaks little; so that he has always something to say.

While looking over the accounts I had prepared for him, his look fell upon my journal, and I was obliged to acknowledge that in this way I wrote a diary of my actions and thoughts every evening for private use. From one thing to another, I began speaking to him of my dream the day before, and my reflections about the influence of outward objects upon our ordinary sentiments. He smiled.

“Ah! you, too, have my superstitions,” he said, quietly. “I have always believed, like you, that you may know the game by the lair: it is only necessary to have tact and experience; but without them we commit ourselves to many rash judgments. For my part. I have been guilty of this more than once, but sometimes I have also drawn a right conclusion. I recollect especially an adventure which goes as far back as the first years of my youth—”

He stopped. I looked at him as if I waited for his story, and he told it me at once.

At this time he was still but third clerk to an attorney at Orleans. His master had sent him to Montargis on different affairs, and he intended to return in the diligence the same evening, after having received the amount of a bill at a neighboring town; but they kept him at the debtor’s house, and when he was able to set out the day had already closed.

Fearing not to be able to reach Montargis in good time, he took a crossroad they pointed out to him. Unfortunately the fog increased, no star was visible in the heavens, and the darkness became so great that he lost his road. He tried to retrace his steps, passed twenty footpaths, and at last was completely astray.

After the vexation of losing his place in the diligence, came the feeling of uneasiness as to his situation. He was alone, on foot, lost in a forest, without any means of finding his right road again, and with a considerable sum of money about him, for which he was responsible. His anxiety was increased by his inexperience. The idea of a forest was connected in his mind with so many adventures of robbery and murder, that he expected some fatal encounter every instant.

To say the truth, his situation was not encouraging. The place was not considered safe, and for some time past there had been rumors of the sudden disappearance of several horse-dealers, though there was no trace of any crime having been committed.

Our young traveller, with his eyes staring forward, and his ears listening, followed a footpath which he supposed might take him to some house or road; but woods always

succeeded to woods. At last he perceived a light at a distance, and in a quarter of an hour he reached the highroad.

A single house, the light from which had attracted him, appeared at a little distance. He was going toward the entrance gate of the courtyard, when the trot of a horse made him turn his head. A man on horseback had just appeared at the turning of the road, and in an instant was close to him.

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The first words he addressed to the young man showed him to be the farmer himself. He related how he had lost himself, and learned from the countryman that he was on the road to Pithiviers. Montargis was three leagues behind him.

The fog had insensibly changed into a drizzling rain, which was beginning to wet the young clerk through; he seemed afraid of the distance he had still to go, and the horseman, who saw his hesitation, invited him to come into the farmhouse.

It had something of the look of a fortress. Surrounded by a pretty high wall, it could not be seen except through the bars of the great gate, which was carefully closed. The farmer, who had got off his horse, did not go near it, but, turning to the right, reached another entrance closed in the same way, but of which he had the key.

Hardly had he passed the threshold when a terrible barking resounded from each end of the yard. The farmer told his guest to fear nothing, and showed him the dogs chained up to their kennels; both were of an extraordinary size, and so savage that the sight of their master himself could not quiet them.

A boy, attracted by their barking, came out of the house and took the farmer's horse. The latter began questioning him about some orders he had given before he left the house, and went toward the stable to see that they had been executed.

Thus left alone, our clerk looked about him.

A lantern which the boy had placed on the ground cast a dim light over the courtyard. All around seemed empty and deserted. Not a trace was visible of the disorder often seen in a country farmyard, and which shows a temporary cessation of the work which is soon to be resumed again. Neither a cart forgotten where the horses had been unharnessed, nor sheaves of corn heaped up ready for threshing, nor a plow overturned in a corner and half hidden under the freshly-cut clover. The yard was swept, the barns shut up and padlocked. Not a single vine creeping up the walls; everywhere stone, wood, and iron!

He took up the lantern and went up to the corner of the house. Behind was a second yard, where he heard the barking of a third dog, and a covered wall was built in the middle of it.

Our traveller looked in vain for the little farm garden, where pumpkins of different sorts creep along the ground, or where the bees from the hives hum under the hedges of honeysuckle and elder. Verdure and flowers were nowhere to be seen. He did not even perceive the sight of a poultry-yard or pigeon-house. The habitation of his host was everywhere wanting in that which makes the grace and the life of the country.

The young man thought that his host must be of a very careless or a very calculating disposition, to concede so little to domestic enjoyments and the pleasures of the eye; and judging, in spite of himself, by what he saw, he could not help feeling a distrust of his character.

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In the mean time the farmer returned from the stables, and made him enter the house.

The inside of the farmhouse corresponded to its outside. The whitewashed walls had no other ornament than a row of guns of all sizes; the massive furniture hardly redeemed its clumsy appearance by its great solidity. The cleanliness was doubtful, and the absence of all minor conveniences proved that a woman's care was wanting in the household concerns. The young clerk learned that the farmer, in fact, lived here with no one but his two sons.

Of this, indeed, the signs were plain enough. A table with the cloth laid, that no one had taken the trouble to clear away, was left near the window. The plates and dishes were scattered upon it without any order, and loaded with potato-parings and half-picked bones. Several empty bottles emitted an odor of brandy, mixed with the pungent smell of tobacco-smoke.

After seating his guest, the farmer lighted his pipe, and his two sons resumed their work by the fireside. Now and then the silence was just broken by a short remark, answered by a word or an exclamation; and then all became as mute as before.

"From my childhood," said the old cashier, "I had been very sensible to the impression of outward objects; later in life, reflection had taught me to study the causes of these impressions rather than to drive them away. I set myself, then, to examine everything around me with great attention.

"Below the guns, I had remarked on entering, some wolftaps were suspended, and to one of them still hung the mangled remains of a wolf's paw, which they had not yet taken off from the iron teeth. The blackened chimneypiece was ornamented by an owl and a raven nailed on the wall, their wings extended, and their throats with a huge nail through each; a fox's skin, freshly flayed, was spread before the window; and a larder hook, fixed into the principal beam, held a headless goose, whose body swayed about over our heads.

"My eyes were offended by all these details, and I turned them again upon my hosts. The father, who sat opposite to me, only interrupted his smoking to pour out his drink, or address some reprimand to his sons. The eldest of these was scraping a deep bucket, and the bloody scrapings, which he threw into the fire every instant, filled the room with a disagreeable fetid smell; the second son was sharpening some butcher's knives. I learned from a word dropped from the father that they were preparing to kill a pig the next day.

"These occupations and the whole aspect of things inside the house told of such habitual coarseness in their way of living as seemed to explain, while it formed the fitting counterpart of, the forbidding gloominess of the outside. My astonishment by degrees changed into disgust, and my disgust into uneasiness. I cannot detail the whole chain

of ideas which succeeded one another in my imagination; but, yielding to an impulse I could not overcome, I got up, declaring I would go on my road again.

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“The farmer made some effort to keep me; he spoke of the rain, of the darkness, and of the length of the way. I replied to all by the absolute necessity there was for my being at Montargis that very night; and thanking him for his brief hospitality, I set off again in a haste which might well have confirmed the truth of my words to him.

“However, the freshness of the night and the exercise of walking did not fail to change the directions of my thoughts. When away from the objects which had awakened such lively disgust in me, I felt it gradually diminishing. I began to smile at the susceptibility of my feelings, and then, in proportion as the rain became heavier and colder, these strictures on myself assumed a tone of ill-temper. I silently accused myself of the absurdity of mistaking sensation for admonitions of my reason. After all, were not the farmer and his sons free to live alone, to hunt, to keep dogs, and to kill a pig? Where was the crime of it? With less nervous susceptibility, I should have accepted the shelter they offered me, and I should now be sleeping snugly on a truss of straw, instead of walking with difficulty through the cold and drizzling rain. I thus continued to reproach myself, until, toward morning, I arrived at Montargis, jaded and benumbed with cold.

“When, however, I got up refreshed, toward the middle of the next day, I instinctively returned to my first opinion. The appearance of the farmhouse presented itself to me under the same repulsive colors which the evening before had determined me to make my escape from it. Reason itself remained silent when reviewing all those coarse details, and was forced to recognize in them the indications of a low nature, or else the presence of some baleful influence.

“I went away the next day without being able to learn anything concerning the farmer or his sons; but the recollection of my adventure remained deeply fixed in my memory.

“Ten years afterward I was travelling in the diligence through the department of the Loiret; I was leaning from the window, and looking at some coppice ground now for the first time brought under cultivation, and the mode of clearing which one of my travelling companions was explaining to me, when my eyes fell upon a walled inclosure, with an iron-barred gate. Inside it I perceived a house with all the blinds closed, and which I immediately recollected; it was the farmhouse where I had been sheltered. I eagerly pointed it out to my companion, and asked who lived in it.

“‘Nobody just now,’ replied he.

“‘But was it not kept, some years ago, by a farmer and his two sons?’

“‘The Turreaus,’ said my travelling companion, looking at me; ‘did you know them?’

“‘I saw them once.’

“He shook his head.



“‘Yes, yes!’ resumed he; ‘for many years they lived there like wolves in their den; they merely knew how to till land, kill game, and drink. The father managed the house, but men living alone, without women to love them, without children to soften them, and without God to make them think of heaven, always turn into wild beasts, you see; so one morning the eldest son, who had been drinking too much brandy, would not harness the plow-horses; his father struck him with his whip, and the son, who was mad drunk, shot him dead with his gun.’”

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16th, P.M.—I have been thinking of the story of the old cashier these two days; it came so opportunely upon the reflections my dream had suggested to me.

Have I not an important lesson to learn from all this?

If our sensations have an incontestable influence upon our judgments, how comes it that we are so little careful of those things which awaken or modify these sensations? The external world is always reflected in us as in a mirror, and fills our minds with pictures which, unconsciously to ourselves, become the germs of our opinions and of our rules of conduct. All the objects which surround us are then, in reality, so many talismans whence good and evil influences are emitted, and it is for us to choose them wisely, so as to create a healthy atmosphere for our minds.

Feeling convinced of this truth, I set about making a survey of my attic.

The first object on which my eyes rest is an old map of the history of the principal monastery in my native province. I had unrolled it with much satisfaction, and placed it on the most conspicuous part of the wall. Why had I given it this place? Ought this sheet of old worm-eaten parchment to be of so much value to me, who am neither an antiquary nor a scholar? Is not its real importance in my sight that one of the abbots who founded it bore my name, and that I shall, perchance, be able to make myself a genealogical tree of it for the edification of my visitors? While writing this, I feel my own blushes. Come, down with the map! let us banish it into my deepest drawer.

As I passed my glass, I perceived several visiting cards complacently displayed in the frame. By what chance is it that there are only names that make a show among them? Here is a Polish count—a retired colonel—the deputy of my department. Quick, quick, into the fire with these proofs of vanity! and let us put this card in the handwriting of our office-boy, this direction for cheap dinners, and the receipt of the broker where I bought my last armchair, in their place. These indications of my poverty will serve, as Montaigne says, ‘*mater ma superbe*’, and will always make me recollect the modesty in which the dignity of the lowly consists.

I have stopped before the prints hanging upon the wall. This large and smiling Pomona, seated on sheaves of corn, and whose basket is overflowing with fruit, only produces thoughts of joy and plenty; I was looking at her the other day, when I fell asleep denying such a thing as misery. Let us give her as companion this picture of Winter, in which everything tells of sorrow and suffering: one picture will modify the other.

And this Happy Family of Greuze’s! What joy in the children’s eyes! What sweet repose in the young woman’s face! What religious feeling in the grandfather’s countenance! May God preserve their happiness to them! but let us hang by its side the picture of this mother, who weeps over an empty cradle. Human life has two faces, both of which we must dare to contemplate in their turn.

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Let me hide, too, these ridiculous monsters which ornament my chimneypiece. Plato has said that “the beautiful is nothing else than the visible form of the good.” If it is so, the ugly should be the visible form of the evil, and, by constantly beholding it, the mind insensibly deteriorates.

But above all, in order to cherish the feelings of kindness and pity, let me hang at the foot of my bed this affecting picture of the Last Sleep! Never have I been able to look at it without feeling my heart touched.

An old woman, clothed in rags, is lying by a roadside; her stick is at her feet, and her head rests upon a stone; she has fallen asleep; her hands are clasped; murmuring a prayer of her childhood, she sleeps her last sleep, she dreams her last dream!

She sees herself, again a strong and happy child, keeping the sheep on the common, gathering the berries from the hedges, singing, curtsying to passers-by, and making the sign of the cross when the first star appears in the heavens! Happy time, filled with fragrance and sunshine! She wants nothing yet, for she is ignorant of what there is to wish for.

But see her grown up; the time is come for working bravely: she must cut the corn, thresh the wheat, carry the bundles of flowering clover or branches of withered leaves to the farm. If her toil is hard, hope shines like a sun over everything and it wipes the drops of sweat away. The growing girl already sees that life is a task, but she still sings as she fulfills it.

By-and-bye the burden becomes heavier; she is a wife, she is a mother! She must economize the bread of to-day, have her eye upon the morrow, take care of the sick, and sustain the feeble; she must act, in short, that part of an earthly Providence, so easy when God gives us his aid, so hard when he forsakes us. She is still strong, but she is anxious; she sings no longer!

Yet a few years, and all is overcast. The husband's health is broken; his wife sees him pine away by the now fireless hearth; cold and hunger finish what sickness had begun; he dies, and his widow sits on the ground by the coffin provided by the charity of others, pressing her two half-naked little ones in her arms. She dreads the future, she weeps, and she droops her head.

At last the future has come; the children are grown up, but they are no longer with her. Her son is fighting under his country's flag, and his sister is gone. Both have been lost to her for a long time—perhaps forever; and the strong girl, the brave wife, the courageous mother, is henceforth only a poor old beggar-woman, without a family, and without a home! She weeps no more, sorrow has subdued her; she surrenders, and waits for death.



Death, that faithful friend of the wretched, is come: not hideous and with mockery, as superstition represents, but beautiful, smiling, and crowned with stars! The gentle phantom stoops to the beggar; its pale lips murmur a few airy words, which announce to her the end of her labors; a peaceful joy comes over the aged beggarwoman, and, leaning on the shoulder of the great Deliverer, she has passed unconsciously from her last earthly sleep to her eternal rest.



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Lie there, thou poor way-wearied woman! The leaves will serve thee for a winding-sheet. Night will shed her tears of dew over thee, and the birds will sing sweetly by thy remains. Thy visit here below will not have left more trace than their flight through the air; thy name is already forgotten, and the only legacy thou hast to leave is the hawthorn stick lying forgotten at thy feet!

Well! some one will take it up—some soldier of that great human host which is scattered abroad by misery or by vice; for thou art not an exception, thou art an instance; and under the same sun which shines so pleasantly upon all, in the midst of these flowering vineyards, this ripe corn, and these wealthy cities, entire generations suffer, succeed each other, and still bequeath to each the beggar's stick!

The sight of this sad picture shall make me more grateful for what God has given me, and more compassionate for those whom he has treated with less indulgence; it shall be a lesson and a subject for reflection for me.

Ah! if we would watch for everything that might improve and instruct us; if the arrangements of our daily life were so disposed as to be a constant school for our minds! but oftenest we take no heed of them. Man is an eternal mystery to himself; his own person is a house into which he never enters, and of which he studies the outside alone. Each of us need have continually before him the famous inscription which once instructed Socrates, and which was engraved on the walls of Delphi by an unknown hand:

Know thyself.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF THE YEAR

December 30th, P.M.

I was in bed, and hardly recovered from the delirious fever which had kept me for so long between life and death. My weakened brain was making efforts to recover its activity; my thoughts, like rays of light struggling through the clouds, were still confused and imperfect; at times I felt a return of the dizziness which made a chaos of all my ideas, and I floated, so to speak, between alternate fits of mental wandering and consciousness.

Sometimes everything seemed plain to me, like the prospect which, from the top of some high mountain, opens before us in clear weather. We distinguish water, woods, villages, cattle, even the cottage perched on the edge of the ravine; then suddenly there comes a gust of wind laden with mist, and all is confused and indistinct.



Thus, yielding to the oscillations of a half-recovered reason, I allowed my mind to follow its various impulses without troubling myself to separate the real from the imaginary; I glided softly from one to the other, and my dreams and waking thoughts succeeded closely upon one another.

Now, while my mind is wandering in this unsettled state, see, underneath the clock which measures the hours with its loud ticking, a female figure appears before me!

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At first sight I saw enough to satisfy me that she was not a daughter of Eve. In her eye was the last flash of an expiring star, and her face had the pallor of an heroic death-struggle. She was dressed in a drapery of a thousand changing colors of the brightest and the most sombre hues, and held a withered garland in her hand.

After having contemplated her for some moments, I asked her name, and what brought her into my attic. Her eyes, which were following the movements of the clock, turned toward me, and she replied:

“You see in me the year which is just drawing to its end; I come to receive your thanks and your farewell.”

I raised myself on my elbow in surprise, which soon gave place to bitter resentment.

“Ah! you want thanks,” cried I; “but first let me know what for?”

“When I welcomed your coming, I was still young and vigorous: you have taken from me each day some little of my strength, and you have ended by inflicting an illness upon me; already, thanks to you, my blood is less warm, my muscles less firm, and my feet less agile than before! You have planted the germs of infirmity in my bosom; there, where the summer flowers of life were growing, you have wickedly sown the nettles of old age!

“And, as if it were not enough to weaken my body, you have also diminished the powers of my soul; you have extinguished her enthusiasm; she is become more sluggish and more timid. Formerly her eyes took in the whole of mankind in their generous survey; but you have made her nearsighted, and now she hardly sees beyond herself! That is what you have done for my spiritual being: then as to my outward existence, see to what grief, neglect, and misery you have reduced it! For the many days that the fever has kept me chained to this bed, who has taken care of this home in which I placed all my joy? Shall I not find my closets empty, my bookcase, stripped, all my poor treasures lost through negligence or dishonesty? Where are the plants I cultivated, the birds I fed? All are gone! my attic is despoiled, silent and solitary! As it is only for the last few moments that I have returned to a consciousness of what surrounds me, I am even ignorant who has nursed me during my long illness! Doubtless some hireling, who will leave when all my means of recompense are exhausted! And what will my masters, for whom I am bound to work, have said to my absence? At this time of the year, when business is most pressing, can they have done without me, will they even have tried to do so? Perhaps I am already superseded in the humble situation by which I earned my daily bread! And it is thou—thou alone, wicked daughter of Time—who hast brought all these misfortunes upon me: strength, health, comfort, work—thou hast taken all from me. I have only received outrage and loss from thee, and yet thou darest to claim my gratitude!”



“Ah! die then, since thy day is come; but die despised and cursed; and may I write on thy tomb the epitaph the Arabian poet inscribed upon that of a king:

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“Rejoice, thou passer-by: he whom we have buried here cannot live again.”

.....

I was wakened by a hand taking mine; and opening my eyes, I recognized the doctor.

After having felt my pulse, he nodded his head, sat down at the foot of the bed, and looked at me, rubbing his nose with his snuffbox. I have since learned that this was a sign of satisfaction with the doctor.

“Well! so we wanted old snub-nose to carry us off?” said M. Lambert, in his half-joking, half-scolding way. “What the deuce of a hurry we were in! It was necessary to hold you back with both arms at least!”

“Then you had given me up, doctor?” asked I, rather alarmed.

“Not at all,” replied the old physician. “We can’t give up what we have not got; and I make it a rule never to have any hope. We are but instruments in the hands of Providence, and each of us should say, with Ambroise Pare: ‘I tend him, God cures him!’”

“May He be blessed then, as well as you,” cried I; “and may my health come back with the new year!”

M. Lambert shrugged his shoulders.

“Begin by asking yourself for it,” resumed he, bluntly. “God has given it you, and it is your own sense, and not chance, that must keep it for you. One would think, to hear people talk, that sickness comes upon us like the rain or the sunshine, without one having a word to say in the matter. Before we complain of being ill we should prove that we deserve to be well.”

I was about to smile, but the doctor looked angry.

“Ah! you think that I am joking,” resumed he, raising his voice; “but tell me, then, which of us gives his health the same attention that he gives to his business? Do you economize your strength as you economize your money? Do you avoid excess and imprudence in the one case with the same care as extravagance or foolish speculations in the other? Do you keep as regular accounts of your mode of living as you do of your income? Do you consider every evening what has been wholesome or unwholesome for you, with the same care that you bring to the examination of your expenditure? You

may smile; but have you not brought this illness on yourself by a thousand indiscretions?"

I began to protest against this, and asked him to point out these indiscretions. The old doctor spread out his fingers, and began to reckon upon them one by one.

"Primo," cried he, "want of exercise. You live here like a mouse in a cheese, without air, motion, or change. Consequently, the blood circulates badly, the fluids thicken, the muscles, being inactive, do not claim their share of nutrition, the stomach flags, and the brain grows weary.

"Secundo. Irregular food. Caprice is your cook; your stomach a slave who must accept what you give it, but who presently takes a sullen revenge, like all slaves.

"Tertio. Sitting up late. Instead of using the night for sleep, you spend it in reading; your bedstead is a bookcase, your pillows a desk! At the time when the wearied brain asks for rest, you lead it through these nocturnal orgies, and you are surprised to find it the worse for them the next day.

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“Quarto. Luxurious habits. Shut up in your attic, you insensibly surround yourself with a thousand effeminate indulgences. You must have list for your door, a blind for your window, a carpet for your feet, an easy-chair stuffed with wool for your back, your fire lit at the first sign of cold, and a shade to your lamp; and thanks to all these precautions, the least draught makes you catch cold, common chairs give you no rest, and you must wear spectacles to support the light of day. You have thought you were acquiring comforts, and you have only contracted infirmities.

“Quinto”

“Ah! enough, enough, doctor!” cried I. “Pray, do not carry your examination farther; do not attach a sense of remorse to each of my pleasures.”

The old doctor rubbed his nose with his snuffbox.

“You see,” said he, more gently, and rising at the same time, “you would escape from the truth. You shrink from inquiry—a proof that you are guilty. ‘Habemus confitentem reum’! But at least, my friend, do not go on laying the blame on Time, like an old woman.”

Thereupon he again felt my pulse, and took his leave, declaring that his function was at an end, and that the rest depended upon myself.

When the doctor was gone, I set about reflecting upon what he had said.

Although his words were too sweeping, they were not the less true in the main. How often we accuse chance of an illness, the origin of which we should seek in ourselves! Perhaps it would have been wiser to let him finish the examination he had begun.

But is there not another of more importance—that which concerns the health of the soul? Am I so sure of having neglected no means of preserving that during the year which is now ending? Have I, as one of God’s soldiers upon earth, kept my courage and my arms efficient? Shall I be ready for the great review of souls which must pass before Him *who is* in the dark valley of Jehoshaphat?

Darest thou examine thyself, O my soul! and see how often thou hast erred?

First, thou hast erred through pride! for I have not duly valued the lowly. I have drunk too deeply of the intoxicating wines of genius, and have found no relish in pure water. I have disdained those words which had no other beauty than their sincerity; I have ceased to love men solely because they are men—I have loved them for their endowments; I have contracted the world within the narrow compass of a pantheon, and my sympathy has been awakened by admiration only. The vulgar crowd, which I ought to have followed with a friendly eye because it is composed of my brothers in hope or grief, I have let pass by with as much indifference as if it were a flock of sheep. I am

indignant with him who rolls in riches and despises the man poor in worldly wealth; and yet, vain of my trifling knowledge, I despise him who is poor in mind—I scorn the poverty of intellect as others do that of dress; I take credit for a gift which I did not bestow on myself, and turn the favor of fortune into a weapon with which to attack others.

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Ah! if, in the worst days of revolutions, ignorance has revolted and raised a cry of hatred against genius, the fault is not alone in the envious malice of ignorance, but comes in part, too, from the contemptuous pride of knowledge.

Alas! I have too completely forgotten the fable of the two sons of the magician of Bagdad.

One of them, struck by an irrevocable decree of destiny, was born blind, while the other enjoyed all the delights of sight. The latter, proud of his own advantages, laughed at his brother's blindness, and disdained him as a companion. One morning the blind boy wished to go out with him.

"To what purpose," said he, "since the gods have put nothing in common between us? For me creation is a stage, where a thousand charming scenes and wonderful actors appear in succession; for you it is only an obscure abyss, at the bottom of which you hear the confused murmur of an invisible world. Continue then alone in your darkness, and leave the pleasures of light to those upon whom the day-star shines."

With these words he went away, and his brother, left alone, began to cry bitterly. His father, who heard him, immediately ran to him, and tried to console him by promising to give him whatever he desired.

"Can you give me sight?" asked the child.

"Fate does not permit it," said the magician.

"Then," cried the blind boy, eagerly, "I ask you to put out the sun!"

Who knows whether my pride has not provoked the same wish on the part of some one of my brothers who does not see?

But how much oftener have I erred through levity and want of thought! How many resolutions have I taken at random! how many judgments have I pronounced for the sake of a witticism! how many mischiefs have I not done without any sense of my responsibility! The greater part of men harm one another for the sake of doing something. We laugh at the honor of one, and compromise the reputation of another, like an idle man who saunters along a hedgerow, breaking the young branches and destroying the most beautiful flowers.

And, nevertheless, it is by this very thoughtlessness that the fame of some men is created. It rises gradually, like one of those mysterious mounds in barbarous countries, to which a stone is added by every passerby; each one brings something at random, and adds it as he passes, without being able himself to see whether he is raising a pedestal or a gibbet. Who will dare look behind him, to see his rash judgments held up there to view?



Some time ago I was walking along the edge of the green mound on which the Montmartre telegraph stands. Below me, along one of the zigzag paths which wind up the hill, a man and a girl were coming up, and arrested my attention. The man wore a shaggy coat, which gave him some resemblance to a wild beast; and he held a thick stick in his hand, with which he described various strange figures in the air. He spoke very

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loud, and in a voice which seemed to me convulsed with passion. He raised his eyes every now and then with an expression of savage harshness, and it appeared to me that he was reproaching and threatening the girl, and that she was listening to him with a submissiveness which touched my heart. Two or three times she ventured a few words, doubtless in the attempt to justify herself; but the man in the greatcoat began again immediately with his loud and angry voice, his savage looks, and his threatening evolutions in the air. I followed him with my eyes, vainly endeavoring to catch a word as he passed, until he disappeared behind the hill.

I had evidently just seen one of those domestic tyrants whose sullen tempers are excited by the patience of their victims, and who, though they have the power to become the beneficent gods of a family, choose rather to be their tormentors.

I cursed the unknown savage in my heart, and I felt indignant that these crimes against the sacred peace of home could not be punished as they deserve, when I heard his voice approaching nearer. He had turned the path, and soon appeared before me at the top of the slope.

The first glance, and his first words, explained everything to me: in place of what I had taken for the furious tones and terrible looks of an angry man, and the attitude of a frightened victim, I had before me only an honest citizen, who squinted and stuttered, but who was explaining the management of silkworms to his attentive daughter.

I turned homeward, smiling at my mistake; but before I reached my faubourg I saw a crowd running, I heard calls for help, and every finger pointed in the same direction to a distant column of flame. A manufactory had taken fire, and everybody was rushing forward to assist in extinguishing it.

I hesitated. Night was coming on; I felt tired; a favorite book was awaiting me; I thought there would be no want of help, and I went on my way.

Just before I had erred from want of consideration; now it was from selfishness and cowardice.

But what! have I not on a thousand other occasions forgotten the duties which bind us to our fellowmen? Is this the first time I have avoided paying society what I owe it? Have I not always behaved to my companions with injustice, and like the lion? Have I not claimed successively every share? If any one is so ill-advised as to ask me to return some little portion, I get provoked, I am angry, I try to escape from it by every means. How many times, when I have perceived a beggar sitting huddled up at the end of the street, have I not gone out of my way, for fear that compassion would impoverish



me by forcing me to be charitable! How often have I doubted the misfortunes of others, that I might with justice harden my heart against them.

With what satisfaction have I sometimes verified the vices of the poor man, in order to show that his misery is the punishment he deserves!

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Oh! let us not go farther—let us not go farther! I interrupted the doctor's examination, but how much sadder is this one! We pity the diseases of the body; we shudder at those of the soul.

I was happily disturbed in my reverie by my neighbor, the old soldier.

Now I think of it, I seem always to have seen, during my fever, the figure of this good old man, sometimes leaning against my bed, and sometimes sitting at his table, surrounded by his sheets of pasteboard.

He has just come in with his glue-pot, his quire of green paper, and his great scissors. I called him by his name; he uttered a joyful exclamation, and came near me.

"Well! so the bullet is found again!" cried he, taking my two hands into the maimed one which was left him; "it has not been without trouble, I can tell you; the campaign has been long enough to win two clasps in. I have seen no few fellows with the fever batter windmills during my hospital days: at Leipsic, I had a neighbor who fancied a chimney was on fire in his stomach, and who was always calling for the fire-engines; but the third day it all went out of itself. But with you it has lasted twenty-eight days—as long as one of the Little Corporal's campaigns."

"I am not mistaken then; you were near me?"

"Well! I had only to cross the passage. This left hand has not made you a bad nurse for want of the right; but, bah! you did not know what hand gave you drink, and it did not prevent that beggar of a fever from being drowned—for all the world like Poniatowski in the Elster."

The old soldier began to laugh, and I, feeling too much affected to speak, pressed his hand against my breast. He saw my emotion, and hastened to put an end to it.

"By-the-bye, you know that from to-day you have a right to draw your rations again," resumed he gayly; "four meals, like the German mein herrs—nothing more! The doctor is your house steward."

"We must find the cook, too," replied I, with a smile.

"She is found," said the veteran.

"Who is she?"

"Genevieve."

"The fruit-woman?"



“While I am talking she is cooking for you, neighbor; and do not fear her sparing either butter or trouble. As long as life and death were fighting for you, the honest woman passed her time in going up and down stairs to learn which way the battle went. And, stay, I am sure this is she.”

In fact we heard steps in the passage, and he went to open the door.

“Oh, well!” continued he, “it is Mother Millot, our portress, another of your good friends, neighbor, and whose poultices I recommend to you. Come in, Mother Millot—come in; we are quite bonny boys this morning, and ready to step a minuet if we had our dancing-shoes.”

The portress came in, quite delighted. She brought my linen, washed and mended by herself, with a little bottle of Spanish wine, the gift of her sailor son, and kept for great occasions. I would have thanked her, but the good woman imposed silence upon me, under the pretext that the doctor had forbidden me to speak. I saw her arrange everything in my drawers, the neat appearance of which struck me; an attentive hand had evidently been there, and day by day put straight the unavoidable disorder consequent on sickness.

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As she finished, Genevieve arrived with my dinner; she was followed by Mother Denis, the milk-woman over the way, who had learned, at the same time, the danger I had been in, and that I was now beginning to be convalescent. The good Savoyard brought me a new-laid egg, which she herself wished to see me eat.

It was necessary to relate minutely all my illness to her. At every detail she uttered loud exclamations; then, when the portress warned her to be less noisy, she excused herself in a whisper. They made a circle around me to see me eat my dinner; each mouthful I took was accompanied by their expressions of satisfaction and thankfulness. Never had the King of France, when he dined in public, excited such admiration among the spectators.

As they were taking the dinner away, my colleague, the old cashier, entered in his turn.

I could not prevent my heart beating as I recognized him. How would the heads of the firm look upon my absence, and what did he come to tell me?

I waited with inexpressible anxiety for him to speak; but he sat down by me, took my hand, and began rejoicing over my recovery, without saying a word about our masters. I could not endure this uncertainty any longer.

“And the Messieurs Durmer,” asked I, hesitatingly, “how have they taken—the interruption to my work?”

“There has been no interruption,” replied the old clerk, quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“Each one in the office took a share of your duty; all has gone on as usual, and the Messieurs Durmer have perceived no difference.”

This was too much. After so many instances of affection, this filled up the measure. I could not restrain my tears.

Thus the few services I had been able to do for others had been acknowledged by them a hundredfold! I had sown a little seed, and every grain had fallen on good ground, and brought forth a whole sheaf. Ah! this completes the lesson the doctor gave me. If it is true that the diseases, whether of the mind or body, are the fruit of our follies and our vices, sympathy and affection are also the rewards of our having done our duty. Every one of us, with God’s help, and within the narrow limits of human capability, himself makes his own disposition, character, and permanent condition.

Everybody is gone; the old soldier has brought me back my flowers and my birds, and they are my only companions. The setting sun reddens my half-closed curtains with its

last rays. My brain is clear, and my heart lighter. A thin mist floats before my eyes, and I feel myself in that happy state which precedes a refreshing sleep.

Yonder, opposite the bed, the pale goddess in her drapery of a thousand changing colors, and with her withered garland, again appears before me; but this time I hold out my hand to her with a grateful smile.

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“Adieu, beloved year! whom I but now unjustly accused. That which I have suffered must not be laid to thee; for thou wast but a tract through which God had marked out my road—a ground where I had reaped the harvest I had sown. I will love thee, thou wayside shelter, for those hours of happiness thou hast seen me enjoy; I will love thee even for the suffering thou hast seen me endure. Neither happiness nor suffering came from thee; but thou hast been the scene for them. Descend again then, in peace, into eternity, and be blest, thou who hast left me experience in the place of youth, sweet memories instead of past time, and gratitude as payment for good offices.”

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Ambroise Pare: ‘I tend him, God cures him!’
Are we then bound to others only by the enforcement of laws
Attach a sense of remorse to each of my pleasures
But above these ruins rises a calm and happy face
Contemptuous pride of knowledge
Death, that faithful friend of the wretched
Houses are vessels which take mere passengers
I make it a rule never to have any hope
Ignorant of what there is to wish for
Looks on an accomplished duty neither as a merit nor a grievance
More stir than work
Nothing is dishonorable which is useful
Richer than France herself, for I have no deficit in my budget
Satisfy our wants, if we know how to set bounds to them
Sensible man, who has observed much and speaks little
Sullen tempers are excited by the patience of their victims
The happiness of the wise man costs but little
We do not understand that others may live on their own account
What have you done with the days God granted you
You may know the game by the lair

ETEXT editor's bookmarks from the entire “Attic” Philosopher:

Always to mistake feeling for evidence
Ambroise Pare: ‘I tend him, God cures him!’
Are we then bound to others only by the enforcement of laws
Attach a sense of remorse to each of my pleasures
Brought them up to poverty
But above these ruins rises a calm and happy face
Carn-ival means, literally, “farewell to flesh!”
Coffee is the grand work of a bachelor’s housekeeping
Contemptuous pride of knowledge
Death, that faithful friend of the wretched



Defeat and victory only displace each other by turns
Did not think the world was so great
Do they understand what makes them so gay?
Each of us regards himself as the mirror of the community
Ease with which the poor forget their wretchedness
Every one keeps his holidays in his own way
Fame and power are gifts that are dearly bought
Favorite and conclusive answer of his class—"I know"

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Fear of losing a moment from business
Finishes his sin thoroughly before he begins to repent
Fortune sells what we believe she gives
Her kindness, which never sleeps
Houses are vessels which take mere passengers
Hubbub of questions which waited for no reply
I make it a rule never to have any hope
Ignorant of what there is to wish for
Looks on an accomplished duty neither as a merit nor a grievance
Make himself a name: he becomes public property
Moderation is the great social virtue
More stir than work
My patronage has become her property
No one is so unhappy as to have nothing to give
Not desirous to teach goodness
Nothing is dishonorable which is useful
Our tempers are like an opera-glass
Poverty, you see, is a famous schoolmistress
Power of necessity
Prisoners of work
Progress can never be forced on without danger
Question is not to discover what will suit us
Richer than France herself, for I have no deficit in my budget
Ruining myself, but we must all have our Carnival
Satisfy our wants, if we know how to set bounds to them
Sensible man, who has observed much and speaks little
So much confidence at first, so much doubt at last
Sullen tempers are excited by the patience of their victims
The happiness of the wise man costs but little
The man in power gives up his peace
Two thirds of human existence are wasted in hesitation
Virtue made friends, but she did not take pupils
We do not understand that others may live on their own account
We are not bound to live, while we are bound to do our duty
What have you done with the days God granted you
What a small dwelling joy can live
You may know the game by the lair

ETEXT editor's bookmarks from the complete "Immortals"

A uniform is the only garb which can hide poverty honorably
A man may forgive, but he never forgets
A mother's geese are always swans
A queen's country is where her throne is
A ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree
A terrible danger lurks in the knowledge of what is possible
A cat is a very fine animal. It is a drawing-room tiger
A familiarity which, had he known it, was not flattering
A defensive attitude is never agreeable to a man
A man weeps with difficulty before a woman
A hero must be human. Napoleon was human
A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly
A man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness
A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror
Abundant details which he sometimes volunteered
Accustomed to call its disguise virtue

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Accustomed to hide what I think
Adieu, my son, I love you and I die
Adopted fact is always better composed than the real one
Advantage that a calm temper gives one over men
Affectation of indifference
Affection is catching
Ah! the natural perversity of inanimate things
All that a name is to a street—its honor, its spouse
All that was illogical in our social code
All that he said, I had already thought
All that is not life, it is the noise of life
All philosophy is akin to atheism
All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft
All defeats have their geneses
Always to mistake feeling for evidence
Always smiling condescendingly
Always the first word which is the most difficult to say
Ambiguity has no place, nor has compromise
Ambition is the saddest of all hopes
Ambroise Pare: 'I tend him, God cures him!'
Amusements they offered were either wearisome or repugnant
An hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs
Ancient pillars of stone, embrowned and gnawed by time
And I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up
And they are shoulders which ought to be seen
And when love is sure of itself and knows response
Anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers
Answer "No," but with a little kiss which means "Yes"
Antagonism to plutocracy and hatred of aristocrats
Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere
Antipathy for her husband bordering upon aversion
Are we then bound to others only by the enforcement of laws
Art is the chosen truth
Artificialities of style of that period
Artistic Truth, more lofty than the True
As ignorant as a schoolmaster
As free from prejudices as one may be, one always retains a few
As Homer says, "smiling under tears"
As we grow older we lay aside harsh judgments and sharp words
As regards love, intention and deed are the same

Assume with others the mien they wore toward him
At every step the reality splashes you with mud
Attach a sense of remorse to each of my pleasures
Attractions that difficulties give to pleasure
Attractive abyss of drunkenness
Bad to fear the opinion of people one despises
Bathers, who exhibited themselves in all degrees of ugliness
Because they moved, they thought they were progressing
Because you weep, you fondly imagine yourself innocent
Become corrupt, and you will cease to suffer
Began to forget my own sorrow in my sympathy for her
Believing that it is for virtue's sake alone such men love them
Believing themselves irresistible
Beware of disgust, it is an incurable evil
Blow which annihilates

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our supreme illusion

Break in his memory, like a book with several leaves torn out
Brilliancy of a fortune too new
Brought them up to poverty
Bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right
But above these ruins rises a calm and happy face
But she thinks she is affording you pleasure
But how avenge one's self on silence?
But if this is our supreme farewell, do not tell me so!
But she will give me nothing but money
Came not in single spies, but in battalions
Camors refused, hesitated, made objections, and consented
Can any one prevent a gossip
Carn-ival means, literally, "farewell to flesh!"
Chain so light yesterday, so heavy to-day
Charm of that one day's rest and its solemnity
Clashing knives and forks mark time
Clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms
Coffee is the grand work of a bachelor's housekeeping
Cold silence, that negative force
Conditions of blindness so voluntary that they become complicity
Confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness
Confounding progress with discord, liberty with license
Conscience is a bad weighing-machine
Conscience is only an affair of environment and of education
Consented to become a wife so as not to remain a maiden
Consoled himself with one of the pious commonplaces
Contempt for men is the beginning of wisdom
Contemptuous pride of knowledge
Contemptuous pity, both for my suspicions and the cause of them
Contrive to use proud disdain as a shield
Convent of Saint Joseph, four shoes under the bed!
Cowardly in trouble as he had been insolent in prosperity
Cried out, with the blunt candor of his age
Curious to know her face of that day
Dangers of liberty outweighed its benefits
Dare now to be silent when I have told you these things
Daylight is detrimental to them
Death is more to be desired than a living distaste for life
Death is not that last sleep
Death, that faithful friend of the wretched
Deeming every sort of occupation beneath him



Defeat and victory only displace each other by turns
Demanded of him imperatively—the time of day
Deny the spirit of self-sacrifice
Despair of a man sick of life, or the whim of a spoiled child
Despotic tone which a woman assumes when sure of her empire
Despotism natural to puissant personalities
Determined to cultivate ability rather than scrupulousness
Did not think the world was so great
Difference which I find between Truth in art and the True in fac
Disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared
Disenchantment which follows possession
Distrust first impulse

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Do you think that people have not talked about us?
Do they understand what makes them so gay?
Do they think they have invented what they see
Do not seek too much
Do not get angry. Rarely laugh, and never weep
Does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality
Does one ever forget?
Does one ever possess what one loves?
Doubt, the greatest misery of love
Dreaded the monotonous regularity of conjugal life
Dreams, instead of living
Dreams of wealth and the disasters that immediately followed
Dull hours spent in idle and diffuse conversation
Duty, simply accepted and simply discharged
Each was moved with self-pity
Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone
Each one knows what the other is about to say
Each of us regards himself as the mirror of the community
Ease with which the poor forget their wretchedness
Efforts to arrange matters we succeed often only in disarranging
Egotists and cowards always have a reason for everything
Egyptian tobacco, mixed with opium and saltpetre
Emotion when one does not share it
Enough to be nobody's unless I belong to him
Eternally condemned to kill each other in order to live
Even those who do not love her desire to know her
Every man is his own master in his choice of liaisons
Every one keeps his holidays in his own way
Every one is the best judge of his own affairs
Every road leads to Rome—and one as surely as another
Every cause that is in antagonism with its age commits suicide
Everybody knows about that
Everywhere was feverish excitement, dissipation, and nullity
Evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing!
Exaggerated dramatic pantomime
Faces taken by surprise allow their real thoughts to be seen
Fame and power are gifts that are dearly bought
Favorite and conclusive answer of his class—"I know"
Fawning duplicity
Fear of losing a moment from business



Felix culpa

Find it more easy to make myself feared than loved

Finishes his sin thoroughly before he begins to repent

First impression is based upon a number of trifles

Flayed and roasted alive by the critics

Follow their thoughts instead of heeding objects

Fool (there is no cure for that infirmity)

Fool who destroys his own happiness

For the rest of his life he would be the prisoner of his crime

Force itself, that mistress of the world

Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life

Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves

Forget a dream and accept a reality

Fortunate enough to keep those one loves

Fortune sells what we

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believe she gives

Found nothing that answered to my indefinable expectations
Fred's verses were not good, but they were full of dejection
Frenchman has only one real luxury—his revolutions
Friendship exists only in independence and a kind of equality
Fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city
Funeral processions are no longer permitted
Galileo struck the earth, crying: "Nevertheless it moves!"
Gave value to her affability by not squandering it
God forgive the timid and the prattler!
God may have sent him to purgatory just for form's sake
God—or no principles!
Good and bad days succeeded each other almost regularly
Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent
Great interval between a dream and its execution
Great sorrows neither accuse nor blaspheme—they listen
Great difference between dearly and very much
Grief itself was for her but a means of seducing
Habit turns into a makeshift of attachment
Had not been spoiled by Fortune's gifts
Had not told all—one never does tell all
Hang out the bush, but keep no tavern
Happiness of being pursued
Happiness exists only by snatches and lasts only a moment
Happy men don't need company
Happy is he who does not outlive his youth
Hard that one can not live one's life over twice
Hard workers are pitiful lovers
Has as much sense as the handle of a basket
Hatred of everything which is superior to myself
Have never known in the morning what I would do in the evening
Have not that pleasure, it is useless to incur the penalties
He Would Have Been Forty Now
He always loved to pass for being overwhelmed with work
He almost regretted her
He fixed the time mentally when he would speak
He does not know the miseries of ambition and vanity
He knew now the divine malady of love
He lives only in the body
He did not blush to be a man, and he spoke to men with force
He was very unhappy at being misunderstood
He lost his time, his money, his hair, his illusions



He is charming, for one always feels in danger near him
He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes
He could not imagine that often words are the same as actions
He studied until the last moment
He who is loved by a beautiful woman is sheltered from every blow
He is not intelligent enough to doubt
He led the brilliant and miserable existence of the unoccupied
He did not sleep, so much the better! He would work more
Hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion
Heed that you lose not in dignity what you gain in revenge
Her husband had become quite bearable
Her kindness, which

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never sleeps

Hermits can not refrain from inquiring what men say of them
His habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth
His sleeplessness was not the insomnia of genius
History too was a work of art
History is written, not made.
Houses are vessels which take mere passengers
(Housemaid) is trained to respect my disorder
How sad these old memories are in the autumn
How many things have not people been proud of
How much they desire to be loved who say they love no more
How small a space man occupies on the earth
How rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers
Hubbub of questions which waited for no reply
Human weakness seeks association
Husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better
Hypocritical grievances
I do not intend either to boast or abase myself
I came here for that express purpose
I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us
I don't call that fishing
I measure others by myself
I am not wandering through life, I am marching on
I would give two summers for a single autumn
I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me!
I neither love nor esteem sadness
"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget"
I believed it all; one is so happy to believe!
I am not in the habit of consulting the law
I have burned all the bridges behind me
I know not what lost home that I have failed to find
I can forget you only when I am with you
I do not desire your friendship
I can not love her, I can not love another
I can not be near you and separated from you at the same moment
I have known things which I know no more
I haven't a taste, I have tastes
I no longer love you
I boasted of being worse than I really was
I thought the best means of being loved were to deserve it
I don't pay myself with words
I have to pay for the happiness you give me



I feel in them (churches) the grandeur of nothingness
I love myself because you love me
I gave myself to him because he loved me
I wished to spoil our past
I make it a rule never to have any hope
Ideas they think superior to love—faith, habits, interests
If there is one! (a paradise)
If I do not give all I give nothing
If well-informed people are to be believe
If trouble awaits us, hope will steal us a happy hour or two
Ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity
Ignorant of what there is to wish for
Ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything
Imagine what it would be never to have been born
Immobility of time
Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself

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Implacable self-interest which is the law of the world
Importance in this world are as easily swept away as the sand
In order to make money, the first thing is to have no need of it
In his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own
In his eyes everything was decided by luck
In times like these we must see all and say all
In what do you believe?
In pitying me he forgot himself
In life it is only nonsense that is common-sense
In every age we laugh at the costume of our fathers
Incapable of conceiving that one might talk without an object
Inconstancy of heart is the special attribute of man
Indignation can solace grief and restore happiness
Indulgence of which they stand in need themselves
Inoffensive tree which never had harmed anybody
Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized
Intelligent persons have no remorse
Intemperance of her zeal and the acrimony of her bigotry
Intimate friend, whom he has known for about five minutes
Irritating laugh which is peculiar to Japan
Is it not enough to have lived?
Is he a dwarf or a giant
Is a man ever poor when he has two arms?
Is it by law only that you wish to keep me?
It is a pity that you must seek pastimes
It is not now what it used to be
It is silly to blush under certain circumstances
It is too true that virtue also has its blush
It was a relief when they rose from the table
It is an error to be in the right too soon
It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him
It was all delightfully terrible!
It was too late: she did not wish to win
It (science) dreams, too; it supposes
It is a terrible step for a woman to take, from No to Yes
It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing
It is only those who own something who worry about the price
It does not mend matters to give way like that
It is the first crime that costs
Japanese habit of expressing myself with excessive politeness

Jealous without having the right to be jealous
Kisses and caresses are the effort of a delightful despair
Knew her danger, and, unlike most of them, she did not love it
Knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope
Lady who requires urging, although she is dying to sing
Laughing in every wrinkle of his face
Leant—and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money
Learn to live without desire
Learned that one leaves college almost ignorant
Learned to love others by embracing their own children
Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love
Lends—I should say gives
Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges

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Let them laugh that win!
Let ultra-modesty destroy poetry
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Life is made up of just such trifles
Life as a whole is too vast and too remote
Life goes on, and that is less gay than the stories
Life is not a great thing
Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded
Life is a tempest
Like all timid persons, he took refuge in a moody silence
Little feathers fluttering for an opportunity to fly away
Little that we can do when we are powerful
Lofty ideal of woman and of love
Looking for a needle in a bundle of hay
Looks on an accomplished duty neither as a merit nor a grievance
Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease
Love is a fire whose heat dies out for want of fuel
Love was only a brief intoxication
Love and tranquillity seldom dwell at peace in the same heart
Love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty
Lovers never separate kindly
Made life give all it could yield
Magnificent air of those beggars of whom small towns are proud
Make himself a name: he becomes public property
Make a shroud of your virtue in which to bury your crimes
Make for themselves a horizon of the neighboring walls and roofs
Man who expects nothing of life except its ending
Man who suffers wishes to make her whom he loves suffer
Man, if he will it, need not grow old: the lion must
Man is but one of the links of an immense chain
Mania for fearing that she may be compromised
Material in you to make one of Cooper's redskins
Mediocre sensibility
Melancholy problem of the birth and death of love
Men of pleasure remain all their lives mediocre workers
Men are weak, and there are things which women must accomplish
Men admired her; the women sought some point to criticise
Men forget sooner
Men doubted everything: the young men denied everything
Mild, unpretentious men who let everybody run over them



Miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past
Misfortunes never come single
Mobile and complaisant conscience had already forgiven himself
Moderation is the great social virtue
Money troubles are not mortal
Money is not a common thing between gentlemen like you and me
Monsieur, I know that I have lived too long
More disposed to discover evil than good
More stir than work
Music—so often dangerous to married happiness
My aunt is jealous of me because I am a man of ideas
My good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure
My patronage has become her property
Natural longing, that we all have, to know the worst
Natural only when alone,



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and talk well only to themselves

Nature's cold indifference to our sufferings

Negroes, all but monkeys!

Neither so simple nor so easy as they at first appeared

Neither idealist nor realist

Nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair

Never interfered in what did not concern him

Never can make revolutions with gloves on

Never foolish to spend money. The folly lies in keeping it

Never is perfect happiness our lot

Never travel when the heart is troubled!

No answer to make to one who has no right to question me

No longer esteemed her highly enough to be jealous of her

No one has ever been able to find out what her thoughts were

No woman is unattainable, except when she loves another

No flies enter a closed mouth

No one is so unhappy as to have nothing to give

No writer had more dislike of mere pedantry

Nobody troubled himself about that originality

None but fools resisted the current

Not everything is known, but everything is said

Not only his last love, but his only love

Not more honest than necessary

Not desirous to teach goodness

Not an excuse, but an explanation of your conduct

Nothing is dishonorable which is useful

Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain

Nothing that provokes laughter more than a disappointed lover

Nothing ever astonishes me

Notion of her husband's having an opinion of his own

Now his grief was his wife, and lived with him

Obstacles are the salt of all our joys

Obstinacy of drunkenness

Of all the sisters of love, the most beautiful is pity

Offices will end by rendering great names vile

Often been compared to Eugene Sue, but his touch is lighter

Old women—at least thirty years old!

Once an excellent remedy, is a detestable regimen

One who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel

One of those beings who die, as they have lived, children

One is never kind when one is in love

One half of his life belonged to the poor



One would think that the wind would put them out: the stars
One of those pious persons who always think evil
One of those trustful men who did not judge when they loved
One does not judge those whom one loves
One should never leave the one whom one loves
One may think of marrying, but one ought not to try to marry
One amuses one's self at the risk of dying
One doesn't offer apologies to a man in his wrath
Only a man, wavering and changeable
Only one thing infamous in love, and that is a falsehood
Opposing his orders with steady, irritating inertia
Ordinary, trivial, every-day objects
Ostensibly you sit at the feast without paying the cost

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Others found delight in the most ordinary amusements
Our tempers are like an opera-glass
Paint from nature
Paris has become like a little country town in its gossip
Pass half the day in procuring two cakes, worth three sous
Patience, should he encounter a dull page here or there
People meeting to "have it out" usually say nothing at first
People whose principle was never to pay a doctor
Perfection does not exist
Pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday
Picturesquely ugly
Pitiful checker-board of life
Playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men
Plead the lie to get at the truth
Pleasures of an independent code of morals
Police regulations known as religion
Poor France of Jeanne d'Arc and of Napoleon
Poverty brings wrinkles
Poverty, you see, is a famous schoolmistress
Power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything
Power of necessity
Prayers swallowed like pills by invalids at a distance
Pride supplies some sufferers with necessary courage
Princes ought never to be struck, except on the head
Princesses ceded like a town, and must not even weep
Principle that art implied selection
Principles alone, without faith in some higher sanction
Prisoners of work
Progress can never be forced on without danger
Property of all who are strong enough to stand it
Pure caprice that I myself mistook for a flash of reason
Put herself on good terms with God, in case He should exist
Quarrel had been, so to speak, less sad than our reconciliation
Question is not to discover what will suit us
Rather do not give—make yourself sought after
Reading the Memoirs of Constant
Reason before the deed, and not after
Recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open
Reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover
Recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy



Recommended a scrupulous observance of nature
Recourse to concessions is often as fatal to women as to kings
Redouble their boasting after each defeat
Regards his happiness as a proof of superiority
Relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her
Remedy infallible against the plague and against reserve
Repeated and explained what he had already said and explained
Reproaches are useless and cruel if the evil is done
Resorted to exaggeration in order to appear original
Respect him so that he may respect you
Richer than France herself, for I have no deficit in my budget
Romanticism still ferments beneath the varnish of Naturalism
Ruining myself, but we must all have our Carnival
Sacrifice his artistic

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leanings to popular caprice

Satisfy our wants, if we know how to set bounds to them
Scarcely a shade of gentle condescension
Scarcely was one scheme launched when another idea occurred
Sceptic regrets the faith he has lost the power to regain
Seeking for a change which can no longer be found
Seemed to enjoy themselves, or made believe they did
Seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill
Seldom troubled himself to please any one he did not care for
Semel insanivimus omnes.' (every one has his madness)
Sensible man, who has observed much and speaks little
Sensitiveness and disposition to self-blame
Seven who are always the same: the first is called hope
She pretended to hope for the best
She said yes, so as not to say no
She is happy, since she likes to remember
She was of those who disdain no compliment
She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it
She would have liked the world to be in mourning
She could not bear contempt
Shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage
Should be punished for not having known how to punish
Should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one
Silence, alas! is not the reproof of kings alone
Simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others
Since she was in love, she had lost prudence
Skilful actor, who apes all the emotions while feeling none
Slip forth from the common herd, my son, think for yourself
Small women ought not to grow stout
So much confidence at first, so much doubt at las
So well satisfied with his reply that he repeated it twice
So strongly does force impose upon men
Society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood
Sometimes we seem to enjoy unhappiness
Sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past
Sorrows shrink into insignificance as the horizon broadens
Speak to me of your love, she said, "not of your grief"
St. Augustine
Succeeded in wearying him by her importunities and tenderness
Such artificial enjoyment, such idiotic laughter
Suffered, and yet took pleasure in it
Sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony



Suffering is a human law; the world is an arena
Sufficed him to conceive the plan of a reparation
Sullen tempers are excited by the patience of their victims
Superior men sometimes lack cleverness
Superiority of the man who does nothing over the man who works
Superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness
Surprise goes for so much in what we admire
Suspicion that he is a feeble human creature after all!
Suspensions that are ever born anew
Sympathetic listening,

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never having herself anything to say
Take their levity for heroism
Taken the times as they are
Talk with me sometimes. You will not chatter trivialities
Tears for the future
Tediousness seems to ooze out through their bindings
Terrible words; I deserve them, but they will kill me
Terrible revenge she would take hereafter for her sufferings
That suffering which curses but does not pardon
That you can aid them in leading better lives?
That if we live the reason is that we hope
That sort of cold charity which is called altruism
That absurd and generous fury for ownership
The bandage love ties over the eyes of men
The future promises, it is the present that pays
The discouragement which the irreparable gives
The heart requires gradual changes
The future that is rent away
The most radical breviary of scepticism since Montaigne
The door of one's room opens on the infinite
The very smell of books is improving
The looks of the young are always full of the future
The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime
The worst husband is always better than none
The past is the only human reality—Everything that is, is past
The man in power gives up his peace
The happiness of the wise man costs but little
The history of good people is often monotonous or painful
The one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you
The women have enough religion for the men
The violent pleasure of losing
The poor must pay for all their enjoyments
The great leveller has swung a long scythe over France
The real support of a government is the Opposition
The politician never should be in advance of circumstances
The uncontested power which money brings
The strong walk alone because they need no one
The leaves fall! the leaves fall!
The guilty will not feel your blows, but the innocent
The forests have taught man liberty
The ease with which he is forgotten
The Hungarian was created on horseback



The most in favor will be the soonest abandoned by him
The usual remarks prompted by imbecility on such occasions
The night brings counsel
The sincere age when one thinks aloud
The groom isn't handsome, but the bride's as pretty as a picture
Their Christian charity did not extend so far as that
Their love requires a return
There are many grand and strong things which you do not feel
There is an intelligent man, who never questions his ideas
There are some men who never have had any childhood
There were too many discussions, and not enough action
There are mountains that we never climb but once
There are pious falsehoods

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which the Church excuses

There is always and everywhere a duty to fulfil
There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget
There are some blunders that are lucky; but you can't tell
There will be no more belief in Christ than in Jupiter
There are two different men in you
These are things that one admits only to himself
These ideas may serve as opium to produce a calm
They tremble while they threaten
They loved not as you love, eh?
They had only one aim, one passion—to enjoy themselves
They are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle'
They have believed me incapable because I was kind
Thinking it better not to lie on minor points
This popular favor is a cup one must drink
This was the Dauphin, afterward Louis XIV
This unending warfare we call love
Those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing
Those who have outlived their illusions
Ticking of which (our arteries) can be heard only at night
Ties that unite children to parents are unloosed
Ties that become duties where we only sought pleasures
Ties which unite parents to children are broken
Timidity of a night-bird that is made to fly in the day
Tired smile of those who have not long to live
To make a will is to put one foot into the grave
To learn to obey is the only way of learning to command
To love is a great deal—To know how to love is everything
To be able to smoke a cigar without being sick
To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form
To be your own guide doubles your pleasure
Toast and white wine (for breakfast)
Too prudent to risk or gain much
Topics that occupy people who meet for the first time
Trees, dwarfed by a Japanese process
Trees are like men; there are some that have no luck
True talent paints life rather than the living
Truth is easily found. I shall read all the newspapers
Truth, I here venture to distinguish from that of the True
Trying to conceal by a smile (a blush)
Trying to make Therese admire what she did not know
Two persons who desired neither to remember nor to forget



Two thirds of human existence are wasted in hesitation
Umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies
Unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob
Unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life
"Unhappy man!" she cried, "you will never know how to love"
Universal suffrage, with its accustomed intelligence
Unqualified for happiness
Unwilling to leave him to the repose he needed
Upon my word, there are no ugly ones (women)
Urbain Grandier
Vague hope came over him that all would come right
Very young, and was

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in love with love

Vexed, act in direct contradiction to their own wishes
Virtue made friends, but she did not take pupils
Voice of the heart which alone has power to reach the heart
Void in her heart, a place made ready for disasters to come
Walked at the rapid pace characteristic of monomaniacs
Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?
Waste all that upon a thing that nobody will ever look at
We are too happy; we are robbing life
We had taken the dream of a day for eternal happiness
We weep, we do not complain
We are so unhappy that our souls are weak against joy
We have had a mass celebrated, and it cost us a large sum
We are not bound to live, while we are bound to do our duty
We do not understand that others may live on their own account
We are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are
Were certain against all reason
What is a man who remains useless
What will be the use of having tormented ourselves in this world
What use is the memory of facts, if not to serve as an example
What you take for love is nothing more than desire
What matters it how much we suffer
What human word will ever express thy slightest caress
What have you done with the days God granted you
What a small dwelling joy can live
When passion sways man, reason follows him weeping and warning
When one speaks of the devil he appears
When he sings, it is because he has something to sing about
When the inattentive spirits are not listening
When time has softened your grief
Whether they know or do not know, they talk
Whether in this world one must be a fanatic or nothing
Which I should find amusing in any one else,—any one I loved
Who has told you that tears can wash away the stains of guilt
Whole world of politics and religion rushed to extremes
Why should I read the newspapers?
Why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap
Will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our action
Willingly seek a new sorrow
Wine suffuses the face as if to prevent shame appearing there
Wiped his nose behind his hat, like a well-bred orator
Wiping his forehead ostentatiously



With the habit of thinking, had not lost the habit of laughing
Without a care or a cross, he grew weary like a prisoner
Woman is more bitter than death, and her arms are like chains
Women who are thirty-five should never weep
Women: they are more bitter than death
Women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault
Word "sacrifice," so vague on careless lips
Words are nothing; it is the tone in which they are uttered
Would not be astonished

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at anything

Would have liked him to be blind only so far as he was concerned
Yes, we are in the way here
Yield to their customs, and not pooh-pooh their amusements
You are in a conquered country, which is still more dangerous
You play with happiness as a child plays with a rattle
You love me, therefore you do not know me
You have considerable patience for a lover
You are talking too much about it to be sincere
You can not make an omelette without first breaking the eggs
You must be pleased with yourself—that is more essential
You are playing 'who loses wins!'
You suffer? Is fate so just as that
You ask Life for certainties, as if she had any to give you
You must always first get the tobacco to burn evenly
You a law student, while our farmers are in want of hands
You believe in what is said here below and not in what is done
You turn the leaves of dead books
You must take me with my own soul!
You may know the game by the lair
Your great weapon is silence
Youth is to judge of the world from first impressions